Chapter 1: A Continent of Villages, to 1500

Chapter Review

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

Between the tenth and fourteenth centuries, Cahokia was an urban, cluster of 20,000 or 30,000 people; a complex agricultural society ruled over by elite leaders that archaeologists term “Mississippian.”

II. THE FIRST AMERICAN SETTLERS

Columbus called the Caribbean Tainos “Los Indios” because of his mistaken belief he was in the East Indies, a term that passed into English as “Indians,” the term commonly used to describe all the native peoples of the Americas.

a. Who Are the Indian People?

Once Europeans realized that the Americas were in fact a “New World,” rather than part of the Asian continent, a debate began over how people might have moved there from Europe and Asia, where (according to the Bible) God had created the first man and woman.

MHL Document: Whose History Is It?: Images of Indians at www.myhistorylab.com

MHL Document: José de Acosta, Speculations on the Origins of the Indians (1590) at www.myhistorylab.com

b. Migration from Asia

The Spanish Jesuit missionary Joseph de Acosta was the first to put forth the idea of Asian origins and the crossing of a land bridge, the most commonly accepted theory in the present day. This migration took place over thousands of years, in a series of three major migrations. The first, in 12,000 BCE or earlier, followed herds of animals and progressed down the North and South American continents at intermittent stages, over land, as the receding glaciers and natural elements allowed, and in the oceans by those who were maritime-oriented. Later migrations, about 5000 BCE, led to the arrival of the native peoples of the American Southwest (Navajo and Apache) and a final migration beginning about 3000 BCE brought the Inuit and other Arctic peoples.

MHL Document: Pima Creation Story, at www.myhistorylab.com

c. The Clovis Culture: The First Environmental Adaptation
“Clovis” is named for a highly advanced form of fluted blades and lance points that appeared about 11,000 years ago (superior to the European tools of the same period). Named for the Clovis, NM, site where they were first found, Clovis tools rapidly spread throughout the continent, suggesting extensive foraging, migration, and trade networks developed by mobile communities of foragers numbering perhaps 30 to 50 individuals from several interrelated families. Clovis people also had to adapt to dramatic changes in the environment after the end of the last Ice Age about 15,000 years ago led to a period of global warming.

d. New Ways of Living on the Land

With the end of the Ice Age, the continental-wide culture fragmented into regional cultures as each was forced to contend with the climatic and environmental changes, with hunting, foraging and fishing cultures arising from the Arctic to the deserts to the coasts.

1. Hunting Traditions

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

MHL Map: The First Americans: Location of Major Indian Groups and Culture Areas in the 1600s at www.myhistorylab.com

2. Desert Culture

Desert culture was exemplified by small game hunting, intensive foraging, small communities that migrated seasonally, and complex systems of resource use and adaptation. The innovative practices of the desert spread from the Great Basin to the Great Plains and Southwest, and eventually leading to the continent’s first groups of settled communities in California and along the Pacific Northwest coast.

3. Forest Efficiency

The peoples east of the Mississippi developed systems of labor divisions and resource exploitation that used all of the various resources provided—wild foods, game, and the ability to create fertile fields, a system called “forest efficiency.” Artifacts from burials suggest that as populations grew and settlements became more permanent, different roles for men and women also emerged.
III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF FARMING

At the end of the Stone Age, communities in different regions of the world independently created systems of farming, each based on a unique staple crop, such as the corn, beans, squash, peppers and tomatoes developed in central Mexico.

a. Origins in Mexico

Five thousand years ago the peoples of central Mexico began shifting to farming, producing more food from less land than wild crops. These surpluses were the foundation of large urban settings, leading to the creation of complex and extensive government bureaucracies, first for the distribution of foods but ultimately to govern the relations among the peoples and growing trade networks, particularly throughout the Mesoamerican region of Mexico. After 100 BCE, a succession of expansive states from Teotihuacan to the Toltecs to the Aztecs appeared in Mexico, while the Maya of the Yucatan also developed complex cultures with advanced writing systems, calendars, and mathematics.

MHL audio: Ritual of the Maize at www.myhistorylab.com

b. Increasing Social Complexity

Agriculture gave rise to complex, urban societies, whether in Mesoamerica or at Cahokia. Families grouped into clans whose leaders arbitrated disputes, out of which chiefdoms emerged, with increasing social stratification and more defined gender roles. Agricultural societies, while wealthier and more complex than foraging communities, were less stable. Greater dependence on farming left societies vulnerable to drought, soil depletion, and erosion.

c. The Resisted Revolution

Farming was not always, as scholars have argued, a superior way of life and was not adopted everywhere. From California to the Great Basin to the Great Lakes, groups resisted agriculture where local climate and resources made other activities more advantageous. Where climate favored farming it was eventually adopted, and with it came transformed ways of life.

IV. FARMING IN EARLY NORTH AMERICA

Maize farming spread north from Mexico in the first millennium BCE, eventually adopted in all the temperate regions.

a. Farmers of the Southwest
In Arizona and New Mexico, the Mogollon culture was among the first to adopt farming, building stone pits to store agricultural surplus. They were followed by the Hohokam, who built irrigation systems and shared traits with the Mesoamerican civilizations to their south.

b. The Anasazis

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

c. Farmers of the Eastern Woodlands

Beginning 3,000 years ago, Eastern Woodlands Indians combined foraging with some cultivation, especially maize and tobacco. They eventually became mound builders, including the Adena and Hopewell cultures and developed extensive trade networks that spanned the continent supplying grave goods for impressive elite burials.

d. Mississippian Society

With the acquisition of new technologies and resources such as the bow and arrow and Northern Flint maize, the peoples of the Eastern Woodlands developed a new “Mississippian” culture following the collapse of the Hopewell. Cahokia, along the Mississippi River in Illinois, gave the culture its name, while other centers emerged in Ohio, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, and Oklahoma, many with thousands of residents.

e. The Politics of Warfare and Violence

Linked by the Mississippi River and its tributaries, the Mississippian chiefdoms were the largest city-states north of Mexico, reaching their height between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries CE. With complex crafts, social stratification, and regional trade, the Mississippian culture lacked only a writing system. Population growth and territorial conflicts led to warfare with large armies equipped with deadly bows and arrows. Although Cahokia collapsed by the end of the fourteenth century, other Mississippian sites persisted into the colonial period.

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

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

a. The Population of Indian America
The generally accepted population range lies between 5 and 10 million people in North America and as many as 50 million in the Western Hemisphere at the time of contact. There is still significant debate about the overall number but scholars agree that there were widely varying populations in North America, with the largest populations in the Southwest, South, and Northeast, the area where European colonizers concentrated their efforts.

b. The Southwest

This arid region relied on irrigation to grow corn, beans, squash, cotton, and other crops traded throughout the region. While Pimas lived in dispersed settlements, the Pueblos lived in large communal villages with complex and stratified social and political rules, some of them the oldest occupied towns in the United States. Many Athapascans, including the Apache retained a nomadic way of life, often raiding other groups for food and material goods, hunting and foraging at other times, while the Navajo gradually adopted framing and crafts similar to the Pueblo.

c. The South

The fertile soil and lush forests of this region allowed for communal settlements of a few hundred to many thousands. The rich floodplains of the river systems allowed replenishment of the soil without intensive fertilizations. These same waterways facilitated trade and political alliances. Mississippian culture persisted among many peoples of the South, including the Natchez, whose culture persisted into the eighteenth century with echoes of Cahokia. Some unstable chiefdoms collapsed before European contact, leading to reorganized confederacies such as the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Creeks. Agricultural festivals and stick and ball games brought communities together in shared culture.

d. The Northeast

Despite colder climate and varied geography this, too, was a farming region with dense populations along the waterways and bays of the Great Lakes and upper Chesapeake. Their cultivation practices led to the development of complex familial patterns as well as a series of military and political associations, most prominently the Iroquois confederation of five nations. While the Iroquois were matrilineal, the neighboring Algonquians culture was patrilineal. Spread from the Great Lakes to Virginia, the Algonquians built smaller houses, lived in smaller villages, and only began to confederate on the eve of colonization.

MHL Document: *Iroquois Creation Story* at www.myhistorylab.com

MHL Profile: *Hiawatha (Deganawida)* at www.myhistorylab.com
VI. CONCLUSION

American cultures developed over thousands of years before colonization, each fine tuned to its environment and with distinctive traditions which Europeans seldom understood and which later Americans often ignored, but Indian communities called on the traditions and gods to defend their homelands.

Learning Objectives

Students should be able to answer the following questions after studying Chapter 1:

1. How were the Americas first settled?
2. In what ways did distinctive communities adapt to the distinct regions of North America?
3. What were the consequences of the development of farming for native communities?
4. What was the nature of the Indian cultures in the three regions that Europeans first invaded and settled?

Discussion Suggestions and Possible Answers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**Lecture Outline**

American Communities: Cahokia  
Theories of Population  
Lost Civilization from the Old World  
Native American Origin Stories  
Acosta and the Bering Straight  
“Pacific Coast Highway”  
Multiple Migrations  

The Rise and Fall of the Great Civilizations of the Americas  
Mesoamerican Civilizations  
Mississippians (North America)  

Diversity of Community Throughout the Continent  
Hunter/Forager  
Eastern Woodlands  
Anasazi Agriculture  
Mississippian Urban Centers  

Farming as a “Revolution”  
In Favor of Adopting Farming  
Disadvantages of Adopting Farming  
Was Farming Necessary?  

What was the Population of the Americas Prior to European Arrival?  
Multiple Theories  
Range of Numbers  
Scholarly Controversy  

Preparing the Way for Colonization  
The Europeans Arrival
Diverse Community, Trade Networks, and Agriculture, and European colonization

Resources (Web, Films/Video)

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

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

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

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

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

MY HISTORY LAB CONNECTIONS

Reinforce what you learned in this chapter by studying the many documents, images, maps, review tools, and videos available at www.myhistorylab.com.

Read and Review

Read the Documents
Pima Creation Story
Dekanawida Myth & the Achievement of Iroquois Unity
Iroquois Creation Story
Ottawa Origins Story (recorded ca. 1720)
The Story of the Creation of the World, Told by a Zuñi Priest in 1885
Thomas Harriot, The Algonquian Peoples of the Atlantic Coast (1588)
José de Acosta, Speculations on the Origins of the Indians (1590)
History Bookshelf: Bartolome de las Casas, Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies (1542)

See the Maps
The First Americans: Location of Major Indian Groups and Culture Areas in the 1600s
Pre-Columbian Societies of the Americas

Research and Explore

Read the Documents
Exploring America: America and the Horse
Whose History Is It?: Images of Indians

Read the Biographies
Trickster
Hiawatha (Deganawida)

Hear the Audio
Ritual of the Maize

Critical Thinking Exercises

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