

Course: Civilization of the Language



MKU – Biskra
 Faculty of Letters and Languages
 English Language Division
 Semester II

Level: 2nd year *Licence*
 Course: Civilization of the Language

LECTURE 3: PRE-COLONIAL NORTH AMERICA: THE NATIVE AMERICANS

Pre-history Migrations

According to anthropological studies, Native Americans probably originated from Asia. From Siberia, they crossed the Bering Strait which was during the Ice Age a kind of icy bridge. They moved to Alaska, and then, further south. This was approximately 30,000 years ago. 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.

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.

Native American Tribes

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. Native American of 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 17th century, they were either exterminated or forced to retreat west. Midwestern civilizations also disappeared due to spreading epidemics.

2. Native Americans living 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 18th century.

3. Natives of 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. Natives of the Southwest

That cultural area included Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, part of Colorado (the south), and Texas. (These states did not exist at that time because there was no country called “the United States.”)

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 neighboring cultures and learnt to farm. They also raised sheep and horses.

(Adapted from *Lectures in American History* by Maameri F. OPU)



Native American Cultural Areas

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Lecture 03: PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD AND FIRST ATTEMPTS AT COLONIZATION

I. THE ORIGINS:

During the Ice Age which began around 70,000 years ago, the sea became a land and formed a bridge between Alaska and Siberia. This Bridge is called **the Bering Strait** and nowadays it's the sea which separates Asia from North America. This bridge is the origin of colonization; the way for people to move through the Americas. Many of those who reached America lived according to a nomadic way of life based on hunting and agriculture. Ancient tribes such as the Mayas, the Aztecs and the Incas colonized the Americas too but their disparity of the territory is a big mystery. At the time isolation was a drawback, for example they didn't know the use of iron.

II. EUROPEAN COLONIZATION DURING THE MIDDLE AGES (11th- 16th century)

Officially the 1st Europeans who came in the US were the Vikings in the 11th century and among them the captain **Leif Eriksson** who is believed to have reached the Island of Newfoundland in Canada and began to set up settlements there. The latter which disappeared across the time because there was not enough people and they couldn't procreate or defend themselves against Natives Americans either. So, some of them died, others went back to Scandinavia and a small number merged into the Indian population.

III. EUROPEAN COLONIZATION DURING THE RENAISSANCE

During the 16th century the American continent was rediscovered but all began in the 15th century. Precisely in 1642 Spain and Portugal became emancipated from the Arabic domination and cut off commercial links with the Arabic Empire. Unfortunately, other European countries were reluctant to trade with Spain and Portugal who found themselves commercially isolated. In order to break this commercial isolation these two countries decided to try to trade with Asia also called at the time "the Indies" and with Africa. But it was not possible because the Republic of Venice had the monopole of trade with the Indies, that's why they had to find another way to go to the Indies.

The Portuguese tried a road which passed around Africa. However they encountered another matter, people didn't know how big the territory was. Later, Vasco de Gama (a Portuguese) tried a road passing through the Cap of Good Hope in South Africa in the 1490s and succeeded to establish a commercial route to Asia and eventually Portuguese became very powerful.

The Spaniards tried westward by sailing. At the time Christopher Columbus tried to convince the queen Isabella of Castile to finance his travel through the sea to find a new route to go to the Indies what she did. But instead of finding the Indies like he wished, he found the Bahamas Island and then the Caribbean Islands. Few years later, another navigator Amerigo Vespucci from Florence explored the coast and found finally the mainland. It is the one who gave his name to the territory "America".

IV. During the 16th century French people tried to establish settlements in America and explore the entire land because they were looking for precious metals, etc...

In the 1530s Jacques Cartier had tried to establish settlements along the St. Lawrence (a big river on the Canadian East Coast connected to the Great Lakes) but he didn't succeed. St. Lawrence was first thought as a route to go to Asia and America was seen as a kind of barrier to go there. It wasn't until **1608** that they established settlements along the St. Lawrence when Samuel de Champlain founded the trading post of Quebec which was to become the capital of New France.

At the time the French started trading with local populations and exploring the entire land but there were no roads in America, so it was extremely difficult to explore it but thanks to the river it was easier.

Around 1615, the French built the city of New Orleans in Louisiana and established few settlements along the Mississippi River as well as permanent relationship with the local populations. St. Lawrence and the Mississippi almost joined up together. At the beginning there were practically nothing neither agriculture nor farming because they needed candidates to emigrate to the settlements but they knew a lack of volunteer to go there because of the harsh climate (hot, humid and tropical in the US and very cold in Canada) that impeded the French colonies to grow up. Dozens of years later, agriculture began to develop. Despite the difficulties most of the American territory has been discovered by French.

V. The Dutch provinces of the Netherlands were also in America and discovered an important River too.

The Dutch commerce grew in the early 17th century and especially because Henry Hudson had discovered the Hudson River in 1609. The first short-lived trading post in the Hudson River was established in 1614 and a decade later Dutch settlers began to arrive on Manhattan Island forming the post of New Amsterdam, known as New York nowadays.

VI. English were the last but not least to colonize America.

English came to America to fishing cods (like did its rivals) between New England and Newfoundland. Their first settlement was under the reign of the Queen Elizabeth I and the state of Virginia was named in honor of Elizabeth the Virgin Queen. In 1585 Walter Raleigh an English sailor settled in an island called Roanoke.

VII. Although Natives American and Indians wanted to protect themselves from colonization, they became dependent of the trade with the Europeans which can explain the rapidly growth of the English and French colonies.