

Chapter 6: Settlement of the Americas and the Pacific Islands: 6-1 Paleoindian Period in the Americas

Book Title: World Civilizations

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6-1 Paleoindian Period in the Americas

Once south of the glaciers, the earliest ancestral Native Americans arrived in a North America whose climate was considerably cooler and moister than it is today. Here they found a world with abundant plant and wild animal life, which included many forms of megafauna—that is, giant, now extinct beasts such as the woolly mammoth, the giant sloth, and the giant bison. The lush grasslands of the Great Bison Belt covered North America, from Canada to the Gulf Coast. Not surprisingly, therefore, the earliest Native American cultures that archaeologists have uncovered were hunters of both large and small game.

The [Clovis \(CLOH-vihs\) culture \(\(CLOH-vihs\) The earliest Native American “culture” known to archaeologists; dated c. 9500–8900 B.C.E., it was largely based on hunting very large game.\)](#) was among the earliest known hunting cultures, dating between about 18,000 and 8,000 B.C.E. Associated with this archaeological culture in particular were large and deeply notched, leaf-shaped spearheads called “Clovis points,” which early Native Americans of North America used to kill their megafauna prey. In addition to the spearheads, archaeologists have discovered varieties of smaller stone implements that [Paleoindians \(9500–8900 B.C.E. in Native American history; a period when American Indians used Clovis spearheads to hunt large mammals like the woolly mammoth and giant bison.\)](#) seem to have used for preparing smaller game for cooking, as well as for skinning and tanning hides used for clothing.

Paleoindian peoples in Central and South America were generally not big-game hunters like their North American contemporaries. Recent and still controversial discoveries reveal a surprising diversity of lifestyles to the south of the Rio Grande River (see [Map 6.1](#)). Regions once assumed to be marginal to the first New World settlements, such as the Amazon rain forest, are yielding evidence of ancient hunter-gatherer campsites.

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