

CHAPTER
1
SECTION 1

Section Summary

MANY CULTURES MEET

READING CHECK

What were Spanish invaders known as?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word *diverse* mean in the underlined sentence? Look for context clues in the surrounding words and phrases.

READING SKILL

Identify Causes and Effects

What were the effects of the Middle Passage?

Most scientists believe that the first inhabitants of the Americas came from northeastern Asia between 15,000 and 40,000 years ago. Over the generations, the American Indians expanded southward, filling the continents of North and South America. They developed diverse cultures as they adapted to the different climates they inhabited. However, they shared many traits. An extended family evolved into a **clan** with a common ancestor. Several clans combined to make up a **band** of Indians. As the Indians learned how to grow crops, the population grew, leading to the growth of towns and cities.

During the fifteenth century, scientific advances and an increase in economic wealth led some Europeans to sponsor voyages of exploration. The Portuguese took the lead and reached the West African kingdoms below the Sahara. There, they expanded the slave trade. During the next three centuries, slave traders from European nations forced at least 11 million Africans across the Atlantic. Known as the **Middle Passage**, this brutal transatlantic slave trade weakened the economy of West Africa while making European merchants and empires wealthy.

In 1492, Spain sponsored a voyage headed by Italian mariner **Christopher Columbus**. He hoped to reach the Indies by sailing westward across the Atlantic. After exploring several Caribbean islands, Columbus thought that he had reached the Indies.

The Spanish rapidly conquered a vast empire around the Caribbean and in Central and South America. Known as **conquistadores**, Spanish invaders were brave, resourceful, ruthless, and destructive. The conquistadores had the advantage of horses and steel weapons, but they also carried deadly European diseases to which Native Americans had no immunity. These plagues killed thousands of Native Americans, making it easier for the Europeans to conquer and colonize North and South America.

In addition to bringing new people into the Americas, the colonizers introduced new animals. They also took American products back to Europe. This exchange of goods and ideas between Europe and the Americas is called the **Columbian Exchange**.

Review Questions

1. Why did the American Indians develop diverse cultures?

2. What did Christopher Columbus hope to accomplish?
