



Cities and Empires

Discover Our Past: American History
Chapter 1 Lesson 2
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It Matters Because



Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South America

- Centuries before the Europeans arrived, great **civilizations**, or highly developed societies, thrived in Mexico, Central American and South America.
- The largest and most advanced of these were the Olmec, Maya, Aztec, and Inca.



Olmec



Maya



Aztec



Inca

Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South America

- Each of these civilizations controlled areas covering hundred of square miles.
- They included millions of people and lasted for several centuries.
- The accomplishments of the Olmec, Maya, Aztec, and Inca rivaled any of the great civilizations in other parts of the world.
- Their people built grand cities in dense forests and on high mountains.
- They created spectacular works of art and developed advanced tools.
- They also came up with complex methods for tracking time, counting, and writing.



Four statues carved as human figures; each 4.6 meters tall; from the Tula Grande archaeological site.

Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South America: The Olmec

- Along the Gulf Coast of what is now Mexico, a people called the Olmec once flourished.
- Between 1200 B.C. and 800 B.C., the Olmec built stone houses, monuments, and drainage systems.



The Olmec people carved huge heads out of volcanic rock.

- Their farmers grew food for thousands of people.
- For reasons that are not fully understood, the Olmec civilization declined.
- By about 300 B.C., it had collapsed.
- Yet the Olmec had a strong influence on the cultures that followed.

Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South America: The Maya

- The Maya civilization followed the Olmec and reached its peak between A.D. 250 and A.D. 900.
- Maya farmers planted maize, beans, squash, and other vegetables.
- These crops helped feed a large population, which may have peaked at 2 million people.
- These people lived in one of the many large cities the Maya built in the steamy rain forests of present-day Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize.



Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South

America: The Maya

- Maya civilizations was a **theocracy**, a society ruled by religious leaders.
- Powerful Maya priests believed the gods were visible in the stars, sun, and moon.
- Their understanding of astronomy and their advanced mathematics helped them predict eclipses and develop a 365-day calendar.
- The Maya also developed a system of writing that used **hieroglyphics**, symbols or pictures that represented things, ideas, and sounds.



theocracy: a society that is ruled by religious leaders



hieroglyphics: a form of writing that uses symbols or pictures to represent things, ideas, and sounds

Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South America: Maya Transport and Trade

- The Maya were active traders.
- Farmers brought maize and vegetables to city markets.
- They exchanged their goods for items such as cotton cloth, pottery, deer meat, and salt.
- Without wheeled vehicles or horses, the Maya carried goods on their backs.
- Traders traveled on a network of roads that were carved out of the jungle.
- They also used canoes to ship goods, such as jade statues, turquoise jewelry, and cacao beans used for making chocolate, up and down Mexico's east coast.



The Temple of the Sun, built in the A.D. 600s, was one of several sacred buildings in the ancient Mayan city of Palenque.

Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South America: Maya Civilization Declines

- In time the Maya civilization declined.
- By about 1200, its once-great cities were nearly deserted.
- The reason is a mystery.
- Recent studies indicate that overpopulation, drought, and warfare are possible reasons for the Maya decline.
- Though their civilization declined, the Mayan people did not disappear entirely.
- Descendants of this great civilization still live in parts of Mexico and Central America today.



The arch of the great Mayan stone gate at Labná, in Yucatán state, Mexico, is flanked by two small stone huts.

Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South America: Aztec Empire



- In 1325, centuries after the fall of the Maya, a group of hunters called the Aztec were wandering through central Mexico.
- They were searching for a permanent home for their people.
- One day, they came upon an island in Lake Texcoco.
- There they saw what they thought was a sign from their god: an eagle with a snake in its beak sitting on a cactus.
- According to Aztec legend, this sign indicated that the island was to be their home.
- It was on this site that the Aztec would bring their capital city, Tenochtitlan (tay-NAWCH-teet-LAHN).
- Today it is the site of Mexico City.

Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South America: Aztec Empire

- At its height, Tenochtitlan (tay-NAWCH-teet-LAHN) was the largest city in the Americas – and one of the largest in the world.
- The city was a center of trade, attracting thousands of merchants to its outdoor marketplaces.
- Tenochtitlan's construction was a marvel of building skill, knowledge, and human labor.
- Workers toiled day and night under the direction of priests and nobles.
- They dug soil from the bottom of the lake to make causeways, or bridges of earth.
- These causeways linked the island and the shore.
- Elsewhere, they used earth to fill in parts of the lake, creating fields for growing crops.



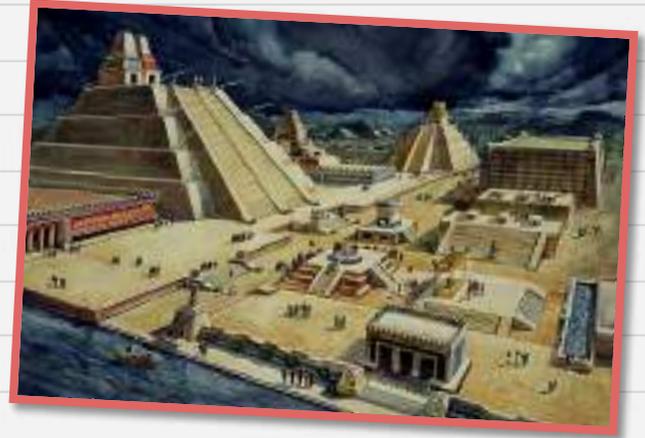
Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South America: Aztec Culture



- The Aztec created a military empire.
 - In the 1400s, the Aztec army conquered many neighboring communities.
 - Conquered people had to pay tribute in food and other goods.
 - Some were also forced to work as slaves in Aztec cities and villages.
 - Like Maya culture, Aztec culture revolved around its religious beliefs.
- The Aztec believed they must perform human sacrifices to please the gods and ensure abundant harvests.
 - They scarified prisoners of war by the thousands for this purpose.

Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South America: Great City Remembered

- The Aztec Empire was still going strong when Europeans arrived in the Americas in 1492.
- The first Europeans to see Tenochtitlan were awed by its splendor.
- In 1519 Hernan Cortes led 550 Spanish soldiers into the Aztec capital.
- Cortes wrote: *“There are forty towers at the least, all of stout construction and very lofty ... The workmanship both in wood and stone could not be bettered anywhere.”* ~ from *Five Letters*



Great Civilizations of Mexico, Central & South America: Great City Remembered



- Bernal Diaz del Castillo, one of the soldiers, marveled at the “great towers and cues [temples] and buildings rising from the water.”
- Some of the Spanish soldiers thought Tenochtitlan was more magnificent than Rome and the other great European capitals of the time.

Great Inca Civilization

- In the western highlands of South America, the largest of all early American civilizations grew - the Inca.
- The Inca people founded their capital city of Cuzco around 1200.
- In 1438 the emperor Pachacuti (PAH-chah-KOO-tee) came to the throne.
- He and his son, Topa Inca, expanded the empire by conquering others with their powerful army.
- At its peak, the Inca Empire stretched for more than 3,000 miles, from present-day Colombia to northern Argentina and Chile.



The remains of an Incan fortress stand on a hilltop near Cuzco, Peru.



Great Inca Civilization

Fearsome Warriors

- The Inca state was built around war.
- All men between 25 and 50 years old could be drafted to serve in the army for up to five years.
- Their weapons included clubs, spears, and spiked copper balls on ropes.
- Using slings, Inca soldiers could throw stones 30 years.
- Rather than fight this fearsome force, many neighboring areas accepted Inca rule.
- The Inca allowed those who cooperated to take part in the empire's government.
- Those who resisted or rebelled faced harsh treatment.



Great Inca Civilization

Inca Culture



Mountains and forests surround Machu Picchu.

- The Inca people believed their emperor was a descendant of the sun god.
- The Inca made magnificent gold jewelry and temple ornaments as gifts to the sun god.
- Inca workers also built great cities devoted to religious ceremonies, including Machu Picchu, a site hidden high in the Andes Mountains.



Great Inca Civilization

Inca Culture

- Supporting the large Inca population required a lot of food.
- In order to farm their mountainous lands, the Inca cut **terraces**, or broad platforms, into steep slopes.
- Stone walls on the terraces held the soil and plants in place.
- Inca farmers grew maize, squash, tomatoes, peanuts, chili peppers, cotton, and potatoes.



Great Inca Civilization

Inca Culture

- Managing the ruling over such a large territory was a great challenge.
- The Inca built at least 10,000 miles of stone-paved roads to link distant parts of their empire.
- The roads crisscrossed mountains, deserts, and dense forests.
- To cross deep canyons or river valleys, the Inca built rope bridges.
- Runners carried messages to and from the emperor in Cuzco to outposts of the empire.
- The Inca language, Quechua_(KEH-chuh-wuh), became the official language for the entire empire. The Inca had no written language, but they did develop a system of record keeping using string called quipus _(KEE-pooos).
- By knotting different colors of string in special patterns, quipus helped the Inca record and keep track of information about resources, such as grain supplies.

Great Inca Civilization

Inca Culture



Atahualpa, the last Inca emperor, meets Hernando de Soto.

- Like the Aztec, the Inca were thriving in the early 1500s.
- They, too, would soon come face to face with Spanish soldiers and experience a dramatic change in fortunes.



Review the Lesson

Vocabulary

- civilization
- theocracy
- hieroglyphic
- terrace

Civilizations

- Olmec
- Maya
- Aztec
- Inca

Key Ideas

- Identify where each of the main civilizations in Early America lived.
- Identify the capital city of the Aztec empire and where it was located
- Describe why the Inca were considered a highly developed culture.
- Explain how the Inca Empire grew so large.
- Sequence the chronological order of the civilizations of Mexico, Central and South American in order of appearance.