

WHERE DID THEY GO? (1)

For years historians claimed that North and South America were almost “empty” continents. Columbus “discovered” them. In some textbooks you might still read that in 1492, the Native Americans were unskilled savages. However, recent research by anthropologists, archeologists, and historians, tells a much different story.

Not all historians agree with this new research. But, with every new discovery, the supporting evidence seems to be mounting. First of all, Native Americans developed complex civilizations. Their lives included government, religion, trade, art, and architecture. They built huge cities and, in some cases, roads. They used fire to keep open the forest floors for travel. They burned the plains to create savannahs for grazing animals like elk and buffalo. They did not build fences or barns, but rather created vast buffalo farms where they could hunt.

Their understanding of agriculture far exceeded what Europeans knew. They grew and stored ample crops to feed their people. They cultivated many varieties of tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, squash, peanuts, and, of course, corn. They built garden islands in the flood plains of the Amazon River. They groomed hanging gardens in their cities. They also terraced hillsides to make the best use of the land. They even developed renewable topsoil to allow the growing of crops in areas where there was poor soil.

But, by the time settlers came to the Americas in the 1600s, evidence of the Native Americans’ achievements were already disappearing. Their cities had crumbled. Their raised gardens looked only like hills. The Native Americans’ story was lost to history— at least for many years. So where did they go?

First, how many Native Americans lived in the New World in 1491?

Estimates range between 20 million and 112 million people.

What happened to them?

95% to 98% of them died.

Europeans killed some Native American in the wars. This number is quite small. Some died as a result of being forced into slavery. This number is even smaller. However, the biggest killer of Native Americans was disease brought to the New World by the Europeans.

There were several epidemics of diseases that historians can document. They use historical records and original sources such as letters and church records to support their theories. Here are just three examples.

WHERE DID THEY GO? (2)

Example 1: Historians searched the Spanish records in Peru. They found that small pox arrived first in Mexico in 1525. A sick sailor probably brought it to the New World. The disease spread southward into Peru in South America. By the time Pizarro arrived, over half the population of the Inca Empire had died of small pox. Their government was in disarray making it easier for Pizarro to conquer them.

Example 2: In 1539, Hernando De Soto landed in Florida with a small army of 200 horses, 600 soldiers, and 300 pigs. Doctors who study disease believe that the pigs carried diseases that infected humans and other animals. Pigs can transmit anthrax, trichinosis, tuberculosis, and life-threatening fevers. These diseases then could be passed on to Native Americans who never met a European directly.

The historical records confirm that De Soto marched through what is now Florida northward to North Carolina and westward to Texas. Along the way he wrote that the lands were thickly settled and had small cities. However, by the time La Salle came to the same area 150 years later, there were no Native American cities. Experts who studied the records believe that 96% of the native population in the area died between De Soto's visit and La Salle's.

Example 3. In 1615, a French ship wrecked along the coast of New England. The Patuxet Indians captured a few survivors. At least one survivor was carrying a disease (probably viral hepatitis) and in the five years it took for the epidemic to run its course, 90% of the natives in coastal New England were dead.

The records show that in 1605 and 1606, the French explorer Champlain wanted to establish a French base on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. He gave up the idea because there were too many natives living there. In 1607, another explorer tried to establish an English community in southern Maine. He gave up because there were too many armed natives. However, by the time the Pilgrims arrived in 1620, there were hardly any Native Americans left. In fact, the Pilgrims survived their first winter mostly because they could use the buried stores of grain abandoned by the local natives who had died.

WHERE DID THEY GO? (3)

Why didn't more Native Americans survive?

Other epidemics hit the Native American populations. They included typhus, influenza, diphtheria, and measles. The natives had no natural immunity to these diseases. What is worse is that they had no idea how disease spread. They did not know that they should quarantine the sick—separate them from the healthy people. (Europeans had learned to quarantine the sick during the Black Death, a plague that killed 1/4 of the population of Europe in the 1400–1500s.) Native Americans tried to cure the sick by drawing their families together to sing and pray at their bedside. This most surely spread disease even faster.

What effect did the epidemics have on history?

Obviously, the epidemics had a huge effect. After the Age of Exploration, the Europeans came to settle. Had more Native Americans survived, they would probably have put up a much greater fight against these settlers. Certainly history would have been different.

Something to think about...

The argument of how many people lived in North and South American will probably go on for years. Regardless—everyone agrees that an enormous number of Native Americans died as a result of their interaction with Europeans. Tragically their culture and way of life died with them. Elizabeth Fenn, a smallpox historian, said it best,

“...the squabble over the numbers obscures a central fact. Whether one million, or 10 million or 100 million died, the pall of sorrow that engulfed the hemisphere was immeasurable. Languages, prayers, hopes, habits, and dreams—entire ways of life hissed away like steam.”

The End

This essay is based on an article written by Charles C. Mann entitled, “1491” in the March 2002 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*.

COUNSEL TRADE DOCUMENT

Name _____

Geographic Area

- lived in the Southwest _____
- lived in Hudson Valley Region to Virginia _____
- lived in upstate New York and Great Lakes region _____
- lived in countries of South America, namely Peru _____
- lived in Mexico _____

Religion

- believed in Spirits and/or Gods _____
- practiced human sacrifices _____
- had the *Society of False Faces* _____
- believed in *Sky Woman, Good Brother, and Evil Brother* _____
- lived in the *Great Spirit of Manitou* _____
- believed in spirits called *Kachinas* _____
- used special rooms called *kivas* for special meeting and religious ceremonies _____

Homes, Buildings, or Road Projects

- homes were built of birch bark _____
- lived in longhouses _____
- lived in multistoried homes of sun-baked brick _____
- built stone cities and temples _____
- built roads _____

Food

- depended on the forest and its resources to meet basic needs _____
- used terraced gardening for planting crops _____
- grew corn, beans, squash _____
- hunted and fished _____
- raised animals to eat _____

TWENTY-EIGHT FACTS

1. The **Iroquois** were famous for their **League of Five Nations** and **Society of False Faces**.
2. The **Inca** lived in **Peru** and built **thousands of miles of roads** over rocky land for protection.
3. The **Pueblo** used special rooms called **kivas** for religious ceremonies and believed in spirits called **kachinas**.
4. The **Aztec** were warlike and practiced **human sacrifices** to please their gods.
5. The **Algonquin** believed in the “**Great Spirit of Manitou**” and **memory scrolls**.
6. **Three Sisters** was the special name for **corn, beans, and squash**.
7. All the **Native Americans** grew **maize (corn)** for food.
8. The **Inca** used **quipu** as a special way of **writing** by arranging **knotted and colored strings**.
9. **Drake** sailed for **England** as **privateer**. He explored the western coast of North America and **circumnavigated the globe**.
10. The **Turks** shut down the **land routes** to the **Far East**.
11. **Prince Henry** of Portugal started a **navigational school** even though he was never an explorer.
12. **Vasco da Gama** was a **Portuguese explorer** who sailed south around the **tip of Africa** to **India**.
13. **Columbus** was an **Italian** who **sailed for Spain** and **discovered the “New World”** in 1492.
14. **Cabot** was an **Italian** who **sailed for England** and **discovered Newfoundland** and **Nova Scotia**.
15. **Cabot** discovered the **Grand Banks**, **rich fishing banks** off the coast of **Newfoundland**.
16. A **German mapmaker** drew a **world map** naming the **New World** after **Amerigo Vespucci**.
17. **Ponce de León**, a **Spanish explorer**, searched for the “**fountain of youth**,” but **found Florida** instead.
18. The **Spanish explorer Cortes** was **ruthless and cruel**. He **conquered the Aztec** of **Mexico**.
19. **Balboa** was the **first European explorer** to see the **Pacific Ocean**.
20. The **Spanish explorer Pizarro** **conquered the Inca Empire** in **Peru**.
21. **Magellan**, a **Portuguese explorer**, **tried to circumnavigate the world** but was **killed in the Philippine Islands**.
22. **Hudson** sailed for both the **English** and the **Dutch** in search for a **Northwest Passage** through **North America**.
23. **Verrazano**, an **Italian explorer**, **sailed for France** along the **Atlantic Coast** of **North America**.
24. **Cartier**, a **French explorer**, explored the **St. Lawrence region** of **Canada**.
25. **De Soto**, a **Spanish explorer**, discovered the **Mississippi River** **flowed south** into the **Gulf of Mexico**.
26. **Coronado**, a **Spanish explorer**, traveled in the **Southwest** and **discovered the Grand Canyon**.
27. The **Treaty of Tordesillas** was an **agreement** that **split the world** in two between **Spain** and **Portugal**.
28. The **astrolabe** was an important **navigational tool** in the **15th century**.

AGE OF DISCOVERY GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Name _____

First Reason to Explore

- Metals for _____
- Spices to _____ and _____ foods
- Silk for _____

Interrupted Trade Routes

- Europeans had sailed on sea routes through _____
- Brought woolen, _____, and _____ goods
- Traded with Far East merchants who traveled _____ routes (the _____ Road)
- Brought _____, _____, and _____
- Holy Wars called _____
- _____ conquered _____
- Seized the eastern ports of the _____
- Land routes were _____
- Needed to find new _____

Second Reason to Explore

- To convert _____ to _____

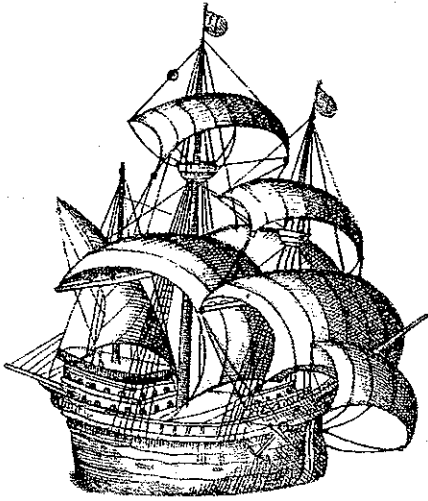
Sailing East or West

- Vasco da Gama (_____) naval officer
- Found a new trade route to India by sailing _____

Exchange of Ideas and a Famous Prince

- Muslims discovered the _____, used for _____
- Prince _____
- Started _____

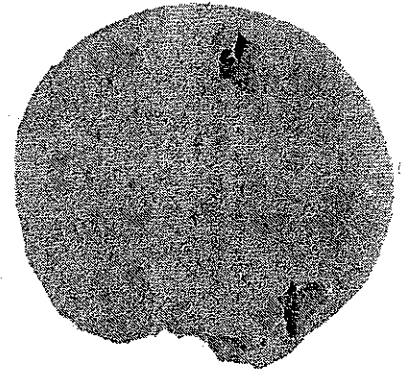
LIFE ABOARD SHIP (1)



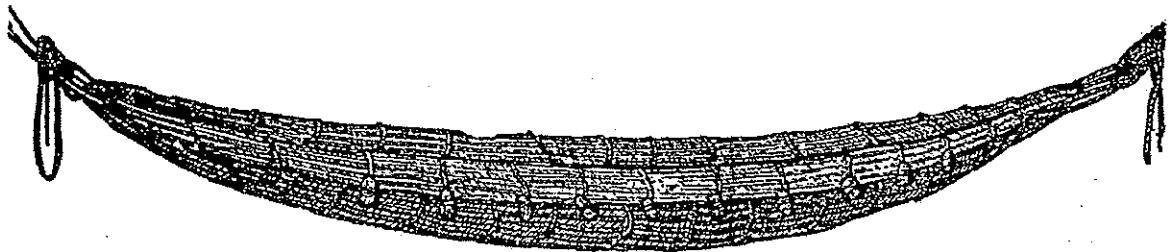
Life on board ship was extremely hard. A voyage of exploration meant months—sometimes even years—at sea. There were terrible diseases, boring, sometimes rancid food and foul water, cramped sleeping quarters, many duties, little time for rest or time to themselves, and strict discipline.

Scurvy was the most common disease to affect sailors. It is a vitamin deficiency caused by lack of fresh fruits and vegetables, which would rot quickly aboard ship. Scurvy causes body weakness, sore and swollen gums and joints, and loose teeth. Sometimes sailors died from scurvy. Eventually Spanish settlements in the New World supplied ships with fresh oranges and lemons. The British carried limes on all of their ships. The fruit helped prevent scurvy.

The sailors' diet was monotonous. Mostly sailors ate salted meat stored in barrels and **hardtack**. Hardtack was a type of biscuit that kept for years. Often the biscuits became infested with beetles or maggots. The sailors would remove the insects so they could eat the hardtack!!! On their long voyage across the Pacific Ocean to the Philippines, Magellan's crew had only rotted food and putrid water. They had to eat leather riggings and rats to survive.



Sailors slept in **hammocks**. These were swinging beds that could be hung up anywhere on the ship. This gave more room aboard ship. Also because the hammock swung from side to side, sailors did not fall out either below or above deck during rough weather.



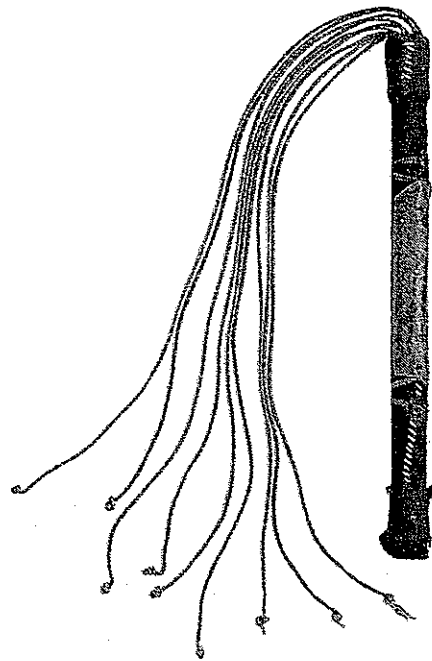
LIFE ABOARD SHIP (2)

Sailors had many duties. They climbed high masts and rigging to work the sails, took turns on watch, and cleaned or **swabbed** the filthy decks. They needed to mend torn or worn sails, repair ropes, and even make their own clothes. They used canvas left over from sail repairs. Sailors would treat the canvas clothes with oil to make them waterproof. One officer was the **bosun mate**. He would blow the bosun's whistle to signal orders at sea. It had a high pitched tone that could be heard over the sound of winds and waves.

If sailors disobeyed orders there was punishment. One of the most common was the "**cat-o'-nine-tails**." It was a whip made of nine lengths of knotted cord attached to a handle. The disobedient sailor would be lashed to a frame and **flogged** (whipped) on his bare back. The number of floggings depend upon the seriousness of his disobedience. But even a few whips of the cords brought blood and caused great pain. However, there would be a doctor present to stop the flogging if it appeared the sailor might die.

Sailing was very dangerous. The ships were small, with tall masts and lots of sails. In very heavy winds the ships could **capsize**. Ships could also run aground on rocks or shallow water near land. Many ships sailed out and never returned.

It is understandable why there were sometimes mutinies or why some men jumped overboard due to the unbearable conditions. There was little romance and excitement while sailing on the high seas. Life aboard ship carried many dangers and no luxuries!



AGE OF DISCOVERY (1)

First Reason to Explore

There were two major reasons why Western European explorers set sail during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. The first reason was to meet the needs of people living in Europe at that time. Europeans needed metals, spices, and silk. They needed the metals for making coins because their existing gold supplies were running low. They needed an ample supply of coins for trade and other transactions that increased wealth. They needed spices more than just to flavor foods. Spices also helped preserve food. This was important because there was no refrigeration. Finally, royalty and members of the merchant class needed silks for clothing and other goods.

Interrupted Trade Routes

Events in Europe and Asia interfered with the usual trade routes. Europeans had sailed on sea routes through the Mediterranean Sea from Genoa and Venice to Constantinople and Arabia. These European merchants brought woolen, leather, and iron goods to the markets on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea. There, they met merchants from the Far East. The eastern merchants had traveled overland routes (the Silk Road) from China through Turkestan and Persia to the Mediterranean. They brought spices, jewels, and silks from the Far East.

The overland trip had always been dangerous. However, trade routes became worse as Holy Wars raged between Muslims and Christians. Both religions claimed ownership of Jerusalem. Europeans sent Christian knights and armies to the area to fight against Muslim Turks. (These wars were called the Crusades.) In the end the Muslims conquered the Christians and seized the eastern ports of the Mediterranean. Traders and merchants could no longer use the trade routes across Asia to China. With the land routes closed, Western European countries needed to find new water routes to the Far East.

Second Reason to Explore

The second reason was a religious one. Christian Europeans believed that it would please God if they caused "infidels" (non-Christians) to convert to Christianity. It was not just the Church that promoted conversions. Explorers knew that most governments of Western European countries supported this goal, too. Therefore, explorers often used the promise to spread Christianity as a reason to support exploration.

AGE OF DISCOVERY (2)

Sailing East or West

In 1497, Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese naval officer, led an expedition to find a new trade route to India by sailing east around Africa. At the time, most Europeans believed that the Indian Ocean did not connect to the Atlantic. He returned in 1499 establishing a route that is still used today. Of all the explorers, he is the only one who actually did find a water route to the Far East. Other explorers who headed west never reached India or China, but instead discovered the New World.

Exchange of Ideas and a Famous Prince

The Age of Discovery may not have evolved if it hadn't been for an exchange of new ideas and a famous prince. The Muslims brought to Europe the understanding of mathematics developed in Arabia. They also studied the writings of ancient Greece, Persia, and Arabia. They rediscovered the *astrolabe*. This was an instrument invented by the Greeks to measure the altitude of the sun and stars. Europeans used astrolabes for navigation on their exploration voyages. They could determine their relative location in the open ocean.

The famous prince was Prince Henry of Portugal. In 1415, he visited Africa. There he saw gold, silver, and other riches. To make Portugal wealthier, he realized he needed to find ways to reach Africa by a water route. When he returned home, he started a navigational school. There, sailors learned how to use all the navigational tools needed to set the course of a ship. They learned to use the compass to find direction. They learned to use the cross-staff and astrolabe to find their position at sea. His school was a success. It was also critical to the success of many voyages.

With seaworthy ships and skillful mariners, the countries of Europe were well equipped to sponsor voyages of exploration. By the end of the 1400s, Europeans were ready for the excitement, adventure, danger, and achievements that would be called the *Age of Discovery*. But, at the same time, Native Americans were unaware of events across the Atlantic in Europe. They were not ready for the devastating effects of their future encounters with European explorers.