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The Adventurers Motives Toward Exploring the New World

I have neither given nor received help on this work, nor am I aware of any infraction of the Honor Code. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

In the 15th century, many parts of Europe were eager to make their way over to the New World. Not knowing much about this uncharted territory inspired explorers to load up their ships and claim it as their own. After making this trip across the Atlantic, the explorers could start fresh. Just as R. W. B. Lewis explains the traits of a “new American” he states, “An individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources” (Lewis 5). The explorers could be this “hero” if they were successful in the explorations to America. The explorers made their voyage to the New World in search of fairly simplistic ideas: land, wealth, and religion are just three of many motivations of the explorers.

A strong motive for many, if not all explorers was the desire for new land. Claiming land for their home countries would bring them great fame and honor. Christopher Columbus was from Spain, who sought for Gold, God, and Glory in the New World. In a letter from Columbus’ first voyage he explains, “And there I found very many islands filled with people innumerable, and of them all I have taken possession for their highnesses, by proclamation made and with the royal standard unfurled, and no opposition was offered to me” (Columbus 25). While showing great honor in claiming this land for the king and queen of Spain, Columbus seemed to be detached from the people and more interested in the new land and economic opportunities. The abundance of land was a powerful pull for explorers.

The second motive for the explorers was their determination to acquire wealth, specifically gold. John Smith was an explorer for England, whose main motivation was to find gold, but after digging and digging they found that there was no gold. After realizing there wasn't any gold, Smith tried to find other ways to convince the people of England to come to the New World, but the hope for wealth was gradually disappearing so it was becoming more difficult. In the beginning of Smith’s explorations he was boastful and proud, but after returning to England he felt that same hope disappearing. Smith wrote in *A Description of New England* that, “For, I am not so simple to think, that ever any other motive than wealth, will ever erect there a commonwealth; or draw company from their ease and humors at home, to stay in New England to effect my purposes” (Smith 71). He explains that people, including himself, will not go over to New England unless there is wealth involved.

Another motive for the explorers was the ability to spread their religious beliefs. Religion had been extremely important in Europe and now there was a way to spread their beliefs to other people. Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca had similar motives to other explorers, but also wished to share his religion with the Natives. De Vaca wrote that, “Since this narrative, in my opinion, is of no trivial value for those who go in your name to subdue those countries and bring them to a knowledge of the true faith and true lord and bring them under the imperial dominion, I have written very exactly” (De Vaca 30). Though he had complex feelings toward the Native Americans, he wanted to share his knowledge of the Lord with them.

In conclusion, some of the explorers motivations to come to the New World were a success, while others were not. Though explorers had their own individual hopes and wants for the New World; land, wealth, and religion were three of the more dominate motivations of explorers. The explorers not only wanted to honor their home land, but also make discoveries that will be known in history forever.

Citations

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