Chapter 2 – The Age of Exploration
The Commercial Revolution, which lasted from the 13th-18th centuries, was a period of great change in the European economy.

- The Crusades led to greater knowledge of the outside world and a greater demand for imported goods such as spices, fabrics, etc. in Europe.
- Merchants no longer traded goods at “fair” prices; instead focused on profits.
- Commercial Revolution led to increase in wealth and power for Europe’s lower and middle classes.
- Families such as the Medicis of Florence became wealthy through trade and banking. They would use this wealth to “purchase” political power, especially through the Church.
- Wealthy families would also use their wealth to help promote art, science, and learning, thus leading to the Renaissance.
- Families like the Medicis would loan people capital, or money used for investments, which included joint-stock companies. In a joint-stock company, investors share profits, depending on how much money was initially invested.
- This increase in trade and investment would encourage geographical exploration in search of new business and trading opportunities.
The Black Death

-The increase in trade during the Commercial Revolution and further contact with Asia lead to the **Black Death** in Europe.

-Scientists believe that the “Black Death” was caused by a disease known as the **bubonic plague**. The disease is believed to have been carried to Europe by fleas on rats travelling aboard trading caravans and ships from Asia. The fleas would carry the disease from host to host.

-This **epidemic** killed between 1/3 and 1/2 of Europe’s population in mid-13th century. The massive numbers of deaths led to a shortage of labor in Europe, which actually led to an overall increase in wages for the lower (peasants) and middle (merchants) classes, which led to greater economic and political power.

-The nobility of Europe no longer held a monopoly over power, wealth, and trade.
The Renaissance

Renaissance was a rebirth of learning and discovery in the fields of art, literature, architecture, mathematics, and science, inspired by ancient Greece and Rome.

The Renaissance began in the city-states of Italy, such as Venice, Florence, and Naples.

Wealthy families like the Medicis would sponsor artists and scientists as patrons. In exchange for their support, these artists, such as Michelangelo, Raphael, and Donatello would dedicate their works to their patrons, which would increase the power and prestige of their patrons, thus leading to more wealth.

Scientists such as Galileo would make new discoveries during this time as well, challenging old ideas about the way the universe worked.

There was much resistance to these new ideas, specifically from the Church, which tightly controlled education and ideas. Arguing new ideas that disagreed with Church teachings could result in imprisonment or death.

Some Renaissance figures, like Leonardo da Vinci, were both artists and scientists.

Important inventions came about during this period, such as the printing press, invented by Johannes Gutenberg. The printing press allowed for the faster spread of ideas and increased literacy rates. Other inventions, such as the astrolabe and magnetic compass allowed for easier navigation on the world’s oceans, which contributed to increased exploration and the search for new trade routes.
Trade fueled the wealth of the Commercial Revolution, mostly from Asia and Africa.

Trade steadily grew between Europe, Asia, and Africa after the Crusades. Introduction to new goods from far-away places encouraged Europeans to establish new trade routes, mainly through the Mediterranean Sea and the overland Silk Road.

Goods in high demand in Europe included spices, such as salt, pepper, cinnamon, etc., fabrics such as silk, and other valuable goods like gold and silver. These goods were scarce in Europe, and thus the demand for them was high, and therefore large profits could be made by European merchants.

The voyages of Europeans such as Marco Polo, an Italian merchant famous for travelling to Asia and meeting with various Asian rulers and cultures, also led to an increased interest in trade with Asia.

Trade was difficult, for many reasons. The Silk Road was dangerous because of its length and route through difficult climates and geography, as well as the threat of banditry. Trading through the Mediterranean was difficult primarily because the city-states of Italy held a monopoly over the route, making shipping costs high and cutting into profits.

In order to avoid these issues, countries began to look for alternate trade routes to Asia that didn’t involve traditional routes already in use.

This search for alternate trade routes encouraged exploration by countries, especially those in Western Europe, who wished to establish their own routes that they could control.
One of the first Western European nations to search for new trade routes was Portugal, who wanted to find an all water route to Asia. This effort was led in part by Prince Henry “The Navigator”, who opened a “school” of navigation and seamanship where he gathered the most knowledgeable experts in mapmaking, shipbuilding, and sailing. There, they improved instruments such as the astrolabe, which allowed sailors to navigate by the stars, the magnetic compass, which allowed sailors to easily determine which direction was north, and the caravel, a small, fast, maneuverable ship capable of sailing in all kinds of waters.

The Portuguese began their explorations by travelling along the western coast of Africa. The first Portuguese ship captain to reach the southern tip of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, was Bartolomeu Dias. He discovered the Cape by accident, after being blown off-course during a severe storm. After reaching the Cape, Dias and his ships returned home.

The Portuguese continued to explore the western coast of Africa and set up trading posts and settlements. They began to exploit the natural resources of Africa, including luxury goods such as gold and ivory. Also at this time, the Portuguese began to capture Africans and sell them into slavery. This would begin the long-standing European practice of enslaving Africans for labor in their various colonies around the world. These successful early efforts would encourage later exploration to Asia.
Christopher Columbus was an Italian sailor and mapmaker from the Italian city of Genoa.

Columbus believed that there was a way to reach the **East Indies** (Asia) by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean based upon what he and.

Columbus needed funding for his voyages, but due to the risk involved, few European monarchs (kings and queens) would give him the money and ships for such a voyage.

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain were interested in Columbus’s plan, but wanted to finish fighting the **Reconquista** first. The Reconquista was the effort to drive the Islamic North African Moors from Spain. The Moors had occupied much of the **Iberian Peninsula** centuries before. Halting the spread of Islam and spreading Christianity were major goals of Ferdinand and Isabella.

Despite victory in the Reconquista, Spain was deep in debt after the war. They wanted to exploit new trade routes that could bring wealth to Spain, and directed Columbus to find natural resources such as gold and silver, claim new lands for Spain, and spread Christianity to the people Columbus met. In return, Columbus would be rewarded with gold and named **viceroy**, or royal governor, of the lands he discovered.
Columbus was given three caravels, the Santa Maria, Nina, and Pinta, and set sail in August of 1492. After a month at sea, Columbus and his crew sighted land in October 1492, believing they had reached the East Indies (Southeast Asia). In reality, Columbus had “discovered” the islands of the Caribbean.

Columbus landed on the island of San Salvador in the Bahamas. He called the people he met “Indians” because he thought he had reached the Indies of Asia.

Columbus further explored the islands of the Caribbean, especially the island of Hispaniola, which today is occupied by the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. There, he encountered the Taino natives.

Ferdinand and Isabella were pleased. They allowed Columbus to make three more voyages to the New World, and made Columbus an admiral and governor of these newly discovered territories. They also wanted Columbus to convert the natives to Christianity.

On his later voyages, Columbus explored the rest of the Caribbean, including the island of Cuba. He also became the first European to see the coast of South America.

Despite Ferdinand and Isabella telling Columbus not to enslave or mistreat the natives he encountered, Columbus did so anyway, and was removed as governor in the New World.
While Spain focused on finding trade routes to Asia by sailing west across the Atlantic, Portugal focused on continued explorations around the coast of Africa.

-Vasco de Gama became the first European to sail around Africa, reaching India in 1498. Thus, Portugal actually became the first European country to discover and all-water route to the Far East.

-Pedro Cabral, another Portuguese explorer, was following de Gama’s route to India, but was blown far off course by a storm. He and his ships eventually sighted the coast of South America, and claimed Brazil for Portugal.

-Other explorers also made important discoveries during this time period. Italian explorer Giovanni Caboto, also known as John Cabot, searched for an all-water trade route west to Asia, like Columbus, on behalf of England. Instead, Cabot would reach the coast of North America and claim the land he found for England.

-Amerigo Vespucci, another Italian explorer and mapmaker, sailed on behalf of Spain. Vespucci reached the coast of South America, of which he made detailed maps and descriptions of natives and wildlife. America was named in Vespucci’s honor.

-Vasco Nunez de Balboa was a Spanish explorer who discovered the Pacific Ocean, which he called the South Sea by crossing the Isthmus of Panama in 1513.

-Ferdinand Magellan was Portuguese, but sailed for Spain. Magellan and his crew continued the search for an all-water route west to Asia. He sailed around Cape Horn of South America and on to the Philippines, which he claimed for Spain. Magellan was killed in a dispute with natives in the Philippines, but his crew sailed on without him. They continued around the coast of Africa and by reaching Spain in 1521 after three years at sea, became the first Europeans to circumnavigate the globe. Only 18 out of the original 250 men in Magellan’s crew survived the voyage due to disease, starvation, or the destruction of Magellan’s ships.
Routes of European Explorers, 15th-17th Centuries
After the voyages of Columbus, Magellan, and other explorers, European countries began to look towards the Americas as a major source of wealth and trade. Asia was no longer the main focus of countries such as Spain and Portugal, and other European countries such as England, France, and the Netherlands took an interest in exploration.

This new trade with the Americas became known as the **Columbian Exchange**, which was the exchange of resources, crops, livestock, people, and even disease, between the “Old World” (Europe) and the “New World” (Americas). From the Americas, Europe began to import tobacco, potatoes, corn, cocoa, silver, and gold. Europeans exported wheat, barley, and various forms of livestock such as pigs, cattle, and horses to America. Part of the Columbian Exchange also included deadly diseases to which native Americans had no **immunity**. Diseases such as smallpox and the measles would lead to the deaths of millions of native Americans over time.

Now that Spain and Portugal dominated the southern routes to the Americas and around South America to Asia, countries such as England, France, and the Netherlands began to look for northern routes west across the Atlantic to Asia. This became known as the search for the **Northwest Passage**. Although such a route would never be found, these explorations had important effects on European colonization in North America.

- **Italian Giovanni Verrazzano** sailed on behalf of France in 1524. He explored the coast of North America and discovered the harbor which would eventually become New York City.

- **Frenchman Jacques Cartier** discovered the St. Lawrence River in 1534. Later, Frenchman **Samuel de Champlain** would follow Cartier’s route up the St. Lawrence river and found the settlement of **Quebec**.

- The **Netherlands** sent Englishman **Henry Hudson** to search for the Northwest Passage. He sailed to present-day New York, where he discovered the Hudson River, and along the coast of Canada, eventually reaching what would become known as Hudson Bay.