

A Patriot's History of the United States: From Columbus's Great Discovery to the War on Terror

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For at least thirty years, high school and college students have been taught to be embarrassed by American history. Required readings have become skewed toward a relentless focus on our country's darkest moments, from slavery to McCarthyism. As a result, many history books devote more space to Harriet Tubman than to Abraham Lincoln; more to My Lai than to the American Revolution; more to the internment of Japanese Americans than to the liberation of Europe in World War II.

Now, finally, there is an antidote to this biased approach to our history. Two veteran history professors have written a sweeping, well-researched book that puts the spotlight back on America's role as a beacon of liberty to the rest of the world. Schweikart and Allen are careful to tell their story straight, from Columbus's voyage to the capture of Saddam Hussein. They do not ignore America's mistakes through the years, but they put them back in their proper perspective. And they conclude that America's place as a world leader derived largely from the virtues of our own leaders—the men and women who cleared the wilderness, abolished slavery, and rid the world of fascism and communism.

The authors write in a clear and enjoyable style that makes history a pleasure, not just for students but also for adults who want to learn what their teachers skipped over.

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The City on the Hill, 1492–1707

The Age of European Discovery

God, Glory, and gold— not necessarily in that order— took post-Renaissance Europeans to parts of the globe they had never before seen. The opportunity to gain materially while bringing the Gospel to non-Christians offered powerful incentives to explorers from Portugal, Spain, England, and France to embark on dangerous voyages of discovery in the 1400s. Certainly they were not the first to sail to the Western Hemisphere: Norse sailors reached the coasts of Iceland in 874 and Greenland a century later, and legends recorded Leif Erickson's establishment of a colony in Vinland, somewhere on the northern Canadian coast.¹ Whatever the fate of Vinland, its historical impact was minimal, and significant voyages of discovery did not occur for more than five hundred years, when trade with the Orient beckoned.

Marco Polo and other travelers to Cathay (China) had brought exaggerated tales of wealth in the East and returned with unusual spices, dyes, rugs, silks, and other goods. But this was a difficult, long journey. Land routes crossed dangerous territories, including imposing mountains and vast deserts of modern-day Afghanistan, northern India, Iran, and Iraq, and required expensive and well-protected caravans to reach Europe from Asia. Merchants encountered bandits who threatened transportation lanes, kings and potentates who demanded tribute, and bloodthirsty killers who pillaged for pleasure. Trade routes from Bombay and Goa reached Europe via Persia or Arabia, crossing the Ottoman

Empire with its internal taxes. Cargo had to be unloaded at seaports, then reloaded at Alexandria or Antioch for water transport across the Mediterranean, or continued on land before crossing the Dardanelles Strait into modern-day Bulgaria to the Danube River. European demand for such goods seemed endless, enticing merchants and their investors to engage in a relentless search for lower costs brought by safer and cheaper routes. Gradually, Europeans concluded that more direct water routes to the Far East must exist.

The search for Cathay's treasure coincided with three factors that made long ocean voyages possible. First, sailing and shipbuilding technology had advanced rapidly after the ninth century, thanks in part to the Arabs' development of the astrolabe, a device with a pivoted limb that established the sun's altitude above the horizon. By the late tenth century, astrolabe technology had made its way to Spain.² Farther north, Vikings pioneered new methods of hull construction, among them the use of overlapping planks for internal support that enabled vessels to withstand violent ocean storms. Sailors of the Hanseatic League states on the Baltic coast experimented with larger ship designs that incorporated sternpost rudders for better control. Yet improved ships alone were not enough: explorers needed the accurate maps generated by Italian seamen and sparked by the new inquisitive impulse of the Renaissance. Thus a wide range of technologies coalesced to encourage long-range voyages of discovery.

Political changes, a second factor giving birth to the age of discovery, resulted from the efforts of several ambitious European monarchs to consolidate their possessions into larger, cohesive dynastic states. This unification of lands, which increased the taxable base within the kingdoms, greatly increased the funding available to expeditions and provided better military protection (in the form of warships) at no cost to investors. By the time a combined Venetian-Spanish fleet defeated a much larger Ottoman force at Lepanto in 1571, the vessels of Christian nations could essentially sail with impunity anywhere in the Mediterranean. Then, in control of the Mediterranean, Europeans could consider voyages of much longer duration (and cost) than they ever had in the past. A new generation of explorers found that monarchs could support even more expensive undertakings that integrated the monarch's interests with the merchants'.

Third, the Protestant Reformation of 1517 fostered a fierce and bloody competition for power and territory between Catholic and Protestant nations that reinforced national concerns. England competed for land with Spain, not merely for economic and political reasons, but because the English feared the possibility that Spain might catholicize numbers of non-Christians in new lands, whereas Catholics trembled at the thought of subjecting natives to Protestant heresies. Therefore, even when economic or political gains for discovery and colonization may have been marginal, monarchs had strong religious incentives to open their royal treasuries to support such missions.

Time Line

- 1492-1504: Columbus's four voyages
- 1519-21: Cortés conquers Mexico
- 1585-87: Roanoke Island (Carolinas) colony fails
- 1607: Jamestown, Virginia, founded

1619: First Africans arrive in Virginia
1619: Virginia House of Burgesses formed
1620: Pilgrims found Plymouth, Massachusetts
1630: Puritan migration to Massachusetts
1634: Calverts found Maryland
1635-36: Pequot Indian War (Massachusetts)
1638: Anne Hutchinson convicted of heresy
1639: Fundamental Orders of Connecticut
1642-48: English Civil War
1650: First Navigation Act (mercantilism)
1664: English conquer New Netherlands (New York)
1675-76: King Philip's (Metacombet's) War (Massachusetts)
1676: Bacon's Rebellion (Virginia)
1682: Pennsylvania settled
1688-89: English Glorious Revolution and Bill of Rights
1691: Massachusetts becomes royal colony
1692: Salem witch hunts

Portugal and Spain: The Explorers

Ironically, one of the smallest of the new monarchical states, Portugal, became the first to subsidize extensive exploration in the fifteenth century. The most famous of the Portuguese explorers, Prince Henry, dubbed the Navigator, was the brother of King Edward of Portugal. Henry (1394-1460) had earned a reputation as a tenacious fighter in North Africa against the Moors, and he hoped to roll back the Muslim invaders and reclaim from them trade routes and territory.

A true Renaissance man, Henry immersed himself in mapmaking and exploration from a coastal center he established at Sagres, on the southern point of Portugal. There he trained navigators and mapmakers, dispatched ships to probe the African coast, and evaluated the reports of sailors who returned from the Azores.⁴ Portuguese captains made contact with Arabs and Africans in coastal areas and established trading centers, from which they brought ivory and gold to Portugal, then transported slaves to a variety of Mediterranean estates. This early slave trade was conducted through Arab middlemen or African traders who carried out slaving expeditions in the interior and exchanged captive men, women, and children for fish, wine, or salt on the coast.

Henry saw these relatively small trading outposts as only the first step in developing reliable water routes to the East. Daring sailors trained at Henry's school soon pushed farther southward, finally rounding the Cape of Storms in 1486, when Bartholomeu Dias was blown off course by fantastic winds. King John II eventually changed the name of the cape to the Cape of Good Hope, reflecting the promise of a new route to India offered by Dias's discovery. That promise became reality in 1498, after Vasco de Gama sailed to Calicut, India. An abrupt decline in Portuguese fortunes led to her eclipse by the larger Spain, reducing the resources available for investment in exploration and limiting Portuguese voyages to the Indian Ocean to an occasional ⁵ boatload of convicts.⁵ Moreover, the prize for which Portuguese explorers had risked so much now seemed small in comparison to

that discovered by their rivals the Spanish under the bold seamanship of Christopher Columbus, a man the king of Portugal had once refused to fund.

Columbus departed from Spain in August 1492, laying in a course due west and ultimately in a direct line to Japan, although he never mentioned Cathay prior to 1493.⁶ A native of Genoa, Columbus embodied the best of the new generation of navigators: resilient, courageous, and confident. To be sure, Columbus wanted glory, and a motivation born of desperation fueled his vision. At the same time, Columbus was earnestly desirous of taking Christianity to heathen lands.⁷ He did not, as is popularly believed, originate the idea that the earth is round. As early as 1480, for example, he read works proclaiming the sphericity of the planet. But knowing intellectually that the earth is round and demonstrating it physically are two different things.

Columbus's fleet consisted of only three vessels, the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria, and a crew of ninety men. Leaving port in August 1492, the expedition eventually passed the point where the sailors expected to find Japan, generating no small degree of anxiety, whereupon Columbus used every managerial skill he possessed to maintain discipline and encourage hope. The voyage had stretched to ten weeks when the crew bordered on mutiny, and only the captain's reassurance and exhortations persuaded the sailors to continue a few more days. Finally, on October 11, 1492, they started to see signs of land: pieces of wood loaded with barnacles, green bulrushes, and other vegetation.⁸ A lookout spotted land, and on October 12, 1492, the courageous band waded ashore on Watling Island in the Bahamas, where his men begged his pardon for doubting him.

Columbus continued to Cuba, which he called Hispaniola. At the time he thought he had reached the Far East, and referred to the dark-skinned people he found in Hispaniola as Indians. He found these Indians very well formed, with handsome bodies and good faces, and hoped to convert them to our Holy Faith by love rather than by force by giving them red caps and glass beads and many other things of small value.¹⁰ Dispatching emissaries into the interior to contact the Great Khan, Columbus's scouts returned with no reports of the spices, jewels, silks, or other evidence of Cathay; nor did the khan send his regards. Nevertheless, Columbus returned to Spain confident he had found an ocean passage to the Orient.

Reality gradually forced Columbus to a new conclusion: he had not reached India or China, and after a second voyage in 1493 still convinced he was in the Pacific Ocean, Columbus admitted he had stumbled on a new land mass, perhaps even a new continent of astounding natural resources and wealth. In February 1493, he wrote his Spanish patrons that Hispaniola and other islands like it were fertile to a limitless degree, possessing mountains covered by trees of a thousand kinds and tall, so that they seem to touch the sky.¹² He confidently promised gold, cotton, spices as much as Their Highnesses should command in return for only minimal continued support. Meanwhile, he continued to probe the Mundus Novus south and west. After returning to Spain yet again, Columbus made two more voyages to the New World in 1498 and 1502.

Whether Columbus had found parts of the Far East or an entirely new land was irrelevant

to most Europeans at the time. Political distractions abounded in Europe. Spain had barely evicted the Muslims after the long Reconquista, and England's Wars of the Roses had scarcely ended. News of Columbus's discoveries excited only a few merchants, explorers, and dreamers. Still, the prospect of finding a waterway to Asia infatuated sailors; and in 1501 a Florentine passenger on a Portuguese voyage, Amerigo Vespucci, wrote letters to his friends in which he described the New World. His self-promoting dispatches circulated sooner than Columbus's own written accounts, and as a result the term "America" soon was attached by geographers to the continents in the Western Hemisphere that should by right have been named Columbia. But if Columbus did not receive the honor of having the New World named for him, and if he acquired only temporary wealth and fame in Spain (receiving from the Crown the title Admiral of the Ocean Sea), his place in history was never in doubt. Historian Samuel Eliot Morison, a worthy seaman in his own right who reenacted the Columbian voyages in 1939 and 1940, described Columbus as "the sign and symbol [the] new age of hope, glory and accomplishment."

Once Columbus blazed the trail, other Spanish explorers had less trouble obtaining financial backing for expeditions. Vasco Núñez de Balboa (1513) crossed the Isthmus of Panama to the Pacific Ocean (as he named it). Ferdinand Magellan (1519) circumnavigated the globe, lending his name to the Strait of Magellan. Other expeditions explored the interior of the newly discovered lands. Juan Ponce de León, traversing an area along the Florida's coast, attempted unsuccessfully to plant a colony there. Pánfilo de Narváez's subsequent expedition to conquer Tampa Bay proved even more disastrous. Narváez himself drowned, and natives killed members of his expedition until only four of them reached a Spanish settlement in Mexico.

Spaniards traversed modern-day Mexico, probing interior areas under Hernando Cortés, who in 1518 led a force of 1,000 soldiers to Tenochtitlán, the site of present-day Mexico City. Cortés encountered powerful Indians called Aztecs, led by their emperor Montezuma. The Aztecs had established a brutal regime that oppressed other natives of the region, capturing large numbers of them for ritual sacrifices in which Aztec priests cut out the beating hearts of living victims. Such barbarity enabled the Spanish to easily enlist other tribes, especially the Tlaxcalans, in their efforts to defeat the Aztecs.

Tenochtitlán sat on an island in the middle of a lake, connected to the outlying areas by three huge causeways. It was a monstrously large city (for the time) of at least 200,000, rigidly divided into nobles and commoner groups.¹⁴ Aztec culture created impressive pyramid-shaped temple structures, but Aztec science lacked the simple wheel and the wide range of pulleys and gears that it enabled. But it was sacrifice, not science, that defined Aztec society, whose pyramids, after all, were execution sites. A four-day sacrifice in 1487 by the Aztec king Ahuitzotl involved the butchery of 80,400 prisoners by shifts of priests working four at a time at convex killing tables who kicked lifeless, heartless bodies down the side of the pyramid temple. This worked out to a killing rate of fourteen victims a minute over the ninety-six-hour bloodbath.¹⁵ In addition to the abominable sacrifice system, crime and street carnage were commonplace. More intriguing to the Spanish than the buildings, or even the sacrifices, however, were the legends of gold, silver, and other riches Tenochtitlán contained, protected by the powerful Aztec army.

Cortés first attempted a direct assault on the city and fell back with heavy losses, narrowly escaping extermination. Desperate Spanish fought their way out on Noche Triste (the Sad Night), when hundreds of them fell on the causeway. Cortés's men piled human bodies, Aztec and European alike, in heaps to block Aztec pursuers, then staggered back to Vera Cruz. In 1521 Cortés returned with a new Spanish army, supported by more than 75,000 Indian allies.¹⁶ This time, he found a weakened enemy who had been rava...

Other Books

Legacy of a Patriot: The First Seven Generations. The author's interest in research of his family roots led him to the conclusion that genealogical charts are the driest of presentations of the family tree. In Legacy of a Patriot his ancestors interact with each other and with fictional characters. The scope of the book covers his family from their time in Germany to the first half of the Twentieth Century and puts flesh on the bones of ancestors and the people they could have encountered along the way. In the first five chapters his father and uncle come alive during WWI in the army and in France.

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