

#3

Europe and the Age of Exploration (Overview)

In the 15th century, European navigators began to conduct voyages to the far corners of the world. As a result, a number of emerging nation-states—including Spain, Portugal, France, the Netherlands, and Great Britain—began to build large colonial empires with trading stations and settlements in Africa, the Americas, and Asia. Each nation was competing for an advantage over its neighbor.

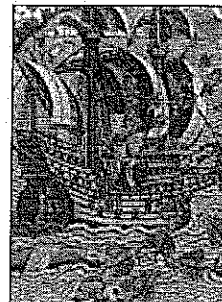
Trade

The Portuguese began the race to build a commercial empire. In the early 1400s, they began to explore the coast of West Africa with the goal of establishing a trade in gold and slaves.

Fish were the natural resource that drew Europeans farther and farther into the North Atlantic Ocean. And spices drew them to India and other parts of Asia.

Converting to Christianity

Hand-in-hand with the desire for commercial success was the desire to convert the people living in faraway lands to Christianity. The work of many missionaries and chaplains was devoted to converting the indigenous peoples.



Navigational Innovations

Technological innovations had a great effect on exploration. Although the principle of the magnetic compass had been known since the 12th century, it wasn't until the 13th century that mariners began to rely heavily on it for long-distance navigation. At about the same time, shipbuilders began to replace the steersman's oar with a rudder attached to the rear of a boat, which allowed them to build heavier crafts more suited for ocean voyages.



There were also a number of advances in cartography, or mapmaking. Cartographers drew information from Venetian traveler Marco Polo's book, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, published in 1477, to draw maps that inspired European navigators to seek sea routes to India and China. A couple decades later in 1492, the German geographer Martin Behaim constructed one of the first terrestrial globes. Although his globe helped people to understand that the earth was indeed round, it misled them, too, because it showed only one large ocean between Europe and Asia and no Americas!

Pivotal Point

Italian navigator Christopher Columbus' voyage to the Americas in 1492 is considered a pivotal point in European expansion. Although at first he thought he had landed in Asia, Columbus later realized that he had landed in a "New World," a place that Europeans of the day did not even know existed. Five years later, a Portuguese navigator named Vasco da Gama sailed around the southern tip of Africa and became the first European to reach India by a sea route. His discovery meant that the Europeans finally had a way to avoid the costly taxes charged by every country between Asia and Europe for letting shipments from the East pass through.

Europe and the Age of Exploration: Discussion

1. What personality traits and skills would have been helpful to a European navigator during the Age of Exploration?
2. Do you think the European countries that colonized the New World had a right to the riches of the New World? Why or why not?
3. Although Prince Henry never set sail on an exploration, he was called the Navigator. Do you think that was an appropriate name for him? Why or why not?

English, French, and Spanish Exploration (Overview) #5

In the late 1400s, European explorers set sail to find a water route to China and India. Trade in jewels, fine silks, perfumes, and spices from the Far East held the promise of great wealth. In 1487, Bartholomeu Dias, sailing for King John II of Portugal, rounded the southern tip of Africa. The Portuguese believed that if they could do that, they could also continue sailing eastward to India and China. (Indeed, in 1498, Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and reached Calcutta, India, proving that an all-water route to the East did exist.) At about the same time, the Spanish, English, and French entered a race to see who could find a water route to China and India by sailing west from Europe.

A Major Omission

At least some of these explorers plotted their course based on information from a theoretical map drawn by Florentine Paolo Toscanelli in 1474. According to his map, a ship sailing due west from Europe would eventually land in Cathaya, as China was then called. It looked like it would be quicker to cross the ocean separating Europe and China than to sail all the way around Africa and then beyond to India and China.

However, as Christopher Columbus, the first explorer to utilize Toscanelli's map, was soon to discover, there was a major omission on Toscanelli's map, a whole new world! In 1492, Columbus sailed west from Portugal, financed by Queen Isabella of Spain. Isabella believed that if Columbus could do what he promised, the gain for Spain would be incalculable—all the wealth of Asia would be Spain's! In a little over two months' time, Columbus sighted land that he believed was the East Indies but was actually the present day West Indies in the Caribbean. He was sure China was nearby.

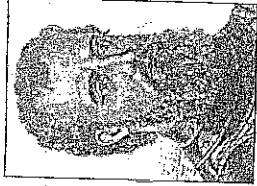
England Joins the Search

Using news of Columbus's discovery on behalf of Spain, John Cabot persuaded King Henry VII to commission him to sail for England in search of a viable, northern trade route. Cabot proposed starting from a northerly latitude where the longitudes are much closer together and where, as a result, the voyage would be much shorter. He set sail in 1497 and five weeks later, reached what is now Newfoundland. He claimed the land for England and returned home.

Disappointed that he had not found the rich cities of China and believing that he had been just off the coast of the Asian continent, Cabot made a second voyage to explore the east and northeast coasts of North America, a trip from which he never returned. Although Cabot did not discover a northern sea route to the Far East, he claimed a good deal of land for England and opened the way to the rich fishing grounds off Newfoundland's shores, ending England's dependence on Iceland's fish.

The French Follow Suit

Sponsored by the French, Giovanni da Verrazano sailed in 1524 in search of the Northwest Passage, a northern route to the Far East. However, he landed in what is now North Carolina.



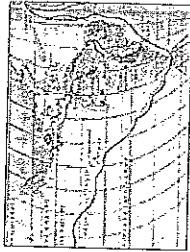
Motives

Ten years later, France tried again, sending Jacques Cartier in search of a sea passage to Asia. Cartier discovered the mouth of the St. Lawrence River in Canada and thought he had found the true way to the Far East. After three more voyages to explore the St. Lawrence River, he finally admitted that he was mistaken. Although France was disappointed by Cartier's failure to find a trade route, they would later be very pleased with the lands he claimed for them.

While English, French, and Dutch exploration seemed solely focused on finding a trade route to Asia, the Spanish explored for "God, Gold, and Glory." They explored, discovered, and conquered. As soon as new lands were discovered, their Jesuit missionaries arrived and sought to convert the native populations to Catholicism. At the same time, their conquistadors, most notably Hernando Cortés and Francisco Pizarro, overthrew ancient empires and confiscated all of their wealth, mostly gold and silver, which was sent home to the Spanish Crown's treasury.

Spain Continues the Quest

Still intent on finding a western water route to India, in 1519, King Charles I of Spain financed the exploration of Ferdinand Magellan. The return on his investment was probably far more than what Charles had expected—Magellan's expedition became the first to sail around the world! Magellan sailed south from Spain, then west across the Atlantic to the coast of South America, and then south again. His ships rounded the tip of South America, entered the Pacific Ocean, and reached the Philippines. Resupplied, the expedition sailed across the Indian Ocean, down the eastern coast of Africa, around the Cape of Good Hope, and up the western coast of Africa, eventually reaching its home port. The voyage took three years to complete.



It was now clear that a New World—North and South America—had been found. There was little inclination to explore it, however, but instead a continuing determination to find a way past it to the wealth of Asia. Nevertheless, there was a great deal of information to use to update Toscanelli's map!

English, French, and Spanish Exploration: Discussion

1. There were many reasons for the age of exploration in Europe. What do you think was the main reason?
2. An explorer is said to have a brave and adventurous spirit. Why?
3. Many of Europe's great explorers sailed for countries other than their own. For example, Christopher Columbus and John Cabot were both Italians but they sailed for Spain and England, respectively. What do you think appealed to these men more than their sense of patriotism?

Document-Based Assessment

Why Did Europeans Explore the Seas?

In the 1400s, Europeans began to embark on long and dangerous voyages to unknown destinations. Why did this age of exploration begin? In Documents A and B, a contemporary observer and a modern-day historian describe the impetus behind these early expeditions.

Document A

"The discovery of the new Western World followed, as an incidental consequence, from the long struggle of the nations of Europe for commercial supremacy and control of the traffic with the East. In all these dreams of the politicians and merchants, sailors and geographers, who pushed back the limits of the unknown world, there is the same glitter of gold and precious stones, the same odour of far-fetched spices."

—Sir Walter Raleigh, 1509

Document B

"The starting point for the European expansion out of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic continental shelf had nothing to do with, say, religion or the rise of capitalism—but it had a great deal to do with pepper. . . . [Pepper] comprised more than half of all the spice imports into Italy over a period of more than a century. No other single spice came within one-tenth of the value of pepper. . . . However, since about 1470 the Turks had been impeding the overland trade routes east from the Mediterranean. As a result the great Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish explorers all sailed west or south in order to reach the Orient. The Americas were discovered as a by-product in the search for pepper."

—From *Seeds of Change* by Henry Hobhouse

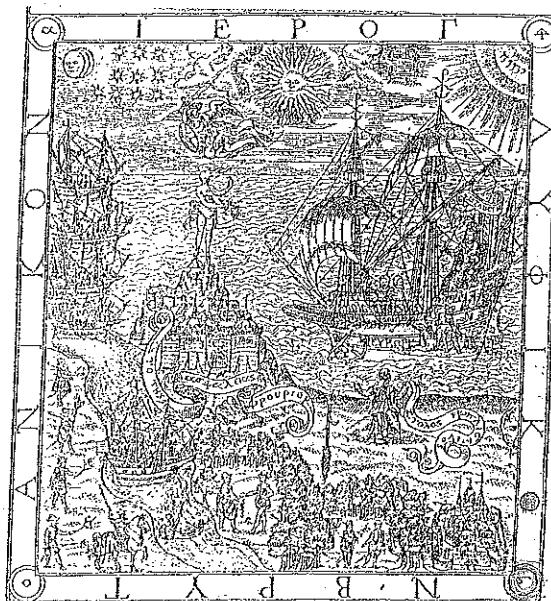
This page from a sixteenth-century book about navigation depicts England's Queen Elizabeth in the ship at the right. ▶

Document C



◀ This fifteenth-century painting depicts Henry the Navigator, standing at right in round black hat. A Portuguese prince, Henry did much to advance maritime exploration and the fields of navigation and cartography.

Document D



Analyzing Documents

Use your knowledge of European exploration and Documents A, B, C, and D to answer questions 1–4.

- Documents A and B both make the point that the discovery of new lands was motivated by
 - religious fanaticism.
 - adventurous dreams.
 - wanting to make money.
 - Renaissance ideals.
- What motivation for exploration is implied in Document C?
 - the search for spices
 - the desire to please king or country
 - the desire to spread Christianity
 - both B and C
- What does Document D suggest about how European monarchs viewed exploration?
 - They saw it as vitally important to their nations.
 - They viewed exploration as interesting but unnecessary.
 - They saw it as important but not worth spending money on.
 - They had no opinion about exploration.
- Writing Task** Using information from the chapter, assess the various motivations for exploration. Are there any that are not shown in these documents? Choose the motivation you think was the most compelling for Europeans. Use specific evidence from the chapter and documents to support your argument.

Document-Based Assessment

The Impact of Piracy

In 1580, Admiral Francis Drake returned to England after circumnavigating the globe. A delighted Queen Elizabeth I knighted the commander when she visited his ship, the *Golden Hind*, in 1581. The British queen had good reason to be grateful. Drake's voyage brought huge revenues to the royal treasury and dealt a blow to her enemy, King Philip II of Spain. The documents below give different views of Drake's activities.

Document A

"Passing the Straits of Magellan, untraversed as yet by any Englishman, [Drake] swept the unguarded coast of [Chile] and Peru, loaded his bark with the gold-dust and silver-ingots of Potosí, and with the pearls, emeralds, and diamonds which formed the cargo of the great galleon that sailed once a year from Lima to Cadiz. With spoils of above half-a-million in value the daring adventurer steered undauntedly for the Moluccas, rounded the Cape of Good Hope, and after completing the circuit of the globe dropped anchor again in Plymouth harbour. . . . The welcome he received from Elizabeth on his return was accepted by Phillip as an outrage which could only be expiated by war. . . . She met a request for Drake's surrender by knighting the freebooter, and by wearing in her crown the jewels he had offered her as a present."

—From *A Short History of the English People* by J.R. Green

Document B

"[The Ambassador urged his king] . . . that no foreign ship be spared, in . . . the . . . Indies, but that every one should be sent to the bottom, and not a soul on board of them allowed to live. This will be the only way to prevent the English and French from going to these parts to plunder, for at present there is hardly an Englishman who is not talking of undertaking the voyage, so encouraged are they by Drake's return."

—Don Bernardino de Mendoza,
Philip II's ambassador to London, around 1580

Analyzing Documents

Use your knowledge of American colonial history and Documents A, B, C, and D to answer questions 1–4.

1. According to Document A, Drake's exploits in Chile and Peru
A were not commercially successful.
B were done impulsively, without Queen Elizabeth's consent or approval.
C gave King Philip II the excuse he'd been wanting to start a war against England.
D met with outrage and anger from Queen Elizabeth and the English-speaking world.
2. According to Document B, what was Don Bernardino de Mendoza's main concern regarding Drake?
A that Drake would return to the West Indies soon
B that other seamen would copy Drake's exploits
C that Spanish seamen would join future Drake expeditions
D that other nations would join with England against Spain
3. Document D shows Queen Elizabeth I with Francis Drake. Which of the other documents does this one support?
A Document A
B Document B
C Document C
D Documents A, B, and C
4. **Writing Task** Write a news article about Drake's exploits that might have appeared in a Spanish newspaper around 1580. Use the documents along with information from the chapter to support your article.

Document C

"To Lima we came the 13th of February; and, being entered the haven, we found there about twelve sail of ships lying fast moored at an anchor, having all their sails carried on shore; for the masters and merchants were here most secure, having never been assaulted by enemies, and at this time feared the approach of none such as we were. Our general rifled these ships, and found in one of them a chest full of reals of plate, and good store of silks and linen cloth. . . . In which ship he had news of another ship called the *Cacafuego*, which was gone toward Payta, and that the same ship was laden with treasure. Whereupon we stayed no longer here, but cutting all the cables of the ships in the haven, we let them drive whither they would, either to sea or to the shore; and with all speed we followed the *Cacafuego* which was gone toward Payta. . . ."

—From *Sir Francis Drake's Famous Voyage Round the World, 1580* by Francis Pretty

Document D ▼

