

Topic 1.7

Causation in Period 1

Learning Objective: Explain the effects of the development of transatlantic voyages from 1491 to 1607.

The reasoning skill of “causation” is the suggested focus for evaluating the content of this period. As explained in the contextualization introduction to Period 1, there are many factors to consider in the broad topic of European encounters in the Americas in the 15th and 16th centuries. One needs to be able to *describe what caused* the Native Americans to develop diverse societies across the enormous and varied lands of North America. This appreciation of the status of Native Americans during this period will help to *explain the specific developments* when the Europeans came to explore what they saw as a “new world.”

A number of factors had come together to explain the causes of the European explorations during this particular period. For example, both desires to spread Christianity and desires for economic gain. However, not all causes are equally significant. One task of a historian is to weigh the evidence to decide how much emphasis to place on each of these various causes. Among the most common differences among historians are debates over whether one cause was more important than another.

Note that causation implies that an event or development had an effect. The results of the contact are viewed by some as the Columbian Exchange, which *explain both the short- and long-term* impact not only on both sides of the Atlantic but on people throughout the world. Given the many factors involved, one can argue as to the *historically significant effects* on the various peoples involved on both sides of the Atlantic.

QUESTIONS ABOUT CAUSATION

1. Explain the factors that resulted in various Native American groups developing their own unique cultures.
2. Explain a significant development in Europe by the 15th and 16th centuries that caused a surge in exploration.
3. Explain the extent to which the Columbian Exchange had beneficial effects on both the Native Americans and Europeans.



THINK AS A HISTORIAN: ANALYZING EVIDENCE

Below are models of a step-by-step process for analyzing a primary source and a secondary source. As you study the italicized questions and answers, consider alternate answers based on your own knowledge and skill as a historical thinker.

Analyzing a Primary Source

“Being earnestly requested by a dear friend to put down in writing some true relation of our late performed voyage to the north parts of Virginia [Massachusetts] I resolved to satisfy his request. . . .

“Coming ashore, we stood awhile like men ravished at the beauty and delicacy of this sweet soil. For besides diverse clear lakes of fresh water . . . meadows very large and full of green grass. . . .

“[This climate so agreed with us] that we found our health and strength all the while we remained there so to renew and increase as, notwithstanding our diet and lodging was none of the best, yet not one of our company (God be thanked) felt the least grudging or inclination to any disease or sickness but were much fatter and in better health than when we went out of England.”

John Brereton, *The Discovery of the North Part of Virginia*, 1602

Content

- *What is the key point?* New England has a healthy environment.
- *What content is useful?* It states one early impression of New England, which can help explain why Europeans wanted to colonize the region.

The Author's Point of View

- *Who was the author?* John Brereton, an Englishman
- *How reliable is the author?* Answering this requires additional research.
- *What was the author's point of view?* New England is a wonderful place.
- *What other beliefs might the author hold?* He believes in God.

The Author's Purpose

- *Why did the author create this document at this time?* Others expressed interest in his experiences in land that was new to them.
- *How does the document's purpose reflect its reliability?* The author could be biased to encourage investment in colonization.

Audience

- *Who was this document created for?* people in England
- *How might the audience affect the document's content?* The audience was looking for opportunities for success in the Americas.
- *How might the audience affect its reliability?* It might emphasize positive information.

Historical Context

- *When and where was this produced?* England in the early 17th century
- *What concurrent events might have affected the author?* the desire of many to encourage and profit from the new colonies

Format/Medium

- *What is the format?* a first-person narrative

Limitations

- *What is one limitation of the excerpt or the author's view?* The document says nothing about the indigenous people living in the region.

Analyzing a Secondary Source

“Why did the English found colonies and make them stick? For most the goal was material. . . . For some the goal was spiritual. . . . But all the colonists who suffered perilous voyages and risked early death in America were either hustlers or hustled. That is, they knew the hardships beforehand and were courageous, desperate, or faithful enough to face them, or else they did not know what lay ahead but were taken in by the propaganda of sponsors. . . . In every case colonists left a swarming competitive country that heralded self-improvement but offered limited opportunities for it.”

Walter A. McDougall, *Freedom Just Around the Corner*, 2004

Content and Argument

- *What is the main idea of the excerpt?* English settlers came to America for diverse reasons.
- *What information supports this historian?* The author gives examples of both the religious Puritans and adventurers as settlers.
- *What information challenges this historian?* Many people were forced to settle in America because they were enslaved or convicts.
- *What is the interpretation of events argued for in this excerpt?* The opportunities for prosperity and religious freedom were far greater in the colonies than those they left behind in Europe.

The Author's Point of View

- *How could the author's perspective have been shaped by the times in which he wrote?* The author was writing in 2004, long after the English colonies had become the United States. The size and power of the United States might have led him to focus on the lack of these traits in the colonies.
- *Why might another historian view the same events differently?* Another historian might emphasize a single factor instead of multiple factors.