

THE DIVERSE COMMUNITIES OF THE AMERICAS IN THE 1400s

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Describe the diversity of American Indian cultures in the United States on the eve of their encounter with Europeans.

Summary

The early native peoples of North America were a diverse group of peoples who spoke many languages and formed 500 to 600 independent societies. The diversity of the Native American population reflected the physical diversity of the Americas; the wide range of geographical conditions influenced the various cultures of these groups. The Aztecs and the Incas created the largest pre-Columbian empires. After conquering the Toltecs, the

Aztecs built an increasingly aggressive empire in central Mexico. The Incas built an even larger empire along the Pacific coast of South America. A vast bureaucracy and army, along with a well-developed infrastructure, helped the Incas maintain control of their territory. In what is now the U.S. Southwest, the Pueblo and Hopi peoples used sophisticated agricultural techniques to farm in a dry climate. A slightly smaller yet sophisticated culture of Mound-Builders established Cahokia, which flourished for centuries, but after its demise, the population of the Mississippi Valley shrank, and a number of small, village-based societies emerged. The inhabitants of the Pacific Northwest, including the Shasta, took advantage of an abundant food supply to develop a settled community life with well-developed art and culture. In the Northeast, the five nations of the Iroquois—the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas—formed a powerful confederacy. On the Atlantic Coast and the eastern slopes of the Appalachians, many tribes lived in permanent towns and villages. Hunting, fishing, and farming provided the major food sources for these peoples. For all of the differences among American Indian communities, the extensive trade networks between them encouraged common ways of looking at the world.

ASIA IN THE 1400s

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Contrast developments in Asia with those in Europe at the time when Europeans first reached the Americas.

Summary

While the Americas, Africa, and Europe were all divided into many small tribes, cities, and nation-states in the 1400s, much of the heart of Asia was united under Chinese imperial control. In the 1400s, Chinese wealth, cities, technological sophistication, military power, and population dwarfed those of Europe. While the Chinese launched significant exploration initiatives, such voyages were quickly halted, and China turned inward. For the next 200 years, China became increasingly isolated from the rest of the non-Asian world.

A CHANGING EUROPE IN THE 1400s

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Describe the changes in Europe that led to Columbus's voyages and that shaped European attitudes when encountering the peoples of the Americas.

Summary

In the century before Columbus sailed across the Atlantic, Europe went through extraordinary changes. Those changes not only

set Columbus on his travels but shaped the beliefs and expectations with which the first Europeans arrived in the Americas. In 1400, Europe was still recovering from the devastation of the Black Death. The Catholic Church was the most unifying force in Europe. From a modern point of view, life in this period would seem primitive. Most people were dirty, poorly clothed, and illiterate. Europe's limited trade was further disrupted by the fall of Constantinople, a key trading hub, to the Ottomans in 1453. This event prompted Europeans to seek new ways to reach Asia for more direct trading opportunities. Prince Henry the Navigator spearheaded Portugal's efforts in this regard. During the 1400s, Portuguese explorers sailed around Africa and into the Indian Ocean. Internal divisions and conflicts left England, France, Germany, and Italy ill-equipped to follow Portugal's lead. The completion of the *Reconquista* and the unification of Spain under Isabella and Ferdinand, however, enabled Spain to emulate, and eventually surpass, Portugal's accomplishments.

AFRICA IN THE 1400s

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Describe the political, cultural, and religious developments in Africa that would shape contact between Europeans and Africans in the Americas.

Summary

By the 1400s, North Africa had been part of Mediterranean civilization for at least 3,000 years. In addition, parts of Africa south of the Sahara Desert had a long history of trade with southern Europe. In West Africa, Ghana's power, which enabled it to gain control of much of West Africa, was based on trade and its mastery of metalworking to make iron weapons and tools. Ghana's successors, Mali and Songhay, built similar regional empires, each, like Ghana, drawing its power from trade and technological advantages. In all three kingdoms, Islam was a religion of the cities and the ruling class. South of Songhay, in the kingdom of Kongo and surrounding areas, government was powerful

but far less structured. Centralized government and the wealth generated by trade also led to military power that allowed West Africans to resist not only the first Portuguese attempts at conquest but also many subsequent ones. Slavery was a significant part of the African economy long before the Portuguese arrived. But during the 1400s, a more terrible form of slavery was born through which not only a slave's freedom but also his or her language, culture, and identity were destroyed.

The 1400s – Pre - Contact

Name: _____

Directions: Read your section's summary then write a one-sentence summary of your section.
Afterwards create a visual for your section to help remind you of the information.

The Americas	Europe
Asia	Africa