

# THE NEW WORLD WAS AN OLD WORLD

## INTRODUCTION

**History** When explorers and colonists first entered the territory that is today the United States, diverse groups of indigenous people populated the land.

**Mystery** Native American cultures were vastly different from the culture of the Europeans they encountered. Yet, the behavior of Native American people can be understood by means of the same economic principles which help explain European behavior. Why?

**Economic Reasoning** All Native Americans faced the problem of scarcity. They developed rules for their economic systems, and these rules guided the choices they made in coping with the problem of scarcity.

## CONCEPTS

Scarcity  
Opportunity Cost  
Specialization and Trade  
Economic Systems

## OBJECTIVE

◆ Use principles from the *HDG* to analyze instances of Native American behavior.

## LESSON DESCRIPTION

Students are divided into groups and given copies of three case studies. In each case study, they identify one example of each *HDG* principle.

## TIME REQUIRED

◆ One class period.

## MATERIALS

One transparency each of Visuals 1 and 2.  
One copy for each student of Activities 1, 2, and 3.  
A wall map of the world.

## PROCEDURE

1. Display a wall map of the world to the class. Explain there is one thing we know about people everywhere—Americans, Russians, Nigerians, and Vietnamese—they all make economic decisions. We can understand economic behavior in any culture according to certain principles.

2. Display Visual 1 (the *Handy Dandy Guide*) to the class and review it briefly.

3. Distribute Activities 1, 2, and 3 to each student. Explain that these are case studies that tell how three Native American peoples, the Choctaw of the Southeast, the Iroquois of the Northeast, and the Pueblo of the Southwest, lived before Europeans entered their regions. Like the Europeans of that time, these Native Americans had developed economic systems. In many ways, the Native Americans lived as well as the average Europeans of the same time period. However, like Europeans, Native Americans faced economic choices.

4. Display Visual 2. Orient students to the location of these groups.

5. Divide the students into groups of three to four. Assign each group to read the three case studies and to find, in each case study, one example of behavior illustrating each of the six principles of *HDG*. One student in each group should record the group's six examples. Since the six *HDG* principles overlap, students may differ in their identification of examples. Some suggested answers are:

### A. PEOPLE CHOOSE.

(Choctaw chose to raise corn and beans together to preserve the fertility of the soil. They were choosing the anticipated benefits and costs most advantageous to them. Raising corn and beans together seemed to be the best alternative. Choctaws produced more corn than they needed and traded it for desirable goods they couldn't produce.)

(Iroquois chose to move. When the fertility of the soil around their villages was exhausted, they found the costs and benefits of moving to new land

## UNIT TWO: LESSON ONE

more advantageous than those of staying where they were.)

(Pueblo chose to increase benefits by using irrigation to raise crops that otherwise would not have grown in the dry land where they lived. Modern Pueblos can often attain a higher standard of living by choosing to work at jobs outside their pueblos.)

### **B. PEOPLE'S CHOICES INVOLVE COSTS.**

(Choctaw overhunted the buffalo who lived in the southeastern forests. One cost of the meat and skin they acquired at any time was meat and skin they would be unable to acquire in future years.)

(Iroquois went to war to obtain beaver pelts and European trade goods. An economic cost of war was the products that could have been produced by young men lost in wars.)

(Pueblo men chose to hunt less and farm more; they used considerable labor to keep irrigation systems working. One cost of more agricultural products was meat the men might have obtained if they had hunted more.)

### **C. PEOPLE RESPOND TO INCENTIVES IN PREDICTABLE WAYS.**

(Choctaw specialized in crafts, such as tool-making, because they knew they could give their tools as gifts and receive presents in return. Gift-giving and receiving constituted a system of incentives.)

(Iroquois expanded warfare in order to obtain beaver pelts that they could trade for valuable European trade goods. European goods were incentives.)

(Pueblo cooperated to build and maintain irrigation systems because, with irrigation, they could increase their food supply. Increased food was an incentive.)

### **D. PEOPLE CREATE ECONOMIC SYSTEMS THAT INFLUENCE INDIVIDUAL CHOICES AND INCENTIVES.**

(Choctaw families followed economic rules. They were allowed to own farmland only as long as they

used it; or, Choctaws were expected to give gifts to other villagers and to the chief.)

(Iroquois rules allowed men to hunt, fish, and make war, while the women raised crops.)

(Pueblo economic rules required men to raise crops and weave cloth, while the women ground corn, baked bread and made pottery.)

### **E. PEOPLE GAIN WHEN THEY TRADE VOLUNTARILY.**

(Choctaw traded their corn for salt, shells, buffalo meat, and hide. Their trading partners benefited because they could not produce corn as cheaply. Both sides were better off in that they obtained products through trade which would otherwise have been more expensive to produce themselves.)

(Iroquois traded only when warfare was impractical. They benefited greatly when they took beaver skins or trade goods by violence, but the cost was high in lives lost.)

(Pueblo improved their standard of living when they spent most of their time farming, maintaining irrigation systems, and trading with nomadic people for meat and skin.)

### **F. PEOPLE'S CHOICES HAVE CONSEQUENCES THAT LIE IN THE FUTURE.**

(Choctaw chose to farm and became prosperous later as a result.)

(Iroquois seldom chose to trade. Instead, they relied on warfare to acquire wealth.)

(Pueblo chose to cooperate in building irrigation systems and prospered in an inhospitable climate.)

## **CLOSURE**

Review with the class the idea that Native American groups, like other people, had to make economic decisions. Their behavior was different in specifics from that of Europeans, but in general, like the behavior of Europeans, it involved choices undertaken within systems of incentives to increase benefits and decrease costs.

**VISUAL 1**  
***HANDY DANDY GUIDE (HDG)***

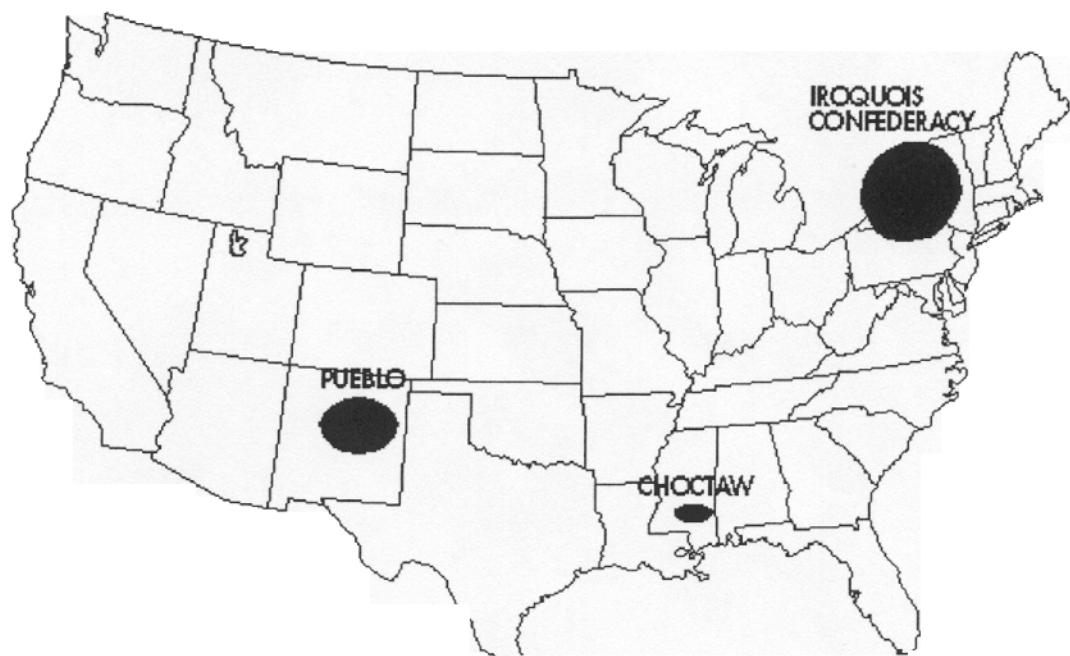
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- 1. People choose.**
- 2. People's choices involve costs.**
- 3. People respond to incentives in predictable ways**
- 4. People create economic systems that influence individual choices and incentives.**
- 5. People gain when they trade voluntarily.**
- 6. People's choices have consequences that lie in the future.**

# VISUAL 2

## MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF PUEBLO, IROQUOIS, AND CHOCTAW PEOPLE

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

**ACTIVITY 1**  
**THE CHOCTAWS**

THE CHOCTAW PEOPLE LIVED IN WHAT IS today Mississippi, western Alabama, and eastern Louisiana, in villages of wood and clay houses surrounded by farmland. When Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto first made contact with the Choctaw in 1540, Choctaw villages were grouped into three geographical divisions, located along the three major rivers in the area. Each village was governed by a village chief and a council of elders; each division was governed by a district chief (*mingo*) elected by all the men in the division.

Choctaw farmers raised corn, beans, squash, melons, sweet potatoes, and several other crops. Their farm tools included hoes, axes, shovels, and spades; these were similar to the tools of European farmers of the time, except that they were made of wood, flint or bone, since the Choctaw had no metal available to them. Each field was considered to be owned by an individual family, which received all the crops raised on it, but if a field was abandoned it reverted back to the tribe. Corn and beans were raised together in the same field, which maintained the fertility of the soil; growing corn removes nitrogen from the soil, but beans replace it.

Among the villagers, a system of barter existed, but it took the form of mutual gift-giving. A person who was especially skilled in making

tools, for example, would give a tool to another villager, and would at some time in the future receive a gift of equal value. Gifts of food were given to the chief, who in turn gave these items to people in need or used them in feasts to honor visitors or the families of men away on hunting or war parties.

Choctaw farmers usually raised a surplus of corn, which they traded with other Native Americans of the Southeast, such as the Chickasaw and the Alabama. Trade with groups to the east brought the Choctaw salt, dried fish, and seashells. In the eighteenth century, Choctaw traders traveled as far north as the Wabash River (in present-day Indiana) and as far west as the Great Plains and the Staked Plains (now the Texas Panhandle). By that time the forest buffalo, once common in the Southeast, was gone, so the Choctaw traded with people in the Great Plains, exchanging excess corn for buffalo skins. They also traded with northern groups of Native Americans for beaver and muskrat, which they could exchange with French and Spanish trappers on the southern Mississippi for metal tools and cooking vessels, rifles, and cotton cloth.

**QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION**

How did the behavior of the Choctaw follow economic principles?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**ACTIVITY 2**  
**THE IROQUOIS**

THE TERM "IROQUOIS" DOES NOT REFER to a single group. In the region that is today the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada, most of the largest Native American groups spoke some version of the Iroquoian language. After Europeans began to trade in this area, five major groups in what is today upper New York State formed the League of the Iroquois, a confederacy of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Cayuga peoples.

The Iroquois lived by farming, fishing, hunting and gathering. The men used fire to clear fields from the heavily forested lands typical of the region. The women raised the "three sisters"—corn, beans, and squash—that were the most important crops among most North American groups that practiced agriculture. Every six to twelve years, when the soil they farmed was worn out, Iroquois from a given village would move to a new location. In the spring, family groups would move temporarily to lakes or streams and would return to their villages with fresh and dried fish. After harvest, hunting parties traveled deep into the woods in search of deer, bear, and small mammals, returning in early winter with fresh and preserved meat.

The Iroquois lived in "longhouses," large wooden structures partitioned into several apartments occupied by related families. Women

owned the longhouses. When a man married, he went to live in the longhouse of his wife.

Iroquois men traveled long distances to hunt or to make war, but they traded very little with other Native American peoples. By the early 17th century, French, Dutch, and English traders were exchanging such valuable goods as weapons and metal tools with the Huron, Ottawa, and other groups, in exchange for beaver pelts. The Iroquois, blocked by these groups from trading directly with the Europeans, attacked them more and more frequently to obtain European trade goods or to drive them out of areas where beaver were abundant. By 1675, the Iroquois had destroyed or driven out most other Native Americans who had competed with them for beaver.

The continual warfare of the Iroquois killed many young Iroquois men. To compensate for this, victorious Iroquois warriors often adopted their prisoners rather than killing them. The influence of women in managing Iroquois villages grew because of the reduced number of young men and the frequent, long absences of war parties.

**QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION**

How did the behavior of the Iroquois follow economic principles?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**ACTIVITY 3**  
**THE PUEBLO**

**WHEN SPANISH EXPLORERS FIRST ENTERED** what is today north central New Mexico, early in the 16th century, they found villages made up of large adobe (clay brick) apartment buildings two or three stories high. Many of these villages, called *pueblos* by the Spaniards, are still occupied by descendants of the people who lived there when the Spanish arrived.

The Pueblo raised corn, beans, and squash, as did other agricultural groups throughout North America. They also grew cotton and kept flocks of turkeys. In the semi-desert area in which the pueblos were located, crops could not have survived without irrigation. In each pueblo, the whole community labored to build and maintain the irrigation systems upon which their livelihood depended. Perhaps this necessary task influenced the beliefs of the Pueblo—for example, that individuals should not compete to outperform their neighbors, or that members of the community should cooperate with each other for the common good and follow traditional ways.

Each pueblo was politically separate from the others. Land was considered to be owned by the community, but usually was kept by the same family for many generations. In some pueblos, inheritance was through the families of wives, but in others it was through the husband's family. In contrast to the practice of agricultural people of the northeast and southeast, Pueblo men cultivated the fields. Men of some pueblos hunted, but hunting was not as important to the

Pueblo way of life as it was to most other Native American peoples. Until recent times, only men were the Pueblo weavers. Women ground corn, baked bread, and made pottery. Much time was taken up with elaborate religious ceremonies and dances.

Trade was carried on among pueblos, and people living in pueblos traded with other groups living near them. The people of Acoma and Pecos exchanged cornmeal with the Apache for deer, rabbit, and tanned deerskin. Taos, the most northern of the pueblos, traded with the Plains people and hunted buffalo as the Plains people did. As Native Americans throughout the Southwest acquired horses, trade increased, but the pueblos also suffered from raids by nomadic peoples such as the Navajo and the Comanche.

Spanish colonization after 1598 introduced new crops to the Pueblo, as well as pigs, sheep, horses, and cattle. However, Spanish colonists also took over much of the land that the Pueblo had farmed. Today, many Pueblo still farm as their ancestors did, but others leave the pueblo every day to work in nearby towns and cities. Most Pueblo still live in the homes built by their ancestors and follow many of the old customs and ceremonies that existed hundreds of years before the Spaniards arrived.

**QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION**

How did the behavior of the Pueblo follow economic principles?