Homo Sapiens into the New World

1. Stanford and Bradley support a hypothesis that is founded on the Solutrean Hypothesis. The latter offers an alternative theory to the form in which the Americans were first settled. Historically, it has been claimed that the first settlers of the Americas were the Clovis people. The Clovis crossed into North America from East Asia; the crossing was carried out through a land bridge that extended over the area that comprises the Bering Sea. The land bridge has since been named the Bering Strait. Around 15,000 years ago, the Clovis people crossed Siberia and entered northwestern America (the territory that now comprises Alaska). Stanford and Bradley acknowledge that such settlement did take place, but they point out that there was a group of people that predated the Clovis and settled the Americas from the East. Their hypothesis is that the first American settlers were the Solutrean people, who set sail from Europe (specifically from the territories that now comprise France and Spain) and reached the Americas during the world’s last Ice Age (between 14,000 and 25,000 years ago).

Therefore, this alternative hypothesis concerning the settlement of the Americas has been highly controversial since it was first proposed. First of all, it completely goes away with the longstanding theory (for more than 400 years now) that the first settlers of the Americas were the Clovis people. They are believed to come into the continent through Northeastern Asia and through the Bering Strait that was previously mentioned. Much still remains unknown about the history of the ‘first Americans’, but despite of this, there was a generalized consensus that the
Clovis people were the first Americans. Stanford and Bradley claim that the Clovis people were not the first settlers of the Americas, but rather the descendants of the first settlers. In other words, the controversy revolves mostly around the claim that the Clovis was the first generation of American born peoples.

In terms of evidence found to support their case, Stanford and Bradley build upon archaeological finds, most notably tools that have been dated and found to precede the tools used by the Clovis people. Furthermore, the authors make it clear that for the most part, the tools have been found in the southeastern territory of the United States. In recent years, however, archaeological finds have been made in northeastern part of the United States. Stone tools that significantly differ from the Clovis’ tools have been found and dated to be at least 18,450 years ago. As well, the authors claim that evidence has been recovered from the ocean. The justification is that shorelines 20,000 years ago were at least 130 meters higher above sea level. Therefore, this is another fact that the authors use to support their claims of ships travelling across the Atlantic Ocean.

2. As far as hypotheses regarding the settlement of the Americas go, the most popular and generally accepted one relies on a land bridge theory. This hypothesis makes an assumption that the Clovis people crossed from northeastern Europe (present day Siberia) into northwestern America (present day Alaska) through the Bering Strait. In terms of water migration theories, two hypotheses, which are additional to the one proposed by Stanford and Bradley, have been proposed. The first one claims that the first Americans came from Northeast Asia into America by following coastlines. The second hypothesis suggests a similar route, but starting from Southeast Asia.
Considering all of the ideas proposed regarding the route in which the Americas were initially settled, the generalized consensus is that it was most likely a terrestrial migration. Furthermore, it has been generally accepted, for more than 400 years now, that the Americas were initially colonized from northeastern Asia by people who crossed the Bering Strait into present day Alaska. This theory, despite having loops of its own, does seem the most plausible of all that have been proposed. The main reason is that no significant piece of evidence has been found to suggest that sea travel (transoceanic travel) had been harnessed by early settlers. This line of reasoning leads to the inevitable conclusion that the watercraft migration theories are the most tedious, particularly the Solutrean Hypothesis proposed by Stanford and Bradley. Of course, there are still a lot of things that remain unknown, so it is impossible to determine for sure which hypothesis is the correct one. However, upon considering the merits of each theory it must be stated that no hypothesis comes close (in terms of its plausibility) to the land bridge theory, upon which the Clovis entered the Americas through Alaska.

3. For the most part, researchers are skeptical about the proposed overlaps between the Solutrean people and the Clovis people. In other words, the proposed direct link that existed between the Solutrean and Clovis peoples has been determined as doubtful given that the dates and regions that each group presumably settled do not evidence any direct relation. Another source of skepticism lies in the fact that there is no evidence to justify Stanford and Bradley’s claim that the Solutrean people travelled across the Atlantic Ocean using boats, with which they simply followed the elevated shorelines until reaching the Americas. The latter idea is further supported by the fact that even though archaeologists have found evidence of Solutrean fishing, no real evidence links the Solutrean people with deep sea fishing, or deep sea resource exploitation in general, has been found.
Apart from the unlikelihood of direct linkages between Solutrean and Clovis peoples and the fact that technology at the time could not enable the Solutrean people to undertake a transoceanic journey from Europe to the Americas, there is also the fact that no direct artistic/cultural practices were passed on from the Solutrean people to their alleged descendants, the Clovis. Artwork has been found at archaeological sites in both Spain and France; both sites have evidenced a characteristic style that has been attributed to the Solutrean people. Analogous artwork, however, has not been found anywhere in the Americas. Therefore, this raises skepticism regarding the plausibility of Stanford and Bradley’s hypothesis. There was one finding made in Florida, which comprised a carved piece of bone showcasing the shape of a mammoth. Such a find has been dated to be between 13,000 and 20,000; it is believed to be the oldest piece of artwork in all of the Americas. It has been further used as a justification of the Solutrean Hypothesis. However, further doubt has been cast on this hypothesis given that similar artwork has been found southern Africa. Based on this, it has been counter proposed that such artwork could very well have developed naturally from other American peoples (primarily the Clovis) instead of the Solutrean people.

The evidence collected by Stanford and Bradley indicates the presence of a group of American settlers that preceded the Clovis people. However, this evidence does not constitute irrefutable evidence that the Solutrean people were the first to settle America. It does not also prove that the settlement was conducted through sea travel from southwestern Europe. It is plausible that Stanford and Bradley could be wrong in their interpretation of the evidence. Alternatives include that the Clovis crossed the Bering Strait much earlier. Another alternative could naturally be that there was a group of Americans that did not migrate from other parts of the world.
Works Cited


