

Chapter 1

The Collision of Cultures

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America Before Columbus

What were the major characteristics of pre-Columbian America?

Society began in the Americas likely after the arrival of boat-riding Japanese and Australian natives. Initially, almost all were characterized by hunting-and-gathering lifestyles, but agriculture slowly emerged, subsequently changing society and tribal culture significantly. Notable Native American hotspots include Mesoamerica, Peru, and the Southwest U.S.

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.

What characterized the early North American civilizations?

- Northern civilizations did not develop elaborate political systems, primarily basing society on hunting/gathering/fishing
- Some civilizations primarily based around hunting/fishing
 - In Arctic Circle, Eskimos fished/hunted seals/caribou/moose, travelled by dogsled
 - In PNW, focused on salmon fishing with coastal settlements
 - Far West contained numerous successful fishing communities, with some gathering
- Most elaborate agricultural society in Southwest
 - Built irrigation for dryland farming, towns as trade centers
 - Architecture primarily stone/adobe, known as pueblos
- Other farming communities in Great Plains, though some hunted buffalo
- Eastern U.S., covered with forests, inhabited by Woodland Indians
 - Enjoyed most food on continent; farmed, fished, hunted, gathered
 - Major city of trade: **Cahokia**, large mound society
 - Northeastern societies far more nomadic due to less fertile terrain
 - * Techniques designed for quick exploitation, immediately killing land
 - * Moved after a few years, dispersing in winter
 - Tribes east of Mississippi unified by linguistic roots
 - * Largest language group: Algonquian (Atlantic from Canada to Virginia)
 - * Iroquoian centered in upstate NY
 - Comprised of Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk
 - Linked to Carolinas, Georgia, Cherokees
 - * Muskogean included southernmost region
 - Included Seminoles, Creeks, Choctaws
 - Fragile connections (did not view as single group)

Early North American civilizations were characterized by vastly different traits: many fished and hunted (especially in the northwest), others focused on agriculture (mostly in Southwest w/ adobe style), and others were primarily nomadic (like in the Northeast). Finally, most tribes east of the Mississippi were unified by linguistic roots, but they rarely made connections because of this.

What were the key cultural elements of Native American tribes?

- All tribes could be characterized by growing sedentary behavior as well as growing agriculture, population
- Defined social customs began to emerge, with central point often religion based on natural environment
 - Generally gods associated with crops, game, forests, rivers, etc.
 - Many tribes used colored totems for rituals, large festivals
- Social stratification continued with division of tasks by gender
 - Women *a/ways* cared for children, prepared meals
 - Farming often restricted to men (Pueblos), but others relied on men for hunting, battles
 - Women respected for ability to keep family together while men battled/hunted
 - * Generally earned powerful role within family

By the arrival of Europeans, almost all tribes had begun to adopt a sedentary, agricultural lifestyle. Settling often led to defined religion based around their natural environment; furthermore, agriculture increased social division between men and women.