

THREE WORLDS MEET:

THE COLUMBIAN ENCOUNTER
AND ITS LEGACY

A Unit of Study for Grades 5-8

by

JAMES DRAKE

AND

JOSEPH PALUMBO



Series: Pre-Colonial US

National Center for
History in the Schools, UCLA

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National Center for History in the Schools
University of California, Los Angeles
Department of History
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1473
FAX: (310) 267-2103

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**JAMES DRAKE
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JOSEPH PALUMBO**

**NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS
University of California, Los Angeles**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

JOSEPH PALUMBO was a teacher in Long Beach, California and an Associate Teacher of the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS) when he first collaborated in the writing of this teaching unit.

JAMES DRAKE is an Assistant Professor of History at Metropolitan State University in Denver, Colorado. He was a graduate student at UCLA when he collaborated with Joseph Palumbo in writing this unit.

Gary B. Nash, Professor of History at UCLA, served as editor of the unit. Marian McKenna Olivas was the layout editor for this second edition.

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INTRODUCTION

APPROACH AND RATIONALE

T*hree Worlds Meet: The Columbian Encounter and Its Legacy* is one of over 60 National Center for History in the Schools teaching units that are the fruit of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of both United States and World History. The units represent specific dramatic episodes in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative.

By studying a crucial episode in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers and literature from the period under study. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of "being there," a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

Introduction

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Within this unit, you will find: Teaching Background Materials, including Unit Overview, Unit Context, Correlation to the National Standards for History Unit, Objectives, Introduction to *Three Worlds Meet: The Columbian Encounter and Its Legacy*, a Dramatic Moment; and Lesson Plans with Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for use by middle school students, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The Teacher Background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the specific Dramatic Moment to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, any handouts or student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of inevitable facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

Columbus's momentous arrival in 1492 in the Caribbean ended the mutual isolation of two regions of the globe. From this moment on, the future of the Americas has been inextricably linked to those of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The watershed encounter between Columbus and Native Americans signalled the beginning of an ever-increasing global interdependence that has had monumental effects—both positive and negative—for world history. These effects continue into the present. Accordingly, historical portrayals of Columbus have varied tremendously. At one extreme he appears a mythical hero, a bold adventurer and intrepid navigator, the honoree of a national holiday, and the worthy namesake for dozens of U. S. cities and a South American country. At the opposite extreme, many see him as responsible for an environmental holocaust and five hundred years of genocide. Only by studying the historical context in which Columbus sailed can we hope to arrive at an accurate and balanced understanding of this pivotal event.

The lessons included in this unit present the Columbian encounter from a variety of perspectives. For centuries, educators have taught the story of the Columbian encounter from a European point of view, as the discovery of a "New World" and the subsequent expansion of Europeans into it. It is important to remember that after 1492 both Native Americans and even those Europeans who stayed at home also lived in a "New World." With the arrival of Europeans the Americas acquired a host of diseases, flora, fauna, and unfamiliar cultures. For Europeans, the knowledge of two previously unknown continents challenged conventional wisdom and their traditional world view. At the same time, it would be inaccurate to portray Native Americans and Africans as merely reacting to European exploits. Indeed, as this unit demonstrates, Native Americans and Africans significantly shaped the subsequent development of both the Americas and

Teacher Background Materials

Europe. This unit begins by comparing and contrasting American and European cultures before 1492. It then examines the changes in European society leading to the wave of maritime exploration at the end of the fifteenth century, which resulted in the famed contact between Europeans and Native Americans. Finally, it explores the dramatic changes wrought by the interaction between two previously isolated regions.

Students should learn from this unit that the actions of historically prominent figures such as Columbus often reflect the general trends and values of their time. This knowledge, however, should not lead them to see history as a string of inevitable events; rather individual choices and contingency shape history. Regardless of whether those involved in the Columbian encounter made good or bad decisions, studying those decisions will help students to understand the world today.

II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit would complement any studies of the Crusades, the Renaissance, European maritime exploration, or Ancient American history. As the scope of this lesson is broad, it could also serve as an introduction to several topics, especially European colonization of the Americas, slavery and the slave trade, Native American history after 1492, or the history of Mexico. Finally, this unit can help students understand the controversy surrounding Columbus and his first voyage to the Americas by placing it in its proper historical context.

III. CORRELATION TO NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

"Three Worlds Meet: The Columbian Encounter and Its Legacy" provides teaching materials that address *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), in both United States and World History. Lessons specifically address United States History, **Era 1, Standard 2**, "How early European exploration and colonization resulted

in cultural and ecological interactions among previously unconnected peoples" and World History, **Era 6, Standard 1**, "How the transoceanic interlinking of all major regions of the world from 1450 to 1600 led to global transformations," and **Standard 6**, "Major global trends from 1450 to 1770."

This unit likewise integrates a number of specific Historical Thinking Standards including: reconstruct patterns of historical succession and duration in which historical developments have unfolded; draw upon data in historical maps; analyze cause-and-effect relationships; draw comparisons across eras and regions in order to define enduring issues; interrogate historical data by uncovering the social, political, and economic context in which it was created; and, evaluate alternative courses of action.

IV. UNIT OBJECTIVES

1. To understand how the European world view had developed in the years preceding Columbus's voyage and how Christo-Eurocentrism pervaded this view.
2. To understand that before 1492 diverse societies existed in the Americas.
3. To examine how historians draw on archaeological sources to study native Americans.
4. To compare European societies with Native American societies.
5. To investigate the various motives prompting Columbus' voyage.
6. To understand how the motives and beliefs of both Europeans and Americans helped to shape the first encounters between the two peoples by examining accounts of these encounters from both Spanish and Aztec points of view.

Teacher Background Materials

7. To explain how ethnocentrism and the drive for profit led some Spaniards to exploit the labor of Native Americans and Africans and to understand the brutality embodied in this labor system.
8. To explain how the exchange of culture, flora, fauna, and disease took place after 1492.

V. LESSON PLANS

1. The Changing European World View (2 days)
2. The Many Peoples of the Americas (2 days)
3. The First Voyage: Motives and Shipboard Conditions (1 day)
4. First Encounters (2–3 days)
5. Relations Among the Races (2 days)
6. Seeds of Change (1–2 days)

VI. INTRODUCTION TO THE COLUMBIAN ENCOUNTER

On October 12, 1492, Columbus first landed on the island that he named Hispaniola (today shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic). Columbus mistakenly believed he had accomplished his primary goal of finding a short, trans-Atlantic route to Asia. For years European sailors had longed to find a shortcut to replace the overland trading routes to East Asia. Many sailors at the time, including Columbus, may have heard the Icelandic sagas describing Leif Eriksson's voyages to Newfoundland five hundred years earlier. Portuguese sailors had already begun to expand Europe's knowledge of the Eastern Atlantic, and Columbus, like many Europeans, speculated that India and Asia lay across the Atlantic; thus it is important to note that while Columbus had pioneered an unprecedented route across the Atlantic, his voyage constituted just a single chapter in a long saga of European maritime exploration. In the late fifteenth century, trends in economics, demographics, technology, cartography, and religion converged, leading to a competition primarily between Spain and Portugal to expand trade and Christianity. Within this context, Columbus deserves the credit for linking Europe and the Americas and also deserves to be held accountable for his individual actions and decisions. Yet it is worth noting that had he not attempted his voyage or had it failed, another mariner would have eventually awakened Europe to the existence of the Americas.

At the close of the fifteenth century, Europe's geographic knowledge improved dramatically. Contrary to popular myth, Columbus as well as most Europeans understood the world to be round. In 1487, the Portuguese sailor Bartholomew Diaz had rounded the southern tip of Africa in search of a sea route to Asia. Ten years later, and five years after Columbus's voyage across the Atlantic, Vasco da Gama of Portugal rounded the Cape of Africa and travelled as far as India. Despite the scope of these voyages, however, Europeans remained uncertain about the earth's circumference until 1522, when Magellan, a Portuguese navigator who sailed for Spain,

Teacher Background Materials

circumnavigated the globe. In 1492, Columbus had underestimated the earth's circumference by two-thirds. Ironically, had Columbus known the actual size of the world he probably would not have attempted to cross the Atlantic. Ignorance gave him the impetus to sail.

Columbus's voyages depended upon many other factors. At the end of the fifteenth century, Europe had largely recovered the huge population loss incurred during the plague of the 1340s. Accordingly, many felt the need to expand the European economy into foreign markets, especially Asia. This expansion would not have been possible without the rise of strong unified monarchies in Europe that could finance maritime voyages. In Spain, Isabella and Ferdinand married, uniting the kingdoms of Castille and Aragon under one monarchy. This monarchy came to power at the end of a long war between Christians and Muslims in Europe. Having just expelled the Jews and Muslims from their country, Ferdinand and Isabella sought to expand their economic power as well as their religion. Fortunately for Columbus, his request of support from the Spanish government for his trans-Atlantic voyage coincided with these developments.

On the eve of Columbus's first voyage, according to recent estimates, as many as seventy five million people lived in the Americas. These people, inaccurately named "Indians" by Columbus who mistakenly believed he had landed in Asia, descended from the first true discoverers of the continent. When Columbus arrived in the Caribbean five hundred years ago, he met a people whose ancestors had arrived at least twelve thousand years before him. As nomadic bands chasing big game, they came from Asia via a land bridge that at one time connected Alaska to Siberia. Over time these first pioneers had spread out and settled throughout North and South America.

It is impossible to characterize the typical native American of 1492, because of the continent's tremendous cultural diversity. The lack of written evidence makes this task even more difficult, and it especially complicates

efforts to understand American history before 1492. Nevertheless, archaeological evidence provides a glimpse at the long history of these peoples. The stereotype of the warrior on horseback roaming the great plains and living in perfect harmony with the environment can be readily dismissed. Native Americans had no horses until after the arrival of Europeans. Instead, living throughout the Americas many different peoples had adapted to a multiplicity of environments and climates. Their histories are full of innovations and inventions produced in complete isolation from Europeans. Some used complex calendars and lived in cities larger than any in Europe at the time. Many lived in small villages and survived by growing corn and hunting game. A variety of political, social, and cultural systems existed throughout the Americas. Native Americans spoke over two thousand languages at the time of Columbus's arrival, and their political and social structures were diverse.

With the arrival of white men in 1492, radical changes shook native American communities. For many, disease marked their first encounter with the European world. Before 1492 Native Americans had not acquired, nor had they needed, immunities to the diseases that Europeans carried. Among them, small pox proved the deadliest. Coastal societies acquired diseases that spread to inland societies through routine contact. In some areas 90 percent of the population had been decimated before they had even seen a white man.

As time passed, however, it became apparent that racism and greed posed an equally great enemy to native peoples. Columbus's first voyage was a relatively small undertaking, and after only ten weeks in the Caribbean he returned to Spain with only a handful of trade goods and six kidnapped natives. His apparent success, however, brought him financial support for three subsequent and much larger voyages. His second voyage consisted of seventeen ships carrying over 1,200 Spaniards and allowed for extended contact between Native Americans and Europeans. Not finding the abundant and readily accessible deposits of gold he had expected, yet deter-

Teacher Background Materials

mined to make his discovery profitable for Europeans, Columbus, against the Queen of Spain's desires, enslaved 1,600 natives and brought a third of them back to Spain. Herein lay the ominous beginning of the Atlantic slave trade. Subsequent settlers in the "New World" would reverse the dominant flow of the trade by bringing Africans to the Americas rather than taking Native Americans back to the "Old World." In the end, Europeans enslaved approximately eleven million Africans over a period of four centuries for use in the Americas.

During his lifetime, Columbus's discoveries seemed relatively insignificant compared to those of the Portuguese sailors along the coast of Africa. Columbus died in poverty in 1506, disgraced by the Spanish government for insubordination. To the day of his death he believed that he had discovered a trans-Atlantic route to Asia. In retrospect, however, his encounter takes on far greater importance. True, he did not pioneer the much heralded water route to Asia. Instead, he brought to an end the isolation of two hemispheres and ushered in the era of global interdependence in which we live today. After 1492, disease, flora, fauna, and masses of people with diverse cultures flowed between the previously separate regions of the globe.

DRAMATIC MOMENT
EXCERPTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF COLUMBUS

The day on which they finally reached a small island . . . they saw some naked people and the Admiral went ashore in the armed boat. . . .

The Admiral brought out the royal standard, and the captains unfurled two banners of the green cross, which the Admiral flew as his standard on all the ships, with an **F** [Ferdinand] and a **Y** [Isabella], and a crown over each letter.

When they landed they saw trees, very green, many streams and a large variety of fruits. The Admiral called the two captains and the others who landed and made them bear witness and testimony that he, in their presence, took possession, as in fact he did take possession, of the said island in the names of the King and Queen, His Sovereigns, making the requisite declarations, as is more fully recorded in the statutory instruments the requisite declarations, as is more fully recorded in the statutory instruments which were set down in writing.

Source: B.W. Ife, ed., *Christopher Columbus: Journal of the First Voyage* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1990), 29.

LESSON ONE

THE CHANGING EUROPEAN WORLD VIEW

A. OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the concept of a Christian/European centered world view by analyzing and interpreting the "Ebstorf World Map" of 1240.
2. To assess how European cartographic knowledge had expanded by 1492 yet failed to comprehend the true size of the world.
3. To explore how Columbus's voyages further expanded European cartographic knowledge by tracing those routes.
4. To understand that although Columbus receives credit as the first European explorer to establish lasting contact with the Americas, he was simply one of many European explorers attempting to expand European influence.

B. LESSON BACKGROUND MATERIALS

That Columbus tried to reach Asia by sailing across the Atlantic tells us something about Europe's cartographic knowledge at the time. Contrary to popular myth, most Europeans believed the earth to be round. Several centuries earlier, however, Europe's world view had differed radically from that of Columbus. In the thirteenth century, as the first map in this lesson demonstrates, Christianity heavily influenced Europe's geographical perception. The "Ebstorf World Map" of 1240 demonstrates some of the religious ethnocentricity of Europe that persisted through Columbus's day and beyond. This map depicts the world as the body of Christ, with Christianity's most holy city—Jerusalem—at its center. Christ's head sits at the top of the map (the east), his feet at the bottom (the west), and his hands lay outstretched at the sides (north and south) offering salvation. Europe has the most cities, while the non-Christian people of Asia and

Africa often appear as monsters and cannibals. Columbus inherited portions of this ethnocentric world view in which Christianity occupies the center of the earth; beyond this center lay non-Christians awaiting "discovery."

Although the spiritual theme constitutes the focal point of the Ebstorf map, its basic structure derives from the "T-O" map that originated before Christ. In these maps the three known continents sit surrounded by an ocean and separated by the Don, the Nile, and the Mediterranean. Asia occupies the top half, Europe the bottom left, and Africa the bottom right. The Ebstorf map follows this pattern, with Spain situated just above Christ's feet and Italy jutting out into the water just below the center.

By Columbus's time cartographic renditions of the earth had become much more similar to those of the present day. In 1492, Martin Behaim produced the second map that appears in this lesson, and it accurately represents Columbus's vision of the world. The Americas are noticeably absent from the map, and Columbus's stated destination of Japan and Asia lies due east of Europe. Not only were Columbus and Behaim unaware of the Americas, but they also grossly underestimated the circumference of the earth. They believed the world to be one-third of its actual circumference. For Columbus, this underestimation made a transoceanic voyage to Asia seem reasonable. Ironically, had he known the true size of the earth he may not have ventured across the Atlantic.

The lack of an accurate means to measure longitude contributed to Columbus's underestimation of the circumference of the world. While Columbus and other Europeans had borrowed technological innovations from throughout their own continent as well as Asia and Africa, navigators of the time could still produce only crude estimates of the distances they had travelled to the east or west. The use of a magnetic compass, borrowed from Muslims in the twelfth century, told European navigators the direction they travelled. Latitude, or north-south position, could be accurately

Lesson One

gauged by examining the position of the sun or stars. Longitude, on the other hand, could only be estimated through a sailor's guess at how fast and for how long a ship had been travelling. The exploits of other navigators (see **Document D**) contributed to Europe's geographical knowledge, but not until Magellan circumnavigated the globe in 1522 did Europeans have a true feeling for the size of the earth.

Sources: J. B. Harley, *Maps and the Columbian Encounter* (1990); William D. Phillips, Jr., and Carla Rahn Phillips, *The Worlds of Christopher Columbus* (1992); and Gary B. Nash, Julie Roy Jeffrey, et al., *The American People Creating a Nation and a Society*, 2nd ed. (1990).

C. LESSON ACTIVITIES (2 days)

1. Have students look at modern world maps (desktops, wall or atlas) and ask them to locate North America. Lead the students in a discussion framed around the question *Why is North America almost always in the middle?*
2. Help students understand the concept of *centrism*—the idea that your world is at the center and all else radiates outward from that point.

Examples:

current world map

Chinese concept of the "Middle Kingdom"

"All roads lead to Rome"

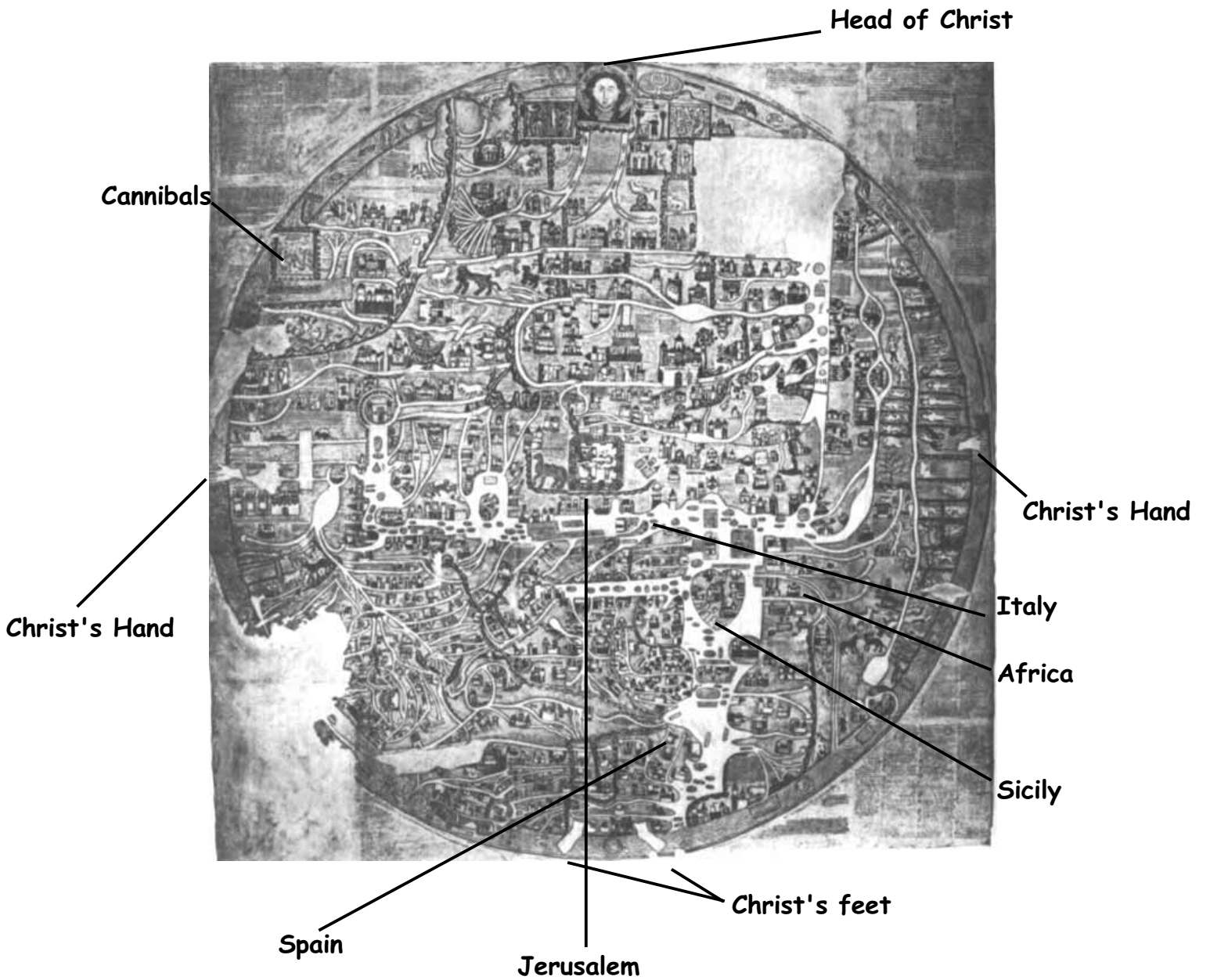
3. Distribute **Document A** to students, the "Ebstorf World Map" of 1240. Using the teacher's information in the lesson background, and the guiding questions, help students to see how this map is an example of Christian/European centrism
4. Explain that by the time of Columbus (250+ years later) cartographic knowledge had expanded. Distribute **Document B**, *Geographische Vorstellung*. Indicate that although an improvement, it still lacks a knowledge of part of the world. What is that part?

5. **Document B** is important for it is under this cartographic framework that European explorers felt they could sail west from Europe to reach Asia. Why did they think that?
6. Show students the map of Columbus's first voyage, **Document C**. Compare this to **Document B**. Ask students how his voyage expanded European cartographic knowledge?
7. Distribute **Document D**. Ask students to trace and color-code routes of Cabot, DaGama, Magellan, Verrazano, and Cartier giving a different color to each explorer. Use the Teacher Key to guide students. Use the completed map to help students see that although Columbus is regarded as "first," he was one of many Europeans attempting to expand European influence.



Girolamo Benzoni, "Christopher Columbus bidding farewell to the Spanish Monarchy," *Historia del Mondo Nuovo* [*History of the New World*], (Francofort, 1595.) Library of Congress.

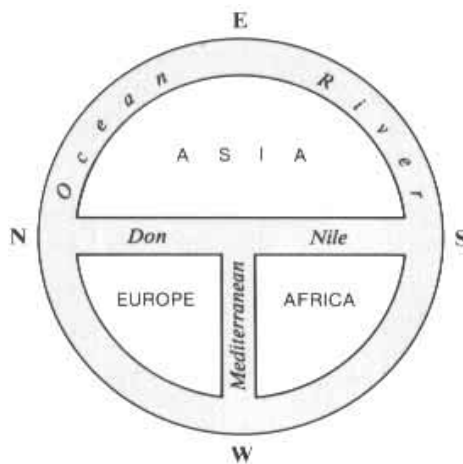
EBSTORF MAP C. 1240



Source: Rare Books and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress.

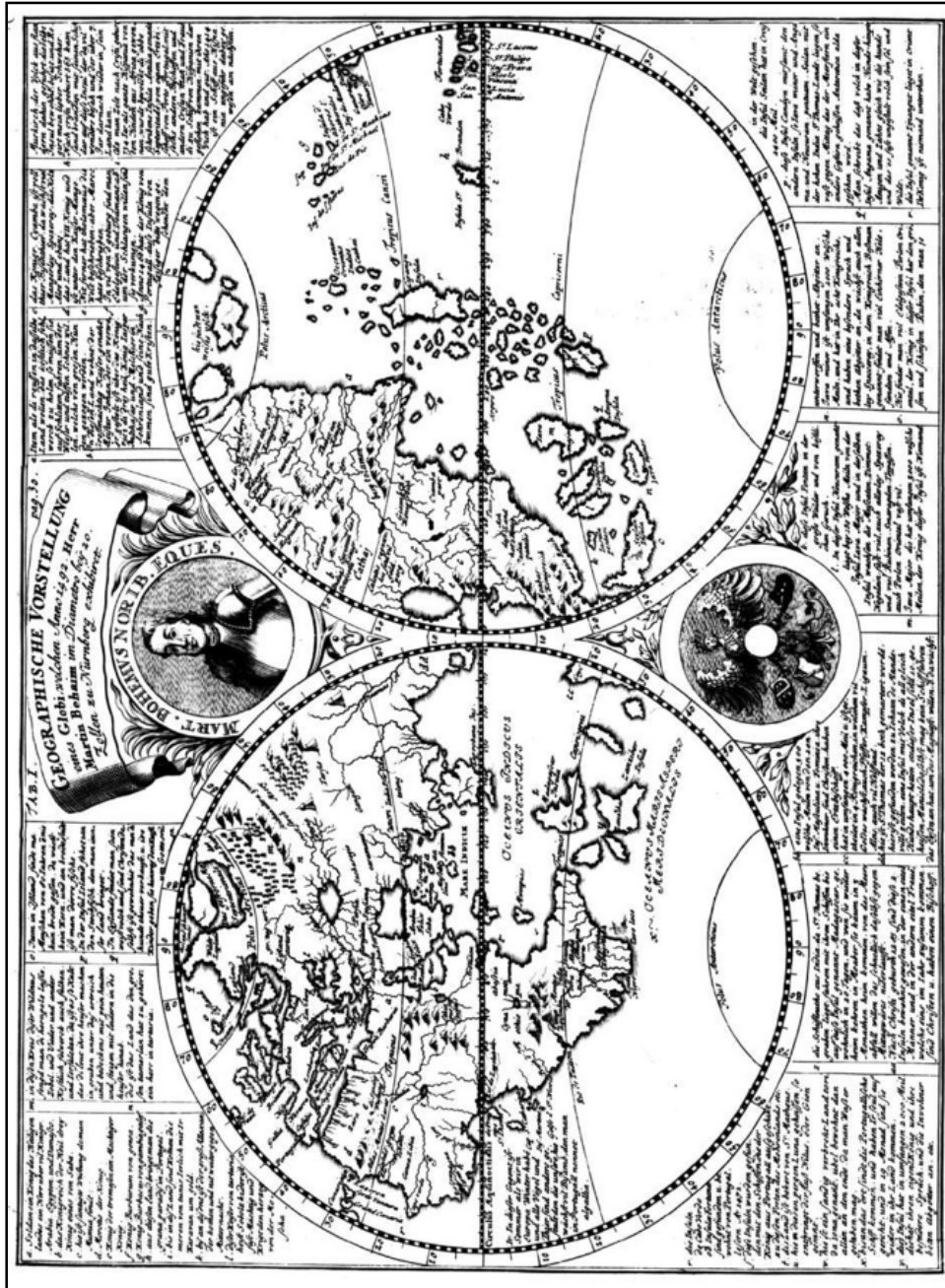
1. List examples of how this map shows a Christian/European centered view of the world.
2. Based on this map, what might European explorers expect to find to the east?
3. How can you use the map to help you prove this statement: *"Europeans believed that all the world could and should be converted to Christianity."*

T-O Map



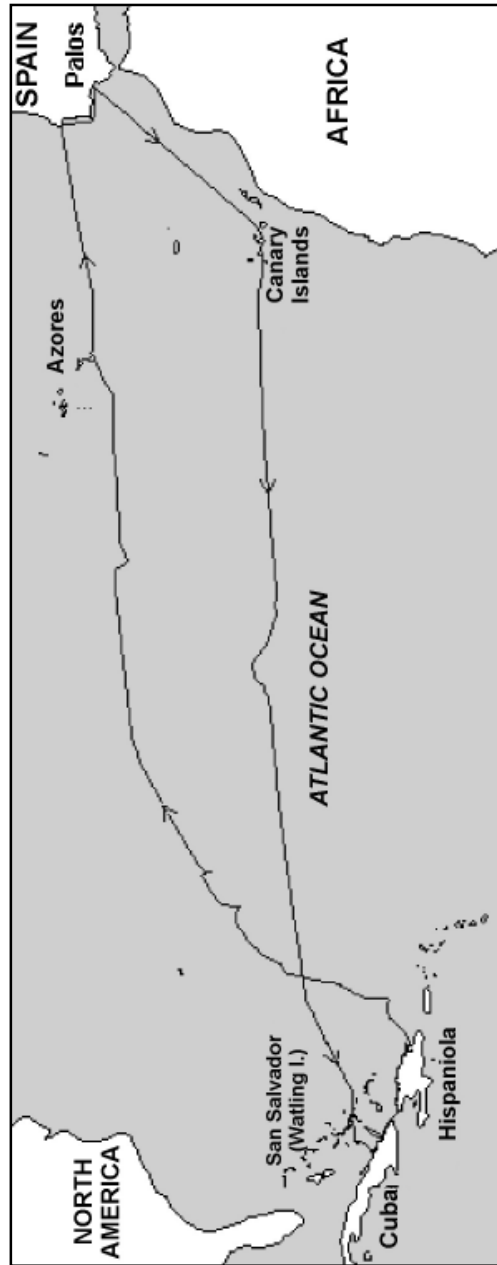
T-O Map Diagram

GEOGRAPHISCHE VORSTELLUNG



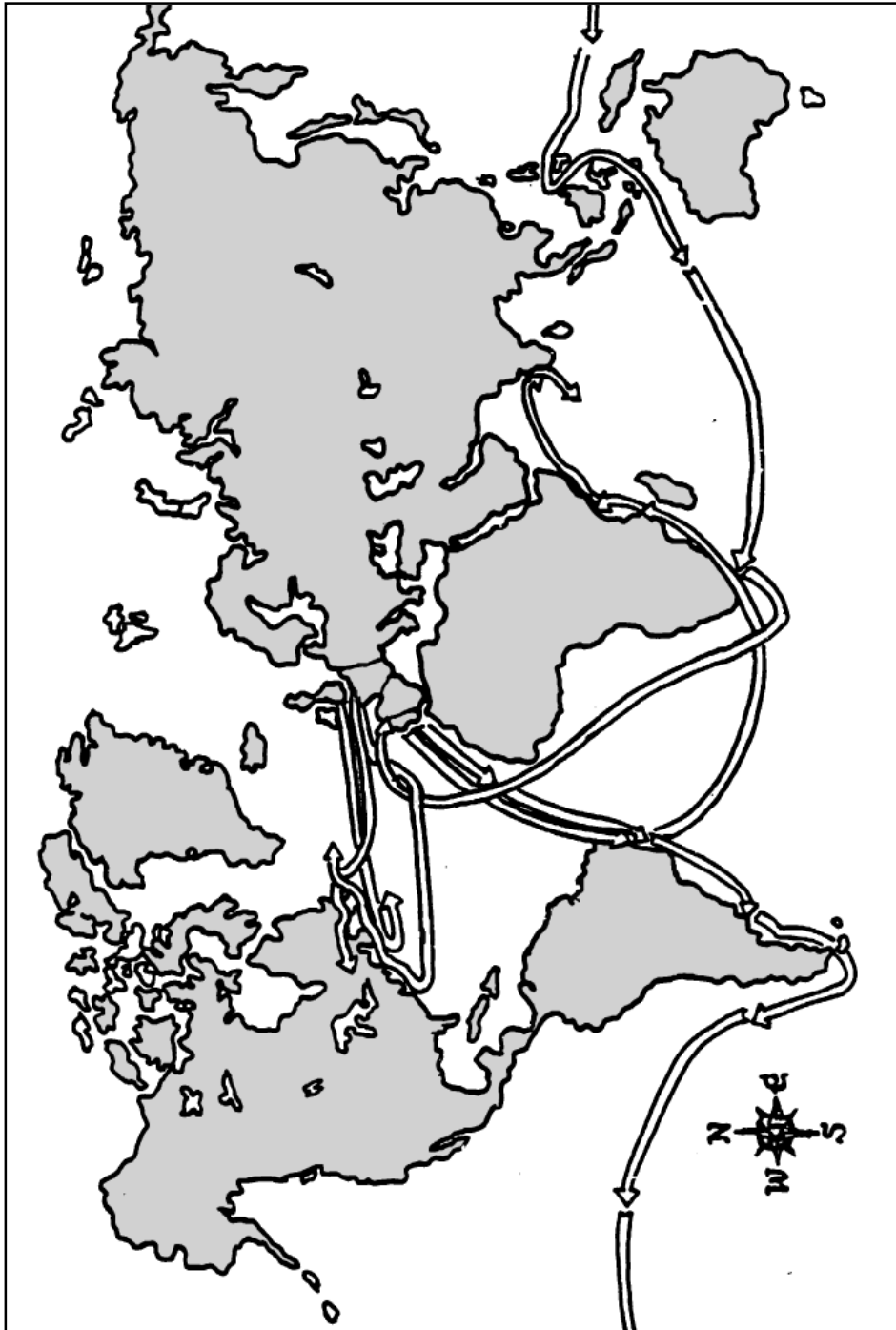
Source: Johann Gabriel Doppelmayr, *Benhim's Globe of the World* (Library of Congress, 1730)

FIRST VOYAGE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, 1492-93



Historical Maps on File. Copyright (c) 1984 by Martin Greenwald Associates. Reprinted with permission of Facts On File, Inc., New York.

THE AGE OF EXPLORATION



Illustrated by Sharon Rudhal

THE AGE OF EXPLORATION (Teacher Key)



- J. Cabot (England) 1497 ————▲
- DaGama (Portugal) 1497-1498 - - - -▲
- Magellan (Spain) 1519-1522 ————▲
- Verrazano (France) 1524 ······▲
- Cartier (France) 1535 ······xxxxx▲

Illustrated by Sharon Rudhal

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Questions?

National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA

Marian McKenna Olivas, Coordinator

Gary B. Nash, Director

6265 Bunche Hall

Los Angeles, CA 90095-1473

(310) 825-4702

FAX: (310) 267-2103

<http://nchs.ucla.edu>

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