**Period 1**

**1491 – 1607**

**OVERVIEW**

Period 1 focuses on the North American continent from 1491 until 1607, the years from just before the arrival of European explorers to the founding of the Jamestown colony by the British. These years include the initial contacts between American Indians and the earliest explorers, as well as the introduction of West African slaves to the Western Hemisphere.

The overview begins with an examination of the various native populations that migrated to and spread across North America – their origins and the different ways each group adapted to the various conditions they faced in the regions they settled. The American Indian societies that developed shared some common characteristics, but all had to make unique adjustments to the environments they encountered. The result was the creation of societies of varying complexity.

Indians living in present-day Mexico and the American Southwest relied on the cultivation of maize, with the addition of a mix of foraging and hunting to sustain their communities. Settlement of the western Great Plains was limited until the arrival of horses with the Spanish made possible a nomadic lifestyle based on hunting. Those who settled in the Northeast and Southeast relied on both agriculture and hunting, practices that led to more permanent towns and villages.

The arrival of European explorers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries brought significant changes to both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. The introduction of trade goods and agricultural products, as well as diseases on both sides of the Atlantic, set off a series of changes that had a lasting impact on the entire world. Called the Columbian Exchange, this series of contacts and interactions initiated demographic, social, and economic changes that reshaped the history of all the regions involved. Areas where the Spanish and Portuguese explored saw the emergence of a racially mixed population, one made even more diverse by the introduction of West African slaves. The Spanish justified slavery by labeling it the *encomienda* system, arguing that offering conversion to Christianity offset the disadvantages of being enslaved. The introduction of horses, pigs, and cattle further altered the economy and lifestyles of those who lived in the Western Hemisphere.

European rivalries led to intense competition for control of the Western Hemisphere. The desire for wealth, the wish to extend political power, and the determination to spread Christianity fueled these rivalries. European nations experienced growth in both population and wealth, furthering the shift from a feudal economy to more modern capitalism. Changes in technology and better business organization also boosted international trade, leading to more rapid changes for the economies of all involved.

Colonization led to significant changes in how Europeans, American Indians, and West Africans viewed each other. Europeans tended to judge all peoples by European standards and saw anyone different from themselves as backward and in need of “civilization.” This belief in white superiority led to the justification and extensive use of slavery and other methods of control, such as forced conversion to Christianity. In spite of these hardships, both American Indians and West Africans managed to adapt to the harsh conditions they faced while still finding ways to maintain cultural and linguistic aspects of their distinct heritages, as well as some measures of autonomy in their daily lives.

**KEY TERMS**

Animism *Encomienda system*

Capitalism Feudalism

Civic humanism Predestination

Columbian Exchange Primogeniture

Cultural autonomy Social diversification

Demographic change Social issues

**GUIDED QUESTIONS**

1. What was lifestyle of the following Indian groups:
   1. Southwestern Indians
   2. Great Plains Indians
   3. Northeast & Southeast Indians
2. Give an example of demographic, social, and economic change caused by the Columbian Exchange.
   1. demographic
   2. social
   3. economic
3. How did economic and political rivalries in Europe affect the forms of colonization in North America?
4. In what ways did American Indians and Africans struggle to maintain their identity and autonomy in the face of Europeans’ attempts to subjugate them?
5. What shape did Indian resistance take, and how successful was it?
6. In what ways did overseas expansion change how Europeans viewed Africans and American Indians?