

America: A Nation of Stories An Introductio to Early America

American Culture and Literature I week 2

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Early Migration to the Americas

- Archaeologists have unearthed remains pointing to the arrival of humans in America at about 35,000 B.C.
- Scientists generally agree that the first inhabitants of the Americas were nomadic travelers from Siberia.
- These peoples traversed an ancient land bridge which connected northeast Asia with Alaska.



Migration Routes from Asia to the Americas

The red arrows indicate the general flow of migrating societies over thousands of years before Europeans reached the Americas. Based on fragile archaeological evidence, these migratory patterns are necessarily tentative, and new discoveries support the theory of early Stone Age arrivals by boat. Reflecting on the Past Can you reconcile Native American creation myths with archaeological evidence of the first humans reaching the Americas by crossing the Bering Straits land bridge? If so, how?



Hunters, Farmers, and Environmental Factors

- The first wave of humans found an abundance of *megafauna*: gigantic animals. Changes in environment and over-hunting wiped most out.
- Adaptable humans learned to exploit new sources of food from plants in the *agricultural revolution*.
- Erosion, deforestation, and salinization added to America's environmental stresses over the centuries.

Pre-Columbian Societies of the Americas

Once described as nomadic hunter-gatherers, indigenous peoples in the Americas were agriculturalists and urban dwellers in many areas and populated the land as densely as did people in many other parts of the world.



Mesoamerican Empires

- **Mesoamerica:** the middle region bridging the great land masses of North and South America.
- The Aztec people of present-day Mexico numbered about 20 million in 1492.
- The Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan later became Mexico City.
- Aztec society was divided into four classes: nobility, free commoners, serfs, and slaves.

Expansion of the Aztec Empire, 1427–1519

In the century before Europeans breached the Atlantic to find the Americas, the Aztecs' rise to power brought 10 to 20 million people under their sway—more than the entire population of Spain and Portugal at this time.



Regional North American Cultures

- In the southwestern region of North America, Hohokam and Anasazi societies developed established communities thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans (who called them the “Pueblo” people).
- Native peoples of the Pacific Northwest formed societies emphasizing fishing, wood craftsmanship and ceremonies such as the *Potlatch*.
- Several societies of *Mound Builders*

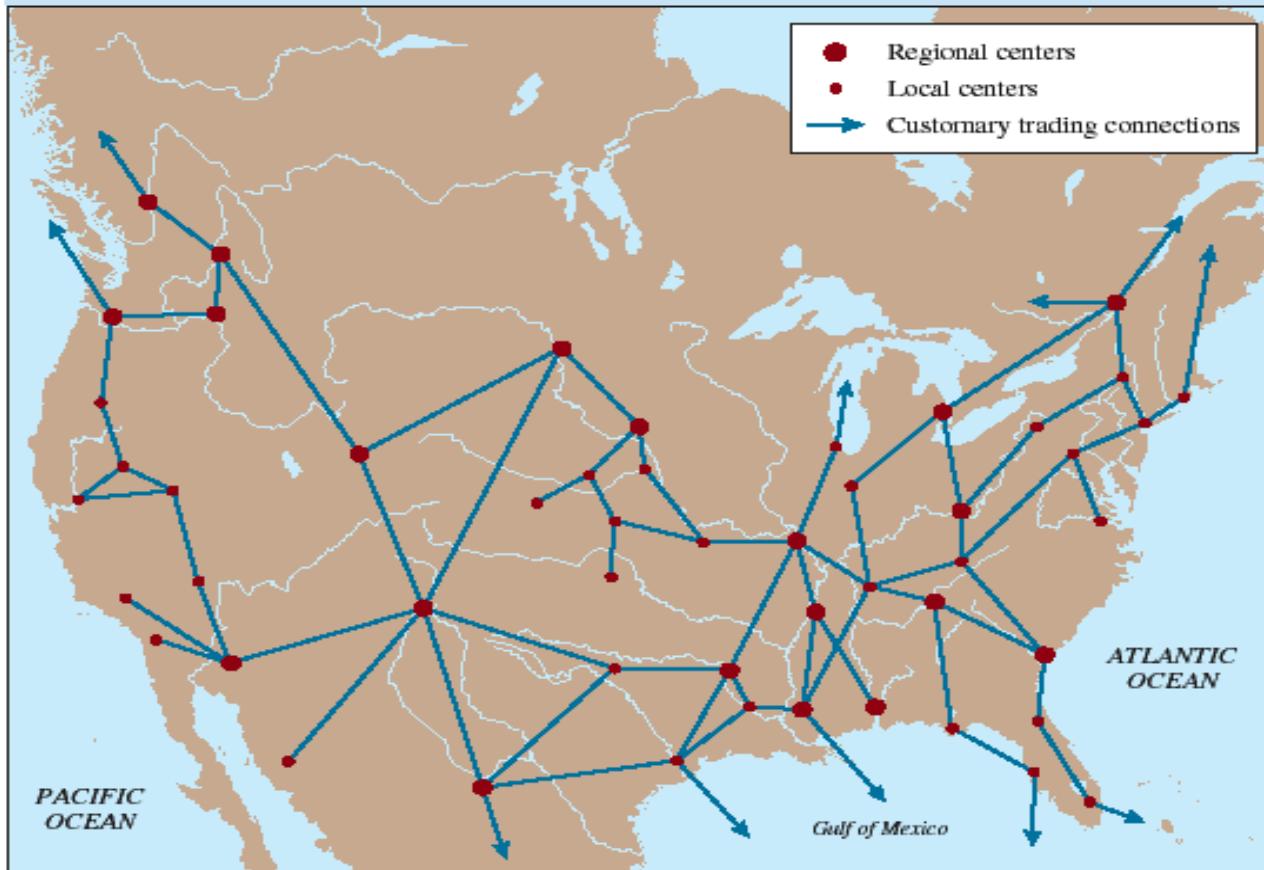
North American Mound-building Cultures

Plows, shovels, and bulldozers have obliterated many of the earthworks created at hundreds of mound-building sites in the eastern half of North America.



Native American Trade Networks in 1400

By recovering objects such as shell necklaces, stone tools, and decorative copper from ancient sites of Indian habitation, and by determining their place of origin, anthropologists have developed this approximate map of Native American trading networks in the century before the arrival of Europeans.



The Iroquois

- **A confederation of five distinct tribes with unified land and goals:**
 - The Mohawk (People of the Flint)
 - The Oneidas (People of the Stone)
 - The Onondagas (People of the Mountain)
 - The Cayuga (People at the Landing)
 - The Seneca (Great Hill People)

Pre-Contact Population

- Recently, scholars have estimated that the pre-contact population of America north of the Rio Grande stood at about 4 million.
- Some estimates put the population of the Western Hemisphere at about 50 to 70 million at the same period.



Indian Population of the Americas in World Context, 1500

Because they are from a time when censuses were rare in most parts of the world, all population figures are estimates. Some demographers believe that 100 million people inhabited the Americas in 1500. New research and lively debate will no doubt alter these figures. **Reflecting on the Past** What is the population today of the areas listed below, and how do you account for differing distribution of the world's population?

China	100–150 million
India	75–150 million
Southwest Asia	20–30 million
Japan and rest of Asia	30–50 million
Europe (including Russia)	70–90 million
Africa	50–70 million
Americas	50–70 million

Indian Population Density in North America, c. 1500

Historical demographers have devised estimates of Native American population density in North America before the arrival of Europeans. Estimates are based on the "carrying capacity" of different ecological regions: rainfall, access to fish and animals, soil fertility, and length of growing season are all factors in the capacity of the land to support human life.



Contrasting Worldviews

- The stark differences in European and American cultures stemmed from perceptions of social relationships and interaction with the environment.
- Differences included concepts of property and communal ownership of goods and food sources.