



## Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VI

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

3. Evaluate the causes and effects of major historical events, including the influence of key individuals, institutions, and ideologies.
  - 3.1 Recall key individuals and their influence on major historical events.
6. Appraise relevant and irrelevant sources or evidence.
7. Create conclusions through the examination of facts about Western Civilization.

## Reading Assignment

### Chapter 10:

Life in Villages and Cities of the High Middle Ages, 1000-1300

### Chapter 11:

The Later Middle Ages, 1300-1450

## Unit Lesson

Unit VI looks at the events of the late Middle Ages, most notably the Black Death, the Hundred Years War, and the problems in the Roman Catholic Church.

### The Black Death

The ravages of disease have haunted mankind for millennia. The eruption of the Black Death worsened from nightmare to perhaps the worst biological disaster in human history. The Black Death has been most commonly identified as the bubonic plague, a bacteria spread by flea bites. The 14th century outbreak originated in China, with untold numbers of deaths, and slowly spread westward along the trade routes. Reports of the devastating epidemic slowly spread to Europe, but the first victims did not arrive until December 1347 as ships carrying dead crews ran aground or were brought into ports in the Mediterranean Sea. From these port cities, the plague spread outward, eventually entangling all of Europe in its grasp. Only a few scattered cities were spared.

In its wake, entire communities were left without a soul, and in others, not enough were left to bury all the dead. Mass graves and the stench of death were a constant for three years. It is estimated by archaeologists that one plague grave, not far from London, contained more than 50,000 dead. Upwards of 25 million died in Europe alone between 1347 and 1350 during the outbreak. This represented about one-in-three Europeans. Populations would not reach pre-plague levels until the eighteenth century.

While modern medicine can treat the plague with antibiotics, no treatments existed at that time. Four-in-five infected patients died from plague without treatment. Approximately two in five of all priests and peasants died from the dreaded epidemic. In the years following the plague, death became a common subject in the art and literature, and the numbers of violent deaths across Europe spiked.

The effects of the Black Death were dramatic. Because of the deaths of so many nobles, few of the rulers of Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth century were direct descendants of the rulers at the beginning of the fourteenth century, though no national government collapsed because of the epidemic.

The Black Death weakened the feudal system in Western Europe as peasants now had new economic opportunities. Wages for laborers rose dramatically in most areas. In London, Parliament passed the Statute of Laborers in 1351, demanding all wages return to pre-plague levels, but these efforts failed. In France, peasants rose up in a rebellion called the Jacquerie, which nearly toppled the king and aristocracy in 1358 before being crushed. In 1378 in Florence, Italy, the *ciompi* arose. The *ciompi* were woolworkers who demanded greater wages and the right to participate in Florence's republic. While some concessions were granted to keep the population quiet, the Florentine aristocrats double-crossed the *ciompi* and stripped them of their gains by 1382. The English Peasant's Rebellion of 1381 was sparked by a generation of rising expectations and King Richard II's attempts to suppress the rise of the common man. He was nearly toppled in the revolt before he regained control of England.

## **The Hundred Years War**

The Hundred Years War was one of the longest wars in history, but it was a series of wars rather than one continuous conflict. Long pauses and truces dotted the history of this war between England and France over the control of France itself. English kings, by the fourteenth century, had considered themselves heirs to the French throne. Philip VI of France and Edward III of England competed for the throne after the death of King Charles IV of France in 1328. Nobles selected Philip, but Edward continued with his efforts to strengthen his political positions to possibly secure Aragon, Scotland, and France for an increasingly powerful England.

Fearful of Edward's intentions, in 1337 Philip VI seized Gascony, a land held by Edward that encompassed most of Southwestern France. Edward III thus declared war on France, using the invasion as a pretext. The Hundred Years War was on. By 1346, the English had the French on the ropes after their victory at the Battle of Crecy, but the war was postponed because of the advancing Black Death. Afterward, fighting was sporadic until the death of Edward III in 1377. Edward's successor, Richard II, agreed to a truce with France in 1396, fracturing his already weakened position on the throne. He was overthrown by Henry IV in 1399.

In 1413, Henry V, a young, ambitious, and able King, took the English throne. He saw the weaknesses of the unstable Charles VI, and renewed the war against France once again. Using new techniques, he was able to smash through French defenses, and increasing numbers of French nobles began siding with the English. At Agincourt in 1415, the armor-piercing Welsh Longbow left more than one thousand French nobles dead, eviscerating the usefulness of knights in battle once and for all. By 1419, the Duke of Orleans allied officially with Henry V, and the Burgundians took a large swath of northern and central France. The Armagnacs, the nobles committed to Charles VI, continued to back a kind they were comfortable they could manipulate.

Charles VI agreed to the Treaty of Troyes in 1420, allowing Henry V to marry his daughter and naming him as the next King of France. However, Henry V was unable to enjoy this victory as he died in 1422 of illnesses contracted while fighting the Armagnacs. His infant son, Henry VI, was crowned, but the regents that Henry V had placed in charge of England proved unable to rule England or end the war in France. Charles VI died two months after Henry V, and his son, Charles VII, was crowned.

A new chapter opened with the emergence of Joan of Arc, a 17-year-old peasant in 1429. She told Charles VII that God had told her to lead France to victory. The king gave her permission to join the troops, where she soon joined in the fighting and inspired the French troops to resist and overpower the English. However, she was captured by the Burgundians in 1430 and then turned over to the Roman Catholic Church, who had her tried and burned at the stake in 1431 for heresy (the verdict was overturned by the church in 1456). But the tide of the war had turned inexorably against England, whose rule was whittled to the small port of Calais by 1453 when the war finally ended.

## **The Great Schism**

As the power of the Roman Catholic Church grew in the Middle Ages, with its influence over culture, political alliances, government, and the common man, some began to see the church as a tool for their own ends. While many served the church with noble intentions of seeking spiritual truths and serving the needy, others sought to enter the church power structure to satisfy their own greed for power and wealth.

Several popes and other church officials attempted to crack down on corruption and secular influences on the church, with varying degrees of success. The situation eventually led to a split in the church. In the late thirteenth century, King Philip IV of France sought to tax church lands. When Pope Boniface VIII objected, it led to a bitter showdown. Debate over the authority of church and state escalated. By 1302, the church issued

the Unam Sanctam, stating that all kings must subject themselves to the authority of the Pope as the head of the church, and the King was excommunicated from the church.

Philip IV responded by sending his army to Italy to arrest the Pope. Upon hearing of his arrest, Italians took to the streets, surrounding the French troops and demanding the Pope's release. Italian nobles soon managed to secure his release, and the Pope returned safely to the Vatican. However, he died a few months later, allegedly of a heart attack. His successor, Pope Benedict XI, died less than a year later, apparently of poisoning.

Philip IV manipulated the College of Cardinals into electing a French cardinal as pope, guaranteed to cement his power over the church. Clement V thus became Pope in 1305, and the papacy moved from Rome to Avignon, just across the border from France and within reach of Philip's armies. This period from 1305-1378 became known as the Avignon Papacy, and the popes quickly moved to increase French control of the church, with five in six of all new cardinals coming from France. The papacy returned to Rome in 1378 when Pope Gregory XI was convinced by a lowly peasant woman, Catherine of Siena, that her vision from God commanded him to make the move.

The move to Rome and the death of Gregory XI only intensified the divisions in the church as the Great Schism erupted. Italians insisted on an Italian successor who would keep the papacy at the Vatican. However, French cardinals insisted the election of Pope Urban VI was corrupted, elected their own pope, and sent him to Avignon. As a result, two men now claimed to be pope, with church officials and secular rulers across Europe defending one faction or another. Each pope denounced and excommunicated the other, denouncing the other as an "anti-pope" or even as an "anti-Christ."

The conciliar movement emerged by some church leaders, attempting to negotiate a way out of the schism. The solution of the Council of Pisa in 1409 was to start over by deposing the two existing popes and electing a third. However, none of the others would step aside. The Council of Constance finally ended the divisions in 1417 with the accession of Martin V. The council then proceeded to discuss ways to solve other church issues and repair the damage done to the church.

## Suggested Reading

The following textbook is optional. It has additional readings that correspond with the topics covered in the course textbook, and you may find these sources interesting. You will not be tested on any information from this textbook:

McKay, J. P., Crowston, C. H., Weisner-Hanks, M. E., & Perry, J. (2014). *Sources for western society: From antiquity to the enlightenment* (3rd ed., Vol. 1). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.