

what were the factors
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What were the factors that led to the contact of West Africa and Europe during the 15th century?

The coming of Europe to Africa during the 15th century was not just a mere coincident as it marked the beginning of dominance and power for Europe. The coming of the Europeans to Africa marked the beginning of what could only be described as the exploitation of one country for the development of another. The Age of Exploration or Age of Discovery as it is sometimes called, officially began in the early 15th century and lasted until the 17th century. The period is characterized as a time when Europeans began exploring the world by sea in search of trading partners, new goods, and new trade routes. In addition, some explorers set sail to simply learn more about the world. The main factors however that led to the contact of West Africa during the 15th century were the Renaissance, Christianity, trade and for political dominance. Firstly, it was the age of Exploration. According Lynne Elliot in her book " Exploration in the Renaissance", noted that during the Dark Ages, churches had a lot of influence on everyday thought and the way people lived.

Most people couldn't read and scientific research was discouraged. Exploration was considered something to be feared. In some areas of Europe, they believed that ' evil things' lurked in those unknown places. However, during the Renaissance, the church didn't have such a strong influence on people everyday lives. The people of the renaissance tended to be more skeptical, individualistic and optimistic. People began to think differently. There was a lot of scientific research going on at this time. Tools

developed in the Middle Ages for exploration continued to be used during the Renaissance. One of these was the astrolabe, a portable device used by sailors to help them find their way by measuring the distance of the sun and stars above the horizon, the astrolabe helped determine latitude, an important tool in navigation. Another tool, the magnetic compass, which had been invented in the twelfth century, was improved upon during the Renaissance. Maps became more reliable as Portuguese map makers, called cartographers, incorporated information provided by travelers and explorers into their work. Shipbuilding also improved during the Renaissance, as large ships called galleons became common. These ships were powered by sail rather than by men using oars.

The Renaissance was a major contributing factor that led to European contact with West Africa. It stimulated European architecture, art science and technology. Secondly, another factor that motivated the Europeans to the New World is the zeal to spread Christianity, because from as early as the 13th century Muslims had extended their influence in Europe. Also, according to Shirley Hamber, the Crusades left Europeans with feelings of hostility between Christians and Muslims. Thus, Europeans believed they had a sacred duty not only to continue fighting Muslims, but also to convert non-Christians throughout the world. Also, as stated by Eric Williams, after the Reformation, people had a new found faith and respects for the church. Europeans wanted to spread Christianity to other parts of the world, including the teachings of the Gospel. Religion was a means of control. The

more people controlled by a religion, the more power that religion had, and thus the more chance of dominance .

Europeans believed they could save souls through Christian salvation. They also believed it was their duty to spread the word of God. According to David Browne, in his book ' Atlantic Interactions', " the Europeans were possessed with a missionary zeal to convert non-Christians to Christianity and to break the stronghold of the Muslim Turks on the rich eastern trade." Thirdly, Trade was very important to Europeans, According to Burgess, 2002, " As civilization developed, so did trade. In fact, historians say that trade is a big part of what made civilization possible. Trade increased wealth and brought isolated peoples into contact with each other, resulting in exchanges of knowledge." Many nations were looking for goods such as silver and gold but one of the biggest reasons for exploration was the desire to find a new route for the spice and silk trades.

The first of the journeys associated with the Age of Discovery were conducted by the Portuguese under Prince Henry the Navigator. These voyages were different than those previously conducted by the Portuguese because they covered a much larger area. Earlier sailors relied on portolan charts which are maps created for navigators based off of land features. Because these charts relied on the ability to see land, the voyages prior to those conducted by Prince Henry stayed along the coastlines. In challenging this form of navigation, the Portuguese sailed out of sight of land and discovered the Madeira Islands in 1419 and the Azores in 1427. The main goal for the Portuguese voyages though was to discover a trade route to

West Africa without having to go through the Sahara Desert. By the mid-1400s, this goal was realized and a trading port was established at Elmina in West Africa. According to 'Amerindians to Africans' by Robert Greenwood and Shirley Hamber, "European interest in Asia developed during the 13th century after the Mongols had established some sort of order over the region from the black sea to China. The Arabs dominated trade; they supplied goods to the different European nations.

Despite the fact that the Europeans had access to gold and merchandise, it must first pass down to them by Arab middlemen. For instance, as the only source of gold was in the Niger region of West Africa, this too had to pass through Arab hands before reaching Europe." The traditional trade routes were wrought with problems. For example, the Arabs traders who controlled these routes especially over land charged exorbitant fees and by the time the goods reached Europe they were too expensive . The trade routes were infested with robbers which made it very dangerous. According to Robert Greenwood and Shirley Hamber, The Portuguese purpose was to colonize, but to establish a secure trading relationship. Prince Henry the navigator initiated the search of the West African coast. Due to his effort, by 1460 the Portuguese had explored the coast of Africa all the way to Sierra Leon. By 1498, Vasco De Gamma had rounded the Cape of Good Hope. Trade was a major contributing factor that led to the contact of West Africa.

In conclusion, the factors that led to European contact with Africa were the renaissance, their desire to spread Christianity, for an alternative trading route and for political dominance. The question is left to be asked did the

coming of the Europeans had a negative or positive effect on Africa or did Europe according to Rodney essentially underdeveloped Africa.?