## Why did the Great Divergence Happen? ER Name:

From 1200-1600, Europe went from being not as advanced as its neighbors to being the most advanced region in the world. The following perspectives will each make an argument about why this might have happened.

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| **Perspective 1 – Discovery of the Americas**  Upon discovering the Americas in the 1490s, Europe began a race to conquer as much of it as they possibly could. The natives were in no position to successfully resist this invasion and were slowly conquered, enslaved, forcibly assimilated, and killed. This gave Europe an enormous amount of cheap land, which allowed them to start an incredibly profitable slave economy which massively enriched Europe’s rulers. |
| **Summarize this perspective:** |

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| **Perspective 2 – the Black Death**  The Black Death hit Europe harder than anywhere else. Much of Eurasia saw 20-30% of their population killed. Europe, on the other hand, saw perhaps 50% or even greater. Ironically, this was an advantage for Europe.  The Black Death did many beneficial things to Europe. It crippled the conservative landlords who had for centuries kept Europe tied to a inefficient feudal economy. It also made the average person far wealthier because there were so few common folk left that their labor was very in demand and they could suddenly afford things like land, machines, and luxuries.  This led to a period of rapid economic growth, the creation of new industries and machines, and the development of capitalism. Additionally, the Black Death caused people to question the conservative church. This all contributed to the eventual scientific revolution and later industrial revolution—and it was all possible because of the Black Death. |
| **Summarize this perspective:** |
| **Perspective 3 – The Military Revolution:** Europe had some pretty bad wars from 1300-1650. These wars tested the armies who fought to the absolute limit of their abilities.  The result was that Europe’s governments suddenly had to field larger and better armies. This led to rapid changes in how Europe fought—including the development of the world’s most sophisticated gunpowder weapons. It also forced European governments to build bureaucracies and centralized governments, which took Europe from medieval to modern government in a relatively short time. |
| **Summarize this perspective:** |

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| **Perspective 4 – The Dark Ages weren’t Dark**  The story goes that Europe was a terrible, stupid place in the Middle Ages and then suddenly was the greatest in the world. This is just inaccurate. It is true that literacy, math, and science declined from 500-1500 in Europe.  However, Europe was actually the center of world engineering throughout the middle ages. Europe had a far greater number of mills than anywhere else in the world—a sort of medieval industrialization. Europe also had the tallest cranes, longest bridges, tallest towers. Europe developed the first true mechanical clock and was the world capital of both siege weapons and fortresses. European armor far exceeded any others in the world for protection and sophistication. European ships were the strongest and most seaworthy.  Europe’s advantage was not that they suddenly had a boom in science, economy, and military. Europe’s advantage was that they were already the best at engineering and that’s more important than the other three. |
| **Summarize this perspective:** |

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| **Perspective 5 – Geographic Luck**  Europe had a number of unique geographic advantages. Firstly, there are very few important resources that do not exist in Europe in large and easily accessible quantities. Most importantly, Europe has a number of sources of excellent iron.  Very few parts of Europe are more than 200 miles from a coast and all of that area is accessible by the Rhine or Danube—Europe’s two great navigable rivers. This made trade, travel, and diffusion much easier in Europe and tended to make Europe focus on navies more than anywhere else in the world.  Finally, Europe is the closest part of Eurasia to the Americas, which allowed it to exploit America in a way that no one else was situated to do. This provided Europe an even greater resource advantage as it now could access the resources of 3 continents. Even greater, the resources of these two American continents were concentrated into the empires of just 3 European countries—England, France, and Spain. This focused wealth into Western Europe and allowed one of these countries, England, to industrialize before any other country on Earth. |
| **Summarize this perspective:** |