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Prehistory Of The Americas



Synopsis

Fiedel's book, exploring the development of the prehistoric cultures of North, Central and South America from about 10,000 BC to AD 1530, has been updated to include discussion of recent discoveries and analyses of their implications. The author describes how different regions of the New World evolved, affected by a variety of factors ranging from population growth to climate change. He compares the evolution of the New World with that of the cultures of the Old World. Discussion of the development of American archaeology from the early European encounters with native Americans to the "new" archaeology is also included.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a wide-ranging summary of the entire prehistory of North, Central, and South America. This book does a good job at giving a broad and general introduction of the entire scope of prehistory for these continents. It is a cheap and relatively solid reference book for at an introductory level for the non-specialist. The text, however, has many drawbacks. It contains very few illustrations and the ones that are in the book are black-and-white line drawings. For a subject like archaeology, maps, pictures of distinctive artifact types, and some just plain visually appealing pictures are necessary to illustrate points and keep the reader interested. This book is written at a fine general level, but is too dry for most students let alone the general public to enjoy and retain what they've read. The biggest attractions of this book are its price and the fact that it covers a wide area in time and space and subject matter. However, it does not make a good coffee table book, a fun pleasure reading book, nor a really effective textbook. There are other books that cover subsets of the subject matter

extremely well. There are other books that cover the same range and depth as this particular book. One that comes to mind is better illustrated than Fiedel's book and easier to read, but is outdated and outright wrong (whereas Fiedel can be counted on to be more accurate). Likewise, the other books that cover the entirety of North, Central and South American seem to have some flaw. So, this book is flawed. But so are comparable texts. Picking a book on New World prehistory is somewhat like picking a spouse -- you have to decide which one to go with by looking at which flaws you would rather live with.

Coming at this subject with little knowledge and prepared for the worst I got this. I don't think I could have done better. OK so it's 18 years old and things move on (phytoliths and better radiocarbon dating for example). But it manages to cover EVERYTHING in enough detail that you feel you know where to start looking for more info. The book is academic but, there being no eyewitness accounts, so is the subject matter. But the best part to me is the writing. Prof Fiedel is clear, fluent and does have an opinion. His analyses of such things as the first hunters onto the continent, the rise of population, the first settlements, agriculture, civilisation and trade is clear and a pleasure to read. He is excellent at demolishing standard models for these events by pointing out the cases where they don't work. Yes, the book hasn't got many pictures. Yes the maps are often in the wrong place in the book and sometimes they haven't got all the sites labelled. But you can probably look up the rest on the internet now (something you probably couldn't have done when the book was first published). Seeing as there's nothing else quite like this (why, I don't know), it's a good place to start.

There has been so much new information since this book was written, including significant new information about pre-Clovis people. It was last edited in 1992, making it 18 years out of date, given the fast moving world of American prehistory. Interested in more up to date history? Try *The First Americans* by Adovasio, or *The Settlement of the Americas* by Dillehay. There may be newer publications as well, but these two are balanced and extensive. Dillehay's book requires attention and study, but it is worth it.

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