

History of the United States

America before colonial times

For thousands of years, Indians were the only inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere. They had wandered into North America from Asia about 15,000 years ago. They spread across the hemisphere to the tip of South America. Probably about 6,000 years ago, the Inuit--another Asian people- moved to the Western Hemisphere. They soon spread eastward across the Arctic part of North America. They remained only in the far north, near the Arctic Circle.

The Vikings were probably the first white people to reach America. A band of these venturesome seafarers is believed to have explored part of the east coast of North America about 1,000 years ago. However, the exploration and settlement of America by Europeans did not begin for another 500 years. Then, in 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed westward from Spain, seeking a short sea route to the Orient. He found, instead, a vast New World. Following Columbus' voyage, explorers, soldiers, and settlers from several European countries flocked to America. The process through which white people would take control of the Indian homeland was underway.

The first Americans

As many as 80 million Indians may have been living in the Americas when Columbus reached the New World. As many as 65 million Indians lived between what is now Mexico and the tip of South America. As many as 15 million Indians lived in what are now the United States and Canada.

The American Indians formed hundreds of tribes, with many different languages and ways of life. Some tribes in Central and South America--including the Aztec, Inca, and Maya--established advanced civilizations. They founded magnificent cities and accumulated gold, jewels, and other riches. Most American Indians north of Mexico lived in small villages. They hunted game and grew such crops as maize, beans, and gourds. Some tribes travelled continuously in search of food and never established permanent settlements.

Some Indian tribes of North America helped the early European settlers survive in the wilderness of the New World. But as the settlers pushed steadily westward, they became a threat to the Indian way of life, and Indians and whites became enemies.

European discovery

The Vikings. About A.D. 1000, Vikings from Greenland explored part of the North American mainland--probably what is now Newfoundland, Canada. Led by Leif Ericson, they were probably the first white people to reach the mainland of the continent. But the Vikings did not establish permanent settlements, and their voyages were soon forgotten.

Columbus. Before Columbus' voyage, Europeans did not know the Western Hemisphere existed. During the 1400's, Europeans became interested in finding a short sea route to the Far East--a region of spices and other valuable goods.

Columbus, an Italian navigator, believed he could find a short route to the East by sailing west. Financed by the Spanish king and queen, he set sail westward from Spain on Aug. 3, 1492. Columbus reached land on October 12, and assumed he had arrived in the Far East. Actually, he landed on San Salvador, one of the islands just east of the North American mainland.

Before he died in 1506, Columbus made three more voyages to the Western Hemisphere. He came to believe he had discovered a vast, unknown continent which he called an "Other World." Other Europeans called this unexplored area the New World and honoured Columbus as its discoverer. Europeans also called the Western

Hemisphere America, after Amerigo Vespucci. An Italian, Vespucci claimed he made voyages to the New World for Spain and Portugal beginning in 1497.

Exploration and early settlement

The discovery of the existence of America caused a wave of excitement in Europe. To many Europeans, the New World offered opportunities for wealth, power, and adventure. European rulers and merchants wanted to gain control of the hemisphere's resources in order to add to their wealth. Rulers also sought to gain New World territory, and thus increase their power. Christian clergymen were eager to spread their religion to the Indians. Explorers and others viewed the New World as a place to seek adventure, as well as gain personal fame and fortune. Before long, Europeans from several countries sailed across the Atlantic to explore America and set up trading posts and colonies.

The Spanish and Portuguese. During the 1500's, the Spanish and Portuguese spread out over the southern part of the Western Hemisphere in search of gold and other riches. The Spaniards quickly conquered the Inca of Peru, the Maya of Central America, and the Aztec of Mexico. The Portuguese took control of what is now Brazil. By 1600, Spain and Portugal controlled most of the hemisphere from Mexico southward.

Also during the 1500's, Spaniards moved into what is now the Southeastern and Western United States. They did not discover riches there, as they did farther south. But they took control of Florida and of the land west of the Mississippi River. In 1565, the Spanish founded St. Augustine, Florida, the oldest permanent settlement by Europeans in what is now the United States. They also established missions and other settlements in the West and South.

The English and French began exploring eastern North America in about 1500. At first, both nations sent only explorers and fur traders to the New World. But after 1600, they began establishing permanent settlements there. The French settlements were chiefly in what is now Canada. The English settlements included the 13 colonies that later became the United States.

For many years, Britain and France struggled for control of the land between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mississippi River, and for Canada. Britain finally won the struggle in 1763 when it defeated France in the Seven Years' War.

The land that became the United States

The explorers who came to the northern part of the hemisphere did not find gold and other riches, as did the Spanish in the south. Nor did these explorers find large Indian civilizations to help supply their needs. Instead, they found a wilderness sparsely inhabited by Indians.

The first settlers encountered many hardships as they attempted to establish colonies along the eastern coast. They had no way of knowing that beyond their settlements lay a vast and unbelievably rich and varied land. But later, the resources of this new land--its fertile soils, abundant water supplies, and plentiful minerals--would help the United States grow into one of the world's largest and most prosperous nations.

Read the text and choose TRUE or FALSE. Moreover, write the correct answers to the false ones.

1- Indians entered North America from Africa about 15000 years ago.

2- The Vikings arrived on the south coast of North America.

3- In 1492, Columbus found a “New World”.

4- Europeans were the first inhabitants of America.

5- America had around 80 million inhabitants when Columbus arrived.

6- Indians understood each other easily.

7- South America main tribes were: Aztec, Inca and Maya.

8- Some Indian tribes reached advanced cultures.

9- Indians welcomed Europeans at first.

10- Europeans treated well the Indian tribes.

Read the text and answer the following questions.

1.- What did the new world offer to many Europeans?

2.- What was the oldest permanent settlement in northern America?

3.- When did The English and French begin to explore eastern North America?

4.- When was France defeated by Britain?

5.- What did the explorers find in the northern part of the hemisphere?
