

THE SHAPING OF A NEW WORLD

In this part of the course, we will look at some of the important ways the world was changing around **1492**, taking people out of the *Dark Ages* and making life more like it is today. The discovery of America by Columbus was part of an *Age of Discovery*. It was a part of a rebirth of ancient (Greek & Roman) knowledge known as *the Renaissance*. Finally, Christianity broke up into separate beliefs, or sects, causing more wars between its already separate peoples during the *Reformation*.

I. The Rebirth of Greco-Roman Culture

A. The Rebirth of Freedom

1. We have seen from our survey of history's "anchor facts" that the United States was "born" in 1776, with the signing of the *Declaration of Independence*.
2. It said governments should protect the rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."
3. This was the first time in modern times that freedom was achieved, but it was not the first time ever. The first birth of freedom was in ancient Athens and ancient Rome.

B. Greek Democracy

1. The people of Athens in Greece decided that the best way to be free was to involve every person in the government.
2. The government they created is known as "democracy." The Greek word "demos" means "people," and "kratia," means "to rule." So the basic meaning of democracy is that "the people rule."
3. In practice what this means is that people vote, and the *majority* rules.
4. The Greeks did not usually vote in ways that destroyed freedom, but the problem with democracy is that the majority can take away the rights of the minority by vote.
5. The worst example of this was when the Athenians *voted* to kill the philosopher Socrates, who had embarrassed many of the leaders of Athens.

C. The Roman Republic

1. The founding fathers decided *not* to make America a democracy. They chose to make it a *republic*.
2. The difference they focussed on was that a *republic* is a government that protects individual rights — including from the power of the majority.
3. In the ancient Roman Republic, the founders saw that one of the important ways to protect rights was for a government to be formed with a set of laws that cannot be changed by the majority. This basic set of laws is called a *constitution*.

D. The *Renaissance* in Art

1. When most people think of the rebirth of Greco-Roman ideas, they think mainly of a time called the Renaissance — a french word meaning “rebirth” — when the people of Europe revived the celebration of human life through realistic and beautiful art.
2. The delight in human life mostly ceased during the Dark Ages. Life, of course, was filled with tribal wars. People starved and fought for scraps.
3. Also, Christianity told people not to think of how wonderful life can be in this world, but rather to believe in a wonderful supernatural life after death.
4. By the time of Columbus, however, the *Renaissance* was in full swing. Artists such as Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci were creating amazing new examples of realistic and beautiful art.

E. The Rebirth of Science

1. Along with the revival of Greek and Roman art and the later revival of Greco-Roman ideas of freedom, came the revival of Greek and Roman science and technology.
2. The Greeks especially had a desire to better know nature through science.
3. “Natural science” in Greece included the study of the solids, liquids, gases, plants, the weather, the stars, mathematics, geometry, and geography, to name just but a few.
4. The idea of the scientific study of nature was reborn in Columbus’s time as well, as we shall now see in detail in the *Age of Discovery*...