

Chapter 1

The Collision of Cultures

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America Before Columbus

What were the major characteristics of pre-Columbian America?

What were the origins and lifestyles of the peoples of precontact Americas?

- Initial belief that all early migrations to Americas from humans crossing Bering Land bridge as result of newly developed tools
 - Referred to as "Clovis" people, originated from Mongolian stock connected to Siberia
 - Clovis established first American civilizations, eating animals and creating tools
 - Gradually expanded to warmer region
- Recent evidence has revealed that earlier Asian migrants had already arrived in South America long before Clovis
 - Likely arrived by boat (backed up by early population of Japan, Australia, Pacific)
- Early population far more diverse/ scattered than scholars originally believed
 - Some likely arrived from Polynesia, Japan; possible from Europe/Africa
 - Most American Indians most similar to Siberians: Mongolians likely dominated
- Period referred to as "Archaic Period" (\approx 8000 - 3000 BCE)
 - Larger animals driven to extinction with spear-hunting, stone tools
 - Bows and arrows unknown until 400-500 CE
 - New tools emerged, including fishing nets, traps, gathering baskets
 - Most important crop was corn, followed by beans/squash in many communities
 - Sedentary settlements slowly began to form

The earliest settlers in America, opposite to the long-held belief that they had arrived over the Bering Land Bridge, likely travelled by boat from Polynesia, Japan, and Mongolia. They arrived with stone tools but gradually developed more advanced technology, including baskets, nets, and fishing traps. Their most significant crops were corn, beans, and squash.

What defined the growth of early South American civilizations?

The most prosperous early civilizations were in fact south of the United States, mostly in Central/South America and Mexico.

The Incas built a 2000-mile empire in the Peruvian region.

- – Persuaded most leaders to join forces w/ them
- Connected by paved roads, which encouraged significant trade

The expansive Incan Empire was the dominant force in South America for multiple decades, known for their well-kept paved roads.

What defined the growth of pre-Aztec civilizations in Central America?

In Mesoamerica, civilization emerged as early as 10000 BCE.

- Olmec society emerged around 1000 BCE
- Most sophisticated: Mayans around 800 CE
 - Written language, numerical system, calendar, agriculture, trade routes

The civilizations in Central America emerged far earlier than those in South America. Significant prosperity began with the Olmecs around 1000 BCE, followed by the Mayans, both of whom were known for a written language and calendar.

What were the key characteristics of the Aztec Empire?

The Mayans were gradually succeeded by the Aztecs, who called themselves the Mexica.

- Established city of Tenochtitlan in modern Mexico City
 - Became largest American city *by far*
 - Characterized by many aqueducts, public buildings, organized military
- Incorporated other neighboring groups into society
 - Rather than directly conquering, drew into elaborate tribute network enforced by military
 - Most groups maintained significant autonomy
- Religion based on human sacrifice
 - Kept historical tradition of blood-letting
 - Introduced new concept of living hearts (generally captives)

The Aztecs were the last successful native civilization in Central America. Despite having been crushed by European disease, the Aztecs were the dominant force in southern North/Central America for centuries due to their extensive tribute system and large capital city.