

THE EUROPEAN WORLD IN THE TIME OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

I. A World of Separate Peoples in Separate Countries

A. The Most Important European Countries for American History

1. We know from our survey of the “anchor facts” of history that there would be no United States of America if it were not for the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492.
2. After this discovery, Europeans took an interest in what there was to the west of Europe and in the *Age of Discovery* learned how immense the Americas are.
3. Not all European countries participated in this equally. Some European countries have no connection to American history at all until modern times.
4. The European countries that are most important in the story of the discovery and exploration of America are Spain, Portugal, England, and France.

B. Why Separate Countries and Separate Languages?

1. After the fall of Rome in 476 AD, Europe was overrun by separate groups of people known as “tribes.”
2. A tribe called the Franks conquered the region we now call France. A tribe called the Angles conquered “Angle-land” (England). Another tribe known as Visigoths took over the Roman province of Hispania (today Spain) and Portugal.
3. Every region in Europe was claimed by such a group, and became a separate country with the conquering tribe ruling over the natives and resisting attempts to take their claim by other tribes.
4. This arrangement gradually became stable. The territories claimed by tribes became their countries, with settled boundaries between them.
5. In each territory, where previously people had been united in speaking Latin, native languages mixed with Latin and the language of conquerors to produce a unique blend. Portuguese became distinct from Spanish. English became distinct from German and French, etc.
6. The variety of peoples and languages in Europe, which today is taken for granted, is actually an important fact with a deeper meaning. The meaning of their separateness is their inability to live together, and the violent history of their separation.

C. As Globalization Begins

The importance of the existence of Europe’s separate countries is that these separate peoples, so disconnected and hurtful to each other, were those responsible for bringing the world together through globalization. It is hardly surprising, then, that the story involves many conflicts between them and the separate peoples they met. Being closely connected to different peoples was not normal for anyone at that time.