



Brain's Belly Photograph 1880 by S.P. Henshaw

Photogram John Andrew P. Lee

BRAIN'S BELLY - ARIKARA

INTRODUCTION



The land made the first people of North America. More than 500 distinct tribes lived in North America, speaking more than 300 languages from 29 language families. They built mas-

sive metropolitan complexes at Cahokia (Illinois) and Tenochtitlan (central Mexico), formed powerful confederacies in the Great Lakes, developed complex social, religious, and political systems, and occupied every corner of the continent not sheathed in ice. The cultural and linguistic diversity of the indigenous peoples of North America dwarfs that of Europe and many other places. Eight major regions of North America each had a distinct cultural evolution, informed and shaped by the land itself. From long-established urban centers in the Southeast to tiny sedentary villages in California and the Northwest Coast, from seasonally nomadic family groups in the Arctic to large nomadic tribes on the Plains, the land shaped the people. Sometimes tribes that had well-established cultures in other regions abandoned older religious practices when they moved into new areas, as happened with many tribes from the Southeast and Northeast that moved

to the Plains. The cultures of North America were dynamic and changing long before European contact. The complexities of tribal culture, geography, and historical experience demonstrate a myriad of experiences, ways of knowing, art forms, societies, and political systems. The beauty and depth of the first people of the land continue to amaze.



Nature infuses Indian art and culture. A depiction of the sun dominates this Hopi kachina mask (above). An Arikara man (opposite) poses with a tanned bear hide.

COMING TO AMERICA

Indians are indigenous to the Americas. Although many people examine the prevailing theories of Paleo-Indian migrations from Asia to North America and end up thinking, "We are all immigrants here," the fact of the matter is that Indians arrived in the Americas and developed a diverse array of cultures and languages, inhabiting the entire hemisphere before there were any humans living in what is now England (the British Isles were entirely encased in ice until 12,000 years ago) and many thousands of years before the emergence of ancient Chinese, Egyptian, or Phoenician civilizations.

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periods of time from 45,000 to 11,000 years ago when vast quantities of the Earth's water were sucked into massive glaciers and Asia and North America were connected by land (not just ice). The footprints of prehistoric camels and horses that traveled from the Americas to Asia have been found on that land bridge, confirming beyond doubt that such crossings were possible.

Geologists and archaeologists have long suspected that humans made the trip, too, but from Asia to the Americas. This theory has changed and evolved dramatically over the past 20 years as new archaeological evidence at Monte Verde (Chile), Meadowcroft Rock Shelter (Pennsylvania), and other places have pushed the dates back further and further. Although there is undisputed evidence of humans in Clovis (New Mexico) about 11,000 years ago, that is no longer the earliest evidence of human habitation in the Americas. New theories, supported by linguistic, genetic, and archaeological evidence, suggest multiple migrations from Asia, probably by land and water—and much earlier than previously imagined. The oral histories of the tribes in North America make their indigenous status paramount, and everything in the scientific record supports that view.



A Caribou Inuit woman and her children. Because of the small size of traditional Inuit communities, extended family and kin networks remain a vital part of the social fabric.

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LAND SHAPED THE PEOPLE

The land shaped Native American cultures. Most were farmers. In the Southwest, the Hopi farmed corn on arid slopes with an innovative system of rain-capture irrigation. In the Northeast, many tribes farmed corn, beans, and squash in a balance that produced

high yields without depleting soil fertility or requiring crop rotation. In the Plains, numerous tribes thrived by hunting the 30 million buffalo that lived there. In all regions, tribal peoples picked berries and gathered tubers, nuts, and regionally specific crops such as the wild rice of the Northeast. In the Northwest, Arctic, and Northeast, fishing was critical to survival.

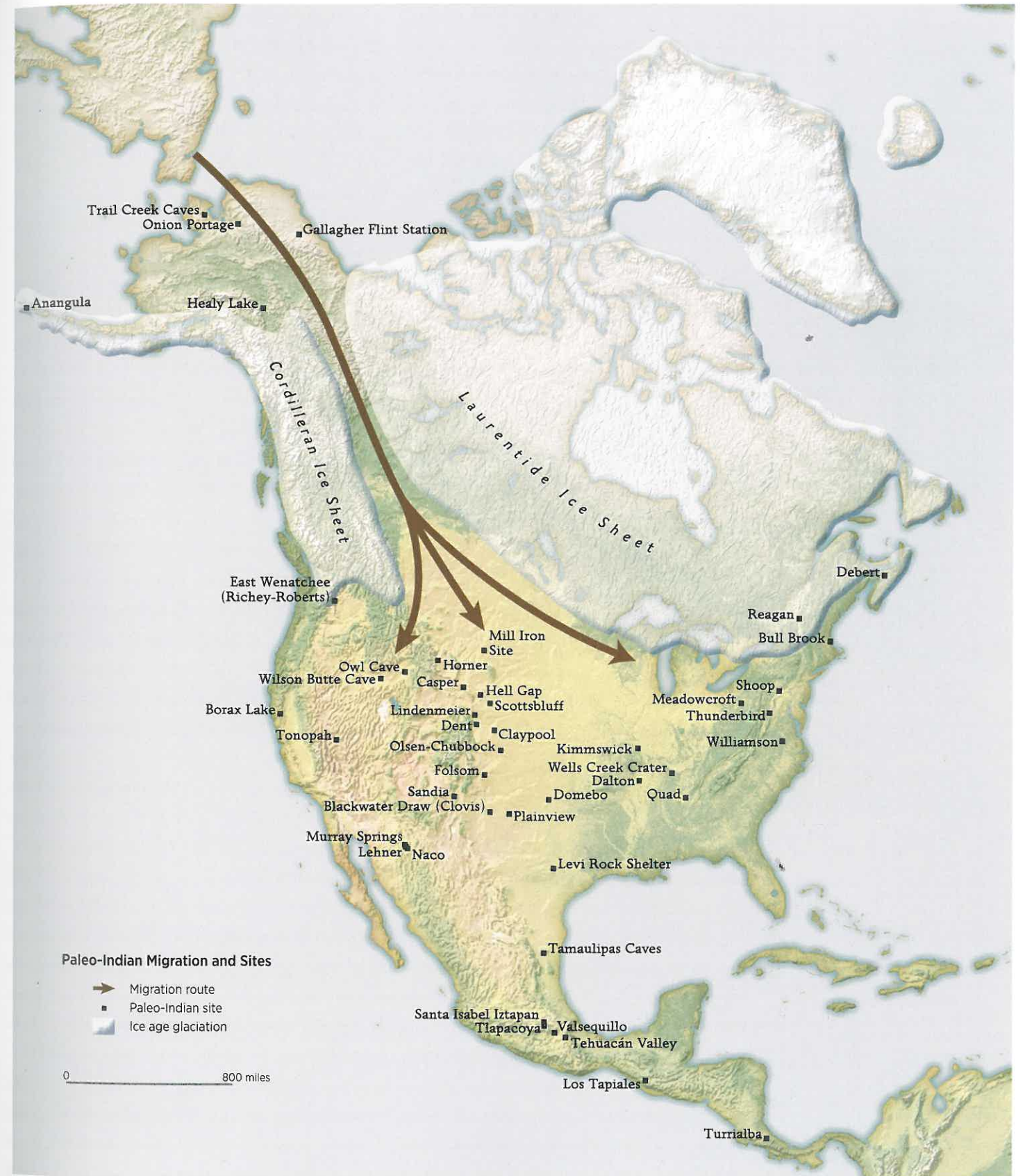
The different paths to sustenance and prosperity shaped political and cultural institutions. The Sun Dance of the Plains tribes was infused into the tribal religious and ceremonial repertoire for most tribes that moved there, regardless of where they came from originally. Lifeways and religious practices were rooted to place and formed by the land even more than by ancestral history.

But tribes shaped the land, too. Controlled burning extended the range of the buffalo all the way to New Jersey. Great moundbuilding civilizations built earthen pyramids still standing today at Cahokia and other places. At Chaco Canyon, nine miles of structures align in perfect symmetry, built by people who had no wheel or transit but amassed a highly developed knowledge of astronomy, solar cycles, weather, and Earth movements through the seasons. Each tribe has its own linguistic and cultural history, but the eight major geographic regions in which they lived were indelible parts of their formation.

DISEASE PANDEMICS

Although the tribes of North America and the regions that shaped them vary greatly, there are common elements to their histories. The most devastating of those shared experiences came through the

NATIONS ON THE MOVE Opposite: Archaeologists, linguists, and geneticists have all studied the early arrival of humans in North America, and they are starting to agree more and more with tribal oral histories. People came to the Americas earlier than previously imagined. And they likely came multiple times and in many different ways. This map shows the prevailing assumed land migration pattern from Asia to the Americas.





introduction of European diseases to which Indians had no natural immunity. The peoples of the Middle East and Europe domesticated sheep, pigs, and chickens, and their sustained daily exposure to the animal population along with crowded and usually unsanitary city conditions exposed them to many diseases. Their populations were periodically hit with terrible plagues. But the diseases in Europe came in spurts, and the populations had a chance to recover before the next major plague. The survivors developed immunities to many of those diseases, and their impact lessened over time to become chicken pox, measles, and other renditions of more serious plagues. In North America, all of those diseases were unknown by Indians. They got them all at the same time. As a result, in most areas, around 95 percent of the tribal population died during the early contact period. Making matters worse, those deaths often occurred at the same time that Europeans came to take their land or enslave their people. The combination crippled resistance and toppled many tribal political systems.

COLONIAL REGIMES

Europeans came to North America to seek better lives, escape religious persecution, and pursue a host of ambitions. Indians were often seen as obstacles to those ambitions, especially when European empires were engineering new colonial regimes in North America. Those empires fought one another for rights to the land and resources, but they all seemed to assume that what was in North America was theirs for the taking despite the long histories and human rights of the first peoples of the land.

The Spanish were interested in gold and precious metals, and they relied heavily on slave labor to engineer their empire. Their relations with tribes in North America often focused on access to slaves and resources. They encouraged tribes to fight one another, raid one another, and sell their tribal captives to the Spanish Empire. They established a mission labor system in the Southeast, Southwest, and California. In California, the missions controlled the army as well as the clergy, and they worked together to subjugate numerous tribes. By the time the Mexican government secularized those missions, many tribes no longer had any functional political systems. Some no longer even had living tribal languages. Most were landless in their own land and relegated to a feudal labor system throughout the Mexican and early American periods. Resistance to the Spanish Empire was crushed.

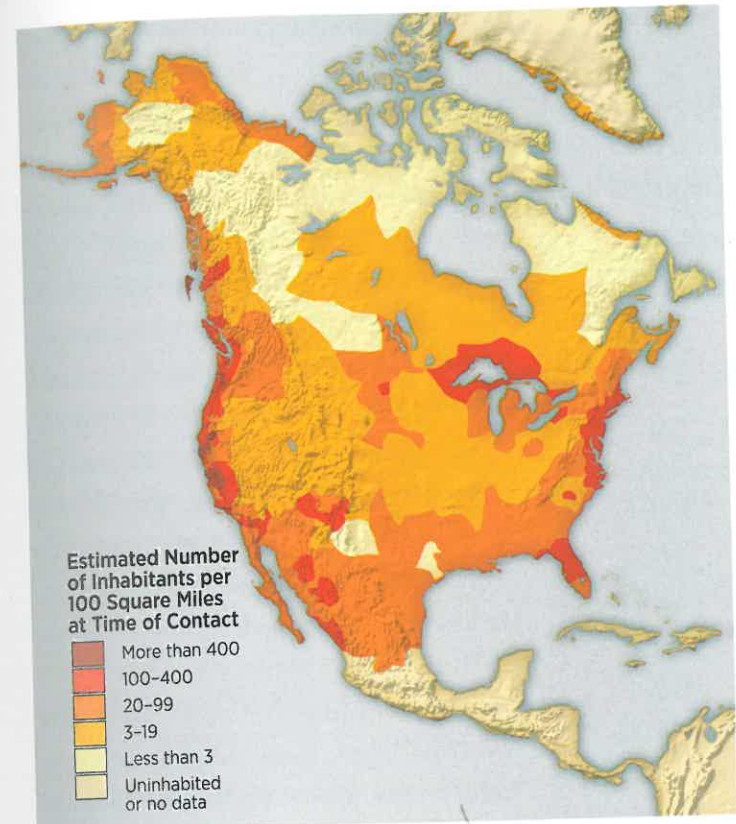
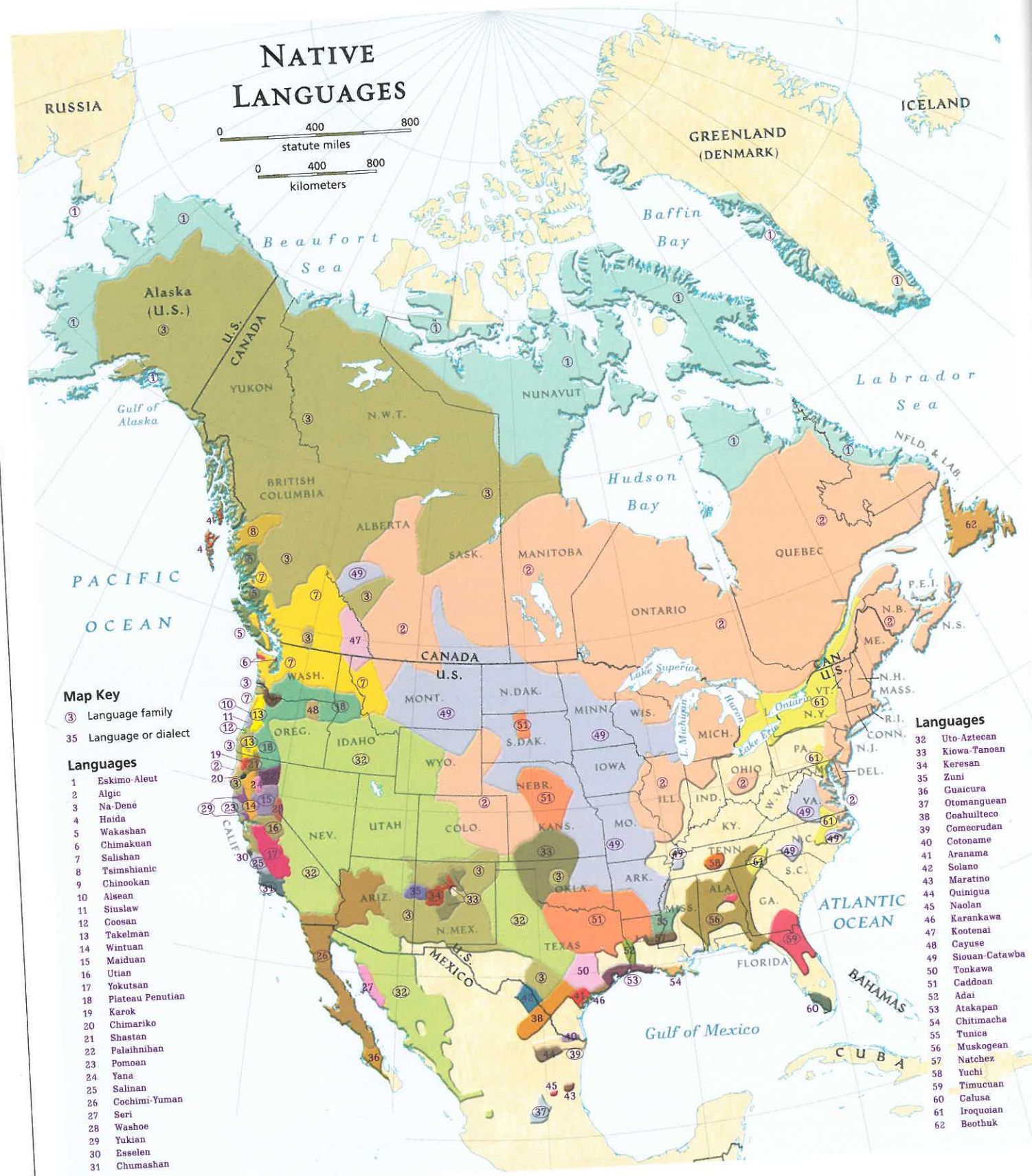
In California, the Northwest Coast, and the Arctic, the Russian Empire also wanted tribal resources. The Russians were less concerned with gold and mining than the Spanish. They wanted furs, especially sea otters. Here, too, the financial imperatives of empire dictated policy, and the Russian-American Company controlled the Russian navy and army. The Russians traded with tribal peoples, but they also took land and conscripted labor around their forts and trading posts. Many indigenous women were raped or forced to marry Russian men. They brought missionaries, who worked to systematically change tribal religion and language. Once again, resistance was brutally suppressed.

In the Southeast and Northeast, it was the French who sought to expand their empire. Like the Russians, they wanted furs, but they also wanted colonies, land, and religious converts. Uncharacteristically, their missionaries worked in tribal languages, so even today there are some entirely Christianized areas in northern Canada with a 100 percent fluency rate in the tribal language. The French formed alliances with some tribes, such as the Ojibwe, Ottawa, and Potawatomi. But they fought any opposed to their



The creators of Cahokia had a highly evolved culture. This deer mask was unearthed at the Cahokia excavation site in southern Illinois, directly across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri.

THE GREAT MOUNDBUILDERS Some of the tribal peoples of North America built massive earthen mounds. At Cahokia they were part of a sophisticated political, religious, and social order. In other places, they served ceremonial or funerary purposes. Some were geometric, pyramid-shaped, or made to resemble animals, birds, or serpents. Some shapes are obvious only when viewed by helicopter or airplane, designed to get the attention of spirits.



ambitions. They even issued a genocidal edict against the Fox, refusing to accept their surrender after a series of punitive wars. The Fox who were not killed or sold into slavery sought refuge with other tribes, eventually merging with the Sac.

The Dutch, and soon after them the British, had colonial aspirations as well. They came after the land and all its resources—furs, deerskins, slaves, mineral wealth, farmland, and converts. The British sought allies among the Iroquois Confederacy and used those allies to dispossess other tribes and spar with the French over colonial rights. Some tribes were toppled, and most were irrevocably changed.

Indians were not passive players in this history. They developed strategies for dealing with European empires and settlers. In the Southeast, some tribes actively evolved their cultures to become more like that of the British. They developed slave-based plantation-style economies and, like the British, started to rely on black slaves more than Indian slaves as a labor force. They created representative structures of governance, written laws, and sophisticated political policies. Other tribes retreated west to avoid the encroachment of European empires, while some actively resisted the most onerous intrusions into the land and lifeways.

There were even a few notable cases of multitribal resistance. In the Great Lakes, Pontiac brought more than a dozen tribes together in 1763, burning down 9 of the 11 British forts there and putting the others under siege. He hoped for French support, which never came, and eventually his warriors had to return to provide for their families and sieges were broken. During the early 1800s, Tecumseh had to return to provide for their families and sieges were broken. During the early 1800s, Tecumseh led another pan-Indian resistance with major support from several tribes, only to lose his life in a battle during the War of 1812. In the Plains, the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho often worked in concert

POPULATION COLLISION North America was densely inhabited prior to European contact. Although precise data is not available, we do know village sizes and tribal population information in many places and can accurately extrapolate from that information. The map above (left) shows the varied densities of the tribal population at the time of European contact. As seen on the map (right), the Russians, French, Spanish, and English converged on North America from multiple directions, reconfiguring the tribal populations of the continent.

LANGUAGE OF THE INDIAN NATIONS The Indian nations of North America were exceptionally diverse. They spoke more than 300 distinct languages. Those languages have been grouped into 29 primary language families, as seen on this map (opposite). The tribes within any given language family shared certain linguistic and cultural roots, but those commonalities did not equate to political or social cohesion. Just as the British and German people spoke tongues in the same language family but had separate political and social histories, so too did Indian tribes with shared linguistic roots.

against American invasion. Other tribes, such as the Apache, fought alone against the Mexican and American militaries.

Tribal resistance, accommodation, and retreat were the strategies employed by tribes. But these rarely did more than buy their people a little extra time before European expansion engulfed them. In the end, they had to deal with new languages, customs, religions, and political systems not of their making

and not within their realm of control.

The tribes gave much to the rest of the world. Many kinds of food—corn, beans, squash, vanilla, chocolate, maple, tomatoes, potatoes, and chilies—dominate the list of contributions. But Indians also changed the nature of European farming and introduced the obsidian scalpel, knowledge of trephination surgery, the birth of corporate enterprise, and enough gold to make that system work.

AMERICAN PERIOD

When the United States of America was born, tribal peoples had to confront a whole new reality—one that was little interested in respecting Indian lives or lifeways. Manifest Destiny—the idea that the United States was destined to spread from Atlantic to Pacific and subordinate any land or people in between—was the dominant paradigm. Through encroachment and squatting, military action, and negotiated treaties, the tribes of North America were deliberately dispossessed. They descended into abject poverty, a condition that has yet to be overcome by most. When the U.S. government stopped making treaties in 1871, the process

continued through executive orders from the President and acts of Congress.

Many tribes resisted their dispossession. Some had initial success, like the Lakota, but most were eventually defeated. Some, like the Yahi, were annihilated; others came very close. Genocide happened in many places. Some of the most horrific acts in human history were perpetrated by the U.S. Army or local militias.

The war on tribal cultures and languages was carried on long after the physical genocide stopped. More than 20,000 Native American children were removed from their homes and sent to residential boarding schools every year. In those government-run schools, children were beaten for speaking the only languages they knew, forced to pray in the Christian tradition, and torn from the social fabric

of tribal communities. Today, as a result, many North American tribal languages are extinct. Most are threatened.

The U.S. government passed legislation called the Dawes Act in 1887. That enabled the government to allot the Indians reservations—to break up the communal land that had been held in common for all tribal members. Instead, each family got a private allotment and two-thirds of the reservation land was opened for white settlement. Most Indians lost their private allotments over the years to land speculators and outright fraud. On Leech Lake (Minnesota), the tribe owns 4 percent of its own reservation. In California, Indians are often minorities in their own communities. The government terminated some reservations and relocated many tribal people to urban areas. Education and social service policies and practices have also undermined the rights of Native peoples to raise their young according to tribal custom. Bitterness and pain remain in Indian country, as justice, remedy, reconciliation, and even truth remain elusive for many Indians.

MODERN ERA

Things are changing quickly for Indians today. Tribal governments in the United States and Canada have been trying to reclaim their sovereign power and rights. It can be contentious, but more and more, tribal peoples are engaged in a growing empowerment of their new political structures. Some tribes, such as the Florida Seminole, have eliminated poverty for their citizens. Their story is an exception, though, rather than the rule. Economic opportunity is still a major problem in Indian lands, with half of the children in poverty. Still, tribes are increasingly finding ways to make a brighter future.

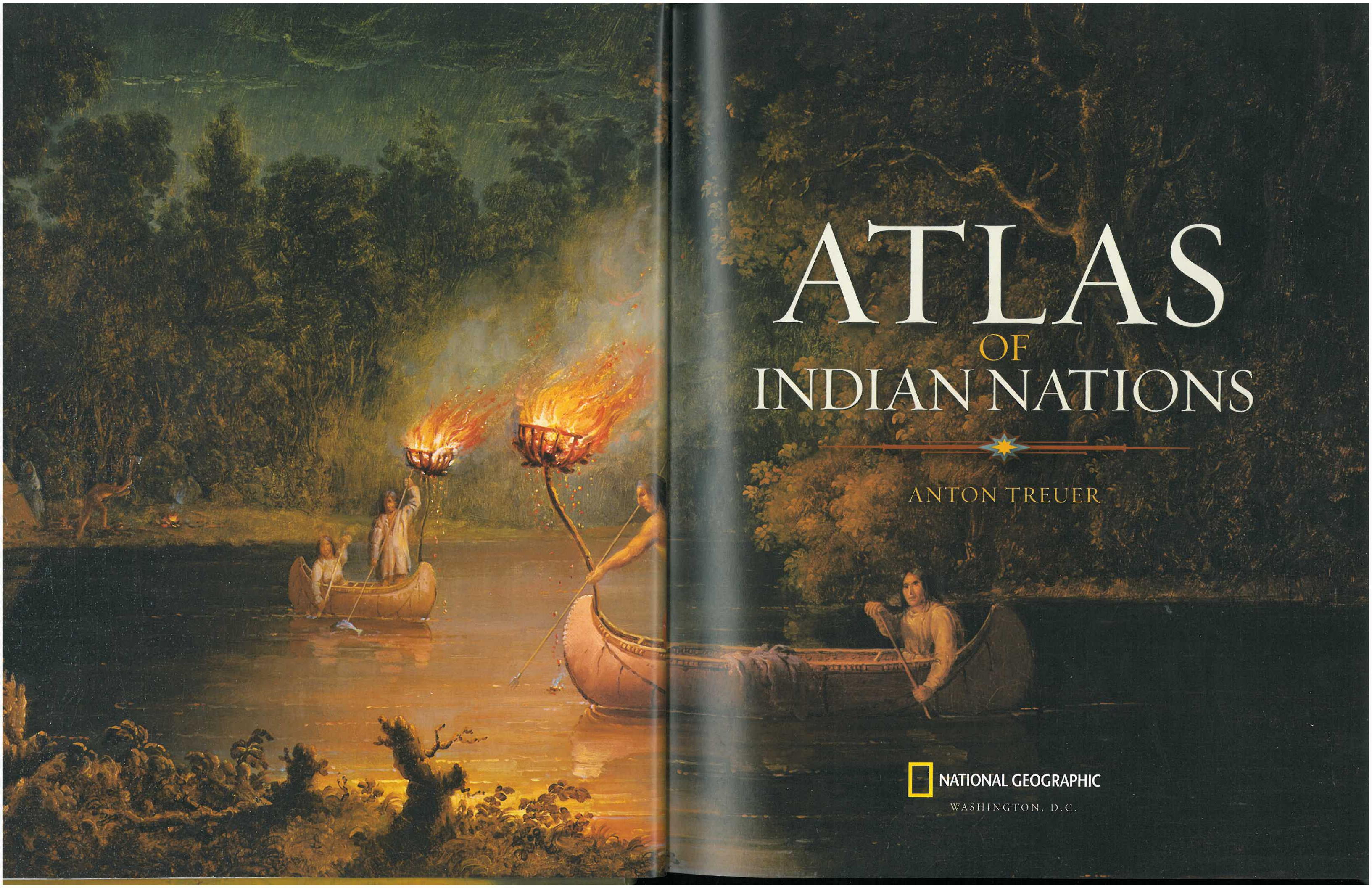
Some tribes are also making great strides to preserve and revitalize tribal language and culture. Immersion programs and scholarly work among the Ojibwe, Mohawk, Crow, Blackfoot, and other tribes are showing true promise. Although the future vitality of tribal languages and cultures is not guaranteed, it is possible. And through those emergent efforts comes an opportunity to preserve the knowledge and ways of knowing that connected human beings to the diverse landscape of the North American continent in the first place and gave birth to its first peoples. With that comes the potential for all of us to better understand and appreciate the spirit of the land itself.



DISEASE EPIDEMICS Diseases brought by Europeans ravaged the tribal populations of the Americas. This map shows some of the most debilitating disease outbreaks in North America. Diseases traveled far faster than colonial regimes. Sometimes entire tribes were wiped out by European diseases before most tribal members had seen a white man.



INTERTRIBAL RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS Most religious belief systems in North America were specific to each tribe and not evangelized from one tribe to another. But some beliefs captivated people from many different tribes, such as the Ghost Dance of the later 19th century. This map shows some of the major regional religious movements in North American tribal communities.



ATLAS OF INDIAN NATIONS

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