



What's in a Date?

"In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue ..." was taught to every child in elementary school. That date became a benchmark for the study of the discovery of the New World. Little was said about the events of that date, which played an important part of shaping the modern world in six ways.

First, King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile completed the Reconquista of Spain, driving the last of the Muslim Moors out of Spain on Jan. 2, 1492. The Moors had been in Spain for 800 years, and the *Song of Roland* and the *Poem of the Cid* told the story of the struggle.

Second, with the Muslims out of Spain, King Ferdinand II signed the Edict of Expulsion on March 31, 1492. This gave the Jews of Spain four months to leave Spain. The Muslims of North Africa sent ships to help the evacuation. Queen Isabella had asked the Pope to begin what is known as the Spanish Inquisition in 1480 to "purify" the country. The Jewish population along with the Muslims made up a large percentage of the middle class of Spain. Many Jews had moved to Portugal and then to Brazil, where they developed the diamond trade. When the Inquisition came to Portugal, the Jews moved to Amsterdam, Holland, which is a diamond center today.

Third, on Aug. 3, 1492, Columbus set sail for India and China. He had the advantages of the compass and knowledge of the ocean currents. Once he returned, a series of events occurred to complement the food supply to the human population.

The Columbians exchanged goods between the New and Old worlds, which had a major impact on both worlds. For example, maize, or corn, and potatoes were added to the Old World products of wheat and rice. Corn and potatoes would grow where wheat and rice would not grow, thus doubling the food supply.

The increase in food production created the need for more labor, and the cheapest labor force is children. The increase in available food provided for better nutrients, which caused a population explosion that soared after 1492.

Finally, after hundreds of years of war in Spain, what was to be done with the professional warriors? The answer lay in the New World. Spain would send their military veterans to the New World as conquistadors to conquer the native population.

Another date that is identified by one event is 1914 and the beginning of the Great War. The war developed weapons, radios, chemicals, air industry, and scores of other new and improved things. That year would establish Albert Einstein's theory with a solar eclipses in August 1914. The war delayed the proof of Einstein's theory until 1919.

In December of 1913, Henry Ford began his moving assembly line to mass-produce his Model T cars. Then in 1914, he started paying his workers \$5 a day. Industry would create a new industrial age with the development of the zipper, stainless steel, wristwatches, many products from the Kimberly-Clark company, and CelluCotton.

That same year saw the Panama Canal open, allowing faster transfer of shipping from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans.

A date is a reference point. Sometimes, the broader history is lost in the focus of one event.

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