

*Unit 1: Creating America*  
*Notes 1: First Encounters, First Conquest*

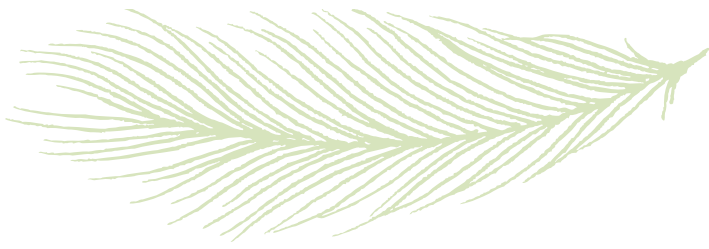
**Introduction:**

- Europeans had been sailing on the Atlantic long before Columbus was born.
- The Vikings came from modern-day Norway and Denmark and settled Iceland in the late 800s and expanded their territory to Greenland by 980. Though their interactions with the natives were not always peaceful, the Vikings were able to export lumber to Scandinavia while maintaining themselves with successful farms. By 1001 the Vikings pushed further west to the modern-day Canadian province of Newfoundland.
- By the time, Columbus was born all earlier European contact with North America was long forgotten and within the next hundred years before Columbus would sail across the Atlantic Ocean, European went through a series of extraordinary changes, which not only set Columbus up for his travels but also shaped the beliefs and expectations with which the first Europeans arrived in the Americas.
- Europe in the 1400s was still recovering from the devastating Black Death, the bubonic plague that arrived in 1348 on rats carried by ships trading in the Black Sea. Whole families and village disappeared. With many people traumatized the survivors who looked for someone to blame for the disaster. Jews, religious nonconformists and foreigners made good scapegoats and there were massive persecutions across Europe.
- A unified Roman Catholic Christian Church dominated the religious life of Europe in the 1400s. The Protestant Reformation was still a century in the future. Nevertheless, the church with its liturgy, creed and clergy (the pope, bishops, priest, monks and nuns) was the strongest institution in Europe, unifying people who had different languages and leaders. Literacy, learning and the preservation of culture rested mostly with the church. The church also provided what social services there were for the aged, sick and poor.
- Life in modern eyes would seem primitive. Most people were dirty, poorly clothed, and illiterate. Life expectancy was in the 30s, especially because infant mortality and death from childbirth were high. Trade was limited because transporting most things was difficult and expensive. The church taught that seeking wealth, especially charging interest for loans, was sinful. People were encouraged to stay where they were – in the community and in social class where they were born, whether they were peasants or nobles.

***Part 1: A Changing Europe in the 1400s***

**The Ottoman Empire Changes Eastern Europe**

- In 1453, when Christopher Columbus was 2 years old, Muslim Ottoman Turks conquered the city of Constantinople, the most important city in Eastern Europe. From their new capital, renamed Istanbul, the Ottomans ruled an empire that stretched from Hungary to most of the Middle East and North Africa.
  - The fall of Constantinople shocked Europe. Constantinople had been at the crossroads of trade routes between Europe and Asia and was considered the equivalent of Rome as a religious and political center.
  - The Ottomans encouraged trade within their empire but restricted others from using the land and sea routes across the eastern Mediterranean.
- Suddenly Christian Europe was cut off from the lucrative land-based trade in spices and luxury goods with Asia that had existed since Italy's Marco Polo had traveled to China in the late 1200s.



### **The Rise of the Portuguese Exploration**

- The first and in many ways most adventurous European to seek a new way of connecting with Asia was Prince Henry of Portugal.
  - Even before the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, Henry decided that Portugal, with its strategic location on Europe's southern Atlantic coast, should try to establish a new trade route to Asia by sailing around Africa.
  - Although he is known to history as "the Navigator", Henry's personal seagoing was modest.
- In 1424, Prince Henry, organized a long series of expeditions – in which others did the actual travel – that sailed farther and farther south along the coast of Africa. Once they learned how to navigate the currents off the African coast, Portuguese explorers moved quickly!
- Finally, in 1488, Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope on the southern tip of Africa. A decade later, in 1498, Vasco da Gama followed Dias's route and reached India. These successful expeditions led to flourishing trade with Asia and Africa by the early 1500s.
  - The Portuguese not only established a string of trading colonies in India, Indonesia and China, they also developed a massive new African trade.
  - Portuguese merchants virtually reinvented slavery in Western Europe and became the first and most significant player in the African slave trade as well as in the spice trade with Asia.
  - This made Portugal the richest nation in Europe!

### **England and France**

- While Portugal was establishing its ocean routes to Asia and growing fabulously wealthy in the process, most of the rest of Europe remained poor and distracted with more immediate worries.
- France and England fought the Hundred Years' War with each other, depleting both nations' resources.
  - When the war was over, France was divided by a bitter civil war until 1477 as the royal government sought to assert its control of the kingdom.
  - England was also torn by a civil war, and fought until Henry VII defeated Richard II in 1485. The destruction brought by war and plague left little time, money or energy for either France or England to engage in exploration.
- Despite all their troubles, England and France were relatively unified kingdoms.

### **The Unification and Rise of Spain**

- Unlike some other parts of Europe, Spain, however achieved a dramatic new unity in the late 1400s and this unified Spain would be a powerful force in the Americas.
- The political, cultural and religious unification of Spain – known as "reconquest" – was an extraordinary development given the 7 centuries during which unity of any sort had seemed impossible.
  - Medieval Spain was in the hands of African Muslims. Christian monarchs gradually conquered Portugal and most of Spain from the Muslims, but the struggle took centuries. While Christians ruled some areas, many others remained Muslim. Yet the very divisions of Spain resulted in some of the richest cultural development in Europe.
  - It was through Spain that the culture of Islam came into Europe, including Arabic numerals, algebra, paper, cotton, rice and sugar.
  - Spain's long-standing divisions ended in the late 1400s.
- By 1400, the peninsula in which Spain was located was divided into four Christian kingdoms and one Muslim kingdom in the south.



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- When two of the most powerful Spanish thrones merged together, through marriage, the joint monarchs then began a long campaign to finish the reconquest of Spain.
  - In 1492, their armies defeated the Muslims, adding its territory to their kingdom and ending the 800 yearlong Islamic presence in Spain. That same year, Ferdinand and Isabella, expelled the Jews from Spain, a move that cost them some of their most innovative citizens, but Isabella and Ferdinand wanted their nation to be unified, and like most Europeans at the time, saw religious uniformity as key to that goal.
- Isabella commissioned an Italian sailor named Christopher Columbus to try to find a route to Asia that would be different from the African one Portugal was exploring.

### **Slavery in Africa**

- Slavery was a significant part of the African economy in the 1400s. In an economic system where the community, not an individual, owed land in common, as it did in West Africa, owning people who could work the land was a way to accumulate wealth.
- When the Portuguese began their African trade in the 1400s, African slaves had been brought across the Sahara to Europe and the Middle East for over 1,000 years. When the Portuguese first became involved in the slave trade they merely built on existing trade and cultural traditions. Far fewer people were involved than would be the case in the future, but for those who were enslaved the new patterns created huge dislocations.
  - An African could be enslaved for many reasons: as punishment for a crime or as payment for debt, but most slaves were captured in war from other communities. Those who sold them considered the slaves aliens, not people like themselves.
  - Enslaving members of another tribe did not distress them. The economic advantages of capturing slaves in war and then selling them also made war itself a profitable commercial venture and intensified other tensions for Africa tribes.
- Nevertheless, just because slavery and the slave trade were already part of the economic system of West Africa when the Portuguese arrived in the mid-1400s does not change the horror of the institution. Being captured in war, losing one's freedom and then being sent away from home must always have been terrifying. It was even worse if by strange-looking people who spoke a totally different language and who considered slaves not merely aliens but subhuman.
- A more terrible form of slavery was being born in the 1400s. For the first time, not only the slaves' freedom but also their language, culture, and identity were being destroyed.
- Africans, as slaves or as free people hired for the work, would accompany some of the earliest Portuguese, Spanish and English explorers of North and South America in the 1500s, helping explore Florida, Virginia, Texas and New Mexico.

### *Part II: Early Conquest*

#### **Columbus and The Columbian Exchange**

- As delighted as Christopher Columbus was by the Natives welcome and generosity and what seemed to him the easy opportunity to convert them to Christianity and that conquest would be easy.
- Columbus described what would be the terms of much of the European contact with American Indians: "They should be good and intelligent servants, for I see that they say very quickly everything that is said to them".
- And then the search for gold, and the effort to subjugate the Natives began.



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- The Voyages of Christopher Columbus
  - In spite of the friendly welcome he received, Columbus took some natives as captives. He wanted to teach them Spanish and show them to his sponsors in Spain. Columbus also wanted guides to the gold he was sure could be found since he had seen some natives wearing gold ornaments.
  - Columbus never fully understood the importance of his voyage. He discovered a route across the Atlantic directly to Asia and he thought he had indeed reached an unknown part of Asia, perhaps Japan or Korea.
  - The rest of Columbus's life was a tragedy. Columbus exaggerated what he had found, especially the gold. Isabella and Ferdinand gave him seventeen ships and 1,200 men for a second voyage to seek slaves and gold in this supposed part of Asia, just as the Portuguese were finding both in Africa.
  - Columbus himself was a better explorer than administrator and less vicious than many of his successors.
- The Columbian Exchange - The Impact of European Arms and Disease
  - The Spanish governors who came after Columbus were more efficient and crueler. As they learned more about the lands and people that Columbus had claimed for them, Ferdinand and Isabella pressed harder for gold. They also ordered that the natives be treated well and not enslaved, but the Spanish governors focused on the gold and ignored the command to show kindness.
  - What became known as the Columbian Exchange, the interchange of disease, plants, animals, and human cultures between New and Old Worlds, reflected changes. However, the most devastating change that Columbus and his successors did was unintentional. They brought European diseases. The Natives, like all natives of the Americas, had no immunity to smallpox, measles, or other diseases they had never known.
    - In Europe, these diseases were common and had been for hundreds of years and many people had developed immunity to them or at least to their worst effects.
    - Natives had no such immunity.
    - As a result, while Indians died by the hundreds from Spanish swords, they died by the thousands from disease.
    - There were probably 1 million people on Hispaniola when Columbus landed in 1492, but by the early 1500s, only 1,000 natives were left. Within a century, all were gone. The European destruction of the first people of the Americas had begun.

**A Divided Europe: The Impact of the Protestant Reformation**

- When Columbus sailed in 1492, he did so with a commission from the rulers of a newly unified Spain. Spanish explorers and conquerors brought the same quest for unity to the Americas. Less than 30 years after Columbus made his voyage across the Atlantic, the Protestant Reformation changed the way Europeans thought about the world.
- The initial European encounter with the Americas was led by representatives of a religiously united Europe, but nearly all of the subsequent exploration and settlement of North America were conducted by Europeans who represented particular groups from a continent deeply divided by religious hostility. The divide shaped the way they understood their efforts on both sides of the Atlantic.



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- The Birth of Protestantism
  - Some within the Roman Catholic Church began to challenge some of the church's practices, prompted partly by new translations of the Bible.
    - The challenges questioned the Catholic Church's insistence that bishops and not every day Christians should interpret the Bible and the idea that one could reach salvation through "good works".
    - This quickly led to a religious split, first in Germany and then across Europe.
    - That split is known as the Protestant Reformation, which would shape the cultural and political development of the future United States.
  - Part of what fueled the extraordinary response to Luther's challenge was the cumulating effect that the technology of printing had produced during the previous 62 years.
    - Many people learned to read, thus new ideas could spread with a rapidity not known before.
    - The printing press prompted a free flow of ideas that most people in Europe had not experienced before.

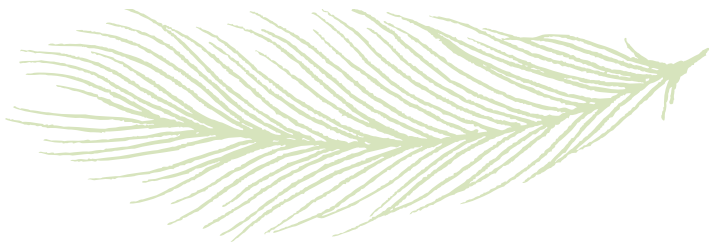
**Exploration and Encounter in North America**

- Although Spanish conquistadors were the leading explorers of the Americas, an English led expedition was among the first to follow Columbus. King Henry VII of England commissioned another Italian to sail across the Atlantic in 1497.
- He made landfall in North America, most likely in Newfoundland and may have traveled as far south as Maine. He did not meet any people but established a cross and banner to claim the lands for England.
- In 1498, he set out on a second voyage but disappeared. There were no more English expeditions for the next 50 years. Years later England would be much different and would have different reasons and needs to look across the Atlantic.
  - England's Reformation Shapes the Country
    - In the early years of the Protestant Reformation, few would have predicted that England would break from the Roman Catholic Church. When Henry VIII became king in 1509 he was a good Catholic. He married Catherine, the daughter of devote Catholic Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain but Henry's marriage problems would soon reshape the country.
    - By the late 1520s, Henry wanted to end his marriage with Catherin (five of their children had died and only a daughter, Mary, survived and Henry wanted a son) and he had fallen in love with Anne Boleyn.
    - The English clergy had agreed to dissolve the marriage but the Pope did not.
    - Now the Protestant Reformation gave Henry an opening. In 1534, Parliament passed legislation ending papal authority in England and declared Henry head of the church of England. Henry annulled his marriage to Catherine, married Anne and celebrated the birth of another daughter, Elizabeth.
    - When Henry died in 1547, England had three major religious groups: Anglicans, Puritans, and Catholics.
    - Henry's successor was his 9-year-old son Edward. The boy-king's regents sought to make the English church more Protestant in its doctrines and rituals, but when Edward died at age 15, Mary became queen and returned England to Catholicism, briefly.
    - Mary soon died after only reigning for about 5 years and in 1558 Elizabeth succeeded her to become Queen Elizabeth.



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- Elizabeth's Reign
  - Elizabeth's reasons for embracing Protestantism were strong. If England were Catholic, then Henry's marriage to her mother would be illegal and she would be illegitimate to rule. If England were Protestant, she had every right to be queen.
  - During her long reign, England became a major power in Europe and the world.
  - Spain, under King Philip II (grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella) was the center of the Catholic revival and Philip's Spain and Elizabeth's England became bitter rivals, planning to overthrow one another.
  - When Spain attacked England in July of 1588, Spain's navy was known as the Spanish Armada but the English navy and storms defeated it.
  - After 1588, England's navy dominated the Atlantic and eventually all of the world's oceans.
  - English sailors became more skilled, the country's shipbuilders became more sophisticated in their designs and its navigators gained new understanding of the winds and currents as well as their charts and instruments.
  - Now a small nation, on the margins of Europe, was suddenly a major player in an emerging Atlantic world.
- Sir Walter Raleigh and the Lost colony of Roanoke
  - In 1584, an ambitious young man, Sir Walter Raleigh, was authorized by England to use his own funds to occupy lands in North America.
  - A mission was put together for reconnaissance to identify a potential site. The small group discovered Roanoke Island and received a warm welcome from the native there.
  - A year later Raleigh sent 100 men back to Roanoke Island, on North Carolina's Outer Banks, it was the first English colony in the modern-day US, but it was short lived (a ship ran aground and most the food they brought was ruined).
  - In 1587 Raleigh convinced English investors to create a new colony in a location on the Chesapeake Bay, of course in a more suitable location.
  - So, 100 people left England to create a new colony, but events along the way ended them back on Roanoke Island. Nevertheless, the colony was established and the building process began.
  - Virginia Dare was born and baptized in this colony, she is known as the first English child born in what is now the United States.
  - But the 1587 colony also failed and became known as the "Lost Colony"
    - The settlers had been left in what was considered relatively good shape with a promise of resupply ships in the spring. However, no ships were allowed to leave England in 1588 because of the threatened Spanish attack (which remember England won). Additionally, weather did not help the colony, between 1587 and 1589, the worst drought in 800 years struck. When John White finally returned to Roanoke in 1590 with the promised supplies he found the colony abandoned. Whether the colonists were massacred or simply melted into the surround native tribes is unknown still today.



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*Conclusion*

- Through most of the 1500s England effort to colonize were considered total failures. Fortunes have been spent, but few permanent settlements had been made.
- The explores had found no gold and no quick route to China.
- Nevertheless, Spain, France and England now had a much clearer picture of the geography of North America. Situations would change quickly though in the years to come as countries would fight for permanent settlement.