Chapter 1 – Ancient America and Africa

The Peoples of America Before Columbus

- **Migration to the Americas**
  - Archaeologists have unearthed remains pointing to the arrival of humans in America at about 35,000 B.C.E.
  - Scientists generally agree that the first inhabitants of the Americas were nomadic travelers from Siberia.
  - These peoples traversed an ancient land bridge which connected northeast Asia with Alaska.

- **Hunters, Farmers, and Environmental Factors**
  - The first wave of humans found an abundance of *megafauna*: gigantic animals. Changes in environment and over-hunting wiped most out.
  - Adaptable humans learned to exploit new sources of food from plants in the *agricultural revolution*.
  - Erosion, deforestation, and salinization added to America’s environmental stresses over the centuries.

- **Mesoamerican Empires**
  - **Mesoamerica**: the middle region bridging the great land masses of North and South America.
  - The Aztec people of present-day Mexico numbered about 20 million in 1492.
  - The Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan later became Mexico City.
  - Aztec society was divided into four classes: nobility, free commoners, serfs, and slaves.

- **Regional North**
  - **American Cultures**
    - In the southwestern region of North America, Hohokam and Anasazi societies developed established communities thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans (who called them the “Pueblo” people).
    - Native peoples of the Pacific Northwest formed societies emphasizing fishing, wood craftsmanship and ceremonies such as the *Potlatch*.
    - Several societies of *Mound Builders* developed in the Mississippi River valley and Great Plains.
  - **The Iroquois**
    - A confederation of five distinct tribes with unified land and goals:
      - The Mohawk (People of the Flint)
      - The Oneidas (People of the Stone)
      - The Onondagas (People of the Mountain)
      - The Cayuga (People at the Landing)
      - The Seneca (Great Hill People)
  - **Pre-Contact Population**
    - Recently, scholars have estimated that the pre-contact population of America north of the Rio Grande stood at about 4 million.
• Some estimates put the population of the Western Hemisphere at about 50 to 70 million at
the same period.

❖ Contrast Worldviews
  ➢ The stark differences in European and American cultures stemmed from perceptions of social
    relationships and interaction with the environment.
  ➢ Differences included concepts of property and communal ownership of goods and food sources.

Africa on the Eve of Contact

❖ The Spread of Islam
  ➢ Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, began preaching the tenants of his revelations in 610 B.C.E.
  ➢ Islam spread rapidly across the Arabian Peninsula and the whole of northern Africa.
  ➢ Eventually, the religion encompassed most of the Eastern Hemisphere.

❖ The Kingdoms of Central and West Africa
  ➢ The Ghana Empire
  ➢ The Mali Empire
  ➢ The Songhai Empire
  ➢ The Kongo Kingdom

❖ African Slavery
  ➢ Slavery existed as a normal social condition in this period and had little to do with skin color.
  ➢ Slaves were a sign of wealth for the owners, who treated their property very well.
  ➢ The status of slavery was not inherited and always held the potential for reversal.

❖ The African Ethos
  ➢ As in Europe, the center of African social organization was the family unit, which was often
    matrilineal.
  ➢ Individualism was seen as distasteful and widely disdained.
  ➢ Africans believed in a Supreme Creator and worshipped ancestors.

Europe on the Eve of Invading the Americas

❖ The Rebirth of Europe
  ➢ Stemmed from revived Italian trade with long-distance ports.
  ➢ Led to a rediscovery of forgotten ancient knowledge.
  ➢ Economic and political implications for societies that survived the Black Death.
    ▪ Enclosure of estates
    ▪ Development of English Parliament

❖ The New Monarchies and the Expansionist Impulse
  ➢ From 1450 onwards, France, England, and Spain sought social and political stability.
  ➢ Economic distress, civil disorder, plague, and Renaissance culture encouraged impulses to
    expand into the New World.
  ➢ The Europeans ultimately hoped to discover an eastern oceanic route to Asia and exploit the
    African gold trade.