

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

NORTH AMERICAN CULTURE – Ancient Period

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Overview Before the arrival of the Europeans, the North American continent was a place that was undergoing constant flux and change. The earliest inhabitants had migrated south from what was then a land bridge connecting Asia and Alaska, and they split into many different groups, each exploring and setting down roots in different parts of the continent. We have better records in some parts of the continent than others, thanks to the existence of caves, a dry (and preserving) climate, and well-engineered constructions. The culture of each group offers a glimpse of their shared beliefs, lifestyles, and means of self-expression.

VERBAL ARTS

Literature

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): There was no literature as we would know it today, although there were signs of the existence of narratives, oral traditions, and religious practices as evidenced in petroglyphs, cave carvings, and geoglyphs (large earthwork design in the desert southwest).

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): There were no written books, scrolls, or codices. However, there was a tradition of sand paintings that told stories. They constituted a type of literature, but it would be more accurate to ascribe them to scripts and oral narrative / folklore.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): Among the civilizations of the Eastern Woodlands, there were no codices or written texts. However, there was a system of communication via wampum, which were patterns in beads. This concept extends the idea of literature – it's more realistically a kind of script.

Discussion / Questions

Literature: Early literature in North America was closely connected to religion. However, it was not the formal religion that was to become more prominent in the late 18th century and later. It had to do with a worldview that attempted to instruct the human being where his or her place was in the world and how to maintain equilibrium. Discuss how religion and literature have a close connection in such a world.

Readings

Blaisdell, Bob. (2014). *The Dover Anthology of American Literature*. NY: Dover.

Nelson, Dana D., Joseph Csicsila, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, James S. Leonard, David Bradley, George McMichael (2010). *Anthology of American Literature*. Longman Publishers

Language

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): The Clovis people came to North America from the land bridge across the Aleutian island arc, and so it can be assumed that their language had as its origin the same origins as the Eskimo-Aleut languages. Later, as they dispersed themselves across the continent, they evolved into different language groups.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): The basic language groups in North America formed after 1200 BC when the people who crossed the land bridge on the Bering Strait fragmented and moved in different directions, essentially differentiating themselves. One major group consisted of the southwest Pueblo, whose language became that of the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, and more.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): Algonquian and Athabasca groups split off from the main group and formed their own language. While it had certain elements in common with the others in the Plains, Southwest, and West, the Eastern Woodlands forms of address and words used to describe states of being, forms for address to ranking women, and also relationships set them apart.

Discussion / Questions

Among the earliest civilizations in North America, there were a number of different groups that had a great deal in common, and yet split off from each other. Discuss the role of migration, branching out of groups, and trade routes (commerce) in the development of individual languages.

References:

Language:

Algeo, John (2001) The Cambridge History of the English Language, Vol. 6: English in North America (Volume 6)Cambridge University Press; 1st Edition edition (November 12, 2001)

Gray, Edward. (2014) New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.

Van der Sijs. (2009) Cookies, Coleslaw, and Stoops: The Influence of Dutch on the North American Languages. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

<http://www.doabooks.org/doab?func=fulltext&rid=12627>

Mithun, Marian. (2001) The Languages of Native North America. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP.

Script

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): The Clovis were known for their rapid progress from the Bering Straits all the way to what is now the Mexican border. They were on the move, and probably too busy to do anything significant in terms of developing elaborate writings, etc. However, even though they spent most of their energy producing highly technical arrows, points, awls, and implements for hunting and everyday life, they did spend some energy in creating petroglyphs which they carved into the walls of certain particularly spacious and accommodating caves. Their geoglyphs could be considered the kind of semiotic script that communicated narratives and were used in conjunction with rituals. The writing included animals, hunting scenes, straight lines, and geometric figures. They also created large geoglyphs in the desert near what is the California / Arizona border just north of the Mexican border east of the Big Maria Mountains along the Colorado River. The most famous geoglyphs are called the Blythe Intaglios. There are more than 200, and they include human figures, spirals, two four-legged animals. They were not discovered until 1932 by a pilot, and they are best viewed from the air, which makes one curious about who the designs were created for. Were they made for the pleasure of the Sky Gods? The longest human figure is 171 feet long, and the smallest is 95 long.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): Not much of the Pueblo writing has survived, primarily because the writing that they did was largely in the form of sand art, which is designed to be ephemeral. However, they made great use of signs and symbols. Some of the writing made its way into meaningful patterns in blankets and rugs, which achieved a complexity that approached that of a formal set of hieroglyphs. Hopi, Zuni, and Navajo used crushed stone, shells, flowers, crushed insects, and more to create elaborate sand paintings that could be 5 or 6 feet in diameter. They were created to be considered as a part of ceremonies, and in particular, in the healing of the sick (in body and in spirit). The Native Americans considered the communication as a natural part of life. Further, there is a sense that all expression is considered to be a part of the sacred, just as all of nature is considered to be animated by the gods. In the case of the Navajo Indians, the sand paintings were begun in the morning by the medicine men, who create the work to honor the gods. The underworld is represented in the middle, the sun and different gods surround it, the roots of the four sacred plants are also included. The stories change, and the medicine men repeat certain patterns to focus the mind on the kind of healing that is desired. The painting is destroyed at the end of the ceremony.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): Signs and symbols were worked into the materials used by the Eastern Woodlands civilizations. Writing took the form of wampum and designs in blankets and beadwork, which expressed identity, tribe, as well as the form of beliefs having to do with creation stories and what could be described as beast fables illustrative of human attributes. Wampum was fashioned from beads and the patterns included squares, lines, leaves, humans, birds, circles, triangles, diamonds, all arranged in different types of patterns. Each tribe's wampums were different. For example, the Pequot wampum belts often tell a story. For example, they can include depictions of human beings holding hands and after a series of animals and triangles symbolizing travel, hunting, and the resolution of conflict.

Discussion / Questions

Script / Writing:

If we consider the early petroglyphs of the Clovis peoples and the mysterious geoforms that resemble the Nazca Lines to be a form of meaningful written discourse, we can say that they wrote in order to communicate. But, what were they communicating? What were people trying to communicate? Who were they communicating to? In the case of the Blythe Intaglios (the geoglyphs), they were best viewed from the sky, or perhaps an overlook from a nearby mountain. Describe the glyphs and propose meanings and human interactions with them.

References:

Script / Writings:

Ancient Origins: Reconstructing the Story of Humanity's Past (2015) Blythe Intaglios: The Impressive Anthropomorphic Geoglyphs of the Colorado Desert. <http://www.ancient-origins.net/ancient-places-americas/blythe-intaglios-impressive-anthropomorphic-geoglyphs-colorado-desert-003003?nopaging=1>

Ancient Origins: Reconstructing the Story of Humanity's Past (2018) Did Humans Speak Through Cave Art? Ancient Drawings and Language's Origins <http://www.ancient-origins.net/news-evolution-human-origins/did-humans-speak-through-cave-art-ancient-drawings-and-languages-021844>

Mythology

Classical

Origin Myth of the Acoma (Pueblo): According to the story, the Acuma Pueblo people were created when the Old Spider Woman goddess, Tsichtinako, sent two sisters to the world. As in the case of the Incas, the deities came up from the ground. The Old Spider Woman taught the sisters how to plant corn, tend and harvest crops, how to use it for food, and how to cook using fire. The two sisters chose clan names – one being the Corn Clan and the other being the Sun Clan.

Kokopeli (Pueblo): Kokopelli is the fertility deity of the Pueblo Indians, and he is usually portrayed as a flute player leaning forward and appearing to have a hump back. For the Hopi, Kokopelli is a trickster god as well as a fertility god. He carries unborn children on his back and distributes them to women. A similar deity has been found in the artifacts of the Mississippian culture of the American southeast from 1000 – 1400 AD.

Coyote (Navajo): The Navajo have many stories that include the coyote, who is a change agent with many seemingly contradictory qualities. He's a trickster and yet also powerful. He helped form the Milky Way which is the pathway for the spirits traveling between heaven and earth. He also controls the rain. The Coyoteway ceremony is considered a transformational one that restores good relations among family members.

Iktomi: For the Lakota Sioux, Iktomi is a shape-shifter and a trickster spirit that takes the shape of a spider. According to the many stories and myths featuring Iktomi, the enormous web that Iktomi spun made language and communication possible. He is a shapeshifter and uses strings to control human beings. He is also capable of creating potions or philtres that allow him to control people.

Thunderbird: For many North American indigenous people, the Thunderbird is a being of power and strength. The thunderbird controls the rain and hail, and their purpose is to fight evil spirits. The thunderbirds also use their power to punish humans who break the rules of morality. For some tribes, to have a vision of a thunderbird means that you will become a warrior chief.

Discussion / Questions

Mythology:

The North American civilizations before the arrival of Europeans had a number of similarities in their myths. Describe some of the myths of origin and their unifying elements. How did the myths origin tie together with trickster figures. Identify three tricksters and describe their roles, functions, and the kinds of animals or beings that were allied with them.

Mythology:

Lowenstein, Tom. (2011). Native American Myths and Beliefs. New York: Rosen Pub Group.

Folklore (and Oral Narrative)

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): The Clovis peoples did not leave signs of oral narrative, except potentially in the brilliantly crafted arrows, knives, and blades, which point to narratives associated with apprenticeship and knowledge transfer.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): The important elements of Desert Southwest cultures include many shamanistic animal tales, which illustrate the human qualities of animals, and their function as spirit guides and exemplars. They include the kokopeli, coyote, turtle, bear, and others, which take on transformative powers (such as in the case of coyote, the trickster).

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): The Eastern Woodlands oral narrative shaped itself around creation stories, animal spirits, and a genealogy that tied to matriarchy. In addition, stories that incorporated the salvation crops -- corn, beans, and squash – figure prominently in the narratives.

Discussion / Questions

Oral Narrative / Folklore:

Many of the stories of early American groups had to do with methods of transformation. For example, the animal tales often were used in shamanistic ways to both explain or allegorize human nature. They were also used as vectors of change or transformation. Explain how the story featuring an animal or bird (bird, hawk, bear, for example), could lead to personal transformation.

References:

Oral History / Folklore:

American Social History Project. Who Built America?, Vols. I & 2. New York: Pantheon Books, 1989, 1992.

VISUAL ARTS

[Painting](#)

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): The Clovis cultures did not paint, but they were prodigious tool-makers, and fashioned spear points, blades, drills, needles, and scrapers, which they used in foraging for plants, hunting small animals, and fishing. They carved lines and shapes into the walls of caves (petroglyphs), but very little has been found as yet.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): The Pueblo Indians painted their dwellings and also used sand paintings in their ceremonies. Hohokam rock art can be found in the valleys in southern and south-central Arizona, which they turned into an agricultural center by means of irrigation canals. The rock art of the Hohokam included both petroglyphs (designs chipped away on the rock) and pictographs (designs painted on the rock). The designs include abstract art (circles, crosses, spirals, and meandering lines) and also representational art, with birds, snakes, mammals, and humans. It is believed that the art was created in conjunction with ceremonies.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): The Algonquin, Mohawk, Seneca, Abenaki and others of the Northeast decorated their clothing and their wampum belts (belts made of beads shaped from shells). The Eastern Algonquian peoples of Canada and the northern U.S. painted flowers, abstract designs, and figures of people on their belts and clothing.

Mississippian (800 – 1500 AD): The Mound dwellers of the Mississippian painted the inner rooms of their dwellings, and also the walls of caves. Very little is known about these architects of the Mississippi River Valley because by the time that the Europeans visited their lands, there was little left except their abandoned structures. Their pottery was painted, generally with geometric shapes, but also in the shape of animals.

Discussion / Questions

Painting:

The earliest inhabitants of North America created artifacts that were highly utilitarian such as finely crafted awls, blades, and spearpoints, and they used their tools to carve glyphs in the walls of caves and on rocks. When we consider that their religion was shamanistic, and it often involved assuming the attributes of an animal. Given the convergence of art and religious beliefs, what are some of the possible ways that art was used in the early civilizations before the arrival of the Spaniards, English, Dutch, and French?

References:

Painting:

Berlo, Janet Catherine. (2014) *Native North American Art. 2nd edition.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Craven, Wayne. (2002) *American Art: History and Culture*. Saddle River, NJ: McGraw-Hill.

[**Sculpture**](#)

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): The Clovis were not known for sculpture, except for small carvings and rock art, carved into the sides of cliffs and in caves.

Classical

Desert Southwest: The Native Americans did not create large sculptures of wood, rock, metal or clay. However, they did create massive earthworks that bring to mind that of the Nazca Lines in Peru. There are similar gigantic human and animal figures drawn on the ground's surface (geoglyphs and "intaglio") in the arid parts of California near Blythe. Thanks to low rainfall, the lines have been preserved and are estimated to be as old as 100 BC. The geoglyphs were created by scraping away the surface layers of dark rocks to reveal the lighter clays below. The clays were compacted to reduce the possibility of invasion by plants. The geoglyphs depict human figures, animals (deer), birds, snakes, and mountain lions.

Eastern Woodlands: On a plateau near Ohio Creek in Adams County, Ohio, there is a 1,348 foot-long continuous effigy mound, which rises up 3 feet from the ground. From above, it gives the appearance of a snake, hence the name, "Serpent Mound." However, to one not so animal-centric, it appears to be a series of sine waves, beginning (or terminating) with a spiral, and then terminating (or beginning) with a circle. Mathematically, it is more coherent in terms of explanation, than that of a shaman-tinged narrative of a snake with a curled tail. Recent dating has put its age at around 250 BC. No one really knows its purpose. It was clearly meant to be seen from above, which reinforces the notion that early civilizations had the ability to travel above the surface of the earth.

Discussion / Questions

Sculpture:

Mounds and geoglyphs have been found in different parts of North America. They resemble in many ways the Nazca Lines found in the desert of Peru. It has been observed that the best (and perhaps only) way to truly see these glyphs is by flying above them. Otherwise, they're not really observable or distinguishable. What are your thoughts about the earthworks (geoglyphs and lines). What might they be communicating, and what is their purpose?

References:

Sculpture:

Optiz, Glenn B., ed. *Dictionary of American Sculptors: 18th Century to the Present*. Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Apollo Book, 1984.

Optiz, Glenn B., ed. *Mantle Fielding's Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers*. Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Apollo Book, 1983.

[**Architecture**](#)

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): The Clovis people inhabited caves which they decorated with cave paintings and carvings. The petroglyphs that remain today correspond to animals, people, and geometric shapes and spirals.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): The Pueblo Indians constructed elaborate cliff dwellings as well as structures using adobe. The designs reflected a view of well-organized communal living and mutual support.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): The civilizations of the Eastern Woodlands were known for creating towns consisting of log buildings which they called long houses. In the swampy parts of the southeast, they built houses on stilts. The long houses were often used for ceremonial purposes, while the storage and sleeping quarters were more informal.

Discussion / Questions

Architecture:

Early architecture integrated itself with the landscape and the climate. The functions of the architecture tended to revolve around society-building ritual as well as providing shelter for families and the community. Describe how the early civilizations of the Americas developed designs that took advantage of local materials and explain how they decorated them in ways that reinforced the rituals and ceremonies held there.

References:

Architecture:

Blumenson, John J.G. Identifying American Architecture, A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms, 1600-1945. Nashville, TN: American Association for State & Local History, 1977.

Bomberger, Bruce D. The Preservation and Repair of Historic Log Buildings, Preservation Briefs #26. Washington, DC: Technical Preservation Services, National Park Service, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Washington, DC, 1991. <http://www.nps.gov/history/tps/briefs/brief26.htm>

Lanier, Gabrielle M. and Bernard L. Herman. Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic, Looking at Buildings and Landscapes. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Mako, Brandon. History of American Architecture – a timeline.

<https://www.preceden.com/timelines/19454-history-of-american-architecture>

PERFORMING ARTS

Dance

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): Archeologists have found some evidence that the Clovis culture had spaces for ceremonies and collective acts. Whether or not they wore costumes or practiced rituals at the same time is not clear. However, based on the cultures that emerged, it is likely that they did have rituals that included drums, song and dance.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): The Pueblo Indians performed dances on feast days (which, after the arrival of the Europeans, corresponded to Patron Saint Days). The dances were essentially shamanistic, and dealt with entreating various entities to imbue the dancer with their special qualities. The dances include the Eagle Dance, for vision, courage, and leadership. The Deer Dance has to do with the attributes of the deer, which include intuition, quickness, and an understanding of the night.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): The Algonquin, Iroquois, and Seneca, as well as other tribes were largely matriarchal. Two of the native dances are mainly performed by women. The Jingle Dress is a medicine dress, and can bring healing. The women's Fancy Shawl represents a butterfly in flight, and it represents a woman warrior. The Grass Dance involves packing the grass down with one's feet in order to create a good dancing surface for all the dancers to follow.

Discussion / Questions

Dance:

The civilizations in North America used dance in conjunction with religious ceremonies and to express connections to animals, natural phenomena, and spirituality. Some of the ways that they expressed the connection was through music and the costumes used in dance, which included masks and skins. Describe the shamanistic beliefs expressed through dance.

References:

Dance:

Brown, Jean M., Naomi Mindlin, Charles Humphrey Woodford, Charles H. Woodford. (1998). *The Vision of Modern Dance: In the Words of Its Creators*, Ed 2. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Book Company.

Cass, Joan, et al. (1993) *Dancing Through History*, Edition 1. New York: Pearson.

Highwater, Jamake. (1996). *Dance: Rituals of Experience*, Edition 3. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnston, Kay. (2003). *The Spirit of Powwow*. Boston: Hancock House Publishers.

Patterson, Daniel W. (2000) *The Shaker Spiritual*. NY: Dover Publications.

Music

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): We do not know much about the music of the Clovis culture, except we do know that they used turtle shell rattles and had drums which they used (most likely) in ceremonies.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1500 AC): Dances were performed and musical instruments such as rattles, shell shakers, and turtle shell rattles were used. It is very likely that the music accompanied rituals and tribal gatherings, often in conjunction with healing ceremonies which incorporated the use of hallucinogens.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1500 AD): As in the case of the Southwest Pueblo, anthropologists have reconstructed ceremonies and rituals that were accompanied by musical instruments, including flutes, pipes, rattles, and drums. The Iroquois, Cherokee, and Mound Builders were a part of the Eastern Woodlands. There is evidence that human sacrifice accompanied playing music during shaman-led religious ceremonies. Not all music-making was accompanied by sacrifice; there is evidence to suggest that drums, rattles, and flutes were used for ceremonies honoring deities and also phases of the sun and moon.

Discussion / Questions

Music:

In early cultures of North America, we have evidence that music was used in conjunction with ceremonies and religious rites. We can extrapolate their activities and what they were doing by examining the artifacts

found with the musical instruments. Describe two different situations in which music would be used by members of Clovis, Southwest Pueblo, or Eastern Woodlands civilizations.

References:

Music:

Crawford, Richard. (2001) *America's Musical Life: A History*. New York: Norton and Company.

Nicholls, David (1998) *The Cambridge History of American Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Scherer, Barrymore Laurence. (2012) *A History of American Classical Music*. Naxos Audiobooks.

Struble, John Warthen. (1995). *The History of American Classical Music: MacDowell through Minimalism*. New York: Facts on File.

Ward, Geoffrey. (2002) *Jazz: A History of America's Music*. New York: Knopf.

Theatre

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): The Clovis culture artifacts suggest that the Clovis peoples practiced a shamanistic form of religion that incorporated dances, enactments, and the use of drums and rattles (especially those made of turtle shells).

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): Pueblo and Hopi Indians practiced different types of dances that were narratives that told a story, particularly in conjunction with an important date. They were performed only with the individuals in their close community and even now are secret. The Turtle Dance and Eagle Dance were other dances that were performed in conjunction with phases of the moon, and which represented a ritual of respect to nature, prayers for rain, and a transfer of divine energy. In conjunction with the performance were the creation of figurines used in conjunction with the Kachina religions, which asserts that there are divine beings in the world around us, and they act as intermediaries between humans and God. Important in the narratives are the trickster figures, the Kokopeli.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): Blended with dance and music, the Iroquois, Seneca, Mohawks, and others performed both social and religious dance / theatrical enactments. Dances such as the Stick Dance, Smoke Dance, and the Rabbit Dance incorporate folkloric tales. For example, the Rabbit Dance is a dance that shows gratitude for the rabbits for providing valuable sustenance. It features hunters in the forest, and then a big rabbit that thumps his leg a prescribed number of times. Other traditional works are similar in the sense that they both incorporate everyday experiences and they instruct the people to feel gratitude, thus building social harmony.

Discussion / Questions

Theatre:

Early theatrical performances in pre-colonial and indigenous cultures centered around religious ceremonies and the enactment of beliefs. What were some of the beliefs that were enacted through participative rituals involving audiences? Why was theatre (or at least a theatrical enactment) effective?

References:

Arnott, James Fullarton and John William Robinson. English Theatrical Literature, 1559-1900: A Bibliography, Incorporating Robert W. Lowe's A Bibliographical Account of English Theatrical Literature Published in 1888. London: Society for Theatre Research, 1970.

Bailey, Claudia Jean. A Guide to Reference and Bibliography for Theatre Research. 2nd ed. rev. Columbus: Ohio State University Libraries, 1983.

WORLDVIEW

Religion

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): From what we can tell from artifacts and petroglyphs, the early religion of the Clovis culture was shamanistic, with also an emphasis on the moon, sun, and stars.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AD): Pueblo Indians. The Pueblo culture is known to us through rock paintings and petroglyphs. In the desert Southwest, near Blythe, California, large geoglyphs of animals, people, and constellations are visible from above, making it possible that there were beliefs here as well as in other American cultures the principle Creation Myth involved contact with beings from the stars.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): The indigenous peoples of the Eastern Woodlands shared a belief in the Great Spirit as the creator of the world, in which the most important feature was the harmonious co-existence between all animals, plants, landforms, and life forms (including people). The spiritual world was believed to interact with the physical world, and that it could be seen in often unexpected manifestations such as messages transmitted by means of animals, etc.

Discussion / Questions

Religion:

The little we know about the religious beliefs of the early Clovis-era culture often has to do with the petroglyphs found in caves. Consider the types of petroglyphs and carvings that have been found. What are some of the possible religious beliefs represented by hunting scenes and diagrams of constellations, the sun, moon, and geometrical shapes?

References:

Lacome, Denis. (2014). *Religion in America: A Political History*. New York: Columbia UP.

Philosophy

Pre-Columbian (Classical)

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): The philosophy of the Pueblo and Southwest Indian cultures was very much aligned with the idea that every act is a sacred one, and that one should respect the gods and seek balance. The key beliefs emphasized the role of “medicine” which is to say spirit, and that the spiritual leaders (medicine men) were a blend of religious leader and teachers of philosophical beliefs, ethics, and ideas about existence.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): For the Native American Indians of the Eastern Woodlands, all of nature and reality is a manifestation of the Great Spirit. Thus, the philosophical emphasis was on not just on existential ideas and ontological issues (beingness), but also in ethics, and that humanity should consider every aspect of the phenomenal world to be one and the same as the

Great Spirit. This is a very unifying belief, and one that requires great reverence to nature as well as close regard of occurrences, which could be considered signs useful for decision-making.

Discussion / Questions

Philosophy:

The philosophical beliefs of the people in the Americas before the arrival of the Europeans were closely aligned with their religious and social beliefs. For example, ideas about reality and the relationship between humans and Nature were often reflected by the overall cosmology that explained the origin of humans, animals, and the earth vis a vis the gods or the Great Spirit. What are some of the main ideas of the Southwest Pueblo Indians and those of the Eastern Woodland Indians? How do they reflect a relationship between human beings and the world at large?

References:

Waters, Anne S. American Indian Thought. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

West, Cornell. The American Evasion of Philosophy. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

Science

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): We do not know much about the scientific knowledge of the Clovis culture, but we do know that they studied astronomy and also were students of animal behavior (which allowed them to be effective hunters).

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): The Pueblo Indians studied astronomy and developed complex calendars. In order to survive in an arid climate, they developed many innovative methods of irrigation, including a bar ditch system and aqueducts. They also developed unique hybrid crops, including different types of beans, corn, squash, and chili peppers. They also developed an understanding of geology as they created homes in the mountains, and carved cliff dwellings.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): The Iroquois, Algonquin and other Indian nations practiced precision farming which allowed them to live in small villages and cultivate fields, where they rotated crops and developed practices such as fertilization and natural pest control.

Discussion / Questions:

Early cultures used science and technology in conjunction with their social, religious, and commercial lives. Describe how astronomy figured into the religious lives of early civilizations in North America. Then, explain how a knowledge of geology and construction science were necessary in the construction of cliff dwellings, ceremonial mounds, and more.

References:

Reingold, Nathan. Science American Style. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1991.

Rosenberg, Charles. No Other Gods. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1997. Ch. 14.

Spanier, Bonnie. Impartial Science. Bloomington, IN: Indiana U Press, 1999.