

Native American History

1-Before the White Man

At the time Europeans first began to arrive in North America, there were about 7 million Indians in what is today the United States and Canada. They spoke hundreds of different languages and lived in different ways. In the northeast the most powerful Indians were the Iroquois. There were six Iroquois tribes and they lived as farmers. With over 35,000 people they often defeated other Indian tribes in war.

In the Great Plains (from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains), most tribes, like the Sioux and the Cheyenne, were nomadic, i. e. they moved their teepees to where they could find and hunt buffalo. They ate the meat, used the skin and fur to make clothes and teepees, and made tools from the bones.

In the southwest, some of the Pueblo people, like the Hopi, lived in villages and grew vegetables. But the Navajo and the Apache tribes, who came to this region from the north, were warriors who moved from one place to the next. They hunted buffalo, but they also attacked other Pueblo villages. When the Indians began to use horses which they got from the Europe hunting buffalo became much easier.



Nomadic prairie tribes such as the Sioux lived in teepees like these which they could easily take down and put up again



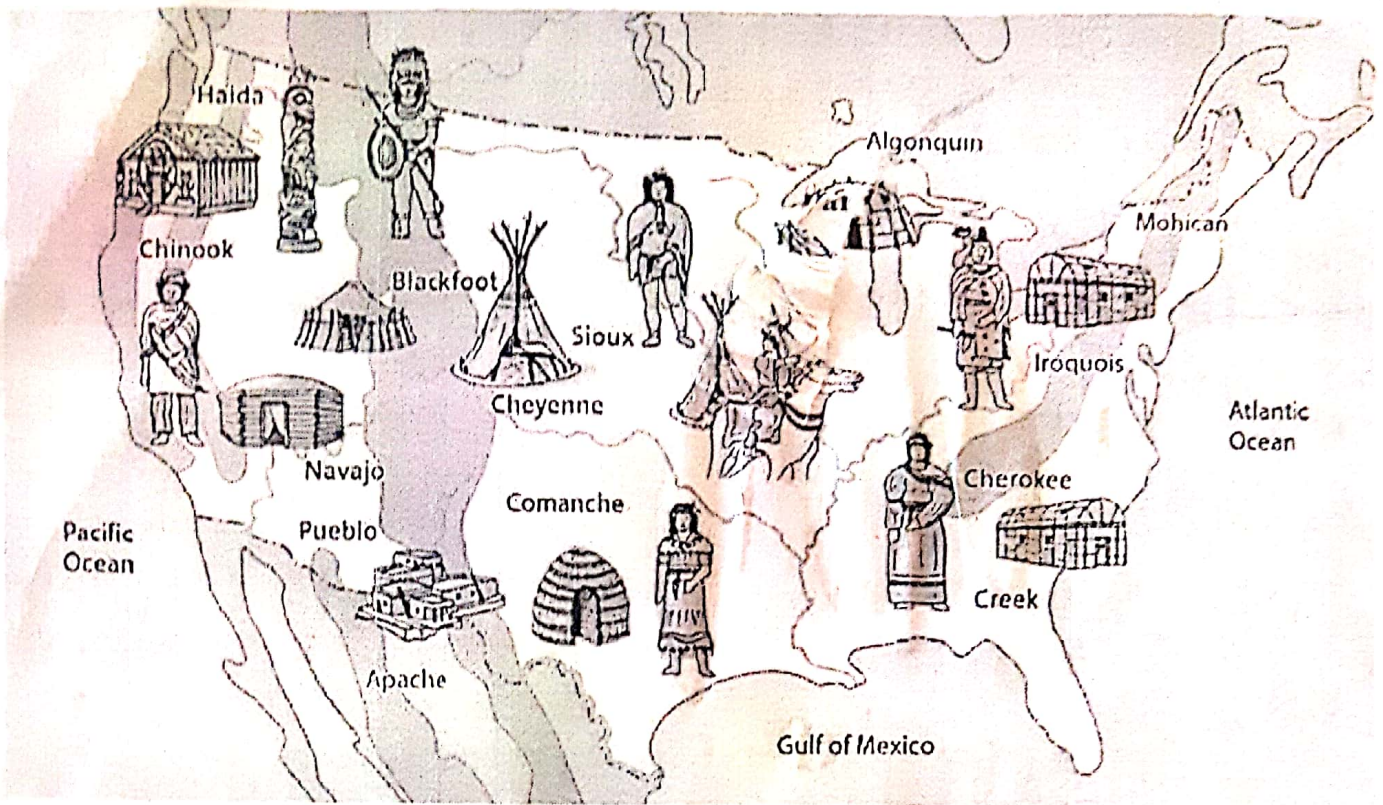
The Pueblo Indians of the Southwest lived in mud houses like these.

2-Arrival of the English

When the English arrived in North America in 1607, they created the colony of Jamestown in the territory of the Powhatan Indians. Many of the white people died during the first year from disease and hunger. Four more ships of people soon came, but in the winter of 1610 the English still did not have enough to eat. Some went to join the Indians, who knew how to grow food on this land.

The Indians began to worry about the large number of people who were arriving. Although they liked to trade with the settlers for horses and guns, many of them had died from diseases that the white people had brought with them. They were also forced to leave their territory. So in 1622 one Powhatan tribe killed 347 white men, women and children, and from that time there was war between the Indians and the European settlers. The Europeans did not believe that the Indians had a right to the land.

The Pilgrims in Massachusetts were the only ones who were able to live in peace with the Indians. They learned how to plant corn and other food from the Indians. The Pilgrims then invited them to a big meal as thanks for their help. Today, the Indians' kindness to the European settlers and the settlers' feeling of thanks is celebrated during the holiday called 'Thanksgiving'.



3-The Trail of Tears

By 1733 there were thirteen British colonies on the eastern coast of North America and over 100,000 Europeans. The population of the Powhatan Indians had fallen from 12,000 to 1,000. By 1776, when the colonies had become an independent country called the 'United States of America', the Europeans had moved west of the Appalachian Mountains. The new Americans pushed many Indian tribes further and further west and tried to teach them white culture.

The Indians fought hard to save their homes and their way of life, but they could not defeat the settlers. When Andrew Jackson became president he gave the land west of the Mississippi River to the Indians; any Indians still in the east had to move there. The Cherokee tribe felt that they should be able to stay in the southeast because they had begun to live like the Americans. When they refused to leave, the army forced them out. While they were travelling west, 4,000 Cherokee died. Another 20,000 Indians from other tribes died, too. The Indians' journey to the west is called the 'Trail of Tears'²⁴.

About 90,000 Indians moved to the new Indian Territory in Kansas, Oklahoma and Nebraska. The Indians who already lived there were unhappy about the new Indians in their territory. The result: wars between the tribes.

4-The idea of 'Manifest Destiny'

Many Americans believed very deeply that God had given them the right to settle in North America; God wanted them to settle the continent from coast to coast. This idea was called 'Manifest

Destiny'. That was one reason for moving West. Another was that people wanted land and adventure west of the Mississippi River, where Indian Territory began. In 1843, 1,000 people travelled to the Far West in covered wagons, on horses and on foot. Many hoped to find gold in California and Oregon. The journey was 3,200 km and by 1860 about 260,000 people had arrived in the Far West. By that time another 4.2 million Europeans had settled in the USA and they were also moving west.

5-Little Bighorn and Wounded Knee



Custer's Last Charge (by Feodor Fuchs, 1876), showing the Battle of the Little Bighorn

In the 1850s more and more fights between Indians and white settlers broke out. The Indians had to move from place to place to find buffalo, and they often met white settlers who had crossed the Mississippi into Indian Territory, were killing all the buffalo and were taking the land they wanted. The Indians wanted to protect their land and their way of life, so they attacked the Americans.

In the 1870s, gold seekers entered Sioux Territory in South Dakota. Some of them were killed. The US Army was sent in to 'punish' the Sioux. One of the Army officers, George Custer, did not believe reports about a very large number of Sioux and other tribes in the area. At the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, 2,000 Indian warriors killed over 250 soldiers under Custer. It was the biggest triumph²⁷ against the whites in Native American history. But in the end, the US Army was too strong. At Wounded Knee, in 1890, fighting broke out for the last time and the Sioux chief and many men, women and children were killed. For the rest of the Sioux and many other Indian tribes, the only choice was to live on reservations.

6-Today

For hundreds of years Indians and settlers did not live together peacefully. But things have begun to change. In the 1960s people decided to call Indians 'Native Americans' because the word 'Indian' had been used negatively for so long. Today there are about 2.5 million Native Americans and another 1.5 million people who are part Native American in the United States. Less than half of them live on the 300 reservations in the US. Those who do are often very poor because they do not get a good education and they cannot find jobs. In some places they have made money and even become quite wealthy²⁹ from casinos: There are special laws in the United States that give Indian reservations privileges that non-Indian lands don't have, e. g. running casinos. Tourism is also an important way to earn money. But only some Native Americans make money this way. More than half of the Native American population now lives in big cities because they can have a better life there. In cities there are often Indian centers that help them find jobs and organize cultural activities, which are very important to most Native Americans. Indian reservations are allowed to have their own government, and some people even feel that they should have their own nation. But Native Americans fight to be part of the national government, too, so they can protect their lands and their culture.