

A World Apart

Historical Sources

"A World Apart" begins to address the recurring themes of freedom, equality, and identity by examining America before 1492. A diverse array of indigenous peoples occupied the area that would eventually become the United States of America long before they had any sustained contact with Europeans. Over time, these Native Americans adapted to the various ecosystems in which they lived and developed distinct cultures. Not all of these cultures survived until the late fifteenth century, but there is a lot to learn about and from them. Their experiences, like ours, play a vital part in the shaping of America.

Researching Prehistoric Peoples

How have experts reconstructed what life was like for indigenous peoples?

"The primary source is, of course, archaeology, which is the only academic discipline which studies changes in human societies over very long periods of time. Another major source are the oral histories of Native Americans, passed down from generation to generation. The third source is historical records written by early European explorers. Another source people are using is linguistics. They're looking at the history of Native American languages, and they're also looking at Native American traditions because every Native American society had its own origin myths and tales."

Brian Fagan, Professor of Anthropology
University of California at Santa Barbara

Activity: Check Your Understanding

Emphasizes that the study of history should provide a sense of who we are, include multiple voices and stories, and spark our curiosity. The study of history should not be focused on dates and battles. It helps us understand the complex development of culture, communities, and nations. Points out how geography is an integral part of American history, because a significant part of American identity is based on place. Six regions of the country, chosen for their ethnic, economic, and geographic diversity, play a recurring role in the course videos – the Northeast, the Southeast, the Mississippi Valley, the Southwest, the California coast, and the Pacific Northwest.