**PORTUGAL (p. 27)**

Portugal led the others into exploration. Encouraged by Prince Henry the Navigator, Portuguese seamen sailed southward along the African coast, seeking a water route to the East. They were also looking for the legendary king Prester, who had supposedly built a Christian settlement somewhere in **northwestern Africa**. Henry hoped to form an alliance with Prester to fight the Muslims. During Henry’s lifetime the Portuguese developed the compass, made advances in map-making, and designed and built stronger and faster ships known as caravels.

At first, the Portuguese established trading stations along the west coast of Africa rather than permanent settlements. They also built forts to protect their trading stations from rival European traders.

During the 1480s the Portuguese came into contact with the kingdom of the Kongo, situated south of the Congo River in West Africa. The **Kongo** people became powerful through war and capturing and enslaving the people they defeated. The Portuguese did not conquer this region but chose rather to become allies of the Kongo king. The Kongo king allowed Catholic missionaries to work among his people. The Portuguese traded guns for slaves captured by the Kongo in war. Other than small amounts of copper and cloth, the area did not provide any profitable trade in gold or silver, which was disappointing for the Portuguese, however profits from slaves more than made up for this disappointment.

After Henry’s death, Portuguese interest in trade and expansion lessened until King John II commissioned [Bartolomeu Dias](http://www.history.com/topics/exploration/bartolomeu-dias) to find a water route to India in 1487. Dias sailed around the tip of Africa and into the Indian Ocean before his frightened crew forced him to give up the quest. A year later, [Vasco da Gama](http://www.history.com/topics/exploration/vasco-da-gama) succeeded in reaching India and returned to Portugal with jewels and spices. In 1500, Pedro Álvares Cabral discovered and claimed **Brazil** for Portugal. When Brazil became a Portuguese colony in the 1530s, the demand for slaves to work on the sugar plantations established there increased. Other Portuguese captains route a water route to the East and established trading posts in the South China Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Arabian Sea.

**SPAIN (p.36-40) & (p.44-48)**

Spain’s explorations were launched by [**Christopher Columbus**](http://www.history.com/topics/exploration/christopher-columbus). He argued that the East could be found by sailing west for a few days. Columbus, hoping to make such a voyage, spent years looking for someone to pay for the trip. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain agreed to pay for Columbus’ journey in hopes of finding a water route to the East. In August 1492, Columbus sailed west with his now famous ships, *Niña, Pinta,* and *Santa María* and found **islands in the Bahamas** he thought was Japan. The Taino natives of the islands suffered greatly at the hands of Columbus’ men. Although many were killed, many others died from European diseases. Many Columbus returned to Spain with many products unknown to Europe–coconuts, tobacco, sweet corn, potatoes–and with tales of dark-skinned native peoples whom he called “Indians” because he assumed he had been sailing in the Indian Ocean. He made three more voyages to America between 1494 and 1502. Each time he returned more certain that he had reached the East. Subsequent explorations by others, however, persuaded most Europeans that Columbus had discovered a “New World.”

Two expeditions led directly to Spain’s becoming the wealthiest and most powerful nation. The first was headed by Hernando Cortés, who in 1519 led a small army of Spanish and Native Americans against the **Aztec Empire** of [**Mexico**](http://www.history.com/topics/mexico). After defeating and killing many Aztecs in 1521, Cortés took control of their gold and silver mines. Ten years later, an exploration by [Francisco Pizarro](http://www.history.com/topics/exploration/francisco-pizarro) defeated the Inca Empire of **South America** and secured the great Inca silver mines.

In 1535, Pedro de Mendoza went to Argentina and established a colony. At the same time, Cabeza de Vaca explored the **North American Southwest**, adding that region to Spain’s New World empire. A few years later (1539-1542) Francisco Vásquez de Coronado discovered the [Grand Canyon](http://www.history.com/topics/grand-canyon) and journeyed through much of the Southwest looking for gold. About the same time [Hernando de Soto](http://www.history.com/topics/exploration/hernando-de-soto) explored **southeastern North America from Florida to the**[**Mississippi**](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/mississippi)**River**.

**FRANCE (p. 53-55)**

While Spain was building its New World empire, France was also exploring the Americas. In 1524, Giovanni da Verrazano was asked to locate a route to India in the East. He was followed in 1534 by [Jacques Cartier](http://www.history.com/topics/exploration/jacques-cartier), who explored the St. Lawrence River in **Canada** and the **Great Lakes** region. In 1562 Jean Ribault led an expedition in Florida. His efforts were followed two years later by a second venture headed by René de Laudonnière. But the Spanish soon pushed the French out of Florida, and the French directed their efforts north and west. In 1608 Samuel de Champlain built a fort at Quebec (Canada) and explored the area north to Port Royal, Nova Scotia, and south to Cape Cod.

Unlike Spain’s empire, “New France” produced no caches of gold and silver. Instead, the French traded with inland tribes for furs and fished off the coast of Newfoundland. New France was populated by fur trappers and missionaries and dotted with military forts and trading posts. At first, France encouraged colonization by granting land to fur-trading companies. The companies, however, was not successful, and in 1663 the king took direct control of New France. Although prosperous, the French empire failed to match the wealth of New Spain or the growth of neighboring British colonies.

The French were able to stay in North America and profit from the fur trade because the Native people allowed and welcomed them to do so. The French were interested in profiting through the fur and timber trade, however they needed the help of the Native to survive in the difficult climate of North America. The Natives showed helped them hunt for food and use the furs from their prey to keep warm during the winter. Later on, French fur trapper’s married Native women. This grew their relationship with the Native people and gave them greater access to hunting and trapping lands.

**ENGLAND (p.66-70)**

In 1497 Henry VII of England paid for an exploration to the New World to search for a northwest passage to India. The first trip, led by [John Cabot](http://www.history.com/topics/exploration/john-cabot), went to the **Canadian Island of Newfoundland** and reported an abundance of fish. Between 1576 and 1578 Frobisher as well as John Davis explored the **Atlantic coast**.

Thereafter, Queen Elizabeth asked Sir [Walter Raleigh](http://www.history.com/topics/exploration/walter-raleigh) to build settlements (colonies) in America. In 1585, Raleigh established a colony on Roanoke Island but by the time he returned three years later, the colony had mysteriously disappeared.

The first two successful efforts at colonization in North America were made at Jamestown in Virginia (1607), and at Plymouth in Massachusetts Bay (1620). At first, the English looked for gold, hoping to find the riches that the Spanish had found in the New World but there was no gold or silver on the east coast of North America. However, the English colonization did find plenty of good land for farming, timber for building, and greater religious freedom. Although they left looking for a route to the East, the English found a new place to call home.

The Indians living in the area where Jamestown was settled had mixed feelings about the arrival of the English in 1607. First they were hostile to the English because of their violent experiences with the Spanish explorers on the coastline. **Iroquois** tribes attacked one of the ships before the English actually landed. However, soon the Native Americans began to offer food and hospitality to the newcomers.

By 1609, the Natives realized that the English intended to stay. Moreover, he was disappointed that the English did not return his hospitality nor would they marry Indian women (an affront from the Native perspective). He knew that the English "invade my people, possess my country." The Iroquois began attacking settlers, killing their livestock, and burning such crops. In the next decade, the colonists conducted search and destroy raids on Indian settlements. They burned Indian villages and their corn crops. Eventually both sides decided to sign a truce to end the violence and destruction.