



**Speaker 1:** Although the first explorers to discover the Americas were Italian and Portuguese, it was the countries of Northern Europe, in particular England, France and Holland that seized the economic opportunities that lay in the vast natural resources of the American continents and the Caribbean islands. Products such as cocoa, sugar, cotton and tobacco soon became staples of the European economy.

This exploded the merchant class to much larger proportions and it allowed the fortunes of the European courts to increase. This infusion of wealth was very good for the arts. This began a period of time when there were more wealthy and affluent households. Those estates started to amass large collections of paintings and to hire court composers and musicians. Yay.

**[00:00:54] [END OF AUDIO]**