

Exploration and Conquest – Exploration's Impact on the Americas

Use the source below to help identify European motivations for exploration. Respond to the questions on your own paper, using a header to identify the source. You will use the information gathered to synthesize responses in a following portion of this assignment.

Source 1: The Iroquois Constitution

In the 15th century, five separate nations of Iroquois—Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, and Onondaga—united to form the League of Five Nations. The purpose of the Iroquois League was to end internal warfare and to form a strong alliance against outside enemies. To further their goals, the league created a constitution, called the Great Binding Law, that consisted of 117 individual laws and customs governing all aspects of life—from self-government and war to family relationships, religion, symbolism, and burial rites. In the following excerpt, the speaker Dekanawidah is the great Mohawk leader credited with establishing the Great Peace among the nations. He speaks to Adodarhoh, leader of the Onondaga. In this English translation, the term Lord means “chief.”

1. I am Dekanawidah and with the Five Nations' Confederate Lords I plant the Tree of Great Peace. I plant it in your territory, Adodarhoh, and the Onondaga Nation, in the territory of you who are Firekeepers. I name the tree the Tree of the Great Long Leaves. Under the shade of this Tree of the Great Peace we spread the soft white feathery down of the globe thistle as seats for you, Adodarhoh, and your cousin Lords. We place you upon those seats, spread soft with the feathery down of the globe thistle, there beneath the shade of the spreading branches of the Tree of Peace. There shall you sit and watch the Council Fire of the Confederacy of the Five Nations, and all the affairs of the Five Nations shall be transacted at this place before you, Adodarhoh, and your cousin Lords, by the Confederate Lords of the Five Nations.

2. Roots have spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south and one to the west. The name of these roots is The Great White Roots and their nature is Peace and Strength. If any man or any nation outside the Five Nations shall obey the laws of the Great Peace and make known their disposition to the Lords of the Confederacy, they may trace the Roots to the Tree and if their minds are clean and they are obedient and promise to obey the wishes of the Confederate Council, they shall be welcomed to take shelter beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves. We place at the top of the Tree of the Long Leaves an Eagle who is able to see afar. If he sees in the distance any evil approaching or any danger threatening he will at once warn the people of the Confederacy.

6. I, Dekanawidah, appoint the Mohawk Lords the heads and the leaders of the Five Nations Confederacy. The Mohawk Lords are the foundation of the Great Peace and it shall, therefore, be against the Great Binding Law to pass measures in the Confederate Council after the Mohawk Lords have protested against them. No council of the Confederate Lords shall be legal unless all the Mohawk Lords are present.

9. All the business of the Five Nations Confederate Council shall be conducted by the two combined bodies of Confederate Lords. First the question shall be passed upon by the Mohawk and Seneca Lords, then it shall be discussed and passed by the Oneida and Cayuga Lords. Their decisions shall then be referred to the Onondaga Lords, (Fire Keepers) for final judgement. The same process shall obtain when a question is brought before the council by an individual or a War Chief.

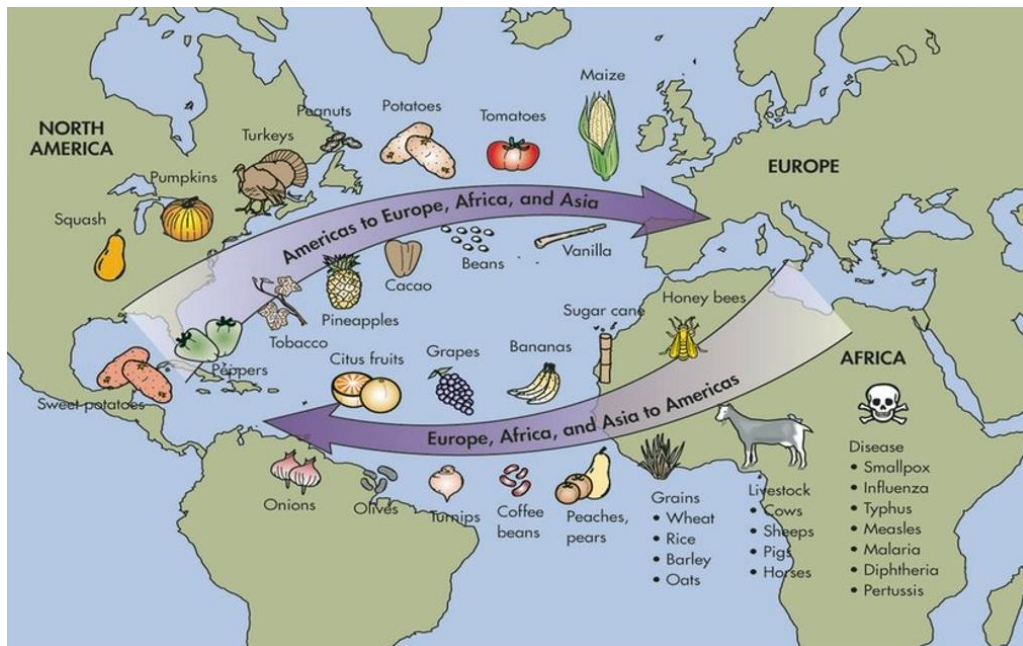
Analysis Questions

1. The Tree of the Great Peace has both literal and figurative meaning. Describe some of the things it might symbolize to the Iroquois.
2. What advantages do you think the Iroquois gained by establishing the constitution? What disadvantages might there have been?
3. Why is it important to consider the governmental systems of Native American tribes? What kind of information can it provide regarding their civilizations?

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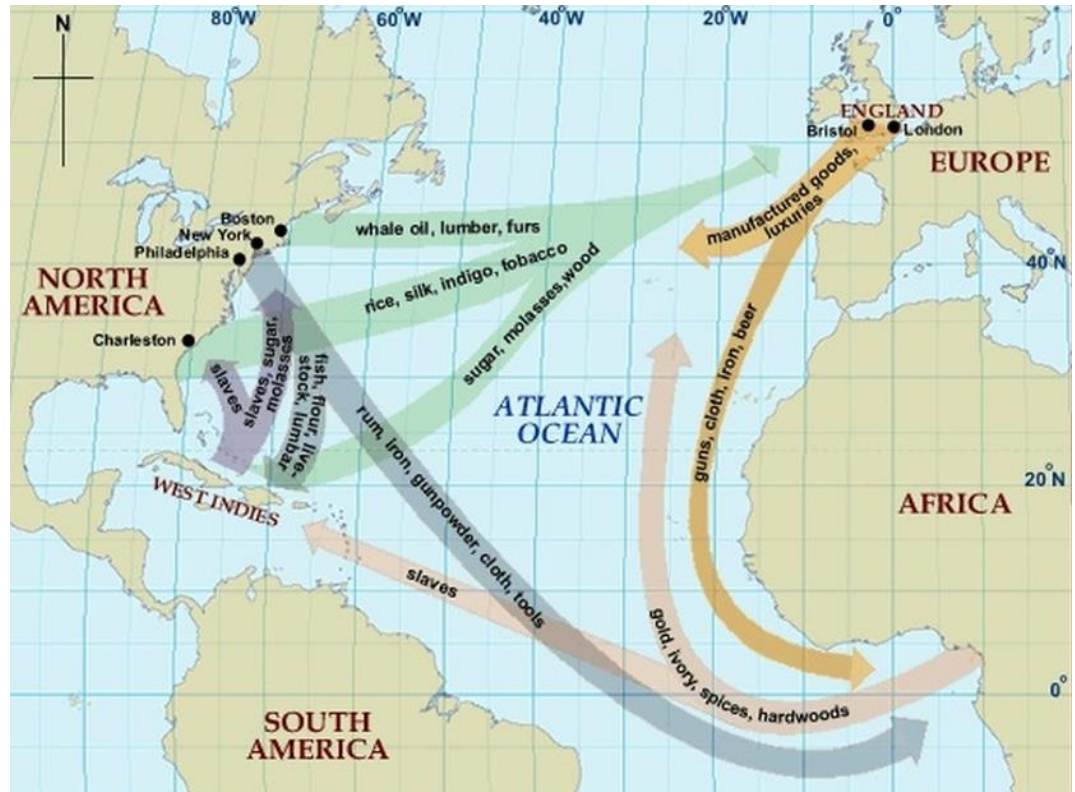
Source 2: The Columbian Exchange



The Triangular Trade Route

Analysis Questions

1. What items passed along the Columbian Exchange were **most** consequential to the Americas?
2. What goods flowed **into** the Americas along the Triangular Trade Route? What goods flowed **out**? Which “corner” of the triangle benefited most, and why is this important?
3. Explain using examples of how you see mercantilism playing out in the exchange of goods on the Triangular Trade Route?
4. Describe the portion of the TTR known as Middle Passage.



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Source 3: The “Mountain of Silver” and the Mita System: Compendium and Description of the West Indies by Antonio Vazquez de Espinosa

In 1545, a native herder lost his footing on a mountain in Peru while chasing his llama, and to keep from falling, he grabbed a bush, which he pulled from the ground revealing a rich vein of silver. This is the most widely told story about how the Spaniards learned of the world's richest silver mine at Potosí, which became the site of the Western Hemisphere's first and greatest silver rush. The backbone of the Potosí operation was the mita system of labor, which had its roots in the Inca Empire when villages had been required to provide an annual quota of laborers for public works projects and military service. The first excerpt describes the mine and facilities at Huancavelica for extracting mercury, a necessary element in refining silver.

Huancavelica

And so at the rumor of the rich deposits of mercury...in the years 1570 and 1571, they started the construction of the town of Huancavelica de Oropesa in a pleasant valley at the foot of the range. It contains 400 Spanish residents as well as many temporary shops of dealers in merchandise and groceries, heads of trading houses, and transients, for the town has a lively commerce....Up on the range there are 3,000 or 4,000 Indians working in the mine...The ore was very rich black flint...and when they have filled their little sacks, the poor fellows, loaded down with ore, climb up those ladders or rigging, some like masts and others like cables, and so trying and distressing that a man empty-handed can hardly get up them. That is the way they work in this mine, with many lights and the loud noise of the pounding and great confusion...As that great vein of ore keeps going down deeper and they follow its rich trail, in order to make sure that no section of that ore shall drop on top of them, they keep leaving supports or pillars of the ore itself...there are men so heartless that for the sake of stealing a little rich ore, they go down out of hours and deprive the innocent Indians of this protection by hollowing into these pillars to steal the rich ore in them, and then a great section is apt to fall in and kill all the Indians...

Potosí

According to His Majesty's warrant, the mine owners on this massive range have a right to the *mita* of 13,300 Indians in the working and exploitation of the mines...These Indians are sent out every year under a captain whom they choose in each village or tribe, for him to take them and oversee them for the year each has to serve...This works out very badly, with great losses and gaps in the quotas of Indians, the villages being depopulated; and this gives rise to great extortions and abuses on the part of the inspectors...towards poor Indians; ruining them and thus depriving the...chief Indians of their property and carrying them off in chains because they do not fill out the *mita* assignment which they cannot do...

After each has eaten his ration, they climb up the hill, each to his mine, and go in, staying there from that hour until Saturday evening without coming out of the mine; their wives bring them food, but they stay constantly underground...They all have tallow candles, lighted day and night; that is the light they work with, for as they are underground, they have need of it all the time.

So huge is the wealth that has been taken out of Potosí since the year 1545, when it was discovered, up to the present year of 1628, that merely from the registered mines, according to most of the accounts in the Spanish royal records, 326 million silver coins have been taken out. This does not count the great amount of silver taken secretly from these mines to Spain, paying no 20 percent tax or registry fee, and to the countries outside Spain...

Analysis Questions

1. What were the major hazards of the work connected with the extraction and production of mercury and silver?
2. What evidence does Espinosa provide of Spanish concern for the welfare of native workers? What evidence is there of a lack of concern?
3. What appears to have been the impact of the *mita* system on native Peruvian society?

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Source 4: Native Americans Describe Traditional Views of Land Ownership

THE GREAT CHIEF in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. The Great Chief also sends us words of friendship and good will. This is kind of him, since we know he has little need of our friendship in return. But we will consider your offer, for we know if we do not so the white man may come with guns and take our land.

How can you buy or sell the sky – the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. Yet we do not own the freshness of the air or the sparkle of the water. How can you buy them from us? We will decide in our time. Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing, and every humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people.

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother, but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on.

-Chief Seattle's response to President Pierce's offer to purchase land

I wish all to know that I do not propose to sell any part of my country, nor will I have whites cutting our timber along the rivers, more especially the bark. I am particularly fond of the little groves of oak trees. I love to look at them, because they endure the wintry storm and the summer's heat, and - not unlike ourselves - seem to flourish by them.

-Sitting Bull, Lakota warrior, quoted in 1932

Our land is more valuable than your money. It will last forever. It will not even perish by the flames of fire. As long as the sun shines and the waters flow, this land will be here to give life to men and animals. We cannot sell the lives of men and animals; therefore we cannot sell this land. It was put here for us by the Great Spirit and we cannot sell it because it does not belong to us. You can count your money and burn it within the nod of a buffalo's head, but only the great Spirit can count the grains of sand and the blades of grass of these plains. As a present to you, we will give you anything we have that you can take with you, but the land, never.

-Crowfoot, chief of the Blackfeet, circa 1885

You ask me to plow the ground. Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it and be rich like white men. But dare I cut off my mother's hair?

-Anonymous Native America, circa 1880s

Analysis Questions

1. Summarize the hopes reflected by the native people above in regard to the relationship between their tribes and the American people.
2. Summarize Native American beliefs about land ownership across various tribes.
3. Faced with clashing beliefs on land ownership, why did Europeans claim land occupied by indigenous peoples?

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Source 5: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, 1791

Vol. 1

One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both, and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the nearest wood. Here they tied our hands, and continued to carry us as far as they could, till night came on, when we reached a small house... The next morning we left the house, and continued travelling all the day...

The next day proved a day of greater sorrow than I had yet experienced; for my sister and I were then separated, while we lay clasped in each other's arms. It was in vain that we besought them not to part us; she was torn from me, and immediately carried away, while I was left in a state of distraction not to be described. I cried and grieved continually; and for several days I did not eat any thing but what they forced into my mouth. At length, after many days travelling, during which I had often changed masters, I got into the hands of a chieftain, in a very pleasant country. This man had two wives and some children, and they all used me extremely well...

Equiano describes the horrors of a slave ship.

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board.

I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country, or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining the shore, which I now considered as friendly; and I even wished for my former slavery in preference to my present situation, which was filled with horrors of every kind, still heightened by my ignorance of what I was to undergo. I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that, with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to cat, nor had I the least desire to taste any thing. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables; and, on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me across I think the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced any thing of this kind before; and although, not being used to the water, I naturally feared that element the first time I saw it, yet nevertheless, could I have got over the nettings, I would have jumped over the side, but I could not; and, besides, the crew used to watch us very closely who were not chained down to the decks, lest we should leap into the water: and I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely cut for attempting to do so, and hourly whipped for not eating. This indeed was often the case with myself.

Analysis Questions

1. Why is Equiano beaten for refusing to eat? Does this reveal true concern on the part of the slavers? Explain.
2. How does Equiano's initial enslavement by an African family differ from his subsequent enslavement by Europeans?
3. Why does Equiano publish his narrative under both his African and European names?

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Source 6: The Discovery of the Americas and the Transatlantic Slave Trade by Ira Berlin

In the middle of the fifteenth century, Europe, Africa, and the Americas came together, creating—among other things—a new economy. At the center of that economy was the plantation, an enterprise dedicated to the production of exotic commodities—the most prominent being sugar—for a distant market. The sugar plantation, which first developed in the Mediterranean, was an enormously complex unit of production requiring the mobilization of vast amounts of capital, the development of new technologies (agricultural, industrial, and maritime), the invention of management techniques, and—because sugar production was extraordinarily labor intensive—the employment of huge numbers of workers. Because sugar was also a most lucrative commodity, plantation entrepreneurs drew capital from all corners of the Mediterranean and Europe, from as far away as the Germanies and the Netherlands. They also developed new technologies to grow, manufacture, and transport sugar great distances. But perhaps the most difficult problem these businessmen faced was securing the labor to sustain the vast economic enterprise they were creating.

Few people wanted to work on a sugar plantation. In the fifteenth century, most men and women labored to gain a competency—a livelihood—for themselves and their families. Free workers also disdained sugar plantations, appreciating that the labor was brutal and dangerous—literally killing. Sugar entrepreneurs turned to enslaved labor, an ancient form familiar to all in the fifteenth-century Mediterranean, although rarely employed on a massive scale.

At first, the sugar entrepreneurs enslaved any men and women they could buy or capture. Christian and Muslim, European and African slaves worked side-by-side on the sugar estates. For reasons of propinquity, Slavic people taken from the Black Sea composed the majority of the enslaved population—hence the word “slave.”

Africans loomed even larger in the slave population when the Portuguese carried the sugar enterprise onto newly discovered Atlantic islands. On these islands, plantations were even larger and required even more labor. Portuguese planters, often backed by Italian bankers, began raiding along the west coast of Africa, seizing Africans and carrying them back to Lisbon, where they were sold to locals, sent to the Atlantic islands, or re-exported to other parts of Europe.

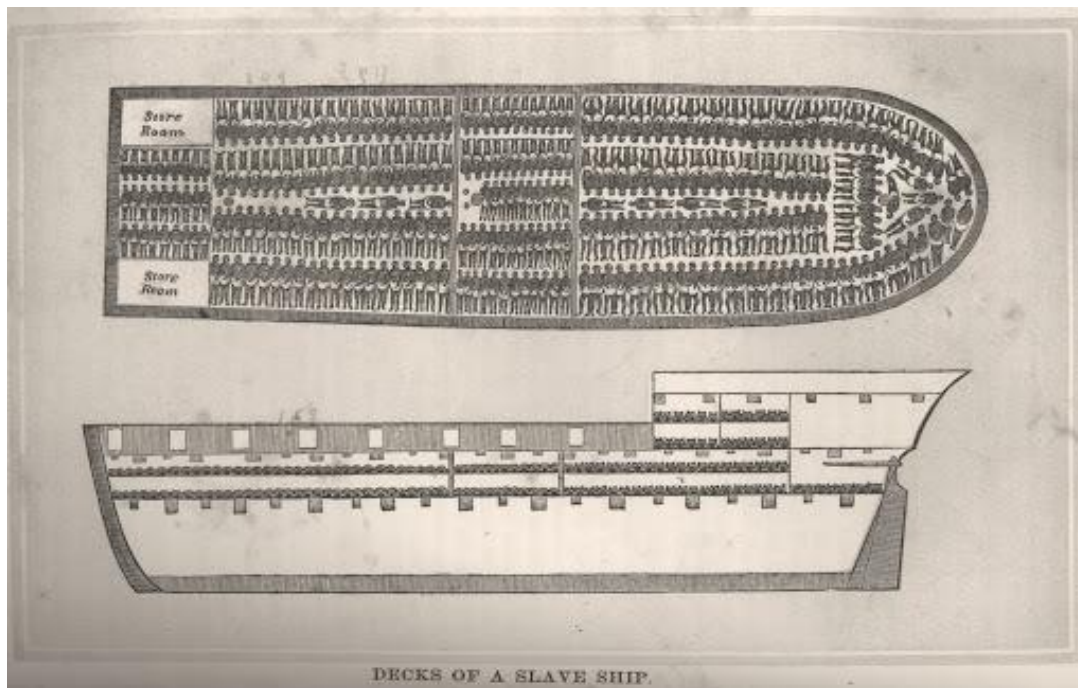
The Portuguese found slave raiding lucrative, but it was also dangerous. Africans resisted, counterattacking with punishing blows. Eventually, they forced the Portuguese to turn from unabashed kidnapping to trade, which proved more efficient, more profitable, and safer.

In Africa, native merchants were more than willing to sell slaves to European outsiders, but they did not sell their own people; rather they sold men and women of nations other than their own, usually men captured in war or guilty of some heinous offense. They also sold them on their terms. They kept the Portuguese and other Europeans who entered the trade at a distance, never allowing them onto African soil without permission, which generally had to be purchased by paying a tax of some sort. African merchants drove hard bargains with European traders, giving as good as they got. Responsibility for the slave trade rested with both Europeans and Africans.

The exchange of European goods for enslaved Africans that began in the middle of the fifteenth century set the terms of the slave trade for the next four hundred years, but the character of that trade was constantly changing for both traders and slaves. The number of slaves grew; their nationality, sex, and age fluctuated. New maritime technology changed the transport that carried slaves, which, in turn, affected everything from the price of slaves to the slaves’ mortality and morbidity. And while the trade expanded enormously, reaching deep into the African interior and to all parts of the Americas, it also created opposition among Africans, Europeans, and the Americas, which eventually led to the slave trade’s final demise during the middle years of the nineteenth century.

Although the nature of the slave trade constantly changed, one thing remained the same. The trade was a violent, deadly business that killed millions, mutilated millions, and traumatized millions. Enslaved Africans everywhere endured the trauma of enslavement. Although the initial deportees may have been drawn from wartime prisoners, by the eighteenth-century enslaved peoples were rarely guilty of anything more than being in the wrong place at the wrong time, taken by mercenary armies, bandits, and professional slavers.

Most captives faced the nightmarish transatlantic crossing, the dreaded Middle Passage. The depths of human misery and the astounding death toll of men and women packed in the stinking hulls shamed the most hard hearted. Slave traders themselves admitted the deleterious effects of the trade. Even among those who defended slavery, there were those who condemned the Middle Passage as an abomination. But, like all human experiences—even the worst—the Middle Passage was not of one piece. While the vast majority suffered below deck, a few men and women chosen from among the captives helped set the sails, steer the ships, and serve the crews that carried the mass of Africans across the Atlantic. Surviving the Middle Passage was but the first of the many tests faced by the forced immigrants. They would now have to make their way in perhaps the most difficult situations human beings have ever faced.



Analysis Questions

1. Describe the evolution of the slave trade as outlined in the essay.
2. Why were enslaved persons from Africa “needed” in the Americas?
3. In your own words, explain a common misconception or myth that Ira Berlin breaks down about the Transatlantic Slave Trade.