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Traditional use of words like 'squaw', 'savage', and 'Indian' are now no longer used. Women are now represented more fairly, and historical hearsay has given way to anthropological research.

What did it feel like to be among the first humans to reach this great, empty land? We know what the first astronauts experienced when they set foot on the moon. They were aware that they were doing something no one had ever done before. We do not know exactly what the first Americans experienced. They did not know that they were exploring a new continent. Understanding the difference calls for an act of historical imagination. Having a good historical imagination means being able to look at past events from the outside, keeping in mind what the people of the day knew, but at the same time remembering what they did not know.

Once in North America, the wanderers moved slowly southward and to the east, following the life-giving game and grasses. The distances they covered were enormous. It is 15,000 miles (24,000 kilometers) from their homeland in Asia to the southern tip of South America and 6,000 miles (9,600 kilometers) to what is now New England. Many thousand years passed before they had spread over all of North and South America.

As they advanced and multiplied, the first Americans gradually changed their ways of life. Some made their homes in fertile valleys, others in tropical jungles. Some settled in mountainous regions or in deserts. Each group had different problems, and each learned to see the world in different ways. As a result each society created its own culture.

A society is a group of families who live and work together and who have common values and patterns of behavior. The culture of a society consists of the special characteristics of the people who make it up: the language they speak, their government, how they make a living, their family relationships, how they educate their children. Some sense of how many different cultures these first Americans and their descendants created comes from the fact that the peoples of North and South America spoke between 1,000 and 2,000 languages.

EARLY AMERICAN CULTURES

About 500 years ago there were more than 25 million people living in North and South America. Only about 1 million of these inhabited what is now the United States and Canada. Partly because they were so few in number and spread over such a huge area, these people had developed a number of distinct cultures. But they had many things in common. Most

did not rely entirely on hunting and living off berries, fruits, and other wild plants. Many were farmers. Seed corn 4,000 years old has been found in caves in the Southwest. Those who planted seeds and cultivated the land instead of merely hunting and gathering food were more secure and comfortable. People who had mastered farming, or agriculture, could settle in one place instead of roaming in constant search of food. They built permanent houses. Their societies grew to include more members.

These agricultural people were mostly peaceful, though they could fight fiercely to protect their fields. The hunters and wanderers, on the other hand, were quite warlike because their need to move about brought them frequently into conflict with other groups. Some early American cultures were matrilinear, which means that family relationships were controlled by the female side. When a man and woman married in such a society, the man became a member of his wife's social group, or clan. A typical household might consist of an older woman, her daughters, and her granddaughters. Of course, the woman's husband, her sons-in-law, and her grandsons would also live in the household group. But only the female members were truly permanent members of the clan.¹¹