

North America Before the European Invasions

SECOND EDITION

ALICE BECK KEHOE



ROUTLEDGE

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"Kehoe's excellent *North America Before the European Invasions* merges archaeology and history, demonstrating that American history did not begin in 1492 with European contact. Kehoe expertly interweaves much evidence demonstrating that colonial Europeans did not begin to manage an American wilderness but appropriated millennia-old manipulated landscapes by indigenous peoples."

Miguel Astor-Aguilera, Arizona State University, USA

"With inimitable style, Alice Kehoe entices, provokes, and challenges us to engage with a history of America that foregrounds, not marginalizes, the indigenous peoples of this vast land. The result is a fuller, more critical, and highly compelling history of Native North America that does much to challenge the outdated, often biased, and sometimes racist accounts of these First Peoples that have hung on for far too long in textbooks and popular culture."

George Nicholas, Professor of Archaeology, Simon Fraser University, Canada

"Alice Kehoe has provided readers interested in the long history of Native North America an excellent introduction to the complex and fascinating archaeology of America before European invasions. Kehoe's approach to archaeological knowledge is critical but also responsive to the concerns and interests of all scholars working in this continually unfolding research area. The reader will find that Native North American history before European colonization continues to define how we see ourselves as residents of a continent that has a rich past, a dynamic present, and an exciting future. Kehoe's account assures us the future of Native North America has the potential for promoting greater understanding between Indigenous First Nations and the newcomers to Native North America."

Bernard C. Perley is Maliseet from Tobique First Nation and an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA

North America Before the European Invasions tells the histories of North American peoples from first migrations in the Late Glacial Age, sixteen thousand years ago or more, to the European invasions following Columbus's arrival. Contrary to invaders' propaganda, North America was no wilderness, and its peoples had developed a variety of sophisticated resource uses, including intensive agriculture and cities in Mexico and the Midwest. Written in an easy-flowing style, the book is a true history although based primarily on archaeological material. It reflects current emphasis within archaeology on rejecting the notion of "pre"-history, instead combining archaeology with post-Columbian ethnographies and histories to present the long histories of North America's native peoples, most of them still here and still part of the continent's history.

Alice Beck Kehoe's academic interests include American First Nations and history of archaeology. Her research includes archaeological and ethnographic fieldwork on the Northwestern Plains, ethnographic fieldwork in Bolivia, and continued collaboration with Montana Blackfeet, for whom she wrote *Amskapi Pikuni: The Blackfeet People* (2012). Among her publications are *North American Indians: A Comprehensive Account* (3rd edition, 2006). She has held office in the Society for American Archaeology and several other professional archaeological and anthropological organizations.

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Cover image: "Wahowa on horseback, Maliseet offering of respect and gratitude to the stars." Artwork by Bernard C. Perley



North America Before the European Invasions

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Reviewed by Amanda J. Butler, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Alice Beck Kehoe's *North America Before the European Invasions* is both an easily digestible history of pre-European North America and a timely reminder that words matter in archaeology. The use of the phrase 'European invasions' in the title immediately orients the reader to the mindset necessary to truly engage with the long histories

of North America—one without a Eurocentric gaze. Kehoe's intent for the book is stated best when she says,

The following chapters endeavor to chronicle the pre-European history of North America..., cognizant of the gaps between preinvasion life and European documentation, and of our bias to see these societies through the lens of European cultures (p. 5).

Using archaeological data and ethnographic sources, Kehoe produces a jargon-free narrative organized primarily by geography. Unlike most big histories of North America that march relentlessly toward the inevitable European invasion, Kehoe attempts to weave threads of broad connections through time and space.

Kehoe begins with a brief but pointed discussion on the shortcomings of previous American histories that center their accounts in discussions of "pre-history." She deftly highlights how such wordings imply a time before history or people without history, with 'real' history beginning only at European contact. Written primarily for general consumption, Kehoe preps the audience with the basics of what archaeology and ethnographic analogy can do before moving into the peopling of the Americas. Each chapter focuses on a time period/geographic region. For example, Chapter 6 concentrates on the Middle Woodland period while Chapter 7 summarizes the West Coast.

Utilizing a big picture narrative, Kehoe grounds the largest parts of the book with what she calls 'Nuclear America,' a concept that sees the geographic area of Mexico south to Peru as a cradle of innovations—agriculture, religious concepts, monumental architecture, etc. Reestablishing this Nuclear America, a popular concept prior to Processualism, she then broadly links the histories of Mesoamerica, the American southwest, and the American southeast/Midwest. As Kehoe states, "The history of Mexico is as relevant to indigenous histories to the north as that of Rome to the European nations beyond Italy" (pg. 41). Kehoe makes these larger connections without discounting the specific historicities of each region. For example, immediately in Chapter 3, Kehoe lays out the evidence of similarities between Mesoamerica, the Southwest and the Southeast/Midwest—maize

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being the primary thread—in addition to the differences—no Mesoamerican artifacts in the southeast/Midwest. While I am not convinced to imagine a Toltec empire that includes Chaco and Cahokia, neither am I interested in throwing out the possibilities. Anyone familiar with Kehoe's work is aware of her interest in these particular large-scale connections, and a hefty part of this book is dedicated to these three regions/time periods (~900–1400 CE). As a result of this focus, a critique of this volume is that the remainder of North American history is presented in a cursory 'fly-over' format that includes the complex Northwest, Northeast, and vast North.

Chapters 13 and 14 bring the book to an intriguing close. The first is a well-written general summary of what was happening at 1600 CE around North America. Ultimately, Kehoe provides a commentary on how each region responded to contact. The final chapter is dedicated to Issues and Research Puzzles. She discusses important questions such as “who owns the past?” (pg. 223), “what constitutes a history?” (pg. 225), and “how should an archaeologist construct the past?” (pg. 227). All of these questions are crucial to helping the public understand *how* an archaeologist produces knowledge.

North America Before the European Invasions delivers a wonderfully jargon-free general history of North America prior to contact. It simultaneously eases the reader into substantial historical summaries, while also challenging the reader to think bigger and ask better questions. Kehoe's narrative style is an accessible format for non-academics and the broad-stroke summaries of times and geographies are a bookshelf necessity for archaeologists. With some supplementary materials, Kehoe's volume would make a suitable introductory text to courses on North American History.