

NEW VIEWS ON AMERICAN COLONIZATION: CRITICAL TESTS FROM SOUTH AMERICA

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The traditional view of colonization of the Americas as a migration across Beringia and subsequent dispersal southward following the last glacial maximum is being increasingly questioned. In North America, archaeological links to Siberia are tenuous and genetic data are more consistent with an earlier entry of people into the Americas, from Central rather than Northeast Siberia. An entry of populations into the Americas prior to the last glacial maximum forces a reconsideration not only of timing, but also geographic points of entry and speed of dispersal, based on ecological theory. A number of emerging alternative hypotheses on the colonization of the Americas predict early entry and dispersal of people into South America - earlier than, or coeval with, initial dispersal in North America. The study of genetic, morphological, and archaeological variation across South America is critical to testing these new, alternative hypotheses of Native American origins. I will review the evidence for emerging, alternative views of American Colonization, and suggest ways in which data from South American populations and prehistory will be crucial in testing them.