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PART

CHAPTER 1
Colliding Worlds,
1450–1600

CHAPTER 2
American Experiments,
1518–1700

Transformations of North America

1450–1700

In 1450, North America, Europe, and Africa were each home to complex societies with their own distinctive cultures. But their histories were about to collide, bringing vast changes to all three continents. European voyagers sailing in the wake of Christopher Columbus set in motion one of the most momentous developments in world history: sustained contact among Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans in dozens of distinct colonial settings. Before the arrival of Europeans, a wide range of complex Native American societies claimed the continent as their own. Although colonization brought profound change, it did not erase what had come before because Native American societies interacted with colonizers from the beginning. They shaped colonial enterprise in important ways, enabling some forms of colonization while preventing others.

Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans were surprisingly similar in many ways, though the differences among them were important as well. Their distinctive ideas about gods and the spirit world informed their political systems and animated their approaches to trade and warfare. Whether they met in peace or war — or whether peaceful interactions quickly turned violent — Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans viewed one another through lenses that were shaped by these ideas.

In Part 1, we compare Native American, European, and African societies on the eve of colonization and then explore how Europeans experimented with various models of colonization in the first two centuries of sustained transatlantic contacts. The story in Chapters 1 and 2 addresses three main developments that are central to this period:



Native American Diversity and Complexity

Popular culture can lead us to think of Native American societies as being substantially the same everywhere in North America: they were organized into tribes, with few material possessions and primitive beliefs and cultures, and reliant mostly on hunting for their subsistence. This impression distorts a much more complicated picture. Native American political organization ran the gamut from vast, complex imperial states to kin-based bands of hunters and gatherers. Patterns of political organization varied widely, and the familiar label of *tribe* does more to obscure than to clarify their workings. Native Americans' economic and social systems were adapted to the ecosystems they inhabited. Many were extremely productive farmers, some hunted bison and deer, while others were expert salmon fishermen who plied coastal waters in large oceangoing boats. Native American religions and cultures also varied widely, though they shared some broad characteristics.

These variations in Native American societies shaped colonial enterprise. Europeans conquered and coopted Native American empires with relative ease, but smaller and more decentralized polities were harder to exploit. Mobile hunter-gatherers appeared politically amorphous, but they became especially formidable opponents of colonial expansion.



Colonial Settlement and the Columbian Exchange

European colonization triggered a series of sweeping changes that historians have labeled the "Columbian Exchange." At the same time that people crossed the Atlantic in large numbers, so too did plants, animals, and germs. Old World grains like wheat and barley were planted in the Americas for the first time, and weeds like dandelions were carried across the ocean as well. Potatoes, maize (corn), and tomatoes, among other foods, crossed the Atlantic in the other direction and transformed dietary practices in Asia as well as Europe. Native Americans domesticated very few animals; the Columbian Exchange introduced horses, pigs, cattle, and a variety of other creatures to the American landscape. Germs also made the voyage, especially the deadly pathogens that had so disordered life in Europe in the centuries prior to colonization. Smallpox, influenza, and bubonic plague, among others, took an enormous toll on Native American populations. Inanimate materials made the voyage as well: enough gold and silver traveled from the Americas to Europe and Asia to transform the world's economies, intensifying competition and empire building in Europe.

Old World diseases devastated Native American peoples. On average, they lost ninety percent of their numbers over the first century of contact, forcing them to cope with European and African newcomers in a weakened and vulnerable state.



Experimentation and Transformation

The collisions of American, European, and African worlds challenged the beliefs and practices of all three groups. Colonization was, above all, a long and tortured process of experimentation. Over time, Europeans carved out three distinct types of colonies in the Americas, each shaped by the constraints and opportunities presented by American landscapes and peoples. Where Native American societies were organized into densely settled empires, Europeans conquered the ruling class and established tribute-based empires of their own. In tropical and subtropical settings, colonizers created plantation societies that demanded large, imported labor forces—a need that was met through the African slave trade. And in the temperate regions of the mainland North America, where neither the landscape nor the native population yielded easy wealth, European colonists came in large numbers hoping to create familiar societies in unfamiliar settings.

Everywhere in the Americas, core beliefs and world-views were shaken by contact with radically unfamiliar peoples. Native Americans and Africans struggled to maintain autonomy in their relations with colonizers, while Europeans labored to understand—and profit from—their relations with nonwhite peoples. These transformations are the subject of Part 1.

Transformations of North America 1450–1700

Thematic Understanding

This timeline arranges some of the important events of this period into themes. Look at the entries for “Ideas, Beliefs, and Culture” from 1450 to 1700. How did the Protestant Reformation and the response of the Catholic Church influence the colonization of the Americas in these years? In the realm of “Work, Exchange, and Technology,” how did colonial economies evolve, and what roles did Native American and African labor play in them? ➤

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CHAPTER

Colliding Worlds 1450–1600

THE NATIVE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

- The First Americans
- American Empires
- Chiefdoms and Confederacies
- Patterns of Trade
- Sacred Power

WESTERN EUROPE: THE EDGE OF THE OLD WORLD

- Hierarchy and Authority
- Peasant Society
- Expanding Trade Networks
- Myths, Religions, and Holy Warriors

WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA: ORIGINS OF THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

- Empires, Kingdoms, and Ministates
- Trans-Saharan and Coastal Trade
- The Spirit World

EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST

- Portuguese Expansion
- The African Slave Trade
- Sixteenth-Century Incursions

In April 1493, a Genoese sailor of humble origins appeared at the court of Queen Isabella of Castile and King Ferdinand of Aragon along with six Caribbean natives, numerous colorful parrots, and “samples of finest gold, and many other things never before seen or heard tell of in Spain.” The sailor was Christopher Columbus, just returned from his first voyage into the Atlantic. He and his party entered Barcelona’s fortress in a solemn procession. The monarchs stood to greet Columbus; he knelt to kiss their hands. They talked for an hour and then adjourned to the royal chapel for a ceremony of thanksgiving. Columbus, now bearing the official title *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, remained at court for more than a month. The highlight of his stay was the baptism of the six natives, whom Columbus called Indians because he mistakenly believed he had sailed westward all the way to Asia.

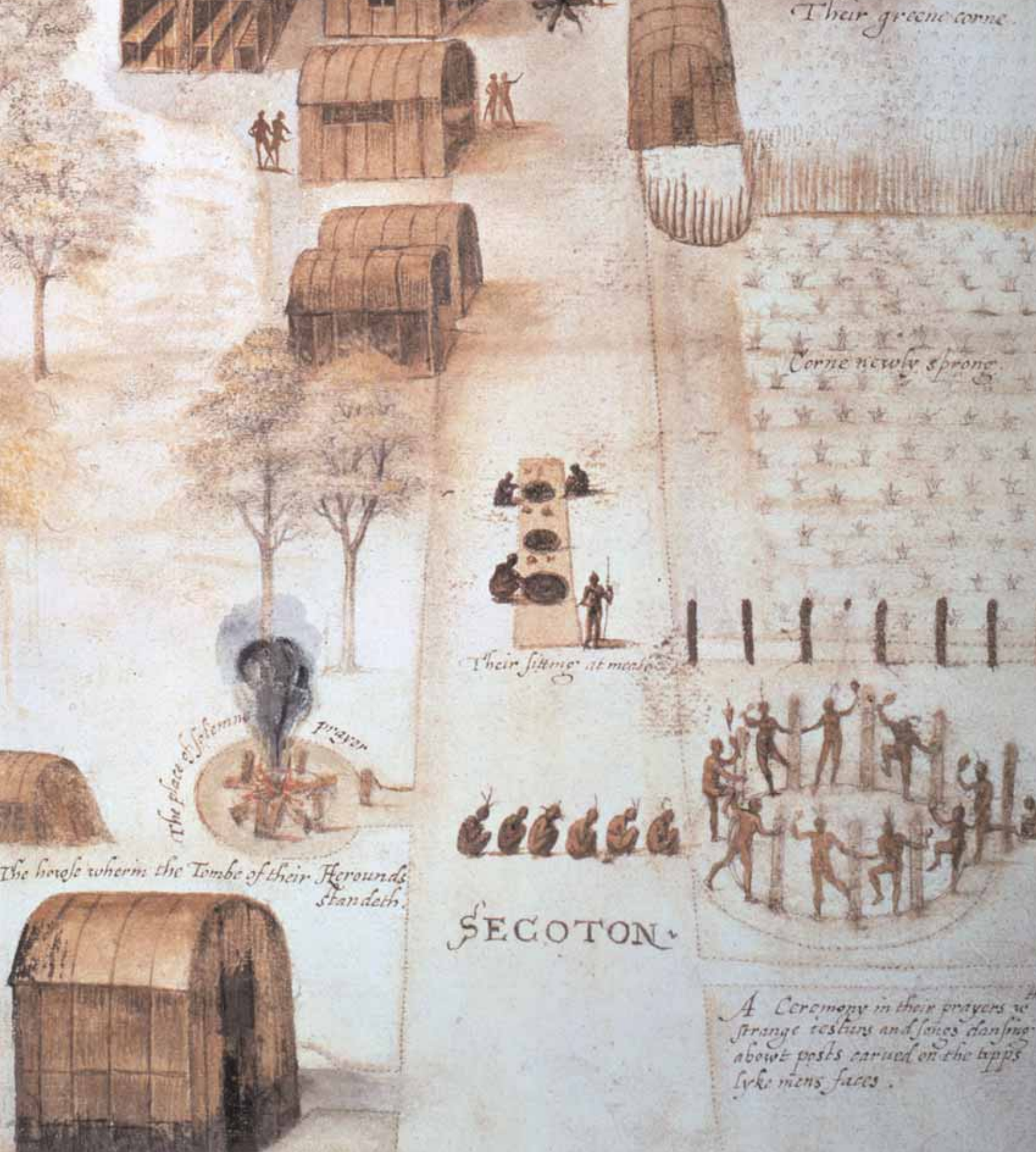
IDENTIFY THE BIG IDEA

How did the political, economic, and religious systems of Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans compare, and how did things change as a result of contacts among them?

In the spring of 1540, the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto met the Lady of Cofachiqui, ruler of a large Native American province in present-day South Carolina. Though an epidemic had carried away many of her people, the lady of the province offered the Spanish expedition as much corn, and as many pearls, as it could carry. As she spoke to de Soto, she unwound “a great rope of pearls as large as hazelnuts” and handed them to the Spaniard; in return he gave her a gold ring set with a ruby. De Soto and his men then visited the temples of Cofachiqui, which were guarded by carved statues and held storehouses of weapons and chest upon chest of pearls. After loading their horses with corn and pearls, they continued on their way.

A Portuguese traveler named Duarte Lopez visited the African kingdom of Kongo in 1578. “The men and women are black,” he reported, “some approaching olive colour, with black curly hair, and others with red. The men are of middle height, and, excepting the black skin, are like the Portuguese.” The royal city of Kongo sat on a high plain that was “entirely cultivated,” with a population of more than 100,000. The city included a separate commercial district, a mile around, where Portuguese traders acquired ivory, wax, honey, palm oil, and slaves from the Kongolese.

Three glimpses of three lost worlds. Soon these peoples would be transforming one another’s societies, often through conflict and exploitation. But at the moment they first met, Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans stood on roughly equal terms. Even a hundred years after Columbus’s discovery of the Americas, no one could have foreseen the shape that their interactions would take in the generations to come. To begin, we need to understand the three worlds as distinct places, each home to unique societies and cultures.



Village of Secoton, 1585 English colonist John White painted this view of an Algonquian village on the outer banks of present-day North Carolina. Its cluster of houses surrounded by fields of crops closely resembled European farming communities of the same era. White captured everyday details of the town's social life, including food preparation and a ceremony or celebration in progress (lower right). Service Historique de la Marine Vincennes, France/Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library.

The Native American Experience

When Europeans arrived, perhaps 60 million people occupied the Americas, 7 million of whom lived north of Mexico. In Mesoamerica (present-day Mexico and Guatemala) and the Andes, empires that rivaled the greatest civilizations in world history ruled over millions of people. At the other end of the political spectrum, hunters and gatherers were organized into kin-based bands. Between these extremes, semisedentary societies planted and tended crops in the spring and summer, fished and hunted, made war, and conducted trade. Though we often see this spectrum as a hierarchy in which the empires are most impressive and important while hunter-gatherers deserve scarcely a mention, this bias toward civilizations that left behind monumental architecture and spawned powerful ruling classes is misplaced. Regardless of size or political complexity, the energies and innovations of Native American societies everywhere profoundly transformed American landscapes. To be fully understood, the Americas must be treated in all their complexity, with an appreciation for their diverse societies and cultures.

The First Americans

Archaeologists believe that migrants from Asia crossed a 100-mile-wide land bridge connecting Siberia and Alaska during the last Ice Age sometime between 13,000 and 3000 B.C. and thus became the first Americans. The first wave of this migratory stream from Asia lasted from about fifteen thousand to nine thousand years ago. Then the glaciers melted, and the rising ocean submerged the land bridge beneath the Bering Strait (Map 1.1). Around eight thousand years ago, a second movement of peoples, traveling by water across the same narrow strait, brought the ancestors of the Navajos and the Apaches to North America. The forebears of the Aleut and Inuit peoples, the “Eskimos,” came in a third wave around five thousand years ago. Then, for three hundred generations, the peoples of the Western Hemisphere were largely cut off from the rest of the world.

During this long era, migrants dispersed through the continents as they hunted and gathered available resources. The predominant flow was southward, and the densest populations developed in

central Mexico—home to some 20 million people at the time of first contact with Europeans—and the Andes Mountains, with a population of perhaps 12 million. In North America, a secondary trickle of migration pushed eastward, across the Rockies and into the Mississippi Valley and the eastern woodlands.

Around 6000 B.C., some Native American peoples in present-day Mexico and Peru began raising domesticated crops. Mesoamericans cultivated maize into a nutritious plant with a higher yield per acre than wheat, barley, or rye, the staple cereals of Europe. In Peru they also bred the potato, a root crop of unsurpassed nutritional value. The resulting agricultural surpluses encouraged population growth and laid the foundation for wealthy, urban societies in Mexico and Peru, and later in the Mississippi Valley and the southeastern woodlands of North America (Map 1.2).

American Empires

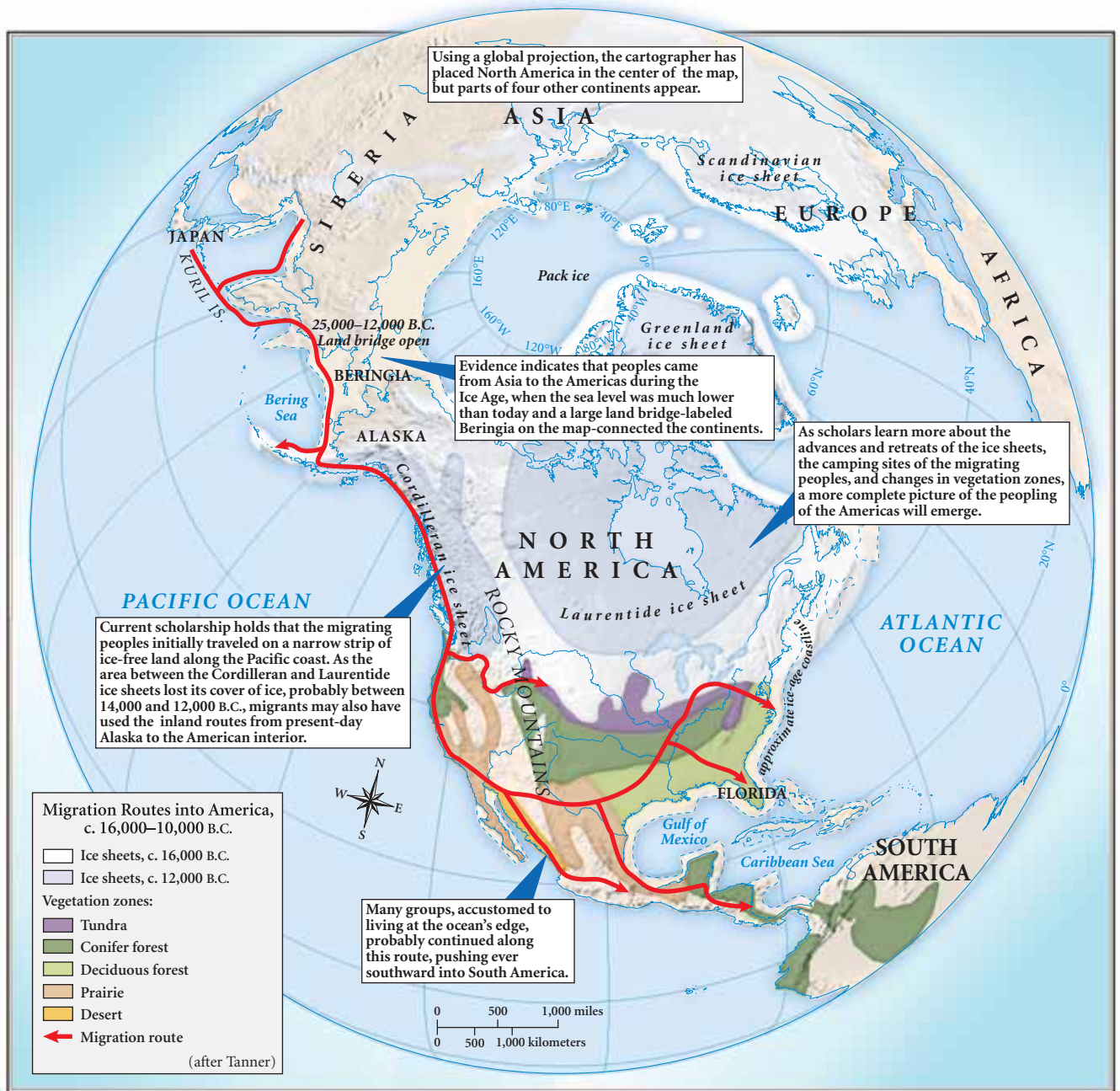
In Mesoamerica and the Andes, the two great empires of the Americas—the Aztecs and Incas—dominated the landscape. Dense populations, productive agriculture, and an aggressive bureaucratic state were the keys to their power. Each had an impressive capital city. Tenochtitlán, established in 1325 at the center of the Aztec Empire, had at its height around 1500 a population of about 250,000, at a time when the European cities of London and Seville each had perhaps 50,000. The Aztec state controlled the fertile valleys in the highlands of Mexico, and Aztec merchants forged trading routes that crisscrossed the empire. Trade, along with **tribute** demanded from subject peoples (comparable to taxes in Europe), brought gold, textiles, turquoise, obsidian, tropical bird feathers, and cacao to Tenochtitlán. The Europeans who first encountered this city in 1519 marveled at the city’s wealth and beauty. “Some of the soldiers among us who had been in many parts of the world,” wrote Spanish conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo, “in Constantinople, and all over Italy, and in Rome, said that [they had never seen] so large a market place and so full of people, and so well regulated and arranged” (see *American Voices*, p. 32).

Ruled by priests and warrior-nobles, the Aztecs subjugated most of central Mexico. Captured enemies were brought to the capital, where Aztec priests brutally sacrificed thousands of them. The Aztecs believed that these ritual murders sustained the cosmos, ensuring fertile fields and the daily return of the sun.

Cuzco, the Inca capital located more than 11,000 feet above sea level, had perhaps 60,000 residents. A dense network of roads, storehouses, and administrative

IDENTIFY CAUSES

What factors allowed for the development of empires in central Mexico and the Andes?



MAP 1.1

The Ice Age and the Settling of the Americas

Some sixteen thousand years ago, a sheet of ice covered much of Europe and North America. The ice lowered the level of the world's oceans, which created a broad bridge of land between Siberia and Alaska. Using that land bridge, hunting peoples from Asia migrated to North America as they pursued woolly mammoths and other large game animals and sought ice-free habitats. By 10,000 B.C., the descendants of these migrant peoples had moved south to present-day Florida and central Mexico. In time, they would settle as far south as the tip of South America and as far east as the Atlantic coast of North America.



MAP 1.2
Native American Peoples, 1492

Having learned to live in many environments, Native Americans populated the entire Western Hemisphere. They created cultures that ranged from centralized empires (the Incas and Aztecs), to societies that combined farming with hunting, fishing, and gathering (the Iroquois and Algonquians), to nomadic tribes of hunter-gatherers (the Micmacs and Shoshones). The great diversity of Native American peoples—in language, tribal identity, and ways of life—and the long-standing rivalries among neighboring peoples usually prevented them from uniting to resist the European invaders.

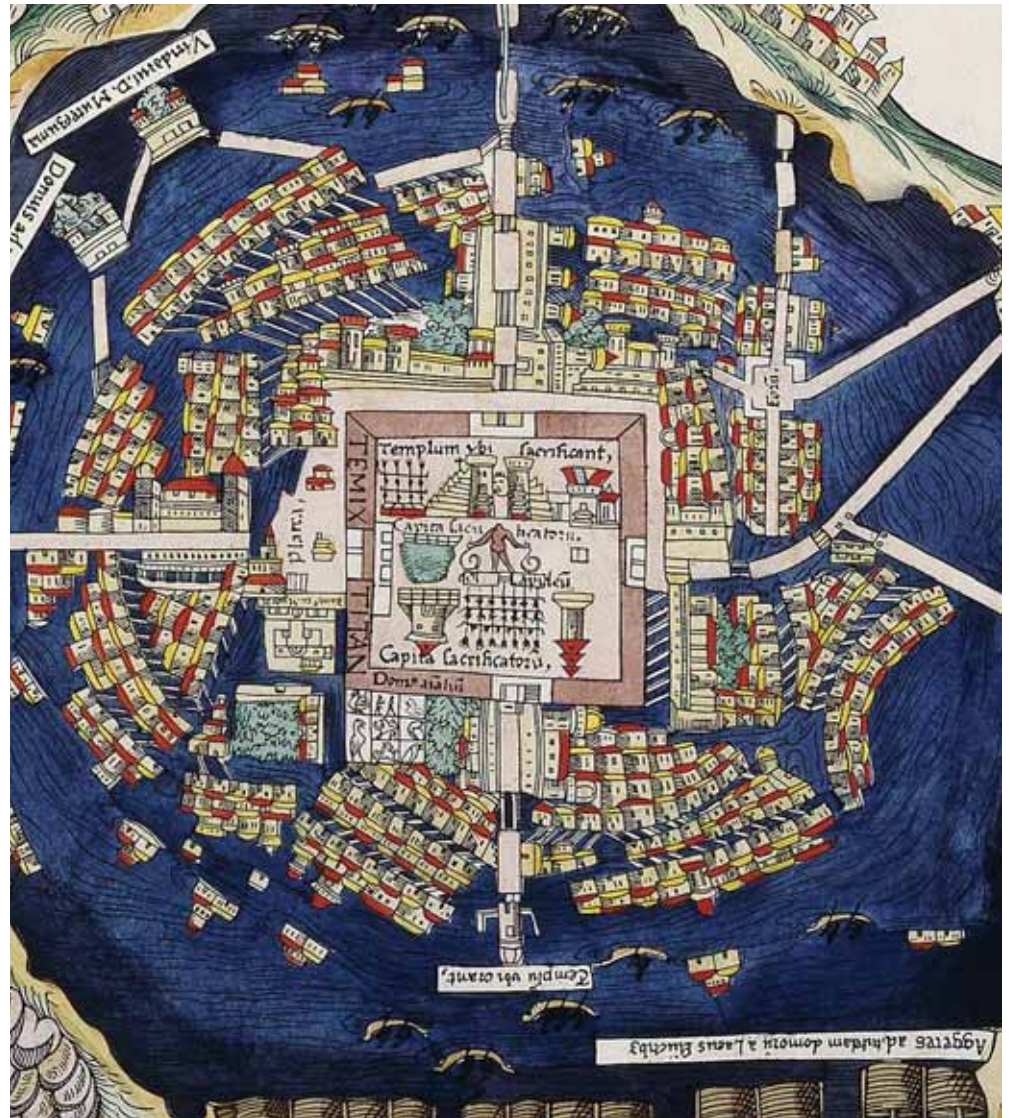
centers stitched together this improbable high-altitude empire, which ran down the 2,000-mile-long spine of the Andes Mountains. A king claiming divine status ruled the empire through a bureaucracy of nobles. Like the Aztecs, the empire consisted of subordinate kingdoms that had been conquered by the Incas, and tribute flowed from local centers of power to the imperial core.

Chiefdoms and Confederacies

Nothing on the scale of the Aztec and Inca empires ever developed north of Mexico, but maize agriculture spread from Mesoamerica across much of North America beginning around A.D. 1000, laying a foundation for new ways of life there as well.

Understanding the Cosmos of the Aztecs

Using Aztec sources, German geographers drew this map of Tenochtitlán in 1524. Recent scholarship suggests that the Aztecs viewed their city as a cosmic linchpin, where the human world brushed up against the divine. In the center of the city stand two elevated temples that represent Coatepec, the Serpent Mountain and the mythic birth-place of the Aztecs' tribal god Huitzilopochtli. Priests sacrificed thousands of men and women here, a ritual the Aztecs believed transformed the temples into the Sacred Mountain and sustained the cosmos. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.



The Mississippi Valley The spread of maize to the Mississippi River Valley around A.D. 1000 led to the development of a large-scale northern Native American culture. The older Adena and Hopewell cultures had already introduced moundbuilding and distinctive pottery styles to the region. Now residents of the Mississippi River Valley experienced the greater urban density and more complex social organization that agriculture encouraged.

The city of Cahokia, in the fertile bottomlands along the Mississippi River, emerged around 1000 as the foremost center of the new Mississippian culture. At its peak, Cahokia's population exceeded 10,000; smaller satellite communities brought the region's population to 20,000 to 30,000. In an area of 6 square miles, archaeologists have found 120 mounds of varying size,

shape, and function. Some contain extensive burials; others, known as platform mounds, were used as bases for ceremonial buildings or rulers' homes. Cahokia had a powerful ruling class and a priesthood that worshipped the sun. After peaking in size around 1350, it declined rapidly. Scholars speculate that its decline was caused by an era of ruinous warfare, exacerbated by environmental factors that made the site less habitable. It had been abandoned by the time Europeans arrived in the area.

Mississippian culture endured, however, and was still in evidence throughout much of the Southeast at the time of first contact with Europeans. The Lady of Cofachiqui encountered by Hernando de Soto in 1540 ruled over a Mississippian community, and others dotted the landscape between the Carolinas and the lower

Mississippi River. In Florida, sixteenth-century Spanish explorers encountered the Apalachee Indians, who occupied a network of towns built around mounds and fields of maize.

Eastern Woodlands In the eastern woodlands, the Mississippian-influenced peoples of the Southeast interacted with other groups, many of whom adopted maize agriculture but did not otherwise display Mississippian characteristics. To the north, Algonquian and Iroquoian speakers shared related languages and life-ways but were divided into dozens of distinct societies. Most occupied villages built around fields of maize, beans, and squash during the summer months; at other times of the year, they dispersed in smaller groups to hunt, fish, and gather. Throughout the eastern woodlands, as in most of North America, women tended crops, gathered plants, and oversaw affairs within the community, while men were responsible for activities beyond it, especially hunting, fishing, and warfare.

In this densely forested region, Indians regularly set fires — in New England, twice a year, in spring and fall — to clear away underbrush, open fields, and make it easier to hunt big game. The catastrophic population decline accompanying European colonization quickly put an end to seasonal burning, but in the years before Europeans arrived in North America bison roamed east as far as modern-day New York and Georgia. Early European colonists remarked upon landscapes that “resemble[d] a stately Parke,” where men could ride among widely spaced trees on horseback and even a “large army” could pass unimpeded (America Compared, p. 14).

Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples had no single style of political organization. Many were chiefdoms, with one individual claiming preeminent power in a community. Some were paramount chiefdoms, in which numerous communities with their own local chiefs banded together under a single, more powerful ruler. For example, the Powhatan Chiefdom, which



The Great Serpent Mound

Scholars long believed that this mound was the work of the Adena peoples (500 B.C.–A.D. 200) because of its proximity to an Adena burial site in present-day southern Ohio. Recent research places the mound at a much later date (A.D. 950–1200) and, because of the serpent imagery, ties it to the Fort Ancient culture, which is closely related to the Mississippian complex. The head of the serpent is aligned with the sunset of the summer solstice (June 20 or 21 in the Northern Hemisphere), an event of great religious significance to a sun-worshipping culture. © Bettmann/Corbis.



The Kincaid Site

Located on the north bank of the Ohio River 140 miles from Cahokia, the Kincaid site was a Mississippian town from c. A.D. 1050 to 1450. It contains at least nineteen mounds topped by large buildings thought to have been temples or council houses. Now a state historic site in Illinois, it has been studied by anthropologists and archaeologists since the 1930s. Artist Herb Roe depicts the town as it may have looked at its peak. Herb Roe, Chromesun Productions.

dominated the Chesapeake Bay region, embraced more than thirty subordinate chiefdoms, and some 20,000 people, by the time Englishmen established the colony of Virginia in Powhatan territory. Powhatan himself, according to the English colonist John Smith, was attended by “a guard of 40 or 50 of the tallest men his Country affords.”

Elsewhere, especially in the Mid-Atlantic region, the power of chiefs was strictly local. Along the Delaware and Hudson rivers, Lenni Lenape (or Delaware) and Munsee Indians lived in small, independent communities without overarching political organizations. Early European maps of this region show a landscape dotted with a bewildering profusion of Indian names. European colonization would soon

drive many of these groups into oblivion and force survivors to coalesce into larger groups.

Some Native American groups were not chiefdoms at all, but instead granted political authority to councils of sachems, or leaders. This was the case with the Iroquois Confederacy. Sometime shortly before the arrival of Europeans, probably around 1500, five nations occupying the region between the Hudson River and Lake Erie—the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas—banded together to form the Iroquois.

These groups had been fighting among themselves for years, caught in a destructive cycle of wars of retribution. Then, according to Iroquois legend, a Mohawk man named Hiawatha lost his family in one of these



Altered Landscapes

In the eastern woodlands, Native Americans set fires once or twice a year to clear underbrush and open up landscapes that would otherwise have been densely wooded. The burnings made it easier to plant corn, beans, and squash and drew big game animals into the clearings, where hunters could fell them. As European colonization displaced Indian populations, this practice ended. Some scholars have even suggested that the decline in burning caused a drop of carbon in the atmosphere large enough to account for the Little Ice Age, an episode of global cooling that lasted from about 1550 to 1850, though the claim is controversial.

Thomas Morton, *Of the Custome in burning the Country, and the reason thereof* (1637)

The Savages are accustomed to set fire of the Country in all places where they come, and to burne it twize a yeare, viz: at the Spring, and the fall of the leafe. The reason that mooves them to doe so, is because it would other wise be so overgrowne with underweedes that it would be all a coppice wood, and the people would not be able in any wise to passe through the Country out of a beaten path.

The meanes that they do it with, is with certaine minerall stones, that they carry about them in baggs made for that purpose of the skinnes of little beastes, which they convert into good lether, carrying in the same a peece of touch wood, very excellent for that purpose, of their owne making. These minerall stones they have from the Piquenteenes, (which is to the Southward of all the plantations in New England,) by trade and trafficke with those people.

The burning of the grasse destroyes the underwoods, and so scorseth the elder trees that it shrinkes them, and hinders their growth very much: so that hee that will looke to finde large trees and good tymber, must not depend upon the help of a wooden prospect to finde them on the uplandground; but must seeke for them, (as I and others have done,) in the lower grounds, where the grounds are wett, when the Country is fired, by reason of the snow water that remains there for a time, untill the Sunne by continuance of that hath exhaled the vapoures of the earth, and dried up those places where the fire, (by reason of the moisture,) can have no power to doe them any hurt: and if he would endevoure to finde out any goodly Cedars, hee must not seeke for them on the higher grounds, but make his inquest for them in the vallies, for the Savages,

by this custome of theirs, have spoiled all the rest: for this custome hath bin continued from the beginnunge.

And least their firing of the Country in this manner should be an occasion of damnifying us, and indaingering our habitations, wee our selves have used carefully about the same times to observe the winds, and fire the grounds about our owne habitations; to prevent the Dammage that might happen by any neglect thereof, if the fire should come neere those howses in our absence.

For, when the fire is once kindled, it dilates and spreads it selfe as well against, as with the winde; burning continually night and day, untill a shower of raine falls to quench it.

And this custome of firing the Country is the meanes to make it passable; and by that meanes the trees growe here and there as in our parks: and makes the Country very beautifull and commodious.

Source: Thomas Morton, *The New English Canaan* (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1883 [orig. pub. 1637]), 172–173.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What benefits and dangers does Morton attribute to the practice of Indian burning? How did he and his fellow colonists respond to the practice?
2. Since Europeans did not practice widespread burning in the Indian manner, they achieved deforestation only slowly, through many years of backbreaking labor. Thinking comparatively about European and Native American approaches to landscape management, how would you assess the benefits and challenges of each approach?

wars. Stricken by grief, he met a spirit who taught him a series of condolence rituals. He returned to his people preaching a new gospel of peace and power, and the condolence rituals he taught became the foundation for the Iroquois Confederacy.

Once bound by these rituals, the Five Nations began acting together as a political confederacy. They avoided violence among themselves and became one of the most powerful Native American groups in the Northeast. The Iroquois did not recognize chiefs; instead, councils of sachems made decisions. These were **matriarchal** societies, with power inherited through female lines of authority. Women were influential in local councils, though men served as sachems, made war, and conducted diplomacy.

Along the southern coast of the region that would soon be called New England, a dense network of powerful chiefdoms—including the Narragansetts, Wampanoags, Mohegans, Pequots, and others—competed for resources and dominance. When the Dutch and English arrived, they were able to exploit these rivalries and play Indian groups against one another. Farther north, in northern New England and much of present-day Canada, the short growing season and thin, rocky soil were inhospitable to maize agriculture. Here the native peoples were hunters and gatherers and therefore had smaller and more mobile communities, though they were no less complex than their agriculturally oriented cousins.

The Great Lakes To the west, Algonquian-speaking peoples dominated the Great Lakes. The tribal groups recognized by Europeans in this region included the Ottawas, Ojibwas, and Potawatomis. But collectively they thought of themselves as a single people: the Anishinaabe. Clan identities—beaver, otter, sturgeon, deer, and others—crosscut tribal affiliations and were in some ways more fundamental. The result was a social landscape that could be bewildering to outsiders. Here lived, one French official remarked, “an infinity of undiscovered nations.”

The extensive network of lakes and rivers, and the use of birchbark canoes, made Great Lakes peoples especially mobile. “They seem to have as many abodes as the year has seasons,” wrote one observer. They traveled long distances to hunt and fish, to trade, or to join in important ceremonies or military alliances. Groups negotiated access to resources and travel routes. Instead of a map with clearly delineated tribal territories, it is best to imagine the Great Lakes as a porous region, where “political power and social identity took on multiple forms,” as one scholar has written.

The Great Plains and Rockies Farther west lies the vast, arid steppe region known as the Great Plains, which was dominated by the hunting and gathering activities of small, dispersed groups. The geopolitics of the Plains Indians was transformed by a European import—the horse—long before Europeans themselves arrived. Livestock was introduced in the Spanish colony of New Mexico in the late sixteenth century, and from there horses gradually dispersed across the plains. Bison hunters who had previously relied on stealth became much more successful on horseback.

Indians on horseback were also more formidable opponents than their counterparts on foot, and some Plains peoples leveraged their control of horses to gain power over their neighbors.

The Comanches were a small Shoshonean band on the northern plains that migrated south in pursuit of horses. They became expert raiders, capturing people and horses alike and trading them for weapons, food, clothing, and other necessities.

Eventually they controlled a vast territory. From their humble origins, their skill in making war on horseback made the Comanches one of the region’s most formidable peoples.

Similarly, horses allowed the Sioux, a confederation of seven distinct peoples who originated in present-day Minnesota, to move west and dominate a vast territory ranging from the Mississippi River to the Black Hills. The Crow Indians moved from the Missouri River to the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains, where they became nomadic bison hunters. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, they became horse breeders and traders as well.

In some places, farming communities were embedded within the much wider geographical range of hunter-gatherers. Thus the Hidatsa and Mandan Indians maintained settled agricultural villages along the Missouri River, while the more mobile Sioux dominated the region around them. Similarly, the Caddo Indians, who lived on the edge of the southern plains, inhabited agricultural communities that were like islands in a sea of more mobile peoples.

Three broad swaths of Numic-speaking peoples occupied the Great Basin that separated the Rockies from the Sierra Mountains: Bannocks and Northern Paiutes in the north, Shoshones in the central basin, and Utes and Southern Paiutes in the south. Resources were varied and spread thin on the land. Kin-based bands traveled great distances to hunt bison along the

EXPLAIN CONSEQUENCES

How did landscape, climate, and resources influence the development of Native American societies?

Yellowstone River (where they shared territory with the Crows) and bighorn sheep in high altitudes, to fish for salmon, and to gather pine nuts when they were in season. Throughout the Great Basin, some groups adopted horses and became relatively powerful, while others remained foot-borne and impoverished in comparison with their more mobile neighbors.

The Arid Southwest In the part of North America that appears to be most hostile to agriculture—the canyon-laced country of the arid Southwest—surprisingly large farming settlements developed. Anasazi peoples were growing maize by the first century A.D., earlier than anywhere else north of Mexico, and Pueblo cultures emerged around A.D. 600. By A.D. 1000, the Hohokams, Mogollons, and Anasazis (all Pueblo peoples) had developed irrigation systems to manage scarce water, enabling them to build sizable villages and towns of adobe and rock that were often molded to sheer canyon walls. Chaco Canyon, in modern New Mexico, supported a dozen large Anasazi towns, while beyond the canyon a network of roads tied these settlements together with hundreds of small Anasazi villages.

Extended droughts and soil exhaustion caused the abandonment of Chaco Canyon and other large settlements in the Southwest after 1150, but smaller communities still dotted the landscape when the first Europeans arrived. It was the Spanish who called these groups Pueblo Indians: *pueblo* means “town” in Spanish, and the name refers to their distinctive building style. When Europeans arrived, Pueblo peoples, including the Acomas, Zuñis, Tewas, and Hopis, were found throughout much of modern New Mexico, Arizona, and western Texas.

The Pacific Coast Hunter-gatherers inhabited the Pacific coast. Before the arrival of the Spanish, California was home to more than 300,000 people, subdivided into dozens of small, localized groups and speaking at least a hundred distinct languages. This diversity of languages and cultures discouraged intermarriage and kept these societies independent. Despite these differences, many groups did share common characteristics, including clearly defined social hierarchies separating elites from commoners. They gathered acorns and other nuts and seeds, caught fish and shellfish, and hunted game.

The Pacific Northwest also supported a dense population that was divided into many distinct groups who controlled small territories and spoke different languages. Their stratified societies were ruled by wealthy families. To maintain control of their territories, the more powerful nations, including the Chinooks, Coast Salishes, Haidas, and Tlingits, nurtured strong warrior traditions. They developed sophisticated fishing technologies and crafted oceangoing dugout canoes, made from enormous cedar trees, that ranged up to 60 feet in length. Their distinctive material culture included large longhouses that were home to dozens of people and totem poles representing clan lineages or local legends.

Patterns of Trade

Expansive trade networks tied together regions and carried valuable goods hundreds and even thousands of miles. Trade goods included food and raw materials, tools, ritual artifacts, and decorative goods. Trade enriched diets, enhanced economies, and allowed the powerful to set themselves apart with luxury items.



Anasazi Ladle

Crafted between A.D. 1300 and 1600 and found in a site in central Arizona, this Anasazi dipper was coiled and molded by hand and painted with a geometric motif. Anasazi pottery is abundant in archaeological sites, thanks in part to the Southwest's dry climate. Clay vessels and ladles helped Anasazi peoples handle water—one of their most precious resources—with care. National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution.

Chilkat Tlingit Bowl

This bowl in the form of a brown bear, which dates to the mid-nineteenth century, is made of alder wood and inlaid with snail shells. The brown bear is a Tlingit clan totem. Animal-form bowls like this one, which express an affinity with nonhuman creatures, are a common feature of Tlingit culture. National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution.



In areas where Indians specialized in a particular economic activity, regional trade networks allowed them to share resources. Thus nomadic hunters of the southern plains, including the Navajos and Apaches, conducted annual trade fairs with Pueblo farmers, exchanging hides and meat for maize, pottery, and cotton blankets. Similar patterns of exchange occurred throughout the Great Plains, wherever hunters and farmers coexisted. In some parts of North America, a regional trade in war captives who were offered as slaves helped to sustain friendly relations among neighboring groups. One such network developed in the Upper Mississippi River basin, where Plains Indian captives were traded, or given as diplomatic gifts, to Ottawas and other Great Lakes and eastern woodlands peoples.

Across longer distances, rare and valuable objects traveled through networks that spanned much of the continent. Great Lakes copper, Rocky Mountain mica, jasper from Pennsylvania, obsidian from New Mexico and Wyoming, and pipestone from the Midwest have all been found in archaeological sites hundreds of miles from their points of origin. Seashells—often shaped and polished into beads and other artifacts—traveled hundreds of miles inland. Grizzly bear claws and eagle feathers were prized, high-status objects. After European contact, Indian hunters often traveled long distances to European trading posts to trade for cloth, iron tools, and weapons.

Within Native American groups, powerful leaders controlled a disproportionate share of wealth and redistributed it to prove their generosity and strengthen their authority. In small, kin-based bands, the strongest hunters possessed the most food, and sharing it was

essential. In chiefdoms, rulers filled the same role, often collecting the wealth of a community and then redistributing it to their followers. Powhatan, the powerful Chesapeake Bay chief, reportedly collected nine-tenths of the produce of the communities he oversaw—“skins, beads, copper, pearls, deer, turkeys, wild beasts, and corn”—but then gave much of it back to his subordinates. His generosity was considered a mark of good leadership. In the Pacific Northwest, the Chinook word *potlatch* refers to periodic festivals in which wealthy residents gave away belongings to friends, family, and followers.

Sacred Power

Most Native North Americans were **animists** who believed that the natural world was suffused with spiritual power. They sought to understand the world by interpreting dreams and visions, and their rituals appeased guardian spirits that could ensure successful hunts and other forms of good fortune. Although their views were subject to countless local variations, certain patterns were widespread.

Women and men interacted differently with these spiritual forces. In agricultural communities, women grew crops and maintained hearth, home, and village. Native American conceptions of female power linked their bodies’ generative functions with the earth’s fertility, and rituals like the Green Corn Ceremony—a summer ritual of purification and renewal—helped to sustain the life-giving properties of the world around them.

For men, spiritual power was invoked in hunting and war. To ensure success in hunting, men took care

UNDERSTAND POINTS OF VIEW

How did Native Americans' conceptions of the spiritual world influence their daily lives?

not to offend the spirits of the animals they killed. They performed rituals before, during, and after a hunt to acknowledge the power of those guardian spirits, and they believed that, when an animal had been killed properly, its spirit

would rise from the earth unharmed. Success in hunting and prowess in war were both interpreted as signs of sacred protection and power.

Ideas about war varied widely. War could be fought for geopolitical reasons—to gain ground against an enemy—but for many groups, warfare was a crucial rite of passage for young men, and raids were conducted to allow warriors to prove themselves in battle. Motives for war could be highly personal; war was often more like a blood feud between families than a contest between nations. If a community lost warriors in battle, it often retaliated by capturing or killing a like number of warriors in response—a so-called mourning war. Some captives were adopted into new communities, while others were enslaved or tortured.

Western Europe: The Edge of the Old World

In 1450, Western Europe lay at the far fringe of the Eurasian and African continents. It had neither the powerful centralized empires nor the hunter-gatherer bands and semisedentary societies of the Americas; it was, instead, a patchwork of roughly equivalent kingdoms, duchies, and republics vying with one another and struggling to reach out effectively to the rest of the world. No one would have predicted that Europeans would soon become overlords of the Western Hemisphere. A thousand years after the fall of the Roman Empire, Europe's populations still relied on subsistence agriculture and were never far from the specter of famine. Moreover, around 1350, a deadly plague introduced from Central Asia—the Black Death—had killed one-third of Europe's population. The lives of ordinary people were afflicted by poverty, disease, and uncertainty, and the future looked as difficult and dark as the past.

Hierarchy and Authority

In traditional hierarchical societies—American or European—authority came from above. In Europe, kings and princes owned vast tracts of land, forcibly

conscripted men for military service, and lived off the peasantry's labor. Yet monarchs were far from supreme: local nobles also owned large estates and controlled hundreds of peasant families. Collectively, these nobles challenged royal authority with both their military power and their legislative institutions, such as the French *parlements* and the English House of Lords.

Just as kings and nobles ruled society, men governed families. These were **patriarchies**, in which property and social identity descended in male family lines. Rich or poor, the man was the head of the house, his power justified by the teachings of the Christian Church. As one English clergyman put it, “The woman is a weak creature not embued with like strength and constancy of mind”; law and custom “subjected her to the power of man.” Once married, an Englishwoman assumed her husband's surname, submitted to his orders, and surrendered the right to her property. When he died, she received a dowry, usually the use during her lifetime of one-third of the family's land and goods.

Men also controlled the lives of their children, who usually worked for their father into their middle or late twenties. Then landowning peasants would give land to their sons and dowries to their daughters and choose marriage partners of appropriate wealth and status. In many regions, fathers bestowed all their land on their eldest son—a practice known as **primogeniture**—forcing many younger children to join the ranks of the roaming poor. Few men and even fewer women had much personal freedom.

Hierarchy and authority prevailed in traditional European society because of the power held by established institutions—nobility, church, and village—and because, in a violent and unpredictable world, they offered ordinary people a measure of security. Carried by migrants to America, these security-conscious institutions would shape the character of family and society well into the eighteenth century.

Peasant Society

In 1450, most Europeans were **peasants**, farmworkers who lived in small villages surrounded by fields farmed cooperatively by different families. On manorial lands, farming rights were given in exchange for labor on the lord's estate, an arrangement that turned peasants into serfs. Gradually, obligatory manorial services gave way to paying rent, or, as in France, landownership. Once freed from the obligation to labor for their farming rights, European farmers began to produce surpluses and created local market economies.

As with Native Americans, the rhythm of life followed the seasons. In March, villagers began the exhausting work of plowing and then planting wheat, rye, and oats. During the spring, the men sheared wool, which the women washed and spun into yarn. In June, peasants cut hay and stored it as winter fodder for their livestock. During the summer, life was more relaxed, and families repaired their houses and barns. Fall brought the harvest, followed by solemn feasts of thanksgiving and riotous bouts of merrymaking. As winter approached, peasants slaughtered excess livestock and salted or smoked the meat. During the cold months, they threshed grain and wove textiles, visited friends and relatives, and celebrated the winter solstice or the birth of Christ. Just before the cycle began again in the spring, they held carnivals, celebrating with drink and dance the end of the long winter (Figure 1.1).

For most peasants, survival meant constant labor, and poverty corroded family relationships. Malnourished mothers fed their babies sparingly, calling them “greedy and gluttonous,” and many newborn girls were “helped to die” so that their brothers would have enough to eat. Half of all peasant children died before the age of twenty-one, victims of malnourishment and disease. Many peasants drew on strong religious beliefs, “counting blessings” and accepting their harsh existence. Others hoped for a better life. It was the peasants of Spain, Germany, and Britain who would supply the majority of white migrants to the Western Hemisphere.

Expanding Trade Networks

In the millennium before contact with the Americas, Western Europe was the barbarian fringe of the civilized world. In the Mediterranean basin, Arab scholars carried on the legacy of Byzantine civilization, which had preserved the achievements of the Greeks and Romans in medicine, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and geography, while merchants controlled trade in the Mediterranean, Africa, and the Near East. This control gave them access to spices from India and silks, magnetic compasses, water-powered mills, and mechanical clocks from China.

In the twelfth century, merchants from the Italian city-states of Genoa, Florence, Pisa, and especially Venice began to push their way into the Arab-dominated trade routes of the Mediterranean. Trading in Alexandria, Beirut, and other eastern Mediterranean ports, they carried the luxuries of Asia into European markets. At its peak, Venice had a merchant fleet of more than three thousand ships. This enormously profitable commerce created wealthy merchants, bankers, and textile manufacturers who expanded trade, lent vast sums of money, and spurred technological innovation in silk and wool production.

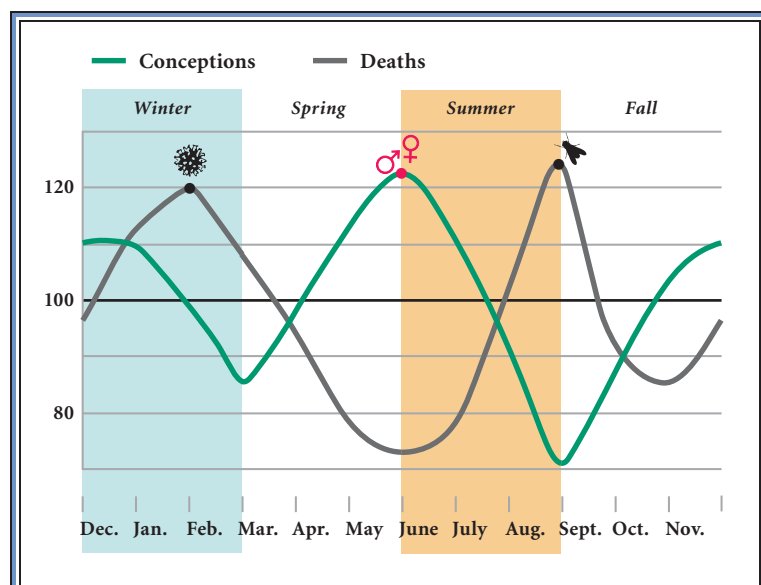
Italian moneyed elites ruled their city-states as **republics**, states that had no prince or king but instead

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

In what ways were the lives of Europeans similar to and different from those of Native Americans?

FIGURE 1.1
The Yearly Rhythm of Rural Life and Death

The annual cycle of nature profoundly affected life in the traditional agricultural world. The death rate soared by 20 percent in February (from viruses) and September (from fly-borne dysentery). Summer was the healthiest season, with the fewest deaths and the most successful conceptions (as measured by births nine months later). A value of 100 indicates an equal number of deaths and conceptions.





Procession in St. Mark's Square in Venice, 1496

Venice was one of the world's great trading centers in the fifteenth century. Its merchant houses connected Europe to Asia and the Middle East, while its complex republican government aroused both admiration and mistrust. Here, Venetian painter Gentile Bellini (c. 1429–1507) depicts a diplomatic procession celebrating the League of Venice, a union of European states opposed to French expansion into Italy. Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice, Italy/Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library.

were governed by merchant coalitions. They celebrated **civic humanism**, an ideology that praised public virtue and service to the state and in time profoundly influenced European and American conceptions of government. They sponsored great artists—Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and others—who produced an unprecedented flowering of genius. Historians have labeled the arts and learning associated with this cultural transformation from 1300 to 1450 the **Renaissance**.

The economic revolution that began in Italy spread slowly to northern and western Europe. England's principal export was woolen cloth, which was prized in the colder parts of the continent but had less appeal in southern Europe and beyond. Northern Europe had its own trade system, controlled by an alliance of merchant communities called the Hanseatic League centered on the Baltic and North seas, which dealt in timber, furs, wheat and rye, honey, wax, and amber.

As trade picked up in Europe, merchants and artisans came to dominate its growing cities and towns. While the Italian city-states ruled themselves without having a powerful monarch to contend with, in much of Europe the power of merchants stood in tension

with that of kings and nobles. In general, the rise of commerce favored the power of kings at the expense of the landed nobility. The kings of Western Europe established royal law courts that gradually eclipsed the manorial courts controlled by nobles; they also built bureaucracies that helped them centralize power while they forged alliances with merchants and urban artisans. Monarchs allowed merchants to trade throughout their realms; granted privileges to **guilds**, or artisan organizations that regulated trades; and safeguarded commercial transactions, thereby encouraging domestic manufacturing and foreign trade. In return, they extracted taxes from towns and loans from merchants to support their armies and officials.

Myths, Religions, and Holy Warriors

The oldest European religious beliefs drew on a form of animism similar to that of Native Americans, which held that the natural world—the sun, wind, stones, animals—was animated by spiritual forces. As in North America, such beliefs led ancient European peoples to develop localized cults of knowledge and spiritual practice. Wise men and women developed rituals to protect their communities, ensure abundant harvests, heal illnesses, and bring misfortunes to their enemies.

TRACE CHANGE OVER TIME

How did the growth of commerce shift the structure of power in European societies?

The pagan traditions of Greece and Rome overlaid animism with elaborate myths about gods interacting directly with the affairs of human beings. As the Roman Empire expanded, it built temples to its gods wherever it planted new settlements. Thus peoples throughout Europe, North Africa, and the Near East were exposed to the Roman pantheon. Soon the teachings of Christianity began to flow in these same channels.

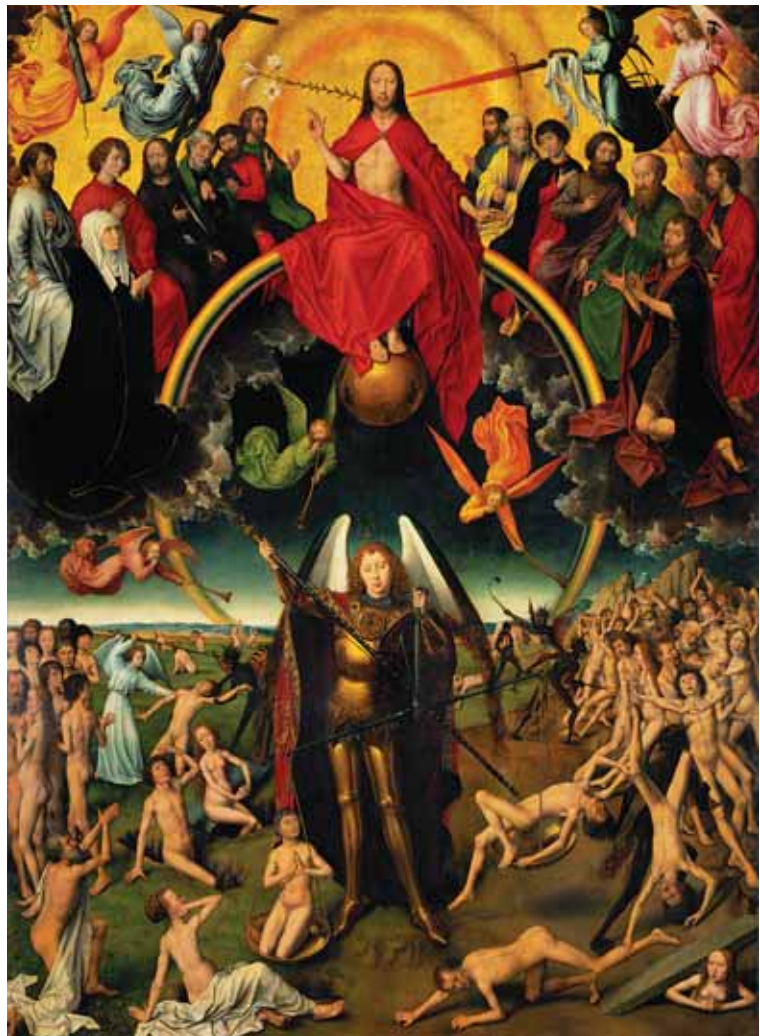
The Rise of Christianity Christianity, which grew out of Jewish monotheism (the belief in one god), held that Jesus Christ was himself divine. As an institution, Christianity benefitted enormously from the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine in A.D. 312. Prior to that time, Christians were an underground sect at odds with the Roman Empire. After Constantine's conversion, Christianity became Rome's official religion, temples were abandoned or remade into churches, and noblemen who hoped to retain their influence

converted to the new state religion. For centuries, the Roman Catholic Church was the great unifying institution in Western Europe. The pope in Rome headed a vast hierarchy of cardinals, bishops, and priests. Catholic theologians preserved Latin, the language of classical scholarship, and imbued kingship with divine power. Christian dogma provided a common understanding of God and human history, and the authority of the Church buttressed state institutions. Every village had a church, and holy shrines served as points of contact with the sacred world. Often those shrines had their origins in older, animist practices, now largely forgotten and replaced with Christian ritual.

Christian doctrine penetrated deeply into the everyday lives of peasants. While animist traditions held that spiritual forces were alive in the natural world, Christian priests taught that the natural world was flawed and fallen. Spiritual power came from outside nature, from a supernatural God who had sent his divine son, Jesus

The Last Judgment, 1467–1471

Death—and their fate in the after-life—loomed large in the minds of fifteenth-century Christians, and artists depicted their hopes and fears in vividly rendered scenes. In this painting by the German-Flemish artist Hans Memling (c. 1433–1494), Christ and his apostles sit in judgment as the world ends and the dead rise from their graves. The archangel Michael weighs the souls of the dead in a balance to determine their final fate: either eternal life with God in heaven or everlasting punishment in hell. Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.



Christ, into the world to save humanity from its sins. The Christian Church devised a religious calendar that transformed animist festivals into holy days. The winter solstice, which had for millennia marked the return of the sun, became the feast of Christmas.

The Church also taught that Satan, a wicked supernatural being, was constantly challenging God by tempting people to sin. People who spread **heresies**—doctrines that were inconsistent with the teachings of the Church—were seen as the tools of Satan, and suppressing false doctrines became an obligation of Christian rulers.

The Crusades In their work suppressing false doctrines, Christian rulers were also obliged to combat **Islam**, the religion whose followers considered Muhammad to be God's last prophet. Islam's reach expanded until it threatened European Christendom. Following the death of Muhammad in A.D. 632, the newly converted Arab peoples of North Africa used force and fervor to spread the Muslim faith into sub-Saharan Africa, India, and Indonesia, as well as deep into Spain and the Balkan regions of Europe. Between A.D. 1096 and 1291, Christian armies undertook a series of **Crusades** to reverse the Muslim advance in Europe and win back the holy lands where Christ had lived. Under the banner of the pope and led by Europe's Christian monarchs, crusading armies aroused great waves of popular piety as they marched off to combat. New orders of knights, like the Knights Templar and the Teutonic Knights, were created to support them.

The crusaders had some military successes, but their most profound impact was on European society. Religious warfare intensified Europe's Christian identity and prompted the persecution of Jews and their expulsion from many European countries. The Crusades also introduced Western European merchants to the trade routes that stretched from Constantinople to China along the Silk Road and from the Mediterranean Sea through the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean. And crusaders encountered sugar for the first time. Returning soldiers brought it back from the Middle East, and as Europeans began to conquer territory in the eastern Mediterranean, they experimented with raising it themselves. These early experiments with

sugar would have a profound impact on European enterprise in the Americas—and European involvement with the African slave trade—in the centuries to come. By 1450, Western Europe remained relatively isolated from

the centers of civilization in Eurasia and Africa, but the Crusades and the rise of Italian merchant houses had introduced it to a wider world.

The Reformation In 1517, Martin Luther, a German monk and professor at the university in Wittenberg, took up the cause of reform in the Catholic Church. Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* condemned the Church for many corrupt practices. More radically, Luther downplayed the role of the clergy as mediators between God and believers and said that Christians must look to the Bible, not to the Church, as the ultimate authority in matters of faith. So that every literate German could read the Bible, previously available only in Latin, Luther translated it into German.

Meanwhile, in Geneva, Switzerland, French theologian John Calvin established a rigorous Protestant regime. Even more than Luther, Calvin stressed human weakness and God's omnipotence. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) depicted God as an absolute sovereign. Calvin preached the doctrine of **predestination**, the idea that God chooses certain people for salvation before they are born and condemns the rest to eternal damnation. In Geneva, he set up a model Christian community and placed spiritual authority in ministers who ruled the city, prohibiting frivolity and luxury. "We know," wrote Calvin, "that man is of so perverse and crooked a nature, that everyone would scratch out his neighbor's eyes if there were no bridle to hold them in." Calvin's authoritarian doctrine won converts all over Europe, including the Puritans in Scotland and England.

Luther's criticisms triggered a war between the Holy Roman Empire and the northern principalities in Germany, and soon the controversy between the Roman Catholic Church and radical reformers like Luther and Calvin spread throughout much of Western Europe. The **Protestant Reformation**, as this movement came to be called, triggered a **Counter-Reformation** in the Catholic Church that sought change from within and created new monastic and missionary orders, including the Jesuits (founded in 1540), who saw themselves as soldiers of Christ. The competition between these divergent Christian traditions did much to shape European colonization of the Americas. Roman Catholic powers—Spain, Portugal, and France—sought to win souls in the Americas for the Church, while Protestant nations—England and the Netherlands—viewed the Catholic Church as corrupt and exploitative and hoped instead to create godly communities attuned to the true gospel of Christianity.

TRACE CHANGE OVER TIME

How did the growing influence of the Christian Church affect events in Europe?

West and Central Africa: Origins of the Atlantic Slave Trade

Homo sapiens originated in Africa. Numerous civilizations had already risen and fallen there, and contacts with the Near East and the Mediterranean were millennia old, when Western Europeans began sailing down its Atlantic coast. Home to perhaps 100 million in 1400, Africa was divided by the vast expanse of the Sahara. North Africa bordered on the Mediterranean, and its peoples fell under the domination of Christian Byzantium until the seventh century, when Muslim conquests brought the region under Islamic influence. In its coastal seaports, the merchandise of Asia, the Near East, Africa, and Europe converged. South of the Sahara, by contrast, the societies of West and Central Africa bordering on the Atlantic were relatively isolated. After 1400, that would quickly change.

Empires, Kingdoms, and Ministates

West Africa—the part of the continent that bulges into the Atlantic—can be visualized as a broad horizontal swath divided into three climatic zones. The Sahel is the mostly flat, semiarid zone immediately south of the Sahara. Below it lies the savanna, a grassland region dotted with trees and shrubs. South of the savanna, in a band 200 to 300 miles wide along the West African coast, lies a tropical rain forest. A series of four major watersheds—the Senegal, Gambia, Volta, and Niger—dominate West Africa (Map 1.3).

Sudanic civilization took root at the eastern end of West Africa beginning around 9000 B.C. and traveled westward. Sudanic peoples domesticated cattle (8500–7500 B.C.) and cultivated sorghum and millet (7500–7000 B.C.). Over several thousand years, these peoples developed a distinctive style of pottery, began to cultivate and weave cotton (6500–3500 B.C.), and invented techniques for working copper and iron (2500–1000 B.C.). Sudanic civilization had its own tradition of monotheism distinct from that of Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Most Sudanic peoples in West Africa lived in stratified states ruled by kings and princes who were regarded as divine.

From these cultural origins, three great empires arose in succession in the northern savanna. The first, the Ghana Empire, appeared sometime around A.D. 800. Ghana capitalized on the recently domesticated camel to pioneer trade routes across the Sahara to

North Africa, where Ghana traders carried the wealth of West Africa. The Ghana Empire gave way to the Mali Empire in the thirteenth century, which was eclipsed in turn by the Songhai Empire in the fifteenth century. All three empires were composed of smaller vassal kingdoms, not unlike the Aztec and Inca empires, and relied on military might to control their valuable trade routes.

Gold, abundant in West Africa, was the cornerstone of power and an indispensable medium of international trade. By 1450, West African traders had carried so much of it across the Sahara that it constituted one-half to two-thirds of all the gold in circulation in Europe, North Africa, and Asia. Mansa Musa, the tenth emperor of Mali, was a devout Muslim famed for his construction projects and his support of mosques and schools. In 1326, he embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca with a vast retinue that crossed the Sahara and passed through Egypt. They spent so much gold along the way that the region's money supply was devalued for more than a decade after their visit.

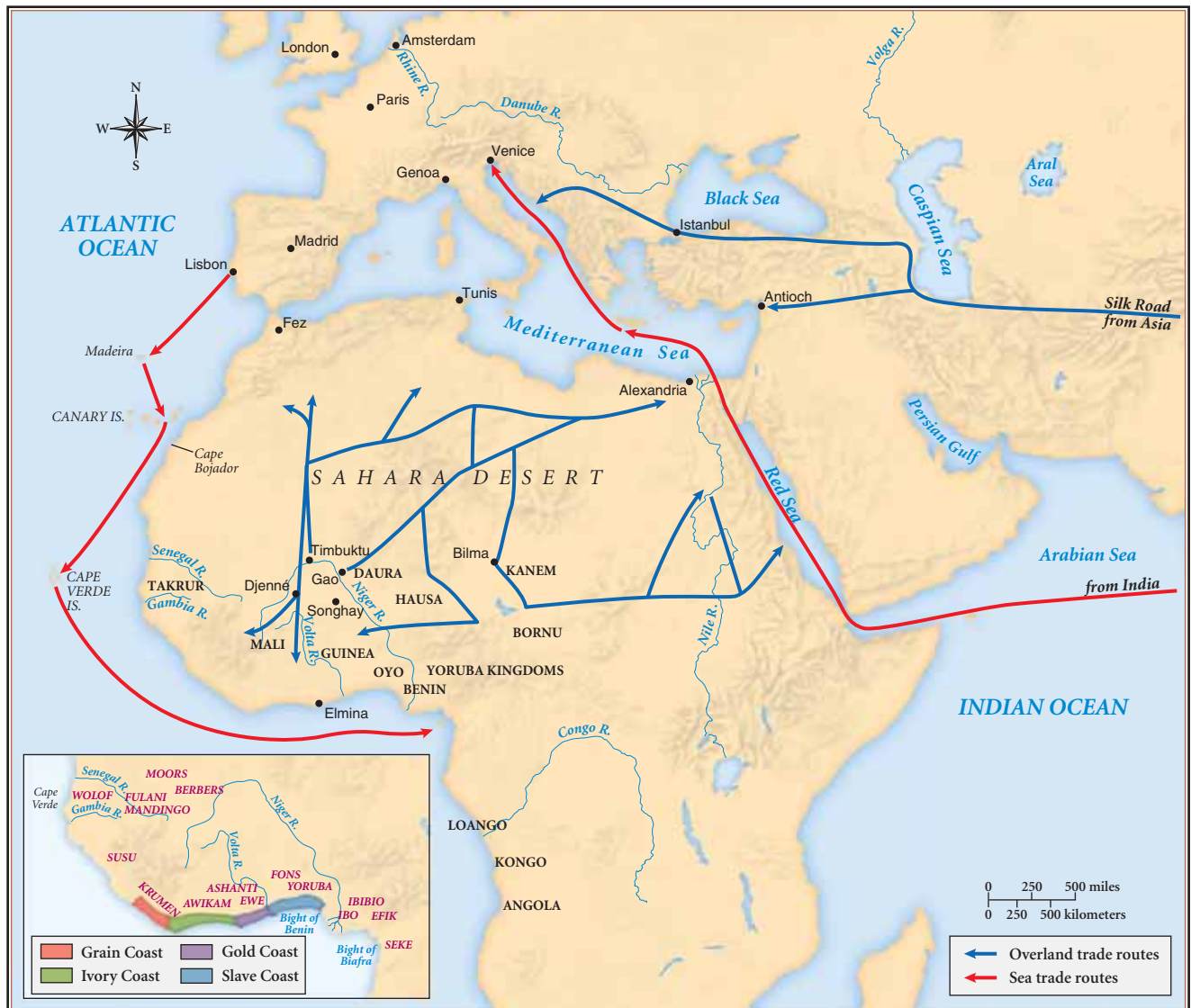
To the south of these empires, the lower savanna and tropical rain forest of West Africa were home to a complex mosaic of kingdoms that traded among themselves and with the empires to the north. In such a densely populated, resource-rich region, they also fought frequently in a competition for local power. A few of these coastal kingdoms were quite large in size, but most were small enough that they have been termed ministates by historians. Comparable to the city-states of Italy, they were often about the size of a modern-day county in the United States. The tropical ecosystem prevented them from raising livestock, since the tsetse fly (which carries a parasite deadly to livestock) was endemic to the region, as was malaria. In place of the grain crops of the savanna, these peoples pioneered the cultivation of yams; they also gathered resources from the rivers and seacoast.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

How do the states of the savanna compare to those of the Americas and Europe?

Trans-Saharan and Coastal Trade

For centuries, the primary avenue of trade for West Africans passed through the Ghana, Mali, and Songhai empires, whose power was based on the monopoly they enjoyed over the **trans-Saharan trade**. Their caravans carried West African goods—including gold, copper, salt, and slaves—from the south to the north across the Sahara, then returned with textiles and other foreign goods. For the smaller states clustered



MAP 1.3

West Africa and the Mediterranean in the Fifteenth Century

Trade routes across the Sahara had long connected West Africa with the Mediterranean region. Gold, ivory, and slaves moved north and east; fine textiles, spices, and the Muslim faith traveled south. Beginning in the 1430s, the Portuguese opened up maritime trade with the coastal regions of West Africa, which were home to many peoples and dozens of large and small states. Over the next century, the movement of gold and slaves into the Atlantic would surpass that across the Sahara.

along the West African coast, merchandise originating in the world beyond the Sahara was scarce and expensive, while markets for their own products were limited.

Beginning in the mid-fifteenth century, a newly opening coastal trade with Europeans offered many West African peoples a welcome alternative. As European sailors made their way along the coast of West and then Central Africa, they encountered a bewilderingly complicated political landscape. Around

the mouths of the Senegal and Gambia rivers, numerous Mande-speaking states controlled access to the trade routes into the interior. Proceeding farther along the coast, they encountered the Akan states, a region of several dozen independent but culturally linked peoples. The Akan states had goldfields of their own, and this region soon became known to Europeans as the Gold Coast. East of the Akan states lay the Bight of Benin, which became an early center of the slave trade and thus came to be called the Slave Coast. Bending



Terracotta Figure from Mali

Dating to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, this terracotta figure came from an archaeological site near Djenna. The rider wears a large, ornate necklace, while the horse has a decorative covering on its head. The Mali Empire relied on a large cavalry to expand and defend its borders, and the horse was an important symbol of Mali's wealth and power. Werner Forman/Art Resource, NY.

south, fifteenth-century sailors encountered the Kingdom of Kongo in Central Africa, the largest state on the Atlantic seaboard, with a coastline that ran for some 250 miles. It was here in 1578 that Duarte Lopez visited the capital city of more than 100,000 residents. Wherever they went ashore along this route, European traders had to negotiate contacts on local terms (Thinking Like a Historian, p. 26).

The Spirit World

Some West Africans who lived immediately south of the Sahara—the Fulanis in Senegal, the Mande-speakers in Mali, and the Hausas in northern Nigeria—learned about Islam from Arab merchants and Muslim leaders called imams. Converts to Islam knew the Koran and worshipped only a single God. Some of their cities, like Timbuktu, the legendary commercial center on the Niger River, became centers of Islamic learning and instruction. But most West

Africans acknowledged multiple gods, as well as spirits that lived in the earth, animals, and plants.

Like animists in the Americas and Europe, African communities had wise men and women adept at manipulating these forces for good or ill. The Sudanic tradition of divine kingship persisted, and many people believed that their kings could contact the spirit world. West Africans treated their ancestors with great respect, believing that the dead resided in a nearby spiritual realm and interceded in their lives. Most West African peoples had secret societies, such as the Poro for men and the Sande for women, that united people from different lineages and clans. These societies conducted rituals that celebrated male virility and female fertility. “Without children you are naked,” said a Yoruba proverb. Happy was the man with a big household, many wives, many children, and many relatives—and, in a not very different vein, many slaves.

PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT

Why were West African leaders eager to engage in trade with Europeans?

Exploration and Conquest

European engagement with the wider Atlantic world began around 1400, when the Portuguese monarchy propelled Europe into overseas expansion. Portugal soon took a leading role in the African slave trade, while the newly unified kingdom of Spain undertook Europe's first conquests in the Americas. These two ventures, though not initially linked, eventually became cornerstones in the creation of the “Atlantic World.”

Portuguese Expansion

As a young soldier fighting North African Moors with the Crusading Order of Christ, Prince Henry of Portugal (1394–1460) learned of Arab merchants' rich trade in gold and slaves across the Sahara. Seeking a maritime route to the source of this trade in West Africa, Henry founded a center for oceanic navigation. Henry's mariners, challenged to find a way through the treacherous waters off the northwest African coast, designed a better-handling vessel, the caravel, rigged with a lateen (triangular) sail that enabled the ship to tack into the wind. This innovation allowed them to sail far into the Atlantic, where they discovered and colonized the Madeira and Azore islands. From there, they sailed in 1435 to sub-Saharan Sierra Leone, where they exchanged salt, wine, and fish for African ivory and gold.



Colliding Cultures

Carefully consider each of the objects or texts below. What meanings might you—thinking like a historian—impart to them?

1. Mississippian warrior gorget (neck guard), A.D. 1250–1350.



Source: The National Museum of the American Indian/George Gustav Heye Center/New York, NY William E. Meyer Collection 15/853.

2. Portuguese officer's account of de Soto's expedition, 1557. This excerpt describes Indian resistance in the face of de Soto's campaign of conquest against Indians in the southeastern United States.

[Spanish soldiers] went over a swampy land where the horsemen could not go. A half league from camp they came upon some Indian huts near the river; [but] the people who were inside them plunged into the river. They captured four Indian women, and twenty Indians came at us and attacked us so stoutly that we had to retreat to the camp, because of their being (as they are) so skillful with their weapons. Those people are so warlike and so quick that they make no account of foot soldiers; for if these go for them, they flee, and when their adversaries turn their backs they are immediately on them. The farthest they flee is the distance of an arrow shot. They are never quiet but always running and crossing from one side to another so that the crossbows or the arquebuses can not be aimed at them; and before a crossbowman can fire a shot, an Indian can shoot three or four arrows, and very seldom

does he miss what he shoots at. If the arrow does not find armor, it penetrates as deeply as a crossbow. The bows are very long and the arrows are made of certain reeds like canes, very heavy and so tough that a sharpened cane passes through a shield. Some are pointed with a fish bone, as sharp as an awl, and others with a certain stone like a diamond point.

3. Duarte Lopez, *A Report on the Kingdom of Kongo*, 1591. A Portuguese explorer's account of his travels in southern Africa in the sixteenth century.

[T]he Kingdom of Sofala lies between the two rivers, Magnice and Cuama, on the sea-coast. It is small in size, and has but few villages and towns. . . . It is peopled by Mohammedans, and the king himself belongs to the same sect. He pays allegiance to the crown of Portugal, in order not to be subject to the government of Monomotapa [Mutapa]. On this account the Portuguese have a fortress at the mouth of the River Cuama, trading with those countries in gold, amber, and ivory, all found on that coast, as well as in slaves, and giving in exchange silk stuffs and taffetas. . . . It is said, that from these regions the gold was brought by sea which served for Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem, a fact by no means improbable, for in these countries of Monomotapa are found several ancient buildings of stone, brick, and wood, and of such wonderful workmanship, and architecture, as is nowhere seen in the surrounding provinces.

The Kingdom of Monomotapa is extensive, and has a large population of Pagan heathens, who are black, of middle stature, swift of foot, and in battle fight with great bravery, their weapons being bows and arrows, and light darts. There are numerous kings tributary to Monomotapa, who constantly rebel and wage war against it. The Emperor maintains large armies, which in the provinces are divided into legions, after the manner of the Romans, for, being a great ruler, he must be at constant warfare in order to maintain his dominion. Amongst his warriors, those most renowned for bravery, are the female legions, greatly valued by the Emperor, being the sinews of his military strength.

4. Benin figurine of a Portuguese soldier from the seventeenth century. This brass figure would have been kept on an altar or on the roof of the royal palace of Benin.



Source: © The Trustees of the British Museum/Art Resource, NY.

6. Sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Spanish silver real. Spain minted enormous quantities of American silver; much of it was shipped to Manila, where it was exchanged for Asian luxury goods.



Source: © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

5. Sixteenth-century Portuguese coin made from African gold. Before the discovery of the Americas, half of the Old World's gold came from sub-Saharan Africa.



Source: © The Trustees of the British Museum/Art Resource, NY.

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

1. What can you infer about cultural values among Mississippian peoples from source 1? About the cultural values of the Spanish and Portuguese from sources 5 and 6? What *can't* you infer from these objects?
2. How does de Soto describe the native peoples he encounters in Florida (source 2)? How does that compare to the traits of the African kingdoms that Lopez comments upon in source 3? Why might the king of Sofala prefer a Portuguese alliance to subjection to Monomotapa?
3. What does source 4 suggest about Benin relations with the Portuguese?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

What do these sources tell us about the ways Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans thought about themselves, perceived one another, and capitalized on cross-cultural exchanges as they came into sustained contact? Write a short essay that considers the connection between the impulses of warfare and commerce, which appear again and again in contact settings.



Banza in the Kingdom of Kongo, c. 1670

The city of Banza, or Mbanza Kongo, was the capital of the Kingdom of Kongo when Portuguese traders first arrived in 1483. Kongo's king, Nzinga a Nkuwu, chose to be baptized to cement an alliance with Portugal and took the name João I. Kongo became officially Christian and Banza came to be known as São Salvador. Duarte Lopez visited and described the city in 1578; this engraving shows the city as it appeared a century later. Banza in the Kingdom of Kongo, San Salvador, from Olfert Dapper, ca. 1668.

Henry's efforts were soon joined to those of Italian merchants, who were being forced out of eastern Mediterranean trade routes by the rising power of the Ottoman Empire. Cut off from Asia, Genoese traders sought an Atlantic route to the lucrative markets of the Indian Ocean. They began to work with Portuguese and Castilian mariners and monarchs to finance trading voyages, and the African coast and its offshore islands opened to their efforts. European voyagers discovered the Canaries, the Cape Verde Islands, and São Tomé; all of them became laboratories for the expansion of Mediterranean agriculture.

On these Atlantic islands, planters transformed local ecosystems to experiment with a variety of familiar cash crops: wheat, wine grapes, and woad, a blue dye plant; livestock and honeybees; and, where the climate permitted, sugar. By 1500,

Madeira was producing 2,500 metric tons a year, and Madeira sugar was available—in small, expensive quantities—in London, Paris, Rome, and Constantinople. Most of the islands were unpopulated. The Canaries were the exception; it took Castilian adventurers decades to conquer the Guanches who lived there. Once defeated, they were enslaved to labor in the Canaries or on Madeira, where they carved irrigation canals into the island's steep rock cliffs.

Europeans made no such inroads on the continent of Africa itself. The coastal kingdoms were well defended, and yellow fever, malaria, and dysentery quickly struck down Europeans who spent any time in the interior of West Africa. Instead they maintained small, fortified trading posts on offshore islands or along the coast, usually as guests of the local king.

Portuguese mariners continued to look for an Atlantic route to Asia. In 1488, Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope, the southern tip of

IDENTIFY CAUSES

How did Europe's desire for an ocean route to Asia shape its contacts with Africa?

Africa. Vasco da Gama reached East Africa in 1497 and India in the following year; his ships were mistaken for those of Chinese traders, the last pale-skinned men to arrive by sea. Although da Gama's inferior goods—tin basins, coarse cloth, honey, and coral beads—were snubbed by the Arab and Indian merchants along India's Malabar Coast, he managed to acquire a highly profitable cargo of cinnamon and pepper. Da Gama returned to India in 1502 with twenty-one fighting vessels, which outmaneuvered and outgunned the Arab fleets. Soon the Portuguese government set up fortified trading posts for its merchants at key points around the Indian Ocean, in Indonesia, and along the coast of China (Map 1.4). In a transition that sparked the momentous growth of European wealth and power, the Portuguese and then the Dutch replaced the Arabs as the leaders in Asian commerce.

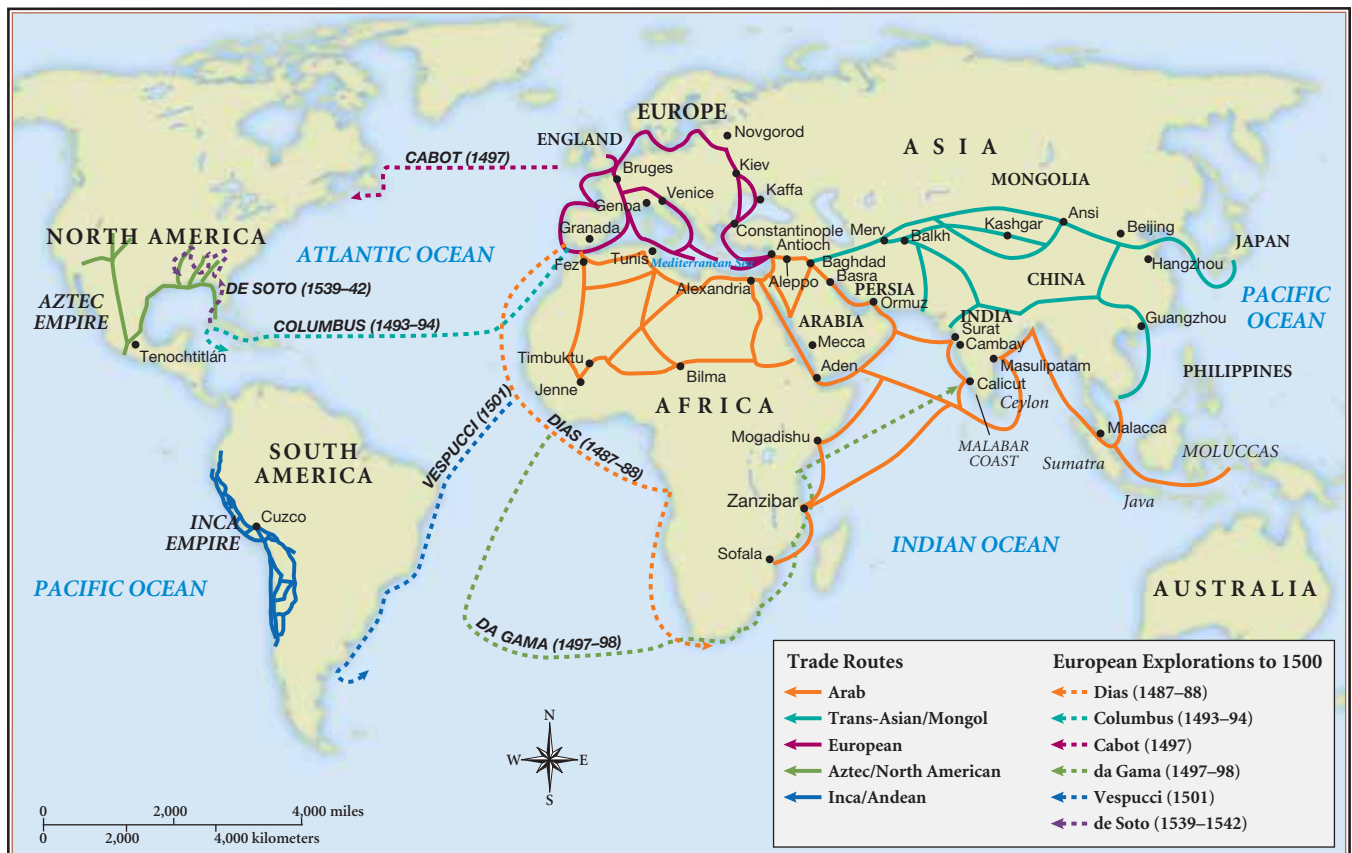
The African Slave Trade

Portuguese traders likewise ousted Arab merchants as the prime purveyors of African slaves. Coerced labor—through slavery, serfdom, or indentured servitude—was the norm in most premodern societies, and in Africa slavery was widespread. Some Africans were held in bondage as security for debts; others were sold into servitude by their kin in exchange for food in times of famine; many others were war captives.

Slaves were a key commodity of exchange, sold as agricultural laborers, concubines, or military recruits. Sometimes their descendants were freed, but others endured hereditary bondage. Sonni Ali (r. 1464–1492),

TRACE CHANGE OVER TIME

How was the African slave trade adapted to European needs?



MAP 1.4

The Eurasian Trade System and European Maritime Ventures, c. 1500

For centuries, the Mediterranean Sea was the meeting point for the commerce of Europe, North Africa, and Asia—via the Silk Road from China and the Spice Route from India. Beginning in the 1490s, Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch rulers and merchants subsidized Christian maritime explorers who discovered new trade routes around Africa and new sources of wealth in the Americas. These initiatives undermined the commercial primacy of the Arab Muslim-dominated Mediterranean.

the ruler of the powerful Songhai Empire, personally owned twelve “tribes” of hereditary agricultural slaves, many of them seized in raids against stateless peoples.

Slaves were also central to the trans-Saharan trade. When the renowned Tunisian adventurer Ibn Battuta crossed the Sahara from the Kingdom of Mali around 1350, he traveled with a caravan of six hundred female slaves, destined for domestic service or concubinage in North Africa, Egypt, and the Ottoman Empire. Between A.D. 700 and 1900, it is estimated that as many as nine million Africans were sold in the trans-Saharan slave trade.

Europeans initially were much more interested in trading for gold and other commodities than in trading for human beings, but gradually they discovered the enormous value of human trafficking. To exploit and redirect the existing African slave trade, Portuguese merchants established fortified trading posts like those in the Indian Ocean beginning at Elmina in 1482,

where they bought gold and slaves from African princes and warlords. First they enslaved a few thousand Africans each year to work on sugar plantations on São Tomé, Cape Verde, the Azores, and Madeira; they also sold slaves in Lisbon, which soon had an African population of 9,000. After 1550, the Atlantic slave trade, a forced diaspora of African peoples, expanded enormously as Europeans set up sugar plantations in Brazil and the West Indies.

Sixteenth-Century Incursions

As Portuguese traders sailed south and east, the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile financed an explorer who looked to the west. As Renaissance rulers, Ferdinand (r. 1474–1516) and Isabella (r. 1474–1504) saw national unity and foreign commerce as the keys to power and prosperity. Married in an arranged match to combine their Christian



The Map Behind Columbus's Voyage

In 1489, Henricus Martellus, a German cartographer living in Florence, produced this huge (4 feet by 6 feet) view of the known world, probably working from a map devised by Christopher Columbus's brother, Bartholomew. The map uses the spatial projection of the ancient Greek philosopher Claudius Ptolemy (A.D. 90–168) and incorporates information from Marco Polo's explorations in Asia and Bartolomeu Dias's recent voyage around the tip of Africa. Most important, it greatly exaggerates the width of Eurasia, thereby suggesting that Asia lies only 5,000 miles west of Europe (rather than the actual distance of 15,000 miles). Using Martellus's map, Columbus persuaded the Spanish monarchs to support his westward voyage. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.

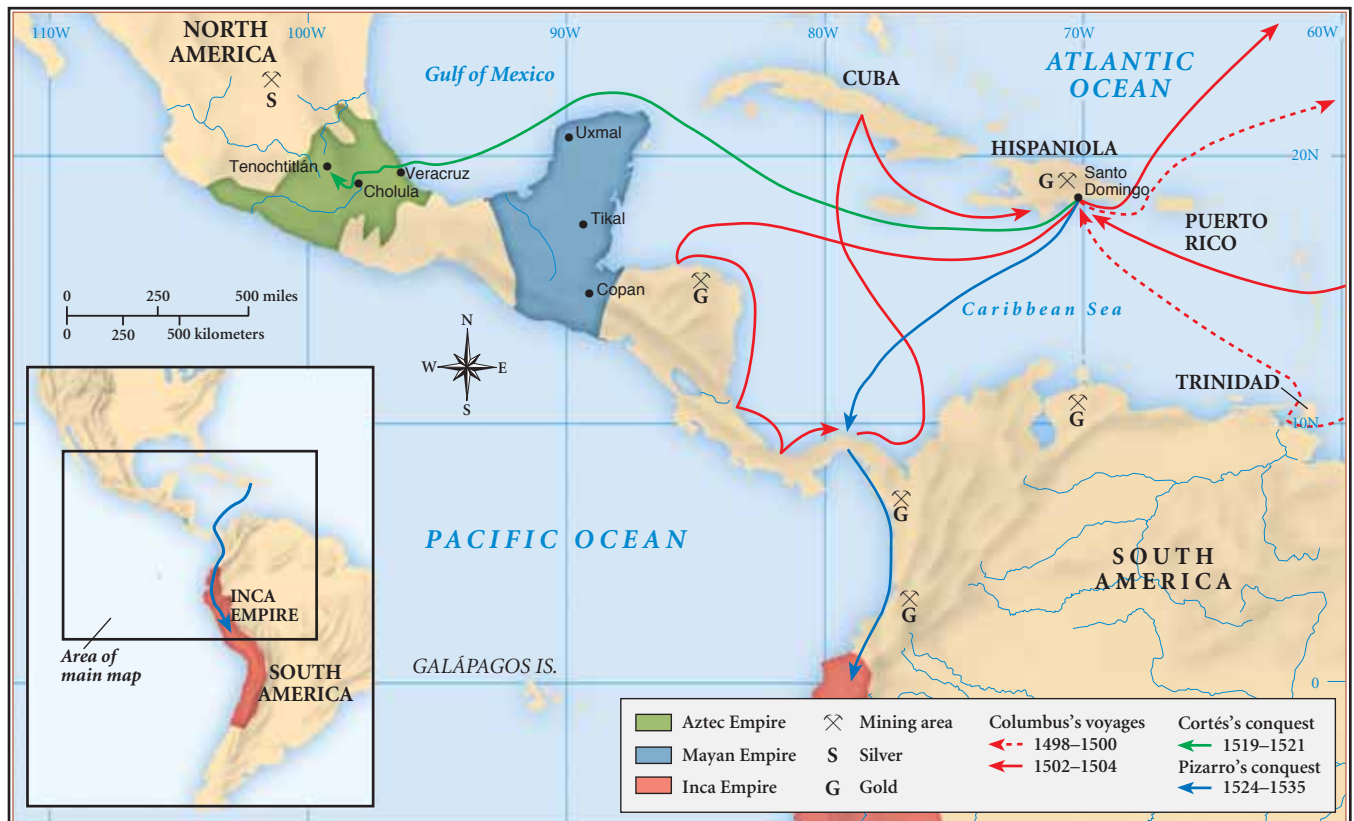
kingdoms, the young rulers completed the centuries-long **reconquista**, the campaign by Spanish Catholics to drive Muslim Arabs from the European mainland, by capturing Granada, the last Islamic territory in Western Europe, in 1492. Using Catholicism to build a sense of “Spanishness,” they launched the brutal Inquisition against suspected Christian heretics and expelled or forcibly converted thousands of Jews and Muslims.

Columbus and the Caribbean Simultaneously, Ferdinand and Isabella sought trade and empire by subsidizing the voyages of Christopher Columbus, an ambitious and daring mariner from Genoa. Columbus believed that the Atlantic Ocean, long feared by Arab merchants as a 10,000-mile-wide “green sea of darkness,” was a much narrower channel of water separating Europe from Asia. After cajoling and lobbying for six years, Columbus persuaded Genoese investors in Seville; influential courtiers; and, finally, Ferdinand and Isabella to accept his dubious theories and finance a western voyage to Asia.

Columbus set sail in three small ships in August 1492. Six weeks later, after a perilous voyage of 3,000 miles, he disembarked on an island in the present-day Bahamas. Believing that he had reached Asia — “the Indies,” in fifteenth-century parlance — Columbus called the native inhabitants Indians and the islands the West Indies. He was surprised by the crude living conditions but expected the native peoples “easily [to] be made Christians.” He claimed the islands for Spain and then explored the neighboring Caribbean islands and demanded tribute from the local Taino, Arawak, and Carib peoples. Buoyed by stories of rivers of gold lying “to the west,” Columbus left forty men on the island of Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and returned triumphantly to Spain (Map 1.5).



To see a longer excerpt of Columbus’s views of the West Indies, along with other primary sources from this period, see **Sources for America’s History**.



MAP 1.5
The Spanish Conquest of America's Great Empires

The Spanish first invaded the islands of the Caribbean, largely wiping out the native peoples. Rumors of a gold-rich civilization led to Cortés's invasion of the Aztec Empire in 1519. By 1535, other Spanish conquistadors had conquered the Mayan temple cities and the Inca empire in Peru, completing one of the great conquests in world history.



The Spanish Conquest of Mexico

How could a Spanish force of 600 men take control of an empire of 20 million people? That the Spanish had steel swords, armor, some guns, horses, and attack dogs certainly gave them a military advantage. Still, concerted attack by the armies of the Aztecs and their allies would have overwhelmed the invaders before they reached the capital of Tenochtitlán. Why was there no such attack? One reason was that Cortés's force was bolstered by a sizable army from Tlaxcala, an independent kingdom hostile to the Aztecs. A later tradition also suggests that some Aztecs, including Moctezuma, thought that Cortés might be an emissary of their god Quetzalcoatl.

These documents come from people who experienced the conquest. Consider them first as *sources*: How trustworthy are they? Are they biased in any way? Then think about their *contents*: Do their accounts agree? Do they explain why the Spaniards reached the city unmolested?

Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Cortés and Moctezuma Meet

Bernal Díaz was an unlikely chronicler of great events. Born poor, he went to America as a common soldier in 1514 and served under conquistadors in Panama and Cuba. In 1519, Bernal Díaz joined Cortés's expedition, fought in many battles, and as a reward received an estate in present-day Guatemala. In his old age, Díaz wrote *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, a compelling memoir written from the perspective of a common soldier. In fresh and straightforward prose, it depicts the conquest as a divinely blessed event that saved the non-Aztec peoples of Mexico from a barbarous regime.

The Great Moctezuma had sent these great Caciques in advance to receive us, and when they came before Cortés they bade us welcome in their language, and as a sign of peace, they touched their hands against the ground. . . .

When we arrived near to [Tenochtitlán], . . . the Great Moctezuma got down from his litter, and those great Caciques [aristocrats] supported him with their arms beneath a marvelously rich canopy of green coloured feathers with much gold and silver embroidery . . . which was wonderful to look at. The Great Moctezuma was richly attired according to his usage, and he was shod with sandals, the soles were of gold and the upper part adorned with precious stones. . . .

Many other Lords walked before the Great Moctezuma, sweeping the ground where he would tread and spreading cloths on it, so that he should not tread on the earth. Not one of these chieftains dared even to think of looking him in the face, but kept their eyes lowered with great reverence. . . .

When Cortés was told that the Great Moctezuma was approaching, and he saw him coming, he dismounted from his horse, and when he was near Moctezuma, they simultaneously paid great reverence to one another. Moctezuma bade him welcome and our Cortés replied through Doña Marina [Malinali, also called Malinche, Cortés's Indian interpreter who bore him a child] wishing him very good health. . . . And then Cortés brought out a necklace which he had ready at hand, made of glass stones, . . . which have within them many patterns of diverse colours, these were strung on a cord of gold and with musk so that it should have a sweet scent, and he placed it round the neck of the Great Moctezuma. . . . Then Cortés through the mouth of Doña Marina told him that now his heart rejoiced having seen such a great Prince, and that he took it as a great honour that he had come in person to meet him. . . .

Thus space was made for us to enter the streets of Mexico, without being so much crowded. But who could now count the multitude of men and women and boys who were in the streets and in canoes on the canals, who had come out to see us. It was indeed wonderful. . . . Coming to think it over it seems to be a great mercy that our Lord Jesus Christ was pleased to give us grace and courage to dare to enter into such a city; and for the many times He has saved me from danger of death . . . I give Him sincere thanks. . . .

They took us to lodge in some large houses, where there were apartments for all of us, for they had belonged to the father of the Great Moctezuma, who was named Axayaca. . . .

Cortés thanked Moctezuma through our interpreters, and Moctezuma replied, "Malinche, you and your brethren are in your own house, rest awhile," and then he went

to his palaces, which were not far away, and we divided our lodgings by companies, and placed the artillery pointing in a convenient direction, and the order which we had to keep was clearly explained to us, and that we were to be much on the alert, both the cavalry and all of us soldiers. A sumptuous dinner was provided for us according to their use and custom, and we ate it at once. So this was our lucky and daring entry into the great city of Tenochtitlan Mexico on the 8th day of November the year of our Saviour Jesus Christ, 1519.

Source: Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, trans. A. P. Maudslay (1632; London: Routledge, 1928), 272–275.

Friar Bernardino de Sahagún Aztec Elders Describe the Behavior of Moctezuma

During the 1550s, Friar Bernardino de Sahagún published *General History of the Things of New Spain*. His *History* compiled the stories of Aztec elders who lived through the conquest. They told their stories to Sahagún in a repetitive style, according to the conventions of Aztec oral histories, and he translated them into Spanish.

Moctezuma enjoyed no sleep, no food, no one spoke to him. Whatsoever he did, it was as if he were in torment. Ofttimes it was as if he sighed, became weak, felt weak. . . . Wherefore he said, “What will now befall us? Who indeed stands [in charge]? Alas, until now, I. In great torment is my heart; as if it were washed in chili water it indeed burns.” And when he had so heard what the messengers reported, he was terrified, he was astounded. . . . Especially did it cause him to faint away when he heard how the gun, at [the Spaniards’] command, discharged: how it resounded as if it thundered when it went off. It indeed bereft one of strength; it shut off one’s ears. And when it discharged, something like a round pebble came forth from within. Fire went showing forth; sparks went blazing forth. And its smoke smelled very foul; it had a fetid odor which verily wounded the head. And when [the shot] struck a mountain, it was as if it were destroyed, dissolved . . . as if someone blew it away.

All iron was their war array. In iron they clothed themselves. With iron they covered their heads. Iron were their swords. Iron were their crossbows. Iron were their shields. Iron were their lances. And those which bore them upon their backs, their deer [horses], were as tall as roof terraces.

And their bodies were everywhere covered; only their faces appeared. They were very white; they had chalky faces; they had yellow hair, though the hair of some was black. . . . And when Moctezuma so heard, he was much terrified. It was as if he fainted away. His heart saddened; his heart failed him. . . . [but] he made himself resolute; he put forth great effort; he quieted, he controlled his heart; he submitted himself entirely to whatsoever he was to see, at which he was to marvel. . . . [He then greeted Cortés, as described above.]

And when [the Spaniards] were well settled, they thereupon inquired of Moctezuma as to all the city’s treasure . . . the devices, the shields. Much did they importune him; with great zeal they sought gold. . . . Thereupon were brought forth all the brilliant things; the shields, the golden discs, the devils’ necklaces, the golden nose crescents, the golden leg bands, the golden arm bands, the golden forehead bands.

Source: From Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of New Spain*, translated by Arthur O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble. Copyright © 1975. Reprinted by permission of Utah Press.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Both Díaz’s account and that of the Aztec elders were written in retrospect, and both reflect their authors’ awareness of the impending conquest. Compare the tone of these accounts. How does each reflect the author’s knowledge of what is to come?
2. Why does Moctezuma pay “great reverence” to Cortés? Why does Cortés return the honor? What is the strategy of each leader?
3. What is Díaz’s explanation for the easy entry of the Spanish into the city? What explanation is suggested by the elders’ account?

Although Columbus brought back no gold, the Spanish monarchs supported three more of his voyages. Columbus colonized the West Indies with more than 1,000 Spanish settlers—all men—and hundreds of domestic animals. But he failed to find either golden treasures or great kingdoms, and his death in 1506 went virtually unnoticed.

A German geographer soon labeled the newly found continents America in honor of a Florentine explorer, Amerigo Vespucci. Vespucci, who had explored the coast of present-day South America around 1500, denied that the region was part of Asia. He called it a *nuevo mundo*, a “new world.” The Spanish crown called the two continents *Las Indias* (“the Indies”) and wanted to make them a new Spanish world.

The Spanish Invasion After brutally subduing the Arawaks and Tainos on Hispaniola, the Spanish probed the mainland for gold and slaves. In 1513, Juan Ponce

de León explored the coast of Florida and gave that peninsula its name. In the same year, Vasco Núñez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Darien (Panama) and became the first European to see the Pacific Ocean. Rumors of rich Indian kingdoms encouraged other Spaniards, including hardened veterans of the *reconquista*, to invade the mainland. The Spanish monarchs offered successful conquistadors noble titles, vast estates, and Indian laborers.

With these inducements before him, in 1519 Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) led an army of 600 men to the Yucatán Peninsula. Gathering allies among native peoples who chafed under Aztec rule, he marched on Tenochtitlán and challenged its ruler, Moctezuma. Awed by the Spanish invaders, Moctezuma received Cortés with great ceremony (American Voices, p. 32). However, Cortés soon took the emperor captive, and following a prolonged siege, he and his men captured the city. The conquest took a devastating toll: the



Mexican Counterattack

This image, which comes from a history of the Aztecs written in 1570 by the Spanish Dominican monk Diego Durán, illustrates a successful counterattack by Mexica warriors against Spanish soldiers prior to the final conquest of Tenochtitlán. The Spaniards try to hold their position as the Mexicans prepare to strike. Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic/Arxiu Mas.

conquerors cut off the city's supply of food and water, and the residents of Tenochtitlán suffered spectacularly. By 1521, Cortés and his men had toppled the Aztec Empire.

The Spanish had a silent ally: disease. Having been separated from Eurasia for thousands of years, the inhabitants of the Americas had no immunities to common European diseases. After the Spaniards arrived, a massive smallpox epidemic ravaged Tenochtitlán, “striking everywhere in the city,” according to an Aztec source, and killing Moctezuma's brother and thousands more. “They could not move, they could not stir. . . . Covered, mantled with pustules, very many people died of them.” Subsequent outbreaks of smallpox, influenza, and measles killed hundreds of thousands of Indians and sapped the survivors' morale. Exploiting this demographic weakness, Cortés quickly extended Spanish rule over the Aztec Empire. His lieutenants then moved against the Mayan city-states of the Yucatán Peninsula, eventually conquering them as well.

In 1524, Francisco Pizarro set out to accomplish the same feat in Peru. By the time he and his small force of 168 men and 67 horses finally reached their destination in 1532, half of the Inca population had already died from European diseases. Weakened militarily and divided between rival claimants to the throne, the Inca nobility was easy prey. Pizarro killed Atahualpa, the last Inca emperor, and seized his enormous wealth. Although Inca resistance continued for a generation, the conquest was complete by 1535, and Spain was now the master of the wealthiest and most populous regions of the Western Hemisphere.

The Spanish invasion changed life forever in the Americas. Disease and warfare wiped out virtually all of the Indians of Hispaniola — at least 300,000 people. In Peru, the population of 9 million in 1530 plummeted to fewer than 500,000 a century later. Mesoamerica suffered the greatest losses: In one of the great demographic disasters in world history, its population of 20 million Native Americans in 1500 had dwindled to just 3 million in 1650.

Cabral and Brazil At the same time, Portuguese efforts to find a sailing route around the southern tip of Africa led to a surprising find. As Vasco da Gama and his contemporaries experimented with winds and currents, their voyages carried them ever farther away from the African coast and into the Atlantic. On one such voyage in 1500, the Portuguese commander Pedro Álvares Cabral and his fleet were surprised to see land loom up in the west. Cabral named his discovery *Ihla da Vera Cruz* — the Island of the True Cross — and

continued on his way toward India. Others soon followed and changed the region's name to Brazil after the indigenous tree that yielded a valuable red dye; for several decades, Portuguese sailors traded with the Tupi Indians for brazilwood. Then in the 1530s, to secure Portugal's claim, King Dom João III sent settlers who began the long, painstaking process of carving out sugar plantations in the coastal lowlands. For several decades, Native Americans supplied most of the labor for these operations, but African slaves gradually replaced them. Brazil would soon become the world's leading producer of sugar; it would also devour African lives. By introducing the plantation system to the Americas — a form of estate agriculture using slave labor that was pioneered by Italian merchants and crusading knights in the twelfth century and transplanted to the islands off the coast of Africa in the fifteenth century — the Portuguese set in motion one of the most significant developments of the early modern era.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the European colonization of the Americas had barely begun. Yet several of its most important elements were already taking shape. Spanish efforts demonstrated that densely populated empires were especially vulnerable to conquest and were also especially valuable sources of wealth. The Portuguese had discovered the viability of sugar plantations in the tropical regions of the Americas and pioneered the transatlantic slave trade as a way of manning them. And contacts with native peoples revealed their devastating vulnerabilities to Eurasian diseases — one part of the larger phenomenon of the Columbian Exchange (discussed in Chapter 2).

SUMMARY

Native American, European, and African societies developed independently over thousands of years before they experienced direct contacts with one another. In the Americas, residents of Mesoamerica and the Andes were fully sedentary (with individual ownership of land and intensive agriculture), but elsewhere societies were semisedentary (with central fields and villages that were occupied seasonally) or nonsedentary (hunter-gatherers). West and Central Africa also had a mix of sedentary, semisedentary, and nonsedentary settlements. Western Europe, by contrast, was predominantly sedentary. All three continents had a complex patchwork of political organization, from empires, to kingdoms and chiefdoms, to principalities, duchies, and ministates; everywhere, rulership was imbued with notions of spiritual power. Ruling classes relied on

warfare, trade, and tribute (or taxes) to dominate those around them and accumulate precious goods that helped to set them apart from ordinary laborers, but they also bore responsibility for the well-being of their subjects and offered them various forms of protection.

As Portuguese and Castilian (later Spanish) seafarers pushed into the Atlantic, they set in motion a chain of events whose consequences they could scarcely imagine. From a coastal trade with Africa that was secondary to their efforts to reach the Indian Ocean, from the miscalculations of Columbus and the happy accident of Cabral, developed a pattern of transatlantic

exploration, conquest, and exploitation that no one could have foretold or planned. In the tropical zones of the Caribbean and coastal Brazil, invading Europeans enslaved Native Americans and quickly drove them into extinction or exile. The demands of plantation agriculture soon led Europeans to import slaves from Africa, initiating a transatlantic trade that would destroy African lives on both sides of the ocean. And two of the greatest empires in the world—the Aztec and Incan empires—collapsed in response to unseen biological forces that acted in concert with small invading armies.



**European Map of Brazil,
c. 1519**

This lavishly illustrated map of Brazil is drawn from the Miller Atlas, made by order of King Manuel I of Portugal around 1519. It features images of Indians harvesting brazilwood; macaws and other colorful birds; a monkey; and—improbably—a fire-breathing dragon. Note, too, the dense annotations and place names along the coast—a reminder that Portuguese familiarity with Brazil was confined almost entirely to the seaboard. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.