

Native Americans

by
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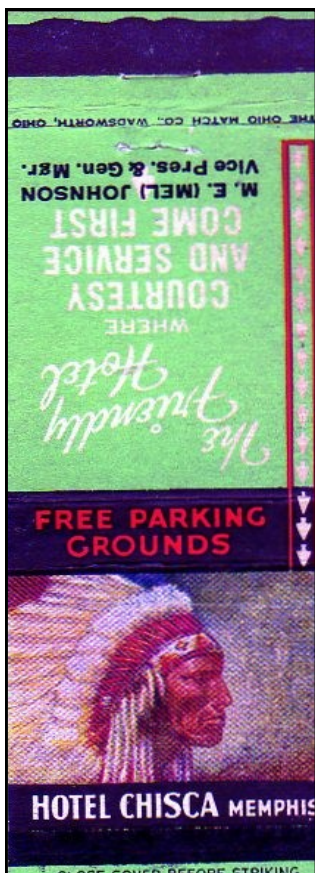
“Native Americans,” “American Indians,” “Indigenous Peoples,” “Aboriginal Peoples,” “Amerindians”...Columbus called them “Indians” (because he thought he was in the East Indies). They’re all the peoples that inhabited the Americas, from the Arctic to the bottom of South America, before the arrival of the Europeans (actually, Leif Ericson landed in North America 500 years before Columbus).

According to archaeological and genetic evidence, North and South America were the last continents in the world to gain human habitation. Some 50–17,000 years ago, falling sea levels [*Climate Change! Climate Change!*] allowed people to move across the land bridge of Beringia that joined Siberia to Alaska.

Around 16,500 years ago, the glaciers began melting, allowing people to move south and east into Canada and beyond. These people are believed to have followed now-extinct Pleistocene herds along ice-free corridors. Another route proposed involves migration – either on foot or using primitive boats – along the Pacific Northwest coast to the south, including as far as South America.

Inuit, Yupik, Aleut, and American Indian creation myths tell of a variety of origins of their respective peoples. Some were “always there” or were created by gods or animals, some migrated from a specified compass point, and others came from “across the ocean”.

According to both Indigenous American and European accounts and documents, American civilizations before and at the time of European encounter had achieved great complexity and many accomplishments. For instance, the Aztecs built one of the largest cities in the world, Teno-



chtitlan (the historical site of what would become Mexico City), with an estimated population of 200,000 for the city proper and a population of close to five million for the extended empire. By comparison, the largest European cities in the 16th century were Constantinople and Paris with 300,000 and 200,000 inhabitants respectively. The population in London, Madrid and Rome hardly exceeded 50,000 people. In 1523, right around the time of the Spanish conquest, the entire population in the country of England was just under three million people. This fact speaks to the level of sophistication, agriculture, governmental procedure and rule of law that existed in Tenochtitlan, needed to govern over such a large citizenry. American civilizations also displayed impressive accomplishments in astronomy and mathematics, including the most accurate calendar in the world. The domestication of maize or corn required thousands of years of selective breeding, and continued cultivation of multiple varieties was done with planning and selection, generally by women.

The European colonization of the Americas fundamentally changed the lives and cultures of the native peoples of the continents. Although the exact pre-colonization population-count of the Americas is unknown, scholars estimate that Native American populations diminished by between 80% and 90% within the first centuries of contact with Europeans. The majority of these losses are attributed to the introduction of Afro-Eurasian diseases. Epidemics ravaged the Americas with diseases such as smallpox, measles, and cholera, which the early colonists and African slaves brought from Europe. The disease spread was slow initially, as Europeans were poor vectors for transferring the disease due to their natural exposure. This changed with the mass importation of Western and Central Africans slaves, who, like the Native Americans, lacked any resistances to the diseases of Europe and Northern Africa. By 1558, the disease had spread throughout South America and had arrived at the Plata basin. Colonist violence towards indigenous peoples exacerbated the loss of lives. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1894), the North American Indian Wars of the 19th century cost the lives of about 19,000 Europeans and 30,000 Native Americans.

The Spanish Empire and other Europeans re-introduced horses to the Americas. Some of these animals escaped and began to breed and increase their numbers in the wild. The re-introduction of the horse, extinct in the Americas for over 7500 years, had a profound impact on Native American culture in the Great Plains of North America and in Patagonia in South America. By domesticating horses, some tribes had great success: horses enabled them to expand their territories, exchange more goods with neighboring tribes, and more easily capture game, especially bison.

Native Americans in the United States make up 0.97% to 2% of the population. In the 2010 census, 2.9 million people identified as Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native alone. A total of 5.2 million people identified as Native Americans, either alone or in combination with one or more ethnicity or other races. Tribes have established their own criteria for membership, which are often based on blood quantum, lineal descent, or residency. A minority of Native Americans live in land units called Indian reservations. Some California and Southwestern tribes, such as the Kumeyaay, Cocopa, Pascua Yaqui and Apache, span both sides of the US–Mexican border. By treaty, Haudenosaunee people have the legal right to freely cross the US–Canada border. Athabaskan, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Iñupiat, Blackfeet, Nakota, Cree, Anishinaabe, Huron, Lenape, Mi'kmaq, Penobscot, and Haudenosaunee, among others, live in both Canada and the United States. The international border cut through their common cultural territory. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_peoples_of_the_Americas]

Graphics on Indian covers range from the simplistic to the highly detailed, and many of them are quite beautiful. Many indicate tribal affiliation...which has also lead me to maintain a separate collection of Indian Tribes. Toby Messmer, KY, has 9,339 in his collection as of last month. The late Steve Kovacs maintained a listing of Indian covers, but that is dormant now.

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This Winnebago Indian is a descendant of the tribe which the French explorers first met when they entered this state. Now every summer many Winnebagoes gather at the Dells to perform their ceremonial dances in a natural amphitheatre near Stand Rock. Indians of other tribes also take part in the ceremonial. All may be seen in their camp daily, making their characteristic wares. Among them the Winnebagoes excel in basketry.

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