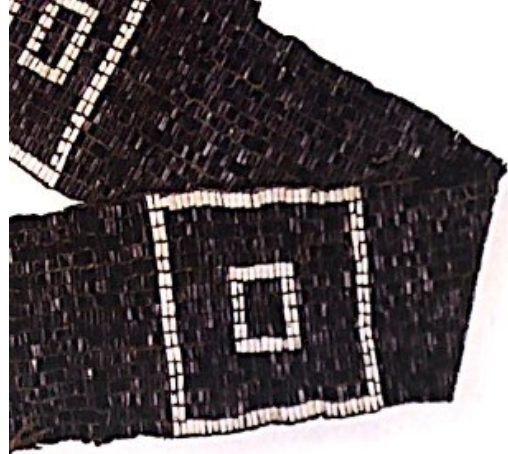


Luck and





Over time, indigenous peoples had developed hundreds of strikingly different societies. Some were rooted in agriculture; others focused on trade or conquest. Many Native Americans (also called Amerindians) were healthier, better fed, and lived longer than Europeans, but when the two societies—European and Native American—collided, Amerindians were exploited, infected, enslaved, displaced, and exterminated.

Yet the conventional story of invasion and occupation oversimplifies the process by which Indians, Europeans, and Africans interacted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Native Americans were more than passive victims of European power; they were also trading partners and military allies of the transatlantic newcomers. They became neighbors and advisers, religious converts and loving spouses. As such, they participated actively in the creation of the new society known as America.

The European colonists who risked their lives to settle in the Western Hemisphere were a diverse lot. They came from Spain, Portugal, France, the British Isles, the Netherlands (Holland), Scandinavia, Italy, and the German states. (Germany would not become a united nation until the mid-nineteenth century.) What they shared was a presumption that Christianity was superior to other religions and that all other peoples were inferior to them and to their culture.

A variety of motives inspired Europeans to undertake the harrowing transatlantic voyage. Some were fortune seekers lusting for gold, silver, and spices. Others were eager to create kingdoms of God in the New World. Still others were adventurers, convicts, debtors, servants, landless peasants, and political or religious exiles. Most were simply seeking opportunities for a better life. A settler in Pennsylvania noted that workers “here get three times the wages for their labor than they can in England.”

Yet such wages never attracted enough workers to keep up with the rapidly expanding colonial economies, so Europeans eventually turned to Africa to supply their labor needs in the New World. Beginning in 1503, European nations—especially Portugal and Spain—transported captive Africans to the Western Hemisphere. Throughout the sixteenth century, slaves were delivered to ports as far south as Chile to as far north as Canada. Thereafter, the English and Dutch joined the effort to exploit enslaved Africans. Few Europeans saw the contradiction between the promise of freedom in America for themselves and the institution of race-based slavery.

The intermingling of people, cultures, plants, animals, microbes, and diseases from the continents of Africa, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere gave colonial American society its distinctive vitality and variety. The shared quest for a better life also gave America much of its drama—and conflict.

The Europeans unwittingly brought to the Americas a range of infectious diseases that would prove disastrous for the indigenous peoples—who had no natural immunities to them—and no knowledge of how to cope with them. As many as 90 percent of Native Americans would eventually die from European-borne diseases. Proportionally, it would be the worst human death toll in history.

At the same time, bitter rivalries among the Spanish, French, English, and Dutch triggered costly wars in Europe and around the world. Amid such conflicts, the monarchs of Europe struggled to manage often-unruly colonies, which, as it turned out, played crucial roles in their frequent wars.

Many of the colonists displayed a feisty independence, which led them to resent government interference in their affairs. A British official in North Carolina reported that the colonists were “without any Law or Order. Impudence is so very high, as to be past bearing.”

The colonists and their British rulers maintained an uneasy partnership throughout the seventeenth century. As the royal authorities tightened their control during the mid-eighteenth century, however, they met resistance, which exploded into revolution.

America was born in melting ice. Tens of thousands of years ago, during a period known as the Ice Age, immense glaciers some two miles thick inched southward from the Arctic Circle at the top of the globe. The advancing ice crushed hills; rerouted rivers; gouged out lakebeds and waterways; and scraped bare all the land in its path.

The glacial ice sheets covered much of North America—areas which are now Canada, Alaska, the Upper Midwest, New England, Montana, and Washington. Then, as the continent's climate began to warm, the ice slowly started to melt, year after year, century after century. So much of the world's water was bound up in glacial ice that the slow melt ultimately caused sea levels to rise more than 400 feet.

As the ice sheets receded, a thick blanket of fertile topsoil scoured from Canada and pushed down the continent was deposited in the Midwest; it would become the world's richest farmland. The shrinking glaciers also opened valley pathways allowing the first immigrants to roam the continent.

Debate still rages about when and how humans first arrived in North America. Yet one thing is certain: the ancestors of *every* person living in the United States originally came from somewhere else. As then senator John F. Kennedy asserted in 1958, America is indeed a "nation of immigrants," a society of striving people attracted by a mythic new world promising new beginnings and a better life in a new place of unlimited space. Geography may be destiny, as the saying goes, but without people of determination and imagination, geography would have destroyed rather than sustained the first Americans.

Until recently, archaeologists had assumed that ancient peoples from northeast Asia, clothed in animal hides and furs, began following herds of large game animals across the Bering Strait, a waterway that now connects the



- When did people first cross the Bering Sea? What evidence have archaeologists and anthropologists found from the lives of the first people in America?
- Why did those people travel to North America?

Paleo-Indians were skilled hunters and gatherers in search of game animals, whales, seals, fish, and wild plants, berries, nuts, roots, and seeds. They lived in transportable huts with wooden frames covered by animal skins or grasses (“thatch”). As people moved southward, they trekked across prairies and plains, working in groups to track and kill massive animals unlike any found there today: mammoths, mastodons, giant sloths, camels, lions, saber-toothed tigers, cheetahs, and giant wolves, beavers, and bears.

Recent archaeological discoveries in California, Florida, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Chile, Brazil, and Venezuela, however, suggest that prehistoric humans from various parts of Asia could have arrived as early as 25,000 or even 50,000 years ago. Findings indicate that some may even have crossed the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans in boats, traveling from Polynesian islands in the southern Pacific or from southwestern Europe.

Regardless of when, where, or how humans first set foot in North America, the continent eventually became a dynamic crossroads for adventurous peoples from around the world, all bringing with them distinctive backgrounds, cultures, technologies, religions, and motivations that helped form the multicultural society known as America.

EARLY CULTURES IN AMERICA

Archaeologists have labeled the earliest humans in North America the *Clovis* peoples, named after a site in New Mexico where ancient hunters some 13,000 years ago killed tusked woolly mammoths using distinctive “Clovis” stone spearheads. Over the centuries, as the climate warmed, days grew hotter and many of the largest mammals—mammoth, mastodons, and camels became extinct. Hunters then began stalking more-abundant mammals: deer, antelope, elk, moose, and caribou.

Over time, the Ancient Indians adapted to their diverse environments—coastal forests, grassy plains, southwestern deserts, eastern woodlands. Some continued to hunt with spears and, later, bows and arrows; others fished or trapped small game. Some gathered wild plants and herbs and collected acorns and seeds, while others farmed using stone hoes. Most did some of each.

By about 7000 B.C.E. (before the Common Era), Ancient American societies began transforming into farming cultures, supplemented by seasonal hunting and gathering. Agriculture provided reliable, nutritious food, which accelerated population growth and enabled once nomadic people to settle down in villages. Indigenous peoples became expert at growing plants that would become the primary food crops of the hemisphere, chiefly **maize** (corn),

Maize-based societies viewed corn as the "gift of the gods" because it provided many essential needs. They made hominy by soaking dried kernels in a mixture of water and ashes and then cooking it. They used corn cobs for fuel and the husks to fashion mats, masks, and dolls. They also ground the kernels into cornmeal, which could be mixed with beans to make protein-rich succotash.

THE MAYANS, INCAS, AND MEXICA

Around 1500 B.C.E., farming towns appeared in what is now Mexico. Agriculture supported the development of sophisticated communities complete with gigantic temple-topped pyramids, palaces, and bridges in Middle America (*Mesoamerica*, what is now Mexico and Central America). The Mayans, who dominated Central America for more than 600 years, developed a written language and elaborate works of art. Mayan civilization featured sprawling cities, hierarchical government, terraced farms, and spectacular pyramids.

Yet in about A.D. 900, Mayan culture collapsed. Why it disappeared remains a mystery, but a major factor was ecological. The Mayans destroyed much of the rain forest, upon whose fragile ecosystem they depended. As an archaeologist has explained, "Too many farmers grew too many crops on too much of the landscape." Widespread deforestation led to hillside erosion and a catastrophic loss of nutrient-rich farmland.

Overpopulation added to the strain on Mayan society, prompting civil wars. The Mayans eventually succumbed to the Toltecs, a warlike people who conquered most of the region in the tenth century. Around A.D. 1200, however, the Toltecs mysteriously withdrew after a series of droughts, fires, and invasions.

THE INCAS Much farther south, many diverse people speaking at least twenty different languages made up the sprawling Inca Empire. By the fifteenth century, the Incas' vast realm stretched 2,500 miles along the Andes Mountains in the western part of South America. It featured irrigated farms, stone buildings, and interconnected networks of roads made of stone.

THE MEXICA (AZTECS) During the twelfth century, the Mexica (Me-SHEE-ka)—whom Europeans later called Aztecs ("People from Aztlán," the place they claimed as their original homeland)—began drifting southward from northwest Mexico. Disciplined, determined, and aggressive, they eventually took control of central Mexico, where in 1325 they built the city of Tenochtitlán ("place of the stone cactus") on an island in Lake Tetzco, at the site of present-day Mexico City.

Tenochtitlán would become one of the grandest cities in the world. It served as the capital of a sophisticated **Aztec Empire** ruled by a powerful emperor and



Mayan society A fresco depicting the social divisions of Mayan society. A Mayan high priest, at the center, is ceremonially dressed.



Mexica sacrifices to the gods Renowned for their military prowess, the Mexica (Aztecs) preferred to capture and then sacrifice their enemies.

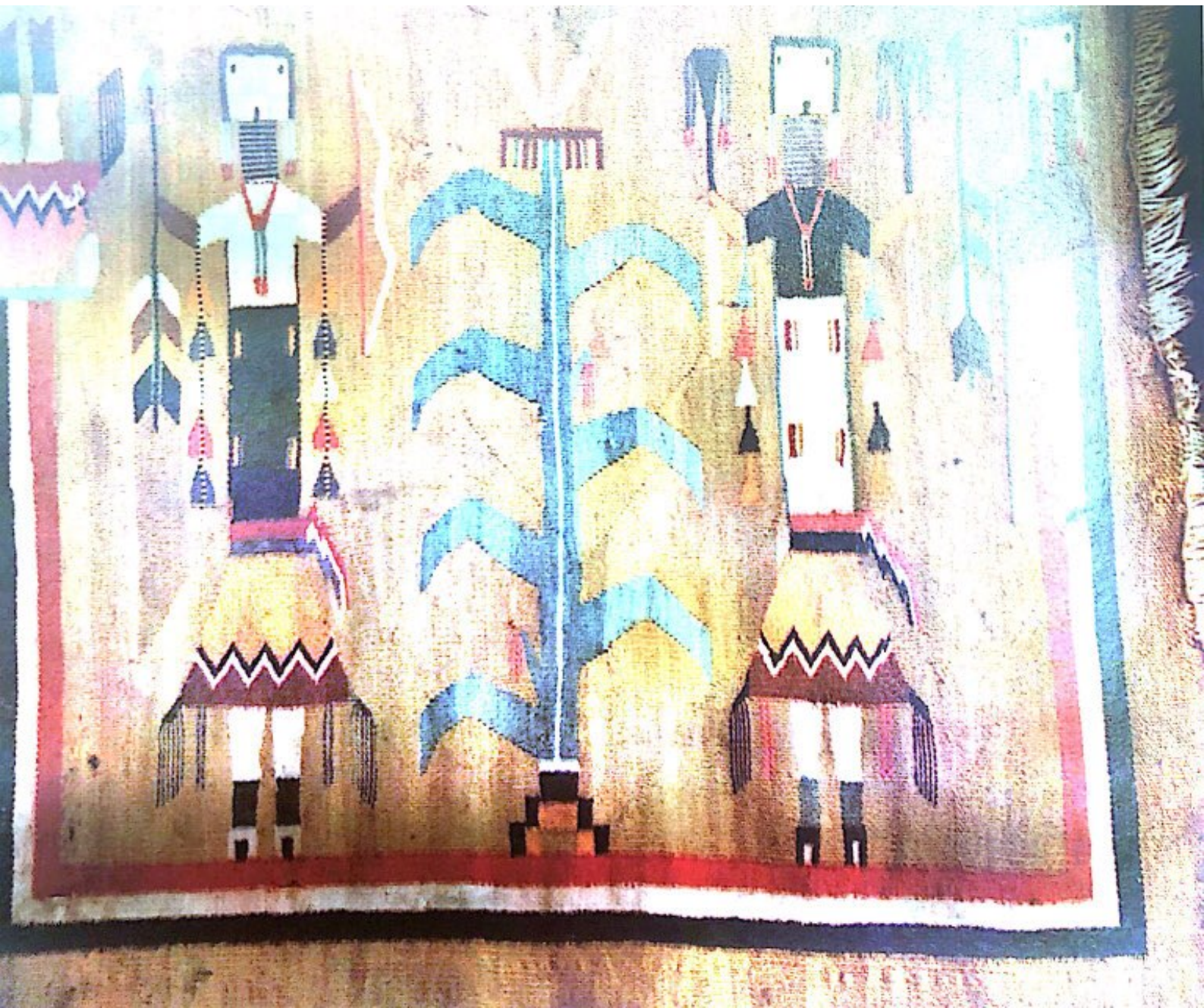
expanded across central and southern Mexico, the Aztecs developed elaborate societies supported by detailed legal systems and a complicated political structure. They advanced efficient new farming techniques, including terracing of fields, crop rotation, large-scale irrigation, and other engineering marvels. Their arts flourished; their architecture was magnificent. Mexica rulers were invested with godlike qualities, and nobles, priests, and warrior-heroes dominated the social order. The emperor's palace included 100 rooms and 100 baths replete with amazing statues, gardens, and a zoo; the aristocracy lived in large stone dwellings, practiced polygamy (multiple wives), and were exempt from manual labor.

Like most agricultural peoples, the Mexica, "people of the sun," were intensely spiritual and worshipped multiple gods. Their religious beliefs focused on the interconnection between nature and human life and especially the sacredness of natural elements—the sun, moon, stars, rain, mountains, rivers, and animals. They believed that the gods had sacrificed themselves to create the sun, moon, people, and maize. They were therefore obliged to feed the gods, especially Huitzilopochtli, the Lord of the Sun and War, with the vital energy provided by human hearts and blood. So the Mexica, like most Mesoamerican societies, regularly offered live human sacrifices—captives, slaves, women, and children—by the thousands.

PRE-COLUMBIAN INDIAN CIVILIZATIONS IN MIDDLE AND SOUTH AMERICA



- What were the major pre-Columbian civilizations?
- What factors caused the demise of the Mayan civilization?
- When did the Mexica build Tenochtitlán?



language. Although few had an alphabet or written language, the different societies developed rich oral traditions that passed on spiritual myths and social beliefs, especially those concerning the sacredness of nature, the necessity of communal living, and a deep respect for elders.

Like the Mexica, most indigenous peoples believed in many “spirits.” To the Sioux, God was Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit, who ruled over all spirits. The Navajo believed in the Holy People: Sky, Earth, Moon, Sun, Thunders, Winds, and Changing Woman. Many Native Americans believed in ghosts, who acted as their bodyguards in battle.

The importance of hunting to many Indian societies helped nurture a warrior ethic in which courage in combat was the highest virtue. War dances the night before a hunt or battle invited the spirits to unleash magical powers. Yet, Native American warfare mostly consisted of small-scale raids intended to enable individual warriors to demonstrate their courage rather than to seize territory or destroy villages. Casualties were minimal. Taking a few captives often signaled victory.

DIVERSE SOCIETIES

For all their similarities, the indigenous peoples of North America developed markedly different ways of life. In North America alone in 1492, when the first Europeans arrived, there were perhaps several million native peoples organized into 240 different societies speaking many different languages.

These Native Americans practiced diverse customs and religions, passed on distinctive cultural myths, and developed varied economies. Some wore clothes they had woven or made using animal skins, others wore nothing but colorful paint, tattoos, or jewelry. Some lived in stone houses, others in circular timber wigwams or bark-roofed longhouses. Still others lived in sod-covered or reed-thatched lodges or in portable tipis made from animal skins. Some cultures built stone pyramids graced by ceremonial plazas and others constructed huge burial or ritual mounds topped by temples.

Few North American Indians permitted absolute rulers. Tribes had chiefs, but the “power of the chiefs,” reported an eighteenth-century British trader, “is an empty sound. They can only persuade or dissuade the people by the force of good-nature and clear reasoning.” Likewise, Henry Timberlake, a British soldier, explained that the Cherokee government, “if I may call it a government, which has neither laws nor power to support it, is a mixed aristocracy and democracy, the chiefs being chosen according to their merit in war.”

For Native Americans, exile from the group was the most feared punishment. They owned land in common rather than individually as private

PRE-COLUMBIAN INDIAN CIVILIZATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA



- What were the dominant pre-Columbian civilizations in North America?
- Where was the Adena-Hopewell culture centered?
- How was the Mississippian civilization similar to that of the Mayans or the Mexica?
- What made the Anasazi culture different from the other North American cultures?

property, and they had well-defined social roles. Men were hunters, warriors, and leaders. Women tended children; made clothes, blankets, jewelry, and pottery; cured and dried animal skins; wove baskets; built and packed tipis; and grew, harvested, and cooked food. When the men were away hunting or fighting, women took charge of village life. Some Indian nations, like the Cherokee and Iroquois, gave women political power.

THE SOUTHWEST The arid (dry) Southwest (present-day Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah) featured a landscape of high mesas, deep canyons, vast



Ruins of Anasazi Vast villages were constructed into the sides of these cliffs in Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado.

About 500 C.E. (Common Era), the Hohokam (“those who have vanished”) people migrated from Mexico northward to southern and central Arizona, where they built extensive canals to irrigate crops. They also crafted decorative pottery and turquoise jewelry, and constructed *temple mounds* (earthen pyramids used for sacred ceremonies).

The most widespread and best known of the Southwest pueblo cultures were the Anasazi (Ancient Ones), or Basketmakers. Unlike the Aztecs and Incas, however, Anasazi society did *not* have a rigid class structure. The religious leaders and warriors worked much as the rest of the people did.

THE NORTHWEST Along the narrow coastal strip running up the heavily forested northwest Pacific coast, from northern California to Alaska, shellfish, salmon, seals, whales, deer, and edible wild plants were abundant. Here, there was little need to rely on farming. In fact, many of the Pacific Northwest peoples, such as the Haida, Kwakiutl, and Nootka, needed to work only two days to provide enough food for a week.

Such population density enabled the Pacific coast cultures to develop intricate religious rituals and sophisticated woodworking skills. They carved

towering totem poles featuring decorative figures of animals and other symbolic characters. For shelter, they built large, earthen-floored, cedar-plank houses up to 500 feet long, where groups of families lived together. They also created sturdy, oceangoing canoes made of hollowed-out red cedar tree trunks—some large enough to carry fifty people. Socially, they were divided into slaves, commoners, and chiefs. Warfare was usually a means to acquire slaves.

THE GREAT PLAINS The many tribal nations living on the Great Plains, a vast, flat land of cold winters and hot summers west of the Mississippi River, included the Arapaho, Blackfeet, Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow, Apache, and Sioux. As nomadic hunter-gatherers, they tracked herds of buffaloes (technically called bison) across a sea of grassland, collecting seeds, nuts, roots, and berries as they roamed.

At the center of most hunter-gatherer religions is the idea that the hunted animal is a willing sacrifice provided by the gods (spirits). To ensure a successful hunt, these nomadic peoples performed sacred rites of gratitude beforehand. Once a buffalo herd was spotted, the hunters would set fires to drive the stampeding animals over cliffs, often killing far more than they could harvest and consume.

THE MISSISSIPPIANS East of the Great Plains, in the vast woodlands reaching from the Mississippi River to the Atlantic Ocean, several “mound-building” cultures that were predominantly agricultural societies prospered growing crops of corn, beans, and squash. Between 700 B.C.E. and 200 C.E., the Adena and later the Hopewell societies developed communities along rivers in the Ohio Valley. The Adena-Hopewell cultures grew corn, squash, beans, and sunflowers, as well as tobacco for smoking. They left behind enormous earthworks and elaborate **burial mounds** shaped like snakes, birds, and other animals, several of which were nearly a quarter mile long.

Like the Adena, the Hopewell developed an extensive trading network with other societies from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada, exchanging exquisite carvings, metalwork, pearls, seashells, copper ornaments, bear claws, and jewelry. By the sixth century, however, the Hopewell culture disappeared, giving way to a new phase of development east of the Mississippi River, the *Mississippian* culture, which thrived from 800 C.E. to the arrival of Europeans.

The Mississippians were corn-growing peoples who built substantial agricultural towns around central plazas and temples. They developed a far-flung trading network that extended to the Rocky Mountains, and their ability to grow large amounts of corn in the fertile floodplains spurred population growth around regional centers.



Great Serpent Mound At over 1,300 feet in length and 3 feet high, this snake-shaped burial mound in Adams County, Ohio, is the largest of its kind in the world.

CAHOKIA The largest of these advanced regional centers, called *chiefdoms*, was **Cahokia** (600–1300 C.E.), in southwest Illinois, near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers (across from what is now St. Louis). The Cahokians constructed an enormous farming settlement with monumental public buildings, spacious ceremonial plazas, and more than eighty flat-topped earthen mounds with thatch-roofed temples on top. The largest of the mounds, called Monks Mound, was ten stories tall, encompassed fourteen acres, and required 22 million cubic feet of soil.

At the height of its influence, Cahokia had a population of 15,000 people on some 3,200 acres, making it the largest city north of Mexico. Around 1300 C.E., it vanished, and its people dispersed. Its collapse remains a mystery, but the overcutting of trees to make fortress walls may have set in motion ecological changes that doomed the community when a massive earthquake struck. The loss of trees led to widespread flooding and the erosion of topsoil, which finally forced people to seek better lands. As Cahokia disappeared, however, its former residents took its advanced ways of life to other areas across the Midwest and into what is now the American South.

The manner of their dance, and
painting their faces when
they go to their generall
councils, or at their
Solemn feasts.



wams OF THE INDIANS,
surrounded by a tall *palisade*, a timber
fence to defend against attackers. Their
villages typically ranged in size from
500 to 2,000 people.

The Algonquians along the Atlantic
coast were skilled at fishing and gath-
ering shellfish; the inland Algonquians
excelled at hunting. They often traveled
the region's waterways using canoes
made of hollowed-out tree trunks (dug-
outs) or birch bark.

The Algonquians foraged for wild
food (nuts, berries, and fruits) and prac-
ticed agriculture to some extent, regu-
larly burning dense forests to improve
soil fertility and provide grazing room
for deer. To prepare their vegetable gar-
dens, women broke up the ground with
hoes tipped with sharp clamshells or
the shoulder blades from deer. In the
spring, they cultivated corn, beans, and
squash planted in mounds of soil. As the

THE IROQUOIANS West and south of the Algonquians were the powerful Iroquoian-speaking peoples (including the Seneca, Onondaga, Mohawk, Oneida, and Cayuga nations, as well as the Cherokee and Tuscarora). Their lands spread from upstate New York southward through Pennsylvania and into the upland regions of the Carolinas and Georgia. The Iroquois were farmer/hunters who lived in extended family groups (clans), sharing bark-covered longhouses in towns of 3,000 or more people. The oldest woman in each longhouse served as the “clan mother.”

Unlike the Algonquian culture, in which men were dominant, women held the key leadership roles in the Iroquoian culture. As an Iroquois elder explained, “In our society, women are the center of all things. Nature, we believe, has given women the ability to create; therefore it is only natural that women be in positions of power to protect this function.” A French priest who lived among the Iroquois for five years marveled that “nothing is more real than women’s superiority. . . . It is they who really maintain the tribe.”

Iroquois men and women operated in separate social domains. No woman could be a chief; no man could head a clan. Women selected the chiefs, controlled the distribution of property, supervised the slaves, and planted and harvested the crops. They also arranged marriages. After a wedding ceremony, the man moved in with the wife’s family. In part, the Iroquoian matriarchy reflected the frequent absence of Iroquois men, who as skilled hunters and traders traveled extensively for long periods, requiring women to take charge of domestic life. As a French explorer noted, the “powerful women of extraordinary stature” served as “mules to carry the baggage” when Indians relocated and thereafter performed “a thousand other kinds of duties and services.”

War between rival groups of Native Americans, especially the Algonquians and Iroquois, was commonplace. Success in fighting was a warrior’s highest honor. As a Cherokee explained in the eighteenth century, “We cannot live without war. Should we make peace with the Tuscaroras, we must immediately look out for some other nation with whom we can engage in our beloved occupation.”

EASTERN WOODLANDS INDIANS The third major Native American group in the Eastern Woodlands included the peoples along the Gulf of Mexico who farmed and hunted and spoke the Muskogean language: the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, Natchez, Apalachee, and Timucua. Like the Iroquois, they were often matrilineal societies—meaning that ancestry flowed through the mother’s line—but they had a more rigid class structure. The Muskogean lived in towns arranged around a central plaza. Along the Gulf, many of their thatch-roofed houses had no walls because of the mild winters and hot, humid summers.

Over thousands of years, the native North Americans had displayed remarkable resilience, adapting to the uncertainties of frequent warfare, changing climate, and varying environments. They would display similar resilience against the challenges created by the arrival of Europeans.

EUROPEAN VISIONS OF AMERICA

The European exploration of the Western Hemisphere resulted from several key developments during the fifteenth century. Dramatic intellectual changes and scientific discoveries, along with sustained population growth, transformed religion, warfare, family life, and national economies. In addition, the resurgence of old vices—greed, conquest, exploitation, oppression, racism, and slavery—helped fuel European expansion abroad.

By the end of the fifteenth century, medieval feudalism's static agrarian social system, in which peasant serfs worked for local nobles in exchange for living on and farming the land, began to disintegrate. People were no longer forced to remain in the same area or to keep the same social status in which they were born. A new "middle class" of profit-hungry bankers, merchants, and investors emerged. They were committed to an increasingly dynamic commercial trade economy fueled by innovations in banking, currency, accounting, and insurance.

The growing trade-based economy in Europe freed kings from their dependence on feudal nobles, enabling the monarchs to unify the scattered cities ruled by princes (principalities) into large kingdoms with stronger, more-centralized governments. The rise of towns, cities, and a merchant class provided kings with new tax revenues. Over time, the new class of monarchs, merchants, and bankers displaced the landed nobility. This process of centralizing political power was justified in part by claims that European kings ruled by divine right rather than by popular mandate: since God appointed them, only God, not the people, could hold them responsible for their actions.

THE RENAISSANCE At the same time, the rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman writings about representative government (republics) spurred the *Renaissance* (rebirth), an intellectual revolution that transformed the arts as well as traditional attitudes toward religion and science. The Renaissance began in Italy and spread across western Europe, bringing with it a more *secular* outlook that took greater interest in humanity than in religion. Rather than emphasizing God's omnipotence, Renaissance *humanism* highlighted the power of inventive people to exert their command over nature.

The Renaissance was an essential force in the transition from medievalism to early modernism. From the fifteenth century on, educated people throughout Europe began to challenge prevailing beliefs as well as the absolute authority of rulers and churchmen. They discussed controversial new ideas, engaged in scientific research, and unleashed their artistic creativity. In the process, they fastened on a new phrase—"to discover"—which first appeared in 1553. Voyages of exploration became "voyages of discovery."

The Renaissance also sparked the Age of Exploration. New knowledge and new technologies made possible the construction of larger sailing ships capable of oceanic voyages. The development of more accurate magnetic compasses, maps, and navigational instruments such as *astrolabes* and *quadrants* helped sailors determine their ship's location. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also brought the invention of gunpowder, cannons, and firearms—and the printing press.

THE RISE OF GLOBAL TRADE By 1500, trade between western European nations and the Middle East, Africa, and Asia was booming. The Portuguese took the lead, bolstered by crews of expert sailors and fast, three-masted ships called caravels capable of sailing into the wind (tacking). Portuguese ships roamed along the west coast of Africa collecting grains, gold, ivory, spices, and slaves. Eventually, these mariners continued around Africa to the Indian Ocean in search of the fabled *Indies* (India and Southeast Asia). They ventured on to China and Japan, where they found spices (cinnamon, cloves, ginger, nutmeg, black pepper) to enliven bland European food, sugar made from cane to sweeten food and drink, silk cloth, herbal medicines, and other exotic goods.

Global trade was made possible with the emergence of four powerful nations in western Europe: England, France, Portugal, and, especially, Spain. The arranged marriage of King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile in 1469 unified their two kingdoms into one formidable new nation, Spain. However, for years thereafter, it remained a loose confederation of separate kingdoms and jurisdictions, each with different cultural and linguistic traditions.

The new king and queen were intense Christian expansionists eager to spread the Catholic faith around the world. On January 1, 1492, after nearly eight centuries of warfare between Spanish Christians and Moorish Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula, Ferdinand and Isabella declared victory for Catholicism at Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in southern Spain. The monarchs then set about instituting a fifteenth-century version of ethnic cleansing

The forced exile of Muslims and Jews was one of many factors that enabled Europe's global explorations at the end of the fifteenth century. Other factors—urbanization, world trade, the rise of centralized nations, advances in knowledge, technology, and firepower—all combined with natural human curiosity, greed, and religious zeal to spur efforts to find alternative routes to the Indies. More immediately, the decision of Chinese rulers to shut off the land routes to Asia's spices in 1453 forced merchants to focus on seaborne options. For these reasons, Europeans set in motion the events that, as one historian has observed, would bind together “four continents, three races, and a great diversity of regional parts.”

THE VOYAGES OF COLUMBUS

These were the circumstances that prompted Christopher Columbus's efforts to find a faster route to Japan and China by sailing west across the Atlantic. Born in the Italian seaport of Genoa, in 1451, the son of a woolen weaver, Columbus took to the sea at an early age, teaching himself geography, navigation, and Latin. By the 1480s, he was eager to spread Christianity across the globe and win glory and riches for himself.

The tall, red-haired Columbus, a fervent Catholic, spent a decade trying to convince European rulers to finance a western voyage across the Atlantic. England, France, Portugal, and Spain turned him down. Yet he persevered and eventually persuaded Ferdinand and Isabella to fund his voyage. The monarchs agreed to award him a one-tenth share of any riches he gathered; they would keep the rest.

CROSSING THE ATLANTIC On August 3, 1492, Columbus and a crew of ninety men and boys, mostly from Spain but from seven other nations as well, set sail on three tiny ships, the *Santa María*, the *Pinta*, and the *Niña*. They traveled first to Lisbon, Portugal, and then headed west to the Canary Islands, where they spent a month loading supplies and making repairs. On September 6, they headed west across the open sea, hoping desperately to sight the shore of east Asia. By early October, worried sailors rebelled at the “madness” of sailing blindly and forced Columbus to promise that they would turn back if land were not sighted within three days.

Then, on October 12, a sailor on watch atop the masthead yelled, “Tierra! Tierra!” (“Land! Land!”). He had spotted a small island in the Bahamas east of present-day Florida that Columbus came to call San Salvador (Blessed Savior). Columbus mistakenly assumed that they must be near the Indies, so he called the native people “Indios” and named the surrounding islands the West Indies.

At every encounter with the peaceful native people, known as Tainos, his first question, using sign language, was whether they had gold. If they did, the Spaniards seized it; if they did not, the Europeans forced them to search for it.

The Tainos, unable to understand or repel the strange visitors, offered gifts of food, water, spears, and parrots. Columbus described them as “well-built, with good bodies, and handsome features”—brown-skinned, with straight black hair. He marveled that they could “easily be made Christians” and “would make fine servants,” boasting that “with fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want.” He promised to bring six “natives” back to Spain for “his highnesses.” Thus began the typical European bias toward the Indians, the belief that they were inferior peoples worthy of being exploited and enslaved.

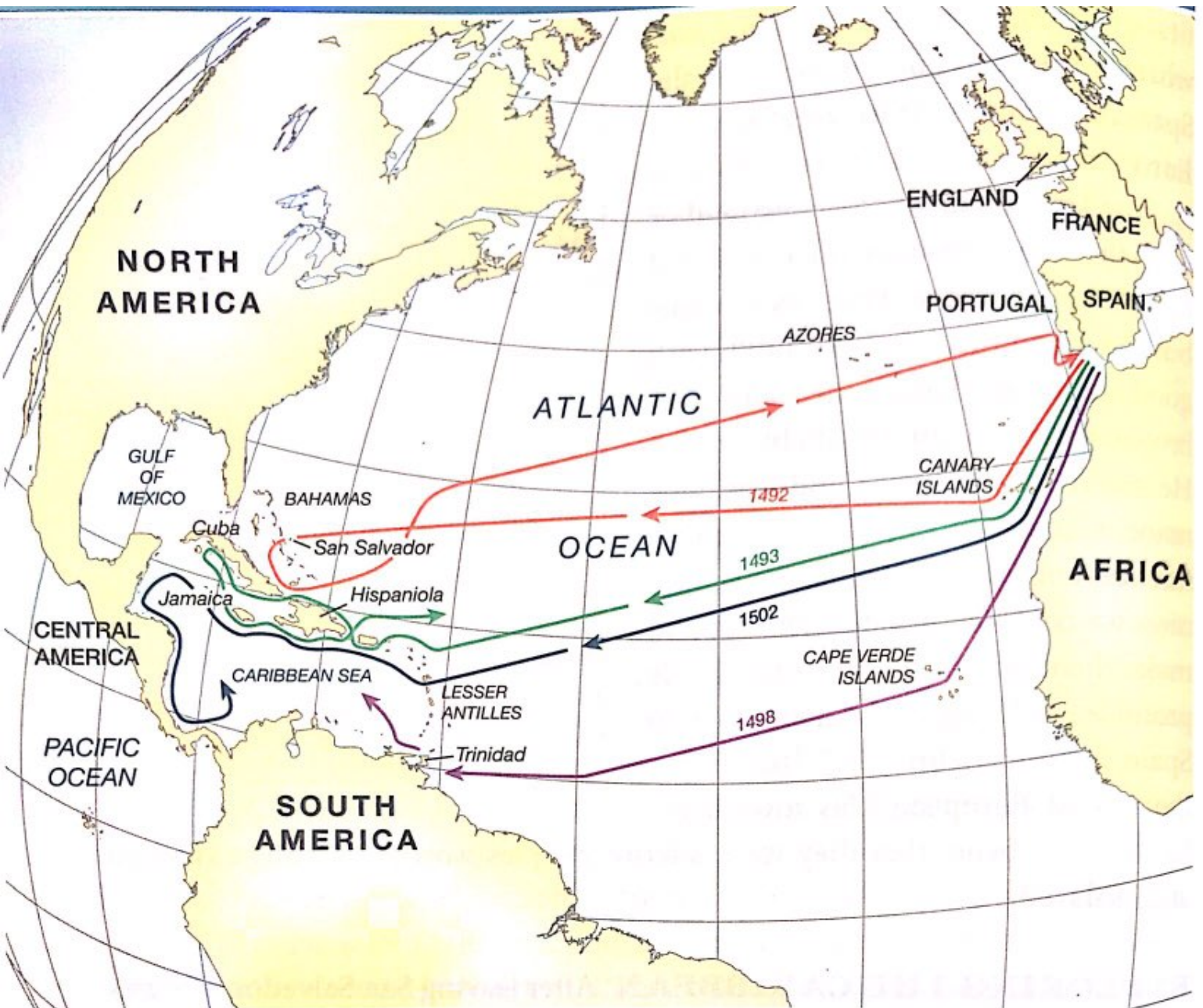


Christopher Columbus A portrait by Sebastiano del Piombo, ca. 1519.

EXPLORING THE CARIBBEAN After leaving San Salvador, Columbus, excited by native stories of “rivers of gold” to the west, landed on the north shore of Cuba. He went ashore, sword in one hand, cross in the other, exclaiming that it was the “most beautiful land human eyes have ever beheld.”

After a few weeks, Columbus sailed eastward to the island he named Hispaniola (“the Spanish island”), present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic. He described the island’s Indians as the “best people in the world,” full “of love and without greed.” They had no weapons, wore no clothes, and led a simple life, cultivating cassava plants to make bread but spending most of their time relaxing, “seemingly without a care in the world.”

Columbus, however, had no interest in simple living. He decided that the Indians were “fitted to be ruled and be set to work” generating riches for Spain. To that end, he decreed that those over age fourteen must bring him at least a thimbleful of gold dust every three months. As it turned out, the quota was often unattainable—there was not as much gold in the Caribbean as Columbus imagined. Nevertheless, those who failed to supply enough gold had their hands cut off, causing many of them to bleed to death. If they fled,



- How many voyages did Columbus make to the Americas?
- What is the origin of the name for the Caribbean Sea?
- What happened to the colony that Columbus left on Hispaniola in 1493?

Thanks to the newly invented printing press, news of Columbus's path-breaking voyage spread rapidly across Europe and helped spur a restless desire to explore the world. The Spanish monarchs told Columbus to prepare for a second voyage, instructing him to "treat the Indians very well and lovingly and abstain from doing them any injury." Columbus and his men would repeatedly defy this order.

Spain worked quickly to secure its legal claim to the Western Hemisphere. With the help of the Spanish-born pope, Alexander VI, Spain and Portugal signed the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494). With the stroke of a pen, it divided the non-Christian world, giving most of the Western Hemisphere to Spain, with Africa and what would become Brazil granted to Portugal. In practice, this meant that while Spain developed its American empire in the sixteenth century, Portugal provided it with most of its enslaved African laborers.

In 1493, Columbus returned to the New World, crossing the Atlantic with seventeen ships and 1,400 sailors, soldiers, and settlers—all men. Also on board were Catholic priests eager to convert the native peoples to Christianity. Upon his arrival back in Hispaniola, Columbus discovered that the forty men he had left behind had lost their senses, raping women, robbing villages, and, as his son later added, "committing a thousand excesses for which they were mortally hated by the Indians."

NAMING AMERICA Columbus proved to be a much better ship captain than a colonizer and a governor. His first business venture in the New World was as a slave trader. When he returned to Spain from his second voyage with hundreds of captive Indians, Queen Isabella, who detested slavery, was horrified. "Who is this Columbus who dares to give out my vassals [Indians] as slaves?"

This incident set in motion a series of investigations into Columbus's behavior. The queen sent a Spanish royal commissioner, Francis Bobadilla, to Hispaniola. The first things he saw were the corpses of six Spanish settlers hanging from a gallows; more colonists were to be hanged the next day. Bobadilla was so shocked that he canceled the executions and announced that he was supplanting Columbus as governor. When Columbus objected, Bobadilla had him jailed for two months before shipping the explorer, now nearly blind and crippled by arthritis, back to Spain in chains in 1500.

To the end of his life, in 1506, Columbus insisted that he had discovered the outlying parts of Asia. By one of history's greatest ironies, this led Europeans to name the New World not for Columbus but for another Italian sailor-explorer, Amerigo Vespucci.

In 1499, with the support of Portugal's monarchy, Vespucci sailed across the Atlantic, landing first at Brazil and then sailing along 3,000 miles of the

South American coastline in search of a passage to Asia. In the end, Vespucci decided that South America was so large and so densely populated that it must be a *new* continent. In 1507, a German mapmaker paid tribute to Vespucci's navigational skills by labeling the New World using the feminine Latin variant of the explorer's first name: America.

PROFESSIONAL EXPLORERS News of the remarkable voyages of Columbus and Vespucci stimulated other expeditions. The first explorer to sight the North American continent was John Cabot, an Italian sponsored by King Henry VII of England. Cabot's landfall in 1497 at what the king called "the new founde lande," in present-day Canada, gave England the basis for a later claim to *all* of North America. On a return voyage, however, Cabot and his four ships disappeared. Their grim fate as well as the English monarchy's preoccupation with religious strife, suppressing a massive rebellion by Irish Catholics, and conducting a war with France prevented it from following up on Cabot's discoveries for one hundred years.

The English were unaware that Norsemen ("Vikings") from Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, Sweden) had in fact been the first Europeans to "discover" and colonize areas of North America. As early as the tenth century, Norsemen had landed on the rocky, fogbound shore of Greenland, a huge island off the northeast coast of North America. They established farming settlements that were active for hundreds of years until prolonged cold weather forced them back to Scandinavia.

RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN EUROPE

While explorers were crossing the Atlantic, powerful religious conflicts were tearing Europe apart in ways that would shape developments in the Western Hemisphere. When Columbus sailed west in 1492, all of Europe acknowledged the thousand-year-old supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church.