European Expansion:
Search for New Trade Routes

Historical Context:

← ← ← Looking Backward
The Crusades greatly increased European interest in goods from the East.
The Silk Road was an important trading route that connected China to the Middle East and ultimately, Europe. It was primarily an overland trading route.
During the 1300s and 1400s, Arab merchants carried goods from Asia to the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea.
The Italian city-states greatly benefited from the Silk Road because the Italian peninsula dominated trade in the Mediterranean Sea where the Silk Road ended.
And the only European kingdoms to prosper from the Silk Road trade were the Italian city-states. After purchasing the Chinese goods, Italian merchants sold the goods at even higher prices to the other European kingdoms.
But other European countries and kingdoms wanted to benefit from trade with Asia. They were tired of the Italian city-states’ monopoly of the trade.
In addition to other European kingdoms wanting to participate in trade with Asia, the Ottoman Empire briefly cut off trade between Europe and Asia.
So, during the 1400s, Portugal began to look for alternatives to the Silk Road. Portugal began to look for an all-water route to Asia.
The Portuguese prince, Prince Henry the Navigator, led the Portuguese in their search. In 1416, he established a school where geographers, cartographers, and astronomers could help sea captains in their search.
With their location near the Atlantic Ocean and new navigational technologies like the compass and movable rudder, Portugal and Spain funded numerous voyages of exploration.
Catholic countries like Portugal and Spain would seek new trade routes for “God, Glory, and Gold.” The world would never be the same again.
As technology improved, Portuguese sea captains could sail farther south to explore the western coast of Africa.
Setting up trading posts in western Africa and traveling carefully south, the Portuguese eventually circumnavigated Africa. Bartholomeu Dias sailed around the southern tip of Africa in 1487.
The Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama, discovered an all-water route to India in 1498.
Once an all-water route to Asia was discovered, the fastest growing part of the European economy was the trade in goods.
While searching for an all-water route to Asia, in 1492, Columbus accidentally landed in the Americas. Columbus sailed for Spain.
Ferdinand Magellan’s crew was the first crew to circumnavigate the world.
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Historical Context:

Looking Ahead → → →
New trade routes shifted trade from the Silk Road to the oceans and seas.
The Commercial Revolution marked an important step in the transition of the local economies of the Middle Ages to Europe’s leadership in a global economy.
Columbus opened the Americas to Europe.
A great exchange of people, ideas, and products occurred as trade developed between the Americas, Europe, and Africa. This great exchange is called the Columbian Exchange.
While the Age of Exploration greatly benefited the Europeans, it greatly harmed the Native American Indians who lost their land, freedom, and culture.
It also greatly harmed the African slaves who were enslaved to replace a dying Indian population in the Americas.