**General US History Chapter 1 Notes**

***Section 1- The First Americans***

**nomad**- a person who travels all the time in search of food

**glacier**- a huge sheet of moving ice

**civilization**- the way of life of a people in one place and time

**empire**- the territories and people under the control of one ruler

The history of the nation that we call the United States begins long before there was such a country. It begins long before European explorers landed on the shores of North and South America.

The first people in the Americas arrived many thousands of years ago. After they arrived, they spread out slowly through the Americas. This took thousands of years. During this time they developed different ways of life.

Not everyone agrees about how and when people first came to the Americas. Some Native Americans believe that their people have always lived in North and South America. However, many scientists believe that the first people in the Americas came from Asia. They were **nomads**.

The first nomads arrived thousands of centuries ago during the Ice Age. At that time, there were many **glaciers** on Earth. Many scientists believe that as the amount of water in the oceans dropped, a land bridge between Asia and North America appeared. The nomads walked across the land bridge to North America. They were following herds of animals that they hunted for food.

About 10,000 years ago, the glaciers began to melt. By that time, thousands of people lived in the Americas. Today these people are called Native Americans. They were the first people to live in the Americas.

*Complete “Land Bridges to the Americas” on page 5.*

After the Ice Age, many Native Americans changed their ways of life. As nomads, they had followed herds of animals. When the climate became warmer, some of the animals died out. Native Americans began hunting smaller animals. They fished and gathered food in a smaller area. As time passed, some Native Americans began to farm, or plant and harvest crops.

Planting and harvesting food meant that people could remain in one area. Groups built shelters, and families gathered into villages. In villages, people were able to do jobs besides hunting or gathering food. Some could make pots and baskets or weave cloth. Others could make tools.

Native Americans lived in areas with different kinds of lands and climates. They developed ways of life that were suited to each area.

Some groups of Native Americans lived along the Pacific coast of northwestern North America. They ate fish, wild berries, and nuts. Food was easy to find, and they raised few crops. Wood from nearby forests was used to make shelters to keep out the rain.

Native Americans who lived in northeastern North America hunted for food in thick forests filled with deer, elk, and other animals. They grew crops of corn, squash, and beans in the good soil. Shelters were made of animal skin, bark, or wood to keep out the snow and cold of winter.

In the Southwest, Native Americans hunted rabbits, deer, and other animals for food. They grew crops such as corn and beans. The climate was hot and there was little rain, so they dug ditches to bring water to the fields. There were only a few forests for wood, so shelters were built from stone and sun-dried clay bricks.

Mexico, Central America, and South America became the home of many Native Americans. Over hundreds of years, these people developed important **civilizations**.

***The Olmecs***

The first large civilization in Mexico was the Olmec civilization. They accomplished many things by about 1200 B.C.

1.) They built stone temples.

2.) They carved huge statues.

3.) They developed a number system.

4.) They developed a calendar system.

5.) They developed a writing system.

***The Maya***

Many centuries after the Olmecs, about A.D. 250, the Maya civilization developed. The Maya lived in the rain forests of Central America. They accomplished many things.

1.) They planted crops such as corn, tomatoes, cocoa, squash, and cotton.

2.) They dug ditches to carry water to their fields.

3.) They formed cities and began trading goods.

4.) They built large temples and stone courtyards.

5.) They used a calendar with 365 days in a year.

Hundreds of years after the Maya civilization, two important **empires** developed from civilizations in the Americas. Empires are territories and people under the control of one ruler. The people of these empires were known as the Incas and the Aztecs.

***The Incas***

In South America, about A.D. 1200, the Inca civilization developed. Here are the things the Incas did.

1.) They planted crops on mountainsides. They used step-like levels for farming.

2.) They mined gold and silver.

3.) They built roads thousands of miles long.

4.) They built palaces that had beautiful gardens and bathing rooms with running water.

***The Aztecs***

By about A.D. 1400, the Aztecs developed an empire near the lands that once belonged to the Olmecs and the Maya. The Aztecs lived in the area that today we call Mexico. Here is what the Aztecs accomplished.

1;) They built a capital city called Tenochtitlan. It is where Mexico City is today. Tenochtitlan was built in the marshes of a huge lake with floating gardens, markets, and drawbridges.

2.) They developed a written language.

3.) They knew mathematics.

Religion was the center of Aztec life. The Aztecs fought wars to make their gods happy and to enlarge their empire. The Aztecs controlled millions of people.

***Section 2- Europeans Explore New Routes***

**colony**- a settlement ruled by people from another land

**navigator**- a person who plans the direction of a ship

At the time early Native American empires were growing, life was different for people in other places. In Europe, most people lived in small villages. There was hardly any trade between countries in Europe. Only a small number of Europeans traveled far from the area in which they lived. Gradually, Europeans began to explore the world.

The Vikings were a seagoing people of Scandinavia, in northern Europe. When farmland became scarce at home, some Vikings began to look for other areas in Europe for settlement and trade. Then in the 900’s the Vikings sailed to Greenland and Iceland. They built **colonies** there.

About A.D. 1000, Leif Ericson, a Viking leader, sailed from Greenland to the Atlantic coast of North America. Some historians think that Viking **navigators** discovered ways to sail along the coats.

Ericson and his men spent a winter on the coast, on the land he called Vinland. The colony of Vinland may have been in the place we know today as Newfoundland, in Canada. It may have been as far south as Cape Cod, in Massachusetts.

Although the Vikings tried several times to settle Vinland, they never could. Changing weather patterns made the climate much colder, and the Vikings and the Native Americans did not get along. For these reasons, the Vikings left Vinland and ended their trips to the coast of North America.

In the late 1200’s, an Italian explorer named Marco Polo traveled to Asia. He spent 20 years there. He wrote a book about his travels that told of visits to China and to islands called the Indies. Marco Polo described food spices that were not known to Europeans. He wrote about a beautiful cloth called silk. He described jewels, carpets, and other treasures.

Marco Polo’s adventures may have made many European traders wish to find a shorter way or route to Asia. Some people believed that the shortest route was by sea.

Merchants, or people who buy and sell goods, crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Asia. They gained control of trade with Asia. These merchants charged high prices. Other European countries wanted to find another route to Asia.

However, few ships sailed far from the shores of Europe. Some Europeans believed the earth was flat, like a table. They were afraid that if they sailed too far from land, they would fall off the edge.

***Section 3- Europeans Search for Wealth***

**compass**- an instrument that shows direction

**geography**- the study of climates and land forms

**astronomy**- the study of stars and planets

In the early 1400’s, Europeans began to explore new places. Explorers began to explore new places. Explorers traveled far from Europe in search of a shorter route to Asia. Portugal was one of the first European countries to send explorers to sea.

Prince Henry of Portugal set up a school for navigators in 1419. The students learned to use a **compass**. They learned about **geography** and studied **astronomy**.

During the 1400’s, the Portuguese were the first to search for a water route to Asia. They believed they could reach Asia by sailing around Africa. Bartolomeu Dias was influenced by these ideas. He was the first explorer to sail around the southern tip of Africa. Later, the explorer Vasco da Gama sailed around the southern tip of Africa to India, in Asia.

All three kingdoms were powerful. They had gold, which they used for trade. Each kingdom traded its gold for salt. Salt was valuable because it was used to keep meat from spoiling. People almost everywhere needed salt to protect their food supplies from rotting.

Portuguese explorers started colonies along the western coast of Africa during the 1400’s. The area became known as the Gold Coast because it had gold. It also had salt and slaves. Slaves had already been used in Africa for many years. Usually, slaves were prisoners of war or criminals. Sometimes people sold themselves into slavery to pay off their debts, or money they owed someone. As the 1400’s came to an end, Europeans were using enslaved Africans to farm the islands off the coast of Africa.

Christopher Columbus lived in Italy. He dreamed of becoming a wealthy explorer. He believed he could find a shorter route to Asia by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean.

At first no one listened to Columbus’s ideas. He tried to get money from the rulers of England and Portugal to pay for a voyage across the Atlantic. He was turned away. Finally, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain agreed to help Columbus. In return, Columbus promised to claim for Spain any lands he discovered.

In early October 1492, Columbus and his ships- the *Nina*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*- landed on an island in North America. Columbus believed that he had landed somewhere close to Japan, in Asia. He claimed the island for Spain and named it San Salvador.

Columbus believed he had landed in the East Indies. When he met the people on the island, he called them Indians. Their real name was Arawak. The Arawaks lived on a chain of islands that stretches from Florida to South America.

The Arawaks welcomed Columbus. However, Columbus did not return their kindness. Like most Europeans of his time, Columbus thought he should defeat other groups of people and control them. Columbus and his men treated the Arawaks badly.

In the following years, Columbus returned to North America three more times. Yet Columbus never found great wealth. By the early 1500’s, almost all the Arawaks died out. Many other Native Americans had also dies. Thousands of Native Americans were killed by battles with Spanish soldiers, European diseases, and enslavement. Columbus died in 1506. He still believed that he had found a short route to Asia.