14 – European Expansion: 1500-1800

The sixteenth century marked the beginning of an age of exploration that introduced profound changes. Tempted by the promise of riches and luxuries and enchanted by the stories of Marco Polo, Europeans took an interest in traveling beyond European shores. As Europeans explored foreign lands, they encountered hitherto unknown peoples and cultures and established new political and economic relationships. While attempting to justify their actions by sending missionaries and government officials to Christianize and modernize these new acquisitions, Europeans plundered New World wealth and subjugated its peoples. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Europeans had created a global trade network that brought wealth and power to the western powers and altered the balance of power in Europe and around the world.

KEY TERMS

audiencias	conquistadors	mercantilism	Treaty of Tordesillas
Aztecs	*encomienda*	Middle Passage	Triangular Trade
balance of trade	Incas	Mughal Empire	viceroy
Columbian Exchange	joint-stock company	price revolution	

KEY CONCEPTS

- Between 1500 and 1800, European powers moved into all parts of the world, establishing colonies and trade routes everywhere. Competition for the riches and political control of new lands led to heated rivalries among the great nations of the Atlantic seaboard and dramatically affected the peoples of the colonial lands.
- European exploration and colonization of the New World transformed the world economy. Commercial capitalism developed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as huge profits lured investors into joint-stock companies, and mercantilism developed as governments began to take control of economic affairs for their own gain.
- Known as the Columbian Exchange, the reciprocal importation and exportation of plants, animals, culture, microorganisms, and people that resulted from the Europeans' conquest of the New World revolutionized the world. Old and New World lifestyles changed, and Europeans gained a new understanding of geography and a new collective intellectual vision.

For a full discussion of European expansion in the New World, see *Western Civilization*, 8th and 9th editions, Chapter 14.

Motives and Means for Expansion

By the end of the 1500s, the center of European trade shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic seaboard as Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, England, and France set out to colonize the New World. Intellectual, economic, political, and religious motives drove their expansion.

Some Europeans were drawn to the new lands as a result of fantasy literature about the New World. But there were real riches, as Medieval travelers to the Far East, such as Marco Polo, had described. After the Ottoman conquests and the collapse of the Mongol empire reduced access to Asia by land, Europeans began to look for sea routes. Valuable Asian commodities and the prospect of bypassing Arab middlemen created a strong economic motive. Eager for political dominance, European nations vied for control of new lands. They were also intent on taking Christianity to New World natives. All in all, "God, gold, and glory" sums up the significant motives for exploring and colonizing the new world.

At the same time, the means of exploration were improving. The political and economic growth and consolidation of Europe's centralized monarchies created the financial means for voyages abroad. The caravel, a new, more mobile ship, and new navigational devices, including the compass and the astrolabe, were invented during this period. Maps improved dramatically by the end of the fifteenth century; Gerardus Mercator created a conformal projection map on which every line is a line of true direction. These, combined with a growing knowledge of geography and wind patterns, made sailing to the New World and around the continent of Africa much safer.

Portuguese Exploration

Prince Henry the Navigator had launched Portuguese exploration in the 1400s. Hoping to find more gold, he sent Portuguese ships south until they reached the Senegal River, in 1441, and established the slave trade, importing Africans for sale in Europe. They also traded in gold and ivory and eventually leased land from local African rulers to build defensive forts.

Searching for a sea route to India, the Portuguese kept venturing further south. By 1498, Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope, stopped at several Muslim-controlled trading ports in modern-day Mozambique and Tanzania, and then traveled to the Port of Calicut, India, before returning to Portugal. The huge profits his investors reaped encouraged more commercial trips to India and eventually the establishment of a port at Goa (south of modern Mumbai). Increasing profits from the spice trade encouraged Portuguese merchants to sail further east, as they worked to destroy Arab traders. In 1511, the Portuguese seized the Muslim trading port of Malacca on the Malay peninsula, further consolidating their control of the spice trade. They then continued on to China and the Spice Islands, garnering a monopoly on the clove trade. Although they created trading posts in India and China, the Portuguese did not set up colonies in Asia. Their success was based mainly on their sailing and military technologies.

Spanish Exploration and Colonization

Aware that the world is a sphere but unaware of its size, the Spanish looked west for a route to the Spice Islands. Rejected by the Portuguese, Christopher Columbus asked Queen Isabella of Spain to finance a westward voyage. His first voyage, in 1492, took him to Cuba and Hispaniola. Believing he had reached Asia, Columbus convinced the Spanish to fund three more expeditions. In search of gold and opportunities to Christianize the natives, these voyages took him to many Caribbean islands and the coast of Central America.

Some realized that Columbus had not reached Asia, and eager to learn more about this new world and claim territory there, several European countries sponsored numerous voyages. Disputes over territory soon erupted. To settle them, in 1494 the pope divided the new world between Portugal and Spain in the Treaty of Tordesillas, with Spain gaining most of South America.

Spanish conquistadors were privately funded, so they were authorized but not totally controlled by the Spanish crown. They were brutal, ravaging thriving native civilizations. In 1519, Hernàn Cortes and his company marched into Tenochtitlan, where they were welcomed by the Aztec leader Moctezuma. The Spanish took Moctezuma hostage and pillaged the Aztec city. In 1520, the Aztecs managed to evict the Spanish, but they were already afflicted with smallpox, a European disease to which they had no immunity. Cortes, regaining his advantage, destroyed the Aztec empire. By the mid-sixteenth century, Spain had taken control of northern Mexico.

The great Inca Empire met a similar fate when Francisco Pizarro arrived with a force of nearly 200 men, in 1530. The Incas had already been weakened by smallpox, and the emperor's death set off a civil war between his two sons, clearing the way for Pizarro to destroy the empire and establish a Spanish capital in Lima, Peru.

Queen Isabella established the *encomienda* in return for the right to govern the natives, using them for slave labor and collecting tributes, Spanish settlers were to care for their subjects, providing protection, paying them wages, and Christianizing them. In the main, the natives experienced terrible mistreatment, forced labor, disease, and starvation. An estimated 30 to 40 percent of the native population died. The protests of Dominican missionaries and writings by Bartolomé de Las Casas pressed the Spanish government to end the *encomienda* system in 1542, replacing it with the viceroy system. The pope granted the Spanish Crown great power over Church affairs in the New World, so Spanish missionaries converted many Indians to Catholicism.

Dutch, French, and English Colonization

During the seventeenth century, the Dutch, French, and English vied with the Spanish and Portuguese for control of the New World.

Africa and the Slave Trade

While the Portuguese were the first to establish a foothold in Africa, other European nations soon wanted their own outposts along the route to the Spice Islands. Further, Africa itself offered profits.

As Europeans explored the coastal regions of Africa, the slave trade increased. Many slaves were sent to the Middle East and Europe, where they worked as household servants or farmhands. But the planting of sugar cane and the founding of plantations in the Caribbean and South America in the late fifteenth century greatly accelerated the need for labor, profoundly expanding the international slave trade. Direct delivery of slaves from Africa to the New World began in 1518, an arrangement that developed into "triangular trade."

AP Tip

Triangular trade had three legs: European merchants shipped European-made items such as cloth and guns to Africa, where they traded them for slaves; the merchants then sailed to the New World, where they sold the slaves and purchased materials grown and manufactured in the Americas, such as molasses, rum, and tobacco; these items were then sold by the merchants when they returned to Europe, completing the triangle. It is important to be able to cite examples of items that were traded on each leg of the trading triangle.

Some ten million African slaves were sold in the Americas between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, about half of them transported and sold by the British. The high death rate among slaves en route to the Americas was caused by appalling conditions on the voyages. Once in the Americas, the death rate remained high because of New World diseases to which the slaves had no immunity, as well as malnutrition and overwork. It was commonly believed that Europeans controlled the slave trade; in fact, African slave traders obtained most slaves and set the terms of sale. While the slave trade boosted the economies of the European nations, it decimated many African societies. As villages were depopulated, European-manufactured items replaced goods made in African cottage industries, increasing poverty and the violence between tribes. Tribes that traded their neighbors for guns profited, and dominated Africa politically. Europeans largely accepted slavery. The French finally abolished it during the French Revolution, and the British in 1807.

Southeast Asia

Portugal failed to gain control of Asia; the Portuguese empire was overextended, and its military could not dominate the region. This gave the Spanish, Dutch, and English an opening in Asia. The Spanish took over the Philippines and established a base from which to trade Asian goods with Mexico. During the early seventeenth century, the Dutch gradually took over Portuguese coastal forts along the Indian Ocean, forced the Portuguese out of the spice trade, and occupied Ceylon and Malacca. The Dutch also cut the British out of most of the spice trade. Consolidating its political and economic power in the region allowed the Dutch East India Company to establish lucrative pepper plantations, and the Dutch government gained control of most of the Indonesian islands. The European powers competed for trade and missionary privileges in continental Southeast Asia, but the Southeast Asian countries had political unity and so were able to resist European control.

India

The Portuguese faced competition from the Dutch and the English in India by the end of the sixteenth century. By the mid-seventeenth century, the English had established a thriving trade, exchanging Indian-made textiles for spices in the East Indies and then selling the spices in England. The Dutch turned their attention away from India; the French had been forced out altogether by 1763. Having defeated the Mughal Empire, which had been in power for several centuries, the politically and militarily powerful British East India Company began to move inland.

China and Japan

Although the Portuguese arrived in China in 1514, serious pressure from the European nations did not occur until the late 1600s. The British East India Company founded a trading post in Canton in 1699 and developed a thriving trade in tea and silk. Fearing foreign domination, China restricted foreign traders to an island off the coast of Canton and allowed them to be there no more than six months a year. In the late eighteenth century, the British East India Company began to press for greater privileges.

The Portuguese, the first Europeans to land in Japan, developed a regional trade network among Japan, China, and Southeast Asia. The Japanese welcomed the European manufactured items, but in 1637, they forced European missionaries out of the country and soon after expelled most European traders. Only the Dutch managed to maintain limited trade relations with the Japanese.

The Americas

Portuguese and Spanish power declined in the Americas in the seventeenth century. The Armada's defeat and the ensuing loss of Spain's political and economic power decreased Spain's power in the Americas, inviting competition from the Dutch, English, and French.

The English and French developed numerous colonies in the West Indies, where, using slave labor, they established thriving sugar, tobacco, cotton, and coffee plantations. Especially important were Britain's sugar plantations in Jamaica and France's in Haiti.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Dutch added to their commercial empire with the founding of New Netherlands. By the latter half of the seventeenth century, however, the English had seized New Netherlands, expanding their North American holdings and putting the Dutch West India Company out of business.

The English colonies in the West Indies and North America benefited the English economy; they were a source for raw materials for English manufacturers, then a market for English goods. The French founded Quebec in 1608 and began to acquire territory in modern Canada, where they profited from trade in fish, furs, timber, and leather. They also sent missionaries to this region: "Fish, fur, and faith" described their colonial motivations. In part because of tight regulation of its political and economic affairs, French North America was lightly populated. During the eighteenth century, France had to give away some North American possessions as a result of European wars, and in 1763, it lost its North American colonies to Britain in the Seven Years' War. Both nations, however, broke into Spanish and Portuguese markets, expanding their economies.

AP Tip

Be sure that you know which European nations dominated the New World during which centuries. Spain and Portugal launched the age of exploration and were dominant in the sixteenth century. During the seventeenth century, Spanish and Portuguese power waned and the Dutch rose to prominence. The English and the French eclipsed the Dutch, becoming the chief powers for much of the eighteenth century. By the end of the 1700s, England had emerged as the paramount imperial power. It is also important to know the reasons that the different nations were dominant during different centuries.

The Impact of Expansion

The Conquered

Conquered territories faced tremendous changes in their lifestyles and often suffered large population losses as a result of European warfare and diseases. In Africa, the slave trade devastated many coastal areas. In Asia, India began to experience dramatic changes as England gained greater control. Europeans devastated Native American populations by replacing their customs and institutions with European ones and introducing new crops and animals to the Americas. In Central and South America, the Latin American culture emerged when Spanish and Portuguese settlers mixed with native women. The children of these unions were known as *mestizos*; the children of European settlers and African slaves were called mulattoes. Thus, South and Central America became racially and culturally diverse.

Christian missionaries, mostly Catholics, went to the New World to spread religion and built villages, schools, hospitals, and orphanages; as a result, the Catholic church gained great power in the Americas. Jesuit missionaries had some success in China and Japan, but the spread of Christianity eventually stalled because of conflicts between religious orders and Asian officials wary of threats to their power.

The Conquerors

Many Europeans went to the New World to acquire wealth, gold and silver, land, and opportunities not available to them in Europe. The influx of precious metals from New World mines created staggering inflation that threatened the Spanish economy and social structure. The Potosi mines alone produced over 45,000 tons of silver for the Spanish between 1556 and 1783. The introduction of New World foods such as corn, potatoes, tomatoes, and chocolate diversified the European diet and economy and led to rapid population growth as potatoes became a staple. Coffee and tea houses opened in Europe, chocolate drinks grew in popularity, and Europeans sought Chinese luxury items, such as porcelain.

AP Tip

The Columbian Exchange refers to the exchange of people, diseases, plants, and animals between Europe and the New World during the age of exploration. It is important to understand the exchanges. Some examples: Europeans took horses, cattle, chickens, apples, wheat, and turnips to the New World and brought tomatoes, potatoes, chocolate, turkeys, maize, squash, and tobacco back to Europe.

By the eighteenth century, growing rivalry over control of New World products and territories had led to bitter conflicts among European powers – some nations even advocated piracy as a means of gaining wealth and weakening their rivals.

Economics in the Age of Exploration

With the growth of international trade, large population increases, the influx of precious metals into the European economy, and the creation of a world market in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Europe experienced a "price revolution," a period of inflation during which wages fell behind the growing cost of food and other necessities. Workers and farmers who labored for a wage experienced a drop in the standard of living, but estate owners, who could raise rents, prospered, as did the commercial and industrial entrepreneurs, who benefited from increased trade and higher prices and decreased labor costs. Making matters worse for the lower classes, European governments, also suffering from the high inflation, borrowed money from bankers and passed the costs on to their subjects through higher taxes.

Commercial Capitalism

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Mediterranean, the Low Countries, Baltic ports, and the Rhine and Danube rivers were the centers of a flourishing European trade network. During the sixteenth century, an important shift occurred: nations on the Atlantic seaboard expanded to the New World, changing trade patterns and creating new world markets. By the seventeenth century, the Dutch had become the middlemen of European trade, dominating both European and Atlantic routes.

The expansion of trade and the cost of exploration gave rise to new commercial organizations. When family-owned banking firms could no longer supply the capital and services needed by overseas merchants, large commercial banks emerged. The Bank of Amsterdam provided traditional banking and also ran the Amsterdam Exchange, a stock exchange. The strength of Dutch shipping, combined with a superior banking system, fueled Dutch commercial expansion.

In addition, new forms of investment were created, the most important of which were joint-stock companies. Investors bought shares in a company, such as the Dutch East India Company, and received a cut of the profits. With large profits, these companies easily raised money for overseas commercial endeavors. Technologies that supported the overseas voyages, including shipbuilding and mining, also prospered. Bankers often made large loans to European governments in exchange for other rewards, such as land grants or mining rights on government lands, but sometimes these backfired. For example, the House of Fugger enjoyed mining privileges in Hapsburg lands, but it went bankrupt when the Hapsburgs could no longer repay the loans.

The commercial revolution created huge profits for those who had money to invest, but most Europeans – approximately 80 percent – were largely untouched by the commercial revolution and continued to depend on agriculture for their living. Although farmers in the west were generally free, most continued to owe feudal obligations to the nobility and lived traditional peasant lives. In Eastern Europe, conditions worsened for many farmers. For example, in Prussia and Russia, many lost their freedom and increasingly were tied to the land and the demands of the landowners.

Mercantilism

Mercantilism is an economic system based on the idea that there is a limited amount of bullion (gold and silver) in the world; it follows that the nation that controls the most wealth will be the nation that dominates the world economically and politically. To acquire more wealth, governments attempted to achieve a favorable balance of trade, often putting in protective tariffs, granting trade monopolies, encouraging investment in new domestic industries, and building roads and canals to further stimulate the national economy. Colonies provided cheap raw materials and a ready market for manufactured items, so European governments often heavily regulated colonial trade. By the seventeenth century, overseas trade was rapidly increasing, further globalizing the economy and encouraging emigration. The age of exploration had transformed European economic institutions and policies.