

The Earliest Americans – Outline

I. Paleo-Indians

- a. Paleo-Indians
 - i. *Paleo* from *palaios* (“ancient” in Greek)
 - ii. *Indians* from Columbus’ mistake
- b. Beringia
 - i. Ice sheet across the Bering Strait that connected what’s now Russia (Siberia) and Alaska
 - ii. Paleo-Indians crossed Beringia circa 12,000 years ago
 - iii. Spread quickly throughout the Americas
- c. Anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians look at artifacts, blood types, genes (DNA), and languages

II. Clovis people

- a. Identified by their style of spear point
- b. Plentiful circa 11,500 years ago
- c. Hunter-gatherers – mammoth, mastodon, etc.
- d. Circa 11,000 years ago – large animals became extinct
 - i. Unknown if extinctions caused by climate change, natural causes, or over-hunting
- e. Clovis culture disappeared with big game

III. Cultural change

- a. Post-Clovis artifacts reveal hooks for fishing and spear points for killing smaller game
- b. Farming culture developed
- c. Domestication of plants
 - i. Circa 5,000 years ago – maize (corn) cultivated in Mexico
 - ii. Stable food supply

IV. Civilization

- a. Stable food supply = permanent settlements
- b. Excess food supply = job specialization
 - i. Builders, leaders, organizers, potters, weavers, etc.
- c. Civilization
 - i. Complex culture, centered around cities, with people working at specialized occupations who operate under complex government

V. The Olmec

- a. Developed circa 1500 BCE along the Gulf of Mexico
- b. Mesoamerican civilizations' "mother culture"
- c. Earthen temple mounds
- d. Earliest American written language
- e. Cultural diffusion through trade

VI. The Maya

- a. Developed in modern-day Guatemala
- b. Civilization but not an empire – each religious center (city) independent
- c. Achievements
 - i. Knowledge of astronomy – developed a calendar
 - ii. Mathematics – invented a symbol for zero
 - iii. Religiously significant rubber ball game with stone-walled playing courts
- d. Declined circa 900 CE but culture survived throughout Central America and Yucatan

VII. Review questions

- a. How and when did Paleo-Indians first arrive in the Americas?
- b. What tools and evidence do historians use to understand the past in the absence of written records?
- c. Who were the Clovis people?
- d. When and where was maize (corn) first cultivated?
- e. How does agriculture lead to civilization?
- f. What did the Olmec contribute to civilization?
- g. What did the Maya contribute to civilization?

VIII. Teotihuacan

- a. Built circa 300 CE in the Valley of Mexico
 - i. Planned city was one of the world's largest
 - ii. Neighborhoods arranged by societal role, etc.
- b. Political and religious structure
 - i. Priest-rulers
 - ii. Numerous gods, such as Quetzalcoatl
 - iii. Sacrifices of agricultural products, animals, and humans
- c. 750 CE – city ended violently

IX. Aztecs

- a. Invaders from what is now northern Mexico
- b. Circa 1325 – settled on Lake Texcoco
- c. Aztec empire covered most of what is now central Mexico
- d. 1450 – period of drought and famine brought on massive amounts of human sacrifice

- e. By 1500 – recovery with population of approximately 250,000 – world’s most populous city

X. Hohokam

- a. Located in the southwestern American desert
- b. Irrigation – dams collected water and canals carried water to crops
- c. Agriculture – “Three Sisters” – beans, corn, and squash
- d. Declined circa 1300

XI. Anasazi

- a. Located on the Colorado plateau
- b. Practiced irrigation farming alongside hunting and gathering
- c. Towns built into sides of canyons
 - i. Pueblo Bonito in what is now Chaco Canyon, New Mexico – trading center
- d. Declined circa 1300

XII. Hopewell

- a. Located in North American Eastern Woodlands
- b. Circa 500 BCE-700 CE – Hopewell culture in Ohio Valley
- c. Mound-builders – leaders buried in large earthen mounds
- d. Circa 700 CE – large defensive earthworks last evidence of this culture

XIII. Mississippian culture

- a. Developed in Mississippi Valley and southeast portion of what is now the United States, along flood plains
- b. Distinctive feature – flat-topped mounds
- c. Cahokia
 - i. Located in modern-day western Illinois
 - ii. Over 100 mounds
 - iii. Population approximately 30,000
- d. Remnants of Mississippian culture survived to 1700

XIV. Review questions

- a. What was Teotihuacan and how did it operate?
- b. Describe the world’s most populous city in 1500 and the people who lived there.
- c. What were the “Three Sisters”?
- d. Describe the towns of the Anasazi.
- e. Where was the Hopewell culture located?
- f. Describe Cahokia and the people who lived there.
- g. Based on your knowledge of Native American cultures, what causes cultures and civilizations to rise and fall? Explain.