The American Promise

A History of the United States

1 Ancient America

Before 1492

CONTENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading and studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- Distinguish archaeology and history as disciplines, and understand the possibilities and limitations of both.
- Identify the earth's first human inhabitants and what developments allowed them to migrate to the Western Hemisphere.
- Differentiate between Archaic hunter-gatherers and the Paleo-Indians, and identify the main characteristics of their cultures.
- Explain how the Archaic peoples transitioned from being nomadic hunter-gatherers to relying on agriculture and permanent settlements.
- Identify the major Native American cultures that flourished in North America on the eve of Columbus's arrival and the similarities among them.
- Describe the structure, influence, and expanse of the Mexica (Aztec) empire on the eve of Columbus's arrival.

MISSISSIPPIAN WOODEN MASK Between AD 1200 and 1350, a Mississippian in what is now central Illinois fashioned this mask. Influenced by the culture of Cahokia, it was probably used in rituals. Photo by John Bigelow Taylor.

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, the giant landmass 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 of more than 20,000 ancient Americans who lived there and 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, 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 pyramid that covers sixteen acres, making it the biggest single structure ever built by ancient North Americans.

Atop Monks Mound, political and religious leaders performed ceremonies watched by thousands of Cahokians who stood on a fifty-acre plaza at the base of the mound. Their ceremonies were probably designed to demonstrate to onlookers the leaders' access to supernatural forces. At the far edge of the plaza, 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 20,000 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. Experts speculate that Cahokians who buried Sun Falcon 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 exquisitely crafted artifacts and the bodies of seven other adults 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, and 43 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.

Nobody knows exactly who Sun Falcon was or why Cahokians buried him as they did. To date, archaeologists have found no similar burial site in ancient North America. Most likely, 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

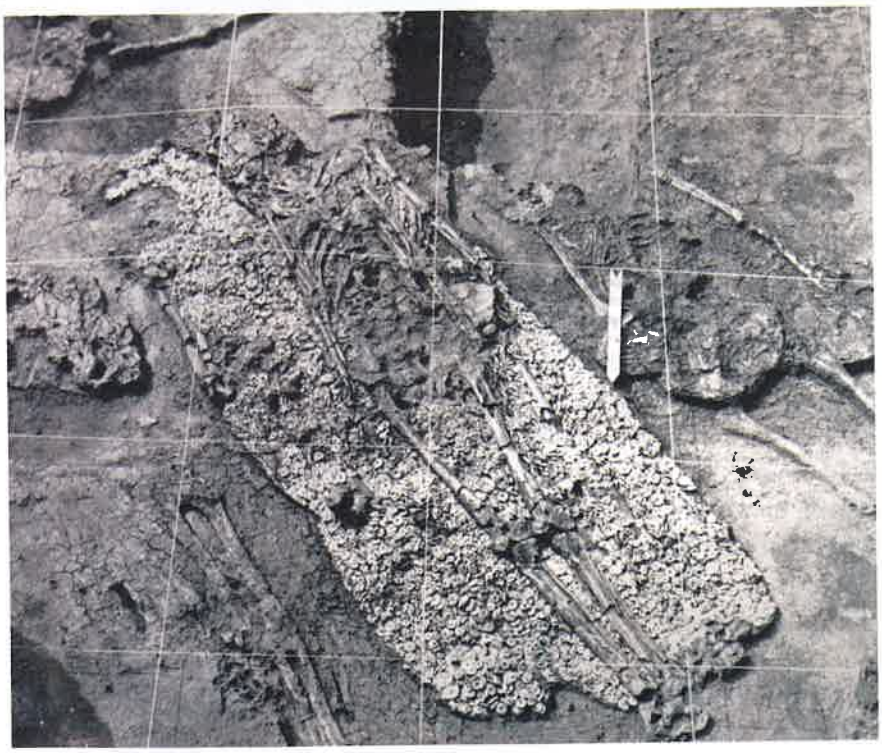
VISUAL ACTIVITY

Cahokia Burial

The excavation of a burial site at Cahokia revealed the remains of a man—presumably a revered leader—whom Cahokians buried atop a large bird-shaped cape covered with shell beads. 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. Photo courtesy of University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Archaeological Research Laboratory (ARL image 1967.2.31).

READING THE IMAGE: What does the cape or blanket suggest about patterns of trade and craftsmanship at Cahokia?

CONNECTIONS: Where was Cahokia located and for approximately how many ancient Americans was this an important spiritual and political center?



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.

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, such as letters, diaries, laws, speeches, newspapers, and court cases. The 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 (a *millennium* is a thousand years) that modern human beings have existed. While 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, they did not use writing. Ancient Americans invented hundreds of spoken languages; they learned 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. However, much of what we would like to know about their experiences and those of other ancient Americans remains unknown because they did not write about it.

Archaeologists specialize in learning about people who did not document their history in

CHRONOLOGY

ca. 400,000 BP	• *Homo sapiens* evolve in Africa.
ca. 25,000–14,000 BP	• Glaciation exposes Beringia land bridge.
ca. 15,000 BP	• Humans arrive in North America.
ca. 13,500–13,000 BP	• Paleo-Indians use Clovis points.
ca. 11,000 BP	• Mammoths become extinct.
ca. 10,000–3000 BP	• Archaic hunter-gatherer cultures dominate ancient America.
ca. 5000 BP	• Chumash culture emerges in southern California.
ca. 4000 BP	• Eastern Woodland peoples grow gourds, make pottery.
ca. 3500 BP	• Southwestern cultures cultivate corn.
ca. 2500 BP	• Eastern Woodland cultures build burial mounds, cultivate corn.
ca. 2500–2100 BP	• Adena culture develops in Ohio.
ca. 2100 BP–AD 400	• Hopewell culture emerges in Ohio and Mississippi valleys.
ca. AD 200–900	• Mogollon culture develops in New Mexico.
ca. AD 500	• Bows and arrows appear south of Arctic.
ca. AD 500–1400	• Hohokam culture develops in Arizona.
ca. AD 800–1500	• Mississippian culture flourishes in Southeast.
ca. AD 1000–1200	• Anasazi peoples build cliff dwellings and pueblos.
ca. AD 1325–1500	• Mexica establish Mexican empire.
AD 1492	• Christopher Columbus arrives in New World.

writing. They study the millions of artifacts these people created. They also scrutinize geological strata, pollen, and other environmental features to reconstruct as much as possible about the world inhabited by ancient peoples. 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. While they created societies and cultures of remarkable diversity and complexity, their history cannot be reconstructed with the detail and certainty made possible by writing.

REVIEW Why must historians rely on the work of archaeologists to write the history of ancient 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 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, and building materials. Most likely, these first Americans wandered into the Western Hemisphere more or less accidentally in pursuit of 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 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.

More than 1.5 million years after *Homo erectus* appeared, or about 400,000 BP, modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) evolved in Africa. (The abbreviation *BP*—for "years before the present"—indicates dates earlier than two thousand years ago; for more recent dates, the common and familiar notation *AD* is used, as in AD 1492.) 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, which retained land connections to Africa that allowed ancient humans to migrate on foot. For roughly 97 percent of the time *Homo sapiens* have been on earth, none migrated across the enormous oceans isolating the Eurasian landmass from North and South America.

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—which endured from about 25,000 BP to 14,000 BP—when snow piled up in glaciers, causing the sea level to drop, thereby exposing a land bridge hundreds of miles wide called **Beringia** that connected Asian Siberia to American Alaska.

Beringia

Siberian hunters roamed Beringia for centuries in search of mammoths, bison, and numerous smaller animals. As the hunters ventured farther east, they eventually became pioneers of human life in the Western Hemisphere. Although they did

MAP ACTIVITY

Map 1.1 Continental Drift

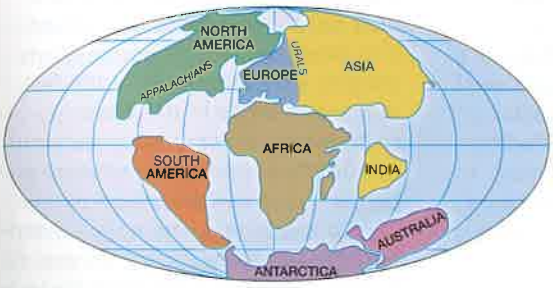
Massive geological forces separated North and South America from other continents eons before human beings evolved in Africa two million years ago.

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

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 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 "Making Historical Arguments," page 6.) Certainly, humans who came from Asia—whose ancestors left Africa hundreds of thousands of years earlier—inhabited the Western Hemisphere by 14,000 BP.

Paleo-Indian Hunters

When humans first arrived in the Western Hemisphere, massive glaciers covered most of present-day Canada. Many archaeologists believe that Paleo-Indians probably migrated in pursuit of game along an ice-free passageway on the eastern side of Canada's Rocky Mountains. Other Paleo-Indians may have 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 teeming with wildlife that had never before confronted human 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 of their arrival, Paleo-Indians had migrated throughout the Western Hemisphere.

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 abundant Clovis points throughout North and Central America in sites occupied between 13,500 BP and 13,000 BP provides evidence that these

Who Were the First Americans?

To learn who the first Americans were and when they arrived requires following a trail of evidence 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 scholars agree that telltale clues to the identity of the first Americans can be gleaned from den-

nomadic hunters shared a common ancestry and way of life. At a few isolated sites, archaeologists have found still-controversial evidence of pre-Clovis artifacts that suggests the people who used Clovis spear points may have followed a few pre-Clovis pioneers who arrived several hundred years earlier. Paleo-Indians hunted large game such as mammoths and bison, but they probably also killed smaller animals. Concentration on large animals, when possible, made sense because just one mammoth could supply meat for months. Some Paleo-Indians even refrigerated killed mammoths by filling their body cavities with stones and submerging the carcasses in icy lakes for later use. In addition to food, mammoths provided Paleo-Indians with 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,

Clovis Point
This spear point excavated along the Columbia River in what is now Washington State was crafted by Clovis people around 11,000 BP. It illustrates how small fragments of stone were chipped away to create the point used for killing animals—a feature common to Clovis points throughout the hemisphere. Archaeologists believe that such commonalities document a widely shared Clovis culture practiced for many generations. Washington State Historical Society.

tal, 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 theory that the first Americans originated in Asia and migrated across the Beringian land bridge.

Linguistic analysis of more than a thousand modern Native American languages demonstrates that Native Americans throughout the hemisphere speak some form of Amerind—an ancient root-language—which (presumably) arrived 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.

Questions for Analysis

Summarize the Argument: Were Clovis people the first Americans?

Analyze the Evidence: What evidence suggests ancient migrants arrived before Clovis people? What evidence suggests the origins and ancestry of ancient Americans?

Consider the Context: How were the first Americans related to their ancestors elsewhere in the world? How did they differ from their descendants among later ancient Americans? What might account for the changes?

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 the animals could reproduce. Some experts dispute this overkill interpretation, but similar environmental changes had occurred for millions of years before the arrival of Paleo-Indians without triggering the extinction of large animals—the presence of skilled hunters seems to have made a decisive difference. Whatever the causes, after the extinction of large mammals, Paleo-Indians literally inhabited a new world.

Paleo-Indians adapted to this drastic environmental change 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

Folsom Discovery
The discovery of this spear point stuck between the ribs of an ancient bison near Folsom, New Mexico, revolutionized our understanding of ancient Americans. Since the bison was known to have been extinct for about 10,000 years, ancient Americans must have been hunting them at least 10,000 years ago. This discovery prompted the search for more human artifacts, such as spear points, that proved humans resided in America for thousands of years before the extinction of the ancient bison. Courtesy of the Center for the Study of the First Americans, Texas A&M University.

cultural diversity adapted to the many natural environments throughout the hemisphere.

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, hundreds of tribes inhabited North America alone. Hundreds more lived in Central and South America. Still more hundreds of ancient American cultures had disappeared or transformed as their people constantly adapted to environmental and other challenges.

REVIEW Why and how did Paleo-Indians adapt to environmental change?

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, many Archaic peoples became excellent basket makers in order to collect and store seeds, roots, nuts, and berries they gathered from wild plants. They prepared food from these plants by using a variety of stone tools. 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

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?

meadow year after year. In regions with especially rich resources—such as present-day California and the Pacific Northwest—they developed permanent settlements. 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 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 this site and found evidence that proved conclusively for the first time that ancient Americans were contemporaries of giant bison—which were known to have been extinct for at least ten thousand years. 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. Until this discovery, leading experts had believed that ancient Americans had arrived in the New World fairly recently, some three thousand years ago. Since the 1920s, thanks to McJunkin's discovery, archaeologists and historians have come to understand that the history of ancient Americans was far more ancient than experts previously imagined.

Like their nomadic predecessors, Folsom hunters moved constantly to maintain contact with their prey. Great Plains hunters often stampeded bison herds over cliffs and then slaughtered the animals that plunged to their deaths. At the Folsom site McJunkin discovered, hunters drove bison into a narrow gulch and then speared twenty-three of the trapped animals.

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 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. These new weapons did not otherwise alter age-old ways of hunting. Although we often imagine bison hunters on horseback, in reality ancient Great Plains people hunted on foot. Horses did not arrive on the Great Plains until decades after 1492, when Europeans imported them. Only then did Great Plains bison hunters obtain horses and become expert riders.

Great Basin Cultures

Archaic peoples in the Great Basin between the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada inhabited a region of great environmental diversity defined largely by the amount of rain. While some lived on the shores of lakes and marshes fed by the rain and ate fish, others hunted deer, antelope, bison, and smaller game. To protect against shortages in fish and game caused by the fickle rainfall, Great Basin Indians relied on plants as their most important food. Unlike meat and fish, plant food could be collected and stored for long periods. Many Great Basin peoples gathered piñon nuts as a dietary staple. 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 some ninety languages, each with local dialects. No other region of comparable size in ancient North America exhibited such cultural variety.

Ancient California Peoples

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, probably caused by competition for valuable acorn-gathering territory, often broke out among the villages, as documented by Chumash skeletons that display unmistakable signs of violence. Although few other 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, 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. Archaic northwesterners often fought with one another over access to prime fishing sites.

Eastern Woodland Cultures

East of the Mississippi River, Archaic peoples adapted to a forest environment that included 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. 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. Woodland burial sites suggest that life expectancy was 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 lifestyle: agriculture and pottery. Trade and migration from Mexico brought gourds and pumpkins to Woodland peoples, who also began to cultivate sunflowers and small quantities of tobacco. Corn, which had been grown in Mexico and South America since about 7000 BP, also traveled north and 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 did not alter Woodland peoples' dependence on gathering wild plants, seeds, and nuts.

Like agriculture, pottery probably originated in Mexico. Pots were more durable than baskets for cooking and storing food and water, but they were also much heavier, and therefore nomadic peoples shunned them. 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 until 1492 and beyond.

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. Richard Alexander Cooke III.

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

BEYOND AMERICA'S BORDERS

Corn: An Ancient American Legacy

Corn on the cob slathered with butter, salted popcorn, corn chips—Americans consume and produce more corn than any other nation on earth. Today, each American eats an average of 52 quarts of popped corn a year. Popcorn grown in the United States is also munched in Mexico City, Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing, and London, and corn on the cob is even sold at Moscow's famed Gorky Park. Yet popcorn and corn on the cob account for a minuscule fraction of the gigantic mountain of 34 billion bushels of corn produced across the globe each year, one-third of it in the United States. All of that corn is descended from a plant domesticated and cultivated by ancient Americans beginning about ten thousand years ago.

The ancient ancestor of what we know today as corn is a grass called *teosinte*. Ancient people in central Mexico, probably women, selected desirable seeds from *teosinte* and over many generations managed to transform the small grass seeds into rows of corn kernels arrayed around a central cob. Slowly, during thousands of years, ancient agriculturalists developed many varieties of corn adapted to different growing conditions, with different nutritional qualities and varying productivity (the number of kernels grown from one corn seed). The remarkable adaptability of the corn plant and the high food value of the corn kernels caused the crop to spread among ancient Americans throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Entirely unknown to Europeans when they arrived in the New World in 1492, corn acquired the name by which it is known in most of the world today: *maize*, which is derived from *mahiz* ("life-giver"), the word for corn Christopher Columbus learned from the Taino Indians he first encountered. It is no wonder ancient Americans worshipped maize gods, given how important corn was to their survival. Columbus and other Spaniards carried corn back to Europe in 1493, and within a generation corn seeds had sprouted for the first time not only in Europe but also in the Middle East, Africa, India, and China.

At first, people outside the Americas did not find corn an appetizing food. An English botanist in the seventeenth century spoke for many others when he declared corn a food of the "barbarous Indians which know no better." He pronounced corn "a more convenient food for swine than for man." But Europeans in the New World, following Native American foodways, soon learned to eat corn ground into meal, often mixed with vegetables or meat, moistened, and served as a kind of mush they called samp or hominy or grits. Or they made a cornmeal dough that they baked in the coals of a fire or on an iron griddle to produce corn bread, which they also called hoecake, johnnycake, or corn pone—all of them adaptations of ancient American tortillas. Corn helped sustain Euro-Americans in the New World for centuries after 1492, just as it had ancient Americans for thousands of years before Europeans arrived.

Today corn is grown throughout the world and is a major commodity in global trade. The United States produces more than half of global corn exports, while Argentina, Brazil, and Ukraine account for another third. This exported corn goes to countries all around the world. Japan takes about a fifth of the global corn imports, and another third of corn imports goes to South Korea, Mexico, Egypt, and Taiwan.

Corn connects the United States to the rest of the world in many more ways than the export of mil-

▸ Agricultural Settlements and Chiefdoms

Among Eastern Woodland peoples and most other Archaic cultures, agriculture supplemented but did not replace hunter-gatherer subsistence strategies. Reliance on wild animals and plants required most Archaic groups to remain small and mobile. But beginning about 4000 BP, distinctive southwestern cultures 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

Florida Woman
This sixteenth-century drawing with watercolor of a Native American woman in Florida shows her extending a gift of hospitality with ears of corn in one hand and a basket of corn mush in the other. The watercolor captures the gift of corn ancient Americans bestowed on people throughout the world today. The Trustees of the British Museum/Art Resource, NY.

lions of bushels of corn kernels. Only about a fifth of the U.S. corn crop is exported annually. The rest is used in dozens of products that Americans consume themselves as well as export to countries around the globe. The seventeenth-century English botanist was correct that corn is an excellent food for animals. Today, about half of the American corn crop is fed to livestock. Chances are that the beef, chicken, pork, and dairy products in American supermarkets came from animals that ate corn. And the United States exports billions of dollars' worth of corn-fed meat and dairy products to the rest of the world every year. A similar pattern prevails in many of the other products corn is used to create, such as corn sugar used to sweeten hundreds of processed foods and corn by-products used, for example, in products as varied as skateboards, toothpaste, tires, batteries, and lipstick. Even pulling into a gas station for a fill-up often means pumping gasoline mixed with ethanol made from corn—about a fourth of the American corn crop is used to make ethanol fuel, a product that reduces American dependence on foreign sources of oil.

Questions for Analysis

Ask Historical Questions: How did ancient Americans contribute to the evolution of corn? Why does the United States produce so much corn today?

Consider the Context: How did corn contribute to changes in ancient American cultures and societies? Why did corn spread so rapidly throughout the world?

Analyze the Evidence: In what ways is corn used today? How do these compare to how ancient Americans used corn?

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. (See "Beyond America's Borders," above.) 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 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

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?

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.

Around AD 500, while the Mogollon culture prevailed in New Mexico, other ancient people migrated from Mexico to southern Arizona and established the distinctive Hohokam culture. Hohokam settlements used sophisticated grids of irrigation canals to plant and harvest crops twice a year. Hohokam settlements reflected Mexican cultural practices that northbound migrants brought with them, including the building of sizable platform mounds and ball courts. 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 did their neighbors to the south. Beginning around AD 1000, 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 known as **Pueblo Bonito** 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 "Analyzing Historical Evidence," page 16.) Anasazi pueblos and cliff dwellings typically included one or 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) also suggests that the Anasazi studied the sky carefully, probably because they believed supernatural celestial powers influenced their lives in every way. Pueblo Bonito stood at the center of thousands of smaller pueblos that sent food and other goods to support Bonito's spiritual and political elites. Exactly how the Pueblo Bonito elites exercised power over the satellite pueblos is not known, but it probably involved a combination of violence and spiritual ceremonies performed in the kivas. 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.

Anasazi Effigy
This effigy figure crafted about a thousand years ago illustrates the great skill of pottery makers among the Anasazi in what is now the American Southwest. Human effigies are extremely rare in Anasazi sites, but they are more commonly found in ancient sites in northern Mexico, a hint of Mexican cultural influences among the Anasazi. Newark Museum/Art Resource, NY.

The prolonged drought probably intensified conflict among the 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, Zuñi, 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 Mississippi River watershed began to build **burial mounds**. The size of the mounds, the labor and 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 understand the organizations chiefs headed. But the only way archaeologists can account for the complex and labor-intensive burial mounds 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 radiating from central Ohio. In the mounds, the Adena usually included grave goods such as spear points and stone pipes as well as thin sheets of mica (a glasslike mineral) crafted into animal or human shapes. 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, not buried. 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 high and thirty feet in diameter. 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.

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

Artifacts of Daily Life in Chaco Canyon

Pueblo Bonito, Chaco Canyon, New Mexico Richard A. Cooke/Corbis.

Like archaeologists, historians study artifacts—physical objects—to investigate the past. Since ancient Americans did not use writing, their artifacts serve as documents of a sort that historians examine for evidence of ancient societies and cultures. Pictured here are artifacts made and used more than a thousand years ago by residents of Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon, located in the arid region at the intersection of present-day Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico.

The largest of many buildings in Chaco Canyon, 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. Chaco residents covered each kiva with a roof, creating a darkened underground space for ceremonial rituals. The ceremonies remain a mystery, but less mysterious are the routines of daily life that for centuries sustained Chacoan people at Pueblo Bonito.

Sandal Courtesy National Park Service, Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

Among the many thousands of artifacts excavated by archaeologists at Pueblo Bonito are these

VISUAL ACTIVITY

Ancient Petroglyph

More than a thousand years ago one or more members of the Fremont people crafted this hunting scene on a sandstone surface in Cottonwood Canyon in northeastern Utah. Four hunters aim their arrows into a flock of bighorn sheep. Other human-like forms appear in the image—perhaps shamans or decoys to move the flock toward the hunters. Lisa Werner/Getty Images.

READING THE IMAGE: What techniques might have allowed the hunters to concentrate the flock in the way depicted?

CONNECTIONS: What weapons did earlier Paleo-Indians and Archaic Indians use for killing and capturing game?

objects Chaco residents used routinely in their daily lives. Imagine a woman at Pueblo Bonito setting out on a spring day to plant corn, her family's most important food. She might strap on sandals, like the one shown on page 16 woven from fibers of the yucca plant. To dig a hole for planting corn seeds, the woman might use a digging stick like the one shown here, tipped by the horn of a mountain sheep and tightly bound with sinew to a cottonwood branch and covered with animal hide to protect the binding.

Ladle

Digging Stick

Once harvested and dried, corn needed to be ground in order to be cooked and eaten. Our imagined woman used the small flat stone (the mano) and the larger stone slab (the metate) to grind the corn. Some rooms at Pueblo Bonito contained numerous grinding stones.

To cook the cornmeal the woman mixed it with water, perhaps using a ceramic ladle—like the one shown here crafted by a Chaco pottery maker—to dip water from a storage pot. To kindle a fire, she might use the Chacoan fire starter kit shown here. After heating the cornmeal gruel in a ceramic pot, she might use the ladle again to transfer servings into small bowls for eating.

Examine these objects and think carefully about them. Each object required a great deal of learning and experience to create it and use it effectively. Consider in detail, step by step, what activities went into the making and use of each artifact.

Mano and Metate

Source: All images courtesy National Park Service, Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

Questions for Analysis

Analyze the Evidence: What kinds of material, knowledge, skill, and activity were required to make and use each of these artifacts? What do the decorations on the ladle suggest about Chacoan artistry?

Consider the Context: What do these artifacts suggest about food production and consumption in Chaco Canyon? What do these artifacts reveal about the society and culture of Chacoan people?

Ask Historical Questions: How did Chacoan culture, as revealed by these artifacts, compare to the lifestyles of ancient Americans in other regions at about the same time? How do these artifacts differ from artifacts of Paleo-Indians and Archaic hunters and gatherers described in the chapter? What changes might account for the differences?

Fire Starter Kit

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**, included huge mounds with platforms on top for ceremonies and for the residences of great chiefs. Most likely, the ceremonial mounds and ritual practices were influenced by Mexican cultural expressions 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. Experts believe that Cahokians probably built woodhenges partly for ceremonies linked to celestial observations. The large plazas at Cahokia were used for religious and political ceremonies as well as for playing the Cahokians' signature game of chunkey, which involved rolling a concave stone disk and trying to throw a spear that landed as close as possible to where the stone stopped. The game of chunkey spread throughout the region of Cahokians' cultural influence, and chunkey stones are commonly found in Mississippian graves, signifying the importance Cahokians attached to chunkey in the hereafter as well as the here and now.

Cahokia and other Mississippian cultures dwindled by AD 1500. When Europeans arrived, most of the descendants of Mississippian cultures,

Cahokia Pipe
This pipe bowl excavated at Cahokia depicts a chunkey player preparing to roll the concave chunkey stone with his right hand. Chunkey stones are frequently found in Cahokian and other Mississippian burials, suggesting the importance of the chunkey game in their culture. The man shown here also wears the characteristic skullcap of chunkey players. Ira Block/Corbis.

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 and why did the societies of the Southwest differ from eastern societies?

▸ 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 uncertain. Some experts claim that Native Americans inhabiting what are 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 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, but regional populations varied (Figure 1.1).

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

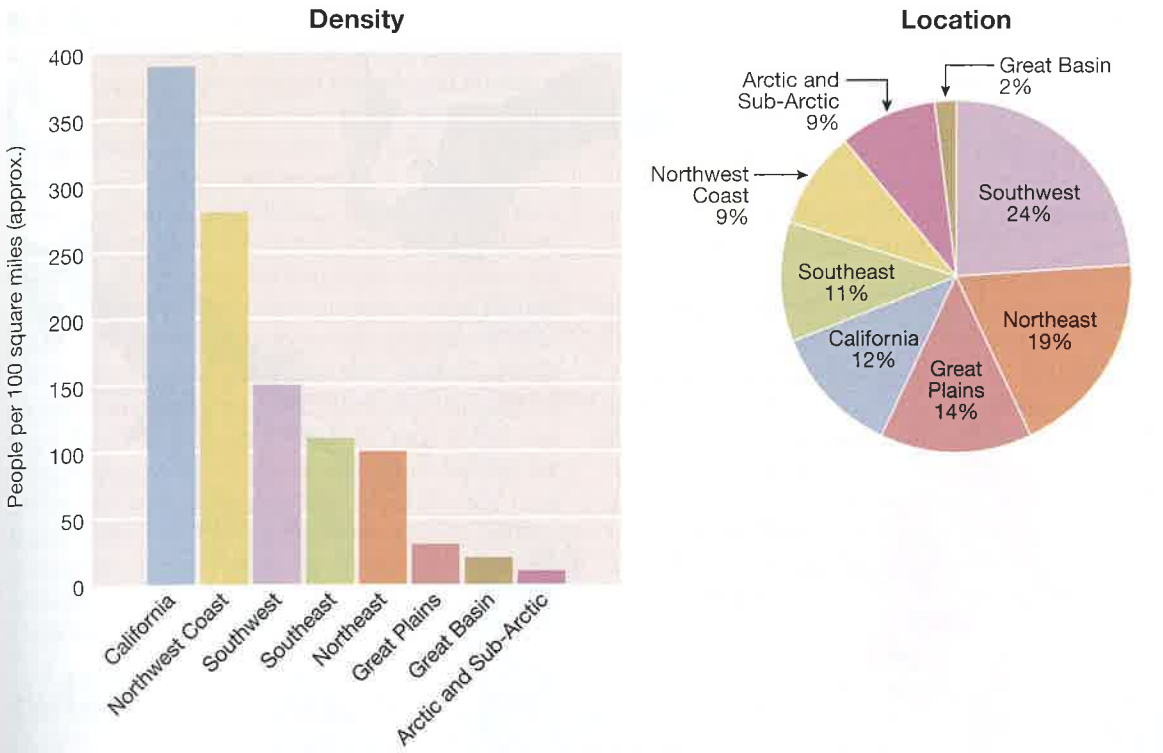


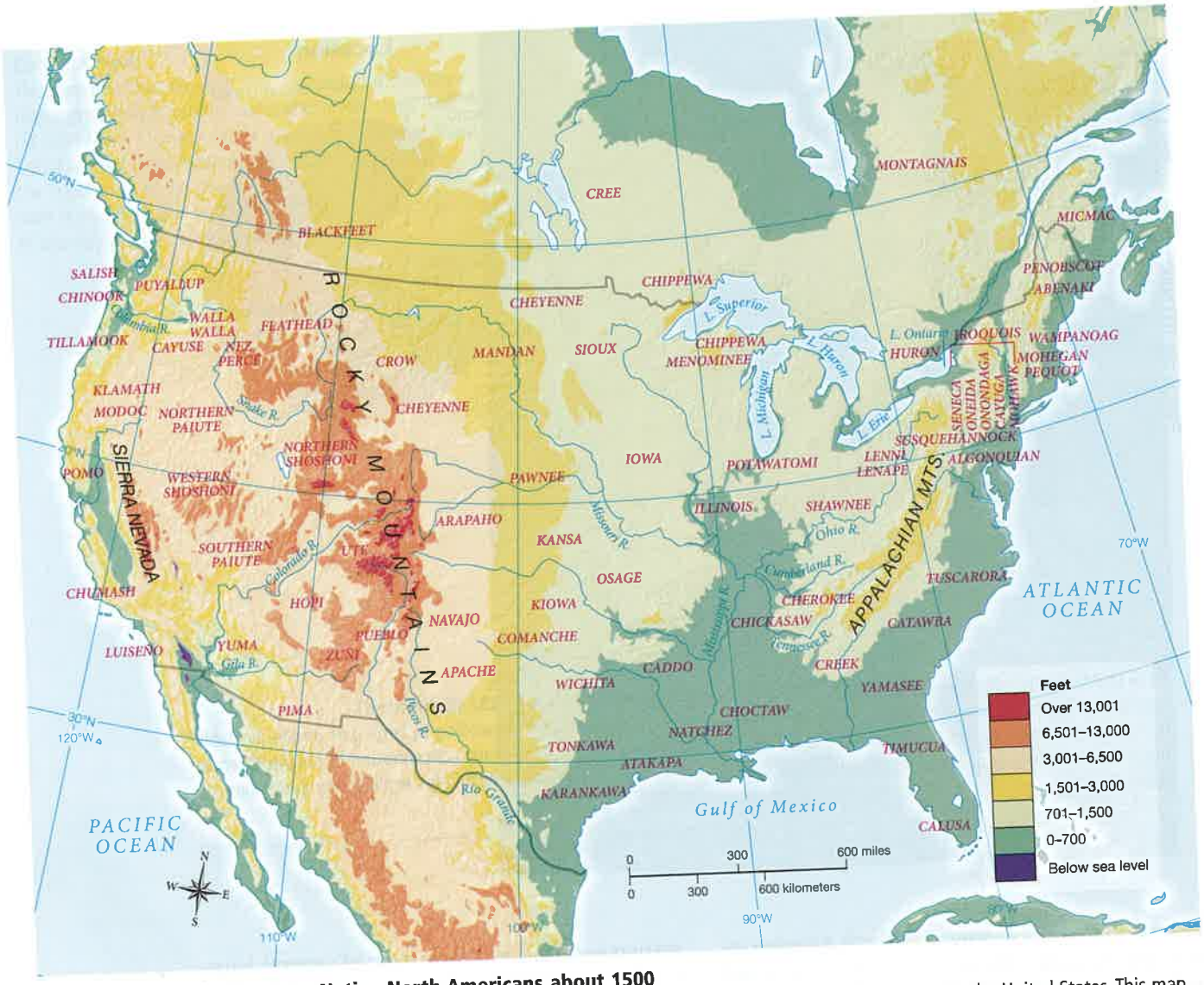
FIGURE 1.1 Native American Population in North America about 1492 (Estimated)
Just before Europeans arrived, Native American population density varied widely, depending in large part on the availability of natural resources. The Pacific coast, with its rich marine resources, had the highest concentration of people. Overall, the population density of North America was less than 1 percent that of England, which helps explain why Europeans viewed North America as a relatively empty wilderness.

approximated the average for North America as a whole. 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 longhouses 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 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.



Map 1.3 Native North Americans about 1500
Distinctive Native American peoples resided throughout the area that, centuries later, became 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.

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 at The Dalles, a prime fishing site on the Columbia River on the border of present-day Oregon and Washington, that Northwest peoples caught enough to use themselves as well as to trade dried fish as far away as California and the Great Plains. It is likely that The Dalles was the largest Native American trading center in ancient North America, although other ancient trading centers, such as Pueblo Bonito and Cahokia, also existed.

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. To express themselves, they drew on stones, wood, and animal skins; wove baskets and textiles; crafted pottery, beads, and carvings; and created songs, dances, and rituals.

North American life did not include features common in Europe during the 1490s. Native North Americans did not use writing, wheels, or sailing ships; they had no large domesticated animals such as horses or cows; their only metal was copper. However, the absence of these European conveniences mattered less than Native Americans' adaptations to local natural environments and to the social environment among neighboring peoples, adaptations that all native North Americans held in common.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that native North Americans lived in blissful harmony. Archaeological sites provide ample evidence of violent conflict. Warfare was common, making violence and fear typical features of ancient American life. Warfare not only killed people and destroyed their settlements, but victors often took captives, especially women and children, and often treated them as slaves. Skeletons, like those at Cahokia, not only bear marks of wounds but also exhibit clear signs 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, anxiety and instability must have been at least as common among ancient 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. To clear land

VISUAL ACTIVITY

Ancient American Weaving

This workbasket of a master weaver illustrates the technology of ancient American textile production. Found in a woman's grave in the Andes dating from one thousand years ago, the workbasket contains tools and thread for every stage of textile production. Weaving—like cooking, hunting, and worship—depended on human knowledge that survived only when passed from an experienced person to a novice. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA/Gift of Charles H. White/Bridgeman Images.

READING THE IMAGE: What human activities were required to produce the tools in the workbasket?

CONNECTIONS: The production of woven materials such as baskets and textiles was common in the North American cultures of the 1490s. What other similarities did these cultures hold?

for planting seeds, native North Americans set fires that burned off thousands of acres of forest.

Ancient North Americans also used fires for hunting. Hunters often started fires to frighten and force together deer, buffalo, and other animals and make them easy to slaughter. Indians also started fires along the edges of woods to burn off shrubby undergrowth, encouraging the growth of tender young plants that attracted deer and other game, bringing them within convenient range of hunters' weapons. The burns also encouraged the growth of sun-loving food plants that Indians 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 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 did native peoples of the Western Hemisphere share in the 1490s, and why?

The Mexica: A Mesoamerican Culture

The vast majority of the millions of 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 tremendous diversity. Among all these cultures, the **Mexica** stood out. Their empire stretched from coast to coast across central Mexico, encompassing approximately six million people. Their significance in the history of the New World after 1492 dictates a brief survey 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 contained about as many people as lived in Spain. The empire exemplified the central values of Mexican society. The Mexica worshipped the 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 was 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 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 amazed the Spaniards after AD 1492: the huge cities, teeming markets, productive gardens, and 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

Mexican Human Sacrifice
This late-sixteenth-century painting depicts human sacrifice, a common Mexican ritual, at the temple of Tenochtitlán, before Spanish conquest. Mexicans believed that cutting the heart from a sacrifice victim fed the sun with human blood and assured that the sun would continue to warm and nourish the world. Spaniards considered these rituals barbaric and banned them. DEA/G. Dagli Orti/De Agostini/Getty Images.

as they paid tribute. Subjugated communities felt exploited by the constant payment of tribute to the Mexica. The high level of discontent among subject peoples constituted the soft, vulnerable underbelly of the Mexican empire, a fact that Spanish intruders exploited after 1492 to conquer the Mexica.

REVIEW How did the conquest and creation of an empire exemplify the central values of Mexican society?

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 lost because they 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 and Pueblo Bonito. Ancient Americans achieved their success through resourceful adaptation to the hemisphere's many and changing natural environments. They also adapted to social and cultural changes caused by human beings—such as marriages and deaths, as well as political struggles and warfare among chiefdoms. 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 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 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 one another. Peaceful negotiations as well as violent conflicts over both land and trading rights resulted in chronic fear and mistrust. While 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.

See the Selected Bibliography for this chapter in the Appendix.

1 Chapter Review

KEY TERMS

Beringia (p. 4)
Paleo-Indians (p. 5)
Clovis point (p. 5)
hunter-gatherer (p. 8)
Archaic Indians (p. 8)
pueblos (p. 13)
Pueblo Bonito (p. 14)
burial mounds (p. 15)
chiefdom (p. 15)
Cahokia (p. 17)
Mexica (p. 22)
tribute (p. 22)

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why must historians rely on the work of archaeologists to write the history of ancient America? (pp. 3–4)
2. Why and how did Paleo-Indians adapt to environmental change? (pp. 4–8)
3. Why did Archaic Native Americans shift from big-game hunting to foraging and hunting smaller animals? (pp. 8–11)
4. How and why did the societies of the Southwest differ from eastern societies? (pp. 12–18)
5. What cultural similarities did native peoples of the Western Hemisphere share in the 1490s, and why? (pp. 18–22)
6. How did the conquest and creation of an empire exemplify the central values of Mexican society? (pp. 22–23)

MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. How did ancient peoples' different approaches to survival contribute to the diversity of Native American cultures?
2. Native Americans both adapted to environmental changes in North America and produced changes in the environments around them. Discuss specific examples of such changes.
3. How did the Mexica establish and maintain their expansive empire?

LINKING TO THE PAST

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 separated from the Eurasian landmass? If so, how and why? If not, why not?