



Native Americans

HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN INDIANS



- During the most recent of the Ice Ages, lasting from 30,000 to 10,000 years ago, an undersea ridge between Siberia and Alaska emerges from the sea. Known as the Bering Land Bridge, it lies partly south of the ice cap.
- Gradually, in many separate incursions, the hunter-gatherers of the Siberian steppes pursue their prey across the land bridge and into America. When the melting ice submerges the bridge, about 10,000 years ago, these northeast Asians become isolated as the aboriginal Americans.

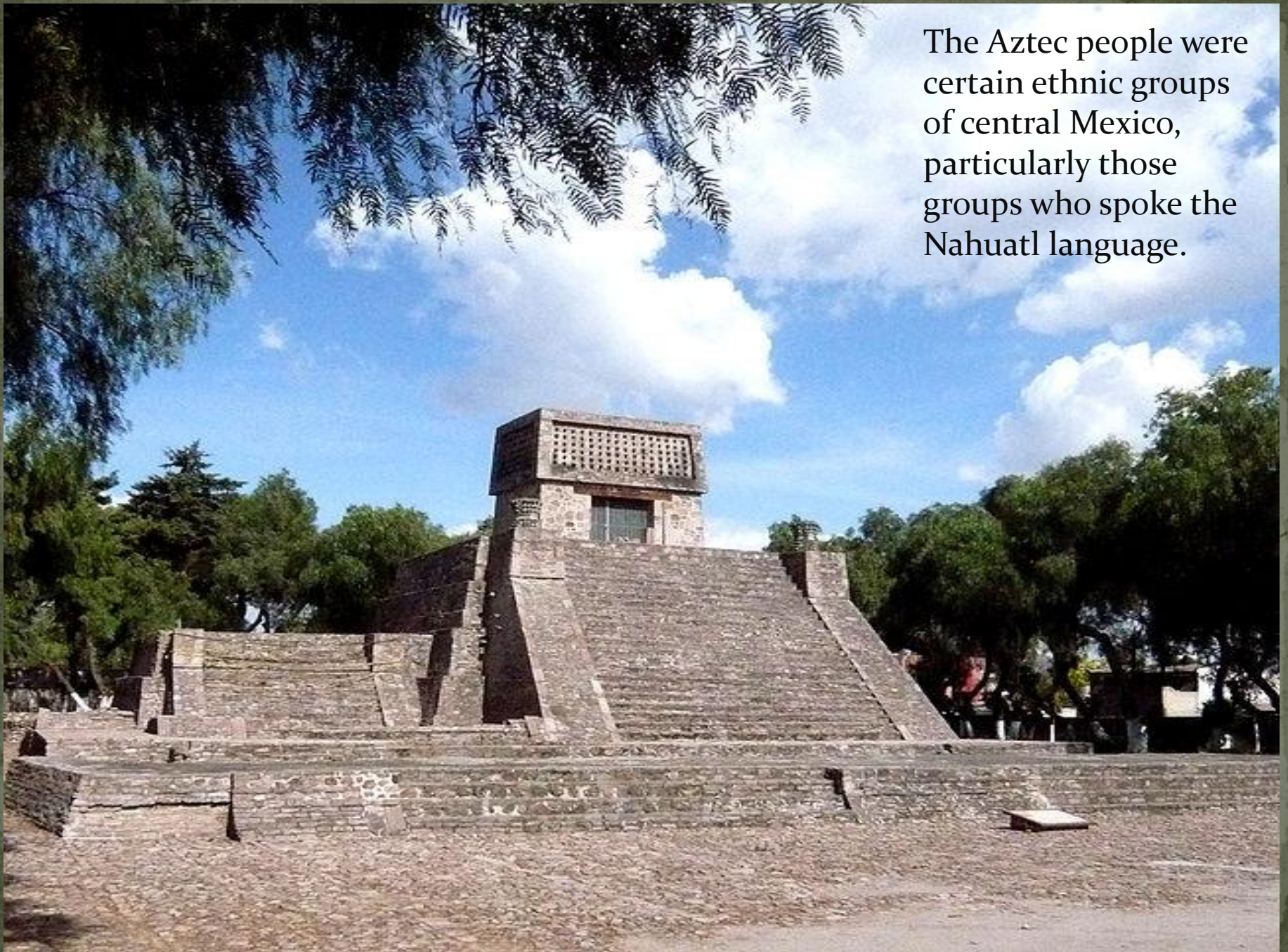
The first American civilizations:

- The earliest civilization in America develops in the coastal regions of the Gulf of Mexico. Dating from around 1200 BC, it is the achievement of the Olmec people. Their culture is contemporary with Mycenae and the Trojan War.
- These two first American civilizations, in Mexico and Peru, set a pattern which will last for more than 2000 years
- Archaeology provides evidence of these various cultures, but the only ones known about in any great detail are those surviving when the Spaniards arrive - to marvel and destroy. These are the very ancient Maya, and the relatively upstart dominant cultures of the time, the Aztecs and the Incas.

The Maya is a Mesoamerican civilization, noted for the only known fully developed written language of the pre-Columbian Americas, as well as its art, architecture, and mathematical and astronomical systems.



The Aztec people were certain ethnic groups of central Mexico, particularly those groups who spoke the Nahuatl language.



According to myth, Incan civilization began with Manco Capac, who carried a golden staff called the 'tapac-yauri'. The Inca were instructed to create a Temple of the Sun in the spot where the staff sank into the earth, to honor their celestial father.





The arrival of Columbus in 1492 is a disaster for the original inhabitants of the American continent. The chief agent of their downfall is disease. With no resistance to new germs, tribes rapidly succumb to unfamiliar illnesses on their first brief contact with Europeans .

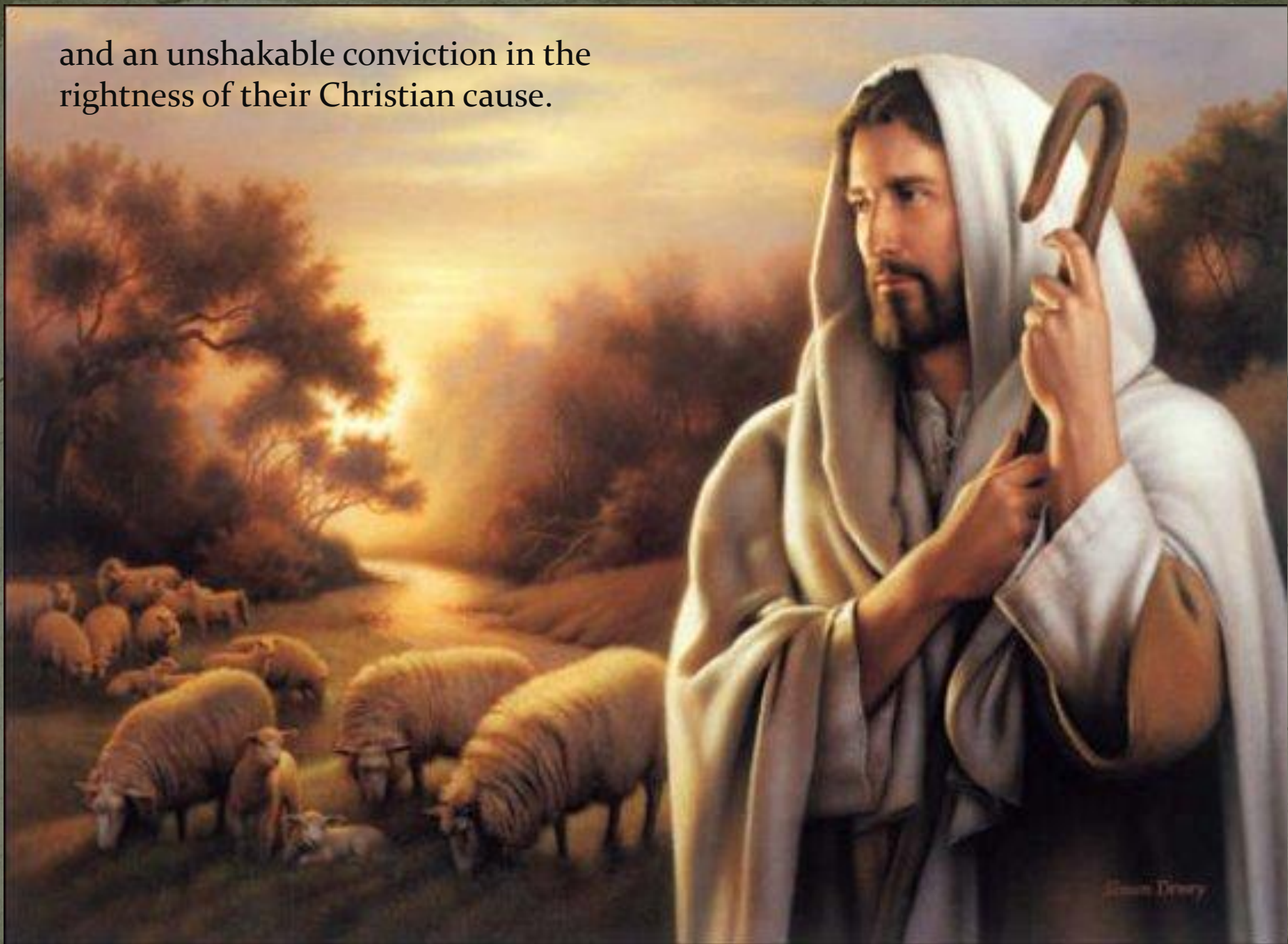
Where the tribes develop a closer relationship with the new arrivals, they are frequently tricked, tormented and massacred by their visitors



Two elements make the Europeans both strong and ruthless - their possession of guns,

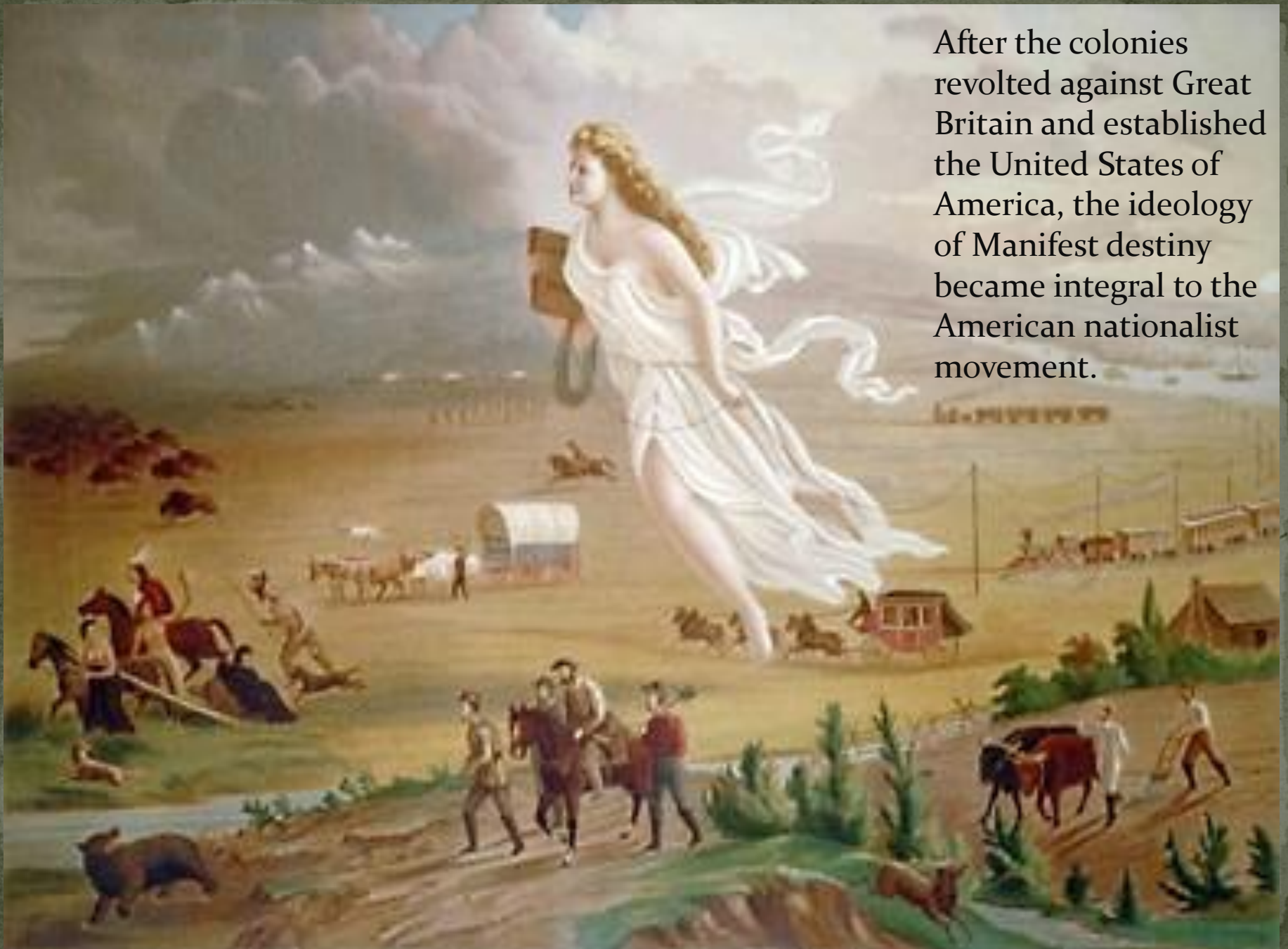


and an unshakable conviction in the
rightness of their Christian cause.



- European colonization of the Americas led to centuries of conflict and adjustment between Old and New World societies. Most of the written historical record about Native Americans was made by Europeans after initial contact. Native Americans lived in hunter/farmer subsistence societies with significantly different value systems than those of the European colonists. The differences in culture between the Native Americans and Europeans, and the shifting alliances among different nations of each culture, led to great misunderstandings and long-lasting cultural conflicts.

After the colonies revolted against Great Britain and established the United States of America, the ideology of Manifest destiny became integral to the American nationalist movement.



- In the late 18th century, George Washington and Henry Knox conceived of the idea of "civilizing" Native Americans in preparation of American citizenship. Assimilation became a consistent policy through American administrations. In the 1830s, most Native Americans of the American Deep South were removed west of the Mississippi River from their homelands to accommodate European-American expansion from the United States. Some groups remained, with descendants living in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Major Native American resistance on the Great Plains took place in the form of "Indian Wars," which were frequent up until the 1890s.



In the early decades of the 20th century the American Indians suffer the long-term effects of the treatment suffered in previous generations. They become increasingly impoverished. Their numbers fall.





The situation improves gradually during the rest of the century, beginning with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 which restores tribal ownership of land in the reservations.



"The
white man
knows how
to make
every-
thing,
but he
does not
know how
to dis-
tribute
it"



SING LOUD
'til the world can't ignore anymore!

- But the civil rights movement (of which the American Indian Movement, founded in 1968, is a part), combined with an increased awareness of past injustices, ensures that the plight of the American Indians is now very much on the political agenda. And the Indians themselves are more confident in pressing their case, with a keen awareness of the emotive potential of their past history.



- The American Indian Movement wins world-wide attention in 1973

when it occupies the village of Wounded Knee and survives a ten-week siege by the authorities.



- Native Americans today have a unique relationship with the United States of America because they can be found as members of nations, tribes, or bands of Native Americans who have sovereignty or independence from the government of the United States. Their societies and cultures flourish within a larger immigrated American populace of African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and European peoples. Native Americans who were not already U.S. citizens were granted citizenship in 1924 by the Congress of the United States.