**Chapter 12**

*Chapter Summary*

In the New World, just as in the Old, many farming societies developed the ability to produce a food surplus. This surplus supported larger populations, the development of social complexity, and increased inequality. Some of these complex societies developed into states, with densely populated cities, formal governments, and power invested in an elite class. The Maya and other civilizations of Mesoamerica developed independently of the Old World. Through their concentration of wealth and power, and as members of an elite social class in a stratified society, rulers were able to organize the labor of the many to produce the spectacular monuments— the pyramids and temples—that dominate the ancient landscapes of Teotihuacán and the territory of the Maya. As in the Old World, the civilizations of the New World eventually collapsed. Although many theories have been proposed to explain the fall of ancient civilizations, including resource depletion, environmental catastrophes, invasion, and insurrection, no one of these explanations alone appears to be enough. In each instance of societal collapse, it is the inability of society to respond adequately to a challenge, whatever it may be, that leads to its disintegration. While abandonment and decentralization characterize the collapse of ancient states, in some instances the trappings of civilization survive in altered forms among living descendants, as with the Maya today.