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## Introduction

*By the end of the 13th century, Europeans had developed a taste for spices, sugar and silk, and other exotic goods from the Far East. They sailed across the ocean looking for a new route that would make those goods cheaper. They discovered a New World instead. So they looked for riches there. In 1607, Virginia became the first English colony in America, quickly followed by another one, further north. But the two places had very little in common, the Northern territories being settled by the Puritans, who wanted to create their New Jerusalem. Meanwhile the southern concerns were still concerned with the idea of making trade and growing rich.*

# 1



## PART 1 – THE FIRST AMERICANS

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

*The first Amerindians were called the **Anasazi**. They emerged in what is now Mesa Verde, Colorado. Other Indian cultures developed after the Anasazi and it is estimated that 2 to 8 million Native Americans were in North America at the beginning of European Explorations.*

When we think about the discovery of America, the first name that usually enters our minds is Christopher Columbus. A favorable political and economic situation explains the 15<sup>th</sup> century discoveries and explorations. Spain, like Portugal, was affirming itself as an important maritime power, while the Spanish also became the new missionaries of the Catholic Church. Economic ties developed between Europe and Asia, based on a trade of exotic products, pearls, spices, and dyes.

In order to make access to all of these riches easier, Europe needed a new route that would avoid going through Muslim territory. The possibility of a route to the West started going through a good number of minds. Add to this a generalized economic growth, upheld by new banking tools and private investment, but also the emergence of new navigation and map-making equipment. All of these changes helped lead to an exploration of the West.

October 12,  
1492

Columbus proposed a financial expedition to the West to John II of Portugal in 1483, but ran up against a refusal. It was, however, Queen Isabella of Spain who agreed to finance Columbus' expedition in 1489. Three boats, *The Niña*, *The Pinta* and *The Santa Maria*, were chartered. Columbus first discovered land on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1492. The indigenous people called it Guanahani, but Columbus renamed it San Salvador. At that time, he was convinced that he had reached Asia, so he called those people "Indians". None of the sought after spices were to be found in the lands he first reached. He set off again on his voyage, and would discover Cuba and Hispaniola (today, Haiti and the Dominican Republic). He lost *The Santa Maria*, which sank near Haiti.

**Christopher Columbus was convinced that he had reached Asia, so he called those people "Indians".**

#### Queen Isabella I

(1451-1504). She is often referred to as 'la Católica' (the Catholic), a 'title' given to her by the Spanish Pope. With her husband, she brought stability to the kingdoms of Castille and Aragon.



#### Christopher Columbus

(1451-1506). Navigator. He opened the way for European exploration. He has long been called 'the discoverer of the New World', but we now know Vikings had visited North America five centuries earlier. Although he made his discovery for Spain, Columbus was Italian.



Also in 1493, Pope Alexander VI decreed that all lands discovered to the West would be divided between Spain and Portugal, separated by an imaginary line drawn from the Azores. His decision was ratified in the *Treaty of Tordesillas*, in 1494. But England and France had no intention of respecting this Papal decree and also set out toward the West. Europe was then divided into powerful kingdoms that worked on appropriating the best sailors – often Italian – to put them at the head of expeditions going to the New World. A veritable, frenzied and disorganized rush to go to America took place throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These expeditions resulted in colonization, long before the entire discovery of what was actually a new continent. Between 1493 and 1495, Columbus discovered some new islands: Dominica, Guadeloupe, and Puerto Rico. A third expedition, carried out between 1498 and 1500, led to the American continent, onto the coast of modern-day Venezuela. Columbus still believed he had arrived in India. It was Amerigo Vespucci, during a voyage that brought him to the Brazilian shores (1499-1501), who was the first to realize they had discovered a new continent. A cartographer named the continent in his honor, using his first name: America. The Spanish and the Portuguese multiplied their expeditions toward South America, and soon had dominance over this continent, thanks to discoveries by explorers such as Pedro Cabral, Hernando Cortez and Francisco

**Aboard the three vessels**

*The Niña, The Pinta and The Santa Maria had few comforts. Only the highest officers had bunks to sleep in. Other crew members slept on decks in good weather and below deck in bad weather. Columbus had a total of about 90 crew members to sail the three ships. He had few navigational instruments. He relied mostly on a compass and the stars to navigate the ships.*

Pizarro. Waves and waves of conquistadors devoted themselves to conquering, pillaging and colonizing South America throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Because the indigenous population was rapidly decimated by the brutality of the conquistadors, and by disease, the Spanish went to find slaves in Africa.



 **ACTIVITY**

**A. Why do you think these explorations did not happen earlier in history?**

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**B. What impelled the earliest Spanish, French and English explorers towards North America?**

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## A LONG, LONG TIME AGO...

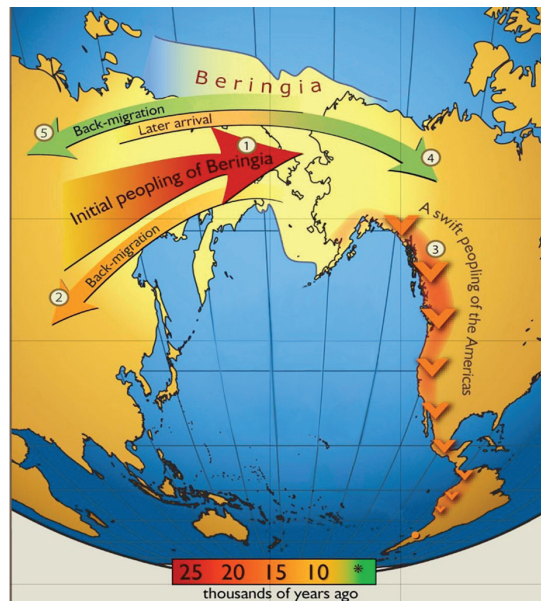
### ZOOM

Humans were living in Asia long before the Ice Age. When the retreating ice gave them the opportunity, it was only natural that they followed the animals to the American continent, because they depended on them for food and clothing. Little by little, they spread over the entire continent, organized themselves, and developed new civilizations: they were the first inhabitants. Then, when the glaciers melted, they were trapped there, and spread down through North America, and later on South America. The Vikings could have been the earliest known European explorers to cross the Atlantic. In the 9th and 10th centuries they colonized Iceland, Greenland, and Newfoundland, and then apparently began exploring and exploiting the resources from the Eastern coast of Canada, after Leif Ericson reached the continent. We know about the Viking explorations because of archaeological findings and because their stories, told orally, were later written down in sagas (narratives recording the deeds of historic and legendary figures). The sagas of Leif Ericson tell how he sailed from Greenland to the eastern coast of North America in A.D. 1000. When he found vines with grapes on them growing there, he called this place "Vinland the Good". The Vikings withdrew from their colonies by the 11th century, and the details of their early explorations were unknown to later European explorers. Before the arrival of the Europeans, highly developed Native cultures flourished in the Americas. In Central and South America, the Maya, Aztec and Inca had vast empires that included huge cities with intricate infrastructures of roads, irrigation systems, and ordered government systems.

### DOCUMENT 1

Look at the map. What made the Southward move of the early migrants possible between 40,000 and 10,000 years ago?

#### The Bering Land Bridge



### DOCUMENT 2

Many historians believe that the Vikings are the people who should be given the credit for discovering America. What is your opinion?

#### Leif Ericson



DOCUMENT 3

What did all these people have in common?

First inhabitants



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because they depended on them for food and clothing. Little by little, they spread over the entire continent, organized themselves, and developed new civilizations: they were the first inhabitants.

**The Maya**

In 1841, the explorer John Lloyd Stephens discovered the ruins of an ancient city in the jungle of Honduras. The most prosperous period for the Maya was between 250 A.D. and 900 A.D. They left behind pyramids erected in honor of their gods and goddesses. We know they were accomplished mathematicians and they were most likely the first people to use the zero. They also studied astronomy and created two calendars.



**The Aztec**

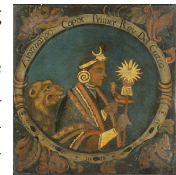
According to the legend, the Aztecs were nomads for centuries, searching for a place their Gods had revealed to them, where a serpent would devour an eagle. They believed to have found it on the banks of Lake Texcoco and settled there. They conquered the



peoples of the region, one by one, and became powerful, rich and bloodthirsty, because they were convinced that their God(s) required human sacrifice.

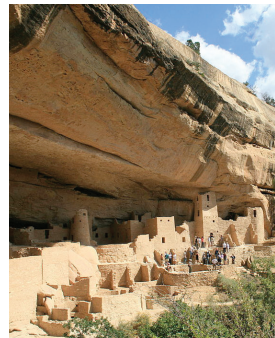
**The Inca**

The Inca Empire extended all along the Pacific coast of South America, for over 2,500 miles. The Inca were skilled builders and they left us a highly developed road system, as well as numerous bridges. They founded a glorious empire.



**The Native Americans**

Further North, in the territories which are now the United States, lived a Native American people that are today called the Anasazi, or "the ancient ones", by present-day Native Americans. They specifically lived in the Four Corners. They subsisted by hunting, but also by growing corn. Their first houses were deep areas dug into the earth. Starting around 750 A.D., they began building pueblo houses. Just like the Hohokam, the Anasazi disappeared abruptly around 1300 A.D., and no one can provide a plausible explanation as to why even today.



ACTIVITY

- A. Read a biography of Leif Ericson (for example, by Kevin A. Weitemier at: [www.mnc.net/norway/LeifErikson.htm](http://www.mnc.net/norway/LeifErikson.htm)). How would you describe him?
- B. Choose one particular group of Native Americans and write a short presentation of these people and their culture (Maya, Inca, Aztec, Anasazi, Adena, Iroquois, Hopewell, or any other group...)

## PART 2 – The Spanish and the French



### John Cabot

(1450-1499). He was an Italian navigator and explorer whose 1497 discovery of parts of North America under the commission of Henry VII of England is commonly held to have been the first European encounter with the mainland of North America since the Vikings.



John Cabot sought to obtain new lands to the West in the name of King Henry VII. In 1497, Cabot reached North America from the North (Labrador, Newfoundland, and New England). This explorer thought he had reached China. A second, sizable expedition was planned in 1498, with the goal of reaching Japan. But Cabot did not return to England and no one knew what had come of him. Despite ending in failure, his expeditions opened the way to the discovery and the colonization of North America, though the English did not launch any further expeditions for almost a century. France took up the torch. Ponce de Leon landed in Florida in 1513 near the present city of Saint Augustine and proclaimed that he had found the 'Fountain of Youth'. In 1524, Giovanni da Verrazano (another Italian) explored the coast of North Carolina in the name of the French King François I. He sailed along the Atlantic Coast, and was the first to sail into New York Bay, which he named the "Bay of Angoulême" in honor of the King. Verrazano's voyage confirmed Vespucci's discovery: it actually was a new continent they had found. In 1528, a new expedition led by Verrazano ended in tragedy; the explorer was killed, then eaten by cannibals.

François I sent the sailor Jacques Cartier to Saint-Malo in 1534, for a voyage to the West in search of a "large quantity of gold and other riches." Cartier came within view of the Newfoundland coast after 20 days, crossing the Strait of Belle Isle and made his way around the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. During a second voyage in 1535, he sailed up the Saint Lawrence River and discovered modern-day Quebec. This was a crucial discovery, since it opened the way for penetrating the entire North American continent. But France was not yet prepared for a policy of settlement. Further south, other explorers penetrated into what is today the United States of America.

Hernando de Soto headed a three-year expedition (1539-1542) throughout the South, searching for a hypothetical empire: he crossed what is now Florida and Alabama, and was the first to cross the Mississippi River. He is remembered as having been particularly cruel to the American Indians. Continually driven by the possible discovery of incredible wealth, a new expedition with Francisco de Coronado was organized between 1540 and 1542. This explorer was looking for the Seven Cities of Cibola and their mythological golden walls, which actually turned out to be nothing but simple villages inhabited by Pueblo Indians. This expedition, however, resulted in the discovery of the Grand Canyon and the Great Plains. Coronado's men

**Dutch explorers**

*The Dutch colonized the New World thanks to an Englishman they had hired, Henry Hudson. They explored Manhattan Bay, and the Dutch West India Company colonized the area in 1624. They founded New Amsterdam the following year, which they controlled until 1664 when its then-governor, Peter Stuyvesant, was forced to surrender to the English who were threatening to destroy the city. New Amsterdam was renamed New York on August 29th, 1664.*

were the first Europeans to lay eyes on the bison. By 1565, the first Spanish settlers had made a permanent home in Saint Augustine after Pedro Menendez established it when Spain drove the French out of what is present-day Florida. As for the French, new expeditions happened at the beginning of the 17th century, leaving from the Saint Lawrence Valley, which was colonized. Samuel de Champlain explored the Great Lakes region over numerous expeditions. The French were motivated by two goals: to obtain pelts and fur (hence the trade with the Huron tribe), and to convert the natives to Christianity. On his map of the discovered lands, he wrote "New France" below Hudson Bay. French influence expanded in North America. Following the Saint Lawrence River, the Mississippi River was a new route of exploration discovered and used by the French. Robert de la Salle sailed all the way down the Mississippi to discover the Gulf of Mexico. The territory that he discovered during this expedition was called "Louisiana", in honor of Louis XIV, who had supported the explorer.

 **ACTIVITY**

**A. Do you know the names of any of the first explorers? Name the most famous ones and say what you know about the achievements of one of them.**

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**B. Why did the the French choose to explore the North rather than the South?**

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