

**Before First Contact: "Columbus did not discover a new world. He established contact between two worlds, both already old." -- Historian J. H. Perry**

### **Overview—big ideas**

- By 1600 Europeans had created the world's first truly global economy.
- Meanwhile, the "age of discovery" resulted in the greatest human catastrophe the world has ever known: 90% of Native Americans killed by 1600; slavery of tens of millions of Africans.
- Cultural differences between the European and Americans were so immense that conflict was tragically inevitable in the 15th and 16th centuries.

### **I. Native Americans**

- Early Native Americans arrive on North American continent → **conflicting research**
  - rapidly migrated south and east
  - Many moved south into Mexico and Central America, others moved east into Canada and the United States

*Developed civilizations ("sedentary societies") — late-Stone Age*

#### **1. Incas in Peru**

#### **2. Mesoamerica: Aztecs in Mexico, and Mayans in Yucatan (earlier)**

- *developed advanced agricultural techniques based primarily on corn*
- *built stone-carved cities rivaling many in Europe*
- *studied mathematics and astronomy*
- *men and women worked fields and families saved surpluses for trade*

#### **North American natives less developed: most "semi-sedentary" by Columbus' time**

- Native American farmers actively managed their environment—not necessarily pristine protectors of environment of myth
- Most Native American societies were bound together by kinship more than anything else
- Most Native American cultures attempted to maintain a sense of dependency among their people
- Gender Roles
  - in most Native American cultures, religious leadership remained in hands of males
  - social and economic power often rested in hands of women
- Religions
  - Native American religions centered on the belief that nature was alive—it has a spiritual power
  - Humans were only one part of the cycle of nature—they didn't control nature, but were a part of it

### **II. Europeans**

- Social and political structure
  - European society and politics based on hierarchical structure
- Daily life
  - most Europeans lived an agrarian lifestyle
  - as kinship and community ties weakened, the nuclear family became more important in European society--with the eldest male head of the family
- Religions
  - Christianity the main religion in Europe
    - Throughout 16th century Europe, Protestants and Catholics struggled to control the religion of different nations
    - this competition would spill over as the Europeans began to explore and colonize the Americas
  - Christianity as a factor of daily life

- religion played a vital role in daily life of many Europeans--important part of their culture (not just something for Sunday)
- The Renaissance and the Age of Exploration
  - The Renaissance opened peoples eyes to a new world outside the continent
  - At the same time, new political and economic developments in Europe pointed toward the outside world
  - nations began to organize and grow--less in-fighting between small principalities
  - wealth of rulers and merchants increased greatly, leading to desire for more wealth and the means to explore for it
  - These two factors helped lead to exploration of other parts of the world--especially Africa and Asia

### **III. West Africans**

- Over half of all immigrants to the New World between 1500 to 1800 came from western Africa--almost all involuntarily
- West Africa dominated by small-scale agriculture and trade
  - Trade--brought about contact with other cultures
- Gender roles
  - women and men frequently shared equal authority in trading with others (although Europeans sometimes had problems accepting fact of women in power)
  - African families tended to be matrilineal--heredity traced through mother, property also inherited through mother
  - still, in most, the two genders held relatively equal power--men and women participated in religious and social leadership--each in their separate spheres
- African villages and kingdoms were ruled by small groups of priests and nobles
  - leaders tended to rely on persuasion rather than force as way of ruling
- Religions
  - Northern parts of West Africa had been exposed to Islam since around 1100 CE, and many Africans had converted to that religion
  - in the areas of west Africa where native religions had survived spread of Islam, people worshiped many gods--usually associated with aspects of the natural world

#### **First Contact**

- Non-Europeans came prior to Columbus but did not stay.
  - Afro-Phoenicians c. 1000 BCE-300 CE may have reached Central America
  - West Africa (Mali) c. 1311-1460 sailed to Haiti, Panama, possibly Brazil
- Vikings & **Leif Erickson** had temporary settlement at New Foundland c. 1000

### **III. Columbian Exchange--biological transfers**

- Diseases and Addictions
- Plants
- Animals

### **IV. Results of contact between Native-Americans and Europeans**

- A. For Native Americans
  1. Genocide: **By 1600, nearly 90% of Native American population perished.**
  2. European impact on culture: cattle, swine and horses, firearms
- B. For Europeans
  1. Global empires for 1st time in human history.
  2. Explosion of capitalism
  3. Revolution in diet

## I. Similarities and Differences between Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans

- Native American farmers actively managed their environment—not necessarily pristine protectors of environment of myth
    - moved villages when soil becomes depleted
    - burning of forests to encourage cultivation of crops and wildlife
    - gatherers would leave seeds of gathered plants to insure more the next year
  - Most Native American societies were bound together by kinship more than anything else
    - extended families often meant as much as the nuclear family (discuss nuclear vs. extended)
    - most villages consisted of a collection of families (or clans)
    - family ties often bound different villages together, helping to form tribes and nations
  - Most Native American cultures attempted to maintain a sense of dependency among their people
    - conformity was viewed as necessary
    - Why? need to work as a group to survive
- Men were the hunters; women the gatherers.  
- Women did the farming (except tobacco); much "slash and burn" agriculture  
- Europeans sought to turn men into farmers; Indian men saw it as "women's work"  
Europeans spoke of "*reducing* the Indian men to civility"
3. Most NA societies matrilineal and matrilocal: women owned the property
    - Men taught their children by persuasion and example.
    - Few cared to acquire more property than could be carried from one site to another.
    - *Antithesis to European capitalism; Europeans saw them as poor consumers*
  4. No individual land ownership (even in sedentary societies) → Clans or families guarded their "use rights" to land allocated by chiefs.

## Religious differences between Native Americans and Europeans

1. Christian view:
  - a. Bible: God gave Adam dominion over animals and plants.
  - b. Bible did not mention Indians. What were they? Where did they come from?
  - c. Sacrificial temples, skull racks, cannibalism and snake motifs of Mesoamerica meant Aztecs worshipped Satan in eyes of Europeans.
    - Yet, 100,000 "witches" killed between 1500-1700 in Europe
    - Spanish Inquisition burned thousands
    - Indians saw these too as human sacrifices
2. Native American view:
  - a. Indians had nothing in comparison for commodification of plants and animals.
  - b. Christians ate their own god (Eucharist) but less outraged at lesser human sacrifice to please Indian god. (Very confusing.)
  - c. Indians had no concept of heaven (in Christian sense); disliked Christian heaven because few souls there were Indian; preferred to be buried with ancestors.

## Differences in War

1. Indians curious why Europeans sought decisive battles on battlefield.
  - a. Saw it as tremendous waste of humans who could be used for replenishment or sacrifice
  - b. Used guerrilla-type warfare.
  - c. Europeans made poor torture victims (except Jesuits)
2. Europeans could not easily catch Indian warriors.
  - a. Resorted often to killing women and children - Pequot War in 1630s most gruesome example
  - b. By King Philip's War (1670s), Indians had learned this lesson well and destroyed Puritan villages, killing non-combatants.
3. Indians often captured children of other tribes and assimilated them.
4. Adult warriors often sacrificed in Mesoamerica
5. European weapons deeply intensified warfare among Native Americans.

## III. Columbian Exchange--biological transfers

- Diseases and Addictions
  - Indians got smallpox, flu, and measles (mortality rates as high as 90% in some areas)
  - Europeans got syphilis, cocaine, and tobacco
- Plants
  - Europeans got corn, bean, squash, and potatoes (discuss importance)
  - Wheat, rye, and weeds introduced to North America
- Animals -- Native Americans got horses (became critical to living among Great Basin societies), cattle, and rats

## IV. Results of contact between Native-Americans and Europeans

### A. For Native Americans

1. Genocide: **By 1600, nearly 90% of Native American population perished.**
  - a. European diseases, e.g., smallpox, yellow fever, malaria, most destructive.
  - b. inter-tribal warfare + introduction of European weapons
  - c. alcoholism
  - d. Central Am. & Caribbean pop. in 1519 = perhaps 25 mil; 1 mil in 1605.
2. European impact on culture: cattle, swine and horses, firearms -- Great Plains tribes: Apache, Blackfoot, and Sioux--transformed via horses

### B. For Europeans

1. Global empires for 1st time in human history.
2. Explosion of capitalism
3. Revolution in diet
  - a. Corn, beans, tomatoes & esp. potato lead to improved diet = higher mortality = higher population = bigger push for emigration → Revolutionized international economy.
  - b. Stimulants: coffee, cocoa, and tobacco