

# **The American Promise**

**A History of  
the United States**

**FIFTH EDITION**

# 1

# Ancient America

## Before 1492

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**NOBODY TODAY KNOWS HIS NAME. BUT ALMOST A THOUSAND YEARS ago, more than four hundred years before Europeans arrived in the Western Hemisphere, many ancient Americans celebrated this man — let's call him Sun Falcon. They buried Sun Falcon during elaborate rituals at Cahokia, the largest residential and ceremonial site in ancient North America. (In this chapter, ancient North America refers to the giant land-mass north of present-day Mexico.) Located near the eastern shore of the Mississippi River in what is now southwestern Illinois, Cahokia stood at the spiritual and political center of the world in the eyes of the 15,000 or 20,000 ancient Americans who lived there and thousands more in the hinterlands nearby. The way Cahokians buried Sun Falcon suggests that he was a very important person who represented spiritual and political authority.**

**What we know about Sun Falcon and the Cahokians who buried him has been discovered by archaeologists — scientists who study artifacts, or material objects, left behind by ancient peoples. Cahokia attracted the attention of archaeologists because of the hundreds of earthen mounds that ancient Americans built in the region. The largest surviving mound, Monks Mound, is a huge terraced pyramid rising one hundred feet from a base that covers sixteen acres (an acre is about the size of a football field), making it the biggest single structure ever built by ancient North Americans.**

**Atop the four terraces — or platforms — on Monks Mound, political and religious leaders performed ceremonies watched by thousands of Cahokia residents and visitors who stood on a fifty-acre plaza at the base of the mound. Exactly what the leaders did in these ceremonies is unknown. Whatever they did was probably designed to demonstrate to onlookers the leaders' access to supernatural forces. Large garbage pits beside the plaza contain the bones of thousands of butchered deer, remnants of giant feasts that probably accompanied these ceremonies. At the far edge of the plaza, about a half mile from the base of Monk's Mound, Cahokians buried Sun Falcon in an oblong mound about 6 feet high and 250 feet long.**

**Before Cahokians lowered Sun Falcon into his grave sometime around AD 1050, they first placed the body of another man facedown in the dirt. On top of that man, Cahokians draped a large cape made of twenty thousand shell beads crafted into the likeness of a bird. They then put Sun Falcon faceup on the beaded cape with his head pointing southeast, aligned with the passage of the sun across the sky during the summer solstice at Cahokia. Experts speculate that Cahokians believed that Sun Falcon looked upward toward the life-giving light of the sun while the man**



beneath the beaded cape communicated with the dark interior of the earth. The people who buried Sun Falcon, it appears, sought to pay homage not only to him but also to the awe-inspiring forces of darkness and light, of earth and sun, that governed their lives.

To accompany Sun Falcon, Cahokians also buried hundreds of arrows with exquisitely crafted arrowheads, thousands of shell beads, and other rare and valuable artifacts that they believed Sun Falcon would find useful in the afterlife. Near the artifacts, Cahokians buried the bodies of seven other adults, including at least one person killed at the grave site, who probably were relatives or servants of Sun Falcon. Not far away, archaeologists discovered several astonishing mass graves. One contained 53 women, all but one between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, who had been sacrificed by poison, strangulation, or having their throats slit. Other graves contained 43 more sacrificed women, 4 men whose arms had been tied together at the elbows and whose heads and hands had been chopped off, and 39 other men and women who had been executed at the burial site. In all, more than 270 people were buried in the mound with Sun Falcon.

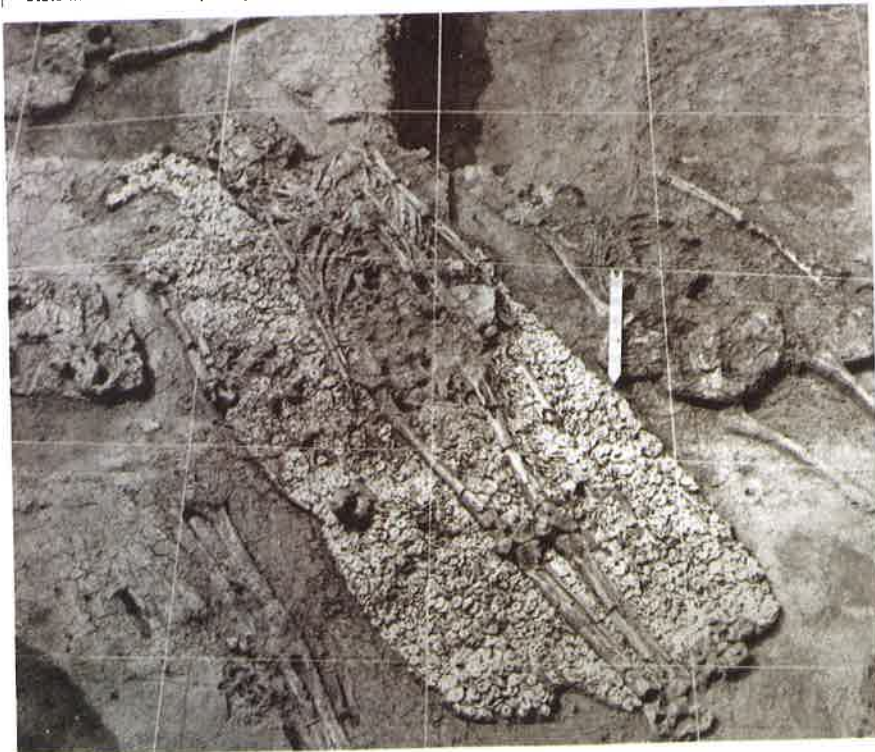
To date, archaeologists have found no similar burial site in ancient

North America. However, they have excavated only a tiny fraction of Cahokia. Who knows what remains to be discovered there and elsewhere?

Nobody knows exactly who Sun Falcon was or why Cahokians buried him as they did. Archaeologists believe that Sun Falcon's burial and the human sacrifices that accompanied it were major public rituals that communicated to the many onlookers the fearsome power he wielded, the respect he commanded, and the authority his survivors intended to honor and maintain. Much remains unknown and unknowable about him and his fellow Cahokians, just as it does with other ancient Americans. The history of ancient Americans is therefore necessarily incomplete and controversial. Still, archaeologists have learned enough to understand where ancient Americans came from and many basic features of the complex cultures they created and passed along to their descendants, who dominated the history of America until 1492.

### Cahokia Burial

The excavation of the ceremonial burial site at Cahokia revealed the remains of a man—presumably a revered leader—whom Cahokians buried atop a large cape or blanket in the shape of a bird, probably a raptor. Archaeologists superimposed the grid of white lines to record the precise location of each object. Covering the cape are more than 20,000 beads made of shells sewn onto an underlying fabric or animal skin (not visible). Nearby in the same mound, excavators found mass graves of scores of other Cahokians, many of them executed just before burial, evidently during ceremonies to honor their leader. Courtesy Illinois State Museum: archival photograph.



## ► Archaeology and History

Archaeologists and historians share the desire to learn about people who lived in the past, but they usually employ different methods to obtain information. Both archaeologists and historians study **artifacts** as clues to the activities and ideas of the humans who created them. They concentrate, however, on different kinds of artifacts. **Archaeologists** tend to focus on physical objects such as bones, spear points, pots, baskets, jewelry, clothing, and buildings. Historians direct their attention mostly to writings, including personal and private jottings such as letters and diary entries, and an enormous variety of public documents, such as laws, speeches, newspapers, and court cases. Although historians are interested in other artifacts and archaeologists do not neglect written sources if they exist, the



characteristic concentration of historians on writings and of archaeologists on other physical objects denotes a rough cultural and chronological boundary between the human beings studied by the two groups of scholars, a boundary marked by the use of writing.

Writing is defined as a system of symbols that record spoken language. Writing originated among ancient peoples in China, Egypt, and Central America about eight thousand years ago, within the most recent 2 percent of the four hundred millennia that modern human beings (*Homo sapiens*) have existed. Writing came into use even later in most other places in the world. The ancient Americans who buried Sun Falcon at Cahokia about AD 1050 and all those who inhabited North America in 1492 possessed many forms of symbolic representation, but not writing.

The people who lived during the millennia before writing were biologically nearly identical to us. But unlike us, they did not use writing to communicate across space and time. They invented hundreds of spoken languages; they moved across the face of the globe, learning to survive in almost every natural environment; they chose and honored leaders; they traded, warred, and worshipped; and, above all, they learned from and taught one another. Much of what we would like to know about their experiences remains unknown because it took place before writing existed.

Archaeologists specialize in learning about people who did not document their history in writing. They study the millions of artifacts these people created. They also scrutinize soil, geological strata, pollen, climate, and other environmental features to reconstruct as much as possible about the world ancient peoples inhabited. Although no documents chronicle ancient Americans' births and deaths or pleasures and pains, archaeologists have learned to make artifacts, along with their natural and human environment, reveal a great deal about the people who used them.

This chapter relies on studies by archaeologists to sketch a brief overview of ancient America, the long first phase of the history of the United States. Ancient Americans and their descendants resided in North America for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. For their own reasons and in their own ways, they created societies and cultures of remarkable diversity and complexity. Because they did not use written records, their

### Mexican Stone Tablet

In 2006, Mexican archaeologists announced the discovery of this stone tablet inscribed with the earliest evidence of writing in the Western Hemisphere. About three thousand years ago, somebody in what is now the Mexican state of Veracruz incised this stone with sixty-two characters, barely visible in this photograph. Experts have not yet deciphered the writing, but the repetition of certain characters has led some experts to speculate that it records poetry.

© Michael D. Coe.



**North Americans in 1492 possessed many forms of symbolic representation, but not writing.**



history cannot be reconstructed with the detail and certainty made possible by writing. But it is better to abbreviate and oversimplify ancient Americans' history than to ignore it.

**REVIEW** Why do historians rely on the work of archaeologists to write the history of ancient North America?

## ► The First Americans

The first human beings to arrive in the Western Hemisphere emigrated from Asia. They brought with them hunting skills, weapon- and tool-making techniques, and a full range of other forms of human knowledge developed millennia earlier in Africa, Europe, and Asia. These first Americans hunted large mammals, such as the mammoths they had learned in Europe and Asia to kill, butcher, and process for food, clothing, building materials, and many other purposes.

Most likely, these first Americans wandered into the Western Hemisphere more or less accidentally, hungry and in pursuit of their prey.

## African and Asian Origins

Human beings lived elsewhere in the world for hundreds of thousands of years before they reached the Western Hemisphere. They lacked a way to travel to the Western Hemisphere because millions of years before humans existed anywhere on the globe, North and South America became detached from the gigantic common landmass scientists now call **Pangaea**. About 240 million years ago, powerful forces deep within the earth fractured Pangaea and slowly pushed continents apart to approximately their present positions (Map 1.1). This process of **continental drift** encircled the land of the Western Hemisphere with large oceans that isolated it from the other continents long before early human beings (*Homo erectus*) first appeared in Africa about two million years ago. (Hereafter in this chapter, the

### MAP ACTIVITY

#### Map 1.1 Continental Drift

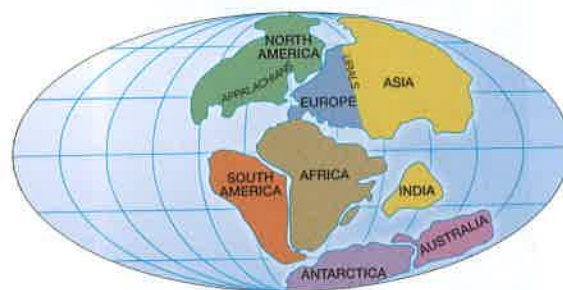
Massive geological forces separated North and South America from other continents eons before human beings evolved in Africa 1.5 million years ago.

**READING THE MAP:** Which continents separated from Pangaea earliest? Which ones separated from each other last? Which are still closely connected to each other?

**CONNECTIONS:** How does continental drift explain why human life developed elsewhere on the planet for hundreds of thousands of years before the first person entered the Western Hemisphere 15,000 years ago?



240 million years ago



135 million years ago



65 million years ago



Present day

abbreviation *BP* — archaeologists' notation for "years before the present" — is used to indicate dates earlier than two thousand years ago. Dates more recent than two thousand years ago are indicated with the common and familiar notation *AD* — for example, AD 1492.)

More than 1.5 million years after *Homo erectus* appeared, or about 400,000 BP, modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) evolved in Africa. All human beings throughout the world today are descendants of these ancient Africans. Their DNA was the template for ours. Slowly, over many millennia, *Homo sapiens* migrated out of Africa and into Europe and Asia. Unlike North and South America, Europe and Asia retained land connections to Africa, allowing ancient humans to migrate on foot. Sometimes ancient people navigated rivers and lakes in small boats, but these vessels could not survive battering by the winds and waves of the enormous oceans isolating North and South America from the Eurasian landmass. For roughly 97 percent of the time *Homo sapiens* have been on



Beringia

earth, none migrated to the Western Hemisphere.

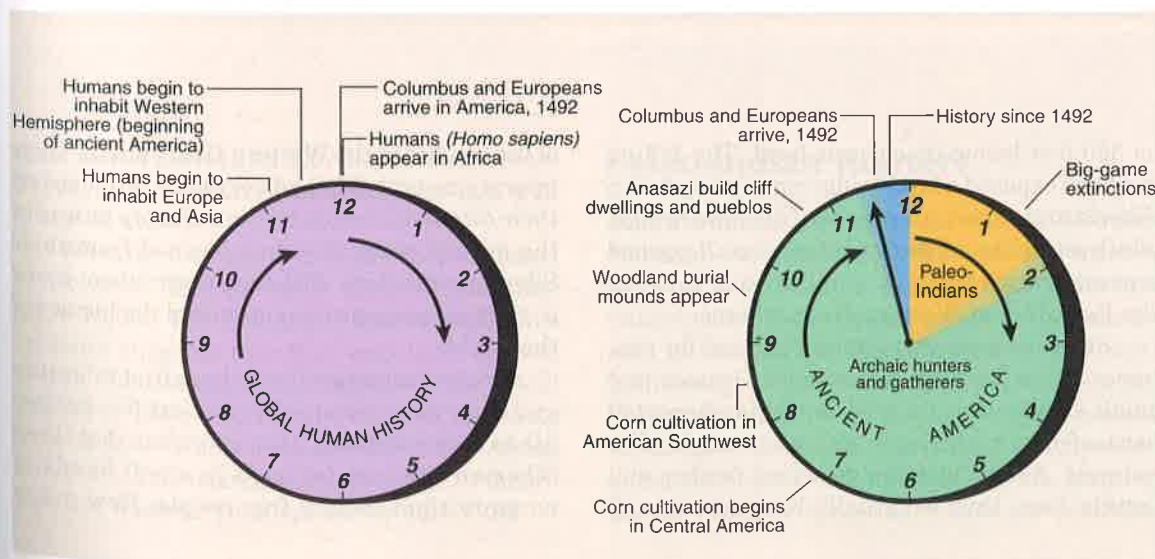
Two major developments made it possible for ancient humans to migrate to the Western Hemisphere. First, people successfully adapted to the frigid environment near the Arctic Circle. Second, changes in the earth's climate reconnected North America to Asia.

By about 25,000 BP, *Homo sapiens* had spread from Africa throughout Europe and Asia. People, probably women, had

learned to use bone needles to sew animal skins into warm clothing that permitted them to become permanent residents of extremely cold regions such as northeastern Siberia. A few of these ancient Siberians clothed in animal hides walked to North America on land that now lies submerged beneath the sixty miles of water that currently separates easternmost Siberia from westernmost Alaska. A pathway across this watery chasm opened during the last global cold spell — the Wisconsin glaciation, which endured from about 25,000 BP to 14,000 BP — when snow piled up in glaciers, causing the sea level to drop as much

### FIGURE 1.1 Human Habitation of the World and the Western Hemisphere

These clock faces illustrate the long global history of modern humans (left) and of human history in the Western Hemisphere since the arrival of the first ancient Americans (right). If the total period of human life on earth is considered, American history since the arrival of Columbus in 1492 comprises less than one minute (or one-tenth of 1 percent) of modern human existence. And if the total period of human life in the New World is converted from millennia to a 12-hour clock, ancient American history makes up the first 11½ hours, and all history since the arrival of the Europeans in 1492 occupies only the last half hour.





# Who Were the First Americans?

**T**o learn who the first Americans were and when they arrived requires following a trail that has grown very cold during the past 15,000 or 20,000 years.

After millennia of erosion and environmental change, much of the land they walked, hunted, and camped on is now submerged and inaccessible beneath the Bering Sea and along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, where rising sea levels have flooded wide, previously exposed coastal plains. Most of the numerous Paleo-Indian sites archaeologists have excavated were occupied more than a hundred centuries after the first migrants arrived. These sites often yield spear points and large animal bones, but Paleo-Indian human skeletal remains are very rare. And yet evidence that Paleo-Indians inhabited the Western Hemisphere is overwhelming and indisputable. Human craftsmanship is the only credible explanation for Clovis points, and carbon dating establishes that the oldest Clovis sites are about 13,500 years old.

Scattered and controversial evidence suggests, however, that Clovis peoples were not the first

arrivals. The Monte Verde excavation in Chile has persuaded many archaeologists that the first Americans resided in South America sometime between 14,750 BP and 14,000 BP. This site and a few other likely pre-Clovis sites in North America, most notably Meadowcroft in Pennsylvania, contain no Clovis-era artifacts, suggesting that their inhabitants arrived earlier and differed from the later Clovis peoples. But if the first Americans already lived in Chile and Pennsylvania 14,000 or more years ago, when did they first arrive and from where?

Some experts hypothesize that pre-Clovis peoples sailed or floated across the Pacific from Australia or Antarctica. Most scholars consider those ideas far-fetched. The Pacific is too wide and tempestuous for these ancient peoples and their small boats to have survived a long transoceanic trip.

Ancient Siberians had the means (hunting skills and adaptation to the frigid climate), motive (pursuit of game animals), and opportunity (the Beringian land bridge) to become the first humans to arrive in America,

and most archaeologists believe they did just that. But when they came is difficult to determine, since the Beringian land bridge existed for thousands of years. The extreme rarity of the earliest archaeological sites in North America also makes it difficult to estimate with confidence when pre-Clovis hunters arrived. A rough guess is 15,000 BP, although it might have been earlier. The scarcity of pre-Clovis sites discovered so far strongly suggests that these ancient Americans were few in number (compared to the much more numerous Clovis-era Paleo-Indians), very widely scattered, and ultimately unsuccessful in establishing permanent residence in the hemisphere. Although they and their descendants may have survived in America for a millennium or more, pre-Clovis peoples appear to have died out. The sparse archaeological evidence discovered to date does not suggest that they evolved into Clovis peoples. Although Clovis peoples evidently were not the first humans to arrive in the Western Hemisphere, they probably represent the first Paleo-Indians to establish a permanent American presence.

To investigate where the mysterious first Americans came from, experts have supplemented archaeological evidence with careful study of modern-day Native Americans. Although many millennia separate today's Native Americans from those ancient hunters, most

as 350 feet below its current level. The falling sea level exposed a land bridge connecting Asian Siberia and American Alaska. This land bridge, which scientists call **Beringia** (see page 7), opened a passageway hundreds of miles wide between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.

Siberian hunters roamed Beringia for centuries in search of game animals. Grasses and small shrubs that covered Beringia supported herds of mammoths, bison, and numerous smaller animals. As the hunters ventured farther and farther east, they eventually became pioneers

of human life in the Western Hemisphere. Their migrations probably had very little influence on their own lives, which continued more or less in the age-old ways they had learned from their Siberian ancestors. Although they did not know it, their migrations revolutionized the history of the world.

Archaeologists refer to these first migrants and their descendants for the next few millennia as **Paleo-Indians**. They speculate that these Siberian hunters traveled in small bands of no more than twenty-five people. How many



### Clovis Point

This spear point excavated from a Clovis-era site along the Columbia River in what is now Washington state was crafted by Clovis people around 11,000 BP. It illustrates the shape, size, and technique of flaking — the chipping away of small fragments of stone to create the point — common to Clovis points throughout the hemisphere. Archaeologists believe that such commonalities in Clovis artifacts document a widely shared Clovis culture practiced for many human generations. Clovis hunters wedged the point into a wooden shaft, bound it with leather or twine, and then had a sharp-edged weapon for killing (and butchering) game animals.

Washington State Historical Society.

scholars agree that telltale clues to the identity of the first Americans can be gleaned from dental, linguistic, and genetic evidence collected from their descendants who still live throughout the hemisphere.

Detailed scientific analyses of the teeth of thousands of ancient and modern Native Americans have identified distinctive dental shapes — such as incisors with a scooped-out inner surface — commonly found among ancient Siberians, ancient Americans, and modern Native Americans, but rare elsewhere. This dental evidence strongly supports the Asian origins and Beringian

migration route of the first Americans.

Linguistic analysis of more than a thousand modern Native American languages demonstrates that Native Americans throughout the hemisphere speak some form of Amerind, the consequence (presumably) of its arrival with the earliest wave of ancient migrants around 13,000 BP. This migration chronology and linguistic analysis remain controversial among experts, but they suggest that Clovis peoples spoke some ancient form of Amerind.

Genetic research into the mutation rate of DNA reveals that many modern Native Americans share

genetic characteristics commonly found among Asians. Estimates of the evolutionary time required to produce the subtle differences between Asian and Native American DNA suggest a migration from Asia as early as 25,000 BP or before. But like the other high-tech evidence, this genetic evidence is sharply disputed by experts.

Fascinating as the genetic, linguistic, and dental studies are, they are unlikely to win widespread support among experts until they can be corroborated by archaeological evidence that, so far, has not been found. Until then, specialists will continue to debate when the first Americans arrived and how they were related to subsequent generations of ancient Americans.

### Thinking about Evidence

1. What evidence supports the hypothesis that the first Americans came from Asia? Do you find the evidence persuasive?
2. If pre-Clovis peoples were the first Americans, what evidence suggests when they arrived and what happened to them?
3. Can you imagine archaeological evidence that, if found, would conclusively identify the first Americans and when they arrived?

such bands arrived in North America before Beringia disappeared beneath the sea will never be known.

When the first migrants came is hotly debated by experts. They probably arrived sometime after 15,000 BP. Scattered and inconclusive evidence suggests that they may have arrived several thousand years earlier. (See “Historical Question,” page 8.) Certainly, humans who came from Asia — whose ancestors had left Africa hundreds of thousands of years earlier — inhabited the Western Hemisphere by 13,500 BP.

### Paleo-Indian Hunters

When humans first arrived in the Western Hemisphere, massive glaciers covered most of present-day Canada. A narrow corridor not entirely obstructed by ice ran along the eastern side of Canada’s Rocky Mountains, and most archaeologists believe that Paleo-Indians probably migrated through the ice-free passageway in pursuit of game. They may have also traveled along the Pacific coast in small boats, hunting marine life and hopscotching from one desirable



landing spot to another. At the southern edge of the glaciers, Paleo-Indians entered a hunters' paradise. North, Central, and South America teemed with wildlife that had never before confronted wily two-legged predators armed with razor-sharp spears. The abundance of game presumably made hunting relatively easy. Ample food permitted the Paleo-Indian population to grow. Within a thousand years or so, Paleo-Indians had migrated to the tip of South America and virtually everywhere else in the Western Hemisphere, as proved by discoveries of their spear points in numerous excavations.

Early Paleo-Indians used a distinctively shaped spearhead known as a **Clovis point**, named for

the place in New Mexico where it was first excavated. Archaeologists' discovery of Clovis points throughout North and Central America in sites occupied between 13,500 BP and 13,000 BP provides evidence that these nomadic hunters shared a common ancestry and way of life. Paleo-Indians hunted mammoths and bison — judging from the artifacts and bones that

**Some Paleo-Indians refrigerated killed mammoths by filling the intestines with stones and sinking the carcasses to the bottom of an icy lake.**

have survived from this era — but they probably also hunted smaller animals. Concentration on large animals, when possible, made sense because just one mammoth kill supplied hunters with meat for weeks or, if dried, for months. Some Paleo-Indians even refrigerated killed mammoths by filling the intestines with stones and sinking the carcasses to the bottom of an icy lake to be retrieved and used later. In addition to food, mammoth kills provided hides and bones for clothing, shelter, tools, and much more.

About 11,000 BP, Paleo-Indians confronted a major crisis. The mammoths and other large mammals they hunted became extinct. The extinction was gradual, stretching over several hundred years. Scientists are not completely certain why it occurred, although environmental change probably contributed to it. About this time, the earth's climate warmed, glaciers melted, and sea levels rose. Mammoths and other large mammals probably had difficulty adapting to the warmer climate. Many archaeologists also believe, however, that Paleo-Indians probably contributed to the extinctions in the Western Hemisphere by killing large animals more rapidly than they could reproduce. Although some experts dispute this overkill hypothesis, similar environmental changes had occurred for millions of years without triggering the large-mammal extinctions that followed the arrival of Paleo-Indian hunters. Whatever the causes, Paleo-Indians faced a radical change in the natural environment within just a few thousand years of their arrival in the Western Hemisphere — namely, the extinction of large mammals. After the extinction, Paleo-Indians literally inhabited a new world.

Paleo-Indians adapted to the drastic environmental change of the big-game extinction by making at least two important changes in their way of life. First, hunters began to prey more intensively on smaller animals. Second, Paleo-Indians devoted more energy to foraging — that is, to collecting wild plant foods such as roots, seeds, nuts, berries, and fruits. When Paleo-Indians made these changes, they replaced the apparent uniformity of the big-game-oriented Clovis culture with great cultural diversity adapted to the many natural environments throughout the hemisphere, ranging from icy tundra to steamy jungles.

These post-Clovis adaptations to local environments resulted in the astounding variety of Native American cultures that existed when Europeans arrived in AD 1492. By then, more than three hundred major tribes and hundreds of lesser groups inhabited North America alone.

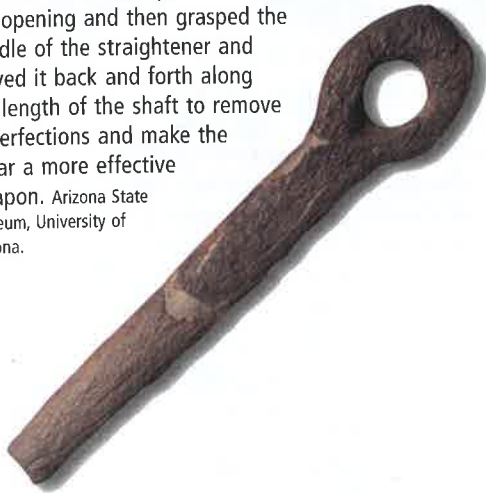
### Ancient Petroglyphs

These petroglyphs — drawings incised onto the surface of rocks — probably depict shamans, ancient American spiritual leaders and healers who claimed the ability to communicate with supernatural powers. Shamans may well have made the petroglyphs to help them cure sicknesses, attempt to control the weather, or assure success for hunters. Petroglyphs can be found throughout North America; often they portray animals, people, or geometric designs. The petroglyphs shown here are among thousands located in the Coso Mountains on the edge of the Mojave Desert in what is now eastern California, where ancient Americans etched them onto rocks for millennia. © David Muench.



### Clovis Spear Straightener

Clovis hunters used this bone spear straightener about 11,000 BP at a campsite in Arizona, where archaeologists discovered it lying among the butchered remains of two mammoth carcasses and thirteen ancient bison. Similar objects often appear in ancient sites in Eurasia, but this is the only bone artifact yet discovered in a Clovis-era site in North America. Presumably Clovis hunters stuck their spear shafts through the opening and then grasped the handle of the straightener and moved it back and forth along the length of the shaft to remove imperfections and make the spear a more effective weapon. Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona.



Hundreds more lived in Central and South America. Hundreds of other ancient American cultures had disappeared or transformed themselves as their people constantly adapted to environmental change and other challenges.

**REVIEW** How and why did humans migrate into North America after 15,000 BP?

## ► Archaic Hunters and Gatherers

Archaeologists use the term *Archaic* to describe the many different hunting and gathering cultures that descended from Paleo-Indians and the long period of time when those cultures dominated the history of ancient America — roughly from 10,000 BP to somewhere between 4000 BP and 3000 BP. The term describes the era in the history of ancient America that followed the Paleo-Indian big-game hunters and preceded the development of agriculture. It denotes a **hunter-gatherer** way of life that persisted in North America long after European colonization.

Like their Paleo-Indian ancestors, **Archaic Indians** hunted with spears, but they also took

smaller game with traps, nets, and hooks. Unlike their Paleo-Indian predecessors, most Archaic peoples used a variety of stone tools to prepare food from wild plants. A characteristic Archaic artifact is a grinding stone used to pulverize seeds into edible form. Most Archaic Indians migrated from place to place to harvest plants and hunt animals. They usually did not establish permanent villages, although they often returned to the same river valley or fertile meadow year after year. In regions with especially rich resources — such as present-day California and the Pacific Northwest — they developed permanent settlements. Many groups became excellent basket makers in order to collect and store food they gathered from wild plants. Archaic peoples followed these practices in distinctive ways in the different environmental regions of North America (Map 1.2).

### Great Plains Bison Hunters

After the extinction of large game animals, some hunters began to concentrate on bison in the huge herds that grazed the grassy, arid plains stretching hundreds of miles east of the Rocky Mountains. For almost a thousand years after the big-game extinctions, Archaic Indians hunted bison with Folsom points, named after a site near Folsom, New Mexico. In 1908, George McJunkin, an African American cowboy, discovered this site, which contained a deposit of large fossilized bones. In 1926, archaeologists excavated the site McJunkin had discovered and found evidence that proved conclusively for the first time that ancient Americans and giant bison — which were known to have been extinct for at least ten thousand years — were contemporaries. One Folsom point remained stuck between two ribs of a giant bison, where a Stone Age hunter had plunged it more than ten thousand years earlier.

Like their nomadic predecessors, Folsom hunters moved constantly to maintain contact with their prey. **Great Plains hunters** developed trapping techniques that made it easy to kill large numbers of animals. At the original Folsom site, careful study of the bones McJunkin found suggests that early one winter hunters drove bison into a narrow gulch and speared twenty-three of them. At other sites, Great Plains hunters stampeded bison herds over cliffs and then slaughtered the animals that plunged to their deaths.

Bows and arrows reached Great Plains hunters from the north about AD 500. They largely replaced spears, which had been the hunters' weapons of choice for millennia. Bows permitted





## MAP ACTIVITY

### Map 1.2 Native North American Cultures

Environmental conditions defined the boundaries of the broad zones of cultural similarity among ancient North Americans.

**READING THE MAP:** What crucial environmental features set the boundaries of each cultural region? (The topography indicated on Map 1.3, "Native North Americans about 1500," may be helpful.)

**CONNECTIONS:** How did environmental factors and variations affect the development of different groups of Native American cultures? Why do you think historians and archaeologists group cultures together by their regional positions?

hunters to wound animals from farther away, arrows made it possible to shoot repeatedly, and arrowheads were easier to make and therefore less costly to lose than the larger, heavier spear points. But these new weapons did not otherwise alter age-old techniques of bison hunting on the Great Plains. Although we often imagine ancient Great Plains bison hunters on horseback, in fact

they hunted on foot, like their Paleo-Indian ancestors. Horses that had existed in North America millions of years earlier had long since become extinct. Horses did not return to the Great Plains until Europeans imported them in the decades after 1492, when Native American bison hunters acquired them and soon became expert riders.



### Fishhooks

Ancient Americans crafted these fishhooks sometime between AD 900 and 1600 from abalone shells collected in the waters off coastal California. Fishermen attached a line to the nub shown at the top of three of the hooks, skewered bait onto the point of the hook, then pulled up when a fish nibbled, hoping to snag the lip of the unsuspecting fish. (The numbers on the hooks were added in modern times.) The hooks illustrate Pacific Coast cultures' exploitation of their rich marine environment. ©The Field Museum #A114464\_32d.

## Great Basin Cultures

Archaic peoples in the Great Basin between the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada inhabited a region of great environmental diversity. Some **Great Basin Indians** lived along the shores of large marshes and lakes that formed during rainy periods, eating fish they caught with bone hooks and nets. Other cultures survived in the foothills of mountains between the blistering heat on the desert floor and the cold, treeless mountain heights. Hunters killed deer, antelope, and sometimes bison, as well as smaller game such as rabbits, rodents, and snakes. These broadly defined zones of habitation changed constantly, depending largely on the amount of rain.

Despite the variety and occasional abundance of animals, Great Basin peoples relied on plants as their most important food source. Unlike meat and fish, plant food could be collected and stored for long periods to protect against shortages caused by the fickle rainfall. Many Great Basin peoples gathered piñon nuts as a dietary staple. By diversifying their food sources and migrating to favorable locations to collect and store them, Great Basin peoples adapted to the severe environmental challenges of the region and maintained their Archaic hunter-gatherer way of life for centuries after Europeans arrived in AD 1492.

## Pacific Coast Cultures

The richness of the natural environment made present-day California the most densely settled area in all of ancient North America. The land and ocean offered such ample food that **California peoples** remained hunters and gatherers for hundreds of years after AD 1492. The diversity of California's environment also encouraged corresponding variety among native peoples. The mosaic of Archaic settlements in California included about five hundred separate tribes speaking

**The richness of the natural environment made present-day California the most densely settled area in all of ancient North America.**

some ninety languages, each with local dialects. No other region of comparable size in ancient North America exhibited such cultural variety.

The Chumash, one of the many California cultures, emerged in the region surrounding what is now Santa Barbara about 5000 BP. Comparatively plentiful food resources — especially acorns — permitted Chumash people to establish relatively permanent villages. Conflict, evidently caused by competition for valuable acorn-gathering territory, frequently broke out among the villages, as documented by Chumash skeletons that display signs of violent deaths. Although few other

### Ancient California Peoples





### Chumash Necklace

Long before the arrival of Europeans, ancient Chumash people in southern California made this elegant necklace of abalone shell. The carefully formed, polished, and assembled pieces of shell illustrate the artistry of the Chumash and their access to the rich and diverse marine life of the Pacific coast. Since living abalone cling stubbornly to submerged rocks along the coast, Chumash divers presumably pried abalone from their rocky perches to obtain their delicious flesh; then one or more Chumash artisans recycled the inedible shell to make this necklace. Its iridescent splendor demonstrates that Chumash people wore beautiful as well as useful adornments. Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.



California cultures achieved the population density and village settlements of the Chumash, all shared the hunter-gatherer way of life and reliance on acorns as a major food source.

Another rich natural environment lay along the Pacific Northwest coast. Like the Chumash, **Northwest peoples** built more or less permanent villages. After about 5500 BP, they concentrated on catching whales and large quantities of salmon, halibut,



### Ozette Whale Effigy

This carving of a whale fin decorated with hundreds of sea otter teeth was discovered along with thousands of other artifacts of daily life at Ozette, an ancient village on the tip of the Olympic Peninsula in present-day Washington that was inundated by a catastrophic mud slide about five hundred years ago. The fin illustrates the importance of whale hunting to the residents of Ozette, who set out in canoes, each carrying eight men armed with harpoons, to catch and kill animals weighing twenty to thirty tons each. Richard Alexander Cooke III.

and other fish, which they dried to last throughout the year. They also traded with people who lived hundreds of miles from the coast. Fishing freed Northwest peoples to develop sophisticated woodworking skills. They fashioned elaborate wood carvings that denoted wealth and status, as well as huge canoes for fishing, hunting, and conducting warfare against neighboring tribes. Much of the warfare among Archaic northwesterners grew out of attempts to defend or gain access to prime fishing sites.

### Eastern Woodland Cultures

East of the Mississippi River, Archaic peoples adapted to a forest environment that included many local variants, such as the major river valleys of the Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, and Cumberland; the Great Lakes region; and the Atlantic coast (see Map 1.2). Throughout these diverse locales, Archaic peoples pursued similar survival strategies.

Woodland hunters stalked deer as their most important prey. Deer supplied **Woodland peoples** with food as well as hides and bones that they crafted into clothing, weapons, and many

other tools. Like Archaic peoples elsewhere, Woodland Indians gathered edible plants, seeds, and nuts, especially hickory nuts, pecans, walnuts, and acorns. About 6000 BP, some Woodland groups established more or less permanent settlements of 25 to 150 people, usually near a river or lake that offered a wide variety of plant and animal resources. The existence of such settlements has permitted archaeologists to locate numerous Archaic burial sites that suggest Woodland people had a life expectancy of about eighteen years, a relatively short time to learn all the skills necessary to survive, reproduce, and adapt to change.

Around 4000 BP, Woodland cultures added two important features to their basic hunter-gatherer lifestyles: agriculture and pottery. Gourds and pumpkins that were first cultivated thousands of years earlier in Mexico spread north to Woodland peoples through trade and migration. Woodland peoples also began to cultivate local species such as sunflowers, as well as small quantities of tobacco, another import from South America. Corn, which had been grown by Mesoamerican and South American peoples since about 7000 BP, slowly traveled north with migrants and traders and eventually became a significant food crop among Eastern Woodland

peoples around 2500 BP. Most likely, women learned how to plant, grow, and harvest these crops as an outgrowth of their work gathering edible wild plants. Cultivated crops added to the quantity, variety, and predictability of Woodland food sources, but they did not alter Woodland peoples' dependence on gathering wild plants, seeds, and nuts.

Like agriculture, pottery probably originated in Mexico. Traders and migrants most likely brought pottery-making skills northward along with Mesoamerican and South American seeds. Pots were more durable than baskets for cooking and the storage of food and water, but they were also much heavier and therefore were shunned by nomadic peoples. The permanent settlements of Woodland peoples made the heavy weight of pots much less important than their advantages compared to leaky and fragile baskets. While pottery and agriculture introduced changes in Woodland cultures, ancient Woodland Americans retained the other basic features of their Archaic hunter-gatherer lifestyle, which persisted in most areas to 1492 and beyond.

**REVIEW** Why did Archaic Native Americans shift from big-game hunting to foraging and hunting smaller animals?

### Mississippian Effigy Bowl

A Mississippian craftsman carved this effigy bowl from the mineral diorite within a century or two of AD 1200. Excavated from the Moundville site near the Black Warrior River in what is today central Alabama, the bowl was probably used in ceremonies to hold ritualistic liquids or herbs, rather than as a vessel for day-to-day drinking and eating. Depicting a crested wood duck, a figure commonly represented among the thousands of artifacts discovered at Moundville, the bowl illustrates the stunning artistry achieved by ancient Mississippians. Richard Alexander Cooke III.



## ► Agricultural Settlements and Chiefdoms

Among Eastern Woodland peoples and most other Archaic cultures, agriculture supplemented hunter-gatherer subsistence strategies but did not replace them. Reliance on wild animals and plants required most Archaic groups to remain small and mobile. But beginning about 4000 BP, distinctive southwestern cultures slowly began to depend on agriculture and to build permanent settlements. Later, around 2500 BP, Woodland peoples in the vast Mississippi valley began to construct burial mounds and other earthworks that suggest the existence of social and political hierarchies that archaeologists term *chiefdoms*. Although the hunter-gatherer lifestyle never entirely disappeared, the development of agricultural settlements and chiefdoms represented important innovations to the Archaic way of life.



## Southwestern Cultures

Ancient Americans in present-day Arizona, New Mexico, and southern portions of Utah and Colorado developed cultures characterized by **agricultural settlements** and multiunit dwellings called pueblos. All southwestern peoples confronted the challenge of a dry climate and unpredictable fluctuations in rainfall that made the supply of wild plant food very unreliable. These ancient Americans probably adopted agriculture in response to this basic environmental uncertainty.

About 3500 BP, southwestern hunters and gatherers began to cultivate corn, their signature food crop. The demands of corn cultivation encouraged hunter-gatherers to restrict their migratory habits in order to tend the crop. A vital consideration was access to water. Southwestern Indians became irrigation experts, conserving water from streams, springs, and rainfall and distributing it to thirsty crops.



About AD 200, small farming settlements began to appear throughout southern New Mexico, marking the emergence of the **Mogollon culture**. Typically, a Mogollon settlement included a dozen pit houses, each made by digging out a rounded pit about fifteen feet in diameter and a foot or two deep and then erecting poles to support a roof of branches or dirt. Larger villages usually had one or two bigger pit houses that may have been the predecessors of the circular kivas, the ceremonial rooms that became a characteristic of nearly all southwestern settlements. About AD 900, Mogollon culture began to decline, for reasons that remain obscure. Its descendants included the Mimbres people in southwestern New Mexico, who crafted spectacular pottery adorned with human and animal designs. By about AD 1250, the Mimbres culture disappeared, for reasons unknown.

Around AD 500, while the Mogollon culture prevailed in New Mexico, other ancient people migrated from Mexico to southern Arizona and



## VISUAL ACTIVITY

### Ancient Agriculture

Dropping seeds into holes punched in cleared ground by a pointed stick known as a "dibble," this ancient American farmer sows a new crop while previously planted seeds — including the corn and beans immediately opposite him — bear fruit for harvest. Created by a sixteenth-century European artist, the drawing misrepresents who did the agricultural work in many ancient American cultures — namely, women rather than men. The Pierpont Morgan Library/Art Resource, NY.

**READING THE IMAGE:** In what ways has this ancient farmer modified and taken advantage of the natural environment?

**CONNECTIONS:** What were the advantages and disadvantages of agriculture compared to hunting and gathering?



### Hohokam "Cigarettes"

Ancient Hohokam smokers in present-day Arizona stuffed these reeds (which probably grew near their irrigation canals) with shredded tobacco. They wrapped cotton thread around each reed to protect their fingers from heat while they inhaled the smoke of the burning tobacco. When hunting or tending their crops, Hohokam smokers probably found these "cigarettes" more convenient than their heavier and more cumbersome stone or ceramic pipes, which were better suited for sedentary occasions.

Jerry Jacka Photography.

established the distinctive **Hohokam culture**. Hohokam settlements used sophisticated grids of irrigation canals to plant and harvest crops twice a year. Hohokam settlements reflected the continuing influence of Mexican cultural practices that migrants brought with them as they traveled north. Hohokam people built sizable platform mounds and ball courts characteristic of many Mexican cultures. About AD 1400, Hohokam culture declined for reasons that remain a mystery, although the rising salinity of the soil brought about by centuries of irrigation probably caused declining crop yields and growing food shortages.

North of the Hohokam and Mogollon cultures, in a region that encompassed southern Utah and Colorado and northern Arizona and New Mexico, the **Anasazi culture** began to flourish about AD 100. The early Anasazi built pit houses on mesa tops and used irrigation much as their neighbors did to the south. Beginning around AD 1000 (again, it is not known why), some Anasazi began to move to large, multistory cliff dwellings whose spectacular ruins still exist at Mesa Verde, Colorado, and elsewhere. Other Anasazi communities—like the one whose impressive ruins can be visited at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico—erected huge stone-walled pueblos with enough rooms to house everyone in the settlement. (See "Visualizing History," page 18.) Anasazi pueblos and cliff dwellings typically included one or

**Southwestern Indians became irrigation experts, conserving water from streams, springs, and rainfall and distributing it to thirsty crops.**



### Mexican Ball Court Model

The Mexica and other Mesoamerican peoples commonly built special courts (or playing fields) for their intensely competitive ball games. This rare model of a ball court, made in Mexico sometime between 2200 BP and AD 250, shows a game in progress, complete with players and spectators. Players wore padded belts and used their hips to hit the hard rubber ball through the goal. Spectators bet on the games, and losing players were often killed. A few ball courts have been excavated in North America, providing compelling evidence of one of the many connections between ancient Mesoamericans and North Americans. Yale University Art Gallery/Art Resource, NY.



# Daily Life in Chaco Canyon



**Pueblo Bonito, Chaco Canyon, New Mexico**

**A**bout AD 1000, Pueblo Bonito stood at the center of Chacoan culture, which ranged over 20,000 square miles in the arid region at the intersection of present-day Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. The largest of more than 3,600 Chacoan archaeological sites, Pueblo Bonito originally stood four or five stories tall and housed more than 600 rooms, including 35 kivas, the circular structures visible around the perimeter of the large plazas.

Chacoans covered each kiva with a roof, creating a darkened underground space for ceremonial rituals. Why might these spaces be built belowground and separated from the other rooms of the pueblo?

The exact nature of Chacoan ceremonies remains a mystery, but less mysterious are the routines of daily life that sustained the people at Pueblo Bonito for centuries. Imagine a woman setting out from the pueblo on a spring day to plant corn,



**Sandal**

the most important food crop. She might first strap on sandals, like the one shown here, woven from fibers of the yucca plant. What does the

more kivas used for secret ceremonies, restricted to men, that sought to communicate with the supernatural world. The alignment of Chaco buildings with solar and lunar events (such as the summer and winter solstices) suggests that Anasazi studied the sky carefully, probably because they believed supernatural celestial powers influenced their lives.

Drought began to plague the region about AD 1130, and it lasted for more than half a century, triggering the disappearance of the Anasazi culture. By AD 1200, the large Anasazi pueblos had been abandoned. The prolonged drought probably intensified conflict among pueblos and made it impossible to depend on the

techniques of irrigated agriculture that had worked for centuries. Some Anasazi migrated toward regions with more reliable rainfall and settled in Hopi, Zuni, and Acoma pueblos that their descendants in Arizona and New Mexico have occupied ever since.

## Woodland Burial Mounds and Chiefdoms

No other ancient Americans created dwellings similar to pueblos, but around 2500 BP, Woodland cultures throughout the vast watershed drained by the Mississippi River began to build burial mounds. The size of the mounds, the labor and

sandal suggest about the importance of the harvesting, processing, and weaving of yucca fibers?

To dig a hole for planting corn seeds, our imagined woman might use a digging stick like the one shown here, tipped by the horn of a mountain sheep, tightly bound with sinew to a sturdy cottonwood branch, and covered with animal hide to protect the binding. What does the digging stick suggest about the interdependence of hunting and agriculture in the daily lives of Chacoans?



**Digging Stick**

Once harvested and dried, corn needed to be ground in order to be cooked and eaten. By looking at the small flat stone (the *mano*) and the larger stone slab (the *metate*) shown here, can you imagine how our Chacoan woman used these tools? Some rooms at Pueblo Bonito



**Mano and Metate**

held numerous grinding stones like the ones shown here. What does such grouping suggest about the corn-grinding process?

To cook the cornmeal she had ground, our imagined woman would need to mix it with water. She might use a ceramic ladle like the one shown here — crafted and decorated by a pottery maker at Chaco — to dip some fresh water from a storage pot. To make a fire, she could use the Chacoan fire starter kit shown here. Can you visualize how



**Ladle**

the fire starter worked?

After kindling a cooking fire, she could heat the cornmeal gruel in a ceramic pot. Once the mixture was cooked, she might use the ladle again to

transfer servings into small bowls for eating. Why do you think the decoration at the end of the ladle's handle is blurred?

Chacoans flourished at Pueblo Bonito despite the arid climate and limited natural resources. In their daily lives, they sustained themselves by using their knowledge and skills to grow and cook corn and to craft vital items such as ceramics and footwear. Can you imagine each step in the creation of the artifacts shown here? Can you imagine the organization and scheduling of daily tasks required to make and use these basic items?

SOURCES: Pueblo Bonito, Chaco Canyon, New Mexico: Richard Alexander Cooke III; sandal, digging stick, mano and metate, fire starter kit, and ladle: Chaco Culture National Historic Park.



**Fire Starter Kit**

organization required to erect them, and differences in the artifacts buried with certain individuals suggest the existence of a social and political hierarchy that archaeologists term a **chiefdom**. Experts do not know the name of a single chief, nor do they know the organizational structure a chief headed. But the only way archaeologists can account for the complex and labor-intensive burial mounds and the artifacts found in them is to assume that one person — whom scholars term a *chief* — commanded the labor and obedience of very large numbers of other people, who made up the chief's chiefdom.

Between 2500 BP and 2100 BP, **Adena people** built hundreds of burial mounds radiat-

ing from central Ohio. In the mounds, the Adena usually accompanied burials with grave goods that included spear points and stone pipes as well as thin sheets of mica (a glasslike mineral) crafted into the shapes of birds, beasts, and human hands. Over the body and grave goods, Adena people piled dirt into a mound. Sometimes burial mounds were constructed all at once, but often they were built up slowly over many years.

About 2100 BP, Adena culture evolved into the more elaborate **Hopewell culture**, which lasted about five hundred years. Centered in Ohio, Hopewell culture extended throughout the enormous drainage of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Hopewell people built larger mounds



than did their Adena predecessors and filled them with more magnificent grave goods. Burial was probably reserved for the most important members of Hopewell groups. Most people were cremated. Burial rituals appear to have brought many people together to honor the dead person and to help build the mound. Hopewell mounds were often one hundred feet in diameter and thirty feet high. Grave goods at Hopewell sites testify to the high quality of Hopewell crafts and to a thriving trade network that ranged from present-day Wyoming to Florida. Archaeologists believe that Hopewell chiefs probably played an important role in this sprawling interregional trade.

Hopewell culture declined about AD 400 for reasons that are obscure. Archaeologists speculate that bows and arrows, along with increasing reliance on agriculture, made small settlements more self-sufficient and therefore less dependent on the central authority of the Hopewell chiefs who were responsible for the burial mounds.

Four hundred years later, another mound-building culture flourished. The **Mississippian culture** emerged in the floodplains of the major southeastern river systems about AD 800 and lasted until about AD 1500. Major Mississippian sites, such as the one at Cahokia (see pages 3–4), included huge mounds with platforms on top for ceremonies and for the residences of great chiefs. Most likely, the ceremonial mounds and ritual



practices derived from Mexican cultural expressions that were brought north by traders and migrants. At Cahokia, skilled farmers supported the large population with ample crops of corn. In addition to mounds, Cahokians erected what archaeologists call woodhenges (after the famous Stonehenge in England) — long wooden poles set upright in the ground and carefully arranged in huge circles. Although the purpose of woodhenges is unknown, experts believe that Cahokians probably built them partly for celestial observations.

Cahokia and other Mississippian cultures dwindled by AD 1500. When Europeans arrived, most of the descendants of Mississippian cultures, like those of the Hopewell culture, lived in small dispersed villages supported by hunting and gathering, supplemented by agriculture. Clearly, the conditions that caused large chiefdoms to emerge — whatever they were — had changed, and chiefs no longer commanded the sweeping powers they had once enjoyed.

**REVIEW** How did food-gathering strategies influence ancient cultures across North America?

## ► Native Americans in the 1490s

On the eve of European colonization in the 1490s, Native Americans lived throughout North and South America, but their total population is a subject of spirited debate among scholars. Some experts claim that Native Americans inhabiting what is now the United States and Canada numbered 18 million to 20 million, while others place the population at no more than 1 million. A prudent estimate is about 4 million, or about the same as the number of people living on the small island nation of England at that time. The vastness of the territory meant that the overall population density of North America (excluding Mesoamerica) was low, just 60 people per 100 square miles, compared to more than 8,000 in England. Native Americans were spread thin across the land because of their survival strategies of hunting, gathering, and agriculture, although variations in climate and natural resources meant that some regions were more populous than others (Figure 1.2).

### Cahokia Tablet

This stone tablet excavated from the largest mound at Cahokia depicts a bird-man whose sweeping wings and facial features — especially the nose and mouth — resemble those of a bird. Crafted around AD 1100, the tablet probably played some role in rituals enacted on the mound by Cahokian people. Similar bird-like human forms have been found among other Mississippian cultures. Cahokia Mounds Historic Site.



## Eastern and Great Plains Peoples

About one-third of native North Americans inhabited the enormous Woodland region east of the Mississippi River; their population density approximated the average for North America as a whole (excluding Mesoamerica). Eastern Woodland peoples clustered into three broad linguistic and cultural groups: Algonquian, Iroquoian, and Muskogean.

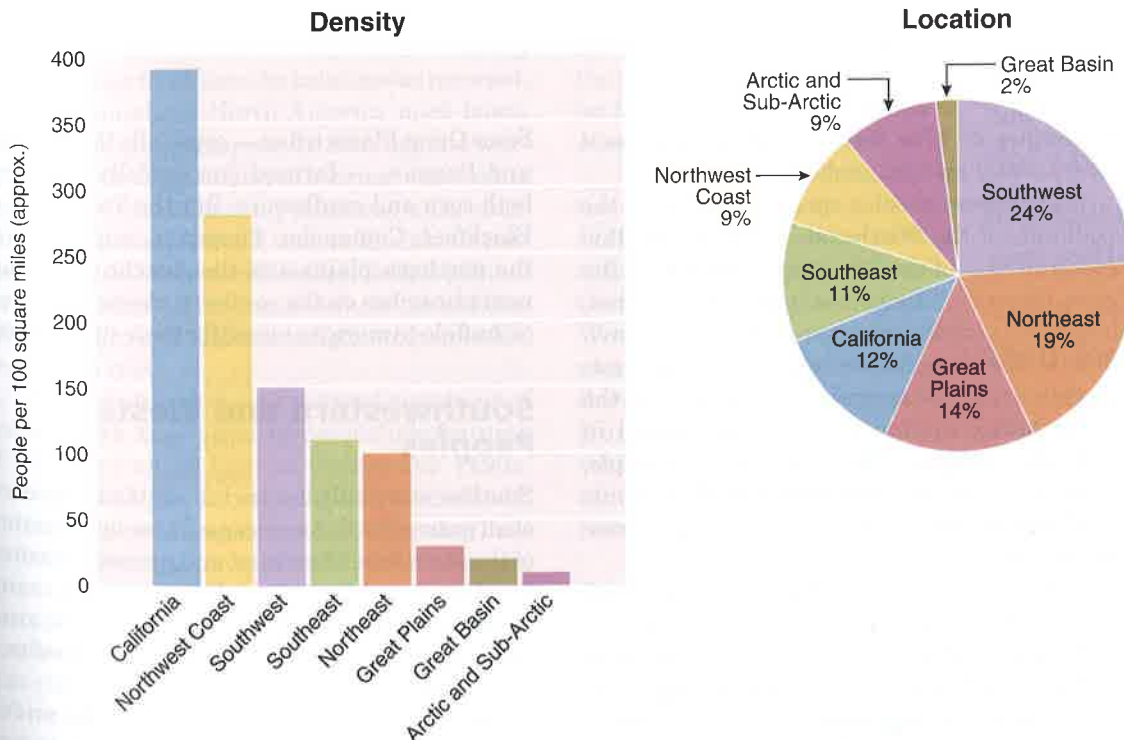
**Algonquian** tribes inhabited the Atlantic seaboard, the Great Lakes region, and much of the upper Midwest (Map 1.3). The relatively mild climate along the Atlantic permitted the coastal Algonquians to grow corn and other crops as well as to hunt and fish. Around the Great Lakes and in northern New England, however, cool summers and severe winters made agriculture impractical. Instead, the Abenaki, Penobscot, Chippewa, and other tribes concentrated on

hunting and fishing, using canoes both for transportation and for gathering wild rice.

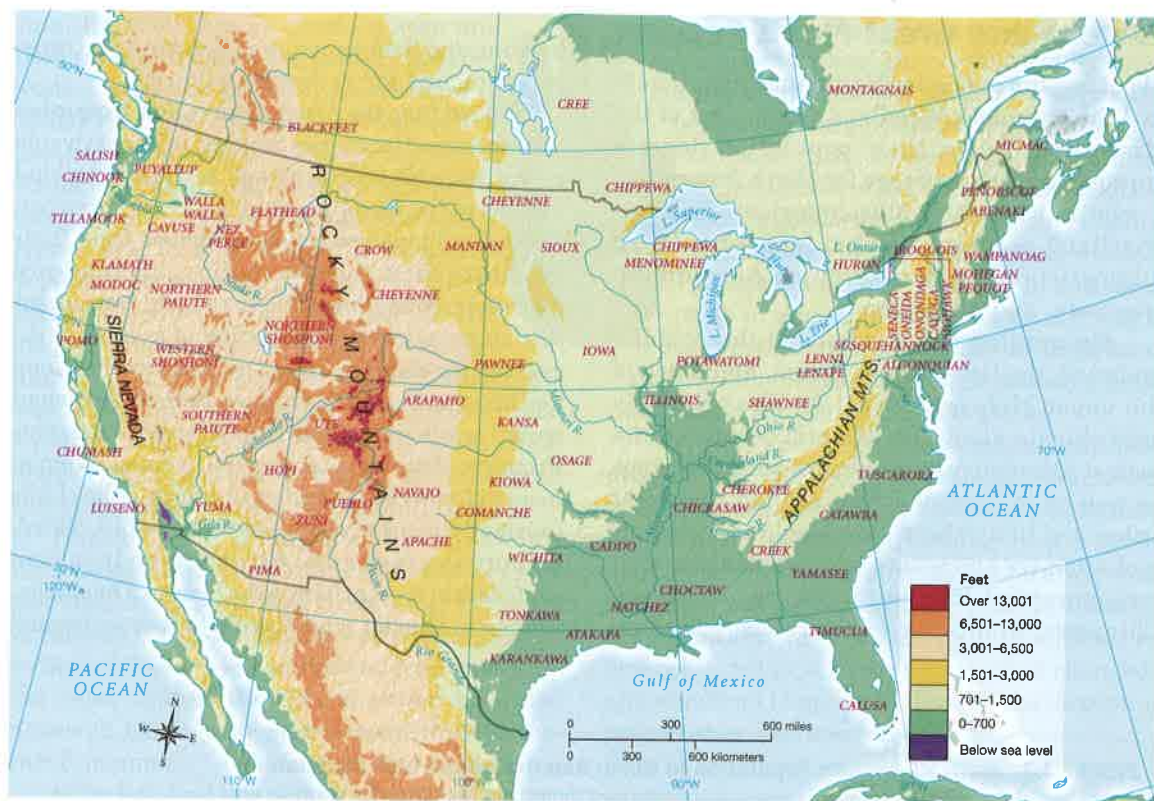
Inland from the Algonquian region, **Iroquoian** tribes occupied territories centered in Pennsylvania and upstate New York, as well as the hilly upland regions of the Carolinas and Georgia. Three features distinguished Iroquoian tribes from their neighbors. First, their success in cultivating corn and other crops allowed them to build permanent settlements, usually consisting of several bark-covered longhouses up to one hundred feet long and housing five to ten families. Second, Iroquoian societies adhered to matrilineal rules of descent. Property of all sorts belonged to women. Women headed family clans and even selected the chiefs (normally men) who governed the tribes. Third, for purposes of war and diplomacy, an Iroquoian confederation—including the Seneca, Onondaga, Mohawk, Oneida, and Cayuga tribes—formed

**FIGURE 1.2 Native American Population in North America about 1492 (Estimated)**

On the eve of the arrival of Europeans, Native Americans lived throughout North America, as their ancestors had for millennia (see Map 1.2, page 12). Population densities varied widely, depending in large part on the availability of natural resources, but the Pacific coast, where rich marine resources supported hunter-gatherers, had the highest concentration of people. The lowest population density was in the Arctic, where the vast expanse of land offered few resources. Overall, the population density of North America was less than 1 percent of the population density of England, which helps explain why European colonists tended to view North America as a comparatively empty wilderness.





**MAP 1.3****Native North Americans about 1500**

Distinctive Native American peoples resided throughout the area that, centuries later, would become the United States. This map indicates the approximate location of some of the larger tribes about 1500. In the interest of legibility, many other peoples who inhabited North America at the time are omitted from the map.

the **League of Five Nations**, which remained powerful well into the eighteenth century.

**Muskogean** peoples spread throughout the woodlands of the Southeast, south of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi. Including the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez tribes, Muskogeans inhabited a bountiful natural environment that provided abundant food from hunting, gathering, and agriculture. Remnants of the earlier Mississippian culture still existed in Muskogean religion. The Natchez, for example, worshipped the sun and built temple mounds modeled after those of their Mississippian ancestors, including Cahokia.

Great Plains peoples accounted for about one out of seven native North Americans. Inhabiting the huge region west of the Eastern Woodland people and east of the Rocky Mountains, many tribes had migrated to the Great Plains within the century or two before the 1490s, forced westward by Iroquoian and Algonquian tribes.

Some Great Plains tribes — especially the Mandan and Pawnee — farmed successfully, growing both corn and sunflowers. But the Teton Sioux, Blackfeet, Comanche, Cheyenne, and Crow on the northern plains and the Apache and other nomadic tribes on the southern plains depended on buffalo (American bison) for their subsistence.

### Southwestern and Western Peoples

Southwestern cultures included about a quarter of all native North Americans. These descendants of the Mogollon, Hohokam, and Anasazi cultures lived in settled agricultural communities, many of them pueblos. They continued to grow corn, beans, and squash using methods they had refined for centuries.

However, their communities came under attack by a large number of warlike Athapascans who invaded the Southwest beginning around

AD 1300. The Athapascans — principally Apache and Navajo — were skillful warriors who preyed on the sedentary pueblo Indians, reaping the fruits of agriculture without the work of farming.

About a fifth of all native North Americans resided along the Pacific coast. In California, abundant acorns and nutritious marine life continued to support high population densities, but this abundance retarded the development of agriculture. Similar dependence on hunting and gathering persisted along the Northwest coast, where fishing reigned supreme. Salmon were so plentiful that at **The Dalles**, a prime fishing site on the Columbia River on the border of present-day Oregon and Washington, Northwest peoples caught millions of pounds of salmon every summer and traded their catch as far away as California and the Great Plains. Although important trading centers existed throughout North America, particularly in the Southwest, it is likely that The Dalles was the largest Native American trading center in ancient North America.



to natural and social environments — underlay all the cultural diversity among native North Americans.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that native North Americans lived in blissful harmony with nature and one another. Archaeological sites provide ample evidence of violent conflict. Skeletons, like those at Cahokia, bear the marks of wounds as well as of ritualistic human sacrifice.

Religious, ethnic, economic, and familial conflicts must have occurred, but they remain in obscurity because they left few archaeological traces. In general, fear and anxiety must have been at least as common among native North Americans as feelings of peace and security.

Native North Americans not only adapted to the natural environment but also changed it in many ways. They built thousands of structures, from small dwellings to massive pueblos and enormous mounds, permanently altering the landscape. Their gathering techniques selected productive and nutritious varieties of plants, thereby shifting the balance of local plants toward useful varieties. The first stages of North American agriculture, for example, probably involved Native Americans gathering wild seeds and then sowing them in a meadow for later harvest. It is almost certain that fertile and hardy varieties of corn were developed this way, first in Mesoamerica and later in North America. To clear land for planting corn, native North Americans set fires that burned off thousands of acres of forest.

Native North Americans also used fires for hunting. Great Plains hunters often started fires to force buffalo together and make them easy to slaughter. Eastern Woodland, Southwest, and Pacific coast Indians also set fires to hunt deer and other valuable prey.

Hunters crouched downwind from a brushy area while their companions set a fire upwind; as animals raced out of the burning underbrush, hunters killed them.

Throughout North America, Indians started fires along the edges of woods to burn off shrubby undergrowth and encroaching tree seedlings. These burns encouraged the growth of tender young plants that attracted deer and other game animals, bringing them within convenient range of hunters' weapons. The burns also encouraged the growth of sun-loving food plants that Indians

## Cultural Similarities

While trading was common, all native North Americans in the 1490s still depended on hunting and gathering for a major portion of their food. Most of them also practiced agriculture. Some used agriculture to supplement hunting and gathering; for others, the balance was reversed. People throughout North America used bows, arrows, and other weapons for hunting and warfare. None of them employed writing, expressing themselves instead in many other ways: drawings sketched on stones, wood, and animal skins; patterns woven in baskets and textiles; designs painted on pottery, crafted into beadwork, or carved into effigies; and songs, dances, religious ceremonies, and burial rites.

These rich and varied cultural resources of native North Americans did not include features of life common in Europe during the 1490s. Native North Americans did not use wheels; sailing ships were unknown to them; they had no large domesticated animals such as horses, cows, or oxen; their use of metals was restricted to copper. However, the absence of these European conveniences mattered less to native North Americans than their own cultural adaptations to the natural environment local to each tribe and to the social environment among neighboring peoples. That great similarity — adaptation

**While trading was common, all native North Americans in the 1490s still depended on hunting and gathering for a major portion of their food.**



## THE PROMISE OF TECHNOLOGY

### Ancient American Weaving

The workbasket of a master weaver shown here illustrates the technology of ancient American textile production. Found in the Andes in a woman's grave dating from one thousand years ago, the workbasket contains tools for every stage of textile production. Weaving — like other activities such as cooking, hunting, and worship — depended above all on human knowledge passed from one person to another in cycle after cycle of teaching and learning. This cycle of teaching and learning was fragile. A weaver's knowledge could die with her if she had not taught it to somebody else. What kinds of human knowledge would have been required to make weavings with the contents of this workbasket? Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Charles H. White, 02.680.



relished, such as blackberries, strawberries, and raspberries.

Because the fires set by native North Americans usually burned until they ran out of fuel or were extinguished by rain or wind, enormous regions of North America were burned over. In the long run, fires created and maintained light-dappled meadows for hunting and agriculture, cleared entangling underbrush from forests, and promoted a diverse and productive natural environment. Fires, like other activities of native North Americans, shaped the landscape of North America long before Europeans arrived in 1492.

**REVIEW** What cultural similarities were shared by the diverse peoples of the Western Hemisphere in the 1490s, and why?

### ► The Mexica: A Mesoamerican Culture

The vast majority of the 80 million people who lived in the Western Hemisphere in the 1490s inhabited Mesoamerica and South America, where the population approximately equaled that of Europe. Like their much less numerous counterparts north of the Rio Grande, these people lived in a natural environment of tremen-

dous diversity. They too developed hundreds of cultures, far too numerous to catalog here. But among all these cultures, the **Mexica** stood out. (Europeans often called these people Aztecs, a name the Mexica did not use.) Their empire stretched from coast to coast across central Mexico, encompassing between 8 million and 25 million people (experts disagree about the total population). We know more about the Mexica than about any other Native American society of the time, principally because of their massive monuments and their Spanish conquerors' well-documented interest in subduing them (as discussed in chapter 2). Their significance in the history of the New World after 1492 dictates a brief discussion of their culture and society.

The Mexica began their rise to prominence about 1325, when small bands settled on a marshy island in Lake Texcoco, the site of the future city of Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Mexican empire. Resourceful, courageous, and cold-blooded warriors, the Mexica were often hired out as mercenaries for richer, more settled tribes.

By 1430, the Mexica succeeded in asserting their dominance over their former allies and leading their own military campaigns in an ever-widening arc of empire building. Despite pockets of resistance, by the 1490s the Mexica ruled an empire that covered more land than Spain and Portugal combined and contained almost three times as many people.

The empire exemplified the central values of Mexican society. The Mexica worshipped the



### Mexican Human Sacrifice

This graphic portrayal of human sacrifice was drawn by a Mexican artist in the sixteenth century. It shows the typical routine of human sacrifice practiced by the Mexica for centuries before Europeans arrived. The victim climbed the temple steps and then was stretched over a stone pillar (notice the priest's helper holding the victim's legs) to make it easier for the priest to plunge a stone knife into the victim's chest, cut out the still-beating heart, and offer it to the blood-thirsty gods. The body of the previous victim has already been pushed down from the temple heights and is about to be dragged away. Scala/Art Resource, NY; Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, Italy.

war god **Huitzilopochtli**. Warriors held the most exalted positions in the social hierarchy, even above the priests who performed the sacred ceremonies that won Huitzilopochtli's favor. In the almost constant battles necessary to defend and extend the empire, young Mexican men exhibited the courage and daring that would allow them to rise in the carefully graduated ranks of warriors. The Mexica considered capturing prisoners the ultimate act of bravery. Warriors usually turned over the captives to Mexican priests, who sacrificed them to Huitzilopochtli by cutting out their hearts. The Mexica believed that human sacrifice fed the sun's craving for blood, which kept the sun aflame and prevented the fatal descent of everlasting darkness and chaos.

The empire contributed far more to Mexican society than victims for sacrifice. At the most basic level, the empire functioned as a military and political system that collected **tribute** from subject peoples. The Mexica forced conquered tribes to pay tribute in goods, not money. Tribute redistributed to the Mexica as much as one-third of the goods produced by conquered tribes. It included everything from candidates for human sacrifice to textiles and basic food products such as corn and beans, as well as exotic luxury items such as gold, turquoise, and rare bird feathers.

Tribute reflected the fundamental relations of power and wealth that pervaded the Mexican empire. The relatively small nobility of Mexican

warriors, supported by a still smaller priesthood, possessed the military and religious power to command the obedience of thousands of non-noble Mexicans and of millions of non-Mexicans in subjugated colonies. The Mexican elite exercised their power to obtain tribute and thereby to redistribute wealth from the conquered to the conquerors, from the commoners to the nobility, from the poor to the rich. This redistribution of wealth made possible the achievements of Mexican society that eventually amazed the Spaniards: the huge cities, fabulous temples, teeming markets, and luxuriant gardens, not to mention the storehouses stuffed with gold and other treasures.

On the whole, the Mexica did not interfere much with the internal government of conquered regions. Instead, they usually permitted the traditional ruling elite to stay in power — so long as they paid tribute. The conquered provinces received very little in return from the Mexica, except immunity from punitive raids. Subjugated communities felt exploited by the constant payment of tribute to the Mexica. By depending on military conquest and the constant collection of tribute, the Mexica failed to create among their subjects a belief that Mexican domination was, at some level, legitimate and equitable. The high

**By the 1490s, the Mexica ruled an empire that covered more land than Spain and Portugal combined and contained almost three times as many people.**



**Salado Ritual Figure**

About AD 1350, this figure was carefully wrapped in a reed mat with other items and stored in a cave in a mountainous region of New Mexico by people of the Salado culture, descendants of the Mimbres, who had flourished three centuries earlier. The face of this figure is as close to a self-portrait of ancient Americans on the eve of their encounter with Europeans as we are ever likely to have. Adorned with vivid pigments, cotton string, bright feathers, and stones, the effigy testifies to the human complexity of all ancient Americans. Photography © 2000 The Art Institute of Chicago.



relied on oral rather than written communication. But much can be pieced together from artifacts they left behind at camps, kill sites, and ceremonial and residential centers such as Cahokia. Ancient Americans achieved their success through resourceful adaptation to the hemisphere's many and ever-changing natural environments. They also adapted to social and cultural changes caused by human beings — such as marriages, deaths, political struggles, and warfare — but the sparse evidence that has survived renders those adaptations almost entirely unknowable. Their creativity and artistry are unmistakably documented in their numerous artifacts. Those material objects sketch the only likenesses of ancient Americans we will ever have — blurred, shadowy images that are indisputably human but forever silent.

When European intruders began arriving in the Western Hemisphere in 1492, their attitudes about the promise of the

level of discontent among subject peoples constituted the soft, vulnerable underbelly of the Mexican empire, a fact that Spanish intruders exploited after AD 1492 to conquer the Mexica.

**REVIEW** Why was tribute important in the Mexican empire?

## ► Conclusion: The World of Ancient Americans

Ancient Americans shaped the history of human beings in the New World for more than thirteen thousand years. They established continuous human habitation in the Western Hemisphere from the time the first big-game hunters crossed Beringia until 1492 and beyond. Much of their history remains irretrievably lost because they

New World were heavily influenced by the diverse peoples they encountered. Europeans coveted Native Americans' wealth, labor, and land, and Christian missionaries sought to save their souls. Likewise, Native Americans marveled at such European technological novelties as sailing ships, steel weapons, gunpowder, and horses, while often reserving judgment about Europeans' Christian religion.

In the four centuries following 1492, as the trickle of European strangers became a flood of newcomers from both Europe and Africa, Native Americans and settlers continued to encounter each other. Peaceful negotiations as well as violent conflicts over both land and trading rights resulted in chronic fear and mistrust. Yet even as the era of European colonization marked the beginning of the end of ancient America, the ideas, subsistence strategies, and cultural beliefs of native North Americans remained powerful among their descendants for generations and continue to persist to the present.

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► FOR MORE BOOKS ABOUT TOPICS IN THIS CHAPTER, see the Online Bibliography at [bedfordstmartins.com/roark](http://bedfordstmartins.com/roark).

► FOR ADDITIONAL PRIMARY SOURCES FROM THIS PERIOD, see Michael Johnson, ed., *Reading the American Past*, Fifth Edition.

► FOR WEB SITES, IMAGES, AND DOCUMENTS RELATED TO TOPICS AND PLACES IN THIS CHAPTER, visit Make History at [bedfordstmartins.com/roark](http://bedfordstmartins.com/roark).



# Reviewing Chapter 1

## KEY TERMS

*Explain each term's significance*

### Archaeology and History

artifacts (p. 5)

archaeologists (p. 5)

### The First Americans

Pangaea (p. 6)

continental drift (p. 6)

*Homo sapiens* (p. 7)

Beringia (p. 8)

Paleo-Indians (p. 8)

Clovis point (p. 10)

### Archaic Hunters and Gatherers

hunter-gatherer (p. 11)

Archaic Indians (p. 11)

Great Plains hunters (p. 11)

Great Basin Indians (p. 13)

California peoples (p. 13)

Northwest peoples (p. 14)

Woodland peoples (p. 14)

### Agricultural Settlements and Chiefdoms

agricultural settlements (p. 16)

Mogollon culture (p. 16)

Hohokam culture (p. 17)

Anasazi culture (p. 17)

chiefdom (p. 19)

Adena people (p. 19)

Hopewell culture (p. 19)

Mississippian culture (p. 20)

### Native Americans in the 1490s

Algonquian (p. 21)

Iroquoian (p. 21)

League of Five Nations (p. 22)

Muskogean (p. 22)

The Dalles (p. 23)

### The Mexica: A Mesoamerican Culture

Mexica (p. 24)

Huitzilopochtli (p. 25)

tribute (p. 25)

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

*Use key terms and dates to support your answers.*

1. Why do historians rely on the work of archaeologists to write the history of ancient America? (pp. 5–6)
2. How and why did humans migrate into North America after 15,000 BP? (pp. 6–11)
3. Why did Archaic Native Americans shift from big-game hunting to foraging and hunting smaller animals? (pp. 11–15)
4. How did food-gathering strategies influence ancient cultures across North America? (pp. 15–20)
5. What cultural similarities were shared by the diverse peoples of the Western Hemisphere in the 1490s, and why? (pp. 20–24)
6. Why was tribute important in the Mexican empire? (pp. 24–26)

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

*Draw on key terms, the timeline, and review questions.*

1. Explain the different approaches historians and archaeologists bring to studying people in the past. How do the different kinds of evidence they draw upon shape their accounts of the human past? In your answer, cite specific examples from the history of ancient America.
2. Discuss ancient peoples' strategies for surviving in the varied climates of North America. How did their different approaches to survival contribute to the diversity of Native American cultures? What else might have contributed to the diversity?
3. For more than twelve thousand years, Native Americans both adapted to environmental change in North America and produced significant changes in the environments around them. Discuss specific examples of Native Americans' adaptation to environmental change and the changes they caused in the North American landscape.
4. Rich archaeological and manuscript sources have enabled historians to develop a detailed portrait of the Mexica on the eve of European contact. How did the Mexica establish and maintain their expansive empire?

## LINKING TO THE PAST

Link events in this chapter to earlier events.

1. Did the history of ancient Americans make them unusually vulnerable to eventual conquest by European colonizers? Why or why not?
2. Do you think that ancient American history would have been significantly different if North and South America had never been disconnected from the Eurasian land-mass? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

► FOR PRACTICE QUIZZES AND OTHER STUDY TOOLS, visit the Online Study Guide at [bedfordstmartins.com/roark](http://bedfordstmartins.com/roark).

## TIMELINE

**NOTE:** Major events are depicted below in chronological order, but the time scale between events varies from millennia to centuries.

(BP is an abbreviation used by archaeologists for "years before the present.")

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>ca. 400,000 BP</b>       | • Modern humans ( <i>Homo sapiens</i> ) evolve in Africa.                             |
| <b>ca. 25,000–14,000 BP</b> | • Wisconsin glaciation exposes Beringia, land bridge between Siberia and Alaska.      |
| <b>ca. 15,000 BP</b>        | • First humans arrive in North America.   |
| <b>ca. 13,500–13,000 BP</b> | • Paleo-Indians in North and Central America use Clovis points to hunt big game.      |
| <b>ca. 11,000 BP</b>        | • Mammoths and many other big-game prey of Paleo-Indians become extinct.              |
| <b>ca. 10,000–3000 BP</b>   | • Archaic hunter-gatherer cultures dominate ancient America.                          |
| <b>ca. 5000 BP</b>          | • Chumash culture emerges in southern California.                                     |
| <b>ca. 4000 BP</b>          | • Some Eastern Woodland peoples begin growing gourds and pumpkins and making pottery. |
| <b>ca. 3500 BP</b>          | • Southwestern cultures begin corn cultivation.                                       |
| <b>ca. 2500 BP</b>          | • Eastern Woodland cultures start to build burial mounds, cultivate corn.             |
| <b>ca. 2500–2100 BP</b>     | • Adena culture develops in Ohio.   |
| <b>ca. 2100 BP–AD 400</b>   | • Hopewell culture emerges in Ohio and Mississippi valleys.                           |
| <b>ca. AD 200–900</b>       | • Mogollon culture develops in New Mexico.  |
| <b>ca. AD 500</b>           | • Bows and arrows appear in North America south of Arctic.                            |
| <b>ca. AD 500–1400</b>      | • Hohokam culture develops in Arizona.  |
| <b>ca. AD 800–1500</b>      | • Mississippian culture flourishes in Southeast.                                      |
| <b>ca. AD 1000–1200</b>     | • Anasazi peoples build cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde and pueblos at Chaco Canyon.    |
| <b>ca. AD 1325–1500</b>     | • Mexica conquer neighboring peoples and establish Mexican empire.                    |
| <b>AD 1492</b>              | • Christopher Columbus arrives in New World, beginning European colonization.         |