Chapter 1: A Continent of Villages, to 1500

Chapter Review

1. AMERICAN COMMUNITIES Cahokia: Thirteenth-Century Life on the Mississippi

Between the tenth and fourteenth centuries, Cahokia was an urban, sophisticated city-state containing nearly 30,000 residents that lay at the center of a vast and advanced Native American society.

1. SETTLING THE CONTINENT

Europeans, despite the cultural diversity and vast numbers of Native Americans present throughout the land, imposed their views and will on the continent and its peoples, including the widespread use of the Spanish term “Indios.”

a. Who Are the Indian People?

A single term or phrase is inadequate to characterize the diversity of cultures and peoples first encountered by the Europeans. Over the centuries many theories have been posited, and discredited, as to the origins and relationship of the native peoples to the Europeans.

b. Migration from Asia

The Spanish Jesuit missionary Joseph de Acosta was the first to put forth the idea of Asian origins and the crossing of a land bridge, the most commonly accepted theory in the present-day. This migration took place over thousands of years, in a series of three major migrations. The first followed herds of animals and progressed down the North and South American continents at intermittent stages, over land, as the receding glaciers and natural elements allowed, and in the oceans by those who were maritime-oriented. Two later migrations led to the arrival of the native peoples of the American Southwest (Navajo and Apache) and, lastly, the Inuit peoples.

c. Clovis: The First American Environmental Adaptation

Clovis is the archaeological name given to a highly advanced form of fluted blades and lance points, superior to the European tools of the same period, that were rapidly spread throughout the continent, suggesting extensive foraging, migration, and trade networks.

1. NEW WAYS OF LIVING ON THE LAND

With the end of the ice age, the continental-wide culture fragmented into regional cultures as each was forced to contend with the climatic and environmental changes.

a. Hunting Traditions

As the climate changed, big game animals (the mammoth and mastodon) along with others, such as the horse and camel, died off. This forced the peoples to turn to smaller yet more plentiful game, and more efficient methods of hunting. Thus the bison became the most prominent prey and led to more complex means of slaughter and sophisticated processing of the kill and preservation of the meat.

b. Desert Culture

Desert culture was exemplified by small game hunting, intensive foraging, small communities that migrated seasonally, and complex systems of resource use and adaptation. These peoples existed among multiple and distinct climates, a pattern that was easily transferred to peoples elsewhere, eventually leading to the continent’s first groups of settled communities in California and along the Pacific Northwest coast.

c. Forest Efficiency

The peoples east of the Mississippi developed systems of labor divisions and resource exploitation that used all of the various resources provided—wild foods, game, and the ability to create fertile fields. Such efficiency ultimately led to a settled way of life and communal living.

1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF FARMING

Resource efficiency and foraging ultimately led to cultivation and adaptation.

a. Mexico

Beginning 5,000 years ago the peoples of central Mexico began cultivating foods such as maize (corn), beans, squash, and much more. Cultivation led to larger crop yields in smaller spaces and eventually crop surpluses. These surpluses were the foundation of large urban settings, leading to the creation of complex and extensive government bureaucracies, first for the distribution of foods but ultimately to govern the relations among the peoples and growing trade networks, particularly throughout the Mesoamerican region of Mexico.

b. The Resisted Revolution

Scholars have used anthropological evidence to question the perceived advantages of farming and crop domestication over hunting and gathering. The evidence clearly shows that one was not always superior to the other and adaptation to cultivation was a choice and often accepted only when its advantages (based on climate technology, and way of life) clearly outweighed disadvantages.

c. Increasing Social Complexity

When cultivation was advantageous it resulted in social systems that were multilayered and bureaucratic. Quickly differences in power, wealth, and labor were evident, offset by patterns of equitable resource redistribution and collectivization. Gender roles also changed in response to the different needs of an agricultural society. But these societies were often less stable, leading to increased tensions, warfare, and vulnerabilities to factors, such as climate, beyond their control.

d. Farmers of the Southwest

The Mogollon culture was among the first to adopt farming and agricultural surplus. They were followed by the Hohokam, who built irrigation systems and shared traits with the Mesoamerican civilizations to their south.

e. The Anasazi

These were the “Pueblo” peoples of the Southwest who built elaborate, multistoried communities as well as complex irrigation systems and terraced fields to sustain intense agriculture. There were more than 25,000 communities in modern-day New Mexico alone. But they were confronted with an ecological crisis between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries along with the arrival of new immigrant peoples, the Navajo and Apache, leading them to abandon the region altogether.

f. Farmers of the Eastern Woodlands

The Eastern Woodlands Indians combined foraging with some cultivation, especially maize and tobacco. They eventually became mound-builders, including the Adena and Hopewell cultures (the latter becoming the most dominant), and developed extensive trade networks that spanned the continent.

g. Mississippian

With the acquisition of new technologies the peoples of the Eastern Woodlands morphed into a new culture following the collapse of the Hopewell dominance. Numerous urban centers emerged in Illinois, Ohio, Alabama and Georgia, all centered on a trade network that used the Mississippi and its tributaries to consolidate power, trade goods, and establish complex social and political networks. They reached their peak between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries but were gone by the time of the European arrival.

h. The Politics of Warfare and Violence

As the societies increased in size and complexity, the potential for clashes also increased, particularly over competition for power and resources. There is ample evidence that the peoples of the Mississippi societies were ever at odds with each other as well as outsiders, and as a result they dispersed into much smaller, decentralized communities, abandoning the sites of the great cities.

1. CULTURAL REGIONS OF NORTH AMERICA ON THE EVE OF COLONIZATION

There were ten distinct culture areas—Artic, Subartic, Great Basin, Great Plains, California, Northwest, Plataea, Southwest, South, and Northeast—with overlapping yet distinct traits that shaped Indian, and ultimately European, patterns of development.

a. The Population of Indian America

The generally accepted population range lies between 5 and 10 million peoples at the time of contact. There is still significant debate about the overall number but scholars do agree that there were widely varying populations among each of the culture areas based on their unique economies, adoption of agricultural practices, and available resources.

b. The Southwest

This region held the most diverse collection of peoples and subcultures. Some lived in small individual settlements of just a few people and determined their own course of life. Others, like the Pueblos, lived in large communal villages with complex and stratified social and political rules. And still others lived a nomadic way of life, often raiding other groups for food and material goods, hunting and foraging at other times.

c. The South

The fertile soil and lush forests of this region allowed for communal settlements of a few hundred to many thousands. The rich floodplains of the river systems allowed replenishment of the soil without intensive fertilizations. These same waterways facilitated trade and political alliances. But these were among the first peoples decimated by disease following the arrival of Europeans. Small groups also left the communal way of life behind in an effort to forgo the hostilities and tensions of the larger groupings. They took up the woodlands way of life and formed loose confederacies for support.

d. The Northeast

This, too, was a farming region with dense populations along the waterways and bays of the Great Lakes and upper Chesapeake. Their cultivation practices led to the development of complex familial patterns as well as a series of confederacies based on military and political associations. They were among the first peoples to become involved in the fur trade and systems of reciprocal exchange with the Europeans.

1. EXPLORING AMERICA: America and the Horse

Animals, not just people, played an essential and shaping role in the development and changes affecting the American continent and its native peoples. Perhaps the most notable animal was the horse. It played a role in the conquest of the native peoples, was adopted by the native peoples and became an essential part of their culture, and eventually became an essential part of America’s developing economy as a tool of industry, westward expansion, communication, and a commercial item with widespread economic impact.

Chapter Resources at a Glance

**Maps**

Migration Routes from Asia to America (plus outline and interactive map on CD-ROM)

Climatological and Culture Regions of North America (plus outline and interactive map on CD-ROM)

Map Exploration: Native North American trade networks, c.a. 1400 CE (plus outline and interactive map on CD-ROM)

Indian Settlement before European Colonization (plus outline and interactive map on CD-ROM)

Southwestern Indian Groups on the Eve of Colonization (plus outline and interactive map on CD-ROM)

Southern Indian Groups on the Eve of Colonization

Northeastern Indian Groups on the Eve of Colonization

**Visual Sources**

Bust of Kennewick Man

Clovis points

Projectile point

Florentine Codex

Mimbres River (NM) pot depicting creation story

Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde (CO)

Hohokam pottery

Great Serpent Mound (OH)

The City of Cahokia

Nursing mother

Theodor de Bry, *The New Queen Being Taken to the King*

**Communities in Conflict**

Arapaho and Penobscot Legends

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Explain the various theories on the peopling of the Americas and describe the three distinct migrations.
2. List the regional geographic areas that emerged after the ice age and describe how each one affected the development of the emerging culture.
3. Describe the various types of communities that arose throughout the continent in response to the impact of farming and detail how domestication of crops was and was not a beneficial advancement.
4. Discuss the new pressures and vulnerabilities that emerged as a result of settled, communal societies.

Discussion Suggestions and Possible Answers

1. What impact did the regional, ecological differences have on the development of distinct, advanced agricultural practices throughout the Americas?

**Answer:** Each region developed according to the resources available. Where fertile land was available and wild crops plentiful, the peoples were often hunters and gatherers, while those who lived in less fertile areas had to manipulate nature by developing crop and irrigation techniques that maximized their yields.

1. What were the characteristics of the hunting, desert, and forest cultures and how was each distinct?

**Answer:** Hunting cultures were based around the migratory patterns of their prey and required large spans of territory in order to sustain their way of life, often moving seasonally to follow the game. Desert cultures often used some agricultural techniques to grow crops but also became effective gatherers and lived in relatively small areas. Forest cultures were often settled peoples who had defined territories and combined the acts of hunting with established agriculture to achieve the best of both possible actions.

1. Was the development of farming and domesticated crops superior to foraging?

**Answer:** Not necessarily. Farming and domesticated crops required intense labor to clear fields, sow the crops and maintain them throughout the growing season. It also required stable intertribal relationships because it made the tribes vulnerable to decimation of their food supply as a result of warfare, drought, or other variables. While foraging was less certain on a seasonal basis and required larger land areas, it was less vulnerable to decimation and allowed for a greater variety of crops.

1. What impact did advanced agricultural practices have on social development?

**Answer:** Agricultural practices often determined if the tribes could develop extended networks of trade as well as settled communities. Likewise they often determined if a surplus would be achieved, which resulted in a large population, requiring more strict social codes, governance, and formal relationships between tribes.

Lecture Outline

Theories of Population

Lost civilization from the Old World

Native American origin stories of creation and being placed on the land

Acosta and the Bering Straight

“Pacific Coast Highway”

Multiple Migrations

The Rise and Fall of the Great Civilizations of the Americas

Maya (Mesoamerica)

Inca (South America)

Mississippi (North America)

Diversity of Community throughout the Continent

Hunter/Forager

Eastern Woodlands

Anasazi Agriculture

Mississippian Urban Centers

Farming as a “Revolution”

Advantages of and factors in favor of adopting farming

Disadvantages of and factors for not adopting farming

Was Farming Necessary?

What was the Population of the Americas Prior to European Arrival?

Multiple Theories

Range of Numbers

Scholarly Controversy

Preparing the Way for Colonization

What the Europeans found when they arrived

How the forces of diverse community, trade networks, and agriculture helped and hindered European colonization

Resources (Web, Films/Video)

**Web**

*Cahokia*: <http://www.cahokiamounds.com/cahokia.html> is the official website for the World Heritage Historical site and contains many resources on the history of the mound-builders and Cahokian civilization.

*The West*: <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/> contains historical timelines, biographies, historical synopses of events, primary sources, and contemporary commentary on the history of the Native American peoples and their place in the American West.

*Theodore De Bry Copper Plate Engravings*: <http://www.csulb.edu/~aisstudy/woodcuts/> contains digital reproductions of the very famous etchings of the peoples encountered by both the Spanish and English settlers by de Bry.

**Films/Video**

*Lost Civilizations* (510 minutes). Discovery Channel. The third DVD of this series details the history of the Maya and Inca civilizations of Mesoamerica and South America.

*The West*, “Episode One (to 1806): The People,” (120 minutes). PBS. Details the lives of the native peoples prior to contact and how their world changes with the arrival of Europeans and the advent of “the new world.”

Instructor’s Resources (Available on CD-ROM)

**Additional Photos**

National Museum of the American Indian

Ursala Roach

The Death of Jane McCrea

Opening Day NMAI

The End of the Trail

Pueblo Bonito

Aztec Rain God, Tlaloc

Native American Agriculture

Powhatan in Longhouse

**Biographies**

Trickster

Hiawatha/Deganawidah

**Interactive Learning Activity**

*Cultures Meet*. An interactive exercise that centers on the encounter between Spanish explorers and missionaries and the native peoples of North America by having students read letters from Columbus, Cabeza de Vaca, and Las Casas, determining what was fact, opinion, and inference, and discussing the impact of the Spanish presence in the New World.

Primary Sources

*Marco Polo Recounts His Travels Through Asia* (1324)

Critical Thinking Exercises

What role might the mounds have played in the mound-builder societies? Who would have seen these mounds and why were there so many different variations of mounds?