

**1961**

**The Civil Rights Movement opened the eyes to many in the US about their multicultural population**

*Ancestors of the Indians Come from Asia to Settle in the New World*

The American Indian is the most truly "native American." Between 20,000 and 40,000 years ago, people from northern Asia—the ancestors of the American Indians—began crossing the Bering Strait from Siberia to settle in Alaska. Over a period of thousands of years, they pushed down from Alaska and spread through-out the length and breadth of North and South America. In time, they lost all contact with Asia and began to develop various cultures of their own. By the time of Columbus, there were millions of Indians spread thinly throughout the vast areas of the New World. They were divided into hundreds of tribes, with different languages and customs, and were isolated from one another by great distances.

Some of these tribes lived by hunting and fishing. Others learned to support themselves by agriculture. Most of them were in a primitive stage of development when Columbus reached the Caribbean. Some of them, however, like the Incas of Peru and the Aztecs of Mexico, had developed

fairly advanced cultures. But, on the whole, the American Indians were at a great disadvantage when confronted by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europeans. Even the most advanced Indian tribes lacked the wheel, the plow, iron implements, and livestock. Nor did any of them possess ships or gunpowder.

#### THE EUROPEAN SETTLERS RECEIVE MUCH FROM THE INDIANS

Nevertheless, the Indians had much to teach the white man. From the Indian, European settlers learned of many new products: maize (Indian corn), white potatoes and sweet potatoes, tobacco, pineapples, peanuts, maple sugar, various kinds of beans, tomatoes, squash, pumpkins, chocolate, quinine, vanilla, and rubber. It is estimated that one-third of our agricultural products came originally from the Indians.

The ability of the early white explorers and fur traders to survive in the wilderness was due, in part, to the forest lore they learned from the Indians. Like the Indians, the European pioneers wore deerskin clothing, used canoes and snowshoes, and learned to move in Indian file and fight in open formation for greater safety. The European settlers also borrowed many Indian names for villages, cities, lakes, rivers, and mountains throughout America. The names of 26 of our 50 states are taken from Indian names. Thus, the heritage of the United States is Indian as well as European. The Indian was to play an important part in the white man's exploration and colonization of America. He was to prove valuable as a friend and dangerous as an enemy.<sup>10</sup>