N

Native America

Before European explorers and exploiters set foot on the North American continent, 500 nations of indigenous peoples, with greatly varying languages, religious beliefs, social organizations, and cultures, lived in what would become the United States. Modern knowledge of these peoples, who have been dubbed *Native Americans*, has been acquired through personal and official letters, manuscripts, drawings, and published works written by Europeans, including Jesuit missionaries; Spanish conquistadores; and English, French, and Dutch colonists from the sixteenth century through American independence. The movement westward of Euro-Americans and continuing waves of immigrants from primarily Europe elicited similar evidence, including oral history, art, and photography of Native American housing, dress, daily life, and ceremonies. The United States government and state governments, in efforts to control the peoples commonly called *Indians* (a misnomer attributed to explorer Christopher Columbus's (1451–1506) error of believing he had found a passage to India), enacted legislation, conducted surveys, and used military force, all of which have left an enormous written record but resulted in a relatively small percentage of Native Americans living where their ancestors flourished.

The history of Europeans and Euro-Americans and indigenous peoples is one of brutality and racism. Yet it is also a chronicle of cultural contact and exchange and survival, evident primarily in material culture. Native peoples actively sought to preserve their identities through their traditions and material culture, surviving at times through accommodation and at times through physical removal to new locations, especially in the nineteenth century. Archaeological investigations undertaken at many sites throughout the United States and study of collections of Native American–made and –used artifacts offer much insight into the material practices of indigenous peoples. Collectors, especially in the early twentieth century, elevated specific native crafts (which were erroneously dubbed *primitive*) into art, so much so as to misrepresent the complexity of native peoples' cultures and in their collecting promote the long-standing romantic idea of the "vanishing Indian." This was

This photogravure image, "Baskets in the Painted Cave," appears in photographer Edward S. Curtis's multivolume The North American Indian *(1924). The Yokuts of central California's Tule River Reservation created these baskets. By the time Curtis posed these baskets within the sacred space of a painted cave, Euro-Americans had developed an interest in Native American goods as collectible and decorative art. (Library of Congress)*

also true of projects undertaken by artist George Catlin (1796–1872) and photographer Edward S. Curtis (1868–1952), both of whom traveled westward to portray Native Americans, fearing their disappearance.

The historical study of Native America is based on two models: language and culture area. Linguists have used language families to classify peoples, but in the study of material culture, the concept of culture area is more useful. A *culture area* is a region defined by ecology and geography in which groups interact through intermarriage and trade, war and diplomacy. Through such activities cultural characteristics are shared and may be traced. Though extensive and complete coverage is impossible in this essay, especially of the indigenous peoples of what are now Alaska and Hawaii, what follows is a discussion of key examples of material life.

Precontact Material Life: The Moundbuilders

The sophistication of the people known as the Moundbuilders is confirmed in the remains of the great mounds they created before European contact. Archaeological excavation has yielded evidence of moundbuilding throughout the Eastern Woodlands, but these forms are found primarily in the Ohio and Mississippi river valleys. Appearing singly or grouped together, designed in squares, circles, rectangles, and octagons, these mounds served their builders as sacred ritual and burial sites. Serpent Mound, in southeastern Ohio, is over 1,330 feet long, rising an average of 4 to 5 feet high, and ranging between 20 and 25 feet wide.

Inside these earthen constructions is evidence of an extensive trade network. For example, copper from the northern Great Lakes region, mica from what is now North Carolina or Mexico, and obsidian from what is now Wyoming have been found by archaeologists in these mounds. Other sacred objects, such as human and animal effigies (carved in stone, cut out of copper and mica, or crafted in clay), pots, pipes, and engraved stone tablets, reveal a complex religion.

Hundreds of mounds near Collinsville, Illinois, mark a city of some 200 acres once protected by wooden palisades. Known as Cahokia, this city likely housed anywhere from 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants, who built by hand these great earthen masses on which public buildings and houses were erected. Also evident are plazas. The built environ-

ment of Cahokia belies the long-held stereotype that Native Americans were nomadic.

Native American Material Life

Christopher Columbus's voyage to the New World marks the commencement of European colonization of what would become the United States. The establishment of new trade networks with colonists of France, Spain, and England altered power structures between native nations, reorganized gender roles within villages, and often augmented rather than changed material life and practices. For example, the Algonkians, who had traded with inland native nations, began trapping what English colonists desired in the early seventeenth century: beaver pelts. Increasingly, trade centers moved to the eastern seaboard, and the Algonkians spent more time on trapping beaver than hunting and preserving larger game such as deer. In turn, the Algonkians donned cotton shirts, knitted stockings, and beaver hats, diminishing to a degree their dependence on animal skins as dress. They adopted portable copper kettles and iron pots, brought by traders and considered to be better than the immovable, carved-out stumps used to heat soups and stews by dropping into the stumps heated stones. Tools carved from stone and bone were not replaced by steel knives, though the Algonkians traded for these implements. Stone implements were still used to scrape hides, prepare food, and build housing.

Still other native-made goods did not incorporate European materials. The materials and construction of houses remained more or less the same. In much of the Eastern Woodlands, houses were constructed of wood frames and covered with bark, plant fibers, and animal skins. The Iroquois, centered in what is now New York State, employed elm bark to cover *longhouses*, large buildings that re-created, through spatial organization, village society. Along the southern eastern seaboard, the Catawbas framed dome-shaped houses with bent tree saplings, which were in turn covered with bark. *Tipis* (or tepees) of the Plains Indians were created using buffalo hides. In the Pacific Northwest, the Tlingit reinforced the social order by creating large, peak-roofed houses of planks with carved posts at each corner. These carved and decorated posts, called *totem poles*, were also created to frame doorways or stand in public areas to commemorate important events.

In the Southwest, the Navajo, once a nomadic people, built *hogans*, one-room houses constructed of earth with a door always facing east. The Apache constructed oval-shaped *wickiups* of brush covered with animal hides. Spanish colonists encountered on top of high mesas a building form they called *pueblo*, thus giving to the builders the name of Pueblos. Constructed of stone or adobe, these multihousehold buildings were the largest of their kind in North America until urban apartment buildings were erected in the late nineteenth century. Adobe pueblos were framed with heavy timber beams (transported from a distance) to support a strong, multilayer roof upon which many activities were performed. The ceremonial chamber known as the *kiva* was also constructed among the Pueblo and the Apache (who built these spaces partially beneath ground level). Kivas were hidden from the Spanish colonists, who, through Franciscan missionaries, attempted to spread Christianity. In part, the missionaries succeeded: Wooden crosses and religious prints appeared in Pueblo households.

Tree bark, wood, and other plant fibers also provided Native Americans the material to make many necessary tools, utensils, and even transport. Birchbark canoes were crafted by many native peoples of the Eastern

Woodlands. Tree saplings were bent and shaped into a frame, over which a covering of bark, stitched together, was stretched. The bark would be sealed with pitch. This method of sealing bark so as to make it waterproof was also applied to cooking and storage vessels, to housing materials, and to clothing.

Animal skins provided Native Americans with clothing, though European trade goods—cotton shirts, heavy wool blankets, leggings, capes, and ornamental glass beads—became part of Native American dress in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the East. Then traders used red and blue "trade coats" to cement alliances with key native leaders. Such clothing became a sign of status, just as purple and white shell beads, called *wampum*, became currency in the increasingly competitive trade market. In the nineteenth century, Native Americans living on the Great Plains depended on the buffalo. After the Spanish introduced the domesticated horse, the buffalo could be hunted with great success. Buffalo hides offered the fabric of tepees and clothing, including capes, robes, and moccasins. The great animal's bones were used to carve shovels, knives, and war implements. Personal ornaments and rope were fashioned from buffalo hair.

Twentieth-Century Crafts

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Euro-Americans had populated the American West that had been made knowable by government surveys, photography, and the railroads. The Homestead Act (1862), wars and other military activity, and the Dawes Severalty Act (1887) had greatly diminished Native Americans' political and economic power. The tourist trade, the quest for the "authentic" by experiencing other ethnic groups' cultures, and in decorative arts (seen in the Arts and Crafts Movement's interest in Native American handicrafts), and the emphasis on the primitive in fine art converged to re-create the relationship between Native Americans, particularly in the Southwest, in California, and in the Pacific Northwest, and Euro-Americans.

In the case of the Navajo, the demands of the tourist market altered in many cases the baskets, blankets, and metalwares that had been produced for centuries. The Navajo had grown cotton and woven blankets before the arrival of the Spanish. Wool from the churro sheep the Spanish brought with them was adapted to the Navajo women's looms, with which blankets and other textile forms were produced. Utilitarian baskets and pottery were also altered for trade, becoming smaller and more decorative to appeal to the market. By the mid-twentieth century, native craftsmen were producing stock items for sale. Silver jewelry, for example, was once pawned by Navajos for goods; the unredeemed jewelry was then sold to Euro-Americans. Its increased popularity led to mass production for the tourist trade and the use of such stock "Indian" symbols as thunderbirds and crossed arrows suggested by traders. By the 1930s and 1940s Indian boarding and reservation schools incorporated instruction in crafts such as weaving, pottery making, and jewelry making. What these forms of material culture represented was an agreement between Native Americans and Euro-Americans of what "Native American" is. In some ways, as scholars Rayna Green (1988) and Philip Deloria (1998) have argued, both groups are "playing Indian."

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See also Agricultural Fairs and Expositions; Animals; Anthropology and Archaeology; Body Modification; Child's Body; Collecting and Collections; Dress, Accessories, and Fashion; Ethnicity; Gifts and Gift Giving; Holidays and Commemorations; Land and

Landscape; Money, Currency, and Value; Mourning and Ethnicity, Music and Musical Instruments; Race; Slavery; Souvenirs; Textiles; Tourism and Travel; Water Transportation

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Nostalgia

The simple fact that humans age and change provides the basis of the phenomenon known as *nostalgia*. The sense that the past was somehow better, whether that past was one's childhood or a time even beyond one's lifetime, describes the phenomenon. *Nostalgia* describes a condition in which a person, community, society, or nation creates selectively a past, often because that invented past offers a pleasant or soothing alternative to the present or the future. As sociologist Fred Davis (1977, 420) observes, nostalgia "always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties even though those may not be in the forefront of the person's awareness." In short, nostalgia provides a means by which individuals and societies may create and maintain identity. For nations, this identity may be a result and a practice of accumulation, generation after generation, of key symbols and shared commemorations. Forms of material culture, such as relics, antiques, historic houses, or even replicas, offer tangible, personal links to that invented past for those who feel a sense of alienation with the present. Indeed, in modern American consumer culture, nostalgia sells.

History of Nostalgia

The concept of nostalgia is most often traced to the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer, who in 1688 employed the German word *heimweh* to characterize the homesickness experienced by Swiss mercenaries far from their native land. *Nostalgia*, a combination of two Greek terms for return home (*nostos*) and sorrow or pain (*algos*), described physical and mental