

CONQUEST *of America*



Northwest

The Northwest coast of North America was one of the last territories to be conquered by Europeans. As Russia became eager to join other European powers in the conquest of this land mass, Peter the Great sent a convoy to determine whether there was a pathway from Asia to North America. Led by Danish sea captain Vitus Bering, an initial expedition failed. Bering quickly regrouped, however, and launched the longest expedition ever undertaken, setting out from St. Petersburg and achieving a triumphant discovery of Alaska eight years later. Bering's voyage sparked decades of Russian settlement as they traveled down the coast and became active in the lucrative fur trade. Meanwhile, the Spanish and British were drawn to this region as news of the riches of sea otter pelts pulled them to present day Northern California. This territory quickly became a region of contest between European nations as they attempted to capitalize on abundant natural resources and to control the native peoples who had flourished there for centuries.

Conquest of America: Northwest is a one hour program in a larger series on the early exploration of North America and the transformations these events unfurled. The dramatic risks and rewards of exploration and conquest are brought to life in this episode as dialogue is delivered in the words of first person documents such as journals, diaries, and testimonies. These documents help present a captivating portrait of conflicts between nations as the Russians construct Fort Ross, the Spanish establish missionaries, the British send the fabled explorer Captain Cook, and as Native American groups formed alliances in an effort to protect their way of life. This program outlines both the attractiveness of this region and the difficult tensions among European powers determined to seize it. In the span of the story told here, California is transformed from a sparsely populated land to a rapidly expanding economic power driven by the rush for gold. Educators and their students will find that this show provides an excellent framework for studying New World exploration and Native American relations, and introduces students to these critical early chapters which helped make California the economic and cultural stronghold it has become.

CURRICULUM LINKS:

Conquest of America: Northwest would be useful for courses on U.S. history, global studies, World Civilization, World Cultures, and California state history. It is appropriate for middle school and high school. This documentary fulfills several National Standards guidelines as outlined by the National Council for History Education including: Values, Beliefs, Political Ideas and Institutions, Conflict and Cooperation, Human Interaction with the Environment and Comparative History of Major Developments.

KEY IDENTIFICATIONS AND TERMS:

Bering, Vitus
dowry
encroach
garrison
maritime
missionary
naturalist
Rezanov, Nicolai
ruse
scurvy
seafarer

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Peter the Great want to support an expedition to North America? What was he hoping to find?
2. Why did Bering's first expedition fail? What were his main fears once the expedition reached Alaska?
3. Why did the Russians travel south to the area of Northern California?
4. What did the Russians find was a very profitable item to trade? Who did they trade with?
5. Why were the Spanish hesitant to trade with the Russians?
6. What were relations like between the Russians and Native Americans? How did their relationships and interactions differ from that of the Spanish? Do you agree or disagree with the way these nations treated the native populations?
7. Do you think Nicolai Rezanov, the Russian American company official, proposed to the daughter or California's governor out of love or for political reasons?
8. Why did the Spanish claim that the West Coast of North America was theirs? How long had they been in the area?
9. Why did the Russians fail to establish a long term colony in North America? What were the biggest obstacles they faced?
10. At the end of the documentary, what major transformation was set to change California forever? How do you think the Russians would have acted differently if they had known about this potential development?

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES:

1. Vitus Bering's expedition to Alaska was a monumental achievement which took many years and included thousands of people. At the library or using the Internet,

- research Bering's journey. Locate a map of his route and the key statistics for the expedition. On a poster-board, a long piece of roll out paper, or on construction paper, paste or draw a map of Bering's route. Decorate your project with images and facts you discover about the 1741 expedition. Include on your map the modern day waterway named after Bering!
2. Throughout California, the Spanish established unique settlements called missions. These missions served the dual purpose of producing crops for trade and sustenance and of converting native populations to Christianity. These missions were central to the development of California, and were also very controversial for their treatment of Native Americans. At the library or using the Internet, research the history of missions in Northern California. Write a short essay of 2-3 pages describing the history of one mission, or create a drawing or 3-D model of a mission of your choice. Include with your creative project facts about when the mission was founded and when it closed. Have a larger discussion with your class or group on the role of missions and your assessment of them
 3. Often times, the relationships which developed in the New World had both personal and political implications. This was certainly the case with the marriage of Count Nikolai Rezanov to Doña Concepción Argüello, the daughter of the Spanish leader. At the library or using the Internet, research the story of their marriage. Then, write your own short story telling this tale and include in your ending how you think both of them felt at the end of their marriage. Use your creativity in writing this story, it does have all the elements of a soap opera!

Additional Resources

Books:

Frost, Orcutt, *Bering: The Russian Discovery of America*, (Yale University Press, 2003).
Hayes, Derek, *Historical Atlas of the Pacific Northwest: Maps of Exploration and Discovery: British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Yukon*, (Sasquatch Books, 1999).

Steller, George Wilhelm and Orcutt Frost, *Journal of a Voyage with Bering, 1741-1742*, (Stanford University Press, 1993).

Van Steenwyk, Elizabeth, *The California Missions (First Books - Examining the Past)*, (Franklin Watts, 1998).

Web sites:

A synopsis of the Russian-American Company's role in North America:

<http://www.parks.sonoma.net/rosshist.html>

A useful activity on California missions:

<http://www.eduplace.com/ss/hmss/4/unit/act2.2.html>

Additional background on the history of California missions:

<http://www.lodi.gov/library/missions.htm>

Background and history on the Russian settlement Fort Ross:

<http://www.basecamp.cnchost.com/fortross.htm>