

Name: _____ Class Period: _____

CONTACT: EUROPE AND AMERICA MEET, 1492-1620

Purpose:

This Crossroads Essay is an optional enrichment activity providing additional insight into the era. Students who complete this activity before they take the chapter 1 reading quiz will earn up to 10 additional points.

Directions:

As you read the article annotate in the space provided along the right margin. *Use INK.*

Sample annotations have been provided for you in section I.

Annotate by:

- Highlighting the main ideas/arguments,
- identifying major themes (BAGPIPE)
- identifying historical context
- defining terms you may not know.

<p>Beliefs and ideas (roles of ideas, beliefs, social mores, and creative expression in development of United States)</p> <p>America in the world (global context of how United States originated and developed as well as its role in world affairs)</p> <p>Geography (role of environment, geography, and climate on the development of United States and individual actions)</p> <p>Peopling (migration, immigration, adaptation and impact of various groups on social and physical environments)</p> <p>Identify (development of American national identity, including focus on subpopulations such as women and minorities)</p> <p>Politics and power (changing role of government/state, the development of citizenship and concept of American liberty)</p> <p>Economy (work, exchange, technology) (development of American economy; agriculture, manufacturing, labor, etc.)</p>

I. Reinterpreting the Encounter

Just in time for the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus's voyages to the Americas, historians have abandoned the rhetoric of discovery -- or, at least, brought it under severe control. No longer do we say that Columbus and the other European explorers "discovered" America. Rather, the European voyagers encountered Indian peoples and cultures who had been present in the Americas for hundreds or even thousands of years.

As John Noble Wilford has pointed out, the quincentenary of Columbus's voyages differed profoundly from the quadricentenary of 1892 and the tercentenary of 1792 -- both of which emphasized the unalloyed benefits of the "discovery of America" and the bravery and modernity of Columbus's thought and enterprise. In part, of course, the 1892 omission of Indian peoples from the commemoration of Columbus, except as anthropological curiosities, stemmed from the series of Indian wars that ranked with the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Civil War as determinants of American foreign and military policy. The Indians were conquered foes, perceived as being somewhere on the spectrum between brave enemies and savage primitives. To accord them equal billing with the great Christopher Columbus was, to their way of thinking, ridiculous. The shift from the emphases of the quadricentenary to those of the quincentenary reflects the dramatic transformation in twentieth-century American views of the Indians -- of their status as indigenous peoples, of the dignity and worth of their cultures, of the plausibility and validity of their ideas about the proper relationships between human beings and the natural world, and of the sufferings they endured at the hands of white explorers, settlers, and conquerors. It also reflects two other factors:

- post-Vietnam doubts about America's role in the world and
- the problems posed by the conflict between defenders of Western culture and attackers of "cultural imperialism."

Nonetheless, although this conceptual shift may look to some like "political correctness," it makes good sense. It recognizes that what we used to call the "Discovery of America" was really a "first contact" (of the sort beloved by fans of science fiction) between two sets of civilizations and cultures. (Indeed, European colonists in North America would not have survived without the aid of the Indian peoples who greeted and befriended them and taught them what crops to cultivate, what game to hunt, and how to build shelters.) This first contact, however, was not governed by the "prime directive" of noninterference familiar to devotees of Star Trek. Most European explorers, conquerors, colonizers, and missionaries felt few compunctions about interfering with indigenous cultures -- by deliberate force (as with Francisco Pizarro's 1531-1533 conquest of the Inca empire in Peru), by a combination of force and accident (as with Hernando Cortes's unsuccessful 1518 assault on the Aztec empire in Mexico, which he exposed the Aztec to smallpox that devastated the population and made Cortes's 1521 attack a success), or by accident (95 percent of the Maya people of Mexico succumbed to diseases contracted due to contact with Europeans).

Historiography; history is changing and is more balanced with white and non-white viewpoints.

European peopling of Americas impacted natives negatively.

Development of identity included view that natives were less than Europeans.

American identity in modern times has changed due to failure in Vietnam (didn't prevent it from falling to communism). Coming down from the pedestal?

Interactions (peopling) between Europeans and natives led to disruptions in native cultures.

There were some beneficial results of contact, however; Europeans introduced new technologies, crops, and domestic animals to the Americas, and **Indian peoples absorbed these innovations into their own cultures and economies**. And, even though Spanish authorities insisted on supplanting (often by forcible conversion) indigenous religions with Roman Catholicism, the Roman Catholic clergy soon emerged as powerful advocates for justice for native peoples. Ultimately, however, Europeans received the great majority of the benefits of American colonization.

Technology introduced by Europeans transformed native peoples.

Beliefs/Christianity transformed culture in Americas

II. Exploration, Conquest, Exploitation, Colonization

The story of this period is more than the story of contact between Europeans and Indians. It is also the story of the Europeans' attempts to found colonies in the Americas -- some as bases for exploration, conquest, and exploitation; others as permanent colonies...

...Before we examine the differing motivations that European nations had to come to the Americas, we should analyze the factors they had in common. All the European nations were beginning to experience a massive growth in population, recovering from the terrible depredations of the Black Death of the fourteenth century. Population growth brought in its wake the growth of national economies, the growth of consumer demand (including demand for exotic products), and the development of advances in shipbuilding and navigation, so that mariners could compete more effectively in the mercantile traffic of fifteenth-century and sixteenth-century Europe. The resurgence of commerce also gave a powerful impetus to the forces of centralization and nationalism, building powerful new monarchic nations whose leaders were intent on consolidating their claims to power by cultivating and fostering the economic development of their nations. Finally, European nations, fascinated by and hungry for increased trade with the wealthy nations of Asia (and inspired by the popular accounts of travelers such as the Venetian merchant Marco Polo), sought better and more effective routes of transportation and trade -- which, in turn, drove these governments to encourage advances in shipbuilding and navigation, and then voyages of exploration. (Much of this summary will be familiar from "older" accounts of the "Age of Discovery.") To offer a few broad generalizations for each exploring and colonizing European nation (keeping in mind William Blake's warning, as quoted by Axtell -- "To generalize is to be an idiot"):

(a) The Spanish and the Portuguese came to the Americas to pursue dreams of empire, both secular and religious. Although the Portuguese acquired Brazil under the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), the Spanish were the principal Iberian power in the Americas. Their religious aims were simple: to win these lands and peoples for Catholicism. Their secular aims included bringing Central and South America under their imperial governance to augment the power of Spain in world affairs, seeking great wealth (both the gold and gems that were rumored to abound in the Americas), and gratifying their individual ambitions for power and glory (especially in a stratified society like Spain, the Americas offered intoxicating opportunities for social and political advancement). As James Axtell points out, the old, powerful "Black Legend" that purported to describe the Spanish explorations, conquests, and colonial enterprises is largely a caricature. Under the terms of this legend, the Spanish colonists were conquistadores (conquerors) -- brutal men, interested only in loot, pillage, rape, and murder, who left a trail of savage destruction wherever they went. Even though many of the early Spanish conquistadores were interested only in gold and gems and were ruthless in their methods, emphasis on brutality and greed does not explain how the Spanish created a colonial empire in Latin America that lasted for more than two centuries (longer, indeed, than the British Empire lasted in that part of North America that we now know as the United States). The "Black Legend" has some basis, notably in the work of the Spanish priest and former conquistador Bartolome de Las Casas, who intended his impassioned histories to persuade the Spanish monarchs to restrain the excesses of the expeditions of exploration, conquest, and conversion they had authorized. But, as Axtell notes, the "Black Legend" is also largely an artifact of nineteenth-century Protestant Americans of English or Anglo-Saxon ancestry who were convinced that Catholic lands and peoples were tyrannous, lazy, cruel, and semi-barbarous. It has thus obscured the stability, cultural achievements (including the founding of universities in Mexico older than any in North America), and occasional beneficence of the Spanish colonies.

It also should be noted here that slavery (in particular, African slavery, because enslaving Indians proved unsuccessful) was introduced to the Americas by the Portuguese and the Spanish -- over a century before the first Africans arrived in Virginia (in 1619). In part, the European slave traders joined a slave trade that was several centuries old, beginning with west Africans' selling slaves to Mediterranean traders in the eighth century. Apparently, the small but continuous traffic in slaves, in which the Portuguese were the leading European practitioners, exploded in the fifteenth century when the Portuguese applied slavery to the cultivation of sugar cane, first in their Atlantic island colonies and then in Latin America. The Spanish quickly followed, to be succeeded in the seventeenth century by the Dutch and in the eighteenth century by the English.

(b) The French also came to the Americas for wealth and power, but their methods were different. They did not seek to conquer the regions they explored and laid claim to -- only to repel the competing claims of rival powers like Spain and England and to establish a foothold for themselves in the American continents (a pattern followed as well by the Dutch and the Swedish, who sought to establish colonies as international economic bases, rather than as permanent settlements). The traditional view is that, because the French did not engage in a full-scale colonizing enterprise like that of the English, they missed a priceless opportunity. To be sure, that statement itself is based on a huge network of unarticulated assumptions about how a European nation ion "should" look upon the "opportunities" presented by the Americas.

(c) The English were laggards in the race for the Americas, but, because they ultimately changed their understanding of the nature and purpose of colonies, the English colonies eventually were among the most successful in the Americas. At first, English explorers sought the same kinds of benefits that animated the Spanish, Portuguese, and French enterprises -- discovery of gold, jewels, and other valuable goods for trade and commerce. Gradually, the English shifted their emphasis to include the plant planting of self-maintaining colonies that, due to the structure of English government, politics, and political theory, acquired a measure of self-governance. As a result, traditional accounts of the English exploration and colonization are remarkably benign, emphasizing the ideas that the founders of the colonies planted "seeds of democracy" in the "New World."

What drove the English to re-conceptualize the nature and purpose of colonies?

One factor was the disastrous Roanoke experiment of 1584. That colony, founded on the traditional model by Sir Walter Raleigh, disappeared without a trace within three years.

The change in the nature of English colonies also grew out of a combination of economic factors. The growing demand for wool, which led many landowners to enclose their lands as pasturage for sheep, deprived many English families of farmland that they had used for subsistence farming.

The growing number of landless poor, combined with a dramatic population growth (from three million in 1485 to four million by 1603), posed a major problem that, English officials became convinced, could be solved by exporting the "surplus population" to colonies in North America.

Finally at the same time that the English were grappling with the challenges posed by the Americas, they also were struggling with the crises of religious divisions and sectarian rivalry. It therefore seemed a useful expedient to permit members of difficult religious minorities -- the most famous examples are the Pilgrims in 1620 and the Puritans in 1630 -- to leave England for America. The mother country would be safely insulated from these dissenting religious colonies by distance and the hardship of travel; mother country and colonies could thus leave one another alone.

By the close of this period, the Europeans had only the dimmest and uncertain ideas of how the new societies they had planted in the Americas would develop. The "voyages of discovery and exploration" set the stage for a re-conceptualization of the European world. No longer would Europeans be limited to the European continent -- they would now occupy the land on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, creating what later scholars would call the Atlantic civilization.