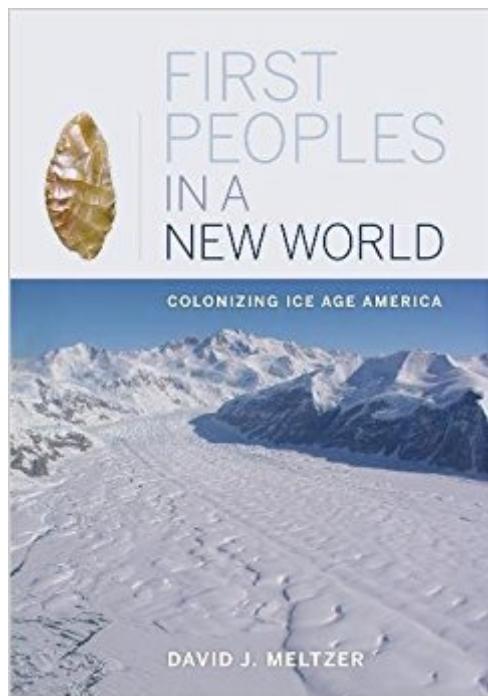


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# First Peoples In A New World: Colonizing Ice Age America



## Synopsis

More than 12,000 years ago, in one of the greatest triumphs of prehistory, humans colonized North America, a continent that was then truly a new world. Just when and how they did so has been one of the most perplexing and controversial questions in archaeology. This dazzling, cutting-edge synthesis, written for a wide audience by an archaeologist who has long been at the center of these debates, tells the scientific story of the first Americans: where they came from, when they arrived, and how they met the challenges of moving across the vast, unknown landscapes of Ice Age North America. David J. Meltzer pulls together the latest ideas from archaeology, geology, linguistics, skeletal biology, genetics, and other fields to trace the breakthroughs that have revolutionized our understanding in recent years. Among many other topics, he explores disputes over the hemisphere's oldest and most controversial sites and considers how the first Americans coped with changing global climates. He also confronts some radical claims: that the Americas were colonized from Europe or that a crashing comet obliterated the Pleistocene megafauna. Full of entertaining descriptions of on-site encounters, personalities, and controversies, this is a compelling behind-the-scenes account of how science is illuminating our past.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It was long axiomatic among archeologists that the prehistoric Clovis people of the Southwest were the first people in the Americas, arriving 12,000 years ago. Meltzer synthesizes controversial recent evidence that humans arrived in the Americas earlier than that and may not all have come across the Bering Strait from Asia. Meltzer also conveys well the heated debates among archeologists on

this crucial subject (an argument among experts after examining evidence in South American turns rather ugly). Drawing on archeology, linguistics, geology, genetics and other disciplines, anthropologist Meltzer (Search for the First Americans) explores that evidence, as well as what we know about the Clovis people, such as evidence regarding Ice Age terrain indicating prehistoric peoples' ability to adapt to an uninhabitable and unfamiliar continent, and the speed with which they might have moved across the new world. Sometimes dense and academic, often lively and occasionally bemused, Meltzer's study—part detective story and part archeological research—is stimulating and sometimes tantalizingly controversial. 16 color and 64 b&w illus. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

—A must read for anyone interested in what is undeniable the greatest debate in American archaeology. . . . Essential. (Choice 2010-07-08) "The book is . . . sharply written and narratively compelling." (Mark Dailey Journal Of World History 2012-07-15) "A masterful exploration and encapsulation of the last two centuries of American archaeology and the first five millennia of the earliest Americans." (American Scientist 2010-05-01) "Informative and entertaining." (E. James Dixon Antiquity 2011-06-21) "A good review of topics and controversies surrounding the peopling of North America." (Susan C. Vehik Great Plains Research 2010-10-13) "[Meltzer] has written the most in-depth synthesis of the history of the debate about the early peopling of North America yet published." (Juliet E. Morrow Journal Of Iowa Archeological Society 2012-01-04) "Often lively and occasionally bemused, Meltzer's study—part detective story and part archeological research—is stimulating and sometimes tantalizingly controversial." (Publishers Weekly: Nonfiction (2) 2009-02-09)

This is both an excellent and a memorable book. It is excellent because of David Meltzer's authoritative knowledge built upon a lifetime of focus on American early archeology. It is a memorable book because the author's style of writing fully exposes us to the rigor of a scholarly mind at its best. When I closed this book, I was left in wonder about the origin of human settlement in the Western Hemisphere. Although this book can be read by an educated college graduate, it seems to be more oriented to the classroom. The 344 pages of text are followed by more than 100 pages of readings, references, index, etc. Not everyone who is curious about the first people in America will want a book as careful, precise, and non-conclusive as

David Meltzer has given us. But for readers who want to know the scientific facts behind the theories, this book is outstanding. This book is clearly organized around a number of scholarly problems in the history of human colonization of North America. For example, what was the climate like when the first Americans arrived and what evidence do we use to answer that question? Were there humans in North America 11,000 years ago, 12,000 years ago, or much earlier? If human beings arrived in North America as early as some scholars think, then how did those early arrivals cross Beringia before the ice barriers opened? Is it possible that the earliest known site of Asians crossing into North America over Beringia could end up being in Chile? Why are there no sites north of Chile? Are early human settlements located on the eastern side of Brazil, and do they pre-date the crossing from Asia, and do they imply an Atlantic crossing? How did the first culture in North America, which archeologists call “Clovis culture,” which produced a uniformly recognizable set of tools, spread so rapidly and so widely? Was human hunting responsible for the extinction of North American megafauna like the mammoth, mastodon, and other large species? David Meltzer reviews each of these topics with uncompromising rigor. The reader can watch the author’s scholarly mind, analyze evidence and reject rapid or faulty conclusions. Fortunately or unfortunately, this also means that the reader must be able to suspend credulity and remain in expectant uncertainty regarding many of the most important questions about the origin of North American people. David Meltzer is not only a scholarly writer, but also a good one, and he reminds the reader to look at pre-history through broad principles, that depend upon a swarm of factors, large and small, specific to historical circumstances that result in the unique contingencies that formed the early history of North America. He reminds us to look for “a long and singularly unpredictable string of choices” that shape history. Meltzer is also aggressive in arguing against other writers such as Vine Deloria, who Meltzer criticizes as a writer of pre-historical doctrine rather than facts; or Paul Martin’s theory of megafauna overkill, which Meltzer attacks as non-credible. The greatest strength of this book is the way it hammers the reader’s mind into a tool for rigorous analysis of data. The greatest weakness of this book is its textbook like ponderousness. For me, this book swung open a door of wonder into North America 11,000 and 12,000 years ago when bands of roving hunters entered an uninhabited region of planet Earth filled with masterful creations of nature like the mammoth, lion and bison. Reviewed by Paul R. Fleischman, author of *Wonder: When and Why the World Appears Radiant*

candid, direct, a good primer into the habitation of N. America by humans.

A good review of the first peoples in a new world archaeological studies. Meadowcroft cave site was very informative.

A few years ago four Paleo-Indian sites were discovered in the town next to mine in northern New Hampshire. Though I studied archeology years ago at university and have followed archeology news for many years, the discovery of Clovis type points way up here intrigued me and I closely followed the digs and datings. I'd read lots of articles about Paleo-Indians and followed the controversies about Meadowcroft and Monte Verde and other pre-Clovis sites, but I wanted to know more about who these people were and how they lived so that I could have a better image in my mind about what they were doing here. As far as I can tell, this book provides the best overview of the subject of any book out there. While Meltzer acknowledges that there are pre-Clovis sites, based on his wide-ranging cross-disciplinary knowledge, he is skeptical of some of the earliest claims but supportive of pushing back dates and peoples and routes. Recent linguistic, genetic, and ecological studies reported just in the last few months appear to strongly confirm that the ancestors of the Paleo-Indians made it to Beringia 10-12,000 years prior to the earliest more southerly sites and remained there for much of the last Ice Age before some headed south and others headed back to Asia. If you want to discover more about the very earliest claimed sites, this may not be the best book for you. But if you are interested in learning more generally about Paleo-Indians and the archeology surrounding their sites, this is a great place to start. A good read too (except the section on haplogroups and haplotypes!), as the author is extremely knowledgeable, a good writer, and with a keen sense of humor. Highly recommend.

The author tells the still unfolding story of the first people to live in North America. He reviews many sources and gives great background information about the sites that have been discovered, the climate in North America 20,000 years ago and the science involved in investigating those sites. There is a lot of detail about many scientific issues that a little previous background in the subject will help but a first time reader easily will get the gist of the situation. Pretty much a middle of the road presentation and doesn't swing too far into current fads in American anthropology. I found the discussions on linguistics to be fascinating and among the best I've read. Scholars in the field may find this book too simplistic. Someone with no background at all in human evolution and migration may find it a little difficult. But, written by a university professor (head of the department at SMU in Dallas) it provides lots of information and further sources and is a great current summary of the field.

Highly recommend.

The debate about how ancient is aboriginal colonization of the Americas is well-covered here, as is a great discussion about how climate change probably directed the spread of people. I enjoyed this book, but thought that it was slightly dry. I enjoyed it better after reading Charles C. Mann's "1491." It is the kind of book that I think I will come back to and read again. I bought the Kindle version. The book may well have been a little more engaging if I had access to all the photos and better versions of the maps and graphs that you can sample when you look inside the print version of the book.

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