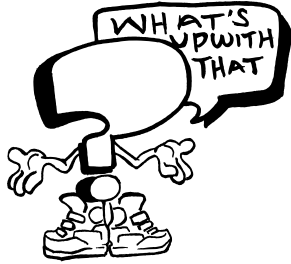


Welcome to
Part 1 of 5

**A Time before Capitalism, White
Supremacy, and Property Ownership:
The First Nation Peoples**

Chicago has not always been a fast-paced city with skyscrapers, cars, neighborhoods, and industry. For thousands of years, Chicago was pristine wilderness with trees, prairie, swampland and the Lake Michigan. Indigenous people (also called First Nation peoples, First Peoples, Native Americans, or Indians) lived on this land for thousands of years prior to any person of European descent. Millions of acres of Chicagoland still remained a key part of the millennia-old Indigenous circle of life until the Treaty of Chicago was forged through **legal trickery and government kickbacks in 1833**. Indigenous Chicago was part of a dynamic Great Lakes region that was recently home to several important First Nations, including the Potawatomi, Illini, Menominee, Kaskaskia, Miami, Ottawa, Sauk, and Fox. To the First Nation peoples and their ancestors, land was not a commodity that could be bought and sold for profit by individuals. Instead, First Nation peoples believed they were caretakers of the land and could not own the resources provided by “Mother Earth.”



MAHPIYA LUTA (RED CLOUD) 1882

**“THE WHITE MAN MADE US MANY
PROMISES, BUT HE KEPT ONLY
ONE. HE PROMISED TO TAKE OUR
LAND AND HE TOOK IT.”**

In many ways, the values and political systems utilized by First Nation peoples were in direct opposition to the capitalist interests of the Europeans. Learning about their approaches to life can provide insight into potential alternatives to the capitalist social organization in Chicago today.

A Brief Look into Chicago's First Nation History

How did the First Nation Peoples get here? What were important aspects of First Nation societies? Do First Nation Peoples' experiences speak to things happening in society today?

Unfortunately, voices from the First Nations are not often the voices through which the indigenous history of Chicago is told. What is known of people here before us has come primarily from written text by French, British, and U.S. authors, archeological digs and excavations, and in some cases, Indigenous accounts of their descendents who lived in this region. With their own social lenses, White conquerors, explorers, and missionaries put pen to paper in documenting the perspectives of Europeans (French and British), who traveled to the western parts of the continent beginning in the 1660s.

Despite the effects of **colonization** and **genocide**, the First Nations survived and maintained a sense of identity, culture, values, and connections to their ancestral lands. Today American Indians continue to struggle for justice and self-determination in this region and throughout the Americas. However the First Nation peoples' perspectives of this history remains less known, even though the founding of Chicago is intricately woven into the political and social relationships between the tribes of the Midwest and Britain, France, and the United States. This part of the story focuses on Chicago's indigenous peoples and their struggle against removal. It is the first story of humans in this region.

In the book *Native Chicago* (1998), First Nation authors, scholars, and their supporters present a brief summary of indigenous life in the Great Lakes region. Other books like *Lasting Echoes*, *Daughters of the Earth*, and *Sisters in Spirit* provide brief insight into the values, beliefs, and practices that helped to make up First Nation societies. Along with a clear picture of

recent and current Native American life, these books provide a glimpse into a former world; one defined by thousands of years of respectful, just, and accountable relationships with nature, human beings, and spiritual realms.

Civilization: The First Nation Peoples and First Nation Societies

According to archeological, genetic, and linguistic research, the first physical sign of human activity begins as far back as 12,000 to 18,000 years ago. After long migrations from Africa, across Eurasia, entering through the Bering Strait, and traveling southward into the present-day Americas, humans arrived. It should be noted that the Bering Strait crossing is just one of many theories about how the Americas became populated. Many nations have their own origin accounts of where they come from and about their connections to places throughout the Americas. **They have roots.**

Early Paleo-Indian groups hunted woolly mammoths, mastodons, and other animals. This caused them to migrate throughout the Americas. Around 4,500 years ago, the early Woodland peoples established more permanent settlements in this region. Fortunately, a few artifacts have been preserved around Calumet Beach at the present day Chicago-Indiana border, and serve as evidence of the vast trade networks that had taken shape among the many communities and settlements in the Americas.

This area was originally named Checagou by the Miami Nation. It was an area connected to vast civilizations, cultures, natural resources, and continental trade networks. In *Native Chicago*, Ed Lace describes the **Hopewell Indians** and their relationship with this area:

The remarkable Hopewell Indians or mound builders are part of this culture. Their burial mounds contain superbly artistic pottery and naturalistic stone figurines, recognizable as people, specific birds, and other visuals. Extensive trade was carried on with distant groups. Their



campsites and burial mounds reveal mica from the East, copper from the North, seashells and alligator teeth from the Gulf Coast and a growing body of evidence points to Mexican links.

First Nations were not only hunters and gatherers, as many history books might cause one to believe. Many communities organized themselves around values and political systems that could be considered progressive in society today. Some of those characteristics are values that promote community, balanced power between female and male genders, and political systems based on consensus. It's important to understand these aspects of First Nation societies because they provide an idea of what life in Chicago might be like without the influence of White settler-colonists. The quote below describes these values played out in one First Nation community. Roesch-Wagner writes:

Some of the First Peoples of the Chicago Region

Cahokian
Hopewell
Mississippian
Miami
Fox
Menomonee
Potawatomi
Sauk