

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

NORTH AMERICAN MILITARY HISTORY

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Overview North American civilizations have required security – from protecting themselves to aggressively expanding territory, political influence, trade, and markets.

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): Although the main source of information about the Clovis people comes from Clovis, New Mexico, there is evidence of two separate groups of Clovis people who came from Asia across the Bering Strait (which was a land bridge at that time). They were well known for their finely crafted obsidian and flint arrow points, knives, and daggers. Because of the juxtaposition of skeletons and arrow points, there is some evidence that warriors raiding other tribes, stealing resources and potentially kidnapping members for either tribal genetic enhancement or human sacrifice.

Arctic Inuit (The Dorset People): There is evidence that prehistoric Inuit whalers had an impact on Arctic freshwater systems. There is evidence of organized hunts and fishing expeditions. The Dorset people believed in animal spirits who could help them be more effective hunters, and they carved hunting weapons such as harpoons in a way to try to imbue them with magical properties. For example, the harpoon could be carved in the shape of a flying bear, intended to strike the target with a great deal of force. There is no evidence that the harpoons were used against people.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): Cliff dwellers in the American Southwest (Colorado, New Mexico) constructed kivas (living spaces) in the cliffs and they were considered sacred. Each kiva had a separate function, and were inhabited by different types of people. There were tower or citadel kivas where warriors lived. They constructed holes in the walls through which they could shoot arrows, and could follow commands of the warrior in chief. The military function was primarily defensive.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): The Abenaki people were typical of the indigenous peoples living in the eastern woodlands. They practiced subsistence farming in what is now Quebec, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and northern New York. They hunted, fished, trapped, picked berries, and grew corn, beans, squash, potatoes, and tobacco. They also wove baskets from local sweet grass. Known as the “People in the Rising Sun,” the Abenaki had no military or warrior classes until the arrival of the French and the English, who wanted their lands, as well as help in obtaining furs and driving away rivals.

Mississippian (800 – 1500 AD): The Mississippian culture was very sophisticated, and had mastered the construction of extremely complex engineered earthworks, pyramids, drainage systems, and waterworks. Their economy was reliant upon trade, and both the trade routes and the territories were coveted, not just for access to supply of goods, but also as markets. So, there were warriors and a standing military that functioned to protect the trade routes. Similar activities occurred in contemporaneous cultures such as the Toltecs and Maya, to the south. The Mississippian Period people produced artifacts that demonstrate their involvement in warfare with other groups or clans. They manufactured objects of stone, shell, and copper. In Tennessee, the Dover chert was used for creating knives, swords, and discs that could have been used in both war and in rituals. Their mortuary behavior suggests that warriors were respected, since that is where representations of weapons, war costumes, and falcons can be found.

Colonial (Early Modern)

Eastern Woodlands Native Americans: The Native Americans in the Eastern Woodlands of northeastern North America were militarized by the French, who used them to attack the English who

were competing for the territory. The French also attacked the Native Americans at times when they were not able to completely subjugate the Native Americans so that they provided furs and assistance in their own exploration and trapping ventures.

Continental North America Native Americans: Although some of the tribes created confederations in order to bolster their force size and impact and they strategically planned attacks on settlers and English / French troops, in general the Native Americans were positioned as underdogs and their stance was largely defensive. They were simply trying to keep from having their lands confiscated and their peoples enslaved or humiliated.

Spanish / English conflicts in the South: At first, some of the local tribes which came in contact with the Spanish explorers offered hospitality. After word spread of the Spanish explorers' disappointingly bloodthirsty and culture-extinguishing interactions in New Spain (Mexico), the local tribes did everything possible to defend their territories and their way of life. They were not successful in the end, but they were a feared and fearful adversary, mainly through their skillful use of guerrilla tactics and their adept use of gruesome tactics which were highly effective in psychological warfare.

Revolutionary War -- new methods: Perhaps developed from masters in the tactic, the Eastern Woodlands tribes during the French-Indian wars, guerrilla warfare, was adopted by the Continental Army. While some of the Continental Army followed the agreed upon Rules of Engagement, many did not. The Continental Army was the most formal. They had uniforms and even were paid stipends by the States. They were issued uniforms and weapons, and many were well funded. However, the American Militia troops were in a different category. Hessian (German) mercenaries constituted around one-third of the combatants on the side of the Colonists (the belligerents). They were paid by the German government, who loaned money to the Americans. French soldiers also served, and were regarded by all as the most decent and unlikely to commit war atrocities or steal property from civilians. They were provided by Louis XVI, who was promised repayment (it never happened, and the Americans never paid their debt). Finally, Americans at home got caught up in the war. Many of the American citizen-soldiers wore home-spun clothing. They were self-funded, and often gained their weapons by attacking the British and stealing their supplies. They had a reputation for cruelty. In addition to other guerrilla techniques both the Continental Army and the American Militia relied heavily on spies and spy networks

Black Market and Informal Trading Networks: Outlaws, Pirates, Buccaneers, Corsairs: The informal economy (contraband, smuggling, piracy, counterfeiting) thrived in the loose and lawless new nation and its territories. Because of the fragile fabric of self-defense in the colonial era and the early years of the new Republic, it was often necessary for the criminal (or at least illicit) enterprises to have their own security. In many cases, the security for the criminal enterprises was much better funded, manned, and equipped than the military forces that were supposed to keep criminal activity at bay.

Nineteenth Century

War of 1812: The War of 1812 was between England and the United States, and represented unfinished business with respect to territorial disputes along the border between the U.S. and Canada. It is important because it was a proving ground for the new U.S. Navy, and represented control over the Mississippi River in the Battle of New Orleans. However, most textbooks do not mention that both this war and the Revolutionary War were marked by atrocities committed by both the U.S. and the British troops. They included sexual assault, the burning of civilian property, and theft of civilian property.

Mexican-American War: General Santa Anna was considered one of the leaders who most failed the newly independent nation of Mexico. He made critical military mistakes which resulted in strategic defeats with the Texas Revolution (triggered by Santa Anna's repeal of the Mexican Constitution, and increasing taxes on the area now known as Texas, which was part of the nation of Mexico), and then later in battles with the U.S. military (navy and army) from 1846-48. Santa Anna's leadership meant Mexico lost one third of its territory to the U.S. Santa Anna had to flee Mexico after 1848 and live in exile in Cuba.

Forts and the American West: The U.S. Army expanded throughout the American West by means of a

series of forts that were designed to protect settlers from attacks by Indians. The fort system was innovative because it allowed local solutions for local problems. The forts became important for protection and also as locations for future bases for training and housing of regular troops.

Civil War (1861-1865): The American Civil War was a long time in the making, and it had to do with a conflict between those States that accepted federal control, versus states that wanted more autonomy. At the heart of the issue was a moral and economic one: slavery. The industrial North was against slavery, not only on moral grounds, but because of fears of labor price competition. The war was remarkable for its brutality, thanks to the use of new technology such as the Gatling Gun (early machine gun) and new types of mortars and bombs. Further, a new “scorched earth” policy of the North resulted in a wide swath of plantations, homes, and cities burned to the ground. When the South finally surrendered, 640,000 soldiers died. There were many civilian deaths, and several million refugees, who moved to Texas and the American West.

Spanish-American War (1898): This war, fought between the United States and Spain for control of far-flung island nations (Cuba, Philippines, Puerto Rico, among others) was unique in that it was the first one to be instigated and fomented by “yellow journalism” – inflammatory, incendiary journalism by a newspaper magnate who had a vested interest in the war. The war had vicious battles in conditions where malaria, yellow fever, dengue and other tropical diseases took their toll. The United States prevailed, which was a very important step in making the United States an empire.

Twentieth Century

War in Central America / Mexico: The Mexican Civil War included many skirmishes on the border of Mexico. Large corporations and oligopolies took advantage of the state of chaos in Mexico and invaded the Gulf of Mexico port of Veracruz with the aim of gaining control of oil and gas resources. For the most part, the efforts of the Americans was rebuffed. The Mexican attacks were led by Pancho Villa, who combined the tactics of vigilante avengers with those of a militia.

World War I: The American participation in World War I resulted in a number of military innovations, including improved submarines, airplanes, and different types of chemical warfare. Not all innovations were destructive; in World War I, more effective gas masks were developed, and for the first time, motorized vehicles were used to transport equipment, troops, and supplies.

FBI / Al Capone -- Prohibition - organized crime wars: Federal Bureau of Investigation came into prominence starting with Prohibition (making alcohol illegal) during the 1920s. The FBI was unique in that it was essentially a Federal law enforcement agency, with jurisdiction for the entire country, making coordination much more efficient.

World War II: Rocketry, radar, aircraft carriers, and nuclear weaponry are generally viewed as groundbreaking technologies in World War II. In addition, new fabrics were developed such as rayon, which could be used for parachutes and other pieces of equipment used during the war.

Korean War: The U.S. involvement in the Korean War was a time of technological advancement. During the 3-year war, the U.S. dramatically increased its use of helicopters, particularly in medical evacuations and to deliver key supplies to isolated pockets of military personnel. Battlefield medicine was revolutionized by the use of the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) unit, combined with the aeromedical evacuation. In the Korean War, the fatality rate for seriously wounded soldiers was cut to a new low: 2.5 percent.

Cold War: The Cold War, which was both an arms / influence race and a complex spy game, saw breakthroughs in the use of satellite technologies, various types of surveillance technologies. The production of propaganda was an important area of contention, with both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. participating in both open and sub rosa operations. For example, student rebellions were often subsidized by communist coffers.

Vietnam War: The justification for United States involvement in the Vietnam War was the “domino theory” – the U.S. needed to help countries resist communist infiltration and domination. In many ways, the Vietnam War was an unethical “proxy war” and one of the first of its kind. In it, the main entities in conflict (Communist China, the Soviet Union vs. the United States) fought their conflict in a smaller country (Vietnam). The cruelty of this approach was not lost on anyone, and it was a war which provoked a great deal of protest. However unethical the proxy war might be, however, no one seemed to prefer direct nuclear conflict with the two main belligerents.

Desert Storm: A war fought over directional drilling (supposedly Iraq was using new directional drilling techniques to burrow under Kuwait and tap into their vast oil reservoirs), it there were questions from the beginning why the U.S. should be involved. So, this war was one of the first where the U.S. was supposedly the prominent global police force. It was also one that was remote-controlled, with rockets and other weapons launched via computer from remote control centers. There were other firsts as well: this was a war that was broadcast live on CNN, What was broadcast was a fireworks display of primarily rocket attacks, which gave it a rather sterile, bloodless character.

War on Drugs: Accompanied by publicity “Just Say “NO” and the spectacle of Nancy Reagan, the so-called “War on Drugs” was spectacularly unsuccessful if the real goal was to reduce the level of drug addiction as well as the activity of narcotraffickers in the U.S. What made this law enforcement effort, dubbed a “war” unique was the way in which satellite imagery based on hyperspectral, multispectral, and infrared sensors, was used to detect marijuana and poppy cultivation, as well as the location of rural methamphetamine labs.

Discussion/Questions

1. The Olmecs and other Mesoamerican economies were more complex than they might appear, and their success had much to do with their militarism. Open trade routes and the health of manufacturing required a well-equipped and prepared security force. Describe the dependence of the Olmecs on their war-like stance.

2. The Incas “franchised” their brand through an extensive confederation of city states, tribes, and outlying groups. Trade networks were held together by common beliefs, but more than that, by their “quipus”, the knotted string accounting, messaging, and inventorying system that allowed the groups to communicate by means of the language of math and calculations. Describe the potential strengths and weaknesses of an economy based primarily on relationships and accounting.

3. In the 19th century, the leaders of countries like Paraguay believed that isolating their populace from the outside world would strengthen it and make it less likely to be corrupted by outside influences. Import restrictions stimulated the production of import substitutions, such as the hand-tatted “spiderweb lace” (called “ñanduti” in native Guaraní) and other artisan items. However, there were several disadvantages to isolationism. Please describe a few of them.

4. In certain parts of Colombia during the height of the cartels, the underground “informal” economy was much larger than the formal economy. What this meant in functional terms was that while there was some circulation of the money used in trafficking (money spent in food, fiestas, rent, clothing, transportation, etc.), the flows were not official, and it was impossible to properly apply an income tax or to assure that the business contributed to the general good. Explain why it is problematic for a country to have informal trade networks (cartels, etc.) and discuss how they can have a devastating impact on legitimate trade.

Guiding Questions

1. The first need for military forces had to do with protection. The protection had to do with communities, but also with the lifelines, which is to say trade routes. Describe how the early North American civilizations protected their communities and their trade routes.

2. The American Revolution was fought by regular military forces (the Continental Army and the British),

but it was won by informal forces – the Prussian mercenaries, the French consignees, and finally, the militia, which consisted of a ragtag collection of pioneers defending their own homes. Explain the ways in which the British forces had difficulties in winning the war.

3. The American Civil War is often described as a war over slavery. But, that's just part of the explanation. Explain how the economic realities of immigration, industrialization, plantation economies, and vertical integration (ownership of the raw materials, the factories, and the distribution) made conflict almost inevitable.

4. Describe the role of technology in WWI and WWII. How did technology apply to surveillance. How did the U.S. contribute to technological changes in warfare? Describe the role of surveillance in the Cold War and also in subsequent wars or police actions.

Readings

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