Europe and Africa

Objective: To understand European and African society before the discovery of America.
After the fall of the Rome Empire in 452 AD, most of Europe became isolated from the rest of the world.

During the Middle Ages (500 to 1400 AD), feudalism (a political system where a king or lord would give estates to nobles in exchange for their military support) became the law of the land.

Peasants were given protection in exchange for working on the noble’s land. This agreement was known as manorialism.

Many of these peasants became serfs, which meant they were bound to the lord’s will.
Feudalism continued

- Most serfs lived in one-room houses that had dirt floors.
- Their diet consisted mostly of bread and ale, although they also ate porridge and a few types of vegetables.
The Church

- During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church provided stability and order.
- It established hospitals and schools.
- With its laws addressing doctrine and morals, it united western Europeans.
- Holy days of obligation were the only days peasants would get off of work.
Expanding Horizons

- Invention of the horse collar and more efficient plows allowed farmers to grow more.
- This surplus of food allowed the revival of trade and the growth of cities.
- As Islam became a threat to the Byzantine Empire, Pope Urban II urged Christians to take up arms and regain the holy land.
- These expeditions became known as the Crusades.
Crusades

- A total of nine expeditions took place to the Holy land.
- Although initially successful in the first two crusades, eventually the Muslims regained the holy land.
Results of the Crusades

- Helped break down feudalism. As kings raised taxes and armies, the nobles sold their land to join the crusades, thus freeing the serfs.
- Trade increased between Europe and the Middle Eastern civilizations. Europeans began importing spices, sugar, and silk from Asia.
- Arab traders demanded money instead of bartering, which led to a rise in the economy. The demand for gold increased to make coins.
- Europeans began to search for a cheaper way to access these goods in Asia, which led to the Age of Exploration.
Emergence of Strong States

- The rise of towns and merchants gave kings and queens more revenue from taxes.
- They used their armies to open up and protect trade routes and establish a common currency in their kingdoms.
- Four strong states emerged from the Middle Ages. They were Portugal, Spain, England, and France.
- These states began to explore other continents in order to expand their trade and power.
Scientific Advances

- The **Renaissance** (rebirth in learning) took place from about 1350 to 1600.
- This was a renewed interest in the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome.
- The philosophical and mathematic works of these cultures were rediscovered.
- Europeans also discovered Arabic teachings, which helped them acquire the **astrolabe**, which was an important navigational instrument.
- The astrolabe and the compass (a Chinese invention) allowed navigators to travel long distances.
- Improvements in ship building allowed ships to become faster.
Prince Henry of Portugal recruited mapmakers, astronomers, and shipbuilders from the Mediterranean to study and plan voyages of exploration.

During the 1420s, Portuguese captains had explored much of the west coast of Africa with caravels (ships incorporated with the latest technology).

By 1488, Bartolomeu Dias reached the southern tip of Africa and in 1495, Vasco da Gama reached the coast of India.

Portugal began trading with West African merchants.

They imported gold, ivory, pepper, palm oil, and enslaved Africans to work on their sugar plantation.