

McCLANAHAN  
ACADEMY



# United States History to 1865

Presentation 2: Pre-Columbian America

## Chronology

- ✓ ca. 33,000-8,000 B.C: First human migrations into the Americas.
- ✓ ca. 5000-1000 B.C.: Agriculture established in the Americas.
- ✓ ca. 1000 B.C.-1500 A.D.: Metal working, advanced irrigation systems, and large settlements in South, Central, and North America.
- ✓ ca. 500-1550 A.D.: Advanced civilizations in the Americas including the Moche, Nazca, Mayan, Toltec, Aztec, Inca, Olmec, and Mississippian peoples.
- ✓ ca. 1000 A.D.: Norwegian Viking explorers discover North America and establish a short lived colony in modern Newfoundland.



# First Peoples

- Who were the first peoples in the Americas and how did they get here?
- Clovis peoples:
  - Clovis culture named for the first discovery in New Mexico in the 1930s.
  - Also known as the “paleo-Indians” or “old Indians.”
  - Possibly crossed Beringia and then moved south between two large ice sheets in modern Canada; perhaps they also used boats to skirt the coast where they used now underwater caves as settlement areas.
  - The most common interpretation; Asiatic origins and Kennewick Man?



- Who were the first peoples in the Americas and how did they get here?
- Pre-Clovis peoples:
  - Archeological digs in South America and on the East Coast of the United States provide evidence that there were earlier settlements than those on the West Coast or in the Western United States.
  - Solutrean hypothesis: Peoples from Europe and Western Asia, not East Asia, arrived first and then were wiped out by a mass extinction event. (Dennis J. Stanford at the Smithsonian)
  - Fluid but contentious interpretation of early America; political connotations.



- Clovis and Pre-Clovis Culture:
  - Hunters and gatherers; stone tools and weapons.
  - No large settlements, art, or any other non-tool related evidence.
  - Use of bifacial, fluted weapons and tools with distinctive flaking. (Flintknapping)
    - Found in Europe first.
  - Atlatl: spear throwing device designed to give more force and speed to the projectile.
    - Found in Europe first.
  - War Before Civilization: brutal, violent conditions and the struggle for life.



# Clovis Points



# Atlatl





# American Indian Empires

- Between 5000-1000 B.C., the American Indian tribes began engaging in agriculture; this generally coincided with the growth in agriculture in the Middle East, though a bit later (6000-5000 B.C. in Mesopotamia and Egypt).
- The growth in agriculture allowed for the establishment of stable and permanent American Indian empires in the Americas, generally in South and Central America between 1000-1 B.C. and later in North America.
- These civilizations also begin to engage in metallurgy and complex construction, including pyramids in South and Central America and later temple mounds in North America.
- The major American Indian empires were comparable to Bronze Age cultures in the Old World in terms of technology, art, and construction.



# American Indian Empires

- South America:
  - Moche, Nazca, and Incan Empire
    - Violent consolidation of tribes leading to the Incan Empire in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.
  - Modern Peru and northern South America.
  - Wide trade and elaborate construction in the Andean Mountains and coastal deserts; Huaca del Sol and Machu Picchu.
  - Terrace farming, irrigation, and fishing.
  - Mummification, medicine, and human sacrifice; polytheistic religion.
  - Nazca lines and Moche artwork; textiles.



# American Indian Empires

- Central America:
  - Olmec, Mayan, Toltec, and Aztec Empire
    - Like the Inca, the Aztec Empire violently forced consolidation of other Central American tribes into a wealthy empire by the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.
    - Modern Mexico.
    - The Mayan and Aztec Empires both featured elaborate construction (temples, pyramids, etc.) with the Aztec building a floating city, Tenochtitlan, the capital of their empire.
    - Farming and mining—the gold and jewels of the Meso-American empires.
    - Human sacrifice, warfare, slavery, and polytheism.
    - Pottery, textiles, and frescos.
    - The Olmec conspiracy theory of James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*



# American Indian Empires

- Mississippian Peoples:
  - Pre-Columbian Indian settlements in the Mississippi River and Ohio River valleys; eventually led to the tribes that comprised the core group of Northern/Great Lakes/Southeastern tribes.
  - Culture reached its zenith between the 12<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.
  - Mound builders—burial, temple, spiritual; Cahokia in modern Missouri and Etzanoa in modern Arkansas; Moundville, AL and Kolomoki, GA (very early mound building site).
  - Agriculture (primarily corn), hunters, with violent tendencies; slash and burn farming and clear cutting.
  - Human sacrifice (mass grave of over 50 sacrificed women at Cahokia) and polytheism—serpent mound in Ohio.
  - Pottery



- Did the Vikings explore and settle in North America?
- Leif Erikson (son of Eric the Red) and the 1000 A.D. Viking expedition.
  - Vinland (Newfoundland)
  - L'Anse aux Meadows (probable ship repair station) on the Northern tip of Newfoundland.
  - Perhaps other settlements around the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Straumfjord) and perhaps further South (maybe Virginia) called Hop.
  - These Europeans probably came in contact with the American Indian tribes but no mention is made in the Viking sagas—Eric the Red does mention a density of birds near Straumfjord.



- Neither the paleo-Indians nor their descendants in the Americas were peaceful communists with modern views of environmentalism.
- Violence dominated the earliest cultures in the Americas, be it warfare or human sacrifice.
- The Americas developed later than Old World societies—agriculture, construction, metal working, etc. None were an iron age culture or approached the technology of Europeans in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- Europeans were in North America at least in 1000 A.D., but perhaps earlier if the Solutrean hypothesis is correct.



McCLANAHAN  
ACADEMY



Thank You