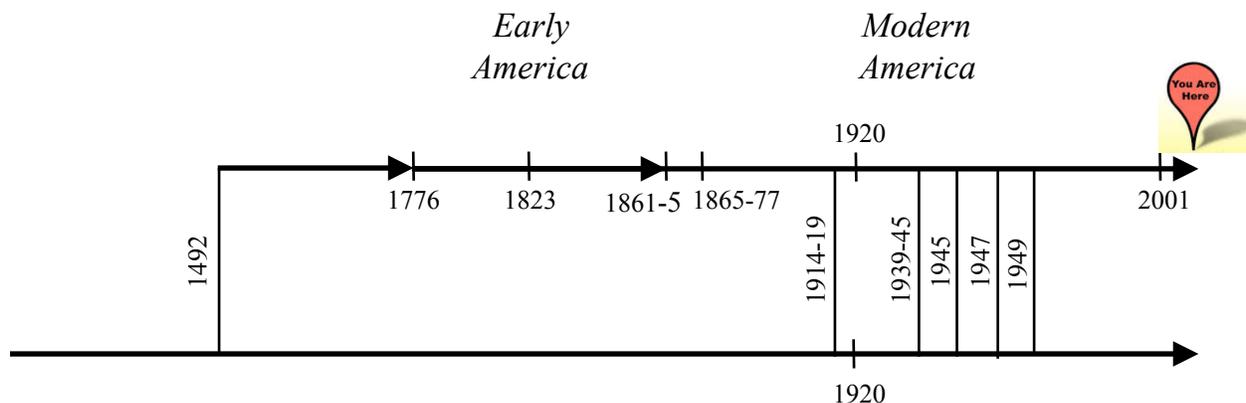


## E. The European Discovery of America (1492)

1. We know that early America maintained its political separation from Europe, and that following World War I, despite the delay of the “return to normalcy,” eventually became politically interconnected with it.
2. The fact that American and European culture have so many connections between them is no accident. It is because American civilization is a branch of the *tree that is* Western civilization, and Europe is the tree trunk. (Review section III - C, above.)
3. The reason for this connection is straightforward. America was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492, leading to the conquest and colonization of both North and South America by various European cultures. We will now add this connection between European history and American history on our combined timeline.

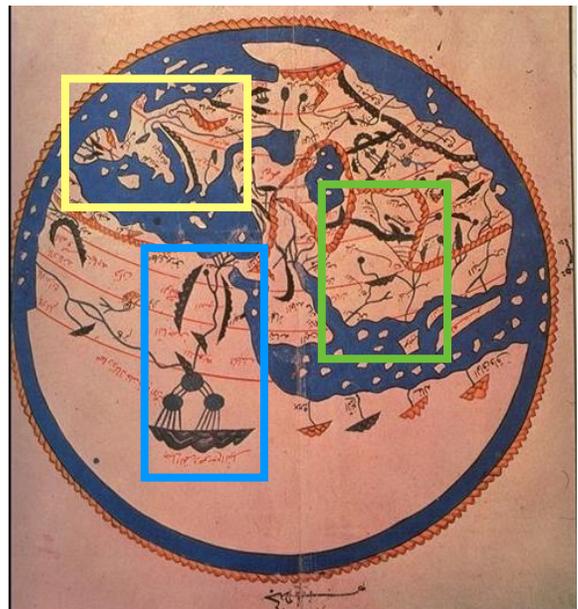


4. Many people today reject the notion that Christopher Columbus discovered America.
  - a) One reason is that scientists called archeologists have found objects left by Vikings from northern Europe led by Leif Erickson that show a prior voyage to Newfoundland (part of Canada) c.1000 BC. Some believe that this disqualifies Columbus's voyage from being called “the discovery of America.”
  - b) A different reason for downgrading Columbus's voyage of 1492 is that people now called “native Americans” were already present in the Americas before Columbus arrived. Some believe that this disqualifies any European expedition as a “discovery,” because others were already there.
  - c) A final reason people do not want to say Columbus discovered America is that he and the Spanish conquerors who followed him were not respectful of the primitive natives they found. People today feel that this makes Columbus a bad person and they don't want to give him credit as an explorer.
5. The HistoryAtOurHouse approach to history says that the purpose of history is: *to reveal and explain the world we live in.*
  - a) From this perspective, the voyages of Leif Erickson did not change history at all. To call Leif Erickson's voyage “the discovery of America,” one would make the phrase unimportant.

- b) Calling Columbus’s voyage “*the* discovery of America” does not deny the fact that other people were in the Americas before. It says that *the world we live in* was not made by them. The same can be said of every army or people or country that was defeated and swept aside in history. There are surely parts of history that are sad and make us angry. That is not the main reason for studying any part of the past, however.
- c) The main reason is: *to understand how the world we live in came to be what it is.* There is only one answer when it comes to the rise of the United States as a cultural block. It exists only because America was discovered by Christopher Columbus in **1492**.

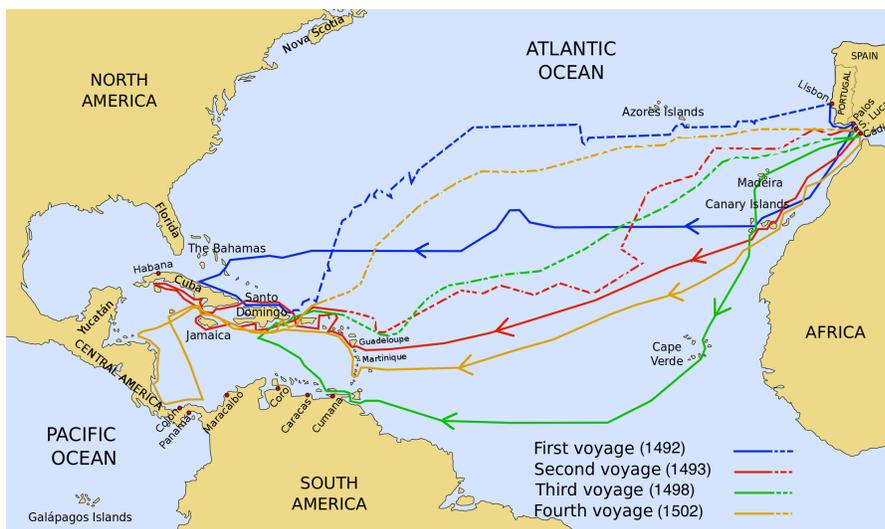
### F. The Basics of Columbus’s Discovery

1. Prior to 1492, even the most educated men in the world had no idea that America existed and where it was in relation to any other part of the world. The most advanced maps of the world relied on the work of the ancient Greek geographer Ptolemy, and consisted of Europe, Asia, and Africa only.
2. Because of this conception of the world, European explorers first set out to reach China and the rest of Asia by sailing around Africa.
3. Why seek out Asia? An Italian merchant named Marco Polo had traveled there by land, and had written a book called “*The Travels of Marco Polo*” that detailed the wonders of China as a vast, unified civilization.



An ancient Greek map by Ptolemy shows Europe (highlighted in yellow), the Nile river (highlighted in blue), and India (highlighted in Green). A medieval map by the Muslim geographer Al-Idrisi over a thousand years later shows the same basic outlook. One difference is the hint that Africa may be surrounded by water. Ptolemy’s map suggests instead that the land wraps around to Asia. The key, of course, is that neither even hints at the existence of America. Regardless of whether theorists were convinced that the Earth was spherical, no one until Columbus had the will and the conviction to prove it once and for all. But as of 1492, all previous conceptions of the world were shattered, and the story of civilization would never be the same.

4. Why travel around Africa? In between Europe and Asia was Islamic civilization, which since its advent had been an enemy of European Christendom.
5. By 1492, Portuguese explorers had discovered the southernmost tip of Africa, and were soon to make their way to India for the first time.
6. Columbus proposed to Isabella, the Queen of Castile (a part of Spain) that it would be better to sail west to Asia, because the Earth is a sphere.
7. Because America is in the way, that is *not* possible! Columbus reached the Bahamas and sailed around the Caribbean, thinking he had reached the “Indies” (near Japan). He only realized that he had found a new continent, or a “New World,” after making multiple return voyages.



Columbus's four voyages to the Americas revealed more and more. The third voyage, in particular, when Columbus sighted the mouth of the Orinoco river in Venezuela, led to his own personal realization that his discoveries were of *continental* proportions. (The size of such a river, he knew, could only be accounted for by the huge extent of its “watershed.”)