

AMERICA

A Cultural History of the United States of America
from the Beginnings to the Revolution

REMUS BEJAN

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EDITURA UNIVERSITARĂ
București, 2012

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Editură recunoscută de Consiliul Național al Cercetării Științifice (C.N.C.S.)

Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României
BEJAN, REMUS

**America : A Cultural History of the USA from the Beginnings
to the revolution** / Remus Bejan. - București : Editura Universitară,
2012

Bibliogr.
ISBN 978-606-591-345-5

821.111(73).09

DOI: (Digital Object Identifier): 10.5682/9786065913455

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Director: Vasile Muscalu
B-dul. N. Bălcescu nr. 27-33, Sector 1, București
Tel.: 021 – 315.32.47 / 319.67.27
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Distribuție: tel.: 021-315.32.47 / 319.67.27 / 0744 EDITOR / 07217 CARTE
comenzi@editurauniversitara.ro
O.P. 15, C.P. 35, București
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PREFACE

Man can understand himself only in history.
Wilhelm Dilthey

This book represents an attempt to bring together into a single unitary, coherent and, in so far as practicable, chronological narrative, the European settlement and colonization, in those areas North America that now constitute the United States of America, down to the Revolution. While the story the English “plantations” forms the core of the volume, I have attempted to give an adequate treatment of the history of colonization by other nations too. My desire has been to give a balanced, yet truthful view of the time sequence in the development of the different regions of the present-day United States.

The colonization process in North America has been presented against a broad European and international background, an approach which, I think, best serves the full understanding of this era. I have traced the intermingling of Native Americans, Europeans and Africans, which often resulted in violent conflicts with tragic effects, but have tried to emphasize that the Native Americans and the Black Africans were intricately involved in the creation of colonial society and of a new, hybrid American culture.

It has been my strongest desire to bring to light some specific histories of people—including Native Americans, Hispanics, English, French, Black Africans, women and certain religious communities. They form the subject matter of specific sections. The book also gives due emphasis to the great civic issues—the causes and effects of immigration, colonization, slavery, or the impact of religion on American life, and to tracing the evolution of major public political and economic institutions, which the colonizers built through pain and struggle.

I have tried to incorporate, to the best of my ability, of the rich scholarship in economic, social, political cultural and intellectual history that has appeared of late, and to present these materials clearly as possible to aid readers.

In relating the story of the American past, I saw a people composed, from the beginning, of several ethnic and racial strains, in continuous transformation. The Native Americans, the early Europeans and the first black slaves developed intricate life ways that merged Old World or African traditions and New World experiences—an evolution that articulated new cultural identities and prepared the settlers for the idea of political independence.

The Author

THE NEW WORLD

Beginnings to 1620

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The First Americans

A deceptively uncomplicated creation story of the Navajo Indians,--expression of immemorial, sacred lore--, reminds us that man's essential condition is to be a wayfarer (*homo viator*), to journey endlessly in this world in search for a home:

Life . . . rests on five successive periods. Its first was . . . self-born. That was the divine spirit, the first cause, the desire to be. Then came the creation; the creation of being, the bringing into begin of material things--the stars of heaven, the elements of earth and atmosphere, life in its elemental form, the desire to live and survive.... The first earth's environment was one of mists--immaterial, unformed. The second was of water, with land portions floating on it. During this period, all sea life was conceived and developed. The third stage brought the coming of animals and bird life of many kinds along with elemental human types. *The fourth stage was a time of earth wandering, a search by Navajo forebears for a durable home. This was found; the land of turquoise skies.* The fifth has been of gradual advance . . . of the Navajo people (Gibson 2, emphasis added).

Moreover, the anonymous sage is not far from truth, for archaeological findings seem to confirm this mythical account, in its broadest lines.

The Paleo-Indians

The first people may have arrived in North America approximately 30,000 years ago,¹ near the end of the last Ice Age, when small bands of spear-throwing Siberian hunters ventured from the Asian mainland across the Bering Straits land bridge created by the receding glaciers, in what seems to have been "the last major dispersal of the human species on this planet" (Dixon 15).

For thousands of years, these nomadic people continued to slowly make their way southward, across the vast and untracked wilderness, or following the coastline and living off the wealth of the sea, until they finally reached the far tip of South America.

Major migrations across the Americas may have begun only as recently as 12,000 years ago, when the number of human sites increased dramatically, and the Paleo-Indians, clearly emerged in historical evidence.

¹ The earliest evidence of the Paleo-Indian people was found at Old Crow Flats, Alaska. there is great controversy surrounding exactly when the first people came to the Americas. Some scientists say humans came into the Americas no earlier than 13,000 years ago, while other scientists believe that people were living in the Americas long before that date.

The earliest group, the Clovis people (or, Llano) were hunters, and manufactured chipped spear or arrow heads of stone, widely disseminated throughout the United States and Mexico, and as far south as *Tierra del Fuego*.

The second group, the Folsom people of southern United States and central Mexico, who seemed to live largely on hunting too, left smaller and finer artifacts, dated from 11,000 to 10,000 BC. Early Paleo-Indian sites, of either the Clovis or of the Folsom type, are easily recognized by the presence of distinctive forms of projectile points called “fluted points”, characterized by a channel flake, which runs up the center of the tool, probably to aid in hafting.

The third group, the Plano people (from about 10,000 to 8000 BC), manufactured leaf-shaped, unfluted projectile points of remarkable diversity, which are even more common and predominate in South America.

The “Old Indians” engaged in a subsistence life-pattern. Evidence (a variety of tools seemingly made for butchering large game animals) found at sites throughout the Plains, the Great Basin, and the southeastern regions of the United States, or in Central America, seems to indicate that their hunting methods mostly involved mass extermination of their prey. The long-horned bison, the mammoth, or the caribou would be driven over a “fall”, or trapped in a box canyon and slain, by means of small spears or darts.

In the Americas, the Paleo-Indians readily adapted to the amazing diversity of climate and topographical conditions of the continent. In coastal areas, a specialized maritime economy was flourishing more than 11,000 years ago. In other regions, people lived in semiarid savanna-woodland environments, and subsisted on a rich diversity of game and edible plants. Deep in the tropical rain forest of the Amazon, the indigenous populations exploited a dazzling array of tropical fruits and nuts, taking fish and mussels from the streams, and hunting small-game animals.

Little is known of the Paleo-Indians’ social organization. In gathering-hunting societies, kin and marriage ties link one band with another. Vital social necessities most likely included sharing, egalitarian status, and social mobility. Evidence seems to suggest that, in some parts, they traveled from camp to camp without a home gathering place, timing their movements according to the seasonal availability of resources. In other regions, they moved through a well-defined territory, and attached their activities to one particular base, leaving it for extended time periods, but always returning to the same home spot.

The period ended with major climatic transformations some 10,000 years ago, as weather systems altered their movements around shrinking ice sheets. Many of the game animals the Paleo-Indians had exploited earlier became extinct and the habitats that had supported plants and animal populations changed. Then, around 8,000 BC, the once exposed continental shelves were inundated by rising sea waters, the 1,500 kilometers wide Asian-American isthmus submerged, leaving the indigenous people isolated on the new continent, most of which they were now occupying.

To these changes, the Paleo-Indians responded by strengthening certain aspects of their existing daily routines, as well as developing new practices better suited to the new environments. Their traditions gradually yielded to the Archaic lifestyles, although some of them continued into the succeeding Holocene in a number of regions of the Americas.

The Archaic Period

As the Ice Age drew to a close, the cold and wet weather yielded to warm and dry conditions, until climates finally stabilized about 5,000 BC. It was during this period that the Paleo-Indians fanned out across the Americas, moving into every portion of the continents fit for human habitation, adjusting and adapting to the immensely varied local environments. Over time, increasingly diverse Indian cultures evolved, so that by the end of the Archaic Period, America was a genuine *mélange* of differing cultures, and communities.

For a long time, the early Americans continued to live as wandering hunters and gatherers of food, in small bands composed of two, or three, extended family groups. Well adapted to the climate, vegetation and animal populations of the late Pleistocene, they preyed on woolly mammoths, mastodons, deer and other animals, using their meat, skins and other parts for food, clothing, tools and other needs. They fished in freshwater streams and along the coast. The Archaic people collected both freshwater and saltwater shellfish and gathered a variety of plant foods, such as acorns, hickory nuts, walnuts, seeds, greens, and berries.

Hunting was done by men. Archaic hunters were ignorant of the bow and arrow; instead, they employed a very efficient weapon called the *atlatl*, or spear-thrower². With *atlatls*, Archaic hunters could throw spears great distances, with remarkable accuracy and power. The distinctive notched and stemmed points that tipped their spears commonly occur at Archaic campsites.

In addition to making spear points, Archaic folks ground hard granitic rocks into axes with grooves for hafting. They also made a variety of scrapers, drills, and other chipped-stone tools. Stone mortars were used to ground seeds and nuts, and the presence of notched stone pebbles that served as net sinkers

² The *atlatl* was a wooden handle about 40 to 80 centimeters long. At the tip end is a hook (a point, or a pin), and at the other end it has some sort of hand hold. The hook of the *atlatl* was typically made out of bone, wood or horn, and was designed to connect to the back end of the dart. Each dart had a small dimple at the end that fitted the hook. The dart was about 1.5 or 1.8 meters long and looked like an oversized arrow, laid parallel to the *atlatl*, and at the handle end it was held in place by the fore finger and thumb in preparation for the cast. The arm went back and then forward. When the *atlatl* reached the halfway point of the cast the dart sprang off of the pin and flew into the air towards the intended target. By applying the propulsion force against the butt, the *atlatl* increased the range and penetration of a spear, making it a more efficient weapon for the killing of large mammals.

attest the use of fishnets. During the latter half of the period, hemispherical bowls were pecked and carved from steatite.

Females usually gathered plant foods, such as nuts, wild plums, grapes, blackberries, which were abundant in the summer and early fall. They also produced weather-tight shelters and warm clothing made of animal skins, for the band.

Archaic Americans generally lived in camps, located on high mountain ridges overlooking game trails, or along river banks, and across hills, where herds would migrate through, which they occupied at certain times of the year, and to which they returned repeatedly over generations. Successful hunters would bring their game back to the base camp to share it with other members of the group. Temporal and spatial availability of food resources most likely forced Archaic peoples to move among a number of different campsites during the course of a year. These mobile bands were probably composed of extended families or groups of families. The nomadic characteristic of the Archaic people would have made sharing and equality a necessary part of their lives.

From 3000 to 1000 BC, the population increased, and there was a gradual trend toward more sedentary life, which, in turn, spawned the beginnings of plant domestication, one of the most important developments of the age (Griffinmix, 5). The most characteristic artifact of the Late Archaic in North America is a large, broad-bladed spear point with a square stem, known as the Savannah River Stemmed.

Archeological evidence seems to indicate that by the end of the Archaic period, sunflower, maygrass, marshelder, chenopodium, and several kinds of cucurbits were selectively cropped as a precursor to effective cultivation, in addition to squash and gourds. Small, circular pit-hearths, lined with stones uncovered at some sites, further suggest that they were occupied over extended period of time, possibly permanently (Ward & Davis 66).

Tools mirror the transformations in their way of life. The Archaic people of America had mortars and pestles for crushing seeds and nuts. They carved bonefish hooks, harpoons, awls and needles, and grounded stone into axes, adzes, or gouges, to work wood. Besides utilitarian objects, they also spent lots of time grinding and polishing delightfully colored, or fashioned stone into beads shaped like animals or insects.

In many areas of North, Central, and South America, native communities began to move away from mainly egalitarian social systems to more complex, often highly differentiated, socio-political systems, changing from nomadic to sedentary settlement patterns, and living in large, permanent villages and towns, growing an ever larger variety of local plants, using fire and other practices in the management of their environments, or carrying long distance trade. Some of these peoples developed astounding civilizations.

In Mexico and South America, the Maya and Tilted peoples built vast cities housing several hundred thousand inhabitants, formed extremely sophisticated government bureaucracies, carried commerce, developed an accurate calendar

as well as a complex form of writing, and made strikingly correct astronomical observations.

The peoples inhabiting the present-day territories of the United States and Canada were by contrast less technologically advanced.

The Woodland Period

Around 1,000 BC, the stable climate, as well as the adoption of horticulture, allowed a greater degree of predictability for plant resources, and made summer-fall food sources readily available to large populations. Although people continued to follow most of the subsistence practices of their archaic ancestors, hunting, fishing, and gathering, more and more labor was committed to tasks of clearing fields, planting and harvesting crops, only when it was certain that those efforts could assure surpluses needed for winter and early spring months when natural food sources were sparse. The house patterns, palisades, the presence of sand-tempered and clay-tempered pottery, and substantial storage facilities, at some sites, also signal that natives of the so-called Early Woodland period were more committed to settled village life than their predecessors.

The onset of the Woodland period is also marked by the appearance of pottery making. The earliest pottery vessels were cone-shaped and used for cooking. Their surfaces were stamped with cord-wrapped or fabric-wrapped paddles before they were fired. Later, carved wooden paddles were used to stamp pots. Distribution of pottery styles and other artifacts indicates that communities began to recognize territorial boundaries. The exchange of exotic materials through large trade networks and the placement of ritual items in burials located in earth mounds are an indication of increasing social and political complexity.

Distinctive ceramic, lithic, and architectural complexes, as well as a series of elaborate burial complexes with a wide range of exotic items derived from a large-scale trade network indicate the Middle Woodland period (200 BC – AD 400). Domesticated native plants, squash, and gourds formed the basis of food production; there is rare evidence for the use of maize in some areas. Circular houses with large cylindrical storage pits and earth ovens nearby were in use. In addition, houses appear to include paired sets of summer and winter-use structures. Mounds and monumental earthworks became prominent. The manufacture and movement of objects such as pipes, ear spools, obsidian, mica, zoned decorated pottery, figurines, pearl beads, and objects of copper, galena, silver, and conch shell as well as other exotic ritualistic items first become obvious archaeologically during this time. These objects were being traded inter-regionally and were most likely used by leaders that gained and enhanced their position by the acquisition and distribution of these ritual items, which were normally placed in the grave at their death.

The indigenous people continued to live in relatively small, dispersed villages, similar to those of the earlier periods. However, after AD 400, many of the traits associated with the Middle Woodland age disappeared. Thus, exotic artifacts, which had previously functioned in a ritual context, were no longer being produced.

The Mississippi Period³

Around AD 900, a new way of life began to thrive in the Mid-South of the present-day United States. The widespread adoption of maize made available a new food source, which encouraged permanent settlements and growth of populations. Intensive corn agriculture provided a surplus that could be easily stored and traded. The use of the bow and arrow, tipped with small triangular points, greatly increased hunting efficiency. Shell tempering provided stronger vessels and increased cooking efficiency.

The settlements characteristic of the period were located predominantly in the floodplains of large rivers, such as the Mississippi and its tributaries, which offered rich, well-drained, easily tilled soils, conducive to the cultivation of cereals. Nearby fish and waterfowl were readily available, and provided an additional supply of food.

In order to take the best possible advantage of the environment, the Mississippian population usually dispersed in farmsteads and hamlets that were related to central villages, which in turn were related to a larger village. Redistribution and storage of surplus took place at the large villages, which seem to have been administrative centers. The main advantage of this type of organization was greater productivity and the ability to support and control larger populations. Storage provided insurance against future crop loss. It also encouraged craft specialization in which work was done in shell, stone, pottery, and wood.

At about AD 1150, villages became increasingly associated with the ceremonial center. Its protection, as well as the defense of the population became ever more important. Though rich soil may have been plentiful in the Mississippi Valley, prehistoric people still competed for the best land, induced, perhaps, by their growing numbers. War seems to have become a more frequent means of enforcing political control as time went on. Villages were

³ It lasted until 1542, the year of De Soto's expedition in southern Missouri which affected the social structure because he killed many village rulers. His presence caused further disruption due to the diseases his men brought into the region. This social disruption led to the decline and disappearance of the Mississippian culture.

enclosed in wooden palisade walls, and artifacts show intensification in martial symbolism.⁴

By 1250, a political system came into being, and was composed of sites that included major civic-ceremonial centers with mounds, associated with palisaded villages, and surrounded by a large number of dispersed farmsteads. Thousands of such earthworks were erected across the Mississippi Delta and southeast USA. The best known of these mound-building cultures were the Adena and Hopewell, centered in the Ohio Valley.

Crews of workers labored over generations, sometimes a century or more, before an earthwork reached its final dimensions. Most of the ceremonial centers were built around a central *plaza* and included at least one large, flat-topped mound.⁵ More often, several mounds⁶ were arranged around a rectangular *plaza*, with the village at its edges. Their purposes are still shrouded in mystery. Some communities buried their dead in mounds, with great solemnity and ceremony. Other cultures built temples atop the mounds, which worshipers approached by climbing steep stairs or ramps. Still other earthworks were symbols of power for leaders who dwelled on top of them. The *plaza* provided a large, central, open space for ceremonial and social events. It was also used for games and contained little or no occupational debris. The houses of the inhabitants were arranged in regular rows outside the *plaza* area, and in some excavated sites, there are indications of social groups separated by unoccupied space or by some type of screening.

Evidence unearthed by archeologists paints a picture of bustling population centers, with houses of thatch and mud plaster stretching out far and wide among cultivated fields. Traders from distant places arrived via the Mississippi, bringing not only basic items but also coveted luxury goods, such as copper, mica, alligator teeth, and conch shells.

Associated with this lifestyle was the belief system of the Mississippian cultures, whose symbols show a preponderance of female characters, serpents, and birds. The emphasis on women and other living things suggests fertility's central role in the culture. Fertility symbols were reproduced in wood statuary, pipes, and pottery. Rattlesnake motifs were common in the late prehistoric art of the Southeast and are believed to be symbolic of the Sun god, who was worshiped throughout the region.

At major sites, highly distinctive artifacts were deposited in burial mounds. These artifacts were symbolic of a religious cult in which the chiefly elite were apparently the leading participants. Among these objects were axes with the

⁴ There are numerous portrayals in Mississippian artwork of scalping or beheading as well as severed trophy heads.

⁵ The shapes of mounds vary. They can be flat-topped pyramids, cones, ovals, or barely perceptible rises on the landscape.

⁶ Mounds can stand alone or be in clusters of as many as twenty constructions. Some mounds are clustered around broad plazas, while others are connected by earthwork ridges.

head and shaft carved from a single piece of stone, polished or chipped stone batons or maces, copper pendants decorated with circles or weeping eyes, shell gorgets depicting woodpeckers, rattlesnakes or spiders, pottery vessels decorated with circles, crosses, hands, skulls, rattlesnakes, flying horned serpents, and feathered serpents, copper plates and engraved shell cups portraying male figures wearing eagle or falcon costumes and sometimes carrying a baton in one hand and a trophy head in the other.

As long as the mound-building people prospered, the southeastern ceremonial complex grew larger and more ambitious in scale, and religion a means of asserting authority. Native towns varied in size, but the population would not have normally exceeded 300-500 residents. A population of over 1,000 would have indicated a major town, while sites like Cahokia or Moundville were unusual, with populations of 2,000-5,000, or perhaps even 10,000 for the central Cahokia area at its peak. Villages had populations of about 100-300 (Silverberg, *Mound Builders of Ancient America* 300).

Before long, elaborate political systems and alliances developed, together with complex social customs and religious rites. The typical social and political structure was that of the chiefdom, in which allied groups of communities were governed by members of an elite class whose positions were inherited or earned by outstanding accomplishments (Anderson 155).

The commoners' lives were led by powerful chiefs and priests who controlled trade, made alliances with neighboring towns, or waged war. In his narrative, the sixteenth century Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto asserts that when major decisions were to be made that affected the whole community, the action to be taken was decided at a meeting of the council, which indicates that the "chief" was not an autocratic head of state (Galloway 302 *passim*). Many of the large Mississippian mound centers were strongly fortified by earthen embankments and ditches.

However, about 1450, the Mississippian mound-building cultures were declining dramatically. Their very success may have brought their ruin. The continuously increasing population competing for limited resources inevitably created tensions. Sanitation in the crowded river towns could have deteriorated, triggering an outbreak of epidemics. There is evidence of massive migrations of people, indicating social and political disorder on a large scale. By 1,500, one could have traveled the once-populous river valley, and covered great distances before coming upon a village.

Native North American Cultures

The native people of America showed an amazing diversity of life ways, worldviews, and traditions, resulting from the wide variety and the relative isolation of local environments. To the east, Native Americans generally supplemented mixed farming with seasonal hunting and gathering. They also