

European civilizations in 1500 history essay



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The world encountered a lot of changes between 1500 and 1850 that completely changed the way things were done and the way people lived. Indeed the world in 1850 was completely different from that of 1500. For instance America as a country never existed in 1500; there was not even a single colony in the whole of America. In 1850 U. S. A had grown as a nation becoming one of the most powerful nations in the world. The world commerce was mainly controlled by the Indians, Arabs and Chinese in 1500 but by 1850, the balance of power had shifted and the west as we know it today controlled the world commerce and its politics.

In 1500 there was little travelling across the continents. Indeed the first explorers had just discovered the new world and the route to the Far East. The world therefore was still a mystery and each civilization did not know much outside their territory. This paper is going to evaluate the changes that occurred in the world between 1500 and 1850 and the overall effect they had on the world affairs and the bilateral relations between countries.

Civilizations in 1500

Prior to 1492 Europeans did not know of the existence of the America. In 1492 Christopher Columbus made the first voyage discovered the Americas and opened it to European colonization (Campbell 1739). The Europeans however did not come to the new world immediately and for much of the 1500s life continued in the Americas uninterrupted by the Europeans. The Americas were inhabited by the native Indians who had thriving kingdoms there. Famous among these were the Aztec and Inca civilization (Adler & Pouwels 193). The two had a reputation for brutality and offering human

sacrifice but they were nevertheless impressive for their social cohesiveness, architecture and city planning. The Indians roamed the Americas unchallenged living in the midst of great wilderness inhabited by wild animals that freely intermingled with them.

European colonization

The arrival of Europeans was to change that dramatically. The Indians in South America were colonized by the Portuguese and the Spanish who enslaved them to provide labor in the large plantations they started (Adler & Pouwels 390). The natives in North America were pushed out of their lands and into the deserts. Their way of life was broken down. Not only in the Americas was colonization changing lives but also in Asia and parts of Africa. In 1498 Vasco Da Gama found the route to India (Adler & Pouwels 352). This opened the Far East to European colonization. Africa was also targeted as it lay on the path to India. In 1652 the Dutch colonized South Africa. The British colonized India and parts of China and much of the Far East. Colonization is one of the factors that contributed to changing the world between 1500 and 1850. It was aided by discovery of the Americas, a shorter route to the Far East, economic reasons and instability in Europe.

Slavery

Colonization went hand in hand with slavery which is another factor that shaped the world between 1500 and 1850. The large plantation farms established by the Europeans in the Americas needed labor. Due to economic reasons the plantation farmers preferred buying slaves as opposed to employing people. Slave trade therefore increased dramatically between <https://assignbuster.com/european-civilizations-in-1500-history-essay/>

Africa and the Americas. According to Rodriguez (479) there were 3.6 million African slaves in the U. S. A in 1860. Millions of Africans were ferried to plantations in the Americas where they provided free labor. These Africans were to form the Caribbean countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba and the Dominica Republic. They also formed a significant population in U. S. A. Where black people never existed in 1500, they had countries in 1850 with Haiti already being an independent country made of former slaves.

Political realignments

The other major factor that brought significant change was political realignment. Before 1500 the world power was tilted towards the East. The West was starting to emerge as the center of world power after the problems of the dark ages of fights between kings and churches. However the Chinese Ming dynasty was unrivalled in wealth, knowledge and power (Adler & Pouwels 367). The Chinese were far more advanced in science than the West with astronomers who could accurately read the heavenly bodies. They had also invented printing, gun powder and the compass. Chinese also owned a fleet of ships by far the largest and most sophisticated of their kind. These they used to explore Africa, India and other countries.

Second to the Chinese in the East was the Islamic empire (Adler & Pouwels 246). United by one religion and a single language, that is Arabic, the Muslims had built a flourishing economy. They controlled trade with the Far East. They also built sophisticated cities such as Baghdad, Istanbul, Cairo,

Granada and Cairo. By 1850 they had lost the trade with the Far East to Europeans while their land was already falling under European colonization.

Political Revolutions and democracy

Revolutions were another factor that changed the course of history between 1500 and 1850. In 1688, England experienced the glorious revolution that resulted in consolidated parliamentary ascendancy, minimal government and secure property rights (Adler & Pouwels 412). In 1770s the U. S. A went through a revolution that culminated in the declaration of independence in July 2, 1776. The French experienced the French revolution that dislodged the most powerful monarch in Europe (Adler & Pouwels 435). Haiti became the first slave colony to gain independence when the slaves revolted against French rule in 1804. These revolutions gave way rise to democracy, a sense of nationalism and improved governance.

Industrial revolution

Industrial revolution heralded the greatest change in this period. Machines substituted human labor which increased production. For instance James Hargreaves discovered spinning jenny machine in the mid-1760s which increased cotton processing. This increased demand for cotton to feed the factories. As demand for cotton increased, more and more farms were put under cotton. This increased the demand for slaves in the Americas to work in the new cotton farms. Slave trade therefore increased tremendously. As industrialization took root, craft guilds and domestic production were replaced by the factory system of manufacturing (Ross 128). The factory system increased production and wealth. The world economy grew in leaps

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and bounds. The factory system brought women into the labor markets. There was however concern about labor issues as most of the factories employed women and children who worked for long hours and were paid peanuts. The government was called to intervene. Industrialization gave rise to a new class of rich people (Ross 135). These people could travel more and afford the good things in life. Innovation therefore increased and education improved. The factory system also led to organization of businesses as cartels and corporations. These corporations became very strong wielding power over other sectors of society.

Urbanization

Industrialization led increased urbanization. The factory workers started living close to their factories forming urban centers. The number of people living in towns grew dramatically as people flocked to towns to look for jobs or to do business. New manufacturing cities arose close to industries. Industrialization produced two classes of people; the middle class composed of people in upper and middle management and poor workers composed of those who provided unskilled labor. This was reflected in town dwelling as the middle class could afford better housing than the unskilled laborers. Rapid and unplanned urbanization characterized this period.

Industrialization was further boosted by the growth of the rail transport. In 1825 George Stephenson invented the first locomotive engine for railways. Railway transport grew rapidly from then onwards. This facilitated swift movement of goods and labor which helped industrialization. Improved transport allowed more people to travel leading to more integration.

Losers and winners

Since the West led in industrialization, they automatically became the biggest beneficiaries. Between 1500 and 1850, the Western countries experienced tremendous growth in their economic and political power. Britain which was the center of industrial evolution grew her economic and political power dramatically (Adler & Pouwels 448). The French, the Germans and the Americans followed suit. Some kingdoms that were powerful in 1500 did loose. The Chinese and the Indians suffered decline as did the Arabs, the Africans and the Native Americans. A smaller world was therefore very beneficial to the West but it came as a cost to the rest of the world except Japan.

The Africans suffered slavery as they were forcibly taken away to work in the Americas, Africa and much of Asia was colonized. These colonies were used as sources for raw materials to the industries in the West as well as markets for the factory produce. The small world that resulted was beneficial to the West but detrimental to the rest of the world.