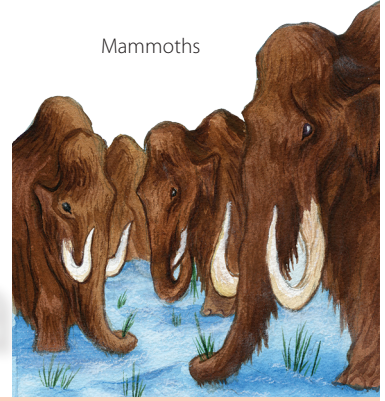




Early Civilizations in North America

Mammoths



Reader

Clovis point



Poverty Point



Cliff dwellings



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Early Civilizations in North America

Reader



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Early Civilizations in North America

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Chapter 1

North America and Louisiana's First Peoples

Ancient Hunters and Gatherers

When did the first humans arrive in North America? There has been much debate over that question.

For a long time, most scientists believed humans arrived about

thirteen thousand to fifteen thousand years ago, or around 11,000 to 13,000 BCE. These dates made sense because more than fifteen thousand years ago, huge sheets of ice still covered much of Canada and the northern United States. In some places, the ice was thousands of feet thick! Scientists call this time the Ice Age. Much of the world's water was frozen into ice.

There was less water in the oceans than there is today. Some lands that are now under water were dry. That's

Vocabulary

land bridge, n. a small strip of land that connects two large landmasses

why dry land once connected Asia to North America. During the Ice Age, this dry land formed an area that scientists today call Beringia, or the Bering **Land Bridge**.

The Framing Question

Who were the first peoples to live in North America?



Early hunters followed a mammoth herd's tracks in the snow. For a band of twenty-five to fifty hunter-gatherers, one mammoth provided a lot of food.

Scientists believe that some of the first Americans arrived by walking across this land bridge and then down an ice-free corridor—a miles-wide gap in the glaciers—into Canada. From there, they traveled through North America and all the way to the

Human Migration into the Americas



The first inhabitants of the Americas may have arrived by walking over a land bridge, or by taking a boat along the Pacific coast.

tip of South America! People most likely were following herds of animals farther and farther into the continent.

Recently, though, scientists have found evidence that some settlers arrived earlier in North America by boat. This may have happened as far back as twenty thousand years ago, or around 18,000 BCE. It is believed that these early sailors stayed close to the shoreline of the Pacific Ocean as they moved into North America. This would have allowed them to take advantage of the resources along the coast. These early settlers lived on the coast and apparently did not move very far into the Americas.

The Clovis Culture

Archaeologists call the first people to arrive in North America Paleo-Indians. Experts believe Paleo-Indians spread across North America in order to expand their hunting grounds. The earliest known civilization among the Paleo-Indian peoples is the Clovis culture, named for the spears with tips made of chipped stone. However, there is some debate about whether this group was in fact the first in North America. The Clovis people are believed to have been living in North America by 11,500 BCE. They eventually migrated to South America. The Clovis civilization hunted large Ice Age mammals such as **mammoths** and **mastodons**. They were also very mobile and likely traveled over hundreds of miles to kill their **game**. They hunted with **atlatls**, devices used to throw spears.

Vocabulary

mammoth, n. a large, prehistoric elephant-like animal covered with hair

mastodon, n. a large, extinct elephant-like mammal

game, n. animals that are hunted

atlatl, n. a device used for throwing a spear

The Clovis people developed several kinds of weapons and tools. They also used smaller knives and scrapers made of stone, bone, and ivory to butcher the animals for food and to prepare wild plant foods.

Evidence of the Clovis people has been found in New Mexico. The culture also has sites in Louisiana and other parts of the United States. There is evidence of them living in Mexico and Central and South America as well. Clovis artifacts have been discovered in eroded riverbanks and during construction projects. The vast Ice Age grasslands of places such as New Mexico were ideal spots for the large game that the Clovis people hunted. Artifacts unearthed by archaeologists tell us that the Clovis people were skilled hunters. They used spearpoints that featured advanced craftsmanship for the time. The design of Clovis spears was unique to them. In fact, the points got their name because they were first found near Clovis, New Mexico. The Clovis people attached their points to spear shafts to allow them to accurately hunt large game. But they did not only hunt large animals. Their prey also included deer, birds, and rabbits. They also ate fish together with the seeds, nuts, and other wild plants that they gathered.

Most of what we know about the Clovis people is based on their stone tools. Stone artifacts do not easily break down over time.



The Clovis people made spearpoints and attached them to spear shafts for hunting.

That's why there is not much information about the clothes and shoes the Clovis people wore. Based on their findings, archaeologists have pieced together small bits of information about the Clovis culture. Archaeologists believe the Clovis people lived in shallow caves, which were safe, comfortable, and easily protected. They might have sometimes slept in tents made of animal skin.

The Folsom Culture

Scientists believe the Clovis culture evolved into the Folsom culture. This hunter-gatherer culture also had sites in New Mexico, throughout the Southwest, and across the Great Plains. Folsom sites have also been found in Colorado. The sites in Colorado are often found high in the mountains. Archaeologists believe that these sites were most likely used during the winter months, and when the weather warmed, people moved. People who lived at high altitudes would have fashioned heavy, insulated clothing to keep warm.

The Folsom civilization existed from about 9000 to 8000 BCE. The Folsom people used spearpoints like the Clovis. However, Folsom stone-working technology is different enough that archaeologists can tell Clovis and Folsom weapons apart. The Folsom spearpoints are smaller than Clovis points and were chipped differently. They were crafted with such skill that they look like they were made with machines. These spearpoints would also have been attached to spear shafts. The Folsom technology was different because this culture hunted different animals.

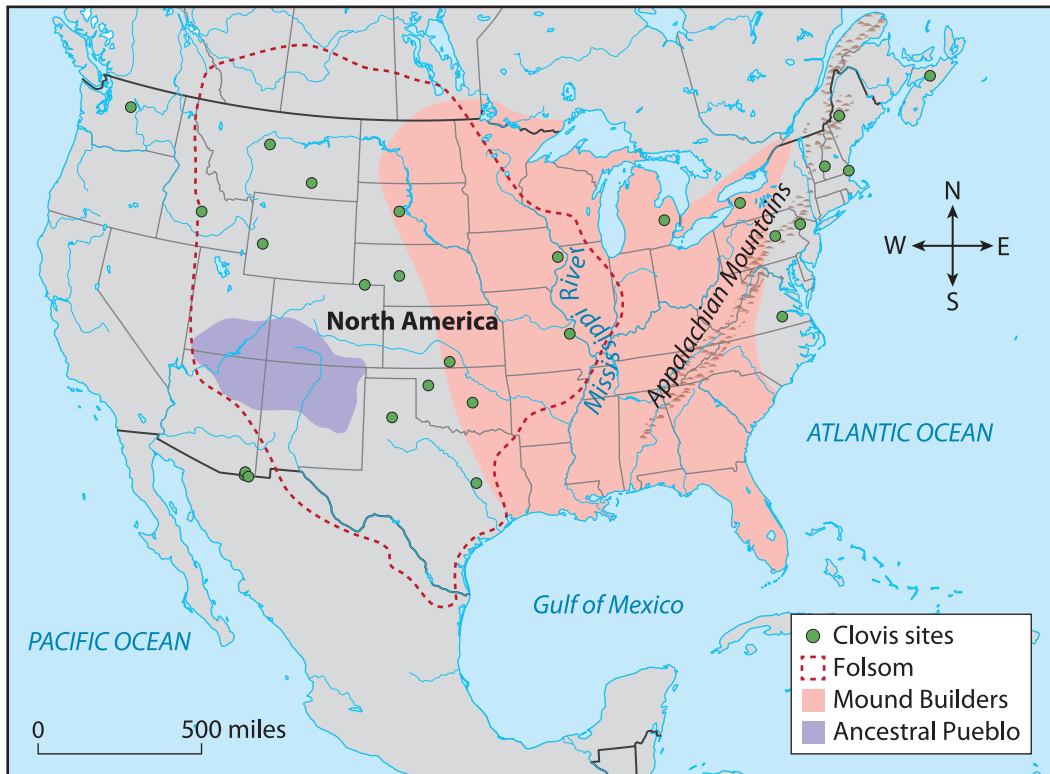
Many of the larger animals that the Clovis people hunted had disappeared during the time of the Folsom culture. This was

probably due to changes in the climate. So the Folsom hunted smaller animals, such as giant bison, which are now also extinct. These smaller animals were faster than the enormous mammoths and mastodons. Like the Clovis people, the Folsom people also used smaller knives and blades to butcher animals. In addition to food, bison were used by the culture for clothing and to create shelters.



This skeleton of a giant bison is in the Museum of Natural History and Science in Ohio.

North American Indigenous Cultures



Different peoples have lived in North America over time.

Just like the Clovis people, the Folsom people were very mobile because of their hunting lifestyle. They most likely traveled large distances following the herds of giant bison during hunting season. Then they would have stayed in one place for part of the year. This temporary home would have had access to water, wood, and plants that could be gathered as a food source. While there is not any evidence that the Folsom culture had a sophisticated social structure, it is probable that there were certain people in the groups who made important decisions.

A Time of Change

As the climate warmed and large animals disappeared, the lifestyle of early Americans slowly changed. At first, cultures still consisted of small, mobile groups of hunter-gatherers. The groups that lived in North America between 8000 and 2000 BCE, during a time called the Archaic period, used tools made of stone and bone. But out of necessity, people began to rely more on hunting smaller animals. They also began eating more fruits and plants.

Around 2000 BCE, people began to grow their own food, no longer relying only on wild plants and animals. They also began living in one place. They built small villages of about fifteen to twenty houses. These homes were made of small trees that were placed in a circle and then were bent until they met at the top. Then, long pieces of bark covered the rounded structures. These small villages were usually built next to a water source. This provided access to fresh water, fish, and good soil for farming.

Eventually, populations began to grow and domesticate plants. By studying artifacts of early cultures, archaeologists have found that some early peoples in America made stone tools to grind seeds and grains.



Early Americans built structures like this one for shelter.

This created a coarse flour that could be baked on a flat rock near a fire. They also began to make pottery and baskets. There is evidence that some early peoples cooked berries and plants with water in waterproof woven baskets. Historians believe that very hot stones were dropped into the baskets to quickly boil the water and cook the food. Food was also cooked over open fires and in roasting pits.

The discovery of agriculture happened at different times in different places. It is possible that the earliest farmers in the Southwest lived around 2000 BCE, whereas farming in the Southeast didn't start until around 1200 BCE. Growing crops changed life for early peoples. With a reliable source of food, more people could live together in one place. Pottery and ceramic containers were created to cook, serve, and store food.

Over generations, villages grew and became more common. Social structures became more complex. Trade networks began to develop over long distances. For example, people living in what is now Tennessee traded with people as far away as the Great Lakes

region and the Gulf Coast area. Populations grew, and regional traditions and practices became more varied.

The Ancestral Pueblo

The Ancestral **Pueblo** lived from about 100 to 1600 CE. This culture is known for its architectural innovations and community settlements. They were one of the first cultures in North America to heavily rely on agriculture. They also created unique pottery and underground ceremonial chambers.

The Ancestral Pueblo lived as **cliff dwellers** in the area called the Four Corners. This area is now where Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah intersect. At first, like their ancestors, they focused on hunting game. They also gathered seeds, berries, and plants. Eventually, they began to plant crops near the streams in the valleys below the cliffs. The first Native people of the Americas to raise corn lived in Mexico about nine thousand years ago, or 7000 BCE. Over time, different groups of people in the Americas, including the Ancestral Pueblo, added corn to the crops they raised. Because the Ancestral Pueblo raised crops for part of the year, they set up farming villages. In addition to corn, they grew beans and squash. Still, they continued to hunt and to gather wild plants for a long time. Women and girls had the job of raising crops and gathering wild plants. They made jars, bowls, and other containers out of clay to store food. They also wove baskets.

Vocabulary

Pueblo, n. a group of Native American peoples who live in the American Southwest

cliff dweller, n. a person who lives on a rock ledge or cliff wall, such as a member of the Ancestral Pueblo people



The cliff dwellings were like small towns.

They cooked squash, corn, and beans over open fires. Men mostly hunted and traded.

As their population grew, the Ancestral Pueblo spread over a wide area in the Southwest. They began building villages in several different styles. They made some buildings with stone or **adobe**, which is made of clay. All of the buildings included places for sleeping and for storing food. The rooms where food was stored were filled with jars of beans and baskets of corn. Rooms were stacked on top of each other like apartment buildings under the overhanging cliffs. Ladders connected the different levels of the cliff dwellings. In the cliff dwellings, villagers went about their work. They wove clothing. They made sandals from strips of animal hide and yucca,

Vocabulary

adobe, n. a type of brick made from sun-dried clay

a vegetable that grows in the Southwest. The structures also had places for meetings, religious ceremonies, and celebrations. Outdoor porches connected the living areas. One style of building was two or three stories high. The flat roof of one story formed the porch for the story above. The Ancestral Pueblo also built paths and trails to connect the settlements where they lived. With other groups, they traded pottery, woven goods, jewelry, and tools.

The Ancestral Pueblo were spread out over a large area. Because of this, some of their traditions and practices differed between the western part of the American Southwest and the eastern part. People in the west, for example, developed religious beliefs that focused on the importance of rain. They held rainmaking rituals throughout the growing seasons. People in the east, somewhat less dependent on rain for their farming, placed less emphasis on rainmaking.

The Ancestral Pueblo lived in the area of the Four Corners for hundreds of years. Then they suddenly abandoned the region and migrated west, east, and south. What happened? We may never know exactly what it was. Scientists have several ideas. Farming can be very hard. Plants need light, warmth, and water to grow. They also need minerals in the soil to be healthy. The Ancestral Pueblo people, living in a dry environment, could only farm in relatively damp areas along the streams. Over many years, they may have worn out the soil. The weather also may have changed. Without enough rainfall, it is difficult to grow food to eat. The animals used for food struggle to survive, too. Those who migrated built new communities along the Rio Grande and in present-day northern Mexico, and many of their descendants still live there today.

The Mound Builders

Another early Native American group was the **Mound** Builders. They once lived near rivers in what is now the Midwest and the Southeast. Their way of life began about

2,900 years ago, or 900 BCE. Like the Ancestral Pueblo, the Mound Builders were farmers. They grew corn, squash, and beans. Because they were farmers, the Mound Builders settled in one place.

Because they raised so much food, they traded with other groups. They built roads, marketplaces, villages, and even some cities.

The Mound Builders' villages stretched along the Mississippi River valley and were populated with thousands of people. Their villages spanned from the present-day states of Ohio, Wisconsin, and Minnesota to Louisiana and the southeastern United States. In fact, mound building has a long history, and even some hunter-gatherer groups built them. The earliest known mounds were built in Louisiana around 3500 BCE.

The Mound Builders used baskets to collect dirt and heap it up into huge piles to form flat-topped mounds. The tallest mounds were several stories high! Archaeologists believe the mounds were used as tall platforms for the homes of important leaders and for religious buildings. It's possible that they were also used for religious ceremonies and as meeting places. The buildings placed on top of the mounds were made of logs or posts covered in either mud and grass or a mixture of soil, clay, sand, and straw that dried into a cement-like material. Then a thatched roof of straw or grass was placed on top.

Vocabulary

mound, n. a large, rounded pile



Some Mound Builders lived in villages such as this one, a reconstruction found in Tennessee.

Some of the mounds were burial spots for especially honored leaders. Food, drink, and sometimes decorative items made of copper and clamshells were buried with the leader. The Mound Builders believed that a person who had died would need these things on their way to the afterlife. Like those of their ancestors, the tools of the Mound Builders were mostly made of bone, stone, and wood. Mound Builders made use of pottery to serve and store food. They wove baskets and carved canoes that were used for transportation along the rivers near where they settled. Their clothes were finely made using animal skins and plants.

The Mound Builders were divided into social ranks. The most important groups were the chiefs and the religious leaders, or **shamans**. These leaders held influence and power over territory that included the

Vocabulary

shaman, n. a Native American leader who is believed to have special powers

mound town, which served as the capital, and several farming villages. They made important decisions for the people who lived in their territory. The religion of the Mound Builders involved worshipping many gods, including the sun, moon, and mythical beings. Each capital town had a temple where ceremonies were held. Then, there was the common class. This group included the farmers and the people who constructed the mounds and buildings.

European explorers arrived in the 1500s CE. Over the next hundred years, Native peoples became involved in the European trade with the French, English, and Spanish, trading enslaved Native Americans and animal skins for guns, ammunition, and other European-made goods. This trade in Native slaves resulted in increased warfare between Native communities. Disease also swept through the South, leaving many dead in its wake. Surviving descendants of the Mound Builders became the Native American nations that today include the Creek, the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Caddo, and the Seminoles. In the late 1600s, French explorers saw the last Mound Builder city in what is now Mississippi. It was ruled by a wealthy, powerful king. But by the early 1700s, this city was gone too, and the survivors joined the Creek nation.

**PRIMARY SOURCE: PETROGLYPHS FROM
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Chapter 2

The Development of Indigenous Cultures in Louisiana

Prehistoric Louisiana What is meant when we use the word *prehistoric*? This term refers to the time before the written word. But there were many events that occurred before people began writing. So how do we know about them? We learn about prehistory in several ways. One way is by studying artifacts. Archaeologists dig up sites all over the world and find things from the past. These items are little hints about what happened during other times. Stone tools and pottery give us clues about how people made things, how they cooked food, and how they built their homes.

The Framing Question

Who were the first peoples to live in Louisiana?



Poverty Point, located in northeast Louisiana, is one of the most significant Native American sites in North America.

Stone artifacts found in Louisiana show that the earliest people lived here at least 11,500 years ago, or around 9500 BCE. You have read about the Clovis people, who hunted large mastodons. It is likely that they were the first people to ever live in, or at least pass through, Louisiana. They were the ancestors of the people who, during the Archaic period, built the impressive Poverty Point site.

Poverty Point

Poverty Point is located in northeast Louisiana. The area came to be called Poverty Point long after the early Native people disappeared. It got this name because a cotton **plantation** called Poverty Point existed in the same place in the early nineteenth century. So while archaeologists refer to the Native Americans who lived there as the people of Poverty Point, it is not known how they referred to themselves. The people of Poverty Point lived in this area more than three thousand years ago, from 1700 to 1100 BCE. The settlement they built was the largest one of its time in what is now the United States. They created Louisiana's first large city and lived there for about six hundred years.

Vocabulary

plantation, n. a large farm where cash crops are grown on behalf of the person who owns the land

These people were hunter-gatherers. They did not use their land to farm. But unlike other groups of hunter-gatherers, they stayed in one place all year because the environment provided plentiful food and other resources year-round. The Poverty Point site has several large earthen mounds and six **semicircular** ridges that cover

Vocabulary

semicircular, adj. having the shape of half a circle

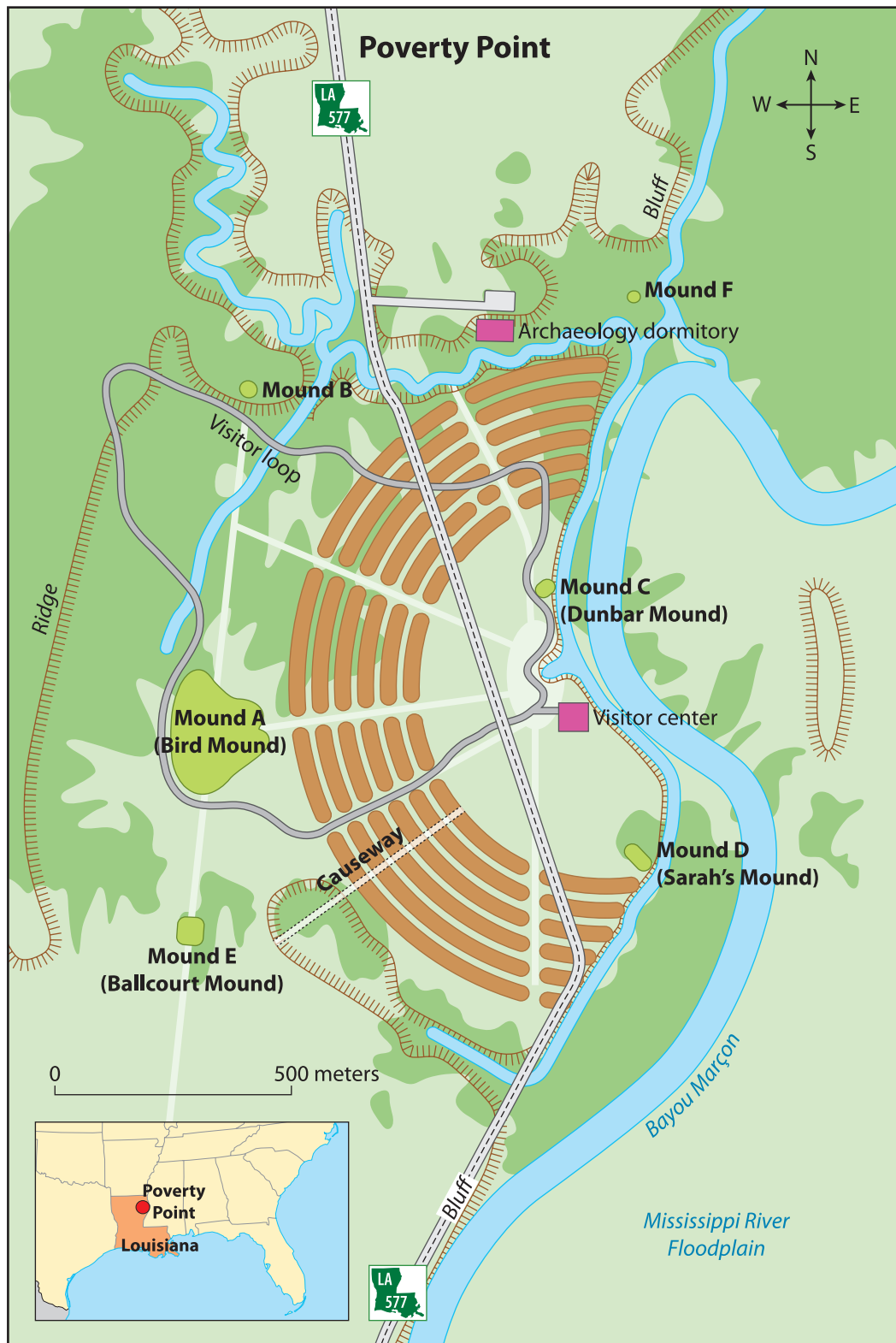
about two square miles (5.2 km²). These mounds and ridges are the remains of the ancient city. It is believed that homes were built on the semicircular ridges and that they faced an open **plaza**.

Vocabulary

plaza, n. an open space near a community

Archaeologists think that the people of Poverty Point probably lived on the ridges. Items that would have been used all the time, such as pottery and tools, have been found along these higher areas. Earth ovens, or hearths and pits used to trap heat and cook food, have also been found here. It is estimated that the earthen mounds surrounding the ridges were made using thirty million basket loads of dirt. That would have been nearly forty thousand dump-truck loads! Recent archaeological finds indicate that the Poverty Point people built the largest of the mounds, Mound A, in only three months. The mounds may have been built for use in religious ceremonies. Mound A, for example, was built in the shape of a large bird with its wings expanded, and there is no indication that anyone ever lived atop it. Both the mounds and the homes on the ridges would have been directed toward the plaza, where some ceremonies were held and games were played. None of the mounds at Poverty Point are burial mounds.

Poverty Point is located on a back bayou of the Mississippi River. The area was full of small animals for hunting, as well as nuts, berries, and fish. The back channels and bayous as well as the Mississippi River offered a means of transportation and a way for the people of Poverty Point to interact with other groups. The location was also good for trade, and the people of Poverty Point



The mounds at Poverty Point were built over several centuries. Mound A was built in three months and is the largest of the site's mounds. It required millions of baskets of dirt to make.



Poverty Point in Louisiana is now a World Heritage Site.

made use of a large trade network. Artifacts from as far away as the Great Lakes region have been found there. Like the people of the Clovis and Folsom cultures, the people of Poverty Point used spears and atlatls for hunting. These and other tools and weapons were often made of stone. In fact, many stone artifacts have been found at Poverty Point.

One great mystery about Poverty Point is how many of the **raw materials** got to the site. The lack of stone nearby was likely one of the few drawbacks to living in this region. Archaeologists think people may have brought more than seventy tons of stone from places as far as seven hundred miles (1,127 km) away. It's not clear whether the people of the city brought it there themselves or traded for it. Similarly, copper and a soft stone known as soapstone, used for making stone bowls, made their way to Poverty Point from someplace else. Neither material was

Vocabulary

raw material, n. a substance used in the primary production or manufacturing of goods

naturally available near the site of Poverty Point. However, copper artifacts and many soapstone fragments have been found there.

As you have learned, people often used heated stones to cook their food during this time period, but the people of Poverty Point did not have easy access to stone. To get around this problem, they made round balls and other shapes out of a mixture of moist soil and clay. Then they dried out and hardened the objects over a fire. These objects are called *cooking balls*. When cooking a meal, the Poverty Point people heated these clay objects in underground ovens. They then either dropped the cooking balls into a basket or leather container filled with water, meats, and vegetables or placed them in the earthen oven with their food and covered it with soil. The food would then cook in the oven. Pottery and decorative items, including figurines, were also made using clay. The people of Poverty Point are known for the ornate clay and stone pendants and other jewelry that they made in the form of owls and geometric shapes.

Experts believe the people of Poverty Point did not have social divisions but rather were equal and had equal rights.

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The Mississippi River provided food and transportation for the people of Poverty Point.

This was an important lesson that archaeologists learned from the Poverty Point site. Archaeologists used to believe that cultures that accomplished large construction projects such as the mounds at Poverty Point would have needed a set of important chiefs to lead the construction. Because of the Poverty Point site, archaeologists now know that this was not always the case. The people living at this site were able to achieve things that were previously thought to be impossible this far back in history. In fact, the semicircular ridges were the largest human-built structure in North America at the time. Another unique aspect of Poverty Point is that even though they did not farm, there were sometimes hundreds of people living there at the same time.

The Poverty Point culture disappeared around 1100 BCE. There are not many clues as to what happened. It is possible that changes in the climate played a role. It is also possible that flooding caused them to leave their homes on the ridges.

Other Louisiana Civilizations

Louisiana was home to several other groups of early people. While these other cultures had many things in common with Poverty Point, there were differences. The differences between cultures can be found in their pottery, weapons, and burial grounds. Over time, the pottery of these cultures became better crafted. The way people hunted also changed after Poverty Point. Arrowheads and the bow and arrow were used more than spears and atlatls. The later cultures also built more mounds, beginning with dome-shaped mounds and then moving to flat-topped mounds. These mounds were used for burials and religious ceremonies and as

platforms for religious temples and the homes of elite leaders. These societies often built large, flat plazas near the mounds, as at Poverty Point.

The Tchefuncte Culture

The decline of Poverty Point occurred at the end of the Archaic period, a time when people throughout Louisiana changed their way of life. This was followed by the Woodland period. At this time, around 800 BCE, the Tchefuncte (/cheh*funk*tuh/) culture emerged along the northern part of the Gulf of Mexico and soon spread throughout modern-day Louisiana, southern Arkansas, western Mississippi, and southeastern Texas. Like the Poverty Point people, the Tchefuncte people also built mounds, but they were smaller and were now used for burying people. The culture lasted for about eight hundred years, until 1 CE.

They had not yet begun farming; instead, the Tchefuncte people still followed a hunter-gatherer and fishing lifestyle. They made unique pottery, though, and much more of it than the people of Poverty Point. The designs on the pottery of the Tchefuncte people tell archaeologists that they were in contact with other peoples living across Louisiana and the southeastern region. For reasons that are unknown, the Tchefuncte people did not prepare their clay pots to withstand the drying process that pottery requires, so their pottery often broke when it was exposed to fire. However, other types of stronger, fire-resistant pottery are also found at Tchefuncte sites, indicating that the Tchefuncte people traded for these other wares and knew about them. It's possible, then, that their pottery was used mostly for display purposes.

There is a good deal of evidence that this culture used the bones and antlers of deer to make spears for hunting and needles for sewing. The Tchefuncte people also used stone tools, but as was the case with Poverty Point, stone was not found near where they lived. They would have traveled or traded for it.

The Marksville Culture

Like the people of Poverty Point, the Marksville culture built large mounds near a set of semicircular ridges. This culture, which existed from 1 to 400 CE, also had similarities to the Tchefuncte culture. The similarities are seen in their tools, weapons, and pottery. The Marksville pottery was stronger than the pottery of the Tchefuncte people. It was also decorated with geometric shapes and patterns that reflected nature. These designs are thought to be an influence of the Hopewell people (200 BCE–500 CE), a Native American group that originated in Ohio and Illinois. The pottery made by the Marksville people was used in practical ways. They used it for serving food and for ceremonies.



The mounds built by the Hopewell people in Ohio are thought to have influenced the mounds of the Marksville people.

Mounds are another way the Hopewell people influenced the Marksville people. The Marksville mounds were used for religious ceremonies, much like the groups who came before them, as well as burials. The Marksville people buried the dead with decorative items. Their mounds are enclosed by a semicircular earthen embankment three thousand feet (910 m) long.

The Troyville Culture

The Troyville culture lasted from 400 to 700 CE and is named for the archaeological site where evidence of early people was found. At Troyville, archaeologists discovered pottery with connections to the Marksville culture. In fact, the Troyville culture as a whole is closely related to both the Marksville culture before it and the Coles Creek culture that came after it.

There is evidence that the people of the Troyville culture painted their pottery. They made red, white, and black paints using minerals. These were applied to the inside and outside of the pottery pieces. The Troyville people used designs that are similar to the ones used by a Native American group in Florida. Archaeologists conclude from these similarities that the groups interacted. What is not known is where the designs first appeared. As far as tools and weapons are concerned, the Troyville people continued to use spears and atlatls. They also were beginning to use arrowheads and the bow and arrow.

Another important change was in how people used the mounds. As you have read, Marksville people built earthworks and burial mounds, but archaeologists believe that the ceremonies around mound building changed during the time of the Troyville people.

They continued to bury some of their dead in dome-shaped burial mounds, but other mounds were not used for burials and were shaped differently, with flat tops. Archaeologists posit that these flat-topped mounds were used like stages. Ceremonies and performances would have taken place on them. Many of the Troyville sites include large pits that were probably used for cooking feasts. These pits are often close to the mounds, and it is possible that feasts were part of the ceremonies and burials. At one unusual Troyville site, burial items included one-foot-tall (30.5 cm) humanlike figurines with painted red, black, and white clothing.

The Coles Creek Culture

The people of Coles Creek (700–1200 CE) built on the advancements made by the Troyville culture. Coles Creek sites are found throughout Louisiana, western Mississippi, and southern Arkansas. The people of the Coles Creek culture reached a new level of craftsmanship among Native Americans in Louisiana. For many archaeologists, their arrowheads and pottery stand out from those of other cultures.

The decoration of Coles Creek pottery has connections with peoples who lived on the northern Gulf Coast and in Florida. This culture was also connected to other groups through trade. Like the people of Poverty Point, the Coles Creek people had a long-distance trade network. It stretched as far as St. Louis, Missouri.

The Coles Creek people also built great ceremonial centers, but unlike previous ceremonial centers, only a small group of caretakers lived at Coles Creek centers. Most people lived in

small towns with other members of their family, where they hunted, fished, gathered, and tended small gardens.

When there was a ceremony to attend, everyone moved to the mounds. The mounds



This arrowhead was found in northeast Louisiana.

built by the Coles Creek people had flat tops. It was during this time that flat-topped mounds became the norm instead of dome-shaped mounds. As in other cultures, temples and the homes of leaders were built on the high, flat surfaces. The Coles Creek people continued to hunt and gather, but they also began to plant small gardens with seed plants and a little corn. For use with bows and arrows during hunts, they began to make even smaller arrowheads than cultures before them.

The Caddo, Mississippian, and Plaquemine Cultures

The last groups of Native Americans to live in Louisiana before European explorers arrived were the Caddo (800–1835 CE), Mississippian (1050–1700 CE), and Plaquemine (1200–1700 CE) cultures. The Mississippian culture emerged near present-day St. Louis and spread throughout the South, including into northern Louisiana. Mississippian people built large platform mounds and capital towns. The Mississippian culture also relied heavily on growing corn. This culture influenced the Plaquemine culture in some ways, such as pottery style. But the Plaquemine people did

not follow all the ways of the Mississippians. The Plaquemine did not bury luxury items with their dead as the Mississippians did. Plaquemine people farmed, but they were not as reliant on corn as the Mississippian people.

The Caddo people lived in northwest Louisiana from 800 until around 1835 CE. They hunted, fished, and gathered plants and nuts. They also farmed corn, beans, and squash. The Caddo people lived in one place and used the large mounds that they built to bury their dead. They also used them as platform mounds. Unlike the Plaquemine, the Caddo people began to bury special handmade objects with people. These objects included pottery, stone knives, and small decorative items. Archaeologists consider the Caddo people to have been skilled at making pottery. Caddo pottery came in several different shapes and was used for food and ceremonies. It often had delicate designs and was polished with a shiny finish. The Caddo people also used stone axes, arrowheads, and bows and arrows for hunting.

European did not start settling the land that is now Louisiana until the 1700s CE. But the first explorers arrived in the 1500s. Europeans brought diseases that were new for these Native peoples. They also brought guns and expanded the existing trade of enslaved Natives.

All of this resulted in a decline in Native populations. Still, some of the Native cultures and traditions have survived until the present day and have had a big impact on Louisiana's culture and history.



Caddo ceramic pot

PRIMARY SOURCE: EXCERPT FROM A FIELD INVESTIGATION REPORT

The spectacular geometric earthwork consists of ridges, each originally about 150 feet [46 m] wide and six feet [1.8 m] high, arranged as six concentric octagons. . . .

At one edge of the octagon rises the massive Poverty Point Mound, as high as a seven-story building, and measuring about 700 by 800 feet [213 by 244 m] at the base. . . .

A mile due north of the center of the octagon lies another huge mound, the Motley Mound. Its base covers an area of 400 by 600 feet [122 by 183 m], and its height is fifty-six feet [17 m]. . . . In proportion and details it is identical with the Poverty Point Mound, except that it is turned at ninety degrees to the larger mound. . . .

The mounds presumably were ceremonial in nature, but the ridges of the octagon represent the village site of these prehistoric people. Concentration of artifacts and debris indicate that they lived on the ridges. The size of the village indicates a large population and implies both an abundant food supply and a high degree of social organization.

—from National Park Service, *Field Investigation Report, Poverty Point, Louisiana* (1962)

Glossary

A

adobe, n. a type of brick made from sun-dried clay (12)

atlatl, n. a device used for throwing a spear (5)

C

cliff dweller, n. a person who lives on a rock ledge or cliff wall, such as a member of the Ancestral Pueblo people (11)

G

game, n. animals that are hunted (5)

L

land bridge, n. a small strip of land that connects two large landmasses (2)

M

mammoth, n. a large, prehistoric elephant-like animal covered with hair (5)

mastodon, n. a large, extinct elephant-like mammal (5)

mound, n. a large, rounded pile (14)

P

plantation, n. a large farm where cash crops are grown on behalf of the person who owns the land (20)

plaza, n. an open space near a community (21)

Pueblo, n. a group of Native American peoples who live in the American Southwest (11)

R

raw material, n. a substance used in the primary production or manufacturing of goods (23)

S

semicircular, adj. having the shape of half a circle (20)

shaman, n. a Native American leader who is believed to have special powers (15)





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