

**INDIANS IN 1500** When Europeans arrived in North America in the sixteenth century, as many as 10 million Indians lived on a continent crisscrossed by trails and rivers that formed an extensive trading network. Over thousands of years, the Indians had developed a great diversity of responses to an array of natural environments. The scores of tribes can be clustered according to three major regional groups: the Eastern Woodlands tribes, the Great Plains tribes, and the Western tribes.

The Eastern Woodlands peoples tended to live along the rivers. They included three regional groups distinguished by their languages: the Algonquian, the Iroquoian, and the Muskogean. The dozens of Algonquian-speaking tribes stretched from the New England seaboard to lands along the Great Lakes and into the upper Midwest and south to New Jersey, Virginia, and the Carolinas. The Algonquian tribes along the coast were skilled at fishing; the inland tribes excelled at hunting. All of them practiced agriculture to some extent, and they frequently used canoes hollowed out of trees (“dugouts”) to navigate rivers and lakes. Most Algonquians lived in small round shelters called wigwams. Their villages typically ranged from 500 to 2,000 inhabitants.

West and south of the Algonquians were the Iroquoian-speaking tribes (including the Seneca, Onondaga, Mohawk, Oneida, and Cayuga, and the Cherokee and Tuscarora in the South), whose lands spread from upstate New York south through Pennsylvania and into the upland regions of the Carolinas and Georgia. The Iroquois’s skill at growing corn led them to create permanent agricultural villages. Around their villages they constructed log walls, and within them they built enormous bark-covered longhouses, which housed several related family clans. Unlike the patriarchal Algonquian culture, Iroquoian society was matriarchal. In part, the matriarchy reflected the frequent absence of Iroquois men. As adept hunters and traders, the men traveled extensively for long periods. Women headed the clans, selected the chiefs, controlled the distribution of property, and planted as well as harvested the crops.

The third major Indian group in the Eastern Woodlands included the tribes who spoke the Muskogean language: the Creeks, Chickasaws, and Choctaws. West of the Mississippi River were the peoples living on the Great Plains and in the Great Basin (present-day Utah and Nevada), many of whom had migrated from the East. Plains Indians, including the Blackfeet, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, Apache, and Sioux, were nomadic tribes whose culture focused on hunting the vast herds of bison. The Western tribes, living along the Pacific coast, depended upon fishing, sealing, and whaling. Among them were Salish tribes, including the Tillamook, the Chinook, and the Pomo and Chumash.

For at least 15,000 years before the arrival of Europeans, the Indians had occupied the vastness of North America undisturbed by outside invaders.

War between tribes, however, was commonplace. Success in warfare was the primary source of a male's prestige among many tribes. As a Cherokee explained in the eighteenth century, "We cannot live without war. Should we make peace with the Tuscororas, we must immediately look out for some other nation with whom we can engage in our beloved occupation."

Over the centuries, the native North Americans had adapted to the necessity of warfare, changing climate, and varying environments. They would also do so in the face of the unprecedented changes wrought by the arrival of Europeans. In the process of changing and adapting to new realities in accordance with their own traditions, the Indians played a significant role in shaping America and the origins of the United States.

## EUROPEAN VISIONS OF AMERICA

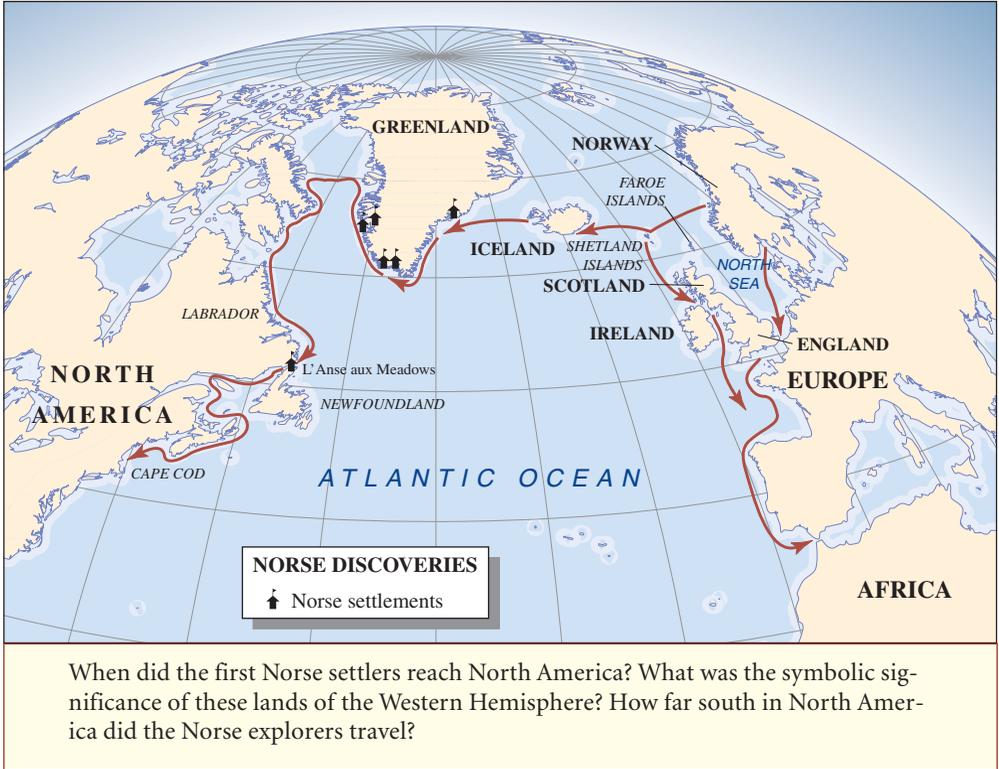
The European invasion of the Western Hemisphere was fueled by curiosity and enabled by advances in nautical technology. Europeans had long wondered about what lay beyond the western horizon. During the tenth and eleventh centuries the **Vikings** (seafaring Norse peoples who lived in Scandinavia) crisscrossed much of the globe. From villages in Norway,

### **Vikings in the "New World"**

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A Viking settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland, in northeastern Canada. Reconstructed longhouses in Icelandic Viking style are in the background.





Sweden, and Denmark, Viking warriors and traders ventured down to North Africa, across the Baltic Sea, up Russian rivers, and across the Black Sea to the fabled Turkish capital, Constantinople (present-day Istanbul). The Vikings also headed west, crossing the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, raiding towns in Ireland, settling in Iceland, and then exploring the coast of the uppermost reaches of North America.

Around A.D. 985 a Norse Icelander named Erik the Red colonized the west coast of a rocky, fogbound island he called Greenland. The world's largest island, Greenland was mostly covered by ice and devoid of human inhabitants. The Vikings established a settlement on the southwest coast. Erik the Red ironically named the island Greenland in hopes of misleading prospective colonists about its suitability for settlement. Leif Eriksson, son of Erik the Red, sailed west and south from Greenland about A.D. 1001 and sighted the coast of present-day Newfoundland in northeastern Canada, where he settled for the winter. The Greenland colonies vanished mysteriously in the fifteenth century.

## THE EXPANSION OF EUROPE

The European exploration of the Western Hemisphere was enabled by several key developments during the fifteenth century. New knowledge and new technologies enabled the construction of full-rigged sailing ships capable of oceanic voyages, more accurate navigation techniques and maps, and more powerful weapons. Driving those improvements was an unrelenting ambition to explore new territories (especially the Indies, a term which then referred to eastern Asia), garner greater wealth and richer commerce, and spread Christianity across the globe. This remarkable age of discovery coincided with the rise of modern science; the growth of global trade, commercial towns, and modern corporations; the decline of feudalism and the formation of nations; the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation; and the resurgence of some old sins—greed, conquest, exploitation, oppression, racism, and slavery—that quickly defiled the mythical innocence of the so-called New World.

**RENAISSANCE GEOGRAPHY** For more than two centuries before Columbus, European thought was enlivened by the so-called Renaissance—the rediscovery of ancient texts, the rebirth of secular learning, and a pervasive intellectual curiosity—all of which spread more rapidly after Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press around 1440. Learned Europeans of the fifteenth century revered the ideas of classical Greece and Rome, including ancient concepts of geography. Greek mathematicians had concluded that the earth was round rather than flat. That Columbus was trying to prove that the world’s sphericity is an enduring—and false—myth; no informed person in the late fifteenth century thought the earth was flat. Progress in the art of nautical navigation accompanied the revival of secular learning during the Renaissance. Steering across the open sea, however, remained more a matter of intuition than science.

**THE GROWTH OF TRADE, TOWNS, AND NATION-STATES** Europe’s interest in global exploration derived primarily from the dramatic growth of urban commerce and world trade. By the fifteenth century, European traders traveled by sea and land all the way to east Asia, where they acquired herbal medicines, silk, jewels, perfumes, and rugs. They also purchased the much-coveted Asian spices—pepper, nutmeg, clove—so essential for preserving food and enhancing its flavor. The growing trade between Europe and Asia spawned a growing class of wealthy merchants and led to

the creation of the first modern corporations, through which stockholders shared risks and profits.

Global commerce was chancy and costly, however. Goods commonly passed from hand to hand, from ships to pack horses and back to ships, along the way subject to taxes demanded by various rulers. The vast Muslim world, extending from Spain across North Africa and into central Asia, straddled the important trade routes, adding to the hazards. Muslims tenaciously opposed efforts to “Christianize” their lands. Little wonder, then, that Europeans were eager to find an alternative all-water western route to spice-rich east Asia.

Another spur to global exploration was the rise of unified nations, ruled by powerful monarchs wealthy enough to sponsor the search for foreign riches. The growth of the merchant class went hand in hand with the growth of centralized political power and the rapidly expanding population. Merchants wanted uniform currencies and favorable trade regulations. They thus became natural allies of the trade-loving monarchs. In turn, merchants and university-trained professionals supplied the monarchs with money, lawyers, and government officials. The Crusaders—European armies sent between 1095 and 1270 to conquer the Muslim-controlled Holy Land—had also advanced the process of international trade and exploration. The Crusades had brought Europe into contact with the Middle East and had decimated the ranks of the feudal lords, many of whom were killed while fighting Muslims. And new means of warfare—the use of gunpowder and royal armies—further weakened the independence of the nobility relative to the monarchs. In the late thirteenth century, the Venetian explorer Marco Polo and his father embarked on an epic, twenty-four-year-long journey eastward across Asia where they met the fabled Kublai Khan, the grand ruler of a vast empire encompassing Mongolia and China. Polo’s published account of the Asian riches amassed by the “Great Khan” dazzled Europeans, including Christopher Columbus.

By 1492 the map of Europe had been transformed. The decentralized feudal system of the Middle Ages had given way to several united kingdoms: France, where in 1453 Charles VII had surfaced from the Hundred Years’ War as head of a unified nation; England, where in 1485 Henry VII had emerged victorious after thirty years of civil strife known as the Wars of the Roses; Portugal, where John I had fought off the Castilians to ensure national independence; and Spain, where in 1469 Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile had united two warring kingdoms in marriage.

The Spanish king and queen were crusading Christian expansionists. On January 1, 1492, after nearly eight centuries of religious warfare between Spanish Christians and Moorish Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula, Ferdinand

and Isabella declared victory for Catholicism at Granada, the last Muslim stronghold. The zealously pious monarchs gave the defeated Muslims, and soon thereafter, the Jews living in Spain and Portugal (called Sephardi), the same desperate choice: convert to Catholicism or leave Spain.

The forced exile of Muslims and Jews from Spain was one of the many factors that prompted Europe's involvement in global expansion. Other factors—urbanization, world trade, the rise of centralized nations, and advances in knowledge, technology, and firepower—combined with natural human curiosity, greed, and religious zeal to spur the exploration and conquest of the Western Hemisphere. Beginning in the late fifteenth century, Europeans set in motion the events that, as one historian has observed, would bind together “four continents, three races, and a great diversity of regional parts.” During the two and a half centuries after 1492, the Spanish developed the most extensive empire the world had ever known. It would span southern Europe and the Netherlands, much of the Western Hemisphere, and parts of Asia. Yet the Spanish Empire grew so vast that its sprawling size and ethnic complexity eventually led to its disintegration. In the meantime, the expansion of Spanish influence around the world helped shape much of the development of American society and history.