

Creating America

Chapter 1: The World in 1500, Beginnings to 1500

Section 1: Crossing to the Americas

Main Idea: Ancient peoples came from Asia to the Americas and over time developed complex civilizations. There are two theories about how the first Americans migrated, or moved, to the Americas from Asia. One theory is that ancient people came during the last Ice Age some 12,000 years ago. They crossed the Bering Strait—a land bridge between Asia and Alaska that is now covered by water. A second theory is that humans came by many routes over thousands of years.

The first Americans lived in hunting and gathering cultures. Some cultures became civilizations. A civilization has five features. First, it has cities with trade centers; second, there are specialized jobs; third there is organized government and religion; fourth—a system of record keeping; and fifth people use advanced tools.

Two advanced civilizations in early Mesoamerica were the Olmec and the Maya. The Mayans had cities in southern Mexico and Guatemala. They kept accurate calendars, they created a number system, and they had a written language. Other early civilizations include the Hohokam in what is now Arizona, and the Anasazi, who settled in the area where Utah, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico meet. Some early Native Americans built large earthen mounds. These groups include the Adena and the Hopewell. The last group of Mound Builders, the Mississippians, built some of the first cities in North America.

Section 2: Societies of North America

Main Idea: By 1500, a variety of Native American groups—each with a distinct culture—lived in North America.

The environment shaped each of the Native American cultures. The Aleut and the Inuit lived in the far North. They hunted sea mammals and caribou. Northwest Coast people caught salmon and hunted. The peoples of the West included tribes in California, the Columbia Plateau, and the Great Basin. They were hunters and gatherers, and they also fished. Their spiritual beliefs were linked to nature.

The Aztecs ruled a great civilization in central Mexico. In 1325, they began building their capital city, Tenochtitlán. They eventually created a strong empire. In the American Southwest, the Pueblo practiced irrigation, while the Navajo and the Apache were hunter-gatherers. The Plains Indians lived on the Great Plains. Some were nomads. Others lived in villages. In summer, they hunted buffalo. In the Southeast, Native Americans became farmers. Their societies were matrilineal, tracing their family ties through women. The Iroquois lived in the Northeast, which was largely forest. They practiced slash-and burn agriculture. In the late 1500s, five northern Iroquois nations formed the Iroquois League. By 1500, hundreds of Native American groups existed. Although different, all Native American groups felt connected to nature. Trade also linked them.

Section 3: Early European Explorers

Main Idea: As Europeans searched for sea routes to Asia, Christopher Columbus reached the Americas.

An Italian sailor, Christopher Columbus, thought he knew a faster way to Asia. Columbus asked Spain's rulers, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, to pay for his voyage. They wanted to share in the rich Asian trade. Queen Isabella also wanted to spread Christianity. In 1492, they agreed to his request. Columbus began his voyage in August of 1492. His three ships sailed southwest toward the Canary Islands. By October 10th, the crew lost confidence in Columbus. To avoid mutiny, Columbus agreed to turn back if they did not sight land within three days. On October 12, they sighted land. The ships landed on a Caribbean island. Columbus thought he had reached the Indies—lands in Southeast Asia. He called the islanders Indians. Columbus named the island San Salvador. Believing he had found an all-water route to Asia, Columbus sailed back to Spain.

Columbus made three more voyages to the Americas. He neither brought back treasure nor spread Christianity. Instead, he enslaved the people of Hispaniola. After his fourth voyage, Spain's rulers refused to help him further. The voyages of Columbus changed European views of the world. People realized that Columbus had reached continents not known to them before. They began to see the Atlantic Ocean as a bridge that linked Europe, Africa, and the Americas.