

Period 1: 1491 to 1607

Overview: On a North American continent controlled by American Indians, contact among the peoples of Europe, the Americas, and West Africa created a new world.

Key Concept 1.1

Before the arrival of Europeans, native populations in North America developed a wide variety of social, political, and economic structures based in part on interactions with the environment and each other.

- I. As settlers migrated and settled across the vast expanse of North America over time, they developed quite different and increasingly complex societies by adapting to and transforming their diverse environments.
 - A. The spread of maize cultivation from present-day Mexico northward into the American Southwest and beyond supported economic development and social diversification among societies in these areas; a mix of foraging and hunting did the same for societies in the Northwest and areas of California.
 - B. Societies responded to the lack of natural resources in the Great Basin and the western Great Plains by developing largely mobile lifestyles.
 - C. In the Northeast and along the Atlantic Seaboard some societies developed a mixed agricultural and hunter-gatherer economy that favored the development of permanent villages.

Key Concept 1.2

European overseas expansion resulted in the Columbian Exchange, a series of interactions and adaptations among societies across the Atlantic.

- I. The arrival of Europeans in the Western Hemisphere in the 15th and 16th centuries triggered extensive demographic and social changes on both sides of the Atlantic.
 - A. Spanish and Portuguese exploration and conquest of the Americas led to widespread deadly epidemics, the emergence of racially mixed populations, and a caste system defined by an intermixture among Spanish settlers, Africans, and Native Americans.
 - B. Spanish and Portuguese traders reached West Africa and partnered with some African groups to exploit local resources and recruit slave labor for the Americas.
 - C. The introduction of new crops and livestock by the Spanish had far-reaching effects on native settlement patterns, as well as on economic, social, and political development in the Western Hemisphere.
 - D. In the economies of the Spanish colonies, Indian labor, used in the encomienda system to support plantation-based agriculture and extract precious metals and other resources, was gradually replaced by African slavery.

- II. European expansion into the Western Hemisphere caused intense social/religious, political, and economic competition in Europe and the promotion of empire building.
- A. European exploration and conquest were fueled by a desire for new sources of wealth, increased power and status, and converts to Christianity.
 - B. New crops from the Americas stimulated European population growth, while new sources of mineral wealth facilitated the European shift from feudalism to capitalism.
 - C. Improvements in technology and more organized methods for conducting international trade helped drive changes to economies in Europe and the Americas.

Key Concept 1.3

Contacts among American Indians, Africans, and Europeans challenged the worldviews of each group.

- I. European overseas expansion and sustained contacts with Africans and American Indians dramatically altered European views of social, political, and economic relationships among and between white and nonwhite peoples.
 - A. With little experience dealing with people who were different from themselves, Spanish and Portuguese explorers poorly understood the native peoples they encountered in the Americas, leading to debates over how American Indians should be treated and how “civilized” these groups were compared to European standards.
 - B. Many Europeans developed a belief in white superiority to justify their subjugation of Africans and American Indians, using several different rationales.
- II. Native peoples and Africans in the Americas strove to maintain their political and cultural autonomy in the face of European challenges to their independence and core beliefs.
 - A. European attempts to change American Indian beliefs and worldviews on basic social issues such as religion, gender roles and the family, and the relationship of people with the natural environment led to American Indian resistance and conflict.
 - B. In spite of slavery, Africans’ cultural and linguistic adaptations to the Western Hemisphere resulted in varying degrees of cultural preservation and autonomy.