CHAPTER 12

The West in the World: The Significance of Global Encounters, 1450 – 1650

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Europeans in Africa

Ancient writers of the Latin world had knowledge of the northern part of the African continent but were completely ignorant of the lands south of the Sahara Desert, considered a monstrous hell, but in actuality a land inhabited by an enlightened people with rich resources and large cities.

A. Sub-Saharan Africa before the Europeans Arrived

Several kingdoms that resembled those in Europe arose in the sub-Saharan lands of Africa during the Middle Ages. Africa meant gold to the Europeans of the age, gold controlled largely by the king of Mali, known as the Mansa, who controlled the flow and distribution of gold from the continent's interior. Ethiopia, alone in its embrace of Christianity, became an early source of fascination about the region to the Europeans. Internal conflicts weakened the regional kingdoms and allowed a European foothold on the continent during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

B. European Voyages along the African Coast

Although the sub-Saharan regions remained mysterious to Europeans, merchants from Italy, Spain, and Portugal had long visited the ports of North Africa along the Mediterranean coast. Trade was decidedly lopsided: a multiplicity of luxury goods from Europe in exchange for the gold from Mali. Unable to efficiently use the Saharan Desert as a trading route, the European quest began to round the continent via water and open new trade relations with the African east.

1. New Maritime Technology

To round the southern tip of Africa, a new style of ship emerged that combined features of the Mediterranean and Atlantic vessels then in use. This hybrid ship (*caravel*) used the square sails of the Atlantic ships and the triangular "lanteen" sails of the Mediterranean galleys, the combination of which gave the new ship remarkable steering. No less important were the developments of the compass, astrolabe, and *portolanos* sailing directories.

2. New Colonialism

New types of colonial expansion emerged as the Portuguese and Spanish began exploration of the Canary Islands. The first new type, a settler colony, resulted from the issuance of a permit from the monarch for a particular person or
company to seize an island or some part of shoreline. These were usually populated by African slave labor. The second type was a plantation colony, usually run by emigrants from the colonizing country and relying heavily on African slave labor.

3. The Portuguese in Africa

The early explorers of the African coast were the Portuguese. Under Prince Henry the Navigator, the Portuguese mapped most of the western coast of the continent. After Henry's death, the Portuguese royal house set precedence by constructing a permanent fortress at Elmina near the mouth of the Volta River. Rather than establishing new settler or plantation colonies, the Portuguese on the African coast busied themselves with trade in spices, slaves, ivory and gold.

II. Europeans in the Americas

Like early European explorers along the African coast, early expeditions to the Americas were in search of gold and a quick route to India and China. The need to sail west to reach the Orient was due to the Ottoman Empire blocking easterly paths. Although the Americas stood in the way of reaching these destinations, they were ultimately rich finds for these explorers.

A. The Americas Before the Conquistadores

Prior to European contact, the Americas hosted a wide variety of cultures and peoples, some with extensive empires and sophisticated societies.

1. The Mexican Empire of the Aztecs

The Aztecs (1325-1522) found safety from regional warfare on an island in Lake Texcoco, now Mexico City. Their empire stretched across much of central Mexico and encompassed many other conquered peoples. The Aztecs valued warfare and integrated it into every facet of their social and religious rituals, especially that of human sacrifice.

2. The Incan Empire of the Andes

As the Aztecs were thriving in Mexico, the Incas were expanding their empire in present-day Peru. Unlike the Aztecs, the Incas were careful to indoctrinate conquered peoples into the Inca way of life, economic organization, culture and religion. Although widespread, the centralization of the Inca government led to factionalism on the eve of the Spanish Invasion, weakening the empire fatally.

B. The Mission of the European Voyagers

The initial arrival of Europeans in the Americas was a result of the colossal miscalculation in navigation by Christopher Columbus who sailed west from Spain in hopes of finding a quick passage to China. He mistakenly landed in the Americas, probably in the Bahamas. The Spanish monarchs who had sponsored the voyage applied
to Pope Alexander VI for a monopoly to explore the lands of the western Atlantic. The pope ordered a line of demarcation drawn from North to South, dividing the "explorable" world between Spain and Portugal, negotiated further in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494). Still, the quest for the Orient continued. The Portuguese continued to—and finally conquered—the southern tip of the African continent in 1487; this led to several tenuous voyages of exploration into Asia. Meanwhile, the Spanish pursued Columbus's proposed route west across the Atlantic. Spanish explorer Ferdinand Magellan finally rounded the tip of South America (ca. 1521) and crossed the Pacific in a voyage lasting three years and costing most of the crew's lives.

C. The Fall of the Aztec and Incan Empires

In the wake of the seafaring Spanish came the conquistadores (Spanish adventurers) seeking fortune and royal recognition through conquests and explorations. The Spanish crown received a "royal fifth" of everything of value found in the "New World." Making war on the indigenous peoples only demanded the reading of the requerimiento to legitimize all actions in the eyes of king and pope.

1. Hernan Cortes and Conquest of Mexico

Possibly the most successful of the conquistadores was Cortes, who managed to sack the Aztec capital with 450 Spanish troops, 15 horses, and 4,000 disgruntled native allies. Confused that Cortes might have been one of their deities in the flesh, the Emperor Montezuma was slow to mount a defense. Aztec revolt followed, but Cortes eventually won an extended siege of the city and eventually administered more territory in "New Spain" than Old Spain itself.

2. Francisco Pizarro and the Conquest of Peru

Another freelance conquistador, Pizarro tracked the Inca's emperor to a mountainous city, where a large native army guarded the ruler. In a move of treacherous gamesmanship, Pizarro invited the Incan ruler for a summit conference then rudely took him captive. Befuddled, the Incas knew not what to do, as the extremely centralized government allowed only the emperor to make important decisions. Pizarro killed the emperor and sacked the capital at Cuzco. The wealth of the Americas was completely at the mercy of Spain.

D. Spanish America: The Transplanting of a European Culture

After the conquest of the Aztec and Inca empires, the Spanish conversion of the Americas jumped into high gear. Many indigenous peoples died quickly through torture, overwork, and European diseases. The ecomienda system of economic and social control over the natives was originally a royal grant awarded for military or other services that gave the conquistadores (and their lineage) the right to gather "tribute" from the natives within a determined area. By the seventeenth century these royal grants had become great landed estates called haciendas. The Spanish imported many African slaves to the New World for labor in the silver mines and agricultural plantations. The various orders of the Roman Catholic Church, especially the Jesuits, fanned throughout "New Spain" to spread the world of God and advance the agenda of the pope and king.
E. Portuguese Brazil: The Tenuous Colony

Claimed, then ignored for years by the Portuguese, Brazil became a haven for pirates and French castaways in the early 1500s until the Portuguese crown acted. Brazil was divided into fifteen regions that were distributed to court favorites in a failed scheme to colonize the huge frontier. The growing demand for sugar in Europe spurred Portuguese efforts, as the Brazilian climate was perfect for growing the cane. Unwilling to do the backbreaking work of sugar farming, the Portuguese increased their use of African slave labor, thereby increasing their presence on the African continent.

F. North America: The Land of Lesser Interest

European experience in present-day North America consisted of a small number of exploratory missions and failed attempts at colonization. Thousands of Spanish had emigrated to Central and South America in pursuit of silver, yet the only sizable European settlement in the North was the Spanish garrison at St. Augustine, Florida. Any attraction of North America to the early Europeans lay in the cod fisheries off Newfoundland and the continued hope of a Northwest passage to China and the Indian Ocean. The English were the last of the European powers to begin exploration and colonization of the New World, the first at Roanoke Island, Virginia, and the second at Jamestown.

III. Europeans in Asia

All of this frantic activity in exploration stemmed from the quest to easily reach, and trade with, Indonesia, the Spice Islands, Malaysia, India, and China. As we have seen, various European powers took various routes to try to open up the Orient to trade.

A. Asia Before the European Empires

After the collapse of the Mongol Empire of present-day India, the overland routes to China and the Indian Ocean were blocked to Europeans by plague, political unrest and Muslim hostility. The greatest rival to European domination of Asian trade was Ming China, a highly advanced society with a seafaring tradition superior to that of Europe. Yet the Chinese were only interested in learning about the world, not extensive trade.

B. The Trading Post Empires

Despite the conquest of the southern tip of Africa and reaching the Indian Ocean, voyages remained prohibitively long and the number of people who could go was few. As a result, European contact with Asia was slight at best for 300 years. In Asia, the Portuguese established factories or trading posts along the coasts of India, China, and the Spice Islands, using force when needed to obtain the most desirable and defendable land. Yet their influence did not spread far beyond the coast. The factories existed mostly on the trade of guns, knives, and various cloths in return for silver, gold, spices, and medicines. Only secondary to the desire to trade was the mission to convert the Asian peoples to Christianity. Missionaries had to learn the languages of the East and immerse themselves in the foreign culture. The Jesuit Order of the Catholic Church had the most
success at this. European influence on Asia was far less than Asia's cultural influence on Europe.

IV. The Beginnings of the Global System

These early voyages of exploration set into place patterns of trade and communication that have sustained into the present. Today's electronic global economy is faster, but based on the same ideas of free trade and compensation prevalent during the sixteenth century. Europeans transformed large areas of the Americas into plantations that were worked by African slaves.

A. The Columbian Exchange

The most dramatic changes produced by international connectivity were those produced by the trade of peoples, plants, animals, microbes, and ideas between the Old and New Worlds in a process known as the Columbian Exchange.

1. The Slave Trade

   Slavery is as old as civilization. Large-scale transportation of black Africans began during the ninth and tenth centuries when they were exported to lower Iraq. The institution of slavery was well established in Africa before the first European incursions. Slavery as an institution depended on labor-intensive projects such as large-scale agriculture and mining. The transportation of Africans to the New World solved many logistical problems. Foreign-born slaves did not know the landscape and were less likely to escape. Africans endured the European diseases better than the Native American peoples, who died by the millions. The blending of African slaves with different points of origin and different languages added to their confusion.

   The demand for labor was supplied happily by African chieftains who would capture a neighboring tribe and sell the hapless victims to the Europeans. As the coastal populations dwindled, these chieftains organized slave-hunting expeditions into the African interior.

   Christianity and Islam provided moralistic justification for the enslavement of unbelievers. It was only later that slavery became connected with race.

   Europeans made slavery into a big business. Slave ships sailed the "Middle Passage" across the Atlantic with holds filled beyond capacity with Africans.

2. Biological Exchanges

   Most of the deaths inflicted on the peoples of the New World by the Europeans occurred by accident. Diseases long tolerated by the European explorers traveled the oceans with them and ravaged whole societies. Native Americans of both the North and South had virtually zero immunity to the smallpox, measles, typhus, scarlet fever, and chicken pox brought over from the Old World.

3. The Problem of Cultural Diversity
One of the basic problems presented to Europeans upon discovery of the new world was the realization that the ancients did not know half the truth about the world. Jews and Christians alike were faced with challenges to their belief systems upon finding unspoiled cultures who had never heard the Gospels or Torah. If these peoples were not children of God, how could one account for them? Some thinkers suggested these peoples were sub-humans, and unworthy of equal consideration. Some called the Natives complete innocents and demanded their care and enlightenment. Another scenario saw the Natives as merely "different" and deserved at least of cultural toleration.

B. The Capitalist Global Economy

As stated earlier, the increase in world exploration naturally led to the beginnings of a truly global economy. Agrarian capitalism, the growth of cash crops on a large scale for wide distribution, created the need for slave labor and the creation of settler and plantation colonies. The emerging scope of this global economy made it impossible for one monarchy to control all the factors, so the system thrived as free-market economies often do.

V. Conclusion: The Significance of Global Encounters

The world was changed forever by the voyages of discovery from 1450 to 1650. Their impact lies not in the actual discoveries made, but in the lines of permanent contact established between diverse peoples. Much harm was done and many live lost, but the earlier semi-isolation of the human race was a thing of the past.
TIMELINE

*Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.*

- English establish colony on Roanoke Island, North Carolina
- Pilgrimage to Mecca by Mansa Musa of Mali
- Spanish conquer Mexico
- European slave trade in Africa begins
- Da Gama reaches India via Cape of Good Hope

1324

CA. 1450

1497-1499

1519-1522

1585

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

*The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.*

Caravels
Portolanos
Plantation colony
Settler colony
Conquistadores
Requerimiento
Trading posts
Encomienda
Haciendas
Aldeias
Columbian exchange
Columbian questions
Agrarian capitalism
Cultural relativism
Mansa Musa
Prince Henry the Navigator
Christopher Columbus
Amerigo Vespucci
Hernán Cortés
Francisco Pizzaro
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in this chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

St. Augustine
Cape of Good Hope
Gold Coast
Strait of Magellan
Antwerp
Lisbon

Pickup map from Kishlansky Study Guide, page 129
MAKING CONNECTIONS

The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. What factors led to European exploration and discovery? What nation led the process? What made the Europeans virtually invincible against the defenses of indigenous peoples? What was the impact of the discoveries on the European concept of self?
2. How did new maritime technologies facilitate European expansion?
3. What motivated Christopher Columbus’s wanderlust? How did his motivations mirror a European sense of mission?
4. What conditions facilitated Hernán Cortés’s conquest of Mexico? How were his adventures to serve as a blueprint for Spanish imperialism throughout the New World?
5. What was the Columbian Exchange? How was this a much more complicated process than the simple transfer of germs from one continent to another?
6. Explain the burgeoning slave trade in the context of capitalist global economics? How could something so ancient form the backbone of something so modern?

DOCUMENT QUESTIONS

1. Compare “Columbus’s Christian Mission” with “What Montezuma Believed about the Spanish.” What was the role of religious belief in this age of exploration?
2. Considering the kinds of conditions faced by sailors, such as that described in “The Difficult Life of Sailors,” what could possibly have motivated men to make these voyages?

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

1. By 1500 Europe was in the process of forming more centralized states and of expanding their dominion beyond Europe. How were these two developments related? Is it true that the more centralized states were responsible for exploration and discovery? How did this second episode of colonialism compare to the first (the Crusades)?
2. From the beginning of this text, you have seen cultures coming together, clashing, and melting into one another. What made the European conquest different? What was the impact of this so-called “Columbian Exchange?” How are we wrestling with its consequences today?
SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. Which statement about Ethiopia is not true?
   A. It was predominantly Christian.
   B. It had diplomatic relations with the Pope.
   C. Its major city was Timbuktu.
   D. Europeans considered it a potential ally against Islam.

2. Prince Henry the Navigator
   A. designed the cog.
   B. sailed to the tip of Africa.
   C. sponsored exploratory voyages along the west coast of Africa.
   D. occupied the Canary Islands.

3. The Inca Empire
   A. extended over 2000 miles of the Andes Mountains.
   B. built a network of roads and bridges.
   C. killed or resettled subjects who resisted.
   D. All of these.

4. The Treaty of Tordesillas
   A. established a line of demarcation between Spanish and Portuguese domains.
   B. set up trade between European merchants and Malian agents.
   C. concluded peace between the Spanish and the Incas.
   D. allowed Italian captains to sail for Spain.

5. Which term is correctly matched with its description?
   A. Montezuma -- silver mine
   B. Pachachuti -- founder of the Inca empire
   C. Quetzalcoatl -- Inca Emperor executed by the Spanish
   D. Atahualpa -- Aztec ruler

6. Which term is correctly matched with its description?
   A. Hacienda -- royal grant to use native labor
   B. Encomienda -- area where ocean winds die down
   C. Requerimiento -- landed estate
   D. Mestizo -- person of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry
7. Which explorer is correctly matched with his description?

A. Pedro Cabral -- claimed Brazil for Portugal
B. Amerigo Vespucci -- crossed Panama by land and sighted the Pacific Ocean
C. Francisco Nunez de Balboa -- took the Inca Empire
D. Ferdinand Magellan -- first used the term "New World" in a book about his voyages

8. Which explorer is correctly matched with his description?

A. John Cabot -- English privateer
B. William Baffin -- sailed for France and described the Atlantic coast of North America
C. Giovanni Verrazano -- sailed for England and landed in North America in 1497
D. Jacques Cartier -- explored the St. Lawrence River for France

9. In the early fifteenth century, China

A. had large fleets of ocean-going vessels.
B. sent ships to trade with India and Africa.
C. abruptly stopped all maritime expeditions.
D. All of these.

10. Which items of the Columbian Exchange were native to the Americas?

A. Maize and horse
B. Maize and tobacco
C. Maize and sheep
D. Sheep and tobacco