

First American Civilization

Did Africans help start the first Native American civilization?

Native Americans came to America from Asia across the “land bridge”. The land bridge connected Asia to Alaska for a short time, and people traveled across the bridge in search of animals to hunt.

Eventually the Native Americans spread throughout Canada, the United States, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America and South America. Although these Native Americans formed many villages and large communities, it wasn't until 1200 BC (B.C. means Before the Christian or Common Era) that the first major civilization appeared.

The first civilization in ancient America is called the Olmec. After the Olmecs, two other great civilizations were started. These civilizations were the Maya and the Aztecs. Each of these civilizations were located in Mexico. Mexico is a country in North America.

The Olmec civilization was located along the Mexican Gulf Coast, and began more than three thousand

years ago. The civilization existed from 1200 to 900 BC, about 3,000 years after the Kemetic civilization began. When the Olmec civilization began, the great West African civilizations, such as Mali, Songhay, and Ghana had not begun. Christopher Columbus would not sail to America for another 2,000 years!

The Olmecs developed a writing system, a calendar, and an irrigation system. They were the first people to introduce writing in the Americas. Their irrigation system allowed them to farm. They also hunted and fished. The Olmecs built small pyramids that seem similar to the pyramids in Kemet. The Olmecs writing system and calendar are also similar to the Kemites.



The head above is 6 feet tall, and 5 feet wide. It was made from a single stone, which was transported from 50 miles away.

The Olmecs played a game which is similar to basketball. They used rubber from rubber plants to make round balls. These balls were thrown through a stone hoop.

The Olmec people sculpted huge heads from stone. A man's head is carved from the stone, and the men appear to be wearing battle helmets. There were several heads discovered in Mexico. The heads are 6 – 9 feet tall, and weigh as much as 40



An Olmec statue.



Does this head bust look African to you?

tons each. The heads are made from a single block of stone.

These stones were transported from over 50 miles away. They may have transported the stones in a raft on the river, or rolled the great stones.

Some scholars have suggested that the heads look like Africans, and therefore Africans helped to start the Olmec civilization, or at least were present when the civilization began. They suggest that a boat sailed from Kemet to Mexico, and these Kemites may have started the Olmec civilization.

Others suggest that this is only a coincidence. What do you think?



This map shows the ancient civilizations in Mexico. Mexico is located in North America.

READING QUESTIONS

1. List three achievements of the Olmecs.
2. Which civilizations in Mexico came after the Olmecs?
3. How big were the head stones?
4. Ask your parents about the head stones. Do they think the head stones look like Africans?
5. An elephant can weigh 4 tons. If a head stone weighs 40 tons, how many elephants would equal one head stone?
6. **[BONUS]** The head stone is

round. If a head stone is 5 feet wide (diameter), what is its circumference?

GEOGRAPHY

1. Identify countries which share MEXICO'S borders.
2. Identify bodies of water in Mexico or on Mexico's shores.

PROJECTS

1. Create a head bust.