

Passage #2

Native North Americans - The Effects of Colonization

European colonization of North America had a devastating effect on the native population. Within a short period of time their way of life was changed forever. The changes were caused by a number of factors, including loss of land, disease, enforced laws which violated their culture and much more.

When the Europeans arrived they brought with them diseases unknown to the natives. The natives, having no immunity died from diseases that the Europeans thought of as commonplace. They also brought guns, alcohol and horses. The effect of these was to change the way of life for the Native Americans. Horses and guns changed their way of hunting for food.

Missions were introduced, and Natives were aggressively encouraged to convert to Christianity. Most of the groups had had some form of ancestral worship, and this enforced change in religion altered their culture identity. On top of all of these factors was the Europeans need for land and food. Native groups, because they were nomadic, didn't see land as belonging to one person. The idea that someone could come in, claim a piece of land and ban them from it caused many problems. Wars broke out over the fact that they could no longer hunt or forage for food in places they had always done so.

Some of the effects that colonization had were unintentional. No one thought much about immunity to diseases, or that they would kill off the entire bison population. These effects were a side effect of the Europeans greed and attitude that they could take anything they saw. Certain tribes were freely supplied with guns, so that they could wipe out their neighbors. Old problems between tribes were brought back into the open, causing wars. The army and many settlers treated the Natives as nothing more than pests to be got rid of. Laws were introduced that banned certain ceremonies, forced the children into the European education system, and tied whole groups to land that was useless and could not sustain them. The intention was to deny them of their cultural identity, which has the same effect as wiping them out.

Northwest Coast Fishermen

Many European ships visited the Northwest coast, beginning in 1741. Diseases, guns and alcohol caused many troubles. Land was not a major problem initially. Although the culture was failing, many of the people remained on the land or close to it. The Native Americans still living in the area are fighting hard to restore their culture.

California Foragers

Europeans first came to this area in 1542, and missions were established soon after. However, the Native population remained fairly intact until the Gold Rush of 1849. During this time the Native Americans had their land taken from them by force, and thousands were needlessly massacred. Although there are still groups present in the area today, much of their cultural identity has been lost.

Southwest Cultivators and Foragers

Although the Apaches and Hopi managed to keep the Mexicans out, they were no match for the US army. From 1840 to 1886, the Natives and US Army fought running battles. Geronimo, the Apache chief was the last to surrender in 1886. Today the Navajo (part of the Apache nation) and the Hopi still live in the area, and have the best preserved culture of all the Native American groups.

It took Europeans, disease, guns and horses less than 300 years to destroy a way of life that had been going on for at least 20,000 years. Although many Native American groups are trying to regain their cultural identity, it will never be the same.