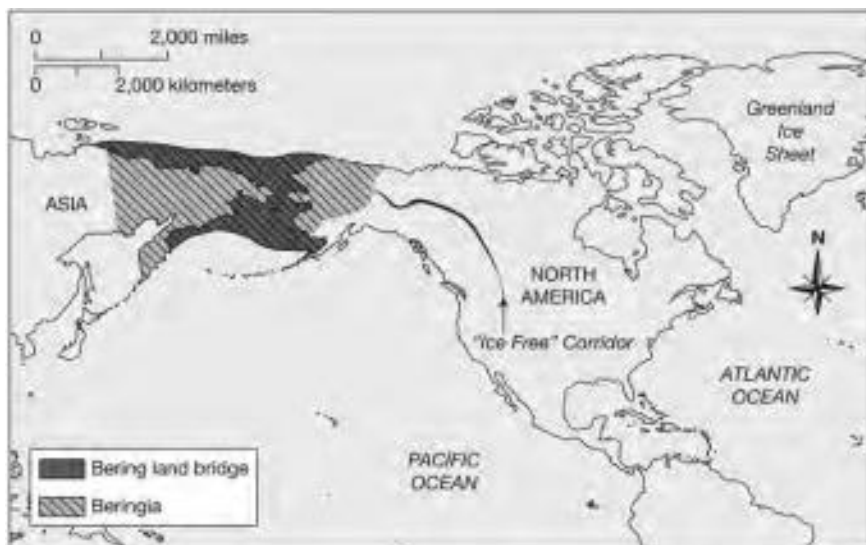


### PRE-COLONIAL NORTH AMERICA: THE NATIVE AMERICANS

#### **Pre-history Migrations**

Scientists postulate that an ice-free corridor, the **Bering land bridge**, opened in successive periods roughly between 30,000 and 13,000 years ago, connecting Alaska and Siberia and allowing for human migration from East Asia into North America.

Groups of Indians wandered southward and next eastward. Gradually, throughout a period of thousands of years, **they adapted to the different geographic and climatic region they settled.**



Map 1.1 Bering land bridge

Scholars have suggested that the migration continued until 2,000 years ago and that extended families came in groups. Over time, these people settled into every habitable area they could find, penetrating to the most southern region and even occupying the many islands off the coast, especially the eastern coast. These ancients established themselves along an 11,000-mile stretch from north to south, and a distance of 3,000 or more miles, in some places, from east to west. They developed a diversity of cultures, depending in the main on the areas where they took up permanent residence; and they spoke at least 300 different languages. Their individual clans formed tribes or nations, and their governments usually consisted of a council of elders and clan chiefs selected by the elders. The highest ruling member of the tribe was the principal chief, chosen from one of the major clans. But many functions of government were normally handled by an individual clan or by a family.

The economy was mostly agricultural, that is, hunting and gathering. But these natives were limited in what they could do by the fact that they had not invented the wheel; nor did they have important domesticated animals, such as the horse and cow. And they had not learned the skills of metallurgy, apart from the hammering of sheet copper to make primitive tools and gold and silver for personal ornaments.

## TIMELINE 1.1 EARLY PEOPLING OF NORTH AMERICA, 30,000 BCE–8000 BCE

Date	Event
30,000 BCE–11,000 BCE	Possible window for people to cross the Bering land bridge from Siberia to Alaska
13,500 BCE–12,900 BCE	Clovis culture
9,000 BCE–8,000 BCE	Folsom culture

The first Natives were gatherer-hunters. They followed the Mammoth and Bison.

### Indian Cultural Differences in North America

The Indians living in different places had different ways of life. This included food, shelter, clothes, religious beliefs, and social organizations. They were living in different cultural areas.

#### 1. *The Eastern Woodlands*

**The Eastern Region**, including the Atlantic Coast and the Midwest, was covered with dense forests, many lakes and rivers. The Indians living that area were **Iroquoian** and **Algonquin** tribes. They had a semi-nomadic life.

**In the Northeast**, the Natives depended on the forest. They hunted its animals for their skins and their meat. They used their bones too. They cut trees and used the branches to build their houses and made their weapons. They also fished. Some Natives practiced agriculture: they cultivated corn, pumpkin, beans, etc...

**In the Midwest**, the Indian tribes based their life on trade, agriculture, and mining. They exchanged goods with neighbouring tribes, grew corn and sunflowers. They mined copper and other minerals. They also built large towns.

Among the Native Americans that lived the Northeast Woodlands were the **Iroquois**, the **Delaware**, and **Narragansett**. In the Midwest lived the **Illinois**, **Sioux**, and **Cheyenne** tribes. The Natives lived in groups called tribes that constituted a socio-economic unit. The tribe included sub-groups called clans.

European settlement began in the 1600s. Those tribes attempted to resist white settlement but epidemics spread among them. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they were either exterminated or forced to retreat west. Midwestern civilizations also disappeared due to spreading epidemics.

#### 2. *The Southeast*

In the Southeast, large tribes of American Indians lived by practicing agriculture. They also gathered wild fruits and hunted animals. Most of the Southeastern Native tribes were speaking the Muskogee language. They included the **Cherokee**, the **Choctaw**, the **Chickasaw**, the **Creek**, and the **Seminole**. These were known as the “**five civilized tribes**.” They organized themselves in a confederacy and had highly developed political institutions. Another highly developed tribe was the **Natchez**. They had a highly civilized social structure too. Because of European conquest, the Natchez disappeared by the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 3. *The Great Plains*

The region was a land of grass and abundant bison or buffalo on which the natives depended. The buffalo provided them with all the necessities of life: meat for food, skin for clothes and dwelling (called “tepees”), boats (canoes), bones for weapons, etc...

Most of the plain tribes lived in small nomadic groups. They constantly moved, following the buffalo. Until the 1880s, it was the most important source of life. But it was exterminated for profit and because it constituted an obstacle to development of the railroad.

Among the early tribes living in the plains were the **Blackfoot**. However, as white settlers occupied the Eastern woodlands, different tribes such as the **Dakota (Sioux)** and **Cheyenne** moved to the plains.

Tribes from the south moved north and traded horses with the Plains tribes. Consequently, the horse entered the culture of Plain Indians and became instrumental in hunting the bison and warfare.

#### 4. *The Southwest*

That cultural area included Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, part of Colorado (the south), and Texas.

The **Pueblo** Indians (**Zuni** and **Hopi** tribes) built large and complex dwellings from stone and clay. They were highly developed agricultural communities. They grew corn, squash, chili pepper, and beans. They introduced a complex system of irrigation.

In 1540, the Spanish conquered the area and imposed their rule. Since then, the region has been dominated successively by the Spanish, the Mexican, and finally, the United States of America.

#### 5. *The Rockies*

The area was a land of great demographic and linguistic diversity. There was a great variety of Native tribes speaking distinct languages. Agriculture was practiced in the valleys. Near the Pacific Coast, people traded and fished.

#### 6. *The Desert*

The Natives were nomadic tribes such as the **Apaches** and the **Navajo**. They were initially hunters and raiders. They raided the Pueblo villages for food and later for slaves. They used to sell slaves to the Spanish.

Gradually, they adapted to the environment; they borrowed from the neighbouring cultures and learnt to farm. They also raised sheep and horses.

(Adapted from *Lectures*)



**Native American Cultural Areas**

At the time of the first European contact, an estimated 90 million Native Americans lived in the Americas. Much of the Native American population in the present-day United States was decimated by war, famine, and disease with the encroachment of the Europeans.

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