

European Exploration in North America

People have always explored the world around them and early Europeans were no different. By the 1400s, the European countries of **Spain, France, and England** were in competition to claim the newly discovered continent of North America. These countries were *motivated* to find **great riches, spread Christianity, and expand their empire and culture.**

As the European explorers set out to claim North America as their own, they faced many *obstacles*. The first obstacle was **poor maps and poor navigational tools**. There were very few maps. The maps they had were individually drawn and were often inaccurate, or wrong. There were few navigational tools. Other than the compass which helped the explorers identify direction and the cross-staff that helped them locate latitude, early explorers had to observe birds, schools of fish, winds, and cloud types to help them navigate across the Atlantic Ocean.

A lack of adequate supplies was the second obstacle the explorers faced. Rough seas and ferocious storms sometimes slowed them down or blew them off course, adding weeks and even months to their journey. There were not enough supplies on board to last more than a few weeks.

The lack of adequate supplies created a third obstacle, **disease and starvation**. Sailors often became sick due to bad water supplies and a lack of fresh fruits and vegetables. When food supplies ran low, sailors were forced to eat rats or sawdust.

A fourth obstacle to exploration was a **fear of the unknown**. Many sailors were convinced that they would sail over the edge of the world or be eaten by giant sea-monsters. Others feared the fierce storms of the open ocean and the very real dangers of wrecking on rocky coastlines or running aground on underwater sand bars.

Although the obstacles were great, European explorers had many *accomplishments*. Exploration of North America brought an **exchange of goods and ideas** between the Europeans and the American Indians. It also resulted in **improved navigational tools and ships**. Most importantly, however, were the **huge areas of land** or territory claimed for the major European powers.

European Exploration in North America (cont'd)

As the European explorers reached North America, they explored and settled different areas of the vast continent. **Francisco Coronado** was a *Spanish explorer* who set out to find the seven cities that were said to be filled with gold and treasure. Although he never found them, he did succeed in claiming the southwest United States for Spain. As more and more land in North America was claimed for Spain, Spanish explorers began to conquer and enslave the American Indians already living there. They also brought Christianity to the New World and tried to convert the American Indians to their religion. In addition to religion, the Spanish explorers also brought European diseases, like smallpox, that killed many American Indian populations.

Samuel de Champlain was a *French explorer* who helped colonize the continent of North America in what is present-day Canada. In an attempt to establish a fur trading post, he created the first permanent French settlement and named it **Quebec**. Another *French explorer* by the name of **Robert La Salle** claimed the entire Mississippi River Valley, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, for France. The French also interacted with the American Indians living on the lands they claimed for France. They established trading posts where American Indian hunters could trade animal furs such as beaver for metal hatchets, knives, blankets, and traps. The French, like the Spanish, also wanted to spread Christianity in North America.

John Cabot made the first voyage to the continent of North America for *England*. His exploration of eastern Canada gave England a claim to lands in North America. The English quickly established settlements and claimed ownership to all they could see. They also learned farming techniques from the American Indians and began to add beans, pumpkins, squash, and corn to their diet. In addition, they also traded with the American Indians, exchanging metal weapons and tools for deerskins and furs.

European explorers and American Indians cooperated in the **areas of trade, farming and farm tools**, and the **sharing of weapons**. Areas of conflict between the two groups involved **competition for trade, differences in cultures and languages**, the **introduction of devastating diseases**, and the issue of **land ownership**. While the early Europeans wanted to claim North America as their own, the American Indians believed that land was to be shared or used but not owned.