



## Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VIII

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

2. Analyze the political, cultural, and social contexts out of which the West developed.
  - 2.1 Recall political, cultural, and social contexts that shaped the West.
3. Evaluate the causes and effects of major historical events, including the influence of key individuals, institutions, and ideologies.
  - 3.1 Recall key individuals and their influence on major historical events.

## Reading Assignment

### Chapter 14:

European Exploration and Conquest, 1450-1650

### Chapter 15:

Absolutism and Constitutionalism, ca. 1589-1725

## Unit Lesson

Unit VIII looks at the impact that the discovery of the New World had on both the Americas and Europe. The unit also covers the shifts in statecraft across Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries.

### Age of Discovery and Exploration

Europe had traded indirectly with the Far East for centuries but had for the most part remained fearful of exploring outward on their own for a variety of reasons. With the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the Muslim control of the land routes trading with India and China, Europe now had an economic incentive to explore outside the Mediterranean. The rediscovery of ancient Greek knowledge of cartography and geometry in Europe awakened a new interest in sailing outside the area. This, coupled with advances in shipbuilding, made sailing on the deep seas more practical but still dangerous and expensive.

Portugal's Prince Henry the Navigator dreamed of making his nation a leader in naval technology and trade. He established a school of navigation in the early 1400s designed to train his navy as well as civilian merchants with the latest techniques in navigation, cartography, and ship design. The efforts proved very successful in making the small nation a trading power in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Several expeditions to the Western Hemisphere had already been attempted in some manner by this time. The first European to reach the Americas was Viking explorer Leif Eriksson. Eriksson sailed along the eastern coast of Canada and wintered in Newfoundland in 1001. Though he was killed in a raid by Native Americans, the Vikings sent several expeditions back over the next fifteen years in an ultimately failed effort to settle the island. Archaeological evidence also suggests that West African sailors had made it to South America perhaps in the thirteenth century. In 1491, Chinese explorers sailed along the western coast of North America. However, these early expeditions came to naught in the long run.

The year 1492 was a year of intense change in the Iberian peninsula. That year, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon married and began the process of uniting their two kingdoms into the Kingdom of Spain. The two would conquer the last Muslim stronghold on the peninsula, Granada, and expel the Jews and Muslims from Spain in pursuit of total Roman Catholic conformity.

In addition, Ferdinand was extremely ambitious and a rival with Henry of Portugal. Portugal's maritime ambitions presented Spain with a new challenge. At this time, a sailor from Italy named Christopher Columbus arrived at the Spanish court with a proposition: that the Spanish sponsor his expedition to reach the Far East by sailing west. No one had ever seriously entertained the idea that the Earth was flat, but the deep-sea sailing that Columbus proposed was unprecedented and pushed the limits of the naval technology available at the time. Spain initially turned down Columbus, who then proceeded to ask the governments of Portugal, France, and England to finance his journey.

Spain eventually reconsidered and offered three ships to Columbus: the *Nina*, *Pinta*, and *Santa Maria*. Columbus then departed, traveling roughly west-southwest in pursuit of Asia. However, he reached the New World instead, reaching the isle of San Salvador in the Bahamas on October 12, 1492. After he encountered the natives, he sailed on, still in pursuit of Asia. On this expedition, he also encountered the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola. At Hispaniola, he encountered a large population of natives and a wealth of gold.

Columbus left several men behind on Hispaniola to explore as he returned to Spain with news of his findings. However, the men he left went wild with greed and assaulted and pillaged the locals. The natives rose up in response, killing ten of Columbus's men. When Columbus returned the next year as an admiral in charge of a fleet of seventeen ships and orders to treat the natives kindly, he ignored his orders and rounded up 500 natives when he learned what had happened. The captured natives were then sold in Europe as slaves.

The transatlantic slave trade thus began in 1493, and Spain escalated its use of Native Americans as slave labor in pursuit of mining and agricultural labor, to the point that countless millions died in the coming decades. Even papal edicts not to enslave the natives were totally ignored.

Columbus would conduct four expeditions altogether, sailing throughout the Caribbean Sea and along the coast of Central America, but he could never find Asia. He died in 1506, largely in disgrace.

As Portugal and Spain expanded their trade routes beyond the Mediterranean, increased tensions between the two threatened to explode into war. In 1493, the Vatican brokered the Treaty of Tordesillas to prevent such a calamity. The treaty split the Atlantic trade routes between the two, allowing Spain to continue its efforts further west and giving Portugal the routes along the coast of Africa and then back north into the Indian Ocean.

Portugal hoped to open trade routes with the Far East by sailing around the Cape of Good Hope and then north to India. This route would keep ships closer to the coastlines as a result. However, Portugal was not able to reach India until the voyage of Vasco de Gama in 1498.

In the meantime, other explorers sailed along the coast of North America. This included English explorer John Cabot, who sailed along the coast of Newfoundland and Eastern Canada in 1497. Amerigo Vespucci also served as cartographer for Spanish expeditions along the coast in 1499 and 1501-1502. However, Europeans were initially puzzled why they had not found Asia.

Spanish cartographers realized the problem by the early 1500s: They had found an entirely new continental system. The Spanish named the new continents "America" in honor of Vespucci.

Other explorers of this time period included Ferdinand Magellan. Magellan led an expedition beginning in 1519 that led to him and his crew being the first to circumnavigate the globe. Though Magellan himself died only two-thirds of the way through the voyage, a handful of his men survived, returning to Spain in 1522.

## **Europe in the New World**

Hundreds of Native American civilizations existed in the Americas as the Europeans arrived. The societies had vastly different languages, cultures, and religious beliefs. While some lived nomadic existences on the High Plains, the majority were farming tribes living in permanent villages. Historians have estimated that the population of the Americas stood at near 50 million in 1492, including four million in what would become the continental United States.

With the conquest of the Aztec Empire in 1521 by Hernando Cortes, and the inland explorations of Hernando the Soto and Cabeza de Vaca, Spain gained control of Mexico and slowly expanded its control throughout the Americas. Spain concentrated its efforts on exploiting the resources of the New World. Spain made billions of

dollars mining gold and silver, but using Native Americans as slave labor. Due to deaths from abuse, malnutrition, and murder, the populations of the tribes collapsed. By the early sixteenth century, Spain began importing African slaves to make up for their resulting labor shortages.

Along the way, trade developed between the two hemispheres as the two sides encountered life forms they had never encountered before. The trade between the Old World and the New World became known as the Columbian Exchange, and it reaped incredible profits for Europe. The Europeans found such products as corn, tobacco, pecans, and potatoes, which quickly became vital crops for Europe. American crops such as sweet potatoes were staple crops in China within a century, as were white potatoes becoming an indispensable food source for Ireland. The Native Americans encountered horses for the first time, which dramatically altered life for the Plains tribes forever. They also encountered diseases to which they had no immunity. These included measles, typhus, and worst of all, smallpox. Smallpox epidemics left millions dead in the Americas, wiping out entire tribes. In fact, within a decade of the Spanish arrival in Central Mexico, one-third of the natives in that region died.

After the earliest explorations of the American continents by Spain, Portugal, France, and England, the four nations (and still more) scrambled to seize control of the new lands beginning in the 1500s. In spite of these efforts by other European powers, Spain still overwhelmingly dominated North and South America.

The Treaty of Tordesillas inadvertently left the eastern tip of Brazil within the Portuguese sphere of influence. Portugal founded a colony in Brazil in the 16th century, with the cities of Sao Paulo founded in 1554 and Rio de Janeiro by 1567.

The Dutch and Swedish also founded colonies in the New World by the seventeenth century. New Sweden was founded in modern-day Delaware in 1638. It was founded primarily as a series of trading posts. The Dutch founded New Netherland in what is now the Hudson River Valley of New York, Long Island, and northern New Jersey in 1614. After buying the island of Manhattan from the local Manhattan tribe, the City of New Amsterdam was incorporated as a port and trade city in 1626. Fearful of Swedish attempts to cut into their trade, the Dutch conquered New Sweden in 1655. However, the English, led by the Duke of York, conquered New Netherland in 1664 and renamed the city and the region New York.

The French attempted to establish a trade colony along the St. Lawrence River as early as the 1530s. However, it was not until 1608 with the founding of Quebec that France was able to develop a thriving colony. The French eventually took control of the entire Great Lakes area as they established trade relations with Native American tribes throughout the region. In 1682, Sir Robert Cavalier (Sieur de la Salle) expanded French claims even further when he travelled down the Mississippi River and at Arkansas claimed the entire Mississippi River Valley and all of its tributaries for France. He named the land after France's reigning king, Louis XIV, calling it Louisiana.

The earliest English attempt at colonization was the Roanoke Colony, established by Sir Walter Raleigh on the Outer Banks of North Carolina in 1587. After establishing the first settlement, Raleigh left for England to recruit more colonists and to procure more supplies. However, by the time he returned in 1590, all of the colonists had vanished without a trace. While the buildings were still intact and no evidence of a plague, storm, or battle existed, no one ever found out what happened to them or where they went in a mystery that has baffled historians for centuries.

England tried again several years later with the Jamestown Colony in Virginia in 1607. Though half the colonists died by the end of the first winter, this became the first permanent English settlement in the New World. It was here in 1619 that the first representative body founded by Europeans was established, the Virginia General Assembly. It was also here in 1619 that the first slaves in the English colonies arrived as a Dutch ship left twenty slaves. The next year, 1620, the Pilgrims, a group of Puritan religious dissenters, landed in Plymouth. Slowly, the English would establish colonies and come to dominate the entire Atlantic seaboard.

## Suggested Reading

The following textbook is optional. It has additional readings that correspond with the topics covered in the course textbook, and you may find these sources interesting. You will not be tested on any information from this textbook:

McKay, J. P., Crowston, C. H., Weisner-Hanks, M. E., & Perry, J. (2014). *Sources for western society: From antiquity to the enlightenment* (3rd ed., Vol. 1). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.