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P A R T

CHAPTER 1
Colliding Worlds,
1450–1600

CHAPTER 2
American Experiments,
1518–1700

Transformations of North America

1450–1700

In 1450, North America, Europe, and Africa were each home to complex societies with their own distinctive cultures. But their histories were about to collide, bringing vast changes to all three continents. European voyagers sailing in the wake of Christopher Columbus set in motion one of the most momentous developments in world history: sustained contact among Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans in dozens of distinct colonial settings. Before the arrival of Europeans, a wide range of complex Native American societies claimed the continent as their own. Although colonization brought profound change, it did not erase what had come before because Native American societies interacted with colonizers from the beginning. They shaped colonial enterprise in important ways, enabling some forms of colonization while preventing others.

Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans were surprisingly similar in many ways, though the differences among them were important as well. Their distinctive ideas about gods and the spirit world informed their political systems and animated their approaches to trade and warfare. Whether they met in peace or war — or whether peaceful interactions quickly turned violent — Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans viewed one another through lenses that were shaped by these ideas.

In Part 1, we compare Native American, European, and African societies on the eve of colonization and then explore how Europeans experimented with various models of colonization in the first two centuries of sustained transatlantic contacts. The story in Chapters 1 and 2 addresses three main developments that are central to this period:



Native American Diversity and Complexity

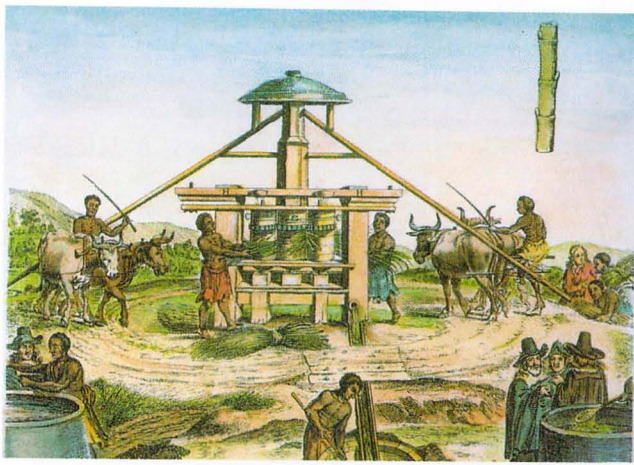
Popular culture can lead us to think of Native American societies as being substantially the same everywhere in North America: they were organized into tribes, with few material possessions and primitive beliefs and cultures, and reliant mostly on hunting for their subsistence. This impression distorts a much more complicated picture. Native American political organization ran the gamut from vast, complex imperial states to kin-based bands of hunters and gatherers. Patterns of political organization varied widely, and the familiar label of *tribe* does more to obscure than to clarify their workings. Native Americans' economic and social systems were adapted to the ecosystems they inhabited. Many were extremely productive farmers, some hunted bison and deer, while others were expert salmon fishermen who plied coastal waters in large oceangoing boats. Native American religions and cultures also varied widely, though they shared some broad characteristics.

These variations in Native American societies shaped colonial enterprise. Europeans conquered and coopted Native American empires with relative ease, but smaller and more decentralized polities were harder to exploit. Mobile hunter-gatherers appeared politically amorphous, but they became especially formidable opponents of colonial expansion.

Colonial Settlement and the Columbian Exchange

European colonization triggered a series of sweeping changes that historians have labeled the "Columbian Exchange." At the same time that people crossed the Atlantic in large numbers, so too did plants, animals, and germs. Old World grains like wheat and barley were planted in the Americas for the first time, and weeds like dandelions were carried across the ocean as well. Potatoes, maize (corn), and tomatoes, among other foods, crossed the Atlantic in the other direction and transformed dietary practices in Asia as well as Europe. Native Americans domesticated very few animals; the Columbian Exchange introduced horses, pigs, cattle, and a variety of other creatures to the American landscape. Germs also made the voyage, especially the deadly pathogens that had so disordered life in Europe in the centuries prior to colonization. Smallpox, influenza, and bubonic plague, among others, took an enormous toll on Native American populations. Inanimate materials made the voyage as well: enough gold and silver traveled from the Americas to Europe and Asia to transform the world's economies, intensifying competition and empire building in Europe.

Old World diseases devastated Native American peoples. On average, they lost ninety percent of their numbers over the first century of contact, forcing them to cope with European and African newcomers in a weakened and vulnerable state.



Experimentation and Transformation

The collisions of American, European, and African worlds challenged the beliefs and practices of all three groups. Colonization was, above all, a long and tortured process of experimentation. Over time, Europeans carved out three distinct types of colonies in the Americas, each shaped by the constraints and opportunities presented by American landscapes and peoples. Where Native American societies were organized into densely settled empires, Europeans conquered the ruling class and established tribute-based empires of their own. In tropical and subtropical settings, colonizers created plantation societies that demanded large, imported labor forces—a need that was met through the African slave trade. And in the temperate regions of the mainland North America, where neither the landscape nor the native population yielded easy wealth, European colonists came in large numbers hoping to create familiar societies in unfamiliar settings.

Everywhere in the Americas, core beliefs and world-views were shaken by contact with radically unfamiliar peoples. Native Americans and Africans struggled to maintain autonomy in their relations with colonizers, while Europeans labored to understand—and profit from—their relations with nonwhite peoples. These transformations are the subject of Part 1.

Transformations of North America 1450–1700

Thematic Understanding

This timeline arranges some of the important events of this period into themes. Look at the entries for “Culture and Society” from 1450 to 1700. How did the Protestant Reformation and the response of the Catholic Church influence the colonization of the Americas in these years? In the realm of “Work, Exchange, and Technology,” how did colonial economies evolve, and what roles did Native American and African labor play in them? >

	WORK, EXCHANGE, & TECHNOLOGY	MIGRATION & SETTLEMENT	POLITICS & POWER	CULTURE & SOCIETY	AMERICAN & NATIONAL IDENTITY
1450	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversified economies of Native America Rise of the Ottoman Empire blocks Asian trading routes of the Italian city-states Europeans fish off North American coast Portuguese traders explore African coast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christopher Columbus explores the Bahamas and West Indies (1492–1504) Pedro Alvares Cabral makes landfall in Brazil (1500) Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru (1519–1535) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rise of monarchical nation-states in Europe Aztecs and Incas consolidate their empires Probable founding of the Iroquois Confederacy Rise of the Songhai Empire in Africa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protestant Reformation (1517) sparks century of religious warfare Henry VIII creates Church of England (1534) Founding of Jesuit order (1540) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Castile and Aragon joined to create Spain; the Inquisition helps create a sense of Spanishness John Calvin establishes a Protestant commonwealth in Geneva, Switzerland
1550	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growth of the outwork system in English textile industry Spanish <i>encomienda</i> system organizes native labor in Mexico Inca <i>mita</i> system is co-opted by the Spanish in the Andes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Castilians and Africans arrive in Spanish America in large numbers English colonies in Newfoundland, Maine, and Roanoke fail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elizabeth's "sea dogs" plague Spanish shipping English monarchs adopt mercantilist policies Defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philip II defends the Roman Catholic Church against Protestantism Elizabeth I adopts Protestant <i>Book of Common Prayer</i> (1559) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English conquest and persecution of native Irish Growing Protestant movement in England
1600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First staple exports from the English mainland colonies: furs and tobacco Subsistence farms in New England Transition to sugar plantation system in the Caribbean islands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First set of Anglo-Indian wars African servitude begins in Virginia (1619) Caribbean islands move from servitude to slavery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> James I claims divine right to rule England Virginia's House of Burgesses (1619) English Puritan Revolution Native Americans rise up against English invaders (1622, 1640s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persecuted English Puritans and Catholics migrate to America Established churches set up in Puritan New England and Anglican Virginia Dissenters settle in Rhode Island 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilgrims and Puritans seek to create godly commonwealths Powhatan and Virginia Company representatives attempt to extract tribute from each other
1700	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tobacco trade stagnates Maturing yeoman economy and emerging Atlantic trade in New England 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing gentry immigration to Virginia White indentured servitude shapes Chesapeake society Africans defined as property rather than people in the Chesapeake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restoration of the English crown (1660) English conquer New Netherland (1664) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metacom's War in New England (1675–1676) Bacon's Rebellion calls for removal of Indians and end of elite rule Salem witchcraft crisis (1692) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social mobility for Africans ends with collapse of tobacco trade and increased power of gentry