Chapter 1: Worlds in Motion, 1450-1550

Overview
When the European, African, and Native American worlds came in contact with one another it was as if three pebbles had been tossed into a pond. The players’ actions and reactions set into motion events that changed the world. The first century of contact established new power structures (both between and within the groups), new economic strategies, and new patterns of behavior towards one another that continued for centuries.

Key Topics
- European trade patterns on the eve of discovery
- Portuguese and Spanish objectives in exploration and colonization
- Native American civilizations and development of Native American social and political organizations
- The biological consequence of conquest
- The conquest of Mexico
- Spanish settlements on the mainland U. S. as frontier outposts

Review Questions
✓ What were the forces that led Europeans to explore the New World?
✓ Describe the development of Indian civilizations in North America from Archaic times until 1500. What were the major similarities among European, Native American, and African civilizations? The major differences?
✓ What did the Spanish expect to find in the New World? How did their experience alter their expectations? Why was slavery introduced into Spanish colonies? How did New World slavery differ from Old World slavery?

Annotated chapter outline
Christopher Columbus: World Traveler: Columbus’s arrival in the Western Hemisphere changed the world for Europeans, Indians, and eventually for Africans. A bold and restless man, Columbus’s “discovery” set off political and economic changes that helped create a truly global economy.

The Worlds of Christopher Columbus: Christopher Columbus lived in a world that was almost unchanged for centuries. Yet at the same time the world around them was changing due in large part to trade, commerce, and national rivalries.
- The creation of the modern nations allowed Europeans to focus on trade and commerce.
- Between 1450 and 1750 new trade patterns and the development of global and complex economies caused the nations’ political and social organizations changed the face of the world.
- When the Spanish and Portuguese arrived in western Africa in the 1400s, they found societies that ranged from simple and poor to complex and wealthy. The Europeans also found existing trade networks which they willingly entered. The Portuguese and Spanish soon dominated the trade network.
- Although slavery was known in Europe during the 1400s, it was neither widespread nor profitable. The African slave trade in the 1400s was different: slaves were a part of a complex African trade network. The Europeans became active players in the African slave trade business.

The World of the Indian Peoples: When Columbus arrived in the western hemisphere, the native population north of the Rio Grande may have been as high as twelve million people, speaking as many as 375 distinct languages. The Spanish encountered people who lived in societies that ranged from poor and simple to complex and diverse.
- Native North Americans were as distinct from one another as were Europeans. Regional differences in the environment, geography, and economy determined cultural differences.
• South of the Rio Grande, the Toltecs prevailed until the 1100s and were replaced in power by the Aztecs, who dominated Mexico until the early 1500s.
• In Peru, the Inca had reached the highest point of their development.

**Worlds in Collision:** Because of European explorers and their desires to find quicker, cheaper, and easier routes to Asia, regions of the world that had once been isolated became known to one another. Eventually they became integral parts of a global economy.
• Columbus’s explorations created two patterns that subsequent Spanish explorers followed: (1) the promise of wealth was real and available for those willing to search for it and (2) encounters with native peoples established patterns of behavior and attitudes that all followed.

**The Biological Consequences of Conquest:** Many of the consequences of contact between the Indians and the Europeans were unintentional. The introduction of new diseases to the New World had immediate and devastating consequences; the introduction of new kinds of plants and animals from one world to the other had more subtle and long-term consequences.
• With the introduction of diseases for which the natives had no immunities, the populations of the New World plummeted.
• Less violent than diseases and more long lasting in its effects were the other plants and animals that found a new home on either side of the Atlantic Ocean. European and Native American diets and culinary habits changed as new food items were adopted and adapted.

**Onto the Mainland:** When the Spanish finally pushed their exploration onto the mainland of North America, the riches they had dreamed of became a reality. When the Spanish encountered the Aztecs of Mexico and the Inca of Peru, their original dreams had not come close to the riches they found.
• The exploration of Florida established patterns that would be played out time and again as the Spanish explored the continent. Their arrival disrupted local political economies by spreading disease and undermining political structures.
• By 1521 the wealth that Columbus had promised was made real when Cortés defeated the Aztec empire. The Aztec capital city, Tenochtitlan, was destroyed and the ruling family displaced. The Aztecs were then vassals of the Spanish monarch.
• The Spanish built their New World capital on the ruins of the Aztec capital. A new economy, one based on the extraction of gold and silver, was created and with the Indians to work the mines, the labor problem was solved.
• Explorers of the American southwest, such as Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, failed to find mineral wealth.

**Conclusion:** The face of the world changed as a result of Columbus’s discovery. A new era began in which new political powers and new political economies were created. Spain became the role model for other European nations who wanted the same power and wealth. A second pattern was established when the Native Americans proved to be unreliable workers, the Europeans willingly brought Africans to the New World. When the morality of slavery was questioned, the economics of the situation seemed to prevail.

**Analytical reading** These questions refer to the passage “The Conquest of Mexico” on pages 18-19.
1. Identify the passages that you think are factual -- this would be information that you could find substantiated in some reliable source.
2. Why were the Tabasco and other non-Aztec people so willing to follow Cortés after he defeated them?
3. Why did Cortés destroy Tenochtitlan?

**Lecture Strategies** In general, Chapter One brings together the three main groups that interact as the new world becomes known to the old.
Native North America: this topic presents you with several lecture ideas. One is the age and complexity of Native North American cultures from about 12,000 years ago to the eve of Columbus’s arrival. This topic not only enables you to discuss the historical and cultural development of the Indians before Columbus but it also gives you the opportunity to confront several popular American myths about Indians: that they all lived in one culture, believing the same thing, speaking the same language, and so on; that that culture was rude, lacking sophistication or the ability of the people to solve many of life’s challenges. Having established Native North American history before Columbus, your students will then be able to evaluate more competently the interaction of Indians and Europeans.

Africa and Africans before the Europeans: this topic also presents several lecture ideas. A similar strategy as outlined above would allow you to discuss the age and complexity of African cultures. Central to this discussion is the development of trade between African societies on the African continent. Slavery -- especially Africans enslaving other Africans -- sets a good foundation for lectures to come. Since slavery was also common within Maya and Aztec cultures, this is an opportunity to examine slavery across cultures.

Europe and Europeans in the century preceding Columbus: One way of looking at European development on the eve of Columbus’s voyages is to look at Leif Ericsson. Ericsson’s “discovery” in 1001 of the same new world did not set off waves of exploration or population dislocations and relocations. Why didn’t Ericsson’s discovery have the same effect as Columbus’s? Answering this question allows for an examination of the things that had to happen in Europe for the notion of a “new world” to have importance.

“Discovery” is a good topic for exploring several related topics: European rules of discovery, the intellectual world of Europeans in the fifteenth century, their ethnocentrism.

Exploration and the evolution of the modern economy: Explore the connection between government policies of exploration (motives, expectations, results) and the ways in which those policies changed the lives of the explorers, the Indians they came in contact with, and Europeans and Indians not directly involved in exploration. The discovery sets off numerous changes that in turn create more changes. Look at the birth of a global economy bringing into it many diverse peoples and their cultures.

Supplements: Prentice Hall has developed a number of supplements that can enhance your lectures as well as your students’ comprehension and performance.


American Stories: Biographies in United States History by Kathryn A. Abbott and Patricia Hagler Minter. See Chapter 1, Meeting of Cultures to 1550, for biographical sketches of Hiawatha/Deganawidah, Virginia Dare, and Las Casas.

Documents Collection see Part One: Meeting of Three Cultures
*Marco Polo Recounts His Travels Through Asia 1324
*Christopher Columbus, Letter to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain 1494
*Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, "Indians of the Rio Grande" (1528-1536)
Jacques Cartier: First Contact with the Indians (1534)
*Bartolomé de Las Casas, "Of the Island of Hispaniola" (1542)
Thomas Mun, from England's Treasure by Foreign Trade (1664)
*Don Juan de Oñate, Plaus: A Settlement in New Mexico (1599)
*The Founding of St. Augustine, 1565
*The Columbian Exchange, 1590
Thomas Harriot, The Algonquian Peoples of the Atlantic Coast (1588)
*Jose de Acosta, A Spanish Priest Speculates on the Origins of the Indians (1590)
The documents of particular relevance to this chapter are identified with an asterisk, although subsequent parts have relevant documents.