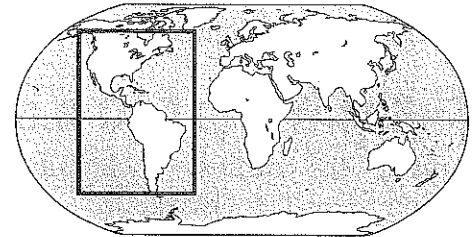


## — IMPORTANT IDEAS —

- A. The Maya, Inca, and Aztec peoples developed complex civilizations in Mexico, Central America, and Peru before the arrival of Christopher Columbus. They grew corn and many other food crops unknown in Europe. They developed their own calendars, mathematics, and engineering skills.
- B. The Renaissance spirit of inquiry and new technologies like the compass, encouraged Europeans to engage in overseas exploration in the 1400s.
- C. Columbus' "first voyage" led to the first encounter between Europeans and the Americans in 1492. This encounter led to the introduction of new foods, livestock, and diseases in both hemispheres, known as the **Columbian Exchange**.
- D. The Spanish conquest of the Aztecs and Incas led to European colonization of the Americas, the introduction of Christianity, and the deaths of millions of Native Americans to European diseases.
- E. Europe was enriched from plundering and colonizing the Americas and from increased trade.
- F. European colonization of the Americas had a great impact on Africa. Africans were enslaved and shipped to the Americas in the **Atlantic slave trade**.

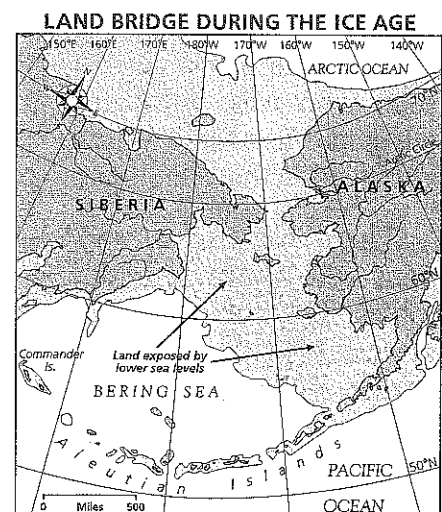
## THE EMPIRE OF THE AMERICAS

While complex civilizations were emerging in Asia, Africa, and Europe, equally striking developments had occurred in the Americas. In this chapter you will review the chain of events set into motion when these two halves of the world collided in 1492. The "encounter" of Europeans with the peoples of the Americas brought the major civilizations of the world together for the first time. This encounter had a profound impact on all peoples.



## THE FIRST AMERICANS

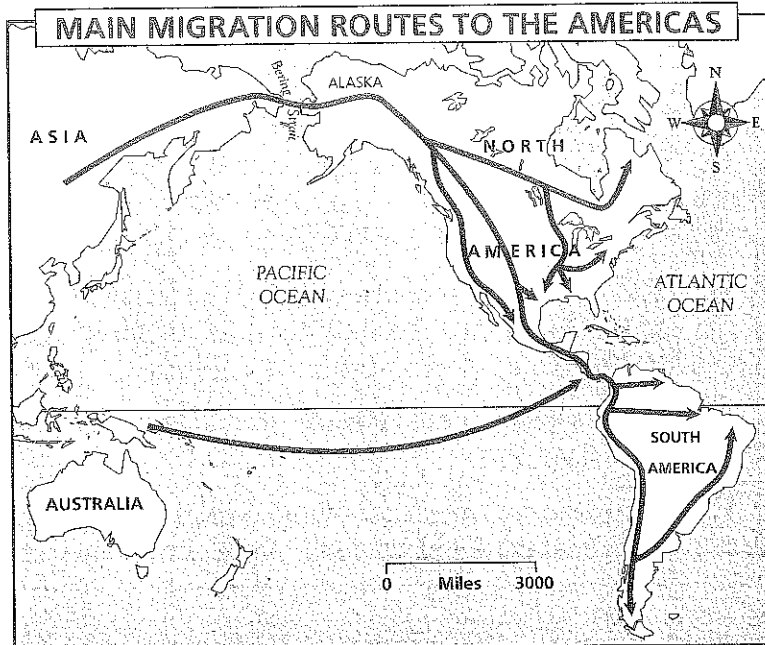
Scientists believe that during the last Ice Age, Asia and Alaska were attached by a land-bridge where the Bering Straits are found today. As long as 25,000 years ago, groups of Asian hunters crossed this land-bridge in search of food, following the migrations of animal herds.



From Alaska, these earliest Americans spread southwards. Over time, these people multiplied and spread throughout North America, Central America, the islands of the Caribbean, and South America. Separated by vast mountains and dense jungles, these people developed their own separate languages and cultures. They settled along lakes and rivers, where they had fresh water to drink.

“Native Americans” experienced their own Neolithic Revolution in which they learned to grow corn (*maize*) and other crops. Several complex civilizations emerged in Mesoamerica (present-day Mexico and Central America). Historians refer to these civilizations as **pre-Columbian** because they existed in the Americas before the arrival of the explorer Columbus in 1492.

Unlike the early civilizations of Africa and Eurasia, the first Native American civilizations did not emerge in river valleys. Native Americans living in the warm and humid rain forests of Mesoamerica learned to plant corn, a crop unknown to the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Corn became the basic food crop in the Americas, supporting the development of permanent settlements and large cities.



## THE MAYA (1500 B.C.—1546 A.D.)

Among the earliest civilizations in the region were the Olmecs and the Toltecs. Over 3,000 years ago, the Maya developed a complex civilization in present-day Guatemala. Each Maya city had its own chief ruler, who was considered half-man and half-god. Most Maya were peasant farmers, who lived in thatched huts and grew corn.

There was also a small class of craftsmen, who made luxuries for the Maya nobles. The nobility were a small hereditary class, who performed sacred ceremonies on special occasions and assisted the rulers. Maya astronomers measured the movement of the sun, moon, and Venus to predict the future.



*Chichen Itza — an important Mayan political and religious center.*

The Maya engaged in frequent wars and practiced human sacrifices. They developed a ball game that became popular throughout the Americas. Two teams competed on a rectangular court, each attempting to hit a solid rubber ball into wooden rings. Archaeologists believe the game had a religious significance. The losing team was sometimes sacrificed to the gods after the game.

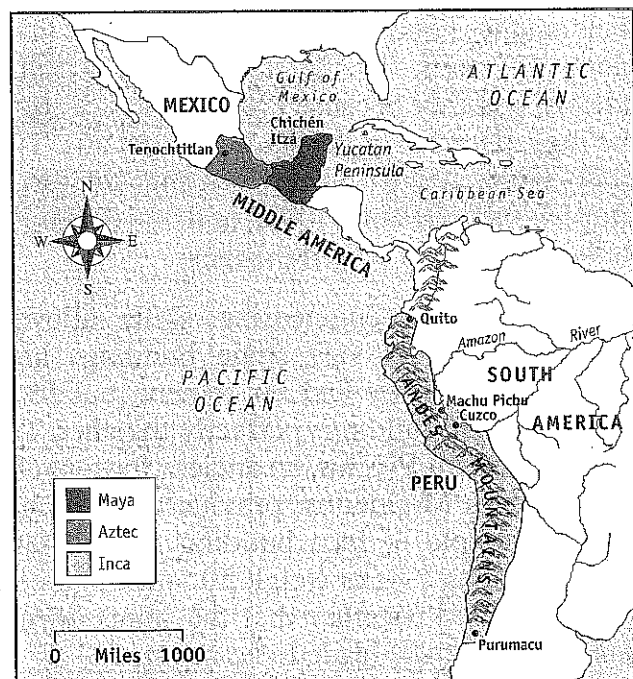
<p><b>Builders.</b> The Maya built huge cities in the jungle with large palaces, temples, and pyramids.</p>	<p><b>Writing System.</b> The Maya developed their own hieroglyphics — a writing system using picture symbols.</p>
<p><b>MAYA ACHIEVEMENTS</b></p>	
<p><b>Math and Science.</b> The Maya developed a complex numbering system, with the use of zero. Their calendar consisted of 365 days and was used to keep track of the changing seasons.</p>	<p><b>Artistry.</b> Maya artists painted colorful murals to decorate their pyramids, palaces, and temples. They developed a ball game, played in a rectangular court, that became popular throughout the Americas.</p>

Around the 9th century, Maya culture experienced a great crisis. Archaeologists do not know if a food shortage, epidemic, or great war brought an end to this classic period of Maya civilization. The Maya migrated northward to the Yucatan Peninsula in present-day Mexico. There, they built a new series of city-states. One of these later Mayan cities is well-preserved at **Chichen Itza**. Constant warfare from the 13th to the 16th centuries, and pressures from neighboring wandering peoples, led to the final decline of Maya civilization.

## THE AZTECS (1200–1521)

The Valley of Mexico, in the center of Mexico, has a high elevation and a temperate climate. Its location is excellent for growing crops. The Aztecs (*or Mexica*) were an alliance of several local peoples.

Around 1300, they settled on an island in the center of the Valley of Mexico. They learned to grow corn from their neighbors. In order to survive, they grew crops in “floating gardens” in wet, marshy lands. They made careful observations of the sky and aligned their temples based on the movements of the sun and moon. Over the next two centuries, the Aztecs engaged in frequent wars to conquer other peoples in the region. These conflicts continued until the arrival of the first Europeans in the Americas.



The Aztecs developed a highly complex social organization. At the top of Aztec society was an all-powerful emperor. Below the ruler were the nobles, who often held high positions in the government, army, or priesthood. Most people were commoners, working as farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, or as warriors in the Aztec armies. At the bottom of Aztec society were slaves.

Like other Native American cultures, the Aztecs worshipped many gods. The most important was the Sun God. Their observations of the sky made it possible to construct accurate calendars of stone. The Aztecs believed the Sun God needed human blood to continue his daily journeys across the sky. For this reason, the Aztecs practiced human sacrifices on a massive scale. Captured warriors from other tribes were sacrificed, as well as Aztecs who volunteered for this honor. They believed their sacrifice was necessary to keep the universe in motion.

## THE INCA EMPIRE (1200–1535)

Thousands of miles to the south of Mexico, advanced cultures developed along the Pacific coast and in the Andes Mountains of South America. Peoples in the Andes terraced mountains and grew potatoes and other root crops that could resist the cold nights. They kept llamas and alpacas for their meat and wool and to carry goods.

The Inca built upon the achievements of these earlier peoples. Around 1400, the Inca began extending their rule across the Andes. Eventually, the Inca ruled an empire covering much of present-day Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile. The Inca built stone roads stretching over ten thousand miles to unite the distant corners of their empire. Food was preserved and kept in storehouses along the roads. The Inca never developed carts with wheels, possibly because such vehicles were unsuited to the rugged terrain of the Andes Mountains. The Inca also never developed a form of writing. Instead, they used **quipu** — bundles of knotted and colored ropes to count, keep records, and send messages.

Their superb engineering skills allowed them to construct vast stone buildings high in the Andes. They had no cement, but fitted stones of their buildings perfectly together. The ruins of **Machu Picchu**, an ancient fortress city in the Andes Mountains, provide the best surviving example of Inca building skills. Many of the building blocks weigh 50 tons but are so precisely fitted together that the joints do not permit a thin knife blade to be inserted.

