

The Early Rise of Christianity

With its roots in a marginal Jewish sect, Christianity became a world religion that shook the foundations of the greatest empire in history.

Jesus of Nazareth is one of the most divisive and yet most-loved figures in world history. Although his official career lasted only about three years, and although he was executed as a criminal, Jesus left an indelible mark on the world.

The Messiah

Jesus' career started around 27 CE in rural Galilee. For centuries foreign invaders had oppressed the Jewish people and they were on the lookout for a messiah to eradicate foreign invaders, and restore the nation to its rightful state.

Many had come before Jesus claiming to be this messiah, but Jesus' message was different and his extraordinary popularity made him a threat to the religious leadership in Jerusalem. To them, he was placing himself above the Law of Moses and some felt it better to quash this popular movement before Rome came to punish the whole nation.

During one of Jesus' few trips to the city of Jerusalem, he was captured and tried for blasphemy by the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin. Unable to exercise the death penalty, the leaders called on Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. With his agreement, Jesus was beaten and crucified. With Jesus dead, the movement around him seemed to have dissolved.

The Early Church

However Jesus' death was the foundation of Christianity as we know it. Rather than running scared, his followers claimed that he was actually the Messiah. Soon Jesus-followers grew into thousands. This early "church" ran into strong opposition in Jerusalem and around 35 CE, a great persecution took place, scattering followers.

Around this time occurred one of the most decisive turning points in world history: The early church, which until now had been a marginal sect within the Jewish faith, began to accept those not of Jewish origin—Gentiles. However, while most agreed that Jesus' message applied to Jew or Gentile, many disagreed on whether they had to become Jewish to follow the Jewish messiah?

Spreading the Word

Paul of Tarsus, more than anyone else, influenced the future of Christianity on this question. Saul, as he was known, was an educated Jew and a citizen of Rome. Playing a role in the persecutions in the 30s, and in the process of carrying out arrests

of Christians, Saul himself was turned to their cause after he had a vision of Jesus and became convinced he was fighting on the wrong side. From then his whole life's purpose was turned around. He changed his name to Paul, and as one who had been a leader in suppressing the early Christian church, he then set about building it.

Paul's first mission was into synagogues, persuading them that Jesus was the Christ—the anointed one. First, he had to explain that the Christ was actually a man who had been executed as a criminal and second, that Gentiles didn't need to become Jewish to become Christian. The message was very revolutionary to preach.

Paul undertook several journeys to establish new churches. In his first trip between 46 and 48 CE, he traveled around Cyprus and Galatia, visiting the towns of Antioch, Lystra, and Derbe. After reporting back to Jerusalem, he took another co-worker, Silas, on his second trip in 49–52 CE. Paul visited the churches founded in Galatia before opening up new ground in Macedonia and Greece. He founded churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. During 53–58 CE, Paul moved to Ephesus while he continued to visit many churches and write his letters.

In 58 CE, Paul returned to Jerusalem where the furor over his revolutionary ways had reached. He was arrested, but holding Roman citizenship, he appealed to Caesar himself. Following two years imprisonment in Caesarea, Paul was taken in chains to Rome. Surviving a shipwreck on Malta, he was eventually placed under "house-arrest" in Rome. For two years he awaited trial. There is conjecture about what happened next, but it seems that by 67 CE, Paul of Tarsus, the first great missionary, was dead.

Persecutions

Meanwhile on April 19, 64 CE, fire broke out in Rome's Circus Maximus. Over nine days the fire destroyed property and human life. Emperor Nero, suspected of lighting the fire himself, tried to divert the blame. The historian Tacitus records that Nero accused the then obscure sect of Jews called Christians. Considered an "evil religion" (*prava religio*), not a legal religion (*religio licita*), they were convicted "not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind."

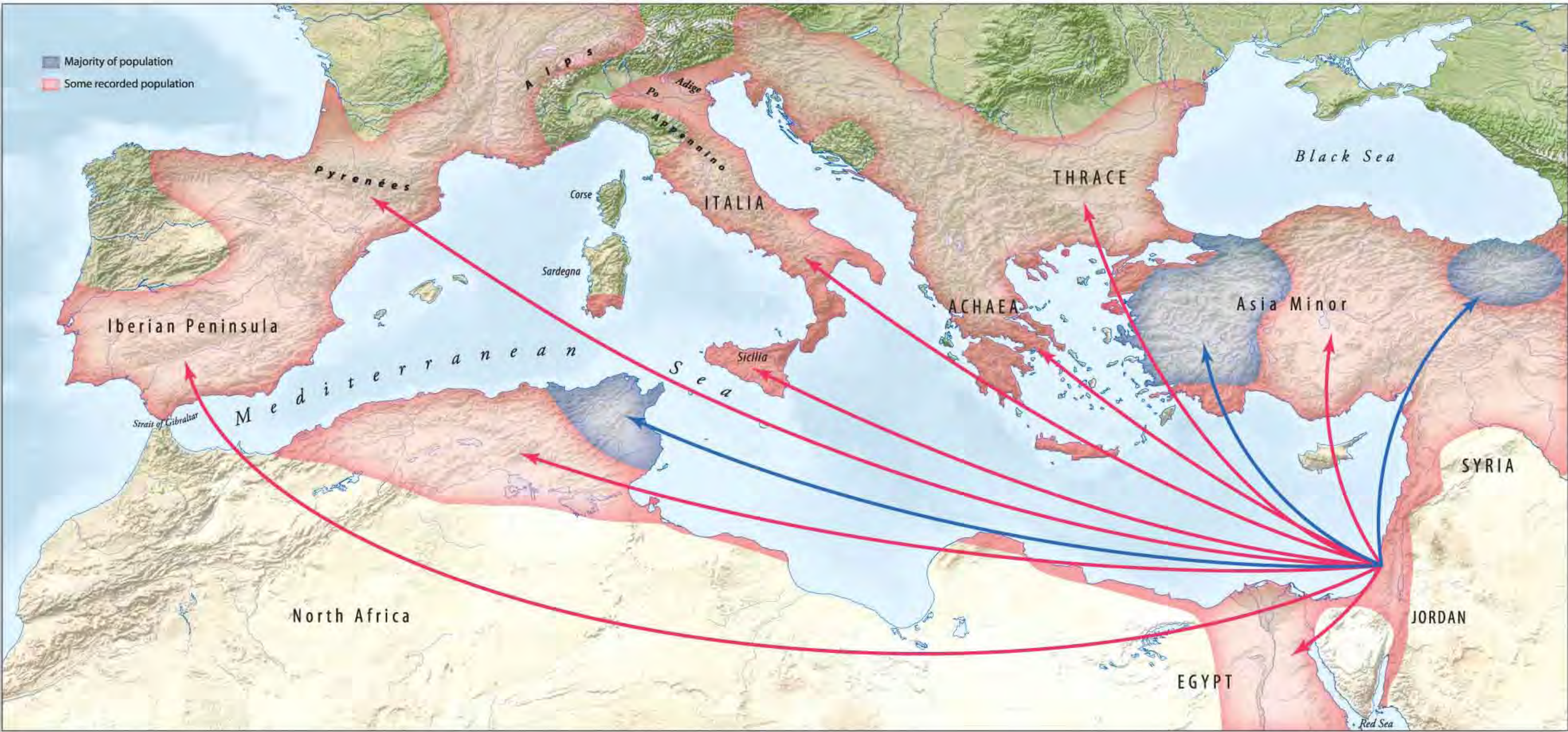
Despite undergoing similar persecutions for the next 150 years, the new Christian church grew in numbers and spread into France, Spain, North Africa, and Mesopotamia. The once small sect grew to between 5 and 6 million by 300 CE.

By 350 CE, the number of Christians in the Roman Empire was over 33 million, more than 50 percent of the population. With the conversion of Constantine in the early 300s, Christianity took a step toward becoming the "establishment" religion it was to remain for almost two millennia.



RIGHT After having a vision of Jesus, Paul of Tarsus changed his beliefs and began a life dedicated to establishing Christianity around the known world. He traveled for many years, preaching and writing his famous letters.

BELOW This rich painting in oil on panels depicts what is referred to as The Last Supper, supposedly the last meal Jesus Christ shared with his closest followers before being betrayed to the Romans. It was painted in 1482.



RIGHT Despite its beginnings of persecutions and martyrdom, Christianity came to the world at a time when the people needed a new message. As a result, it spread quickly from the urban poor to higher social groups and from small regional meetings to the building of special places of worship.

LEFT This exquisite tile mosaic depicts Paul preaching to the Jews in the synagogue at Damascus. Considered the true apostle of Christianity, Paul is depicted in many religious works of art. This scene is taken from a larger mosaic image depicting different aspects from his life.

1 CE Buddhism begins to spread from India into Central Asia.

06 CE Jesus of Nazareth is born in the town of Bethlehem.

27 CE After many conquests, Rome becomes an empire.

30 CE Jesus of Nazareth is crucified by the Romans.

64 CE Nero persecutes Christians in Rome.

100 CE Buddhism reaches through most of Asia to the east.

300 CE Christianity becomes the official religion of the Romans.



PUNISHMENT SEVERE ENOUGH?

The Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus reported that Nero punished Christians for their alleged role in the fire of Rome using the following means:

- He had them covered with animal skins and let them be eaten by dogs.
- He had them nailed to crosses.
- He had them burned as torches for light after sundown.

"Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car." *From Tacitus Annals 15.44*

RIGHT This detailed engraving shows Emperor Nero (37–68 CE) overseeing the torture of Christian followers by burning them at the stake in ancient Rome.



Conflict and Expansion in North America

In a mix of diplomatic intrigue, real estate purchases, and bloodshed, 13 small British colonies hugging the east coast of North America expanded, and the people of the United States gained sovereignty over a land they already imagined as their own.

“The right of our manifest destiny [is] to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us.” So John L. Sullivan put into memorable words. “Manifest Destiny” was one way of saying what many Americans believed: That they were a special people, with a special way of life, to whom the continent rightfully belonged.

Thirteen Colonies

During the eighteenth century, North America was home to a range of colonial concerns. The British had settled 13 colonies down the east coast. The French held a vast tract through the middle, and the Spanish held the great southwestern slab. A great diversity of Native American nations also enjoyed possession over most of the interior. Borders were anything but fixed.

Since defeating France in 1763, Britain held all territory between the Mississippi River and the Atlantic. The east coast colonies were hemmed in, however, by a British “Line of Proclamation” recognizing the right of native peoples’ sovereignty and self-rule in “reservations.” White settlement was forbidden in this so-called “Indian Territory” that was perhaps three times the size of the 13 colonies.

Independence

After the War of Independence, things began to change. The newly independent USA stood to gain a large parcel of Britain’s land to the west. Sure enough, the Paris Treaty of 1783 gave the new colonies the land from the east coast to the Mississippi. The Ohio valley was opened and settlers



RIGHT The early history of North America reveals a country occupied by many different nations. With the need to take control of their country, the people of the US set about buying the land they felt was rightly theirs. It took luck and just under a century for them to achieve their goal—ownership and control of their own destiny in the United States of America.

LEFT This oil painting shows combat between the frigate *L'Embuscade* and the *Boston* in the port of New York in 1793.

poured into what became Kentucky and Tennessee. Native Americans no longer had British protection and began to be forced westward, with many of them resettling in the area known as the Great Plains.

Real Estate

All this expansion was to be doubled by one of the better real estate purchases made in history—the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Since 1682, the French had held the territory bounded by the Missouri River in the west, and the Mississippi in the east, and from the Gulf of Mexico into what is now Canada in the north. But in 1763 they ceded it to Spain. However, Spain had given it back to France around 1800. This raised anxieties about access to the Mississippi, and so President Jefferson sent diplomats to Paris to buy an area around New Orleans and west Florida. Napoleon offered more than expected, however, and the whole Louisiana territory was bought for a price of \$15 million. Of course, it did not take into account the claim that native peoples had on the area, and this would remain a persistent issue well into the next centuries.

Go West

From 1803, the American imagination turned to the Pacific. This was further encouraged by the successful expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. President Jefferson commissioned the two to lead a “Corps of Discovery.” Leaving in 1804, they made it up the Missouri River, and crossed overland to the Pacific, reaching it in November of 1805.

The following spring they headed for home, finally reaching St Louis on September 23, 1806. One question was answered: There was no way to sail west all the way to the Pacific. Yet with the publishing of the explorer’s accounts, the public was awakened to the vast territory their government had purchased.

Gaining Florida

The Spaniards were not happy with France’s “sale” and diplomatic wrangling followed. Spain, however, was in no position to bargain in North America. First, an uprising in the Spanish territory of west Florida resulted in US troops taking control. In 1812, Congress annexed the territory and

BARGAIN REAL ESTATE

- Much of the present-day territory of the United States was purchased the good old fashioned way—with money.
- Legend has it that the island of Manhattan was bought for a mere \$24 USD.
 - The Louisiana Purchase, a land parcel of 828,000 square miles (2,145,000 km²) went for \$15 million USD.
 - California, Arizona, and Nevada were part of a 500,000 square mile (1,295,000 km²) package purchased from the Spanish for \$18.25 million USD in 1848—only months before the discovery of gold in California.
 - Alaska was purchased from the Russians in 1867 for a cool \$7.2 million USD.

absorbed half into the state of Louisiana, and half into Mississippi. Second, in the Seminole War in 1817–1818, President Monroe ordered Andrew Jackson to invade the Floridas, claiming that the Spaniards were not controlling their Indian population. In effect, the United States warred against Spain and the native Seminole Indian population. Spain finally ceded the Floridas in the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819.

However, there was still the matter of the west and John Quincy Adams did a deal. The United States would renounce its claim to Texas, and Spain would recognize the Louisiana Purchase as reaching all the way to the Pacific.

Nationalism

In the 1820s, the United States was barely more than 60 years old when the expansionist spirit further strengthened its hold. George Bancroft, one of the first historians of the United States, made such ideas popular through his voluminous,

LEFT Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where the US Constitution was written, the Declaration of Independence was first read, and the Liberty Bell was rung to acclaim its adoption.



1783 Britain and the United States sign a peace treaty.

1787 The US Constitution is adopted by the people of the new United States.

1789 George Washington becomes the first President of the United States, John Adams is Vice-president, Thomas Jefferson is Secretary of State, and Alexander Hamilton is Secretary of the Treasury.

1790 Congress meets in the temporary capital of Philadelphia. US Supreme Court meets for the first time.

1791 The Bill of Rights comes into effect.

1797 John Adams becomes the second President of the United States.

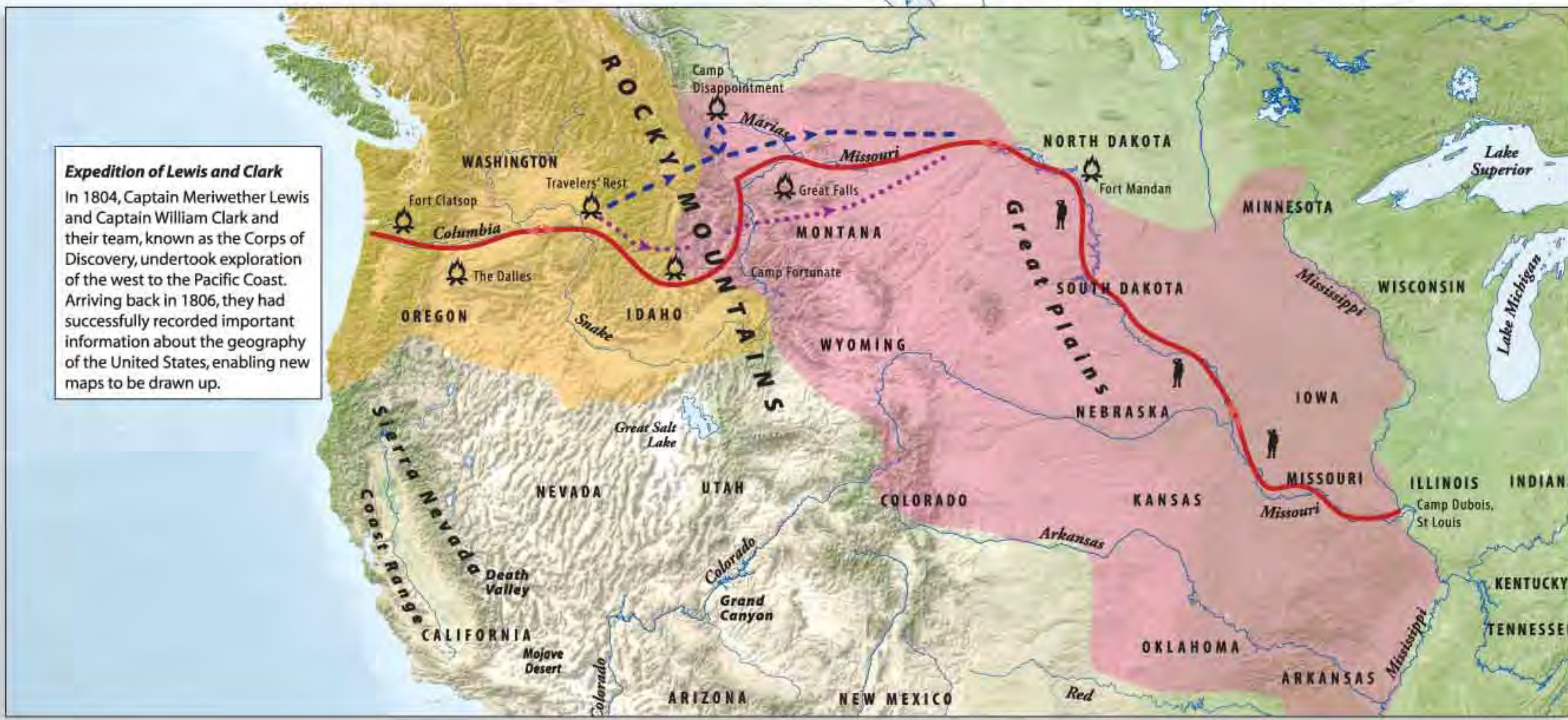
1800 Washington DC is chosen as the capital of the United States.

1803 The US buys the Louisiana Territory from France for \$15 million.

1804 Lewis and Clark begin their expedition to the west, attempting to find a sea route.

1808 The importation of slaves is prohibited.

LEFT Following the Louisiana Purchase, Captain Meriwether Lewis and Captain William Clark were commissioned on a Corps of Discovery which included finding a way to sail to the west coast. After a grueling overland expedition, they returned with the knowledge that such a voyage was impossible but their success lay in the establishment of trade routes, the study of the flora and fauna, and the drawing up of new maps.





ABOVE US state flags for Oregon, Washington State, Montana, Utah, Nevada, Oklahoma, South Dakota, New Mexico, Minnesota, Missouri, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Nebraska, North Dakota, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maryland, New Jersey, New York State, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and West Virginia.

1812 Congress declares war on Britain after the British seize US ships and assist Native Americans by supplying them with guns.

1814 British soldiers invade Washington DC and burn the Capitol. The “Star Spangled Banner” is written by Francis Scott Key—it later becomes the national anthem.

1836 Texans at the Alamo are besieged by Mexicans.

1838 The US government forces Cherokees to leave their homes and move westward for 1,200 miles (1,900 km), causing the death of thousands. The reports of the march outrage the nation.

1854 The US Supreme Court upholds slavery and denies Black Americans citizenship.

1860 Abraham Lincoln becomes the 16th president of the United States.

A NATION IN 501s
When gold was discovered in California in 1848, the mining population boomed. Merchants sprung up to supply miners’ needs, and one of these needs was tough and durable clothing. One Levi Strauss moved to California in 1853 to provide miners with canvas trousers and tents. Finding that canvas caused chafing, Strauss experimented with a French fabric called “*serge de Nîmes*,” later known as denim. Following the success of his new denim trousers, Levi Strauss & Co. was founded in 1873.

In the resulting Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, not only Texas, but all of the Pacific territory of California was incorporated into the United States. Mexico was restricted to a boundary that stretched from the Gulf of Mexico in the east to a point south of San Diego in the west. Under the treaty, a total gain of 500,000 square miles (1,295,000 km²) was made for a purchase of around \$18.25 million USD.

Gaining the Rest
The “cession” of Mexican territories left one corner of territory unclaimed. The issue of the Oregon Territory had been unresolved since John Quincy Adams had signed the Convention of 1818, in which Britain and the United States agreed to joint ownership for a period. Oregon spread north and south of the present-day US-Canada border. Yet since the territory had been opened, Americans had begun to settle in the region south of the Columbia River. In the Oregon Treaty of 1846, the British-American border was kept at the 49th parallel, and was extended to the Pacific through a more-or-less equal distribution of the coastal waterways along the west.

The territory of Maine was settled with the British in 1842. Mexico ceded a little more land—some of present-day Arizona—in the Gadsden Purchase of 1853. This finalized the US-Mexico border. Finally, Alaska was sold off by the Russians for an easy \$7.2 million USD in 1867.

The Wealth and Heartache of Gold Discovery
In 1848, just as the war with Mexico had ended, gold was discovered in California. Within two years the territory, indeed the whole west, was irreversibly transformed. The population in California boomed exponentially, as did the infrastructure. Gold required transport and access to the northeastern commercial centers. Soon the first transcontinental railroads were built. More railways meant more rail towns, and this meant disaster for many Native American nations.

The trails cut right through the heart of native buffalo territory. Not only were native food supplies cut, but their land titles were gradually eroded too. The blood-letting was perhaps worst in the so-called Plains Wars of 1850–1880, peaking in 1864 with the infamous massacre of a friendly Cheyenne group at Sand Creek. The removal and killing of Native Americans was emerging as a pattern—a consequence of feverish westward expansion. Earlier in the 1830s, removal of whole people groups from Georgia to “Indian Territory” west of the Mississippi caused thousands of deaths, and was remembered as “The Trail of Tears.”

At the end of the eighteenth century, the continent of North America had been shared by the small colonies of the United States, Spanish and Mexicans, British and French, and native peoples. However, by the close of the nineteenth century, John L. Sullivan’s “Manifest Destiny” had completed its work. Millions of dollars and thousands of lives later, the United States had occupied and settled the transcontinental territory over which it holds sovereignty today.



RIGHT Following the discovery of the routes to the west, the people of the United States began a move into the new territories that their government had purchased or won. The drive from the 13 colonies meant hardship for all, particularly the Native American inhabitants who were driven further and further away from their traditional hunting grounds.



LEFT American soldier Colonel William Washington fighting in hand-to-hand combat with British dragoon Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton along the Green River Road during the Battle of Cowpens in 1781.



BELOW Tensions over borders were greatly enhanced by the movement west of settlers in wagon trains. These wagons were lighter than the traditional ones which enabled them to be pulled by horses. Settlers had to leave behind heavy possessions and fill their wagons with the food necessary for the journey.

BOTTOM Following an agreement that exchanged the traditional lands of the Cherokee nation for those further west, US troops forced the Cherokees westward. The Cherokees were rounded up under protest and forced from their homes. The estimated death toll is around 4,000. Named the Trail of Tears, in the Cherokee language, the event is called *Nunna daul Isunyi*—“the trail where we cried.”

The World of Marco Polo

Traveling as a teenager to the far reaches of the Mongol Court, Marco Polo changed the world's perception of China.



ABOVE Marco Polo began his great journey to China with his father and uncle, gathering gifts for the Great Khan, Kublai, along the way.

- 1192** The Shogun (supreme commander) takes power from the emperor of Japan.
- 1196** Genghis Khan establishes a Mongol Empire and begins expansion into China.
- 1206** Genghis Khan declared Emperor of the Mongol Empire.
- 1210** Genghis Khan invades China.
- 1218** Genghis Khan captures the Persian Empire.
- 1219** The Mongols conquer Bokhara. Genghis Khan's destruction of irrigation in Afghanistan leads to permanent deserts in the area.
- 1223** The Mongols invade Russia.
- 1227** Genghis Khan dies and his sons divide the empire among themselves.
- 1260** Kublai becomes grand Khan of the Mongols in China.

Fifteen-year-old Marco Polo must have been awestruck when his father, Nicolo, returned home to Venice from China, with his uncle, Maffeo, and was full of amazing stories about their visit to the city of the great Mongol Emperor, Kublai Khan. The year was 1269 and it had been over nine years since Marco had seen his father.

Brother Traders

The Polos were part of an elaborate network of traders and missionaries sprawled around the Byzantine and Mongol empires. It was with Berke Khan of the “Golden Horde” that they found themselves trading jewels and precious goods. So impressed was the Khan, that he decided to send them to see the Great Khan, Kublai, emperor of the whole Mongol empire.

Being the first Latin visitors, the emperor interviewed them exhaustively about the west. As Marco Polo recorded, the Khan wanted his advisers taught Christian ways, and principles of fair and just governance. “Send me 100 persons well skilled in your law,” the great Khan instructed. “Bring me also some oil from the lamp in the Holy Sepulcher at Jerusalem.”

Maffeo and Nicolo Polo arrived back as Pope Clement had just died, leaving it impossible to gain assistance to fulfil Khan's request. After two years of protracted papal elections, Pope Gregory X filled the office in 1271. He offered to send two friars, diplomatic letters, and gifts. More significant, perhaps, was the inclusion of Nicolo's 17-year-old son, Marco.

The Silk Roads

The Polos left Venice in late 1271, sailing to Acre, then retrieved oil from the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. They then ventured

overland through Armenia and Persia, visiting Baghdad and Tabriz, with the aim of reaching the Persian Gulf and sailing the remainder of the journey. When this proved unviable the Polos reverted to the overland trip. Crossing Afghanistan, and the mighty Pamiri mountains, the Polos traversed some of the trading routes known as the Silk Roads that linked China all the way to the Mediterranean Sea.

Traditionally, the Silk Roads had operated on a kind of “relay” system, with goods being passed from one party to another and each party only completing a certain segment of the journey. The Polos, however, had to travel the whole route, but fortunately Kublai Khan ensured they received what they needed along the way.

China

In September 1275 the party reached the capital of the Mongol Empire, Dadu—present day Beijing. Here Marco Polo records: “The city is full of fine mansions, inns, and dwelling-houses. All the way down the sides of every main street there are booths and shops of every sort.”

With an encyclopedic eye, Marco observed the customs and industry of people. Particularly novel was the use of paper currency—Marco wrote: “The coinage of this paper money is authenticated with as much form and ceremony as if it were actually of pure gold and silver.” Marco soon showed an aptitude for language, learning four of those in use. Kublai Khan then appointed him as an ambassador, and eventually as governor of Yangzhou.

The Return Voyage

After 17 years, Marco and his family became anxious to return to Venice. The Great Khan

was advancing in years, and they feared for their position should he die. Their desire to leave eventually coincided with his need to send a new bride to King Arghun of India. Marco Polo offered his extensive seafaring skills to escort the young bride-to-be to India via the ocean voyage.

In 1292, a fleet of 14 ships and 600 men, set sail from Zaitun (Changchow) in China. They sailed the South China Sea, docking at modern-day Vietnam and Sumatra. They then ventured to Ceylon and finally India. Along the way, most of the 600 men were lost. Furthermore, in another change of plans, the Princess had to marry King Arghun's son, as Arghun had since died. The Polos continued on to Persia where they learned that the Great Khan had passed away too.

Late in 1295, the Polos reached Venice, with Marco now aged 41. However, it wasn't until a war between Genoa and Venice, when Marco was taken prisoner, that he dictated his journey to Rusticello da Pisa, a writer of Arthurian romance. Marco's account was published variously as *Le divasement dou monde* (The Description of the World), *Il Milione* (The Million), or later, *The Travels of Marco Polo*. The impact of the work, regardless of its fidelity, may be partly seen by its influence on Christopher Columbus, who attempted to sail west to the lands Polo so meticulously described.



Silk Roads
After crossing Afghanistan, and the mighty Pamiris, Marco Polo joined the trading routes known as the Silk Roads. These routes worked on a system of relays with parties only traveling certain sections and goods being passed from one party to another along the way.

By Sea or Land
Marco Polo, together with his father and uncle, arrived in the Persian Gulf intending to sail the rest of their journey. However, this proved unviable because of weather and they were forced to continue overland.

Return Journey
After 17 years of faithful service to the Great Khan, Marco and his family were anxious to return to Venice. Using the excuse of delivering a new bride to India, Marco set sail in a fleet of 14 ships and 600 men. The monsoons and extreme weather caused great hardship and most of the 600 men were lost. They docked in India to find King Arghun had died and the bride had to marry his son. On arrival in Persia, the Polos were informed that the Great Khan had also died.

BELOW An intricate miniature of the Bodleni manuscript from The Wonders Book, written by Marco Polo. It resides in the Correr Museum Library, Italy.



Gobi Desert
Despite assistance from Kublai Khan, some parts of Marco's journey were still very difficult. Marco wrote, “this desert is reported to be so long that it would take a year to go from end to end; and at the narrowest point it takes a month to cross it... There is nothing to eat at all.”

Arrival
Dadu was the capital city of the Mongol Empire. It is on the site of present day Beijing. Life there was very sophisticated with broad streets, fine homes, lodgings for travelers, and shops selling a huge variety of goods. One of the most intriguing things that Marco found was the use of paper currency.

ABOVE Marco Polo's journey to China was taken at a time when most the world was unexplored and navigation systems were primitive. The journals he dictated later in his life described the sophistication of China to the rest of the world.

BELOW Seen in context against the majority of the known world, the vastness of Marco Polo's epic journey can be appreciated.

