The Latin West 1200-1500

So, what should you know?

- The causes and consequences of Europe’s fourteenth century demographic disaster
- The significance in world history of technological development and urbanization in the Latin West in the later Middle Ages
- The intellectual development of the later Middle Ages reflected Westerners’ views of themselves and their relationship to the past
- The Hundred Years War and the emergence of the “new monarchies” laid the foundations for the modern European state system.

RURAL GROWTH AND CRISIS
Peasants, population, and plague

- In 1200, most Europeans were peasants, bound to the land in serfdom and using really bad agricultural practices.
- Women labored in the field with men but were subordinate to them. Surprise.
- Europe’s population more than doubled between 1000 and 1445. Population growth was accompanied by new agricultural technologies in northern Europe including the three-field system and THE CULTIVATION OF OATS! (I thought that was really exciting.)

- As population grew, people opened new land for cultivation, including land with poor soil and poor growing conditions. This caused a decline in average crop yields beginning around 1250.
The population pressure was eased by the Black Death (bubonic plague), which was brought from Kaffa to Italy and Southern France in 1347. The plague ravaged Europe for two years and returned periodically in the late 1300s and 1400s, causing substantial decreases in population.

Social Rebellion
- As a result of the plague, labor became more expensive in Western Europe. This caused a series of peasant and worker uprisings, higher wages, and the end of serfdom. Serfdom in Eastern Europe grew extensively in the centuries after the Black Death.
- Rural living standards improved, the period of apprenticeship for artisans was reduced, and per capital income rose.

Mills and mines
- Between 1200 and 1500, Europeans invented and used a variety of mechanical devices including water wheels and windmills. Mills were expensive to build but brought great profits to their owners over time.
- Industrial enterprises including mining, ironworking, stone quarrying, and tanning grew during these centuries. The results included both greater productivity and environmental damage including water pollution and deforestation.

URBAN RENEWAL
Trading cities
- Increases in trade and in manufacturing contributed to the growth of cities after 1200. The relationship between trade, manufacturing, and urbanization is demonstrated
in the growth of the cities of northern Italy and in the urban areas of Champagne and Flanders (where Ned, Rod, and Todd live).

- The Venetian capture of Constantinople (1204), the opening of the Central Asian caravan trade under the Mongol Empire, and the post-Mongol development of the Mediterranean galley trade with Constantinople, Beirut, and Alexandria brought profits and growth to Venice. The increase in sea trade also brought profits to Genoa in the Mediterranean and to the cities of the Hanseatic League (a trade alliance in northern Europe) in the Baltic and the North Sea.

- Flanders prospered not only from the Leftotorium but also from its woolen textile industries. Champagne benefited from New Year’s Eve and from its position on the major land route through France and the series of trade fairs sponsored by the nobles.
- Textile industries also began to develop in England and in Florence. Europeans made extensive use of water wheels and windmills in the textile, paper, and other industries.

Civic Life

- Some European cities were city-states, while others enjoyed autonomy from local nobles. They were then better able to respond to changing market conditions than the Chinese or Islamic cities were. European cities also offered citizens more freedom and social mobility.
- Most of Europe’s Jews lived in the cities. They were—news flash!—blamed for any sort of disasters like the Black Death and expelled from Spain.
- Guilds regulated the practice of and access to trades. Women were rarely allowed to join guilds but worked in unskilled non-guild jobs in the textile industry and in the food and beverage trade.
The growth in commerce gave rise to bankers like the Medicis of Florence and the Fuggers of Augsburg. These bankers handled financial transactions for merchants, the church, and the kings and princes of Europe. Because the Church prohibited usury (interest), many moneylenders were Jews. Christian bankers got around this by asking for “gifts” instead of interest.

Gothic Cathedrals
- Gothic cathedrals were masterpieces and very, very big. Their identifying characteristics are the pointed Gothic arch, flying buttresses, high towers and spires, and large interiors lit by huge windows.
- The men who designed and built these cathedrals were not formally trained but rather just learned through their mistakes.

LEARNING, LITERATURE, AND THE RENAISSANCE

Universities and scholarship
- After 1100, Western Europeans got access to Greek and Arabic works on science, philosophy, and medicine. These manuscripts were translated by Jewish scholars and studied at Christian monasteries, which remained as the primary source and centers of learning.
- After 1200, colleges and universities were established. Some were started by students. However, most were teaching guilds established by professors in order to oversee the training, control the membership, and fight for the interests of the profession.
- Universities generally specialized in a particular branch of learning. Bologna was known for its law school, and others were known for medicine or theology. Theology was the most popular discipline because scholars were
attempting to justify the scholasticism movement with theology.

Humanists and printers

- Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) and Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400) were among the great writers of the late Middle Ages. Dante wrote *Divine Comedy*, which tells about the author’s journey through the nine layers of Hell and his entry into Paradise. Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* is the story of everyday people on a pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral.

- Dante influenced the intellectual movement of the humanists—people like Petrarch and Boccaccio. These scholars were interested in the humanities and in the classical literature of Greece and Rome. The humanists had a great influence in the reform of education.

- Some of the humanists wrote in the vernacular, but most wrote in Greek or Latin. Some worked at restoring the original text of the Bible. Erasmus produced a critical edition of the New Testament.

- The humanists’ influence was increased by the development of the printing press in 1454. Johann Gutenberg was the mastermind of the printing press. By 1500, more than 200 printers had produced more than 10 million printed works.

Renaissance artists

- Fourteenth and fifteenth century artists were more realistic in their works. Jan van Eyck helped to develop the use of oil paint, and Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo were two of the most influential artists.

- Wealthy patrons like the Medicis of Florence and the church contributed to the development of Renaissance
art. The developments and innovations of this period of time were later adopted all over the world.

POLITICAL AND MILITARY TRANSFORMATION

Monarchs, nobles, and the church

- Thirteenth century European states were ruled by weak monarchs whose power was limited by their modest budgets, the regional nobility, the independent towns, and the church.
- The development of the armor-piercing crossbow and of firearms began to undermine the importance of the nights (and the feudal system).
- King Phillip the Fair of France reduced the church’s power when he arrested the pope and had a new French pope installed at Avignon. However, the monarchs still faced resistance, especially from the stronger vassals. The Norman Invasion of 1066 in England had strengthened the royal power there, but the kings continued to have their power curtailed by the pope and by English nobles. The nobles forced the king to recognize their rights in the Magna Carta in 1215.

The Hundred Years War

- The Hundred Years War was France against England. The English King Edward III claimed the French throne in 1337 when the French king died heirless (he only had dumb daughters, no sons). The war was fought with the new military technology like crossbows, longbows, pikes (pulled knights off horses), firearms, and a new nifty cannon.
- The French finally defeated the English after Joan of Arc (a dumb girl) saved the day—and the nation. The war left the French monarchy in a very strong position governmentally.
New Monarchies in England and France

- The new monarchies after the Hundred Years War had stronger central governments, more stable national boundaries, and stronger representative institutions. Both the English and French monarchs consolidated their control over their nobles.
- New military toys, especially the cannon and hand-held firearms, made our rusty tin-can knight outdated. The new monarchs depended on standing armies (not sitting armies) of bowmen, pikemen, musketeers, and artillery units.
- The new monarchs, in order to get more money to pay for these armies, taxed land, merchants, and the church.
- By the end of the 15th century, there was a shift in power from the church to the monarchs. It wasn’t complete, though, and the English king had to answer to the Parliament and the French king to the Estates General.

Iberian Unification

- Spain and Portugal became strong, centralized states through a process of marriage alliances, mergers, warfare, and the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslims. Reconquest offered the nobility large landed estates. That way, the nobility could become rich without having to work.
- The reconquest took place over a period of several years but really picked up speed after the Christians began to push the Muslims out of Spain in 1212.
- Portugal was established in 1249. The Portuguese captured the Moroccan port of Ceuta in 1415, which gave them access to the trans-Saharan trade.
- Castile and Aragon were united in 1469, and the Muslims were driven out of the Iberian peninsula all together when the Christians took over Granada in 1492. That
same year, the Jews and Muslims (Moors) were pushed out of Spain, and Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

CONCLUSION

❖ The people of the Latin West proved very capable at using natural resources but were unable to prevent overpopulation, famine, and plague.
❖ The basic political, military, economic, intellectual, and cultural characteristics of the West emerged between 1200 and 1500.
❖ During these centuries, economic growth and the use of technology borrowed from points farther east put the Latin West in a position to project its military power and culture abroad.