

SECTION
1

Peopling the Americas

MAIN IDEA

In ancient times, migrating peoples settled the Americas, where their descendants developed complex societies.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Patterns of immigration have always shaped and continue to shape American history.

Terms & Names

- nomadic
- Olmec
- Maya
- Aztec
- Inca
- Hohokam
- Anasazi
- Adena
- Hopewell
- Mississippian

One American's Story

Thomas Canby, a writer for *National Geographic* magazine, spent a year with archaeologists as they searched for clues about the earliest Americans. As Canby watched the archaeologists unearthing fragile artifacts, a long-lost world came into sharper focus.

A PERSONAL VOICE THOMAS CANBY

“What a wild world it was! To see it properly, we must board a time machine and travel back into the Ice Age. The northern half of North America has vanished, buried beneath ice sheets two miles thick. Stretching south to Kentucky, they buckle earth’s crust with their weight. . . . Animals grow oversize. . . . Elephant-eating jaguars stand as tall as lions, beavers grow as big as bears, South American sloths as tall as giraffes. With arctic cold pushing so far southward, walrus bask on Virginia beaches, and musk-oxen graze from Maryland to California.”

—“The Search for the First Americans,” *National Geographic*, Sept. 1979



▲ Modern depiction of early Americans hunting the woolly mammoth around 20,000 B.C.

This was the world of the first Americans—people who migrated to the Americas from another continent. Centuries later, a different kind of immigration to the Americas would bring together people from three complex societies: the Native American, the European, and the West African. The interaction of these three cultures helped create the present-day culture of the United States. However, it is with the ancient peoples of the Americas that the story of America actually begins.

Ancient Peoples Come to the Americas

The first Americans may have arrived as early as 22,000 years ago. Ice Age glaciers had frozen vast quantities of the earth’s water, lowering sea levels enough to expose a land bridge between Asia and Alaska. Ancient hunters trekked across the frozen land, now called Beringia, into North America.



HUNTING AND GATHERING Experts suspect that most of these ancient explorers came by foot. Some groups may have edged down the Pacific coast in boats fashioned from the bones and hides of animals—boats that are much like the kayaks used by modern-day Inuit.

The evidence suggests that the earliest Americans were big-game hunters. Their most challenging and rewarding prey was the woolly mammoth, which provided food, clothing, and bones for making shelters and tools.

As the Ice Age ended around 12,000 to 10,000 years ago, this hunting way of life also ended. Temperatures warmed, glaciers melted, and sea levels rose once again. Travel to the Americas by foot ceased as the ancient land bridge disappeared below the Bering Sea.

Over time, people switched to hunting smaller game, fishing, and gathering nuts, berries, and fruit along with grains, beans, and squash. While many ancient groups established settlements in North America, others continued south through what is now Mexico into South America. Wherever they went, the first Americans developed ways of life to suit their surroundings.

AGRICULTURE DEVELOPS Between 10,000 and 5,000 years ago, a revolution quietly took place in what is now central Mexico. There, people began to plant crops. Some archaeologists believe that maize (corn) was the first plant that ancient Americans developed for human use. Other plants followed—gourds, pumpkins, peppers, beans, and more. Eventually, agricultural techniques spread throughout the Americas.

The introduction of agriculture brought tremendous change. Agriculture made it possible for people to remain in one place and to store surplus food. As their surplus increased, people had more time to develop other skills. From this agricultural base evolved larger, more stable societies and increasingly complex cultures. However, some Native American cultures never adopted agriculture and remained **nomadic**, moving from place to place in search of food and water, while others mixed nomadic and non-nomadic lifestyles. **A**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Effects

A What were the effects of agriculture on the hunting and gathering peoples of the Americas?



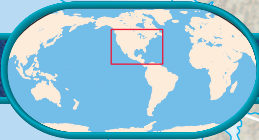
▲ Hunters roaming over 10,000 years ago in what is now southern Arizona may have used this large spearhead to kill a woolly mammoth.

Complex Societies Flourish in the Americas

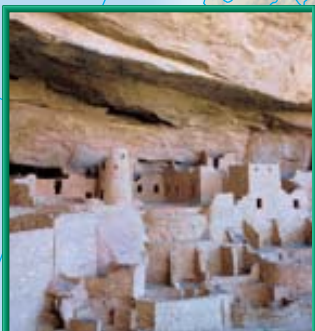
Around 3,000 years ago, the first Americans began to form larger communities and build flourishing civilizations. A closer look at the more prominent of these societies reveals the diversity and complexity of the early American world.

Today, Alaska and Siberia are separated by the Bering Strait, a strip of sea only 55 miles wide. During the last Ice Age, glaciers moved south from the North Pole, freezing up the waters of the Bering Sea and exposing more land. This formed the Beringia land bridge, over which the earliest Americans probably migrated from Asia.





Early North American Cultures



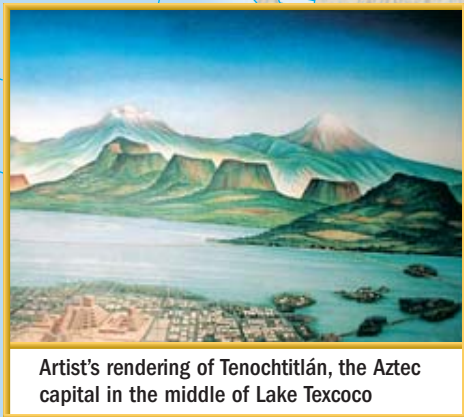
The 200-room Cliff Palace in Colorado, an Anasazi pueblo, or cliff dwelling



The Great Serpent Mound, a giant effigy mound of the Adena culture



Cahokia, a center of the Mississippian culture, as it might have looked around 1150



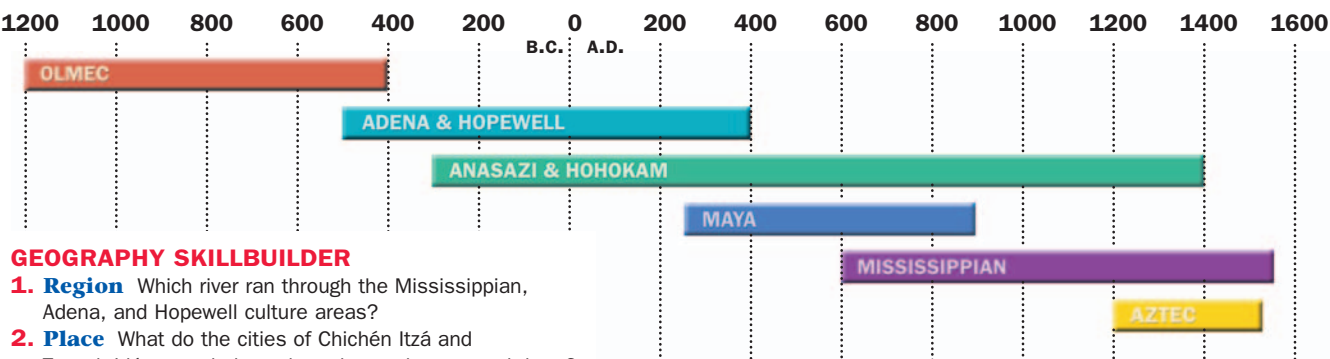
Artist's rendering of Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital in the middle of Lake Texcoco



One of the massive sculptures created by Olmec peoples



The astronomical observatory in the Mayan city of Chichén Itzá

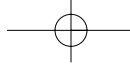


GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

- Region** Which river ran through the Mississippian, Adena, and Hopewell culture areas?
- Place** What do the cities of Chichén Itzá and Tenochtitlán reveal about the cultures that created them?

EMPIRES OF MIDDLE AND SOUTH AMERICA Archaeologists believe that the first empire of the Americas emerged as early as 1200 B.C. in what is now southern Mexico. There the **Olmec** peoples created a thriving civilization in the humid rain forest along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Other civilizations appeared in the wake of the Olmec's mysterious collapse around 400 B.C. These included the **Maya**, who built a dynamic culture in Guatemala and the Yucatán Peninsula between A.D. 250 and 900, and the **Aztec**, who swept into the Valley of Mexico in the 1200s.

In South America the most prominent of these empire builders were the **Inca**, who around A.D. 1200 created a glittering empire that stretched nearly 2,500 miles along the mountainous western coast of South America.



MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

B What were some of the achievements of the early civilizations of the Americas?

These empires' achievements rivaled those of ancient cultures in other parts of the world. The peoples of these American empires built great cities and ceremonial centers, some with huge palaces, temple-topped pyramids, and central plazas. To record their histories, some of these civilizations invented forms of glyph writing—using symbols or images to express words and ideas. **B**

ANCIENT DESERT FARMERS As early as 3,000 years ago, several North American groups, including the **Hohokam** and the **Anasazi**, introduced crops into the arid deserts of the Southwest. Later, between 300 B.C. and A.D. 1400, each group established its own civilization. The Hohokam settled in the valleys of the Salt and Gila rivers in what is now central Arizona. The Anasazi took to the mesa tops, cliff sides, and canyon bottoms of the Four Corners region—an area where the present-day states of Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico meet.

MOUND BUILDERS To the east of the Mississippi River, in a region extending from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, another series of complex societies developed. There the **Adena**, the **Hopewell**, and the **Mississippian** societies excelled at trade and at building. Some Adena and Hopewell structures consisted of huge burial mounds filled with finely crafted objects. Other mounds were sculpted into effigies, or likenesses, of animals so large that they can be seen clearly only from the air. People of the Mississippian culture constructed gigantic pyramidal mounds.

Although societies such as the Mississippian and the Aztec still flourished when Christopher Columbus reached American shores in 1492, others had long since disappeared. Despite their fate, these early peoples were the ancestors of the many Native American groups that inhabited North America on the eve of its encounter with the European world.

HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

THE "OTHER" PYRAMIDS

The stone pyramids of Egypt, which were used as elaborate tombs for Egyptian kings more than 4,000 years ago, are some of today's most famous structures. However, they were not the only pyramids to tower over the ancient world.

On the American side of the Atlantic, the Maya built giant flat-topped pyramids with stairs leading to rooftop temples, where Mayan priests performed religious ceremonies.

Farther north, at Cahokia, in what is now Illinois, people of the Mississippian culture constructed more than 100 massive earthen mounds. The mounds served as tombs, temples, and foundations for elaborate homes. The largest of these mounds is Monk's Mound, which is 100 feet high and covers about 16 acres at its base.



ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- nomadic
- Aztec
- Anasazi
- Hopewell
- Olmec
- Inca
- Adena
- Mississippian
- Maya
- Hohokam

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

In a chart like the one below, list the early civilizations of the Americas. Include the approximate dates they flourished and their locations.

Civilization	Dates	Location

What are some similarities that you have noticed among these early civilizations?

CRITICAL THINKING

3. ANALYZING

How did the development of agriculture affect ancient societies in the Americas?

4. EVALUATING

Evaluate the achievements of the ancient cultures of the Americas. Which single accomplishment do you find most remarkable and why?

5. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Which ancient American empire do you think was most advanced? Support your choice with details from the text. **Think About:**

- the cultural achievements of each empire
- the characteristics of modern civilizations