Thus out of small beginnings greater things have been produced by His hand that made all things of nothing, and gives being to all things that are; and, as one small candle may light a thousand, so the light here kindled hath shone unto many, yea in some sort to our whole nation.

William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation—1620–1647

The original exploration, discovery, and settlement of North and South America occurred thousands of years before Christopher Columbus was born. In fact, many archeologists now believe that the first people to settle North America arrived as much as 40,000 years ago. At that time, waves of migrants from Asia may have crossed a land bridge that then connected Siberia and Alaska (a bridge now submerged under the Bering Sea). Over a long period of time, successive generations migrated southward from the Arctic Circle to the southern tip of South America. The first Americans—or Native Americans—adapted to the varied environments of the regions that they found. They divided into hundreds of tribes, spoke different languages, and practiced different cultures. Estimates of the Native population in the Americas in the 1490s vary from 50 to 75 million persons.

Cultures of North America

Estimates vary widely as to the population in the region north of Mexico (present-day United States and Canada) in the 1490s, when Columbus made his historic voyages. From under a million to over 10 million people may have been spread across this area.

Small settlements. Most of the Native Americans lived in semipermanent settlements, each with a small population seldom exceeding 300. The men spent their time making tools and hunting for game, while the women grew crops such as corn, beans, and tobacco. Some tribes were more nomadic than others. On the Great Plains, for example, the Sioux and the Pawnee followed the buffalo herds.
Larger societies. A few tribes had developed more complex cultures and societies in which thousands lived and worked together. The Pueblos in the Southwest lived in multistoried buildings and developed intricate irrigation systems for farming. East of the Mississippi River, the Woodland Native Americans prospered with a rich food supply. Mound-building cultures, including the Adena, Hopewell, and Mississippian, evolved in the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys and elsewhere. Supported by hunting, fishing, and agriculture, many permanent settlements developed. Cahokia (near present-day East St. Louis, Illinois), the largest, had as many as 30,000 inhabitants. For unknown reasons, Mississippian culture began to decline in the 15th century. In the Northeast (present-day New York), Iroquois tribes formed a political confederacy, the League of the Iroquois, which withstood attacks from opposing Native Americans and Europeans during much of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Cultures of Central and South America
While the exact population of Native Americans in this region in the 1490s is unknown, most historians agree that it was greater than that of North America. The great majority of Native Americans—estimates vary widely, to as many as 25 million people—lived in Central and South America. Three peoples in this region developed complex civilizations. Between A.D. 300 and 800, the Mayas built remarkable cities in the rain forests of the Yucatan Peninsula (present-day Guatemala, Belize, and southern Mexico). Centuries later, the Aztecs in central Mexico and the Incas in Peru ruled over vast empires. All three civilizations developed highly organized societies, carried on an extensive trade, and created calendars that were based on accurate scientific observations. The Aztecs’ capital of Tenochtitlán was equivalent in size and population to the largest cities of Europe.

Europe Moves Toward Exploration
Until the late 1400s, Americans had no knowledge of the continents on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Neither did Europeans or Asians know of the existence of the two American continents (North and South America). Voyages and settlements such as those of the Vikings around the year 1000 to Greenland and North America had no lasting impact. As you know, Columbus’ voyages of exploration finally brought Europe and the Americas into contact. But why was an oceanic crossing and exploration accomplished in the late 15th century and not before?

Improvements in Technology
In Europe, there occurred a rebirth of classical learning and an outburst of artistic and scientific activity known as the Renaissance. Columbus and other explorers lived when this era of creative vitality was at its height, in the late 1400s and early 1500s.
One aspect of the Renaissance was a gradual increase in scientific knowledge and technological change. Europeans made improvements in the inventions of others. For example, they began to use gunpowder (invented by the Chinese) and the sailing compass (adopted from the Chinese by Arab merchants). There were also major improvements in shipbuilding and mapmaking. The invention of the printing press in the 1450s also aided the spread of knowledge across Europe.

**Religious Conflict**

The later years of the Renaissance were a time of intense religious zeal and conflict. The Roman Catholic Church that had once dominated the culture of Western Europe was threatened from without by Ottoman Turks (followers of Islam) and from within by a Protestant revolt against the pope’s authority.

**Catholic victory in Spain.** In the Middle Ages, Spain had been partly conquered by Muslim invaders. Only one Moorish stronghold remained in that country when Isabella, queen of Castile, and Ferdinand, king of Aragon, united their separate Christian kingdoms. In 1492, the very year that Christopher Columbus sailed on his historic first voyage, Isabella and Ferdinand succeeded in defeating the Moors of Granada. The uniting of Spain under Isabella and Ferdinand was a sign of new leadership, hope, and power for European believers in the Roman Catholic faith.

**Protestant revolt in northern Europe.** In the early 1500s, certain Christians in Germany, England, France, Holland, and other northern European countries revolted against the authority of the pope in Rome. Their revolt was known as the Protestant Reformation. Conflict between Catholics and Protestants led to a series of religious wars. It also caused the Catholics of Spain and Portugal and the Protestants of England and Holland to want their own versions of Christianity adopted by non-Christian peoples in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Thus, a religious motive for exploration and colonization was added to political and economic motives.

**Expanding Trade**

Economic motives for exploration grew out of a fierce competition among European kingdoms for increased trade with Africa, India, and China. In the past, this trade had traveled from the Italian city-state of Venice and the Byzantine city of Constantinople on to an overland route that reached all the way to the capital of the Chinese empire. This land route to Asia had become blocked when, in 1453, the Ottoman Turks seized control of Constantinople.

Might a new way to the rich Asian trade be opened up by sailing either west across the Atlantic Ocean or south along the West African coast? At first, the latter possibility (sailing around Africa) seemed more promising. Voyages of exploration sponsored by Portugal’s Prince Henry the Navigator eventually succeeded in opening up a long sea route around South Africa’s Cape of Good Hope. In 1498, the Portuguese sea captain Vasco da Gama was the first European
to reach India by this route. By this time, Columbus had attempted what he thought would be a shorter route to Asia. (He was wrong, of course. What he found was a sea route to the Americas.)

**Developing Nation-States**

Europe was also changing politically in the 15th century. Monarchs were gaining power and building nation-states in Spain, Portugal, France, England, and the Netherlands. (A nation-state is a country in which the majority of people share both a common culture and common political loyalties toward a central government.) The monarchs of the emerging nation-states depended on trade to bring in needed revenues and the Church to justify their right to rule. Among these monarchs were Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain and Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal, who used their power to search for riches abroad and to spread the influence of the Roman Catholic Church to new overseas dominions.

**Early Explorations**

Changing economic, political, and social conditions in Europe shaped the ambitions of the Italian-born Christopher Columbus.

**Columbus**

Columbus spent eight years seeking financial support for his plan to sail west from Europe to the “Indies.” Finally, in 1492, he succeeded in winning the backing of the two Spanish monarchs. Isabella and Ferdinand were then at the height of their power, having just defeated the Moors. They agreed to outfit three ships and to make Columbus governor, admiral, and viceroy of all the lands that he would claim for Spain.

After sailing from the Canary Islands on September 6, Columbus landed in the Bahamas on October 12. His success in discovering lands on the other side of the ocean brought him a burst of glory in Spain. But three subsequent voyages across the Atlantic were disappointing. Columbus died in 1506, still believing that he had found a western route to Asia.

**Columbus’ legacy.** At the time of his death, many Spaniards viewed Columbus as a failure because they suspected that he had not found a route to the riches of China and the Indies, as he claimed, but a “New World.” Today, some people scoff at Columbus for having erroneously given Native Americans the name “Indians.” Even the land that he had explored was named for someone else, Amerigo Vespucci, another Italian sailor. Also Columbus’ critics point out the many problems and injustices suffered by Native Americans after Europeans arrived and took over their land.

Nevertheless, no one can seriously dispute Columbus’ importance. Modern scholars have recognized his great skills as a navigator and his daring and commitment in going forth where nobody else had ever dared to venture. Furthermore, there is no denying that Columbus’ voyages brought about, for
the first time in history, *permanent* interaction between Europeans and Native Americans.

**Exchanges.** Europeans and Native Americans had developed vastly different cultures over the millennia. The contact between the peoples of the Americas and the Europeans had both immediate and long-term effects. The Native Americans introduced Europeans to many new plants and foods, including beans, corn, sweet and white potatoes, tomatoes, and tobacco. They also infected Europeans with syphilis for the first time. Europeans brought sugar cane, bluegrasses, pigs, and horses, which all flourished in the new lands. They also introduced the wheel, iron implements, and guns to the Americas. Deadlier than all the guns was the European importation of germs and diseases, such as smallpox and measles, which within a century decimated the Native American population. Millions died (there was a mortality rate of over 90 percent), including entire tribal communities. These exchanges, biological and cultural, would permanently change the entire world.

**Dividing the New World**

Spain and Portugal were the first kingdoms to lay claim to territories in the New World. The Catholic monarchs of both countries turned to the pope in Rome to help settle their dispute over the ownership of newly discovered lands. In 1493, the pope drew a vertical, north-south line on a world map, giving Spain all lands to the west of the line and Portugal all lands to the east.

In 1494, the two disputing kingdoms signed the Treaty of Tordesillas, which moved the line a few degrees to the west. It was later discovered that the line passed through what is now the country of Brazil, and this, together with Portuguese explorations, established Portugal’s claim to Brazil. Spain claimed the rest of the Americas. (Other European countries, however, were soon to challenge these claims.)

**Spanish Exploration and Conquest**

Spanish dominance in the Americas was based on more than a treaty and a papal line of demarcation. Spain owed its power in the New World to the efforts of explorers and conquerors (or conquistadores). Feats such as the journey across the Isthmus of Panama to the Pacific Ocean by Vasco Núñez de Balboa, the circumnavigation of the world by one of Ferdinand Magellan’s ships, and the conquests of the Aztecs in Mexico by Hernan Cortés and of the Incas in Peru by Francisco Pizzaro secured Spain’s initial supremacy in the New World.

The conquistadores sent ships loaded with gold and silver back to Spain from the New World. They increased the gold supply by over 500 percent, making Spain the richest and most powerful nation in Europe. Other nations were encouraged to turn to the Americas in search of wealth and power. After seizing the wealth of the Indian empires, the Spanish turned to an *encomienda* system, with the king of Spain giving grants of land and Indians (Native
Americans) to individual Spaniards. These Indians had to farm or work in the mines. The fruits of their labors went to their Spanish masters, who in turn had to “care” for them. When Europeans’ brutality and diseases reduced the Native American population, the Spanish brought slaves from West Africa under the 

\textit{asiento} system. This required the Spanish to pay a tax to their king on each slave they imported to the Americas.

\textbf{English Claims}

England’s earliest claims to territory in the New World rested on the voyages of John Cabot, an Italian sea captain who was under contract to England’s King Henry VII. Cabot explored the coast of Newfoundland in 1497.

England, however, did not follow up Cabot’s discoveries with other expeditions of exploration and settlement. England’s monarchy in the 1500s was preoccupied with other matters, including Henry VIII’s break with the Roman Catholic Church. In the 1570s and 1580s, under Queen Elizabeth I, England challenged Spanish shipping in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Sir Francis Drake, for example, attacked Spanish ships, seized the gold and silver that they carried, and even attacked Spanish settlements on the coast of Peru. Another English adventurer, Sir Walter Raleigh, attempted to establish a settlement at Roanoke Island off the North Carolina coast in 1587, but the venture failed.

\textbf{French Claims}

The French monarchy first showed interest in exploration in 1524 when it sponsored a voyage by an Italian navigator, Giovanni da Verrazano. Hoping to find a northwest passage leading through the Americas to Asia, Verrazano explored part of North America’s eastern coast, including New York harbor. French claims to American territory were also based on the voyages of Jacques Cartier (1534–1542), who explored the St. Lawrence River extensively.

Like the English, the French were slow to develop colonies in the New World. During the 1500s, the French monarchy was preoccupied with European wars as well as with internal religious conflict between Roman Catholics and Protestant Huguenots. Only in the next century did France develop a strong interest in following up its claims to North American land.

The first permanent French settlement in America was established by Samuel de Champlain in 1608 at Quebec, a fortified village on the St. Lawrence River. Champlain was later regarded as the “Father of New France” because of his strong leadership in establishing the colony. In time, other explorers extended French claims across a vast territory. In 1673, Louis Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette explored the upper Mississippi River, and in 1682, Robert de La Salle explored the Mississippi basin, which he named Louisiana (after the French king, Louis XIV).
Dutch Claims

During the 1600s, the Netherlands also began to sponsor voyages of exploration. The Dutch government hired Henry Hudson, an experienced English seaman, to seek a northwest passage. In 1609, Hudson sailed up a broad river (later named for him as the Hudson River), an expedition that established Dutch claims to the surrounding area that would become New Amsterdam (and later New York). A private joint-stock company (see below), the Dutch West India Company, was given the privilege of taking control of the region for economic gain.

Early English Settlements

In the early 1600s, England was finally in a position to colonize the lands explored more than a century earlier by John Cabot. By defeating a large Spanish fleet—the Spanish Armada—in 1588, England had gained a reputation as a major naval power. Also in this period, England’s population was growing rapidly while its economy was depressed. This condition gave rise to a large number of poor and landless people who were attracted by the idea of economic opportunities in the Americas. The English had also devised a practical method for financing the costly and risky enterprise of founding new colonies. Their joint-stock companies pooled the savings of people of moderate means and supported trading ventures that seemed potentially profitable. Thus, in the 1600s, various colonies on the North Atlantic Coast were able to attract large numbers of English settlers.

Jamestown

England’s King James I chartered the Virginia Company, a joint-stock company that established the first permanent English colony in America at Jamestown in 1607.

Early problems. The first settlers of Jamestown suffered great hardships from Indian attacks, famine, and disease—and their own mistakes. The settlement’s location in a swampy area along the James River resulted in outbreaks of dysentery and malaria, diseases that were fatal to many. Moreover, many of the settlers were gentlemen unaccustomed to physical work. Others were gold-seeking adventurers who refused to hunt or farm. Thus, food supplies dwindled to almost nothing, and the colonists nearly starved.

Tobacco prosperity. Through the forceful leadership of Captain John Smith and the establishment of a tobacco industry by John Rolfe, the Jamestown colony survived. Rolfe and his Indian wife, Pocahontas, developed a new variety of tobacco, which became very popular in Europe and brought financial prosperity to the colony.
The growing of tobacco on Jamestown’s plantations required a large labor force. At first, the Virginia Company hoped to meet the need for labor by sending indentured servants to the colony. An indentured servant was often a person (usually a young man) who, in exchange for free transportation to a colony, was obligated to work on a plantation for a certain number of years. After the arrival in Jamestown in 1619 of a few Africans who became indentured servants, the Virginia tobacco growers began to employ a combination of both forced labor (slavery) and free labor (indentured servitude).

**Transition to a royal colony.** Although it made profits from tobacco sales, the Virginia Company made unwise decisions that caused it to fall heavily into debt. The bankrupt company’s charter was revoked in 1624, and the colony, now known as Virginia, came under the direct control of King James I. Thus, Virginia became England’s first royal colony (a colony under the control of a king or queen).
Puritan Colonies

Religious motivation, not the search for wealth, was the principal force behind the settlement of two other English colonies on North America’s Atlantic Coast. The first such colony was Plymouth; the second, Massachusetts Bay. Both were settled by English Protestants who were influenced by John Calvin’s teachings, including that of predestination, the belief that God guides those who are to be saved.

Founded by Henry VIII in the early 1500s, the Church of England, or Anglican Church, was Protestant in that it was under the control of the English monarch, not the pope in Rome. Its rituals, however, resembled those of the Roman Catholic Church. In the early 1600s, during the reign of James I, many people wanted to change both the ceremonies and the hierarchy (governing structure) of the Church of England. Because these religious reformers said they wanted to “purify” their church of Catholic influences, they became known as Puritans. James viewed the Puritans as a threat to both his religious and political authority and ordered some of them arrested and jailed.

The Plymouth Colony

One group of Puritans rejected the idea of simply reforming the Church of England. This group, known as the Separatists, wanted to organize a completely separate church, one that was independent of royal control. Several hundred Separatists left England in search of religious freedom. The Pilgrims, as they were called, first migrated to Holland. But economic hardship and cultural differences led many of the Pilgrims to seek another haven for their religion. They decided to settle in the new colony in America then operated by the Virginia Company of London. In 1620, a small group of Pilgrims set sail for Virginia aboard the Mayflower. Fewer than half of the 100 passengers on this ship were Separatists; the rest were people who had economic motives for making the voyage.

After a hard and stormy voyage of 65 days, the Mayflower dropped anchor off the Massachusetts coast, a few hundred miles to the north of the intended destination in Virginia. Rather than going on to Jamestown, the Pilgrims decided to establish a new colony at Plymouth.

Early hardships. After a first winter that saw half their number perish, the settlers at Plymouth were helped to adapt to the land by friendly Native Americans. They celebrated a good harvest at a thanksgiving feast (the first Thanksgiving) in 1621. Under strong leaders, including Captain Miles Standish and Governor William Bradford, the Plymouth colony grew slowly. Fish, furs, and lumber became the mainstays of Plymouth’s economy.

Massachusetts Bay Colony

In England, the persecution of Puritans increased as a result of the policies of a new king, Charles I. Seeking religious freedom, a group of Puritans (who
were not Separatists) gained a royal charter for a new colonizing venture, the Massachusetts Bay Company (1629).

In 1630, about a thousand Puritans led by John Winthrop sailed for the Massachusetts shore and founded Boston and several other towns. A civil war in England in the 1630s drove some 15,000 more settlers to the Massachusetts Bay colony—a movement known as the Great Migration.

**Early Political Institutions**

From the very beginning, England allowed its American colonies a certain degree of self-rule.

**Majority rule in Plymouth.** Aboard the *Mayflower* in 1620, the Pilgrims drew up and signed a document that pledged them to make decisions by the will of the majority. This document, known as the Mayflower Compact, represented both an early form of colonial self-government and an early (though rudimentary) form of written constitution, establishing the powers and duties of the government.

**Representative government at Jamestown.** The Virginia Company sought to encourage settlement in Jamestown by guaranteeing colonists the same rights that they had had in England, including the right to be represented in the lawmaking process. In 1619, just 12 years after the founding of Jamestown, Virginia’s colonists organized the first representative assembly in America, the House of Burgesses.

**Representative government in Massachusetts.** In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, there were limited but important democratic actions. All freemen—male members of the Puritan Church—had the right to participate in yearly elections of the colony’s governor, his assistants, and a representative assembly.

**Limited nature of colonial democracy.** While some of the English colonies were partly democratic, a sizable part of the colonial population was excluded from the political process. Only male property owners could vote for representatives. Those who were either female or landless had few rights; slaves and indentured servants had practically none at all. Also, many colonial governors ruled with autocratic or unlimited powers, answering only to the king or others in England who provided the colonies’ financial support. Thus, the gradual development of democratic ideas in the colonies coexisted with antidemocratic practices such as slavery and the widespread mistreatment of Native Americans.

**Spanish Settlements in North America**

Spanish settlements developed slowly, due to limited mineral resources and strong opposition from the Native Americans.
Florida. After a number of failed attempts and against the strong resistance of the Native Americans, the Spanish in 1565 established a permanent settlement at St. Augustine. Today, St. Augustine is the oldest city in North America.

New Mexico. Santa Fe was established as the capital of New Mexico in 1609. Harsh efforts to Christianize the Native Americans caused the Pueblo people to revolt in 1680. The Spanish were driven from the area until the early 1700s.

Texas. After they were driven from New Mexico, the Spanish established a few small settlements in Texas. These settlements grew in the early 1700s as Spain attempted to resist French efforts to explore the lower Mississippi River.

California. In response to Russian exploration from Alaska, the Spanish established permanent settlements at San Diego in 1769 and San Francisco in 1776. By 1784, a series of missions or settlements had been established along the California coast by members of the Franciscan order. Father Junípero Serra founded nine of these missions.

European Treatment of Native Americans

The various nations that colonized North and South America used a variety of approaches for controlling or subjugating Native Americans. The Spanish approach was to conquer, rule, and intermarry with the Aztecs, Mayas, and Incas. The English, on the other hand, occupied the land and forced the small, scattered tribes they encountered to move away from the coast to inland territories. The French, looking for furs and converts to Catholicism, tended to treat the Native Americans as economic and military allies.

In general, Europeans of all nationalities viewed Native Americans as inferiors who could be exploited for economic, political, and religious gain. Two long-term effects of European colonization were (1) the destruction by disease and war of large segments of the Native American population and (2) the establishment of a permanent legacy of subjugation.

Spanish Policy

In the American territories conquered and occupied by Spain, millions of Native Americans died as a result of both the conquistadores’ methods of warfare, efforts at enslavement, and, even more, European diseases for which the Native Americans had no immunity. Spain incorporated the conquered peoples of Central and South America into a highly organized empire. Because few families came from Spain to settle the empire, the explorers and adventurers intermarried with Indians as well as with Africans. The latter group were captured in Africa and forced to travel across the ocean to provide slave labor for the Spanish colonists. A rigid class system developed that was dominated by pure-blooded Spaniards.
**English Policy**

Initially, at least in Massachusetts, the English and the Native Americans coexisted, traded, and shared ideas. The Native Americans taught the settlers how to grow new crops such as corn and showed them how to hunt in the forests. They traded various furs for an array of English manufactured goods, including iron tools and weapons. But peaceful relations soon gave way to conflict and open warfare. The English had no respect for Native American cultures, which they viewed as primitive or “savage.” For their part, the Native Americans saw their way of life threatened as the English began to take more land to support their ever-increasing population.

**French Policy**

Unlike the Spaniards and the English, the French maintained relatively good relations with the Native American tribes who occupied the St. Lawrence Valley and the Great Lakes region. Seeking to control the fur trade, French soldiers assisted the Huron people in fighting their traditional enemy, the Iroquois. French traders built trading posts along the St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi River, where they exchanged French goods for Indian furs. Because the French had few colonists, farms, or towns, they posed little threat to the native population.

**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: COLUMBUS**

Over the centuries, Columbus has received both praise for his role as a “discoverer” and blame for his actions as a “conqueror.” In the United States, he has traditionally been viewed as a hero. As early as 1828, Washington Irving wrote a popular biography extolling the explorer’s virtues. The apex of Columbus’ heroic reputation was reached in 1934 when President Franklin Roosevelt declared October 12 a national holiday.

In recent years, however, revisionist histories and biographies have been highly critical of Columbus, especially those written on the occasion of the 1992 quincentennial of Columbus’ first voyage. His detractors argue that Columbus was simply at the right place at the right time. Europe at the end of the 15th century was ready to expand. If Columbus had not crossed the Atlantic in 1492, some other explorer—perhaps Vespucci or Cabot—would have done so a few years later. According to this interpretation, Columbus was little more than a good navigator and a self-promoter, who exploited an opportunity.

Some revisionists take a harsh view of Columbus and regard him not as the first discoverer of America but rather as its first conqueror. They portray him as a religious fanatic in the European
Christian tradition who sought to convert the Native Americans to Christianity and liquidated those who resisted.

The revisionist argument has not gone unanswered. The historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., for example, has argued that the chief motivation for Columbus’ deeds was neither greed for gold nor ambition for conquest. What drove him, in Schlesinger’s view, was the challenge of the unknown. Columbus’ apologists admit that thousands of Native Americans died as a result of European exploration in the Americas, but they point out that thousands had also suffered horrible deaths from Aztec sacrifices. Moreover, the mistreatment of Native Americans was perhaps partially offset by such positive developments as the gradual development of democratic institutions in the colonies and later the United States.

The debate about the nature of Columbus’ achievement is unresolved. As with other historical questions, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction and to separate a writer’s personal biases from objective reality. One conclusion is inescapable: As a result of Columbus’ voyages, world history took a sharp turn in a new direction. His explorations established a permanent point of contact between Europe and the Americas, and we are still living with the consequences of that fact.

**KEY NAMES, EVENTS, AND TERMS**

Native Americans; land bridge
Sioux; Pawnee; Pueblo; Adena; Hopewell; Mississippian; Iroquois
Mayas; Incas; Aztecs
Renaissance technology; compass; printing press
Spain; Moors
Ferdinand and Isabella Protestant Reformation trade
Portugal
Henry the Navigator nation-states
Christopher Columbus New World
Amerigo Vespucci
papal line of demarcation
Treaty of Tordesillas (1494)
Vasco Núñez de Balboa
Ferdinand Magellan
Hernan Cortés
Francisco Pizarro
conquistadores
encomienda system
asiento system
John Cabot
Giovanni de Verrazano
Jacques Cartier
Samuel de Champlain
Father Jacques Marquette
Robert de la Salle
Henry Hudson
joint-stock company
Father Junípero Serra
Virginia Company; Jamestown
Captain John Smith
John Rolfe; Pocahontas
royal colony
Puritans
Plymouth colony
Separatists
Pilgrims
*Mayflower; Mayflower*
Compact
Massachusetts Bay Colony
John Winthrop
Great Migration
Virginia House of Burgesses
MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. “In the 1500s, Native Americans possessed a wide range of complex cultures.” Each of the following gives evidence to support this statement EXCEPT
   (A) the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán
   (B) the organization of Inca society
   (C) Native Americans’ susceptibility to European diseases
   (D) the Mayas’ agricultural system
   (E) the Maya calendar

2. Which of the following best describes the way Europeans treated Native Americans in the 1500s and 1600s?
   (A) Native Americans were regarded as inferior people subject to Christian domination.
   (B) Native American ways of life were respected.
   (C) Since nothing of value could be learned or obtained from the Native Americans, Europeans thought it was permissible to exterminate them.
   (D) Europeans cultivated good relations with Native Americans and sought to make them economic partners.
   (E) Only the English believed that Native Americans should be treated fairly.

3. Which of the following was the LEAST important factor behind European exploration and settlement in the 16th century?
   (A) increase in scientific knowledge and technological change
   (B) population increase
   (C) development of nation-states
   (D) competition for trade
   (E) religious commitment

4. By the end of the 16th century, all of the following were generally true about Spain’s colonial empire EXCEPT
   (A) It was controlled by a bureaucracy in Madrid.
   (B) The Roman Catholic Church had great influence.
   (C) New universities were spreading education and culture.
   (D) Families continued to emigrate from Spain.
   (E) Great wealth was being sent back to Spain.

5. The delay in founding English settlements in the Americas was the result of
   (A) weak English monarchs
   (B) the lack of English territorial claims in the Americas
   (C) failure to develop trade with other nations
   (D) fear of Spain
   (E) religious upheavals in England

6. At the beginning of the 17th century, all of the following factors served to increase the English role in America EXCEPT
   (A) defeat of the Spanish Armada
   (B) population growth
(C) royal leadership
(D) development of joint-stock companies
(E) emigration for religious reasons

7. The survival of the Jamestown colony can be most directly attributed to the
   (A) religious spirit of the settlers
   (B) management of the Virginia Company
   (C) development of a tobacco industry
   (D) location of the settlement
   (E) nobles’ diligent search for gold

8. Which of the following sources would be most useful in studying the development of democratic institutions in the early colonial period?
   (A) the Edict of Nantes
   (B) the first charter of the Virginia Company
   (C) Columbus’ journals
   (D) the Treaty of Tordesillas
   (E) the Mayflower Compact

9. Which of the following statements is the most widely accepted description of Columbus’ accomplishments?
   (A) He discovered a New World.
   (B) He bears much of the blame for oppressing Native American peoples in North America.
   (C) He started a permanent relationship between Europe and the Americas.
   (D) He is responsible for most of the problems in the Americas during the colonial period.
   (E) His heroic deeds will always be respected by fair-minded American citizens.

10. The issue of religion figured most prominently in the consideration of which of the following?
    (A) the settlement of Jamestown
    (B) the establishment of Puritan colonies in Massachusetts
    (C) France’s Indian policy
    (D) discoveries by the Spanish conquistadores
    (E) Spain’s support of Columbus’ voyages