

AMERICAN INDIAN HISTORY: A VERY, VERY CONCISE HISTORY OF AMERICA

compiled for the seminar
"American Indians: An Introduction," Summer 2008

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Contents

Abstract:

This presentation provides a brief overview of American Indian history.

Contents:

1. Epistemological Prelude
2. Migration History
3. History Before Conquest
4. Conquest
5. American Indians Today
6. „Savagism“ and „Civilization“
7. Summary

3

1. Epistemological Prelude

How do we know what we know?

1. Epistemological Prelude

4

- What are facts?
- What is history?
- How do we know what we know?
- What is objective – and what subjective?

1. Epistemological Prelude

5

- Epistemology (επιστήμη =knowledge):
the science of knowledge

- knowledge can be
 - gained
 - transmitted

- knowledge is dependent on what you have learnt before – and the context you are in

1. Epistemological Prelude

6

- determinism: how free are we in a certain choice
- discourse (lat. discurrere: to run around):
the general discussion on a certain theme
in a specific society
- presentism: the assumption that things in the past can be
directly compared to things now
- “THE PAST IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY;
THEY DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY THERE.”
(Leslie Poles Hartley, *The Go-Between*)

1. Epistemological Prelude

7

- who speaks – for whom?
- who can represent themselves – who is represented?
- e.g. history – herstory
- whose perspective has shaped the text?

1. Epistemological Prelude

8

- knowledge is mostly communicated through texts
- texts have a writer, and a writer lives in a specific context
- texts need to be interpreted in order to understand them, they need to be questioned
- who wrote the text – why – how
- limitations may be conscious or unconscious

1. Epistemological Prelude

- knowledge consists of
 - **facts** (what happened, how are things like)
 - **theory** (why did x happen, why is x like this)
- theory (θεωρεῖν: to see) always influences facts:
it is difficult (but not impossible) to find something you are not looking for
- Plato: οἶδα οὐδὲν εἰδώς: „I know as one who doesn't know“
- new theories eventually arise when old theories cannot be brought together with facts

1. Epistemological Prelude

10

- all knowledge is tentative
- new information can always change the way the world is seen
- there exist different **readings** of history
- objectivity is difficult – but it may be reached by
 - trying to incorporate diverse perspectives
 - by staying open to new information
 - by being aware of one's subjective perspective

1. Epistemological Prelude

11

- how do we know about Indians?
 - historiography
 - archaeology
 - anthropology
 - geography
 - linguistics
 - genetics & biology
 - written literature
 - oral history and literature
 - comparative conjecture from present

- through non-Indians
- through Indians themselves

2. Migration History

When Did American Indians Arrive in America?

2. Migration History

- traditional model: Bering Strait, approx. 13.000 years ago

problems with that model:

- older finds have surfaced
- In archaeology, it is difficult to say when a culture started. Usually, the oldest find up to date is considered the starting point of a culture. More recent finds that predate those believed to be the oldest push back the date.
- Dating is only possible for organic material.
- The Bering Strait theory presupposes a longer period of an ice-free, water-free corridor between Asia and Alaska

2. Migration History

14

- ❑ Originally, the Model presupposed one wave of migration. Now some theories suspect at least three to account for the various language families.
- ❑ The Pacific was settled by boat; people got as far as Hawai'i and Easter Island. Some evidence suggest a reach as far as California. Why not also America?
- ❑ Today's Inuit hunt by boat. What makes it impossible for Asian people in the past to have traveled the American Coast by boat, and then settled, despite the Ice Age?

2. Migration History

15

- As many cultures have been destroyed and their tradition lost, information about origin is difficult to come by.
- The traditional origin stories of most Indian peoples most often state that their people have been in their respective territory “since time immemorial.”
- The answer to their origin may lie in a combined analysis of language families and genetics.
- some contested newer theories claim settlement more than 40.000 years ago

2. Migration History

- For some people, this becomes an ethical question:

If Indians also immigrated to the Americas, they do not have right to the land either and can be replaced by Whites.

- This “argument” misses that migration is a common theme in human history. Europe, for instance, was settled much later than the Americas.
- Removal remains problematic no matter how long somebody stayed at a specific place.

2. Migration History

17

- Why could Indians not have originated in America?

Biological answer: Homo Sapiens only evolved once. The simultaneous evolution of the same species in two different places has not yet been observed and must appear impossible. Humans originated in Africa, and then spread.

There are also genetic ties to Asia.

- American Indians are not Asians – even if they have probably roots in Asia. They have become Americans.

2. Migration History

- There is widespread resistance against Arrival Theories amongst Indians. This often is a resistance against oversimplified and now proven wrong theories of recent arrival.
- Also, the “out of Asia” theory has religious precursors: As Adam is the father of all humankind, and as the Deluge had only Noah survive, Indians had to come from Asia.
- Mormonism sees Indian tribes related to the “lost tribes of Israel”

3. History Before Conquest

A Brief Overview

1. Prerequisites and Assumptions
2. Ancient Cultural Centers and Empires
3. South America
4. Mesoamerica
5. North America

3.1. Prerequisites: Domestic Animals

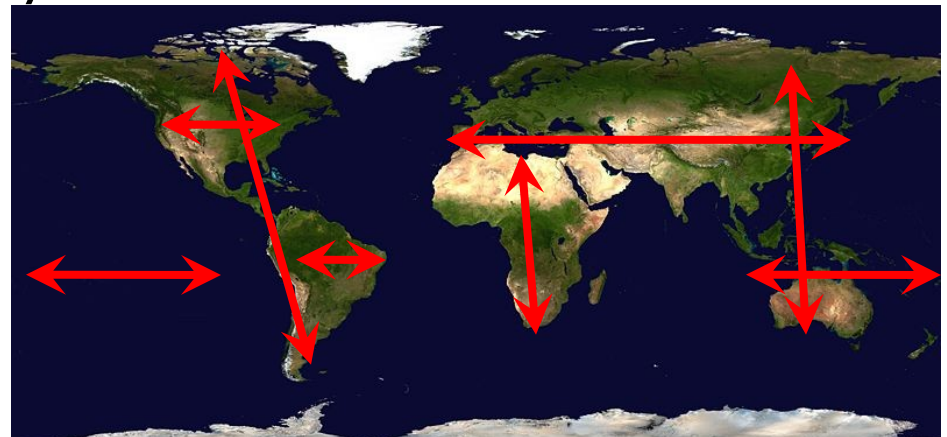
- Coinciding with assumed waves of migration, several groups of animals died out.
- There may be a causal connection (hunting), but there were also animals affected that were not hunted.
- Also, as the time-frame of migration is not clear, the extinction could have had environmental and climate reasons.
- Big mammals like horses, cattle, pigs did not exist after the extinction. This reduced chances for domestication and disease, and made Indians more receptive for European diseases later on.

3.1. Prerequisites: Geography

21

- Eurasia extends mostly horizontally. This eases the transport of plants and animals: Most Eurasian centers of civilization lie in a similar climate zone (Mesopotamia, Mediterranean, Indus/Ganges, Huang He/Yangtze).
- America extends mostly vertically. This makes transport of plants and animals exceedingly difficult. The Mesoamerican isthmus, high mountains and jungles complicate trans-continental travel till today.

(Jared Diamond,
Guns, Germs and Steel)



3.1. Domestication

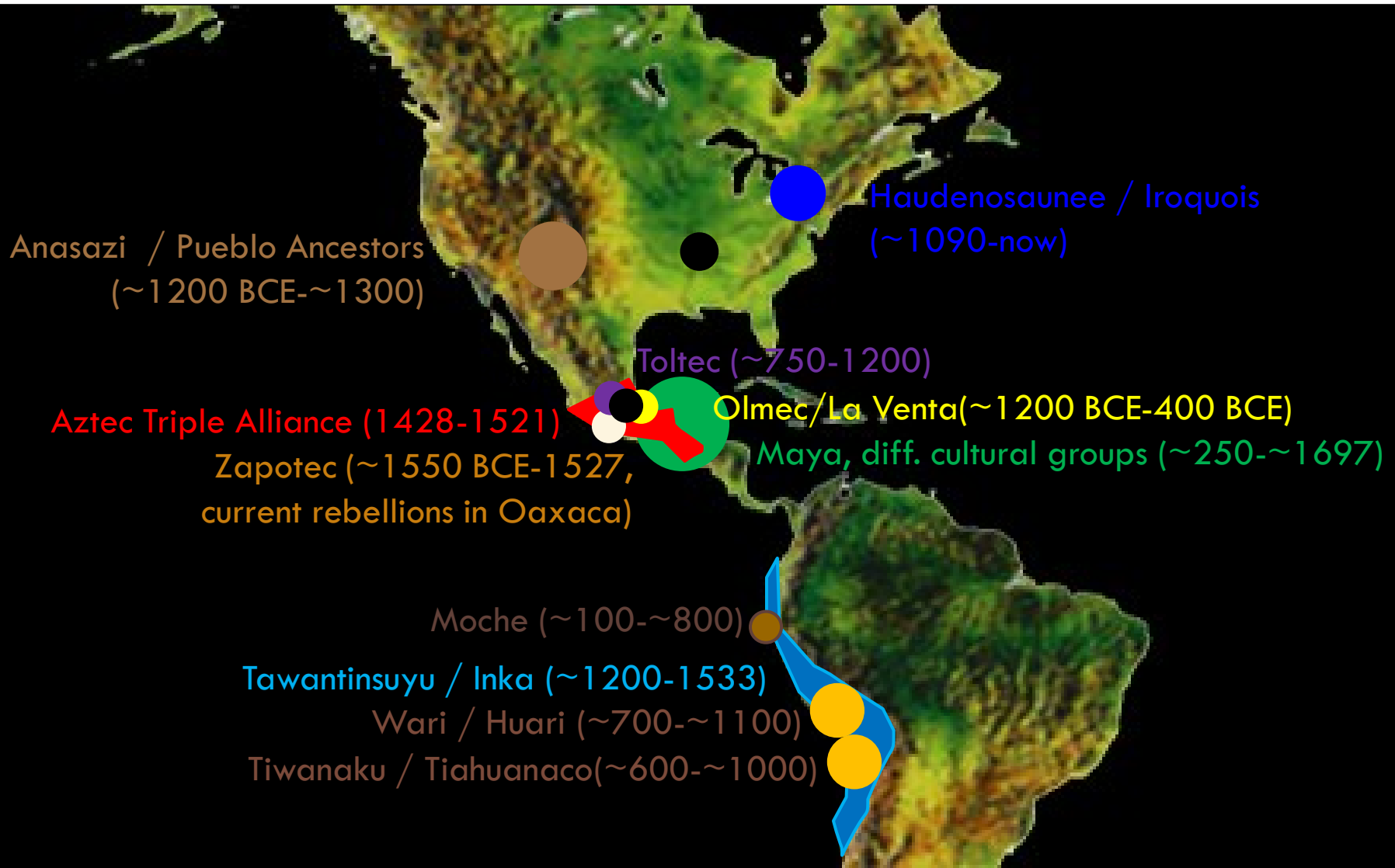
- Maize (corn) had to be domesticated from a less suitable plant (Teosinte). Several dozen varieties of maize have been bred systematically.
- Squashes, tomatoes, potatoes, manioc, cacao and many other plants have been domesticated by Indian peoples.
- The “discovery” of America meant that foods bred by Indians revolutionized the world economy.
- Forests in North America were regularly cleared from underbrush to ease hunting and prevent wildfires. They also planted fruit trees. After European conquest, forests were given room to grow – “wilderness” is a European creation.

3.1. Virgin Soil?

- Indians cultivated their world **like any other civilization.**
- They were not living in a “natural state.”
- Europeans, when they first saw America, described a country filled with vibrant cities and incredible riches. Indian agricultural achievements, till this day, feed the world.
- Wide trade networks spanned the entire North American continent.
- Tenochtitlán, for instance, was bigger than any European city at the same time.

3.2. Ancient Cultural Centers & Empires

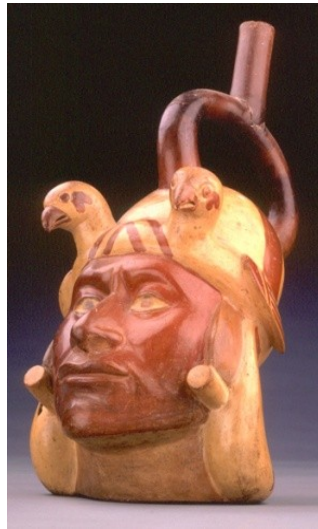
24



3.3. South America: Moche / Mochica

25

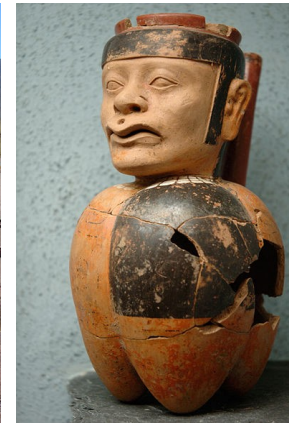
- Moche polities (~100-~800)



3.3. South America: Tiwanaku / Tihuanaco

26

- Tiwanaku culture (~600-~1000), near lake Titicaca



3.3. South America: Wari / Huari

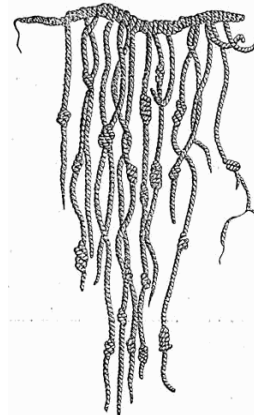
27

- Wari culture (~700-~1100)



3.3. South America: Tawantinsuyu / Inka

- Tawantinsuyu Empire (“Four Corners”, ~1200-1533)
capital: Qosqo
Inka roads
quipu writing



3.4. Mesomerica: Zapototecs

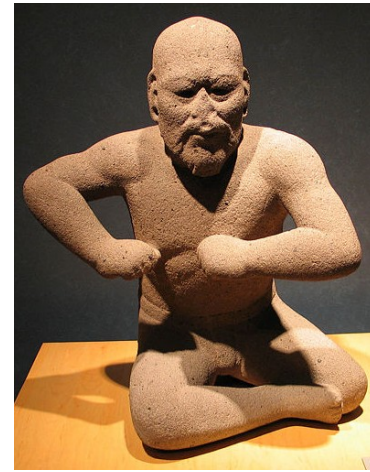
- Zapotec culture (~1550 BCE-1527, current rebellions in Oaxaca)



3.4. Mesomerica: „Olmecs“ / La Venta Culture

30

- Olmec culture (~1200 BCE-400 BCE)



3.4. Mesomerica: Teotihuacan

31

- City of Teotihuacan (~200 BCE-~800)



source: Wikimedia Commons

3.4. Mesomerica: Maya (1)

32

- various Mayan polities (~250-~1697); Mayans still exist; there are protests in Chiapas and other states (Zapatistas)

source: Wikimedia Commons



Palenque



Tikal / Mutal



Calokmul / Kaan







Chichén Itzá



Tikal / Mutal

3.4. Mesomerica: Maya (2)

0	1	2	3	4
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5	6	7	8	9
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10	11	12	13	14
	•	••	•••	••••
15	16	17	18	19
	•	••	•••	••••



3.4. Mesomerica: Maya (3)



3.4. Mesomerica: Toltecs / Tula

35

- Toltec culture (~750-1200)



3.4. Mesomerica: Aztec Triple Alliance (1)

- Triple Alliance: Texcoco, Tenochtitlan, Tlacopan



3.4. Mesomerica: Aztec Triple Alliance (2)

37



Tezcatlipoca

3.4. Mesomerica: Aztec Triple Alliance (3)



3.5. North America: Anasazi / Pueblo Ancestors

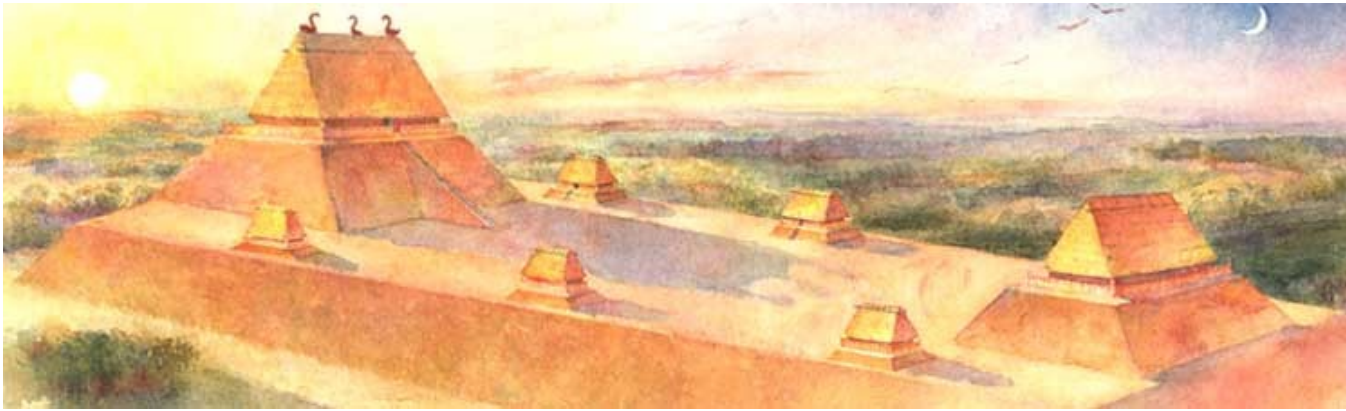
39

- Anasazi culture: ancestors of modern pueblos



3.5. North America: Cahokia & Mound Builders

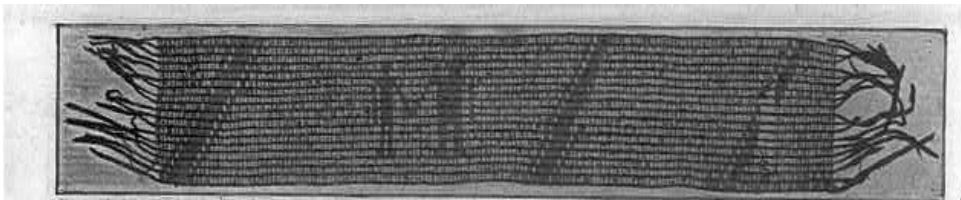
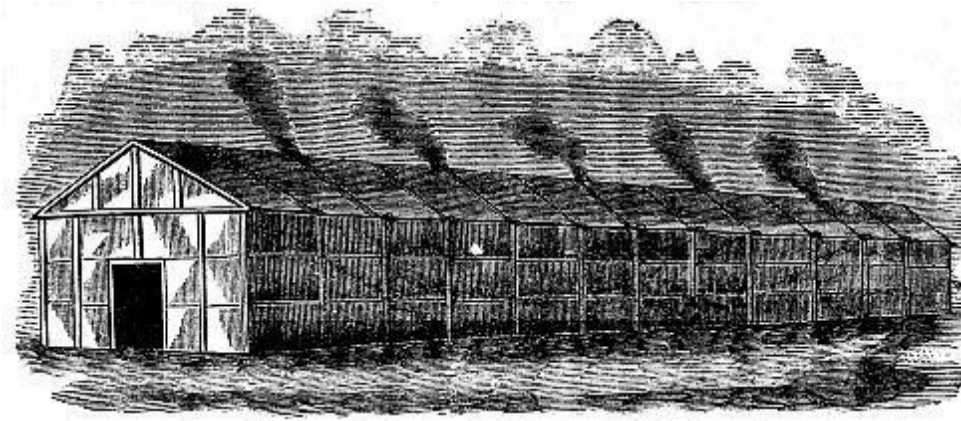
- Mound Builders: Mississippi & Ohio; City of Cahokia



3.5. North America: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois)

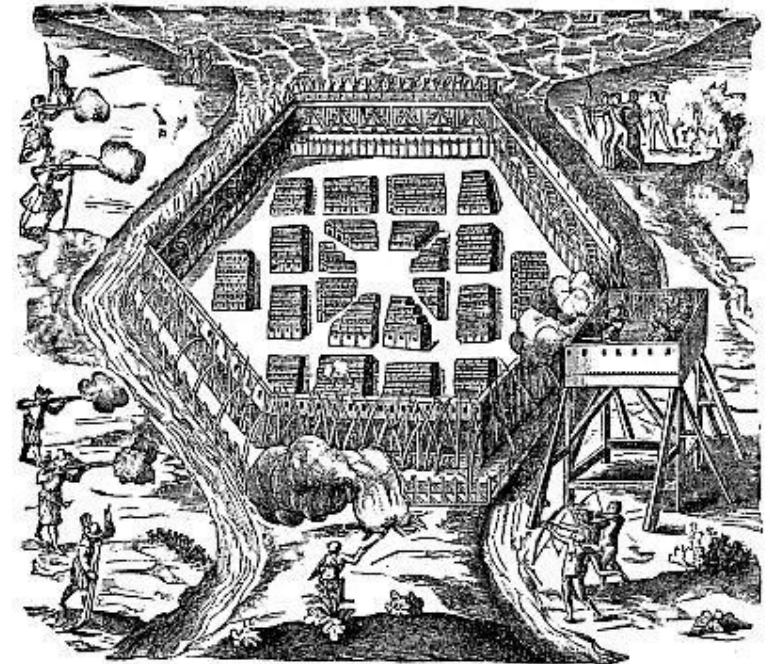
41

- Six Nations: Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, Tuscarora (People of the Longhouse)
- Great Law of Peace: Confederacy of allied nations



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THE BELT OF WAMPUM DELIVERED BY THE INDIANS TO WILLIAM PENN AT THE
"GREAT TREATY" UNDER THE ELM TREE AT SHACKAMAXON, IN 1682



Stockaded Onondaga Village.

42

4. Conquest

An Ongoing Story

4. Conquest: First Discovery by Europeans

43

- Vikings:
Colonies in Greenland ~980-~1430
- contact and trading with Vinland (New England / Nova Scotia area?) between late 10th century and 14th century
- It is suspected that diseases did not play such a role as Scandinavians carried less pathogens (warmer climate).
- Older contacts by Phoenecians, Romans, Africans, Hawai'ians are debated.

4. Conquest:

The World is Round – or Flat?

44

- Despite wide-spread belief, since Antiquity (3rd Cent. BCE) the world was believed to be round.
- Flat Earth thesis: people before Columbus believed the world was flat, especially Medieval Christians
- this thesis was **invented** in the 19th Century:
Washington Irving, 1828
The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus

Antoine-Jean Letronne, 1834
On the Cosmographical Ideas of the Church Fathers

4. Conquest: Spanish Discovery and Conquest

45

- Columbus believed the circumference of the world to be smaller than it is; through his miscalculation he thought to be able to sail to Asia.
- arrived in Bahamas in 1492, later Cuba and Hispaniola
- Reconquista of Spain as prerequisite for conquest:
January 2, 1492: Conquest of Granada

4. Conquest: Triple Alliance / Hernán Cortés

46

- 1519 capture of Veracruz
- 1519 occupation of Tenochtitlán (with Tlaxcalan allies), took the *tlatoani* Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin hostage , expelled in 1520 after his death
- 1520 smallpox epidemic in Mexico
- 1521 conquest of Tenochtitlán, ending Aztec rule

4. Conquest:

Tawantinsuyu / Francisco Pizarro

47

- 1524 or 1525: smallpox epidemic
- civil war amongst the Inka
- 1532-1535: conquest of Tawantinsuyu

- The epidemics claimed up to 95 % of the indigenous population. Several waves of diseases went through the Americas.
- Without the diseases claiming the majority of their population, Indian cities and states could have resisted, they were technological equals if not superiors in many respects.

4. Conquest:

General Colonization Tendencies

48

- Spain focused on creating ethnically mixed but Spanish-dominated vassal states, Indians were used as workforce, Indian slavery prohibited (nominally) 1537 (Bartolomé de Las Casas, Papal Bull *Sublimus Dei*, Pope Paul III).
- English colonies focused on settlement, pushed away other European powers, such as Netherlands, and later on the French and Spanish
- French colonies focused on building a trade network along the Great Lakes, the Ohio and Mississippi
- Slavery started with Indians, till Europeans brought Africans over.

4. Conquest: North America, Virginia

49

- 1585-1587 Roanoke colony, „lost“ (inhabitants were left alone, probably fled to surrounding Indian tribes)
- 1607 Jamestown, VA Settlement established
- 1618 Wahunsenacawh (Powhatan) dies of disease
- 1622 and 1644 resistance movement by Opchanacanough
- < [pictures](#) >

4. Conquest: North America, New England

50

- 1620 Plymouth, MA founded on site of Patuxet



4. Conquest: US Policy of Conquest

51

- the English aimed at restricting settlement over the Appalachians,
- since Independence, settlement went forward
- with the Seven Years War / French & Indian War (1754-1763), and the Louisiana Purchase (1803), the US had free reign for settlement – after removing the Indians
- 1845 Texas Annexation
- in the Mexican-American War (1846-48), the US gained California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and parts of New Mexico and Colorado from Mexico
- 1898 Hawai'i Annexation
- 1898 invasion of Puerto Rico (in Spanish-American war)

4. Conquest: Effects for Indians

52

- diseases killed up to 95% of the indigenous population
- nevertheless, the land was neither „empty“ nor „virgin“: these descriptions of the „frontier“ are propagandistic

- alternating phases:
 - intermixing
 - peaceful coexistence
 - land-grabbing (settlers = squatters [Jenkins])
 - voluntary exile
 - forced removal
 - biological warfare („smallpox blankets“)
 - direct war

4. Conquest:

Phases of US Policy (Pevar)

53

- past-1787: Tribal Independence
- 1787-1828: Agreements between Equals
- 1828-1887: Relocation
 - 1830: Indian Removal Act, 1832-1843 „Trail of Tears“
 - 1864: Sand Creek Massacre
 - 1872: Battle of the Little Big Horn
- 1887-1934: Allotment and Assimilation
 - 1890: Wounded Knee Massacre
- 1934-1953: Indian Reorganization
- 1953-1968: Termination
- 1968-now: Tribal Self-Determination

4. Conquest: Evaluation

54

- complex picture;
general tendencies for all, but each tribe different
- more detailed discussions will follow when we talk about the literature
- own reading

- „whitestream“ culture
- „Ethnic Cleansing“
- „genocide“ / „Indigenocide“
- guilt vs. responsibility

5. American Indians Today

(In the USA)

1. Original Cultural Groups in the US
2. 1990 US Census Data
3. Indian Reservations

5.1. Original Cultural Groups in the US

56

- “American Indian,” “Native American,” “First Nations,” “Indigenous,” “Amerind” are terms that gloss over a large group of diverse peoples
- language families point to common historical roots
- individual tribal identities continue to be important

5.1. North American Language & Culture Groups, Regions



5.1. Original Cultural Groups in the US

**COAST
SALISH**

GREAT LAKES REGION

GREAT PLAINS

**EASTERN
WOODLANDS
& COASTS**

CALIFORNIA

**MISSISSIPPI,
CAHOKIA,
MOUND BUILDERS**

PUEBLOS

SOUTHERN

**MEXICANA/NAHUA
(AZTEC)**

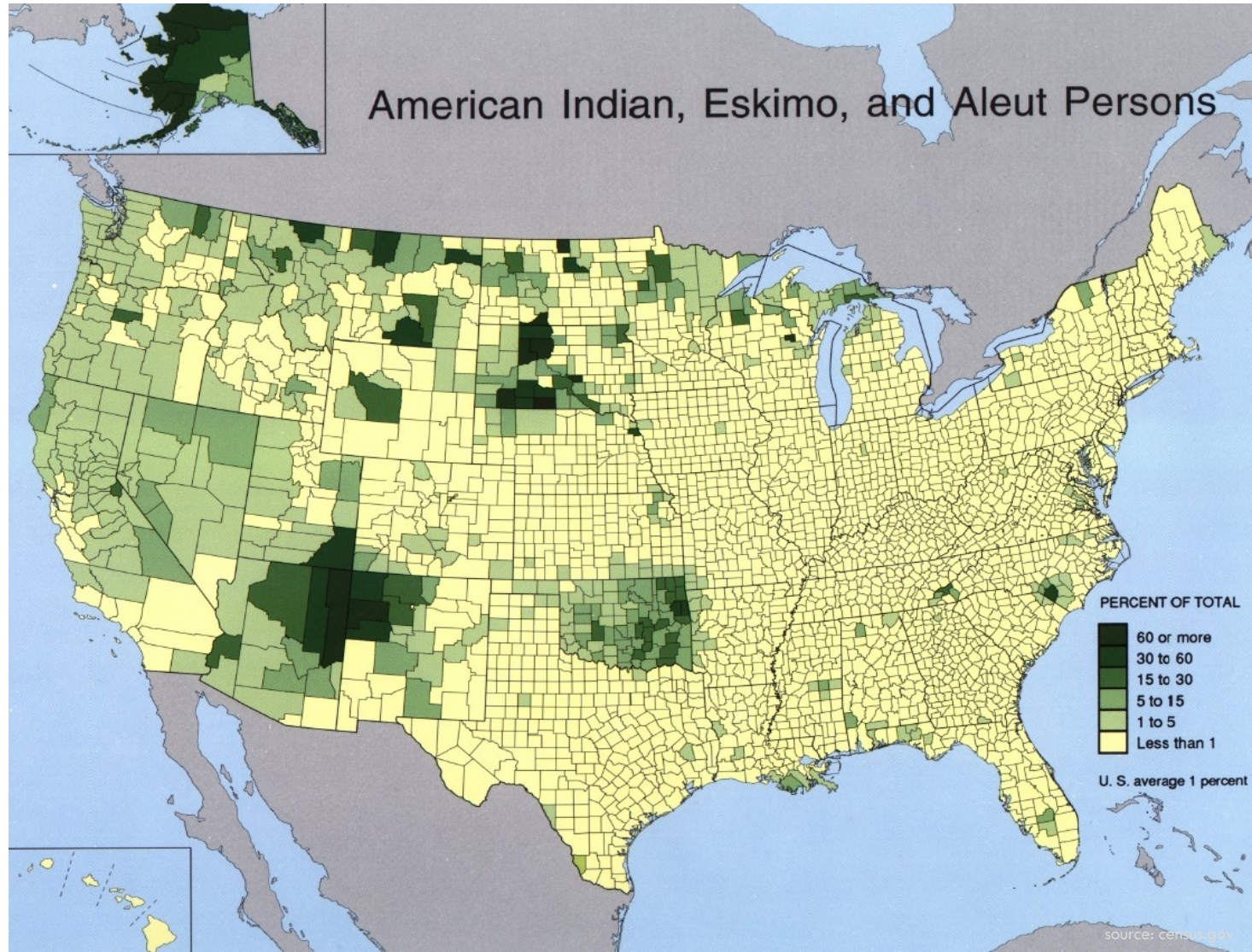


Data Sources:
This map was compiled from unknown sources by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) circa 1900.

Map Information:
Lambert Azimuthal Equal Area, Scale 1:5845860
The numbers on the map represent the locations of Indian reservations. Please reference these numbers with the accompanying sheets entitled "Indian Reservations- BIA/CAST 5/96".

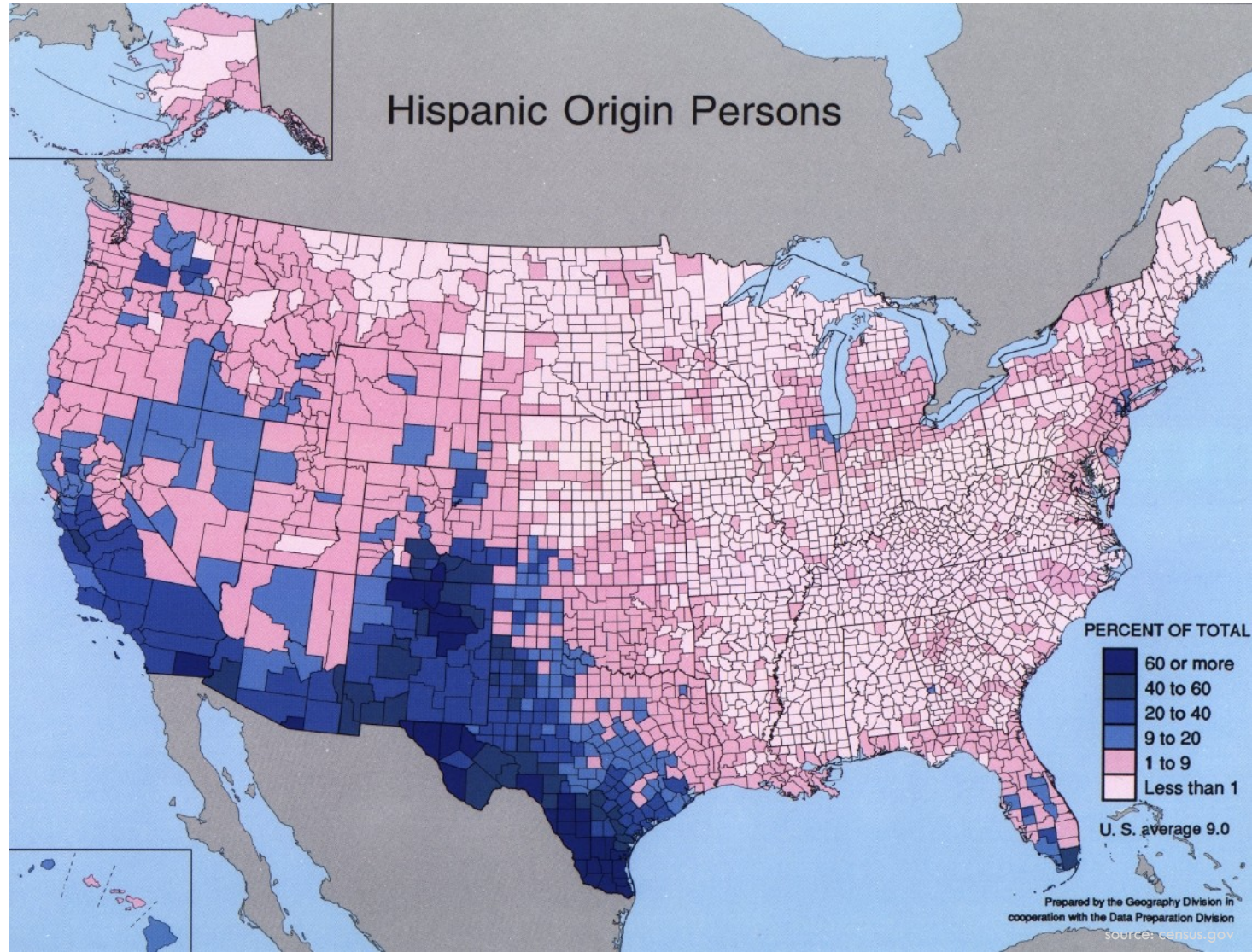
5.2. US Census 1990: American Indians

59



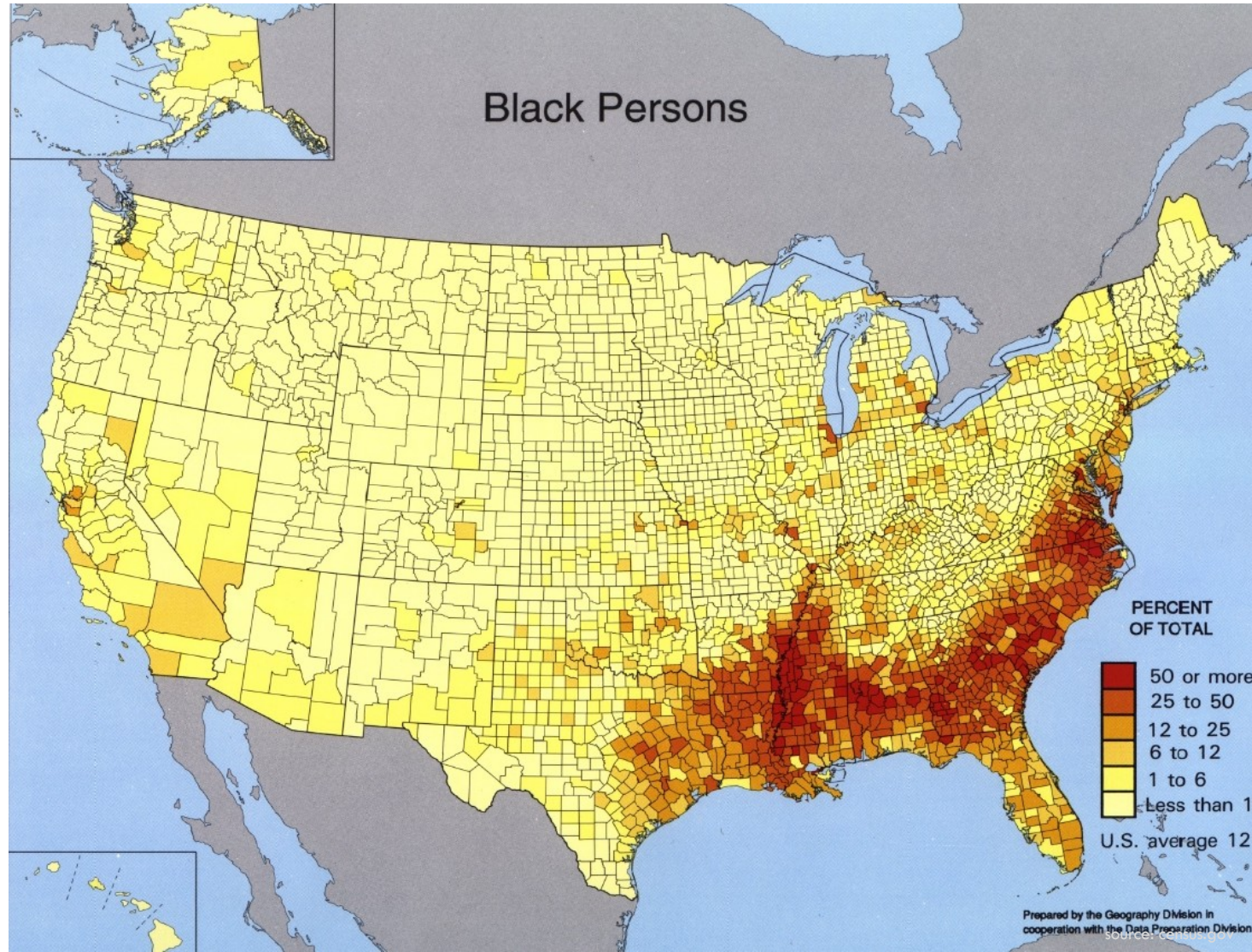
5.2. US Census 1990: Hispanics

60



5.2. US Census 1990: African American

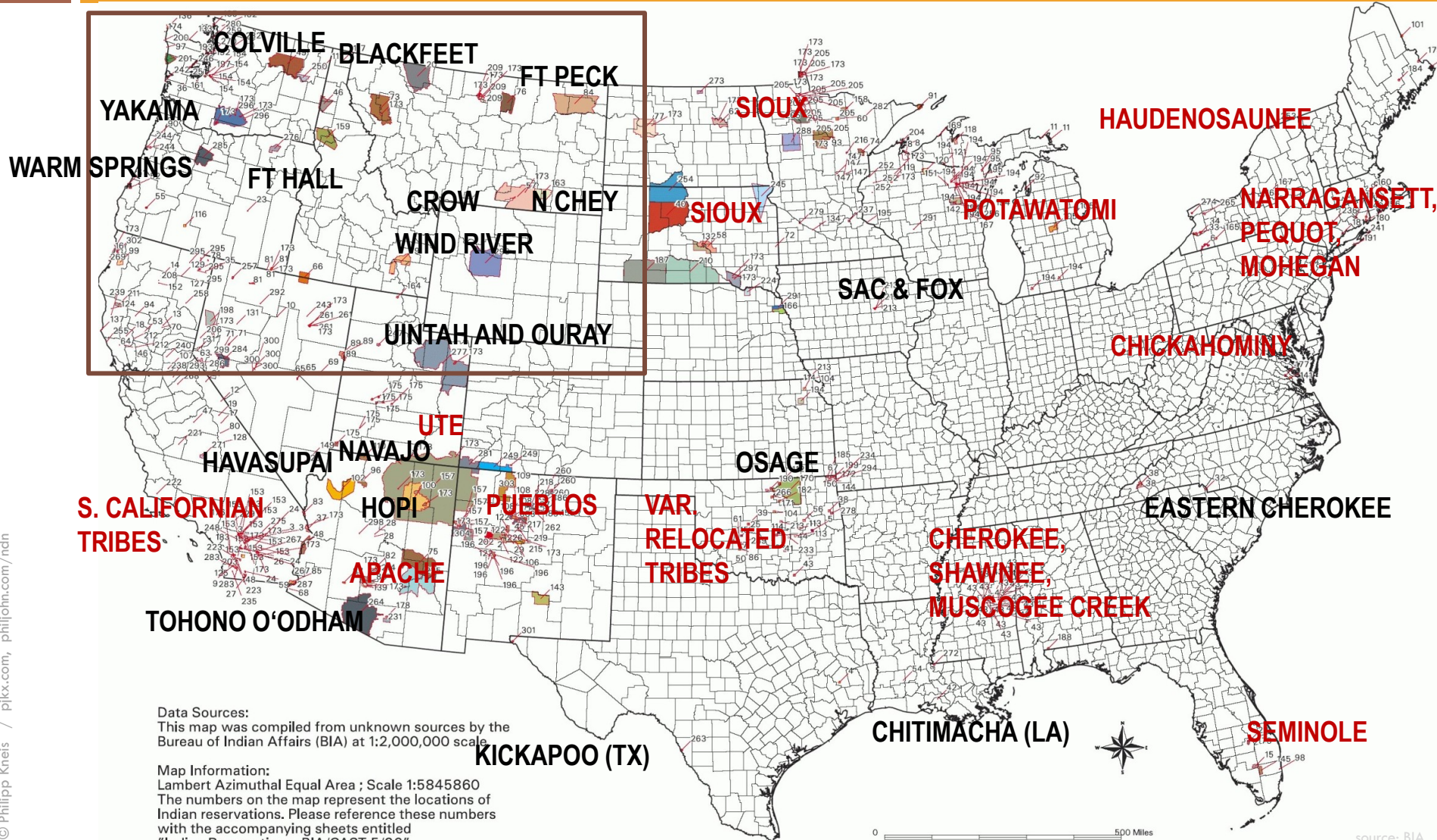
61



5.3. Indian Reservations

- Indian Reservations have been established to concentrate and contain Indians at a specific location which may or may not be part of their homeland.
- to a certain extent, this has helped preserve Indian peoples
- it has also worked to destroy their culture & traditions in „preparing“ them for Whitestream society

5.3. Indian Reservations



Data Sources:
 This map was compiled from unknown sources by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) at 1:2,000,000 scale.

Map Information:
 Lambert Azimuthal Equal Area ; Scale 1:5845860
 The numbers on the map represent the locations of Indian reservations. Please reference these numbers with the accompanying sheets entitled "Indian Reservations- BIA/CAST 5/96".

5.3. Most Populous Tribes (1990)

Tribe	Number	%	Tribe	Number	%
All American Indians	1,937,391	100.0	Chickasaw	21,522	1.1
Cherokee	369,035	19.0	Tohono O'Odham	16,876	0.9
Navajo	225,298	11.6	Potawatomi	16,719	0.9
Sioux	107,321	5.5	Seminole 2	15,564	0.8
Chippewa	105,988	5.5	Pima	15,074	0.8
Choctaw	86,231	4.5	Tlingit	14,417	0.7
Pueblo	55,330	2.9	Alaskan Athabaskans	14,198	0.7
Apache	53,330	2.8	Cheyenne	11,809	0.6
Iroquois	52,557	2.7	Comanche	11,437	0.6
Lumbee	50,888	2.6	Paiute 2	11,369	0.6
Creek	45,872	2.4	Osage	10,430	0.5
Blackfoot	37,992	2.0	Puget Sound Salish	10,384	0.5
Canadian and Latin American	27,179	1.4	Yaqui	9,838	0.5

5.3. Biggest Reservations

State / Reservation	km ²	Population	State / Reservation	km ²	Population
IR: Navajo (AZ, NM, UT)	70.000	298.215	NJ	22.588	8.724.560
WV	62.755	1.818.470	MA	27.336	6.437.193
MD	32.133	5.615.727	MD	32.133	5.615.727
HI	28.311	1.285.498	Tr: Puerto Rico	8.959	3.927.188
MA	27.336	6.437.193	CT	14.357	3.504.809
VT	24.901	623.908	WV	62.755	1.818.470
NH	24.216	1.314.895	NH	24.216	1.314.895
NJ	22.588	8.724.560	HI	28.311	1.285.498
IR: Uintah and Ouray (UT)	17.532	19.182	RI	4.002	1.067.610
CT	14.357	3.504.809	DE	6.447	853.476
IR: Tohono O'odham (AZ)	11.553	11.000	VT	24.901	623.908
IR: Cheyenne River (SD)	11.051	8.470	DC	442	581.530
IR: Crow (MT)	9.307	6.894	IR: Navajo (AZ, NM, UT)	70.000	298.215
IR: Standing Rock (ND, SD)	9.251	8.250	IR: Osage(OK)	5.967	44.437
IR: Wind River (WY)	8.996	23.250	IR: Flathead (MT)	5.020	26.172
IR: Pine Ridge (SD)	8.984	15.521	IR: Wind River (WY)	8.996	23.250
Tr: Puerto Rico	8.959	3.927.188	IR: Uintah and Ouray (UT)	17.532	19.182
IR: Fort Peck (MT)	8.519	10.321	IR: Pine Ridge (SD)	8.984	15.521
IR: San Carlos (AZ)	7.539	9.385	IR: Fort Apache (AZ)	6.805	12.429
IR: Fort Apache (AZ)	6.805	12.429	IR: Tohono O'odham (AZ)	11.553	11.000
IR: Hopi (AZ)	6.557	6.946	IR: Fort Peck (MT)	8.519	10.321
DE	6.447	853.476	IR: Blackfeet (MT)	6.142	10.100
IR: Blackfeet (MT)	6.142	10.100	IR: San Carlos (AZ)	7.539	9.385
IR: Osage(OK)	5.967	44.437	IR: Yakama (WA)	5.260	9.000
IR: Colville (WA)	5.482	7.000	IR: Cheyenne River (SD)	11.051	8.470
IR: Yakama (WA)	5.260	9.000	IR: Standing Rock (ND, SD)	9.251	8.250
IR: Flathead (MT)	5.020	26.172	IR: Colville (WA)	5.482	7.000
IR: Hualapai (AZ)	4.146	1.353	IR: Hopi (AZ)	6.557	6.946
RI	4.002	1.067.610	IR: Crow (MT)	9.307	6.894
DC	442	581.530	IR: Hualapai (AZ)	4.146	1.353

5.3. Indian Reservations

67

- the bigger sizes are exceptional
- most reservations are small

- some miniscule reservations remain on the East Coast

- two trends:
 - through removal, Indians at different locations (Oklahoma)
 - Indians (especially in the West) on or near their home territories
 - all reservations smaller than the original territory

6. “Savagism” and “Civilization”

Propaganda Then and Now:
Stereotypes, Hybridity, Syncretism

1. Concepts of Civilization
2. Savagism
3. New Age Indians

6.1. Concepts of Civilization

69

- civilization means something specific, but it is often used as a general term
- what is “civilized” to one group may be “barbaric” to another
- original dichotomy: Greek citizens vs “βάρβαροι” (people who speak in unintelligible tongues)
- “civilization” from lat. “cives,” citizen – specifically: Roman-inspired civilization

6.1. Concepts of Civilization

70

- French and Spanish „civilization“ tied to Roman Catholicism
- English immigrants mostly Anglican or Protestant

- English Model for colonization of America:
colonization of Catholic Ireland

- in New England:
civilized = Christian = Protestant = a specific Protestant

6.1. Concepts of Civilization

71

- Civilization tied in to agriculture
- Locke: land has to be “improved upon” to be owned

- Problem:
 - Indians were most often farmers
 - Indian villages and fields regularly taken over by Whites

 - Indians were nomadic only in specific areas (Plains)

 - Indians were *made* nomadic through conquest
(also Amazon tribes like the Yanomami)

6.2. „The Other“

- according to some theories of identity formation, the self is recognized as such by defining it against an “other”
- societies regularly create a normative, prescriptive model of themselves
- people outside the norm are considered “different,” “other”
- the “other” is stereotypically seen as a homogeneous group of a less than civilized status
- this allows for discrimination and racism

6.2. Savagism

73

- theories of the “savage” are tied to Greco-Roman theories of the “Barbarian”
- in Europe, “Barbarians” became civilized through becoming Christians → political dimension of religion
- theories of a “savage past” were becoming popular through Columbus’ travels
- it was assumed that Indians were stuck in time, representing an “earlier form” of evolution
- these theories still persist, notwithstanding all evidence

6.2. Savagism (2)

- stereotypes of the “Noble Savage” are equally rampant as those of the “Wild Savage”
- both views of Indians are **de-humanizing**
- Indians are seen as conforming to certain ideas, they are not seen as real, living, modern people
- this constitutes a **distortion** of evolutionary theory
- further reading:
Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*

6.3. New Age Indians

- theories of the Golden Age are frequent
- inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Margaret Mead and Henry Lewis Morgan, and especially since the 1960s, a view of Indians has emerged that is equally demeaning

- Indians are seen as
 - spiritual
 - anti-scientific
 - anti-materialistic
 - ecologically aware and superior
 - inherently peaceful
 - somehow magical / tied to Shamanism and Wicca
 - matriarchal

6.3. New Age Indians

76

- this view is equally wrong and de-humanizing
- it is a **projection** of the wishes of people living in an industrial world and tells us more about contemporary society than about Indians

- **New Ageism can also be seen amongst Indians**

- by seeing Indians as somehow anti-industrial, ecological and spiritual, their scientific achievements (especially in agriculture and terraforming) are ignored

Conclusion

Conclusion

- American Indian societies have been more complex than usually assumed.
- American Indian cultures still exist today. These do not constitute “remnants” of an anthropological past, but equally modern modes of human existence.
- Processes of colonization are still going on. Demeaning and misleading stereotypes continue to depict Indians as savages and sometimes sub-humans.
- Throughout the seminar, we will discuss how a modern Native American identity has emerged in recent times, and how our understanding of the past has to change as well.
- These are not merely academic but very practical issues.

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