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In 1492 Christopher Columbus sailed from Europe to North America and changed the world forever. Soon people from crowded European cities learned of the New World — a big, beautiful place where they could hunt, farm, and worship in freedom. For the millions of people already living there, however, this world was not new, it was home.

Their ancestors had been living on the American continents for thousands of years. They had their own rich civilizations, languages, and cultures. Columbus called them Indians, thinking he had reached India. Today, in the United States, they are called Native Americans and in Canada they are called First Peoples. They are further categorized by their tribal names, such as Cherokee, Mohawk, or Hopi.

Translated into English, many tribal names simply mean The People. As this name implies, they were the people of the land, the only people. Then Europeans came to North America. Colonists settled the eastern coast of North America and later established the United States. Then pioneers arrived and moved to new areas, west of the colonies. The incoming Europeans brought a hunger for more land. They also brought diseases, for which the Native Americans had no immunity.

During a period of four hundred years after the arrival of Columbus, both the Native Americans and the settlers faced immense challenges. During this time, millions of Native Americans died from disease and war. Since the 1900s, however, their populations have grown and much of their culture has survived. This encyclopedia series presents significant people and events in the history of Native Americans from the arrival of the Europeans to present-day events.
**Abalone shells** are used by Native Americans to make jewelry. The abalone is a type of mollusk. The shell of the abalone is lined with a shiny, iridescent layer. To be made into jewelry, the shiny layer is broken, split, cut, and polished.

Native Americans used abalone shells to make simple beads or intricate carvings for their jewelry.

**Abenaki** (also known as Abnaki, Wabanaki, and Wpanahaki meaning *people of the dawn or easterners*), a confederacy of many Algonquian speaking tribes, lived in what is now Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and sections of eastern Canada.

This watercolor shows an Abenaki couple in the 18th century.

The Abenaki were among the first Native Americans to meet Europeans. During the wars between the French and the English, who fought for control of North America, the Abenaki sided with the French. After the Abenaki confederacy was defeated by the English in 1725, many of the Abenaki moved to sections of Canada ruled by the French.

Their food included maize, also known as corn, beans, squash, deer, moose, muskrat, otter, bear, and fish. The Abenaki fertilized their maize with dead fish. They lived in wigwams and wore clothing made from animal hides. They used tree bark to make canoes and containers.

See also: Dummer’s War and wigwam
Aboriginal peoples (also known as Native Americans, indigenous peoples, First Peoples, native peoples, First Nations, and Aborigines) are believed to be the original people to live in a particular location.

See also: American Indians

Abraham (1782–unknown) (also known as Sauanaffe Tustunnagee meaning Suwannee warrior) was a Black Seminole warrior. Black Seminoles were Africans who escaped slavery and found freedom in Florida, among the Seminole Nation.

Abraham escaped slavery by joining the British army during the War of 1812. He helped build a fort in Florida that became a safe place for runaway slaves. This fort was attacked during the first Seminole War, which was waged between the Seminoles and the United States Army from 1817 to 1818. Abraham fought with the Seminoles and became a member of the Seminole Nation. He married the widow of Chief Bowlegs and became the chief advisor to Chief Micanopy, of the Alachua Seminoles.

See also: Seminole and Seminole Wars

Acculturation refers to the changes that one culture experiences when it meets another culture. This change can happen naturally, as when Native Americans learned European ways of hunting and farming. One culture can also force acculturation on another. For example, beginning in the late 1800s, the U.S. government forced some Native American children to attend boarding schools. There, the children were taught English and job skills. They were not allowed to speak their native languages.

See also: Indian boarding schools

Abraham was a Black Seminole warrior and part of the Seminole Nation from its beginning in Florida.

Confederacy (kun-FEH-der-ah-see): groups who work together toward a common goal

Iridescent (EAR-ah-deh-sent): having changing rainbow colors, as seen on bubbles

Mollusk (mall-UH SK): a soft-bodied invertebrate (an animal that has no backbone), such as a snail
Achomawi (also known as Pit River Indians) are Native Americans who lived in the river basin of the Pit River in north-central California. They spoke a Palaihnihan branch of the Hokan family of languages. They lived in bark lodges and partially underground homes in the winter. They ate fish, wildfowl, and vegetables. They were known to be expert basket weavers.

The Achomawi crafted baskets using grasses and willow which they colored with vegetable dyes.

Acoma Pueblo is a 70-acre village in New Mexico. It was built on top of a mesa that is almost 400 feet high. Another name for this pueblo is Sky City. It is believed to have been built in the 1100s. Its high location and steep sides protected the Acoma people from raiders. The Acoma Pueblo is said to be the oldest continually inhabited community in the United States.

Today, less than 50 people live in Sky City. About 3,000 Acomans live in nearby villages. These people continue the traditions of their ancestors. Many of them are farmers. Some practice their traditional religion and others observe the Catholic religion, which was brought by Spanish settlers in the 1500s.

On special feast days, all the Acomans gather together on the ancient mesa for cultural celebrations.

Spanish settlers built this mission church in the Acoma Pueblo in the 1600s.

Seeds were stored inside this Acoman seed pot. The pots were broken as needed.
Adena culture refers to Native American societies that existed from 1000 B.C. to 100 B.C. The Adena lived in Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, Kentucky, and parts of Pennsylvania and New York. They are known for the mounds of earth that they built. These mounds were 20 to 300 feet (6 to 91 meters) across and were used for burials.

Adobe is the name for a kind of building material and for the buildings that are made with it. Native Americans of the Southwest built adobe homes and apartments. Adobe bricks are made of clay, water, straw, and burned twigs and grass. Once the bricks are shaped, they are dried in the sun. Adobe homes were often built together as apartments. Many families lived in each apartment. As families grew, rooms were added to the tops of the buildings. Several of these apartments were considered a village. This kind of village is called an adobe pueblo.

Adz is a tool similar to an ax. Originally, the blade was made from stone, shell, bone, or copper. Later, Native Americans learned from Europeans to make the blades with iron. An adz was used to hollow out a tree log so it could be made into a canoe.

Ahtena (also known as Ahtna and Atnatuna meaning Ice People) is the name of a tribe of Native Americans who live in south-central Alaska. The Ahtena live in the basin of the Copper River. Their language is also called Ahtena, and it is written in the Latin alphabet.
Akimel O’odham (also known as Pima, Akimel O’otam, and Akimel Au-Authm) is a tribe that lives in central and southern Arizona and in Sonora, Mexico. They speak the O’odham language. They got their name, meaning River People, because they lived in ranchería villages built along riverbanks. They became known for the canals that they built as part of an irrigation system for watering crops.

Akimel O’odham

New York and southern Canada. The original goal of Akwesasne Notes was to tell the experiences of the Mohawk community living on Akwesasne, where pollution became a problem. The journal now includes stories about all native peoples.

Akwesasne Notes was an important source of information about Native people founded during the Indian civil rights movement. The name Akwesasne means Land Where the Partridge Drums. This refers to Mohawk Nation land in northern New York and southern Canada. The original goal of Akwesasne Notes was to tell the experiences of the Mohawk community living on Akwesasne, where pollution became a problem. The journal now includes stories about all native peoples.

Akwesasne Notes

This is a photograph of a Pima woman taken in 1907.

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Alabama tribe lived in southern Alabama in the early 1700s. It was a member of the Creek Confederacy. The Alabama hunted, fished, and grew corn, beans, squash, and sunflowers. The men often wore scalp locks. During the 1800s, the tribe moved to Louisiana and Texas. Today, many of the Alabama share a Texas reservation with the Coushatta tribe.

Alabama

The welcome sign at the Alabama-Coushatta Reservation is east of Livingston, Texas. The reservation is home to the Alabama and Koasati, also known as Coushatta Indians, which was formed after they were forced southward from present-day Alabama by the United States around the turn of the 17th century.

The welcome sign at the Alabama-Coushatta Reservation is east of Livingston, Texas. The reservation is home to the Alabama and Koasati, also known as Coushatta Indians, which was formed after they were forced southward from present-day Alabama by the United States around the turn of the 17th century.
Alcatraz is a small island in California’s San Francisco Bay. Alcatraz was first used by the United States as a military fort and later, as a prison. In 1969, hundreds of Native Americans took occupation of the island to protest the treaties broken by the U.S. government. After 19 months, Federal Marshals forced them off the island. However, their efforts improved U.S. policy toward Native Americans. Today, many people visit Alcatraz to learn about its history.

Alexie, Sherman (1966-) Alexie is an award-winning author, screenplay writer, and comedian. He is a Spokane–Coeur d’Alene Native American. He grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington. As a baby, Alexie needed surgery to drain water from his brain and was expected to suffer mentally. However, by the age of five, he was reading adult novels. Later, he became the first member of his tribe to earn a university degree.

Today, Alexie is married and has two sons. He has written many books, short stories, and poems about Native American experiences. He has earned many awards for his work, including The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, his first collection of short stories. His book called The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, won the 2007 National Book Award in the category of Young People’s Literature.

Aleut (also known as Unangan) originally lived in what is now Alaska’s Aleutian Island chain. They wore waterproof clothing made from sealskin to protect them from rain. In 1867, their land became part of the United States. Today, the Aleut live in small communities within and near their original land.

See also: barabara
Algonkin (also known as Algonquin) lived 5,000 years ago along the Ottawa River in Canada and parts of what is now Michigan. They hunted and fished and grew corn, beans, and squash. They waterproofed their canoes with tree resin and animal fat. They also made metal tools with copper mined from land in what is present-day Ontario, Canada.

In 1603, French explorer Samuel de Champlain and his group were the first Europeans to meet the Algonkins. The Algonkins began trading fur with the French and other Europeans. This led to their battle with the Iroquois, who also wished to trade fur. Eventually, the Iroquois, with the help of the Dutch and British, defeated the Algonkins and the French.

In the 1800s, the lumber industry moved into Algonkin lands, and some of the Algonkins went to live on reserves. Recently, however, Algonkins have protected some of their lands from government use, such as land in Ontario that was scheduled to become a garbage dump.

Algonquian is a term that refers to a wide variety of North American tribes that spoke a related group of languages.

FACT FILE

Language: The common original language of all Algonquian tribes is called Proto-Algonquian, which was spoken 3,000 years ago. From Proto-Algonquian came about 27 different languages.

Location: The Algonquian tribes are divided into three geographical groups: Central, Plains, and Eastern. These tribes once included hundreds of thousands of people, living from the east coast of the United States and Canada to the Rocky Mountains. Many lived in the New England area.

Housing: In warm weather, Algonquians lived in lightweight wigwams that they could take with them when they moved.

WORDS TO KNOW

reserves (REE-zervs): Native American reservations in Canada
resin (reh-ZIN): a clear, sticky material that oozes out of certain trees and plants
The Algonquian tribes include the: Abenaki, Algonkin (Algonquin), Arapaho, Attikamek, Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Cree, Gros Ventre, Illini, Kickapoo, Lenni Lenape/Delaware, Lumbee (Crotan Indian), Mahican (including Mohican, Stockbridge Indian, and Wappinger), Maliseet, Menominee, Sac and Fox, Miami, Mi’kmaq/Micmac, Mohegan (including Pequot, Montauk, Niantic, and Shinnecock), Montagnais/Innu, Munsee, Nanticoke, Narragansett, Naskapi, Ojibwe/Chippewa, Ottawa, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, Potawatomi, Powhatan, Shawnee, Wampanoag (including the Massachusetts, Natick, and Mashpee), Wiyot, and Yurok.

In cold weather, clans would live together in warmer longhouses. They kept their food and supplies in partly underground buildings.

See also: longhouse

Diet: Most tribes hunted wild game, fished, and farmed. Western tribes hunted buffalo, turkey, and rabbits. Southern tribes grew corn, beans, and squash. Near the Great Lakes, the tribes hunted moose, caribou, and other game and collected wild rice that grew in the marshlands. Northern tribes hunted elk and moose and gathered vegetables and nuts. In the spring, they netted fish from their canoes and fished in the ocean and streams with hooks and fishing lines. In the winter, they hunted whales, porpoises, walruses, and seals.

Customs: Community dances happened frequently. They came together to eat, dance, and settle arguments.