

CHAPTER ONE: PEOPLE IN MOTION: THE ATLANTIC WORLD TO 1590

READING AND STUDY GUIDE

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To the people who had lived in the Americas for millennia, the idea that theirs was a “New World” would have seemed strange. Scientists continue to debate when the first people arrived in the Americas from Asia, but estimates range from between forty thousand and fourteen thousand years ago. In the millennia that followed, the peoples of the Americas fanned out and established a range of societies.

Yet to the Europeans who arrived in the Americas toward the end of the fifteenth century, America was indeed a “brave new world,” as William Shakespeare wrote, inhabited by exotic plants, animals, and peoples. In images and words Europeans portrayed this extraordinary land in the most fantastic terms. Some accounts spoke of America as an Eden-like earthly paradise inhabited by good-natured, but primitive, peoples.

The European arrival in the Americas was part of a process of exploration and colonization pursued primarily by Portugal, Spain, France, and England. This impulse was

driven both by a hunger for riches as well as by profound changes in European society, religion, economics, and politics brought on by the Renaissance and Reformation. Africa was eventually drawn into this vast trading network encompassing the entire Atlantic world. Colonization almost always involved the severe exploitation of native peoples, including dispossession of land and coerced labor. Eventually Europeans turned to the international slave trade and the labor of enslaved Africans to draw the wealth from the mines and fields of the New World.

Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 1, students should be able to do the following:

1. Define the term *Paleo-Indians*.
2. Explain the impact of the development of agriculture on Native American society.
3. Define the term *culture area* and apply it to the development of Native American societies in the New World.
4. Explain the significance of Mesoamerica in the development of Native American culture.
5. List the Native American societies that emerged north of Mexico and describe their distinctive cultural characteristics.
6. Describe the Native American societies of the Caribbean Islands.
7. Describe the general cultural characteristics of Native American society, focusing on religion, family and kinship traits, and gender roles.
8. Describe the cultural characteristics of West African society, focusing on the political systems, economy, family, religion, and the tradition of slavery.
9. Describe the cultural characteristics of western European society on the eve of discovery, focusing on the economy, family and kinship ties, political systems, and religion.
10. Distinguish between Catholic and Protestant Christianity and identify and chronologically place the Protestant Reformation.
11. List the factors contributing to the development of western European interest in exploration and discovery.
12. Identify Christopher Columbus and discuss his role in the European discovery and exploration of the New World.
13. Explain the factors that contributed to Hernán Cortés's conquest of the Aztecs in Mexico.

14. Define the term *Columbian exchange* and discuss its impact on European and Native American culture.
15. Identify the major French explorers of the sixteenth century and describe their contributions to creating a French empire in the New World.
16. Identify the major English explorers of the sixteenth century and describe their contributions to creating a British empire in the New World.
17. Explain how the British experience in Ireland impacted British colonization in the New World.
18. Discuss the mystery of Roanoke Island and the possible explanations offered by historians as to the fate of the settlement.
19. Explain the ecological consequences that flowed from the Huron view of nature.

Key Terms & Definitions:

Paleo-Indians The name given by scientists to the first inhabitants of the Americas, an Ice Age people who survived largely by hunting big game, and to a lesser extent by collecting edible plants and fishing. (4)

Archaic Era Period beginning approximately nine thousand years ago lasting an estimated six thousand years. This period was marked by more intensive efforts on the part of ancient societies to shape the environment to enhance food production. (5)

Aztec Led by the Mexica tribe, the Aztec created a powerful empire whose capital, the great city of Tenochtitlán, was created on an island in Lake Texcoco in 1325 CE. (6)

Islam Monotheistic faith whose teachings followed the word of the prophet Muhammad, and whose followers controlled most of the overland trade routes to the Far East. (10)

capitalism An economic system in which the market economy determined the prices of goods and services. (11)

humanists Individuals who advocated a revival of ancient learning, particularly ancient Greek thought, and encouraged greater attention to secular topics including a new emphasis on the study of humanity. (13)

Reformation The movement for religious reform started by Martin Luther. (13)

Spanish Inquisition A Spanish tribunal devoted to finding and punishing heresy and rooting out Spain's Jews and Muslims. (15)

Columbian Exchange The term used by modern scholars to describe the biological encounter between the two sides of the Atlantic, including the movement of plants, animals, and diseases. (16)

plantation An English settlement or fortified outpost in a foreign land dedicated to producing agricultural products for export. (Later the term would become synonymous with a distinctive slave-based labor system used in much of the Atlantic world.) (29)

privateer A form of state-sponsored piracy, usually directed against Spanish treasure fleets returning from the Americas. (30)

Study Questions:

How did Europeans envision America? (2)

What theories account for the mass extinction of large mammals in the Americas? (4)

What impact did agriculture have on the evolution of the societies of the Americas? (5)

What role did commerce play in Aztec culture? (6)

What role did trade play in ancient American societies? (7)

What were some differences between Eastern Woodlands Indian and Mesoamerican societies? (8)

What were some of the distinctive characteristics shared by all of the societies of the Americas? (9)

What trade goods from Asia were most sought after by Europeans? (10)

What impact did printing have on European society? (11)

How does this painting of Adam and Eve reflect European views of nature? (12)

What were the essential teachings of Calvinism? (13)

Why did Calvinists wish to remove all icons from their churches? (14)

How was the English Reformation different than the Continental Reformation? (15)

What was the Columbian Exchange? (16)

What role did disease play in the Columbian Exchange? (17)

What technological advances facilitated European expansionism? (18)

What role did disease play in the Spanish conquest of the Aztec? (19)

Why did the Spanish stress the cruelty and barbarism of Aztec culture? (20)

What were the major religious traditions of Africa? (21)

How did the Portuguese justify the enslavement of the Guanche? (22)

What role did slaves play in African societies? (23)

What theories account for Benin's ability to resist involvement in the international slave trade? (24)

What was the Black Legend? (25)

What does the architecture of the central Plaza of Mexico City tell us about Spain's approach to colonization? (26)

What types of labor systems were employed in the Spanish colonies? (27)

What were the most important differences between New France and New Spain? (28)

What lessons did the English learn from their experiences in Ireland? (29)

What is the symbolic importance of the Position of Queen Elizabeth's hand in the Armada portrait? (30)

How did de Bry change the Indians in John White's painting? (31)