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History of america before columbus

Before Columbus' time, there were many interesting old books about people settling down in America. You might have heard of the "White Indians". Actually, white people had already been living there for thousands of years. The Solutreans arrived 33,000 years ago from SW France and NE Spain, and are probably the ancestors of the Celts and Tuatha de Danann who later returned to Europe after the biblical flood. There are documentaries on YouTube that demonstrate this. Many other groups settled in America before Columbus, including the Greenland Vikings, Irish, Welsh people, Arabs, Romans, Tartarians, Sumerians, Tamil, Japanese, Chinese, Aryans from Persia and India, Phoenicians, Balearics, Galicians, and West Africans. This means that American history needs to be rewritten, as the evidence is obvious and can no longer be hidden. Columbus is often depicted in U.S. histories as landing on an island called Guanahani on October 12, 1492. However, this chapter will show that European contact with the Americas was a complex event, not just a simple story of discovery. Interestingly, by around 1500, the populations of Europe, Africa, and the Americas were quite similar. This demographic parity changed quickly as we will soon see. It is important to understand this because the stories of Columbus remain controversial, and it's crucial that Europe, Africa, and the Americas had populations of similar size before contact. Before humans arrived in the Americas, there was a 12,000-year period since the end of the Ice Age during which Native Americans experienced their own agricultural revolution around the same time as Africans and Eurasians. Instead of domesticating cattle, horses, sheep, goats, pigs, and chickens, they developed certain plants, creating three of the world's current top five staple crops: corn, potatoes, and cassava, as well as additional plants such as hot peppers, tomatoes, beans, cocoa, and tobacco. Ancient Mesoamericans built impressive urban centers after establishing stable food sources. The Mayan civilization thrived in Central America during their "Classic Period" (250-900 CE), with notable achievements in architecture and governance. However, the Mayan society's collapse around 900 CE was initially attributed to internal conflicts among city-states. Recent research employing laser technology has revealed a more interconnected network of cities, debunking this theory. The Maya developed sophisticated agricultural systems, including raised fields and fish-based fertilizers, allowing for high population densities in areas such as the Yucatan Peninsula. Their written language, comprising 800 hieroglyphs, was crucial for recording their complex society's governance and spiritual practices. The Mayan calendar, with its base-20 system and concept of zero, surpassed European astronomy at the time. Notably, the Maya calendar's significance is often misunderstood, as its "end date" of December 21, 2012, merely represented a calendrical reset rather than an apocalypse prediction. Pre-Columbian cultures, such as the Olmecs and Teotihuacanos, demonstrate that many civilizations were at their peaks before European contact. The presence of certain languages in these societies challenges traditional notions of "civilization" and its correlation with technological advancements. The Aztecs built Tenochtitlan on an island in Lake Texcoco, connected to the lakeshore by causeways. To feed their large population, they used chinampas - floating platforms with raised planting-beds that controlled soil fertility and watering. The Aztecs also created a dike to separate fresh water from brackish lake water, bringing aqueduct water from springs on the hills overlooking the lake. In comparison, other civilizations like the Chinese intensive rice farmers and the Incas developed similar farming techniques. For example, the Inca terraced farms around Lake Titicaca in Bolivia covered thousands of square miles. The Andean cities like Cusco were built with walled terraces and guano from coastal islands was carried via well-built roads to fertilize the farms. These native cities have been hidden by rainforested trees, but structures like Machu Picchu provide a glimpse into their organization and architecture. Complex societies in the Americas included Aztecs, Maya, Incas, and others who built ceremonial cities, irrigation systems, and traded goods. When European colonizers arrived in South America, they encountered various native groups who built impressive structures using massive tree trunks instead of stone. Unfortunately, these architectural marvels did not survive the Spanish conquest. The Musca civilization didn't have a written language like some other pre-Columbian cultures but preserved their spiritual practices centered on ancestor reverence and the sacred status of their rulers. An annual ceremony, where the Musca king would powder himself in gold dust before diving into a ceremonial lake near present-day Bogotá, is believed to be the origin of the legendary figure of El Dorado, which fueled Spanish explorers' quests for a city of gold. Native agricultural systems in North America were incredibly sophisticated. Indigenous peoples in various regions established complex societies based on crops like corn, wild rice, and squash, as well as managing their environment to ensure game animal populations thrived. The traditional Thanksgiving feast in the US and Canada celebrates these native foods, including turkey. Along major rivers such as the Mississippi, indigenous people lived mostly in villages but occasionally formed larger settlements with earthen mounds similar to those found at Cahokia. The Algonquian and Iroquois tribes were semi-sedentary, inhabiting what is now upstate New York and southern Quebec and Ontario. By the time of European contact, the Iroquois had established a powerful confederacy of five major tribes. The Ojibwa and Dakota were also semi-sedentary, residing in western Great Lakes settlements and on the northern Great Plains' edge. When Europeans arrived, the Dakota dominated the Plains, utilizing buffalo herds for food, clothing, and shelter while gathering wild rice and cultivating corn and squash. Many North American forest-dwellers tamed maple tree sap as a primary source of sugar. The fact that these agricultural advancements and civilization-building occurred in the Americas without being known to Europeans or others is striking. Although it's often claimed that people believed the world was flat until Columbus, some Europeans were uncertain about Earth's size and the existence of American continents and the Pacific Ocean. However, European exploration did not begin with Columbus. Around 1000 CE, five hundred years before the Italian explorer set out to discover a new trade route to Asia for Spain, Norse explorers from Europe and Iceland established a presence on Greenland. This colony lasted four hundred years and served as a base for further exploration and settlement in North America. In fact, Leif Erikson, son of Greenland's leader Erik the Red, began a colony in what is now northern Newfoundland. Scandinavian claims about a North American colony called Vinland were once dismissed as folktales but archaeologists confirmed their validity when they discovered a site at L'Anse aux Meadows dating back to around 1000 CE. The settlement included buildings such as a blacksmith shop and spinning room, suggesting women lived there and wove cloth for their community. The Viking Age map from 1570 highlights key locations visited by Vikings, including Greenland and North America. The Little Ice Age, which began around 1430s, led to harsher winters, cutting short the agricultural season and forcing the abandonment of the Greenland colony in the early 1400s. Without a base in Greenland, the Vikings' attempt to sustain a North American colony faltered. The map identifies Skralinge Land at Newfoundland's latitude, along with Markland (forests) and Helleland (flat stones). A later 1747 map of Greenland features old Viking settlements and a channel believed to have once cut through the island. The text on this map notes that the straits were formerly passable but are now blocked by ice. While textbooks often emphasize European desire for gold and silver, it's essential to consider the fear of famine during the Little Ice Age. Even before Columbus's voyage, Basque fishermen visited the Grand Banks off Newfoundland to catch cod. A 1497 account by Giovanni Caboto described the abundance of cod on North America's coast, allowing Europeans to walk from ship to ship. Historians initially doubted Viking settlement in Vinland due to a lack of evidence. However, European interest in sailing across the Atlantic for cod fishing was driven by several factors. Columbus's promise to find a sea route to Asia appealed to European monarchs like Ferdinand and Isabella, as land-based trade routes became more difficult and expensive. The collapse of the Mongol Empire and the plagues of the fourteenth century increased the perceived danger of overland travel. Columbus failed to interest Portugal in his proposal, as Bartolomeu Dias had already discovered a route around Africa. Spain's unified monarchy under Ferdinand and Isabella created an opportunity for exploration, following their recent victory over Muslims in Granada. The discovery of new lands by Christopher Columbus marked a significant era in exploration and empire building. This new era was facilitated by inventions like the sternpost rudder, compass, gunpowder, and printing press, which originated in China and made their way to Europe through an existing trade network dominated by Arab merchants. The European encounter with the Americas in 1492 led to a globalized economy and cultural exchange. Columbus's voyage sparked widespread excitement and fascination across Europe. Upon his return to Spain, Columbus wrote extensively about his journey, claiming he had reached Asia. However, this document was primarily intended for his royal sponsors, and he hoped to be sent back again. His accounts of Hispaniola, which included descriptions of its fertile land, beautiful harbors, and rivers filled with gold, left a lasting impression on readers. As other European explorers ventured into the Americas, they too were amazed by what they discovered. Traveler's accounts like Amerigo Vespucci's Mundus Novus (1504) helped spread knowledge about the New World, emphasizing that these lands were not part of Asia but rather a previously unknown continent. These early explorers brought back eyewitness accounts, native plants and animals, and captive people, paving the way for further exploration and colonization. In the centuries that followed, European settlers introduced a wide range of species from their home continents to the Americas. The Spanish, in particular, played a significant role in this process, introducing crops like sugar cane, coffee, bananas, and cattle to the New World. Many of these species would go on to transform the cultures and ecosystems of the Americas. The Americas had few large mammal species that could be domesticated, whereas the majority of domesticated animals, such as goats, sheep, cows, horses, pigs, and chickens, originated in Europe and Asia. The Spanish and Portuguese dominated the early stages of this process, which would have far-reaching impacts on the environment and indigenous populations. Of exploration, colonization, and conquest in the Americas, Spain and Portugal had several motivations. They were driven by centuries-old military traditions stemming from their fight against the Moors. Portugal's maritime heritage played a key role, as it was through this trade that Christopher Columbus gained experience. However, both countries also possessed papal charters. The 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas granted vast territories to each nation: Spain received everything west of the 47th parallel, while Portugal got everything east. This distribution was influenced by Pope Alexander VI's interests and connections with Spanish power. As European powers, Spain and Portugal sought new lands for colonization. Columbus' voyage is an excellent example of this endeavor. The Pope granted little territory to other European kingdoms. Corruption within the Vatican contributed to these events. As a result, reformers like Martin Luther developed further into the Protestant Reformation. The transfer of plants, animals, and diseases between Europe and America led to significant changes in the modern world. The Columbian Exchange refers to this biological exchange that started after 1492. It had far-reaching effects on environments and populations alike. European food sources such as maize, potatoes, and cassava supported growing populations worldwide. Meanwhile, domesticated animals were well-suited for life in America. Given text: paraphrase this text: inherited immunity is called a virgin soil epidemic. Such epidemics had happened in Eurasia, when the Romans spread smallpox into the populations they conquered, and in Europe when the expanding Mongols introduced bubonic plague, the Black Death that killed probably half the population of Europe in the fourteenth century, reducing world population by about a hundred million. Virgin soil epidemics spread across the Americas when explorers and colonists introduced Eurasian diseases to Native Americans. The Eurasian diseases that attacked native populations included smallpox, measles, chickenpox, influenza, typhus, cholera, typhoid, diphtheria, bubonic plague, scarlet fever, whooping cough, and malaria. 1540 European depiction of Aztecs suffering from smallpox. The impact of these Eurasian diseases on Native Americans was one of human history's most abrupt and severe population disasters. Even the Black Death did not kill as large a percentage of Europeans, and when diseases recurred in Europe, they generally killed their victims over a much longer time-span due to the inherited immunity of European populations. American native populations had no such safeguards, and disease spread virulently. For example, there were over a million people living on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola in 1492 when Columbus left his 39 sailors in La Navidad. By 1548, there were only 500 natives left alive. 999,500 people had disappeared in a little over 50 years. The populations of other Caribbean islands like Cuba were similarly wiped out. Whole societies disappeared, and this was not only a tragedy for the cultures that vanished. The reduction of native populations began a cycle of violence that became central to the history of the Americas. Once there were no natives left to work on European sugar plantations, enslaved Africans—who had a similar acquired immunity as Europeans—were considered crucial to the survival of the West Indies sugar economy. The greater population densities of Central and South America enabled contagious diseases to spread more quickly there. Heavily-traveled roads in central Mexico actually helped spread disease beyond areas that had been reached by Spanish explorers. Cities were wiped out that had never seen a white man. The population of the Aztec heartland dropped from about 25 million on the eve of the Spanish conquest in 1519 to just under 17 million a decade later. One out of every three native people died in just ten years. After another decade the Aztec population was reduced to about 6 million. Three out of four people in the Aztec world disappeared in 20 years. Imagine writing a list of your 10 closest friends and family, and then randomly crossing off seven names. By 1580, the Aztec empire had been hollowed out to less than 2 million people, from a starting point of 25 million. Cross off two more – you're down to one friend. 1524 Spanish map of Mexico City, built on top of Tenochtitlan. The depopulation of the Americas is one of the Earth's most significant population disasters, both in its human toll and in the changes it brought about. Over the years, as you might expect, there has been a lot of controversy about what happened. Critics of Spanish colonialism (many of them Spanish, like the priest Bartolomé de las Casas) have accused Spaniards of atrocities in what has become known as "the Black Legend". To defend themselves, colonialists accused the Aztec and Inca Empires with atrocities of their own. The conquest of the Americas was far more complex than the traditional European accounts often suggest. While conquistadors like Cortés received support from some indigenous rivals, it's essential to consider the perspectives of native populations and their responses to European invasion. The devastating impact of disease on native societies is a critical aspect to examine. A 1550 illustration shows Cortés meeting Moctezuma with Malintzin by his side, highlighting the role of an enslaved Nahuua woman in facilitating communication between the Spanish and Aztecs. Malintzin's actions demonstrate how native peoples contributed to their own conquest, often under pressure or through coercion. The Inca Empire suffered a similar fate, with 90% of its population dying before the arrival of European invaders. The social chaos and weakened state of the empire created opportunities for conquistadors like Pizarro to capture and kill key leaders, ultimately leading to the end of the empire. De Soto's Expedition and its Lasting Impact on North America The territory that De Soto explored now encompasses Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Oklahoma. Upon his arrival, he reported that the region was "thickly settled with large towns." However, due to the devastating effects of diseases brought by De Soto's men, the area had returned to wilderness by the time French explorer La Salle visited in 1670. Unlike De Soto, who saw fortified towns, La Salle encountered vast expanses without a single village. Historians were surprised to discover that the American South was once heavily populated before European colonization. Spanish invaders took advantage of the chaos and military weakness of native societies, introducing diseases they didn't fully understand at the time. In Mexico and Peru, conquistadors formed alliances with indigenous groups who saw them as victors rather than conquerors. The Spaniards quickly seized control of capital cities and inserted themselves into existing governments. They used the encomienda system to reward military service with land grants, maintaining patterns of tribute and labor draft. This system was adapted from Spain's Reconquista, where conquistadors were rewarded for their service. While De Soto's expedition had a lasting impact on North America, it also raises questions about Malintzin's role in collaborating with Cortés. How did regions far from European contact cope? What was life like for the natives? The colonizers used various tools to organize native labor, including forced relocation and enslavement. The New World brought new crops to Europe, such as potatoes and maize, which led to a population boom and helped prevent famines. Many plant species developed by native Americans remain crucial to modern economies, including tomatoes, cacao, and quinine. These discoveries played a significant role in shaping the world we live in today. From Africa and the Americas, where enslaved people cultivated it, crops were sent back to European markets for profit. This led to a surge in cities and new industries in Europe, thanks to cheap food from Native American sources. Without these resources, the Industrial Revolution might not have occurred. The search for gold and silver fueled Spanish exploration of Africa and the Americas. Although they didn't find El Dorado, they did discover significant amounts of gold and silver. Potosí, a Bolivian city in the Andes at 13,420 feet, was a major source of silver, with its population remaining stable since 1660 despite being larger than many European cities. Spanish coins from Potosí and other mines became the international currency for Europe and Asia. Treasure fleets carried silver to China and India every year between 1566 and 1815, while another fleet brought spices and ceramics from Asia to Spain. These goods fueled a global commercial boom that financed European industrialization. In Latin America, most Spanish men were soldiers who took native women as wives or mistresses, leading to a significant mestizo population. This resulted in many children being left without support, with their fathers often refusing to acknowledge paternity. The lack of support for these children was a major issue, and it is argued that Spaniards should have married equal-status partners instead of taking advantage of native women. The legacy of Spanish colonialism continues to shape the economies of Latin America's countries today. The concept of mestizo populations in the Americas has been a subject of study for centuries, with the colonists attempting to categorize various groups into distinct castes in the 1700s. Despite these arbitrary distinctions, many mixed Euro-American populations developed strong ethnic identities over time. A similar process occurred in New France, where French colonizers intermarried with local Indian women, resulting in the creation of a distinct ethno-cultural group called Métis. In Latin America, a complex social caste system was established based on both blood and origin, with peninsulars (Spaniards born in Spain) holding positions of power, followed by criollos (born in the colonies), then mestizos (people of mixed race). Indians were considered lower, but still managed their communities under missionary supervision. The introduction of African slaves led to new designations, such as mulatto and zambo, which often occupied similar roles in the economy and society as mestizos. In contrast, the Portuguese initially ignored Brazil until French Huguenots established a colony near present-day Rio de Janeiro, leading to the establishment of sugar plantations with enslaved African labor. The Spanish colonization of the Americas led to the exploitation of enslaved labor on sugar plantations, with a focus on maintaining "pure blood" and social hierarchy. The four major caste status levels in colonial society were: 1. Criollo: Born to Spanish parents and considered superior. 2. Mestizo: Mixed European and indigenous ancestry. 3. Indio: Of full indigenous descent. 4. Negro: Enslaved Africans. The sugar trade fueled the transatlantic slave trade, perpetuating racial superiority and justifying enslavement of people with darker skin. The Hapsburg dynasty's power struggles led to chaos in leadership, including Charles V's ascension to Holy Roman Emperor and Philip II's rule over Spain, Portugal, and their possessions. Despite financial troubles, Philip II attempted to regain control of the British throne and England, but ultimately suffered defeat at the hands of Elizabeth I and the Spanish Armada was defeated by the British Royal Navy in 1588, marking the beginning of the end of the Spanish Empire's dominance. The world's population grew from 60% of people to 67% between 1500 and 1800. The Mings in China and Mughals in India ruled empires with over 150 million people each, with a strong interest in expanding trade with the West. Asia was highly productive, producing 80% of the world's goods during this period. Although focusing on the Atlantic World, it is essential to remember that China and India dominated global commerce and industry until the mid-1700s. Asian textiles, such as Chinese silks and Indian cotton, were of high quality and low cost, making them widely used worldwide. Even in Spanish colonies, people were required to trade only with their home country. The British were so impressed by Asian textiles that they imposed tariffs to protect their own weavers. Mercantilism was not a primitive economic system that evolved into free market capitalism but rather an attempt to shield European merchants from the already-existing international free market dominated by Asian powers. We set sail on a boat and arrived at a place with no grass. Inland, we found great ice mountains, but the land was flat and rocky all the way to the sea. The country seemed barren. Leif said, "This is Helluland, or the land of flat rocks." We returned to our ship and sailed to another island. This new land was wooded and had white sand beaches that stretched far out. Leif named it Markland, after its forests. We explored this island and found a sweet dew on the grass. It tasted like nothing we had ever had before. We sailed into a certain sound between an island and a cape. At low tide, there were shallow waters where our ship ran aground. But we couldn't wait to explore, so we left the ship and made our way up a river that flowed from a lake. When the tide rose, we took our boat and rowed back to the ship. We carried our belongings into the lake and built cabins. The salmon in the river and lake were plentiful, and it was mild there during the winters. Cattle wouldn't need any food. Leif decided to build a large house. Karlsefni wanted to explore Vinland further. He asked his brother-in-law Thorvald to join him on a journey to Vinland with Leif's ship. They soon had plenty of food, as a large whale washed up on the shore. The cattle became aggressive, especially the bull that had been brought along. Karlsefni cut down trees and prepared them for use in loading his ship. In their second summer in Vinland, they encountered the Skrellings. These people came out of the woods, but when they saw the aggressive bull, they ran away with their furs and pelts. They tried to enter Karlsefni's house, but he had it defended against them. The conquistadors approached Mexico, speaking first to La Malinche: "Tell Montezuma that we are here with good intentions. We've wanted to meet him for a long time now." Then they said the same thing to Montezuma directly, trying to show their friendship. The Spaniards even patted his back and shook hands with him as a sign of affection. Meanwhile, the people asked Montezuma how to celebrate their god's feast day, and he told them to dress Huitzilopochtli in all his finest ornaments. But behind the scenes, disaster was unfolding. The Sun had ordered Montezuma and Itzcohuatzin to be taken prisoner, while the Spaniards were busy killing other Aztec leaders. They hanged Nezahualquetzin from Acolhuacan and burned Cohaupolcopatzin alive. This led to our warriors being on high alert at the Eagle Gate. As the people prepared for their god's feast day, they received a message telling them to dress Huitzilopochtli in his finest finery. They left their posts to do this, thinking it was part of the celebration. But without warning, the Spaniards attacked and killed all the dancers and singers, including those who were unarmed and just watching. The slaughter continued for three hours, with the Spaniards even attacking the musicians and spectators. The king Montezuma tried to intervene, saying "Our lords, this is enough! These people are not armed." But it was too late, as the Sun had already ordered their massacre. This event marked the beginning of the war between our people and the conquistadors. We allowed them to return to the city in peace, but on the following day we attacked him with all our might. The natives of Hispaniola, Cuba, Jamaica, and other islands were innocent and simple people, void of malice or craft, and behaved patiently and submissively towards the Spaniards. They were capable of morality and goodness and would receive the principles of Catholic religion easily. However, the Spanish atrocities, such as the massacre of innocents and torture, left only a few hundred survivors. The islands that were once thriving with population now lie waste and desolate. Even the most fertile islands, like Seville's Royal Garden, are uninhabited. The Spaniards have depopulated ten kingdoms larger than Spain, along with Aragon and Portugal, by their brutal actions over forty years. Men women and children were brutally wiped out in a catastrophe; it is estimated that over Fifty Million people paid the ultimate price. The Spanish conquistadors who claimed to be Christians, sailed across vast oceans with two primary intentions: to exterminate and eradicate this indigenous population from the face of the earth. They employed two methods to achieve their goals. Firstly, they engaged in a bloody and unjust war against these people, leaving only women and children behind. Secondly, they targeted those who yearned for freedom and liberty, brutally silencing them. The ultimate driving force behind this genocide was the pursuit of gold, which fueled the Spanish conquest's ambition and avarice. Despite the peaceful nature of the indigenous population, the Spaniards viewed them as inferior beings, treating them with contempt and disdain, even going so far as to deny them basic human rights and religious freedoms. The Native Americans had lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years, developing complex societies that spanned from small villages to large urban centers. Their cultures were diverse and rich, with hundreds of languages spoken across the Americas. By 1492, it is estimated that at least 60 Million people inhabited this vast continent, but their stories and histories have often been overlooked in favor of European narratives. As Sky Woman fell onto Turtle Island, she became the first human, bringing life to North America with the help of muskrat and beaver. In contrast, Choctaw traditions believe that southeastern peoples originated from the great Mother Mount earthwork, Nunah Waya, in the lower Mississippi Valley. Meanwhile, Nahuua people trace their legends to the Seven Caves, where their ancestors emerged before migrating to Central Mexico. America's indigenous peoples have passed down accounts of their origins through oral and written traditions, sharing creation and migration histories. A map depicting Bering land bridge migration patterns shows possible movements of people around 25,000 years ago. Archaeologists and anthropologists focus on migration histories, studying artifacts, bones, and genetic signatures to piece together narratives suggesting that the Americas were once a "new world" for Native Americans. During the last glacial ice age, massive continental glaciers trapped much of the world's water, creating a land bridge connecting Asia and North America across the Bering Strait. Between 12-20 thousand years ago, Native ancestors crossed the ice, waters, and exposed lands between continents, traveling in small bands to exploit resources in the Beringian tundra. DNA evidence suggests that these ancestors paused for about 15,000 years in this expansive region before continuing their migration. Other ancestors crossed seas and voyaged along the Pacific coast, settling where local ecosystems permitted. As glacial sheets receded around 14,000 years ago, a corridor to warmer climates opened, allowing ancient communities to migrate south and eastward. Evidence found at Monte Verde suggests human activity began there at least 14,500 years ago, while similar evidence hints at settlement in the Florida panhandle at the same time. Archaeological and traditional knowledge sources converge on numerous points: dental, archaeological, linguistic, oral, ecological, and genetic evidence illustrates great diversity, with different groups settling and migrating over thousands of years from various points of origin. Whether emerging from earth, water, or sky, being made by a creator, or migrating to their homelands, modern Native American communities recount histories in America dating long before human memory. As the ice age ended and warming temperatures spurred ecological change, Native peoples developed unique subsistence patterns to harness regional resources. In the Pacific Northwest, groups exploited great salmon-filled rivers: on plains and prairies, hunting communities followed large game animals like bison; and in mountains, prairies, deserts, and other regions, diverse groups adapted to their environments. In prehistoric times, life on Earth varied as much as its landscapes. Many groups of people existed then, each with their own way of living and speaking hundreds of different languages. The population grew fast due to diverse diets. About 9,000 to 5,000 years ago, farming began almost at the same time in both East and West hemispheres. In Mesoamerica (the area from Panama's north up to central Mexico's desert), people used domesticated corn to become the first settled population by 1,200 BCE. Corn provided many calories, was easy to dry and store, and could sometimes be harvested twice a year in the warm Gulf Coast region. Growing corn also led to cultivating other crops like squash and beans. However, it seems that for some, farming might have weakened their health. Bones and teeth from farmers were found to be weaker than those of hunters. Yet, despite these possible drawbacks, farming brought many benefits. Farmers could produce more food than hunters, allowing some members of the community to pursue other skills. Religious leaders, skilled soldiers, and artists could now focus on activities other than food production. As a result, early civilizations in Mesoamerica began to rise. These societies were marked by great diversity but shared several characteristics. They believed in many gods with both male and female traits and practiced blood sacrifices of enemies or ritual bloodletting. Corn formed the basis of their diet, which they also used to devise a calendar that accurately predicted eclipses and solstices. Their mathematical system was sophisticated enough to direct planting and harvesting. Most importantly, they developed the only known writing system in the Western Hemisphere. Researchers have made progress in interpreting inscriptions on their temples and pyramids. The Olmec were considered the "mother" civilization of Mesoamerica, thriving from 1200 to 400 BCE along Mexico's hot Gulf Coast. They produced impressive works of art, architecture, pottery, and sculpture, including giant head sculptures and a pyramid in La Venta. Their aqueducts transported water into their cities and irrigated fields, allowing them to grow various crops like corn, squash, beans, and tomatoes. They also domesticated small dogs for protein and developed a trade system that gave rise to an elite class. Although what happened to the Olmec after 400 BCE remains unknown due to the jungle reclaiming many of their cities, their culture paved the way for later Mesoamerican civilizations. The Olmec worshipped a rain god, a maize god, and a feathered serpent, which would become important figures in the future. The ancient Aztecs revered Quetzalcoatl, while the Maya worshipped Kukulkan. This map illustrates the extent of major civilizations in the Western Hemisphere during that era. In South America, early inhabitants settled along the coast due to the inhospitable Amazon Basin and Andes Mountains making the interior less hospitable. After the Olmecs declined, a new city emerged in Mesoamerica's central highlands. Teotihuacan was one of the largest population centers before Columbus' arrival, housing over 100,000 people around 500 CE. This allowed for specialized trades and skills beyond farming, resulting in large-scale agricultural production. The city boasted over 2,200 apartment compounds and more than 100 temples, including the Pyramid of the Sun (200 feet high) and the Pyramid of the Moon (150 feet high). Teotihuacan was also a hub for trade with settlements on Mesoamerica's Gulf Coast. Mayan culture had strong ties to Teotihuacan, which contributed significantly to their architecture and mathematics. At its peak from 200 CE to 900 CE, Mayan civilization encompassed around 50 urban centers across modern-day Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and Guatemala. However, for reasons still debated by scholars, the Mayan civilization declined by 900 CE, leaving behind abandoned population centers. The Spanish conquest in the 1520s found little resistance from the Mayans but discovered their history through glyphs recorded in folding books called codices. Unfortunately, many of these valuable historical records were destroyed, including those collected and burned by Bishop Diego de Landa in 1562. Only a few codices remain today. El Castillo at Chichen Itza served as a temple for Kukulkan, featuring 91 steps on each side and a total of 365 stairs, representing the number of days in a year. In contrast to Mesoamerica's urban civilizations, Native American societies in North America tended to be more dispersed. However, large population centers did develop among groups like the Puebloans in the Greater Southwest and those living along eastern river valleys. Extensive trade networks connected people across vast distances, including between Mesoamerica and southern parts of today's United States. The Pueblo people developed complex societies through cultural exchange and trade, as well as farming techniques. The Mogollon, Hohokam, and Anasazi were the main groups. The Mogollon created distinctive art, while the Hohokam built extensive irrigation systems to support high crop yields. The Anasazi carved homes into cliffs for safety. Chaco Canyon was a major urban center with over 15,000 residents, but deforestation and drought caused its collapse. New groups moved in, including the Apache and Navajo, who adopted Pueblo customs. The Mississippi Valley also experienced population growth through trade and cultural exchange. The Mississippian civilization thrived around 1000 years ago, peaking at a population of 10,000 to 30,000 in Cahokia. This city rivaled European cities in size, with its central earthen hill and over 120 mounds. Leaders exercised authority in surrounding neighborhoods. Life in early cultures like the Pueblo and Mississippian was closely tied to their environment. The ancient city of Cahokia was intricately linked to celestial bodies like stars, sun, and moon, as reflected in its ceremonial structures. A rendering of Cahokia from around 1150 CE depicts a thriving metropolis. Around 1050 CE, the city experienced a significant transformation, with population growth reaching almost 500% over just one generation. However, by 1300 CE, Cahokia had undergone severe strains leading to collapse. Scholars previously attributed this decline to ecological disasters or slow depopulation but new research suggests mounting warfare and internal political tensions as primary causes. Recent discoveries indicate that environmental pressures due to population growth may have played a role in the city's demise. The demand for fuel and building materials led to deforestation, erosion, and droughts. External threats from enemies and political turmoil among the ruling elite also contributed to the collapse of this once-great civilization. The Mississippi River served as a vital trade artery, with long-distance trading routes connecting North American communities. Archaeological findings suggest that goods like seashells and copper traveled extensively throughout the continent. In the Eastern Woodlands, many tribes farmed using hand tools instead of European-style plows, taking advantage of rich soils and abundant water sources. The Lenapes, also known as Delawares, settled in areas along the Hudson and Delaware River watersheds, with their communities stretching from southern Massachusetts to Delaware. Women played a crucial role in agriculture, harvesting nuts and berries, while men hunted, fished, and provided protection. Both men and women shared responsibility for raising children, and most Eastern societies were matrilineal, meaning they followed female relatives' lines of descent and inheritance. In contrast, the Pacific Northwest region thrived due to its moderate climate, lush forests, and numerous rivers. The Kwakwaka'wakw, Tlingits, Haidas, and other peoples, speaking dozens of languages, relied heavily on salmon for survival and revered it as a symbol of prosperity, life, and renewal. Sustainable harvesting practices ensured the salmon populations' survival. Men used nets, hooks, and small tools to catch salmon during their migration upriver to spawn. The Pacific Northwest's unique social organization centered around elaborate feasts called potlaches, which celebrated births, weddings, and determined social status. A party could last for days, with the host demonstrating wealth and power by feeding and entertaining guests. The more a host gave away, the greater their prestige and power within the group. Some men saved for decades to host an extravagant potlach, gaining respect and influence in their community. The region's abundance also led to the construction of elaborate plank houses, built from the abundant cedar trees. This unique social structure and architectural achievement was a testament to the Pacific Northwest's rich cultural heritage. Native American cultures were characterized by a deep connection with nature and a spiritual practice that blended the natural and supernatural realms. The Squamish Oleman House, a 500-foot-long structure, was carved into giant cedar trees and served as a symbol of storytelling and identity. Totem poles, masks, and wooden items like hand drums and rattles were created to express the complex identities of Pacific Northwest tribes. Meanwhile, Native American communities shared certain traits, such as kinship networks that bound people together, spiritual practices that recognized the interconnectedness of all things, and a more relaxed attitude towards marriage and family. Matrilineal societies, where women held significant power and influence, were common in Eastern Woodlands communities. The concept of private ownership was foreign to Native American cultures, whereas Europeans viewed land as a source of wealth and believed they had the right to take it. This clash of values led to conflicts over land use and ownership. However, Native Americans did not necessarily consider the land permanent possession. They would often exploit specific areas, using violence or negotiation to exclude others. The human history of the Americas began during the last ice age, when peoples migrated from northeastern Asia across a land bridge. As temperatures warmed, unique subsistence patterns emerged, and agriculture arose around 5,000 years in Mesoamerica, leading to the development of complex urban civilizations. Mexico today is a country located in North America, along with the Yucatan peninsula. The history of this region is rich with great civilizations that rose and fell over time. In the American Southwest, Puebloan societies adopted Mesoamerican farming techniques and built impressive cities within the canyons. At its peak, Cahokia was a significant city in the Mississippian civilization in the East. In contrast, the Eastern Woodland peoples had more dispersed settlements that allowed them to make efficient use of their resources. The Pacific Northwest became one of the most densely populated regions due to abundant food resources. By the time Europeans arrived, the Americas were home to a diverse range of people speaking hundreds of different languages. Despite their differences, North American indigenous cultures shared certain common traits. They all attached great importance to kinship in organizing their societies and believed that there was a close relationship between the physical and spiritual worlds. They also recognized the value of kinship ties and saw the spiritual world as accessible to humans. A key difference between their value systems and those of Europeans lay in the concept of property ownership, where they did not believe in permanent possession of land but rather recognized the rights of people to use certain areas.