

The "European Miracle"
By Paul Kennedy

The one feature of Europe that immediately strikes the eye when looking at a map of the world's "power centers" in the sixteenth century is its **political fragmentation**. For a thousand years after the fall of Rome, the basic political power unit had been small and localized, in contrast to the steady expansion of the Christian religion and culture.

1. Put "political fragmentation" in your own words. Use context clues:

For this political diversity Europe had largely to thank its geography. There were no enormous planes over which an empire of horsemen could impose swift dominion; nor were there there broad and fertile river zones like those around the Ganges, Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates. Europe's landscape was much more **fractured**, with mountain ranges and large forests separating the **scattered population centers** in the valleys; and its **climate altered considerably** from north to south and west to east.

2. Explain how each **BOLD** phrase was an advantage for Europe:

Probably the most important characteristics of this **commerce** was that it consisted of primary *bulk* products- timber, grain, wine, wool, herrings, and so on, **catering to the rising population of fifteenth-century Europe**, rather than the luxuries carried on the oriental caravans.

3. Put the paragraph above in your own words:

Being surrounded by seas was a further incentive to the vital fishing industry, and by the later Middle Ages a flourishing maritime commerce was being carried out between the Baltic, the North Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea. **Regular long-distance exchanges of wares in turn encouraged the growth of bills of exchange, a credit system, and banking on an international scale.** The very existence of mercantile credit, and then of bills of insurance, pointed to a basic predictability of economic conditions which private traders had hitherto rarely, if ever, enjoyed anywhere in the world.

4. Why did banking systems develop in Europe?

5. Why do solid banking practices lead to trade?

In addition, because much of this trade was carried through the rougher waters of the North Sea and Bay of Biscay- and also because long-range fishing became an important source of nutrient and wealth- shipwrights were forced to build tough (if rather slow and inelegant) vessels capable of carrying large loads and finding their motive power in winds alone. The political and social consequences of this decentralized, largely unsupervised growth of commerce and merchants and ports and markets were of the greatest significance. In the first place, there was no way in which such economic development could be fully suppressed. But the basic fact was that there existed no uniform authority in Europe which could effectively halt this or that commercial development; no central government whose changes in priorities could cause the rise and fall of a particular industry.

6. What are two main ideas of the preceding paragraph.

7. Do you find Kennedy's assertions valid? Why or why not?