

1492
Columbus sails
to Americas

1494
Spain and Portugal divide
the non-Christian world

1499
Amerigo Vespucci
explores the
American coast

1507
"America" first
appears on map

1490

1495

1500

1505

1510

4 The Atlantic World Is Born

SECTION PREVIEW

Objectives

- 1 Identify Columbus and describe the circumstances that led to his explorations.
- 2 Describe the challenges the expedition faced.
- 3 Describe the positive and negative impact of Columbus's journeys.
- 4 **Key Terms** Define: Columbian Exchange; Treaty of Tordesillas; plantation; cash crop.

Main Idea

Columbus's voyages to the Americas permanently reshaped American, European, and African history.

Reading Strategy

Analyzing Cause and Effect As you read, write down specific details that explain why Europeans came to the Americas.

Until quite recently, schoolbooks on American history repeated a famous but false legend about Christopher Columbus's voyage to America. According to the legend, Columbus believed that Earth was round, while everyone else thought it was flat. As he sailed west across the Atlantic Ocean, his crew nearly mutinied, thinking that they would fall off the edge of Earth. Just then, the story goes, the crew spotted land. Columbus had discovered America, the old histories claimed. He was the first European to set foot on American soil.

This legend is wrong in a number of ways. First, Renaissance scholars of Columbus's time studied the work of ancient Greek and Arab scientists, who had shown that the Earth is a sphere. Second, Native Americans had discovered the uninhabited Western Hemisphere thousands of years before. Third, Norsemen led by Leif Ericsson had landed and briefly settled on what is now Newfoundland, Canada, about 500 years before Columbus's famous journey.

The truth itself is amazing enough. Columbus was an experienced navigator who undertook a highly dangerous voyage into unknown waters. Other mariners had attempted the trip across the Atlantic. They never returned. Columbus did, and his accomplishment changed the course of history.

Christopher Columbus

AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY

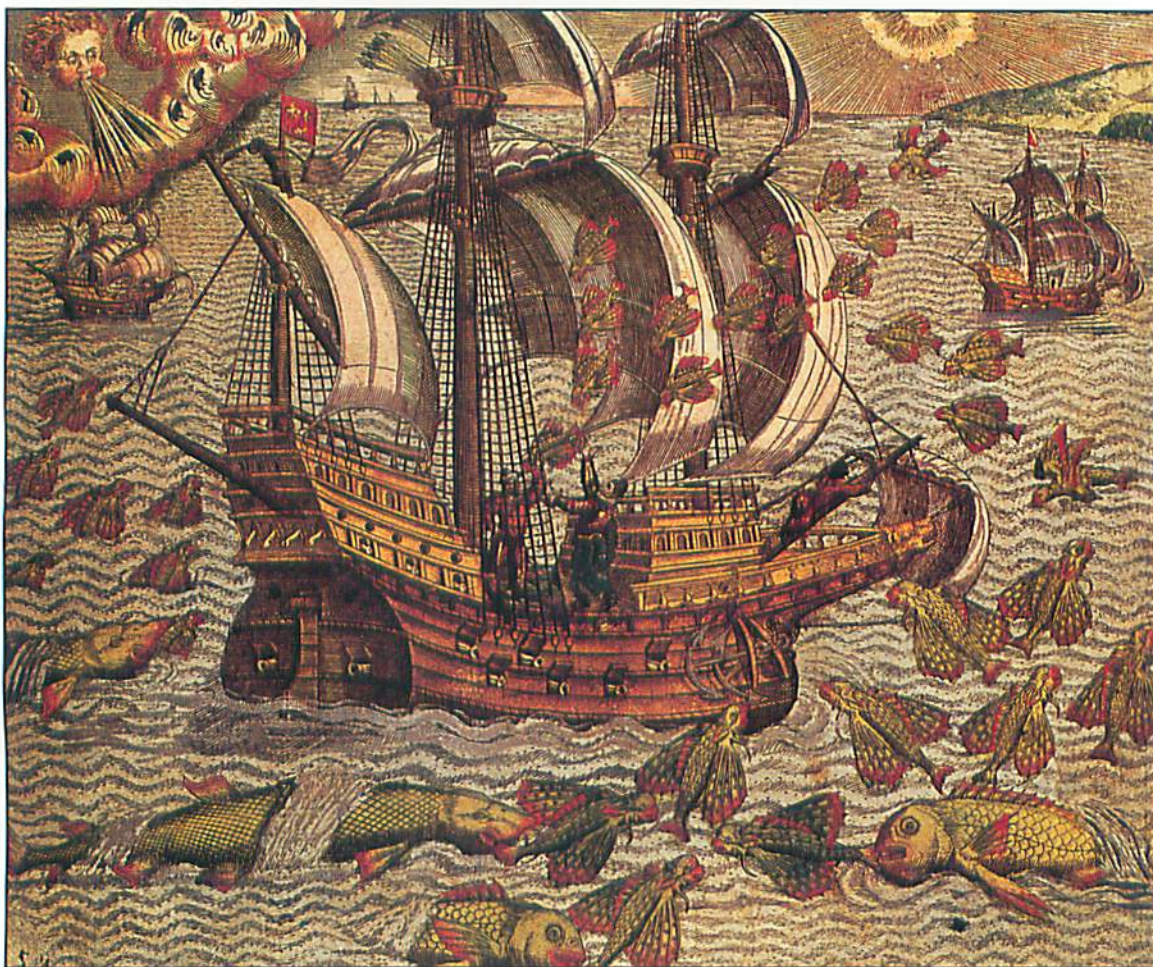
Columbus wrote volumes about his journeys to the Americas. Yet we know very little about his early life. Columbus, or Cristoforo Colombo in Italian, was born in 1451 in the bustling merchant city of Genoa, Italy. His father, Domenico, did a modest business as a merchant and worked in the wool industry. His mother, Susanna Fontanaroosa, was the daughter of a wool weaver.

Columbus grew up determined to make his fortune and join the ranks of the wealthy nobility. Young Columbus had a variety of interests, spending some time as a map-maker and a trader. His love, however, was the ocean. So he went where any aspiring mariner of that time would go: to Portugal, for navigator's training.

Much of the rest of Columbus's life was spent at sea. In 1476, at age 25, he



Christopher Columbus
(1451–1506)



In this 1594 painting, Atlantic winds, whales, and flying fish alarm the crew of a Portuguese ship. **Geography** What does this painting suggest about people's attitude toward the westward journey across the Atlantic Ocean?

Main Idea CONNECTIONS

What motivated Columbus to set sail for "the Indies"?

survived a shipwreck off the coast of Portugal. With a fearlessness that would serve him well later on, he went right back to the sea. He joined Portuguese crews that sailed to Iceland and Ireland in 1477. After spending some time as a sugar buyer for an Italian company in Spain, the restless sailor traveled to West Africa to trade along the forested coast. On these voyages Columbus developed a genius for navigation. He also learned much about the geography and wind currents of the eastern Atlantic Ocean.

Columbus was a complex man, moody and distant from others, ambitious and stubborn. He was also highly religious and well-schooled in the Bible. Columbus believed absolutely that he could succeed where others had failed and that God had given him a heroic mission. ■

A Daring Expedition

As his skills matured, Columbus became more eager to seek a westward sea route to the "Indies," meaning China, India, and other Asian lands. He did not think of *attempting* it. He would *do* it. But he did not have the personal wealth to fund such an undertaking. For years he petitioned various European monarchs to sponsor his risky project.

Columbus's pleas were answered in January 1492, when he appeared before the Spanish court of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand. They authorized Columbus to make contact with the people of "the lands of India." Much to his pleasure, they granted him the title of a noble and made him "High Admiral of the Ocean Sea and . . . Governor of the islands and continent which I should discover," as Columbus wrote later. His sons and grandsons would inherit his title and the conquered lands, he said.

Reasons for the Voyage Spanish nobles and clergy strongly supported Columbus's voyage. All had reasons for wanting the mission to succeed:

(1) Columbus hoped to enrich his family and to gain honor and fame. Yet Columbus also planned to conquer non-Catholic lands and convert their peoples to Catholicism. He held the belief, widespread at that time, that other cultures were inferior to his own. In the very year of his voyage, Columbus witnessed the final battle of Queen Isabella's crusade to reconquer Spain from the Muslims. This he saw as proof that God wanted him to bring Christianity to other lands.

(2) Columbus's royal patrons shared his desire to spread Catholicism. They had economic motives as well. The Crusades had failed to retake Jerusalem, and Muslims still controlled the overland trade routes connecting Europe and Asia. Europeans wanted to bypass the Muslims and find a way to trade directly for the eastern spices and herbs that Europeans needed for cooking and for medicine.

(3) Spain's rivalry with Portugal gave the Spanish an extra reason for backing the voyage. Portuguese sailors had found an eastern route to India by sailing around Africa. If Spain could find an easier, western route to Asia, it might gain an advantage over Portuguese traders.

Destination: Asia Shortly before sunrise on Friday, August 3, 1492, three ships under Columbus's command set sail from the seaport of Palos, in the Spanish kingdom of Castile. They bore Spanish names: *Niña*, *Pinta*, and *Santa María*. Before them stretched the blue curve of the horizon. Awaiting them were dangers such as ocean storms, starvation, and the sailor's enemy: rickets, a painful disease resulting from lack of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Columbus showed his navigational skills by first heading south, then west, avoiding the Atlantic storms that had blown other ships to pieces. However, the voyage was on a course for disaster, because Columbus had underestimated the size of the planet.[†] His ships had not brought enough food or water for a voyage all the way to Asia. Columbus's journals of the voyage suggest that as the tense weeks

passed, the admiral did not reveal to his crews how far they had actually traveled, wisely avoiding a scare.

On October 12 the thankful crew of the *Pinta* spotted land. The explorers' actual landing place is disputed, but it certainly was not China. Many scholars believe it to be the island of San Salvador, in the Bahamas.

A Historic Meeting Fortunately for Columbus and his crew, they received a warm welcome from the first Native Americans they met, the Tainos. The Tainos greeted the newcomers with gifts. This astonished Columbus, who was not familiar with the Native American view of trade as an exchange of gifts. Columbus later wrote about the Tainos to Isabella and Ferdinand:

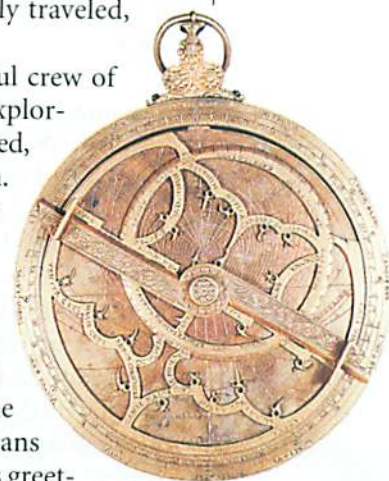
“They are so ingenuous [innocent] and free with all they have, that no one would believe it who has not seen it; of anything that they possess, if it be asked of them, they never say no; on the contrary, they invite you to share it and show as much love as if their hearts went with it.”

—letter from Columbus to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain, 1493

Continuing on to other islands, Columbus and his crew collected—often by force—other gifts to give to the queen. These “gifts” included some Native Americans, whom Columbus brought back to Spain to present to the Spanish monarchs. Columbus called these people “Indians,” because he believed that he had reached the Indies. The term is still sometimes used today.

Heading Home When the return trip to Spain began, on January 16, 1493, only two ships set sail. The *Santa María* had accidentally run aground. The crew used the ship's battered planks to help build a small fort, where they stored what treasure they couldn't carry. Columbus left part of the crew behind to guard the stockade until he could return.

Numerous disasters followed the voyagers home. Upon his return, Columbus received the honors he had sought, including the governorship of the present-day island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean. He did not stay long to enjoy his fame. In only six months he was on his way back to the Americas.



Early sailors sighted the North Star and used an astrolabe such as this one to calculate their latitude.

[†]Columbus's flawed measurements put China roughly where the city of San Diego, California, is today. He figured that Japan was on the same line of longitude as what we now call the Virgin Islands.

Later Voyages Columbus led a total of four trips to the Americas. Not all were profitable. In addition, Columbus proved to be a far better admiral than governor. The Spanish settlers on Hispaniola, where Columbus and his two brothers ruled, complained to the Spanish government of harsh and unfair treatment. Columbus lost his governorship, as well as his prestige at court. Furthermore, despite increasing evidence that he had found a new continent, Columbus clung to his claim that he had reached the "Indies."

The aging explorer returned from his fourth and last voyage in 1504, the same year Isabella died. Columbus asked Ferdinand to restore his governorship, but the king refused. Columbus died a disappointed man in 1506, never knowing how much he had changed the course of history.

A New Continent Others, however, realized the importance of Columbus's findings. In 1499, a merchant from Italy named Amerigo Vespucci made the first of two voyages to the Caribbean Sea. After sailing along the coast of South America, Vespucci suggested that these lands might be a continent previously unknown to Europeans, "what we may rightly call a New World." A German mapmaker named Waldseemüller read Vespucci's account and took it to heart. In 1507 he printed the first map showing the "New World" to be separate from Asia. He named the unfamiliar lands "America," after Amerigo Vespucci.

Columbus's Impact

In recent years, considerable public debate has arisen over the long-term effects of Columbus's voyages to the Americas. Most historians agree that the effects were both good and bad.

The Columbian Exchange



The Columbian Exchange Columbus's journeys launched a new era of transatlantic trade known as the **Columbian Exchange**, explained in the chart (left). European ships returned with exciting new foods from the Americas, including peanuts, pineapples, and tomatoes. One new item, cocoa, set off a craze in Europe. Another food, the potato, quickly became the new food of Europe's poor, helping to save them from famines.

Europeans brought to the Americas crops such as wheat, and domesticated animals such as the cow and the horse. They brought firearms and the wheel and axle, technologies that Native Americans did not have. Finally, Europeans introduced their culture to the Americas, including European laws, languages, and customs.

Native Americans Devastated Any benefits the Native Americans received, however, were far outweighed by the misery brought upon them. The greatest source of this misery was disease. The Columbian Exchange brought together people who had been isolated from one another and thus had no resistance to one another's diseases.

Europeans had already experienced a severe decline in their population due to plague and other diseases. Now Europeans brought similar disasters to the Americas. Passing germs through even the most casual contact, explorers and soldiers infected Native Americans with smallpox, typhus, measles, and other deadly diseases.



Interpreting Charts Agricultural products, domesticated animals, and diseases crossed the Atlantic in the Columbian Exchange. **Economics** What effects did the Columbian Exchange have on the European economy?

The diseases spread rapidly along the extensive Native American trade network. One man, the son of a Native American woman and a Spanish captain, described what explorers found in 1540 when they first reached the Native American town of Talomeca in present-day Georgia: "The Castilians found the town of Talomeco without any people at all, because [of] the recent pestilence [disease] . . . [Near] the rich temple, it is said they found four longhouses filled with bodies from the plague."

Europeans Gain Wealth At first, Europeans were unaware that they were passing on disease to the Native Americans. Many Europeans believed that the "pestilence" that ravaged the Native American population was a sign that God favored Europeans over Native Americans. God, these Europeans believed, had sent Europeans to conquer the Americas.

The rival nations of Europe all wanted a part of this sudden opportunity to gain land and wealth. The Portuguese, whose navigational technology made Columbus's voyage possible, resented Spain's claim to the Western Hemisphere. So Portugal sent a complaint to the Pope.

European Catholics believed that the Pope had the authority to divide up any newly conquered non-Christian lands. In 1494, at the urging of Pope Alexander, Portugal and Spain signed the **Treaty of Tordesillas**. Under the treaty, the two countries divided all lands on Earth not already claimed by other Christians. They did this by drawing an imaginary line around the world called the Line of Demarcation. Spain was to rule over lands west of the line, including most of the Americas. Portugal would control the rest, including Brazil and the sea route around Africa.[†]

At first, Spain and Portugal were able to control much of the regions they claimed. In the 1500s, however, France, England, and the Netherlands began to move into North America. In the first century after Columbus's voyage, the amount of gold and silver in Europe's economy increased eight times over, much of it made out of ore from mines in the Americas.

[†] The effects of this 500-year-old treaty can be seen today. People in most of South America, the part given to Spain, speak Spanish. In Brazil, the area set aside for Portugal, most people speak Portuguese.



A Native American in Mexico drew this picture of a smallpox victim being comforted by a healer. The squiggle near the healer's mouth symbolizes spoken words.

Geography How did European diseases such as smallpox travel throughout the Americas?

Africans Enslaved To supply the American foods that Europeans demanded, Portugal and Spain established **plantations**, the large farming operations that produced crops not for their own use but for sale. Such products are called **cash crops**. Plantation farming of tropical cash crops such as sugar and pineapple required huge numbers of workers who labored long hours in hot climates.

At first, soldiers kidnapped Native Americans and forced them to work on the plantations. Unaccustomed to that type of work and weakened by disease, these slaves did not provide a reliable labor force. Europeans then turned to West Africa.

As you read in Section 3, a West African slave trade began to emerge in the 1400s. In 1517, the first enslaved Africans arrived in the Americas. The huge **need for labor** in the Western Hemisphere turned this grim business into an industry.

Main Idea CONNECTIONS

How was Africa changed by the introduction of cash crops in the Americas?

CAUSE AND EFFECT : European Exploration

CAUSES

- *Desire to accumulate wealth through trade*
- *Rebirth of a spirit of inquiry*
- *Improved seafaring technology*

EUROPEANS EXPLORE THE AMERICAS

EFFECTS

- *An exchange of goods and ideas between Europe and the Americas begins.*
- *European diseases devastate Native American populations.*
- *Europeans enter the West African slave trade.*



Interpreting Charts European exploration of the Americas set off a chain of events that would forever change life for not only Europeans, but for Native Americans and West Africans as well.

Diversity What was the nature of these changes?

From Benin and dozens of other thriving cultures and kingdoms, Europeans began trading for slaves. The West Africans who were forced into slavery generally included the healthiest people, those who would be well

suited for conditions on American plantations and in other enterprises.

Historians continue to debate the number of Africans enslaved. Some estimate that during the 1500s, about 275,000 West Africans were taken against their will across the Atlantic Ocean. That number grew to about 6 million in the 1700s, these historians say. Estimates of the total number of West Africans abducted from their homeland and taken to North and South America range from roughly 9 million to more than 11 million.

Mere numbers, however, cannot portray the full horror of slavery for West Africans. Europeans constructed a uniquely cruel system to supply slaves to the Americas. They regarded slaves as mere property and treated them no better than farm animals. Slavery was a lifetime sentence—often a death sentence—from which there was no escape.

A New Culture The blending of cultures in America happened quite rapidly. Explorers and settlers from other European nations soon followed the Spanish. The Europeans would adopt ideas and customs from the Native Americans and from one another as well. In time this cultural exchange would form the foundation for a new nation, the United States of America. It is an exchange that still continues today.

SECTION 4 REVIEW

Comprehension

1. **Key Terms** Define: (a) Columbian Exchange; (b) Treaty of Tordesillas; (c) plantation; (d) cash crop.
2. **Summarizing the Main Idea** Reread the Main Idea statement in the Section Preview. Rewrite and expand it into a paragraph of your own words.
3. **Organizing Information** Create a two-column chart entitled *Columbus's Challenges*. Label the left column *Problem* and the right column *Strategy*. Fill in the chart with at least four entries in each column.

Critical Thinking

4. **Analyzing Time Lines** Review the time line at the start of the section. Choose any four entries and explain who benefited from each event and who was harmed by it.
5. **Recognizing Bias** What specific beliefs influenced Europeans' views of themselves and other cultures? How did these beliefs affect their actions?

Writing Activity

6. **Writing a Persuasive Essay** From the point of view of Columbus, write an essay to try to persuade Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand to fund your expensive voyage to the Indies.