



# Native Peoples of North America

Dr. Susan Stebbins  
SUNY Potsdam

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2013

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# About this Textbook

*Native Peoples of North America* is intended to be an introductory text about the Native peoples of North America (primarily the United States and Canada) presented from an anthropological perspective. As such, the text is organized around anthropological concepts such as language, kinship, marriage and family life, political and economic organization, food getting, spiritual and religious practices, and the arts. Prehistoric, historic and contemporary information is presented. Each chapter begins with an example from the oral tradition that reflects the theme of the chapter. The text includes suggested readings, videos and classroom activities.

## About the Author

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Dr. Susan Stebbins (Doctor of Arts in Humanities from the University at Albany) has been a member of the SUNY Potsdam Anthropology department since 1992. At Potsdam she has taught Cultural Anthropology, Introduction to Anthropology, Theory of Anthropology, Religion, Magic and Witchcraft, and many classes focusing on Native Americans, including *The Native Americans*, *Indian Images* and *Women in Native America*. Her research has been both historical (Traditional Roles of Iroquois Women) and contemporary, including research about a political protest at the bridge connecting New York, the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation and Ontario, Canada, and Native American Education, particularly that concerning the Native peoples of New York. She currently is the Special Assistant to the President for Diversity at SUNY Potsdam, where she continues to teach Native American Studies.

# Reviewer's Notes

*Native Peoples of North America* is a groundbreaking new text for undergraduate introductory courses in Native American Studies. Dr. Susan Stebbins, the author, is a Native American scholar who is trained as a cultural anthropologist and specializes in Native American and Indigenous Studies. As such, she writes this accessible text from an anthropological perspective, carefully presenting basic concepts of cultural anthropology such as ethnography, kinship, fieldwork, demography, society, modes of subsistence, type of political organization, and assimilation, while using Native North American examples to illustrate and explain each point. This book could, therefore, be successfully used to teach Introduction to Cultural Anthropology at tribal colleges, as well as courses in Native American Studies at other colleges and universities.

Clearly covering topics as the devastating influences of European-introduced diseases, the varying perspectives held by the colonial nations about Native people, indigenous religions, revitalization movements, federal Indian policies, and expressive culture, Stebbins draws on a wealth of examples from prehistoric sites to contemporary events to effectively tell the story of the hundreds of different societies making up what is known today as Native North America. While doing this, Stebbins does not treat Native North America or its peoples as isolates as has been done for generations in hegemonic discourse. Rather, she systematically places them within the context of world cultures in both time and space in order to dispel stereotypes and build multicultural understandings.

Dr. Maureen Trudelle Schwarz, Professor, Anthropology,  
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Open SUNY Textbook Peer Reviewer

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# Introduction

The attempt to write any book, especially a textbook, about the histories and cultures of the indigenous peoples of what is now called North America is a daunting task. It is equivalent to writing a book about the histories and cultures of the peoples of Europe, though there are some differences. For example, it is readily accepted by both scientists and the general public that fully modern humans were in Europe well over 40,000 years ago. However, the **hypothesis**, based on archaeological sites in South America that fully modern humans were in the Americas 40,000 years ago is hotly debated. While there is evidence for **hominid** species (**Homo habilis**, **Homo erectus**, **Neanderthals**) in Europe as well as Asia and Africa, the skeleton remains of only fully modern humans, called **Paleo-Indians**, have been found in the Americas. While humans have not been in the Americas as long as in Africa (from whence all humans come), Europe or Asia, archaeological evidence shows that people have been in the Americas for at least over 12,000 years.

The historical inquiry about human activity around the world is broken into two large categories: pre-historic and historic. The term proto-historic applies to a period of transition between the two. With the exception of societies like the Maya and Aztecs of Meso-America, who had written documents and historical accounts on monumental architecture well over 2,000 years ago, research about Native societies prior to 1492 is pre-historic. A number of techniques—geology, archaeology, botany, zoology, and the oral traditions of contemporary Native societies—are used to make hypotheses about their lives before historical documents were kept. Archaeologists and historians use historical categories that are unique to the Americas: **Paleo-Indian, archaic, and formative**.

Paleo-Indian refers to the first migration of people to the Americas sometime prior to the last glaciation around 10,000 years ago. Archaic refers to the period from 8,000 BCE (before the common era) to 2,000 BCE when many but not all societies across the Americas developed horticulture and agriculture. The estimated development of horticulture and agriculture vary for different parts of the Americas. The formative stage refers to the period of 1,000 BCE to 500 CE



(common era) in which, in addition to horticulture/agriculture, societies developed pottery, weaving, and permanent towns with ceremonial centers. These categories and dates were first postulated in the 1950s. Contemporary archaeological data now tells us that the estimated dates of these developments can be off by 1,000 years or more. Further, the original peoples of the Americas had technology such as pottery and weaving before they developed horticulturally, if they ever did. Such technologies are not dependent on horticulture or permanent settlements. So, while these time frames are not supported by current data, the terms Paleo-Indian, archaic, and formative are still used to describe the resources strategies of American indigenous peoples.

In the Americas, a wide assortment of crops was grown, including, but not limited to: corn, potatoes, tomatoes, and several varieties of beans, chili peppers, and chocolate. Despite the popular media image of Indians hunting bison on horseback, by the time of European contact many, many Native Americans produced much of their food through **horticulture** (the domestication of some plants while still foraging, fishing and hunting) and agriculture. Societies in South America, Meso-America, and most of the eastern, mid-western, and southwestern parts of what is now the United States were prosperous horticultural and agricultural societies. The original inhabitants of the Americas developed horticultural/agriculture, a high level of technology, as well as ceremonial/spiritual life and expressive culture (the arts) without influence from Europe.

The Americas were separated from Africa, Asia, and Europe (**the Old World**) by vast oceans. People may indeed have sailed those oceans hundreds of years before Columbus; or people may have crossed from the Americas to the Old World. There is little evidence for either hypothesis, and even less evidence that possible early explorers had any impact or influence on the people and societies they may have encountered. Another hypothesis is that during **glacial** eras people migrated over the ice-covered Arctic areas between northern Asia, Europe, and North America. Unfortunately, there has been little research in this area; it is a hypothesis that deserves more investigation.

The physical separation of the Americas from the Old World slowed human migration, but people did eventually arrive (some hypotheses about how and when will be discussed in Chapter 1).

When they did, they brought all the technology and knowledge they had developed and used these to help them adapt to the new environments they encountered, and they continued to develop new technologies and new knowledge. People came to the Americas as **foragers**, who, like all people around the world before 12,000 years ago, acquired their food through a combination of gathering wild edibles, fishing, and hunting. Around 8,000 to 10,000 years ago, the indigenous peoples of the Americas, like people in the Old World, started domesticating some plants and started the process of producing their food (horticulture). Some aboriginal people lived in relatively large cities; some had **hierarchical** forms of government. If you could time travel back to a Native American Mississippi River Valley village, and a village in England 1,000 years ago, you would be struck by the similarities. Both villages would be farming some of their food, while also gathering some wild edibles and fishing and hunting. Chances are, the villages would be built around a mound, on which the leader of the village lived (Chapter 3). In today's England, he would be referred to as a king; in the Mississippi River Valley, we would probably call him a chief, although their roles would have been very similar. They both would have **achieved** their positions, rather than been **ascribed** (born to) their status, probably because of the status of extended families (**kin groups**) and would probably still be directly accountable to the people of their respective villages (Chapter 4).

There would have been dissimilarities between Native American and European societies as well. Religious beliefs and practices would have been different (Chapter 5), as well as the expressive culture, or what we call today the arts (Chapter 6). While in Europe, Asia, and to a lesser extent Africa, kin organization became more centered around men (**patrilineal**), many Native American societies were **matrilineal** and **matrifocal** meaning that their kin groups were descended from women, so inheritance or **usufruct** rights went from mother to daughter (Chapter 2). Perhaps because of the important roles of women within kin groups and religion, they held important roles within the political systems of many Native American societies (Chapter 4). Native American women also had very important roles within the **economies** of their societies, both producing and distributing important resources.

This text is written from an anthropological perspective. That is, I attempt to write about some Native American societies from the categories frequently discussed within **cultural anthropology**: kinship, gender roles, economic resources and distribution, political organization, religion, and expressive culture. To write a history or **ethnography** (cultural description) of all the estimated 700 indigenous societies of just North America would require an encyclopedia (the Smithsonian has such a reference, *The Handbook of North American Indians* and *The Handbook of South American Indians*, which contains nearly forty volumes). For this book, I selected different societies from the areas of what are now Canada and the United States to illustrate the different anthropological concepts discussed. While this is the method I have chosen, it can pose some problems. One of them is approaching a society from components such as kin groups and the other categories mentioned above. These components are part of the cultural whole for any society, but when studying ancient cultures, any of these pieces may be missing. For example, kinship systems are very flexible and change over time. So a kinship system observed in the 19th century in a society that has experienced much change—the Lakota for example—may have different kin organization than it did in the 18th century. Since each one influences the other, just as kinship influences status, resources, and religious beliefs, which in turn influence other aspects, it helps to think of culture as a spider web. The cells of the web are all connected, and the destruction of one cell can greatly change or even destroy the web. I hope that as you read the different chapters you will think about the inter-relationships between the topics discussed in each chapter.

There are other perspectives. For those interested in the history of Native Americans, I would suggest approaching the subject from either a societal perspective by researching a particular society like the Crow or Lakota or Navajo, or a cultural-geographic perspective by selecting societies from a particular region to study. For instance, looking at the history of the peoples of the Arctic or the Great Lakes area or the Northwest Coast. In anthropology this is called the cultural-geographic perspective. There is a tendency to study American Indians historically, while ignoring contemporary issues. To study the 12,000-plus-year history of the Native peoples of North or South America would be as difficult and confusing as trying to study the history of all the peoples of Europe for the last 10,000 years.

I hope you are sensing a point here: the histories and cultures of the indigenous peoples of the Americas are no less complex than those of Europe or Asia or Africa. **Euro-Americans** and **Canadians** (those people who are descended from immigrants from Europe to North America) continue to hold many mistaken stereotypes about pre-Columbian American Indians. For example: it is commonly believed that at the time of European contact, the Americas were vast empty lands occupied by a few thousand people who still acquired their food only through hunting and had not developed any of the attributes associated with the civilizations of Europe, such as growing their own food. The facts are that the Americas were occupied by millions of people, many of whom were farmers, and these people had achieved similar technological development to people in Europe except in one area: weapons (Weatherford 1988).

So where do the mistaken concepts about American Indians come from? One answer may lie in the fact that Europeans introduced contagious diseases to which the indigenous peoples of North America had no immunities. Thus, waves of epidemics were launched into areas often years before face-to-face contact with actual Europeans, wiping out enormous numbers of Native peoples. Another answer may be in the practice that Euro-Americans and Canadians had of eliminating the Native peoples they encountered as they pushed their way through the continent to get its land and resources. In the United States this process is justified by **Manifest Destiny**: the belief that it is the God-given destiny of Christian Europeans and later Euro-Americans to control the land and resources of the Americas. Elimination came in many ways: death from warfare or disease, termination of treaty rights of Native American societies to their lands; the removal of Native people to what became known as Indian Territory or to city slums; and residential boarding schools with the expressed goal to “kill the Indian” in children. The elimination process culminated in the belief that there were not many indigenous peoples in the Americas in the first place—and that there are hardly any now.

Another answer may come from the ideas about biological race that were commonly held in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries (and are still held by some). From an anthropological or biological perspective, there is no such thing as biological race. The last remaining human race other than the one now

inhabiting planet Earth was the Neanderthals, who died out around 40,000 years ago. We are all the same species; there is as much or more biological diversity within any one human group (such as your classroom, dorm, or neighborhood) as is among any human population, no matter how isolated or **phenotypically** (physically) different. When we talk about race, what we are talking about is a **social construct**, with real-world consequences. **Race** is based on a set of ideas that are focused on physical appearance or geographic origin. **Racism** is a set of ideas whereby one group of people claims that a set of physical features commonly possessed by another group of people are directly linked to specific negative characteristics, such as poor morality, lack of intelligence, or the inability to govern themselves. Currently anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and others have come to refer to the ideas about race and racism that developed in the late nineteenth century as **biological determinism** or **social Darwinism**.

I prefer to refer to use the term biological determinism, because such ideas have nothing to do with Charles Darwin's theories about evolution and the process by which any species (including humans) adapts to a new or changing environment. I think Mr. Darwin would have been saddened to know his theories were used as justification for the exploitation of humans who came to be seen as biologically inferior to other humans. From Darwin's evolutionary perspective, the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Africa, or Asia, were and are just as evolved as those in Europe, because all had successfully adapted to their environments and were successfully producing and raising offspring to succeed them by providing food, shelter, security, and cultural knowledge and memory.

Biological determinism was combined with social ideas that many Europeans, Euro-Americans, and Canadians had about the cultural, **linguistic** (language) and biological inferiority of peoples from the Americas, Asia, and Africa. It was commonly believed that people from these areas had cultures or societies that were inferior to those in Europe as well as languages that were inferior to European languages, and that this inferiority was based in biology. Particular attention was paid to the brain. Scientists such as Samuel Morton did experiments that purported to show that the skulls of Africans, Asians, and Native Americans men and women, along with European and American women, were smaller than the skulls of European men. He

concluded that if their brains were smaller, they were less intelligent, and, as result, their cultures and languages were inferior to those of Europe—and all women were inferior to European men.

Let's discuss theories and facts. Darwin's ideas about evolution are criticized by some because they are theories, not facts. True, Darwin postulated theories about evolution, which over the last 100 years have been supported and expanded. At no time has any scientific finding from archaeology, geology, biology, or zoology that examines changes to the earth, plants, or animals, found any evidence to refute evolution. Evolution will probably never be proven as a fact because we may never have the opportunity to observe similar changes on another planet. However, to disprove a theory we need only one verified, repeatable example. No such examples to the theory of evolution have been found. There is much tangible evidence in biology and geology to support Darwin's theory of evolution.

What of Samuel Morton's theories about skull and brain size and intelligence? First, skull size is related to skeleton size. An average human male's skeleton is larger than the average female's, so the male's skull on average will be larger than the female's. However, a 6-foot female model (and they generally are around six feet) may well have a larger skull than a shorter, say, 5-foot, 3-inch man. So would the model be more intelligent than the shorter man? According to Morton's theory, this would be the case, and Neanderthals would have been more intelligent than modern humans because their skulls (and by inference their brains) were larger than ours. Were they more intelligent? Evidence shows we're still here, they're not. Second, Morton knew what skulls belonged to Europeans, men and women, Africans, American Indians, and Asians. This was not a **blind study** as is used to ensure the validity of scientific research today. For example, if you or a member of your family are involved in a trial study of medications, neither you nor your doctor will know if you are receiving the real medication or a **placebo** (basically a sugar pill with no medicinal value). Morton measured the capacity of the skulls by pouring mustard seeds into the skulls and then weighing the seeds. He may well have been guilty of packing the seeds more tightly into the male European skulls than the others, much as we might try to get that last bit of coffee or sugar from a bag into a canister. If Morton had been able to weigh human brains (as soft

tissue they deteriorate very quickly) he would have found that adult human brains all weigh the same, about 3 pounds. Those Neanderthal brains were probably heavier.

What gives our brain its potential for intelligence is not its size, but its complexity, which is revealed by its density. The human brain is remarkably heavy for such a small object. That is because our brain is not smooth, like a cow's, but layered and folded in on itself. Have you ever seen a picture of brain coral, so called because it looks like our brains? The folding gives our brains much more surface area than that of other mammals. The increased surface area means more brain cells, synapses, and neurons. It is this density, along with environmental factors like a good diet and secure and stimulating surroundings that give humans the potential for intelligence.

Unlike Darwin's theory of evolution, Morton's theories about the relationship between skull and brain size and intelligence, and all the theories that built on his, do not hold up to scrutiny, as many examples disprove his theory. However, ideas such as this were (and still are) used to support beliefs about the biological, linguistic, and cultural inferiority of non-European peoples. In the nineteenth century, early anthropologists and archaeologists ranked societies and their people on a progressive scale as being in a state of **savagery-barbarism** or **civilization**. Social attributes, such as having a written language, a patrilineal kinship or hierarchical political system, were used to assign societies to one of the three categories. The category of civilization was based on European societies, so that those non-European societies that were most like Europe would rank higher. There were inconsistencies. For example, agriculture was necessary for a society to be considered in a state of civilization. Societies such as those of China and India were agricultural long before the societies of Europe, but China and India were usually ranked as being in a state of barbarism. The agricultural societies of the Americas (and Africa) were generally ranked as being in a state of savagery.

You may have noticed that the darker the skin of a society's people, the lower they ranked. Also, those people who occupied lands into which Europe was expanding its economic and political power were ranked lower. Categorizing the people you are killing, enslaving, or displacing from their homes as inferior to you is an excellent justification for that behavior. There is always a social context for people's beliefs

and behaviors. The peoples of the Americas (and Africa and Asia) had to be seen as inferior by Europeans, Euro-Americans, and Canadians in order to allow and justify the colonialization of their lands, lives, and societies. Thus, the Americas were seen as vast, near empty lands inhabited by a few hunting societies who, despite the resources available, had not advanced as had the people of Europe.

None of us would consider ourselves racist, but we have all been influenced by these ideas. When I was in elementary school, one of my classrooms had a large world map hanging on the wall. Around the map were illustrations of “the races of the world;” pictures of humans were arranged from lightest hair and skin to the darkest. My textbooks often referred to the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Africa as “savages” and “barbarians.” These ideas were often illustrated in the television shows and movies I and other people of my generation watched. Do you think your images are much different? Have you read any books by a Native American writer? Do you see any Native American actors on television or in movies? When you do read or see something about Native Americans, is it placed in the past or in the present?

Too often when people read or write about American Indians, the material is placed in the past. Histories about Native Americans typically stop around 1890, the date of the massacre at Wounded Knee in North Dakota. Despite disease, warfare, loss of land, reservations, boarding schools, termination, and relocation to cities, Native Americans have neither died out or been assimilated into the mainstream societies of Canada and the United States. In fact, Native American populations are growing, and many societies are experiencing a cultural renaissance.

You may notice that I am using various terms—indigenous, Native Americans, American Indians—to refer to the First Peoples of the Americas. Names can be powerful: they are the most powerful when they are the names people choose for themselves. However, those names are not usually the ones by which we refer to people, particularly those of the Americas or Africa. Each indigenous American society had a name by which they referred to themselves and names (not always flattering) by which they referred to other people. Using a generic term like Native Americans assumes that all of the 700 or so different societies of North America were or are alike. While there are some similarities, such statements are akin to referring to a society in



Europe as European instead of French or Italian or British. Would you assume that Italians like fish and chips, just because the British—one European society—like fish and chips? The people of Europe do not speak European; they speak French or Italian or English. The native peoples of the Americas do not speak Indian or American Indian; if their language is not extinct, they may speak one of the estimated 800 languages spoken before colonization. When writing about a specific society, I will use that society's name for itself, along with the commonly know name. For example, the people commonly known as the Navajo name themselves Dine. The politically correct generic name for the First Peoples of the Americas changes. In Canada, First Nations, First Peoples, indigenous, and aboriginal are used. In the United States, Native American or American Indian are typically used. I will use them all at different points.



By Albert Gallatin, from *Archaeologia Americana: Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society, Vol. II*. Cambridge: Printed For The Society, At The University Press, 1836.

*Map of the Indian Tribes of North America about 1600 A.D. along the Atlantic & about 1800 A.D. westwardly*

It is difficult to find a good map that illustrates the diversity of societies found in North America at the time of European contact. This map attempts to illustrate that diversity in 1600. You may notice it follows the political boundaries of the present day United States, which did not exist in 1600, and as a consequence, only shows aboriginal societies that lived within the border of what would become the United States and part of Canada, with nothing shown below the southern border.

You may also notice that when referring to communities of Native peoples, I use the word **society**. From an anthropological perspective, a society is a group of people who reproduce offspring and have at

least three generations who depend on each other and share land, resources, and cultural traditions and institutions. The United States and Canada are examples of societies: each country has members who reproduce offspring, at least three generations, each recognizes **geo-political** boundaries, and their people share their resources and other traditions such as legal, economic, and educational institutions. A **culture** is more difficult to define. A society may be made up of many cultures. The *Dictionary of Anthropology* defines culture as, “All that is nonbiological and socially transmitted in a society, including artistic, social, ideological and religious patterns of behavior, and the techniques for mastering the environment” (pg. 144). So within the societies of the United States and Canada there are many cultures based on religion, work, class, geographic regions, volunteer organizations, sports, and even college.

Since the 1800s, the indigenous societies of the Americas have typically been grouped by **cultural-geographic areas**. In that time, most anthropologist and government representatives thought Native peoples were a dying or vanishing race. As a result, they often engaged in what is called **salvage ethnography**, in which Native American artifacts were collected to be saved and studied. Museum curators, overwhelmed with the plethora of **material culture** coming to them, developed this model as a means of sorting specimens for storage and eventual exhibition in institutions such as the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. While acknowledging that these categories were not ideal in grouping Native American societies, the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, working in the 1920s, believed that the societies within cultural-geographic areas shared similar social-cultural practices, behaviors, and technologies that would be understood by museum visitors.



Submitted to the public domain by wikimedia user Nikator

*North American Cultural-Geographic Areas. Classification of indigenous peoples of North America according to Alfred Kroeber, English-language version of map*

This map shows common Native American cultural-geographic areas in North America, including parts of Mexico. While I will reference societies from the different cultural-geographic areas, I will not be using those categories in describing the various societies discussed in this text. I find the cultural-geographic perspective of examining indigenous societies to be problematic. For example, look at the area referred to as the **Plains**, which stretches from southern Canada nearly to what are now the border of Mexico and the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Within this area are very different environmental **niches** that were occupied by and utilized by very different peoples.

There were both horticulturalists and foragers living on the Plains. These different peoples organized their societies differently and spoke an array of languages. Examining Native American societies from the cultural-geographic perspective fails to illustrate the differences among societies found within these artificially designed categories. Further, this is a very static method for studying Native American societies, which tended to be quite adaptable to change and mobile when the need arose.

The indigenous peoples of the Americas did not encounter geopolitical boundaries as we do today. People would move as resources became limited, populations too large, or segments of the population just were not getting along. People migrated for much the same reasons as humans migrated out of Africa to Asia and Europe and ultimately to the Americas. For example, before European contact, the people known as the Lakota lived in the prairies of what is now the state of Minnesota, part of the **Northeast** cultural-geographic area. The Lakota were not the Horse Culture commonly seen in T.V. and movie westerns. Horses did not exist in the New World until Europeans brought them. In 1680, many pueblos (communities) in the Southwest revolted against the Spanish who had attempted to colonize them. As a result of the revolt, many Spanish horses were freed. Eventually these horses, ancestors of the mustang, found their way to the Plains. In the meantime, European contact and increasing population in the Midwest had pushed the Lakota onto the Plains. The Lakota soon came to depend on and revere the horse that helped them survive in their new environment. So should they be considered a society of the Northeast cultural-geographic area or the Plains?

Kroeber was one of the last Renaissance anthropologists. By that I mean he studied social-cultural organization, languages, material culture, and human biology. Today, most anthropologists specialize in one or two of these areas. Later in his life, Kroeber was most interested in studying the languages of Native Americans. Scientists like to put things into categories, so he categorized the languages of Native Americas into seven large language **families**. A language family consists of several to many languages that exhibit characteristics indicating they are related to one another and are descended from a common language. If you speak Spanish, French, Italian, or Portuguese you probably know they are related to each other and are descended

from Latin. These languages belong to a much larger language family called **Indo-European**, which includes languages as varied as English, Gaelic, German, Greek, Sanskrit, and Persian. **Linguists** examine the sounds of languages, how those sounds are put together into words and how those words are put together into sentences to determine their relationships to each other. Essentially, that is what Kroeber accomplished when studying the indigenous languages of the Americas.



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### *North American Indigenous Language Families*

Other anthropologists and linguistics since Kroeber have theorized different numbers and organization for Native American languages. Some current theories hypothesize three language families throughout North and South America. The reconstructing of language families in the Americas is difficult because so many, at least half, have become extinct. One important contribution Kroeber and his generation of anthropologists made to the study of Native Americans and to Native peoples themselves was to record, either in notes or on early recordings, many languages that have since become extinct.

You will notice on the map of language families that the speakers of various languages in a family cut across cultural-geographic areas. For example, Athabascan languages are spoken from the East Coast almost to the West Coast, and in pockets of the Southwest (Apache and Navajo/Dine). This shows an additional problem with cultural-geographic grouping, and demonstrates the mobility of the people. They moved, taking their language and cultural traditions, behaviors and technologies with them. You can see why studying American Indian societies from either the perspective of cultural-geographic areas or language families alone are problematic. But you might also think about the encounters between different societies as they migrated and encountered new and different peoples. Languages, behaviors, and technologies often changed from these contacts. For example, the technology of agriculture was probably transferred from Meso-America to North America via migration or trade. The oral traditions of many societies speak of migrating from place to place. Such oral traditions, which have been carefully passed down from generation to generation, hold vast amounts of valuable knowledge for each of the 564 federally recognized Native nations today.

Due to the significance of these oral traditions, each chapter in this text will begin with an excerpt from the indigenous society under consideration. These examples have been carefully chosen to illustrate the anthropological concept presented in that chapter. While archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians have their theories about the aboriginal peoples of the Americas—where they came from, how they got here and how long ago—Native peoples have their own beliefs and their own knowledge. For too long, scientists and academics have ignored the beliefs, knowledge, and concerns of Native peoples. But Native peoples had important truths in their beliefs and stories. For example, many people of northern Canada have stories about giant beavers that were thought by Euro-Canadians to be merely folk or fairy tales. We now know the stories about giant beavers are true; their skeletal remains have been found throughout Canada and the northern United States. The *Casterorides Ohioensis* measured around 8 feet (2.5m) in length, weighed between 130-220 pounds (60-100 kg), and became extinct 10,000 years ago, after the last Ice Age.

The fact that Native peoples have stories about an animal species that died out 10,000 years ago indicates that Paleo-Indians were in North America 10,000 years ago to see those animals. Until the 1920s, archaeologists generally assumed that humans occupied the Americas less than 8,000 years ago. We know now that date is too recent. Ongoing archaeological investigations have pushed the date for human migration to the Americas farther and farther back in time.

Much truth can be found in the oral traditions of any society. The stories told at the beginning of each chapter were chosen to illustrate each society's beliefs about kinship, their society's resources, the responsibility of political leaders, and religion. The stories of a society can tell us as much as any other source of information if we approach them with an open mind. However, the beliefs, knowledge, interests, and concerns of Native peoples are often ignored by the broader public and governmental agencies of the United States and Canada. As a result, indigenous peoples frequently find themselves in adversarial situations with the U.S. and Canadian governments, agencies, and general public.

Some of these adversarial situations are discussed in the various chapters of this book. One such situation I will discuss now is the removal, buying, selling, or desecration of Native American **artifacts** or skeletons. Anthropologists and archaeologists in the United States and Canada have been fortunate in that they do not have to travel to far distant lands to study "**the Other**." They can stay relatively close to home and study the aboriginal Others here. Perceiving an individual or group of people as Other is the process by which one group of people excludes another group. The process is often associated with the growth of nationalism, a process that would have been important to both the United States and Canada as they separated themselves from Great Britain and came to perceive themselves as separate and unique nations. Further, **Othering** will also dehumanize or even demonize a group to justify their treatment as inferiors. U.S. and Canadian anthropologists and archaeologists have been guilty of this, as have many within the Euro-American and Canadian societies. This attitude among anthropologists and archaeologists is particularly evident in the collection and display of artifacts and skeletal remains



considered sacred by Native Americans. Yet, museums throughout the world display artifacts and skeletons that were obtained illegally or are considered sacred by their society.

In 1990, the United States government passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPA). This act makes it a federal crime to loot or damage bodies or artifacts from Native American sites. Further, if a museum or any other institution that receives federal funding has Native American artifacts, it must inventory all Native American human remains as well as associated and un-associated funerary items, then attempt to determine what Native American society those artifacts came from and return them. Unfortunately, the funding for the act is inadequate. There are not enough policemen or park rangers to patrol Native American sites within state or national parks, much less those that are not on such protected lands. Most museums do not have the staff or funds to conduct the research needed to determine to what society artifacts belong. However, some artifacts and skeletons have been returned.

The prosecution of looters has been difficult. In the Southwest, the looting of Native American sites has been going on for over a century and is seen as a hobby by many. Over a dozen looters were arrested in the late 1980s, but none were convicted. In June 2009, nearly two-dozen looters were arrested in southern Utah. Law enforcement and the courts may be changing their attitudes about such looting and this time there will be convictions, which may help convince potential looters of the seriousness of this crime.

Despite its inadequacies, NAGPA does illustrate changes in the ways a growing number of archaeologists and anthropologists view the indigenous peoples they wish to learn more about in the Americas, as well as in other countries like Australia and New Zealand. For one thing, a growing number of American Indians have become anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians (not to mention doctors, scientists, lawyers, and even astronauts). American or Canadian Indian researchers bring new knowledge and perspectives to the study of Native peoples. Further, fewer and fewer anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians view the Native peoples they study as Other, but instead as collaborators from whom they have much to learn.

## Conclusion

This Introduction has briefly covered a number of topics concerning the First Peoples of the Americas. Entire books address many of these topics. You should remember that while emerging archaeological evidence is pushing the dates for human habitation in the Americas farther and farther backward, there is only evidence for fully modern humans in the Americas. So we will probably never find indications for the peopling of the Americas more than 100,000 years ago. There are many hypotheses concerning how humans came to the Americas, as well as how many people were here in 1491. The most commonly known hypothesis about migration to the Americas is the **Bering Land Bridge (Bergina)**. It suggests that over the last 100,000 years the span of ocean between present-day Alaska and present-day Siberia was dry land during at least three periods. People, plants, and animals could have migrated across the area, utilizing ice-free corridors between glaciers that led to the interior of North America. Another theory postulates that peoples could have migrated over the ice-covered Arctic between northern Asia, Europe, and North America. Another suggests that people canoed or kayaked between the Aleutian Islands in the Bering Sea and down the western coast of North America. Native peoples have their own stories—such as how they came to be on the Island on the Back of the Turtle (Chapter 1). Generally, these stories are either emergence stories where people journey from an underground world into this world or Earth Diver stories, in which people (generally women) fall from the **Sky World** (see page 41) to this world.

It might be surprising to you that the population of North America in 1491 may well have been between 40 and 60 million people (or more). It is difficult to estimate populations of peoples who lived in scattered communities—some large, some small—throughout the continent, especially since most societies had no reason to call for a census. But other factors may also come into play in low population estimates. One reason is the catastrophic consequence of European diseases among indigenous peoples who had no immunity to those diseases. Another may be Manifest Destiny, the idea held by many Euro-Americans that it was their destiny to settle, Christianize, and civilize the continent.

There were many similarities between the Native peoples of the Americas and Europe. They all had societies whose members shared common values and passed on their customs and traditions from one generation to another. They all recognized rights and responsibilities between family or kin members. They all obtained food and other resources through foraging or farming. They all had ways of distributing those resources throughout the community. They all had a political or power organization to their society. They all had religious beliefs and rituals. They all had arts—visual and spoken—that added to their enjoyment of life. When an anthropologist studies, teaches, or writes about societies, these are the categories they use. These are the categories I will use in this book.

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## Suggested Questions

Can you name four Native Americans? Four Native American societies? Four accomplishments of American Indians?

In 1491, how many people were living in what are now Canada and the United States? How long had they been here? How did they get here? Why are these questions important to know?

How do American indigenous peoples say they came to the Americas?

What do you know about Native Americans; what would you like to know; what do you think other people should know?

What do you notice about the phenotypes (physical characteristics) of peoples thought to be inferior by eighteenth and nineteenth century Europeans, Euro-Americans, and Canadians?

Do you recall any information about Native peoples that you've seen in newspapers, magazines, online, or on television? Can you summarize this information? How are they related to topics covered in this book?

Have you recently noticed any visual or verbal stereotypes about American Indians? What does this example depict? Is the stereotype related to any topics discussed in the Introduction? How do you think indigenous Americans react to these stereotypes?

Can you describe how one component of your society (such as religion) is influenced by or influences another component of your society?

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## Suggested Resources

The PBS series *Five Hundred Nations* and the more recent *We Shall Remain* can be useful for a historical overview of the Native peoples of the United States, though both have inadequacies. *Five Hundred Nations* ends at the massacre at Wounded Knee, contributing to the myth that there are few, if any, American Indians in the twenty-first century. While *We Shall Remain* does present contemporary information, particularly the American Indian Movement, it presents very little information about women and their important roles within Native American societies, and its focus is on Native societies of the United States. *Five Hundred Nations* does include information about Mexico and the Caribbean, as well as some notable indigenous women.

*Myth of the Moundbuilders*, also a PBS video, does an excellent job of presenting some of the nineteenth and twentieth century myths about Native peoples that were first confirmed and then debunked

by archaeology. The video goes on to present some contemporary information about Native American societies. I use this video along with the book *Life in a Pueblo: Understanding the Past Through Archaeology*, by Kathryn Kamp. This book does an excellent job of explaining how archaeology can be used to obtain information about pre-historic societies and use that data to give a multi-dimensional view of a southwestern village.

The PBS series called *Evolution* includes a video called *Transformations* that provides an excellent summary of the evolutionary process and evidence supporting it. An accessible book about human evolution is *Becoming Human: Evolution of Human Uniqueness* by Ian Tattersall.

A couple of references for a general history of Native Americans are: *Indians in American History: An Introduction*, edited by Frederick Hoxie and Peter Iverson and for a more Canadian perspective, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*, by James Wilson.

An interesting, different perspective about other than early European contact with the Americas is *They Came Before Columbus: The African Presence in Ancient America* by Ivan Van Sertima.

For a brief summary of recent and alternative theories about human migration to the American I recommend "Quest for the Lost Land," by Hetherington, Renee et.al. that appeared in *Geotimes* in February 2004.

A good reference for the controversies about American Indian artifacts and skeleton remains is *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology and the Battle for Native American Identity*, by David Hurst Thomas.

A good book about the connections between racist beliefs and Manifest Destiny is *Race and Manifest Destiny: Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, by Reginald Horsman.

I frequently refer to two books by Jack Weatherford, *Native Roots: How the Indians Enriched America* and *Indian Givers: How American Indians Transformed the World*. Both present excellent information about important resources and ideas from the Native peoples of North and South America.

You may look in your local library or on Amazon.com for the now out-of-print *Different Drums, Different Moccasins*, by Harriet J. Kupferer, for an outstanding illustration of the different ways indigenous peoples utilized the same ecological niche.

The histories and cultures of Mexico and Meso-America (present-day Mexico and Central America) will not be discussed in this text. However, there is a number of excellent texts that deal exclusively with those unique societies. I have found *Sons of the Shaking Earth*, by Eric Wolf, *The Aztecs*, by Brian Fagan; and *The Maya*, by Michael Coe all to be accessible to students.

Most of the stories cited in this book are taken from *American Indian Myths and Legends*, selected and edited by Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz.

# Chapter 1

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## IN 1491 ...

### The Jicarilla Apache Genesis Story

*In the beginning the earth was covered with water, and all living things were below in the underworld. Then people could talk, the animals could talk, the trees could talk, and the rocks could talk.*

*It was dark in the underworld, and eagle plumes were used for torches. The people and animals that go about by day wanted more light but the night animals—the bear, the panther, and the owl—wanted darkness. After a long argument they agreed to play the thimble-and-button game, and if the day animals won there would be light, but if the night animals won it would always be dark.*

*The game began. The magpie and the quail, who love the light and have sharp eyes, watched until they could see the button through the thin wood of the hollow stick that served as a thimble. This told the people where the button was, and in the first round, the people won. The morning star came out and the black bear ran and hid in the darkness. They played again, and the people won. It grew brighter in the east and the brown bear ran and hid in a dark place. They played a third time, and the people won. It grew brighter in the east and the mountain lion slunk away into the darkness. They played a fourth time, and again the people won. The sun came up in the east, and it was day, the owl flew away and hid.*

*Even though it was light now, the people still didn't see much because they were underground. But the sun was high enough to look through a hole and discover that there was another world—this earth. He told the people. And they all wanted to go up there. They built four mounds to help them reach the upper world. In the east they mounded the soil and*

*planted it with all kinds of fruits and berries that were colored black. In the south they heaped up another mound and planted all kinds of fruits that were blue. In the west they built a mound that they planted with yellow fruits. In the north they planted the mound with fruits of variegated colors.*

*The mounds grew into mountains and the bushes blossomed, fruited, and produced ripened berries. One day two girls climbed up to pick berries and gather flowers to tie in their hair. Suddenly the mountains stopped growing ...*

*The mountains stopped growing while their tops were still a long way from the upper world. So the people tried laying feathers crosswise to make a ladder, but the feathers broke under their weight. The people made a second ladder of larger feathers, but again they were too weak. They made a third ladder of eagle feathers, but even these would not bear much weight. Then a buffalo came and offered his right horn, and three others also contributed their right horns. The horns were strong and straight, and with them the people were able to climb up through the hole to the surface of the earth. But the weight of those humans bent the buffalo horns, which have been curved ever since*

*Now the people fastened the sun and moon with spider threads so that they could not get away, and sent them up into the sky to give light. And since water covered the whole earth, four storms went to roll the waters away. The black storm blew to the east and rolled up the waters into the eastern ocean. The blue storm blew to the south and rolled up the waters in that direction. The yellow storm rolled up the waters in the west, and the varicolored storm went to the north and rolled up the waters there. So the tempests formed the four oceans in the east, the south, the west, and the north. Having rolled up the waters, the storms returned to where the people were waiting, grouped around the mouth of the hole.*

*The Polecat first went out, when the ground was still soft, and his legs sank in the black mud and have been black ever since. They sent the Tornado to bring him back, because it wasn't time. The badger went out, but he too sank in the mud and got black legs, and Tornado called him back. Then the beaver went out, walking through the mud and swimming through the water, and at once began to build a dam to save the water still remaining in the pools. When he did not return, Tornado found him and asked why he had not come back.*



*“Because I wanted to save the water for the people to drink,” said the beaver.*

*“Good,” said Tornado, and they went back together. Again the people waited, until at last they send out the gray crow to see if the time had come. The crow found the earth dry, and many dead frogs, fish, and reptiles lying on the ground. He began picking out their eyes and did not return until Tornado was sent after him. The people were very angry when they found he had been eating carrion, and they changed his color to black.*

*But now the earth was all dry except for the four oceans and the lake in the center, where the beaver had dammed up the waters. All the people came up. They traveled east until they arrived at the ocean; then they turned around south until they came again to the ocean; then they went west to the ocean, and then they turned north. And as they went, each tribe stopped where it wanted to. But the Jicarillas continued to circle around the hole where they had come up from the underworld. Three times they went around it, when the Ruler became displeased and asked them where they want to stop. They said, “In the middle of the earth.” So he led them to a place very near Taos and left them, and there near the Taos Indians, the Jicarillas made their home.*

Collected by James Mooney in the 1890s (Erdoes and Ortiz)

## The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Creation Story

*Long, long ago, the earth was deep beneath the water. There was a great darkness because no sun or moon or stars shone. The only creatures living in this dark world were water animals such as the beaver, muskrat, duck, and loon.*

*Far above the water-covered earth was the Land of the Happy Spirits, where the Great Spirit dwelled. In the center of this upper realm was a giant apple tree with roots that sank deep into the ground.*

*One day the Great Spirit pulled the tree up from its roots, creating a great pit in the ground. The Great Spirit called to his daughter, who lived in the Upper World. He commanded her to look into the pit. The young woman did as she was told and peered through the hole. In the distance, she saw the Lower World covered by water and clouds.*

*The Great Spirit spoke to his daughter, telling her to go down into the world of darkness. He then tenderly picked her up and dropped her into the hole. The woman, who would be called Sky Woman, by those creatures watching her fall, began to slowly float downward.*

*As Sky Woman continued her descent, the water animals looked up. Far upon them they saw a great light that was Sky Woman. The animals were initially afraid of the light emanating from her. In their fear they dove deep beneath the water.*

*The animals eventually conquered their fear and came back up to the surface. Now they were concerned about the woman, and what would happen to her when she reached the water.*

*The beaver told the others that they must find a dry place for her to rest upon. The beaver plunged deep beneath the water in search of earth. He was unsuccessful. After a time, his dead body surfaced to the top of the water.*

*The loon was the next creature to try to find some earth. He too was unsuccessful. Many others tried, but each animal failed. At last, the muskrat said he would try. When his dead body floated to the top, his little claws were clenched tight. The others opened his claws and found a little bit of earth.*

*The water animals summoned a great turtle and patted the earth upon its back. At once the turtle grew and grew, as did the amount of earth. This earth became North America, a great island.*

*During all this time, Sky Woman continued her gentle fall. The leader of the swans grew concerned as Sky Woman's approach grew imminent. He gathered a flock of swans that flew upward and allowed Sky Woman to rest upon their back. With great care they placed her upon the newly formed earth.*

*Soon after her arrival Sky Woman gave birth to twins. The first born became known as the Good Spirit. The other twin caused his mother so much pain that she died during his birth. He was to be known as the Evil Spirit.*

*The Good Spirit took his mother's head and hung it in the sky and it became the sun. The Good Spirit also fashioned the stars and moon from his mother's body. He buried the remaining parts of Sky Woman under the earth. Thus, living things may always find nourishment from the soil for it springs from Mother Earth.*

*While the Good Spirit provided light, the Evil Spirit created the darkness. The Good Spirit created many things, but each time his brother would attempt to undo his good work.*

*The Good Spirit made the tall and beautiful trees, including the pines and hemlock. The Evil Spirit, to be contrary, stunted some trees or put gnarls and knots in their trunks. Other trees he covered in thorns or poisoned their fruit.*

*The Good Spirit made bear and deer. The Evil Spirit made poisonous animals such as lizards and serpents to destroy the animals created by his brother.*

*When the Good Spirit made springs and streams of pure crystal water, the Evil Spirit poisoned some and placed snakes in others. The Good Spirit made beautiful rivers. The Evil Spirit pushed rocks and dirt into the rivers creating swift and dangerous currents.*

*Everything the Good Spirit made his wicked brother attempted to destroy.*

*After the Good Spirit completed the earth, he created man out of red clay. Placing man upon the earth, the Good Spirit instructed the man about how he should live. The Evil Spirit made a monkey out of sea foam.*

*Upon completion of his work, the Good Spirit bestowed a protecting spirit upon all of his creations. This done, he called his brother and told him he must cease making trouble. The Evil Spirit emphatically*

*refused. The Good Spirit became enraged at his brother's wickedness. He challenged his evil twin to combat. The winner would be the ruler of the world.*

*For their weapons they used the thorns of the giant apple tree. The battle raged for many days. The Good Spirit triumphed, overcoming his evil brother. The Good Spirit took his place as ruler of the earth and banished his brother to a dark cave under the ground. In this cave the Evil Spirit was to remain.*

Keller George, Oneida Wolf Clan, from the storytelling of his maternal great-grandmother.

In 1491 how many people were living in the Americas, how did they get here, how long had they been here, and what had they accomplished?

When most of us who now live in the United States and Canada learn about the history of our homeland, material starts with Christopher Columbus's landing on islands in the Caribbean in 1492. Little attention is given to the thousands of years before his arrival, to the people who had been living here and their accomplishments. Further, when information *is* given, it is generally a historical or archaeological list of "first this happened, then that," with little attention to the cultural diversity of the peoples who lived on what many Native peoples call **Turtle Island**.

Columbus and his men were probably not the first Europeans (or Asians or Africans) to come to the North American continent, but they did come with the intention to stay, and stay they, and many others following them, did. These early Europeans encountered people as diverse and advanced as they themselves were. Those of us living in the twenty-first century are often unaware of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the peoples who inhabited (and continue to inhabit) what we now call North America, how they got here or how long they've been here. This chapter will examine those questions, looking first at the population and cultural diversity of the First Peoples of North America previous to 1492.

## How many were there?!

It is difficult to estimate populations in the fifteenth century in most parts of the world. Most people lived in small societies; everyone knew everyone else, their families, and their ancestors. There was little reason to do a population count of how many people, how many women, men, and children, people over or under a certain age, and their occupations. This is the type of census now done in the United States and Canada every 10 years. A census shows not only the number of people in a society, but also how that society changes over time. Such a census is an important source of data for governments and for future historians and anthropologists. In the past, empires such as Rome in Europe, and the Aztec in Meso-America (present day Mexico and Central American) conducted censuses, largely for tax or tribute purposes, but most small-scale societies had no reason to do so. So how do we go about estimating population numbers from so long ago?

One way is to examine documents left by the Europeans (Spanish, French, English, Dutch, Russians, and many more) who came to the Americas. There are a number of problems with this method. First, not everyone kept records. Among the French, for example, while religious missionaries kept population counts (largely to show how many people they had converted), the **voyagers** who came for animal skins to trade in Europe did not. Further, Europeans based their population estimates on people they encountered; there is no way to estimate how many people they didn't meet.

Which leads to another issue: various Native peoples were encountered by Europeans at different times. The Caribbean peoples (**Caribs, Tanios, Arawaks**), the Meso-American peoples (**Maya** and **Aztecs**) and the many South American peoples were probably not the first indigenous peoples to encounter the Europeans. Perhaps surprising to many Euro-Americans and Canadians, the first Native Americans to encounter Europeans were not the peoples of the Caribbean, but the peoples of the Arctic and Sub-Arctic. Archaeological evidence indicates the Norse established villages in Greenland and Newfoundland 1,000 years ago. For whatever reasons, these sites were abandoned by 1500, and it is questionable these Norse sites had much impact on the Native peoples.

What is more intriguing, however, is the incidence of Native peoples from the area who somehow made it to Europe. There is historical evidence to show that Native peoples and artifacts were found in Europe, particularly in Ireland and the northern coast of Scotland. In the case of the artifacts, it seems they were found in the bodies of seals and other marine life. Perhaps the currents of the Gulf Stream and storms brought what were possibly Inuit peoples to the coast of Ireland. In *Lonely Voyagers*, the historian Jean Merrien notes that a man and woman were tied to wrecks that came ashore near Galway, Ireland; and that another man—specifically described as “red and strange” and not African, came ashore on the coast of Spain in a craft that appeared to be a hollowed-out tree. Merrien further suggests in *Christopher Columbus: The Mariner and the Man*, that Columbus may well have known about these incidents and assumed the people were from Cathay (China). In the 1500s (not long after Columbus’s display of people he had captured in the Caribbean) an Eskimo man and woman captured at sea were put on exhibition in various European cities.

Christopher Columbus came in contact with the peoples of the Caribbean, among them the Tanios, Arawaks, and Caribs. Later, Spanish conquerors such as Hernando Cortez conquered the peoples of Meso-America (present-day Mexico and Central America) such as the Maya and Aztecs. The contact continued to peoples living along the eastern seaboard, to the southwestern part of the United States, then the western coast of North America, and finally the peoples of the interior part of North America—the last to be encountered by Europeans. However, Native peoples did not have to have direct contact with Europeans to be affected by them. One of the most devastating of these encounters—direct or indirect—was disease.

The peoples of the Americas had no immunity to the diseases brought by Europeans. The populations of the Americas had been largely isolated from Europe, Africa, and Asia for thousands of years. In that time, many diseases evolved in the Old World. Diseases like smallpox, the plague, and even diseases that are now commonplace, such as measles, mumps, and chicken pox. Over time, the Europeans who survived these diseases, and their children, developed immunities to them. Despite surviving, they were still carriers of the disease, and they carried it to the Americas. The Native peoples had no immunity

to these diseases and many died from the exposure. Probably far more Native peoples died from disease than in warfare with Europeans. Europeans may have contracted diseases, such as a form of syphilis, from Native peoples as well, but the diseases passed onto the Europeans did not seem to have had the same devastating impact.

This population lost due to disease further complicates estimating how many people lived in the Americas before the significant European contact that followed in the wake of Columbus's arrival. Native peoples had extensive trade routes throughout Turtle Island. People met, traded goods, and often formed marriage alliances. As a result, trade goods often spread the European diseases before a specific society ever encountered a European, and well before the population size could be estimated.

Starting in the nineteenth century, archaeology and the examination of burials and the material remains of a society became a tool in helping to estimate Native populations before European contact. However, many early archaeologists didn't just examine burials for population estimates. In numerous instances, Native American skeletons were exhumed from burial sites and sent to various museums in the United States, Canada, and Europe for examination and storage. Often the data accompanying these remains were inadequate, so that now it is difficult to determine where a skeleton and other artifacts came from. Therefore, they are not very useful in determining population size.

It must be clear by now that trying to estimate a population from more than 500 years ago can be very difficult. Estimates for North America at that time have ranged from 8.4 million to 112.5 million. In 1976, geographer William Denevan (1992) used a combination of techniques and data to arrive at what he called a "consensus count" of 53.9 million people in the Americas in 1491 (with a margin of error of 20%, Denevan suggests population could have ranged between 43 million to 65 million). He divides the population into: 3.8 million for North America, 17.2 million for Mexico, 5.6 million in Central America, 3.0 million in the Caribbean, 15.7 million in the Andes, and 8.6 million in the lowlands of South America. The largest populations coincide with the city-state societies of the **Aztecs** and **Maya** in Mexico, and the **Inca** in Peru. Denevan further estimates that the First Peoples of the Americas suffered a death toll of 89%, striking their numbers from 53.9 million to 5.6 million by the sixteenth century, as

a result of disease, warfare, and the experience of slavery (Denevan: *Pristine Landscape*). Some populations, like the Maya, would not attain their pre-1492 population levels until the twentieth century. Some never have, some have become extinct. It is no wonder Native Americans refer to their experiences at the hands of European invaders as **genocide**.

Why then, from the very beginning of European settlement were the Americas described as vast, empty spaces ready to be occupied by Europeans who were feeling population pressures in their home countries? Both European governments, like the Spanish, French and British, and private companies with royal charters, like the Virginia Bay Colony, encouraged landless people to move and settle in the New World, where land and resources were plentiful. In part, this policy was based on relieving population pressure and civil unrest in Europe, and partly on the need to have people to harvest the resources of the Americas. Following the wake of the Spanish—who, it is estimated, removed \$40 billion of gold and silver from Meso- and South America—many came looking for gold, and instead found lumber, fish, animal skins, and a variety of foods not known in Europe, Asia, or Africa (Cowan). In the long run, these resources proved to be more valuable than the gold and silver that were soon depleted.

In his books *Indian Givers* and *Native Roots*, anthropologist Jack Weatherford examines how Native Americans enriched the world through their contributions of food and medicines. Weatherford estimates 70% to 75% of the world's food and medicines come from the Americas and were unknown in the Old World previous to the 1500s. Euro-Americans and Canadians usually think of tobacco, a plant used by Native Americans for religious and medical purposes, as an example of an indigenous American crop. Early colonial farmers like John Rolfe, the husband of Pocahontas, had to hybridize the native tobacco to suit the tastes of European smokers. More crucial were crops such as corn, beans, squash, tomatoes, potatoes, chili peppers, and chocolate. Not only did Native Americans develop and grow these important crops, they developed various varieties to adapt to various environmental factors. Thus they grew over 30 varieties of corn: some varieties adapted for drought, pests, and the shorter growing seasons of the Northeast. Early conquerors of the Southwest noted the rainbow colors of corn drying on the roofs of the pueblos.



In the nineteenth century, when Americans were working to distinguish themselves from their European kin as they established communities across the continent, they developed the concept of Manifest Destiny. This concept held that it was the destiny of “Americans” to occupy, settle, and civilize North America. This idea is depicted in the painting *American Progress* by John Gast in which a woman holds a book leading the way west for “American” settlers, driving the indigenous (Native Americans) people away into the darkness. Inherent within the understanding of Manifest Destiny was the belief that the Americas were vast nearly empty lands, not an area that was home to up to 53 million people. This myth that the Americas were nearly empty lands until Europeans got here is one that continues in the minds of Euro-Americans today. But Turtle Island, like Europe, was home to vast array of people who harvested resources, raised families, ran their communities, traded, and sometimes fought with, other communities.



Painter: John Gast Date: 1872 Source: wikipedia.org

*Spirit of the Frontier by John Gast 1872*

## Where do your people come from?

When Christopher Columbus returned to Spain after his first voyage to the Caribbean, he brought with him people, animals, plants, and other artifacts he had found during his travels. A two-month journey in a small, crowded ship was no doubt very difficult for the Caribbean natives who were unused to ocean travel. In Spain (indeed in all of Europe) their arrival caused quite an upheaval in the way Europeans viewed the world. At this time Europeans held that the earth was about 8,000 years old (based on the calculation of generations in the *Bible*), and that the world and everything in it was the same now as it was at the time of creation. So how could Europeans account for very different animals, plants, and people that did not fit into this very ordered view of the world?

The question of who the Native peoples of Turtle Island were and where they came from is one that various people have tried to answer since 1492. In the 1500s there were arguments about whether these indigenous peoples were even human or had souls. The Dominican priest Bartolome' de Las Casas, in 1542, established (at least for the Catholic Church) that Indians were human and had souls, that they were not a separate creation or created by the devil. But if that was so, how did they come to be in the Americas, separated from the rest of the world?

Over the last 500 years there have been a number of highly speculative theories about where the indigenous peoples of the Americas came from. One was that they are a remnant population from the Lost Continent of Atlantis. Another theory was that American Indians were the descendants of western societies (Egyptian, Greek, Irish, or Welsh) sailors who were blown off-course by storms to the Americas (were there women on these ships?). Another theory speculates that Native Americans were the descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel, though no explanation is given to how these tribes traveled from the deserts of the Middle East to the Americas. More recently, some speculators like Erich von Daniken (*Chariots of the Gods*: 1968) have maintained that Native Americans are the descendants of alien visitors from space who have lost the knowledge of their ancestors.

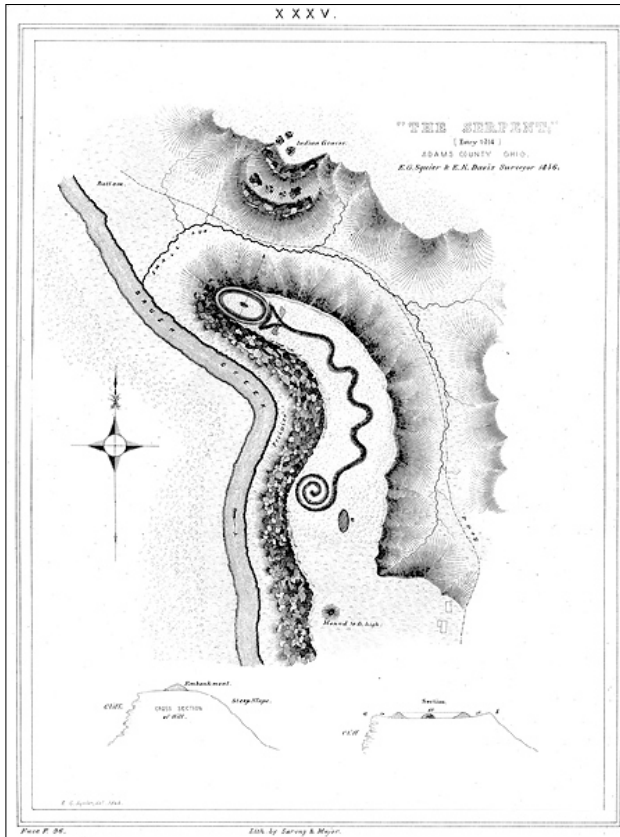
These theories are often based on the premise that Native Americans were not capable of building the monumental architecture and art found throughout the Americas. But those who encountered Native peoples early in the conquest of the Americas had no such thoughts. Cortez, the Spanish conquistador who attacked, conquered, and destroyed much of Tenochtitlan, the capital city of the Aztecs, was convinced the Aztecs had built the city. Cortez marveled at Tenochtitlan's floating gardens and public baths, which were so large that he said Rome could fit in one corner. However, he then destroyed much of it. But he didn't think men from outer space had built it; he knew that Aztecs had.

Archaeology has shown us how Native peoples were able to build monuments like those in Mexico; Monk's Mound of Cahokia, found not far from the present-day city of St. Louis; pueblos found throughout what is now the southwestern part of the United States; and mounds found in the Mississippi and Ohio river valleys. Like people throughout the world who built monuments, they started off small and learned as they went along.



CC-BY-SA 3.0 by wikipedia user: Skubastev834

*Monk's Mound, a Pre-Columbian Mississippian culture earthwork, located at the Cahokia site near Collinsville, Illinois. The concrete staircase is modern, but it is built along the approximate course of the original wooden stairs.*



Ephraim George Squier & Edwin Hamilton Davis, 1836. Accessed from wikipedia.org

*Drawing of the Serpent Mound Archaeological sites in Ohio by Ephraim George Squier & Edwin Hamilton Davis, Surveyor, 1836*

From the 1700s to today, amateur archaeologists and anthropologists wondered about the Native Americans they encountered and the artifacts they found. Thomas Jefferson, for example, had an extensive collection of Native artifacts he found in Virginia. The poet William Cullen Bryant wrote the poem “The Prairies,” in which he postulated that the peoples who had built the monumental architecture found in various parts of the Americas had been killed and supplanted by the more “brutish” and warlike Indian Americans. This belief about Native Americans was commonly held by Euro-Americans well into the twentieth century.

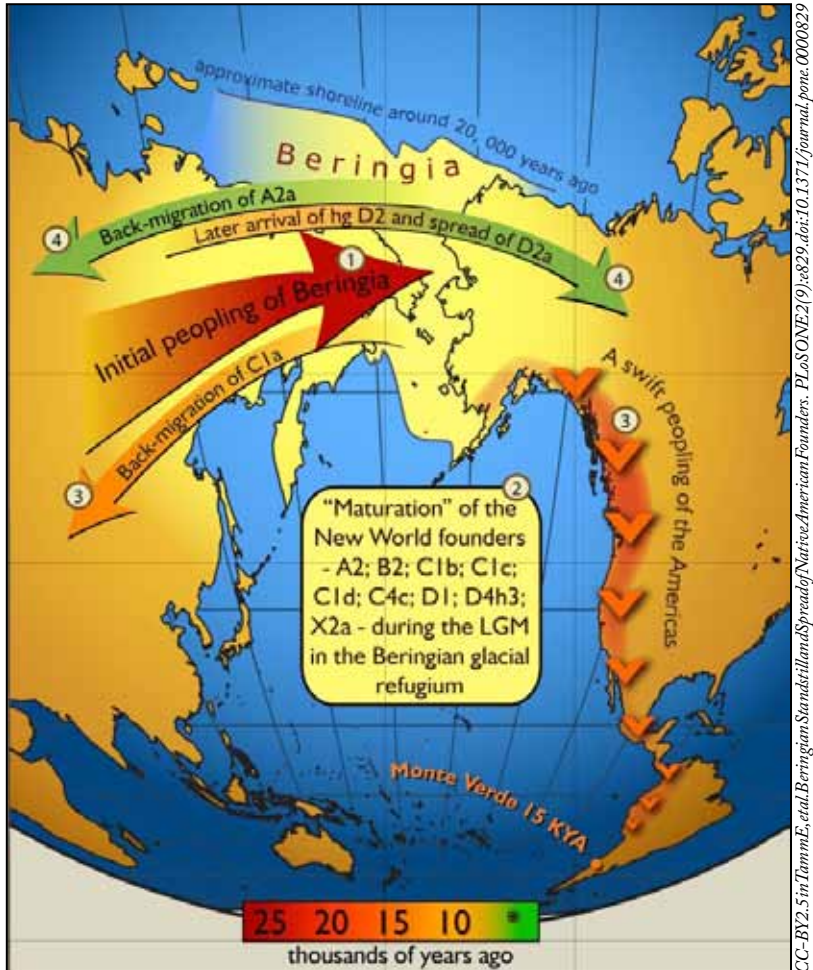
The development of archaeology and anthropology as an academic discipline in which people are trained to gather information with a defined set of **protocols** (the systematic collection and recording of data) started to develop in late nineteenth century. Throughout the twentieth and now twenty-first century, anthropologists and archaeologists continue to gather data about the Native peoples of the Americas. One of the big questions continues to be: Where did they come from?

The issue of where humans come from, how they developed (evolved) is one of the biggest general questions in anthropology and archaeology. The origination of people of a particular geographic area is part of that question. Scientifically there are two ways of looking at the evolution and migration of humans—**monogenesis** and **polygenesis**. Did humans start the evolutionary process in one geographic area (monogenesis), or in two or more (polygenesis)? Currently the evidence suggests, and most scientists would agree, that human (*Homo sapiens*) evolution started in Africa. For example, while archaeologists continue to find older and older skeletal remains of humans in the Americas, all these remains are fully modern humans. There have been no Neanderthals, *Homo erectus*, *Homo habilis*, nor any of the other early stages of human evolution found in the Americas.

Early populations of humans migrated from Africa to other parts of the world. In the twenty-first century we may forget that until the 1869 construction of the Suez Canal, a thin strip of land connected Africa to Asia and Europe. So that part of the migration pattern is relatively easy to understand, but how did people (fully **modern** humans like us) get across vast oceans to the Americas?

Here knowledge of geology is helpful. Unlike the Europeans of Columbus's time, we now know the world we live in did not always look like it does now, and it will change in the future as well. The planet Earth has gone through periods of glaciations and melting. What is now dry land, may have been an ocean thousands of years ago. Mountains erupt and then wear down. Earth is an ever-changing landscape. Changes in land, geology, and topography made it possible even necessary for early humans to migrate out of Africa.

One of the oldest theories about how humans came to the Americas is based on geological evidence that suggests present-day Alaska was connected to present day Siberia by a land bridge. This phenomenon is called the Bering Land Bridge (for the Bering Strait, which it crosses) or Beringia.



*Bering Land Bridge*

The Bering Land Bridge was in existence at several different periods in the last 100,000 years: 28,000-10,000 **BP (before present)**, 50,000-40,000 years BP and 100,000-70,000 years BP. It was over 100 miles wide at its widest point and would have been crossable for hundreds of years before it was covered up in water and then appeared again

as ocean levels rose and fell. While most of northern North America was covered by glaciers, geological evidence suggest there might been ice-free corridors that could have allowed for the migration of people and animals. These factors made it possible for not just people, but also plants and animals to migrate back and forth between North America and Asia over long periods of time. It is postulated that humans came east, while early ancestors of the horse (hyaacotherium, which was about the size of a fox) for example, went west to Asia where they continued to migrate and evolve until they were brought back, first by the Spanish and then other Europeans.

Until recently the Bering Land Bridge was the most commonly accepted theory about how people came to the Americas. However, new archaeological evidence continues to emerge that suggests other migratory patterns. If you looked at the map of the Bering Land Bridge you may have speculated about another possible route to the Americas: down along the Pacific coastal areas of present-day western Canada and the United States. Archaeologist Carole Mandrik has called this the Aboriginal Pacific Coast Highway. Unfortunately, archaeological evidence to support this theory in most cases would now be under water, as the coastal area of western North America has shifted. However, some archaeological evidence has been found in caves and other protected areas along the West Coast that supports the theory of possible migration along coastal areas.

In the popular media such as the January 2000 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* the article “The Diffusionists Have Landed” speculated that people from Europe, Asia, or Africa might have been coming to the Americas by boat for long periods of time before Columbus appeared. Archaeologists have evidence for Viking settlements in Greenland and what is now Labrador in Canada, but for whatever reasons these settlements did not last long. The impact of these Viking settlements on Native peoples was probably negligible.

People could also have sailed from Asia on boats. Archaeologists now know people were migrating to and settling in Polynesia 60,000 to 80,000 years ago. Most recently some researchers have speculated that people could have sailed from Africa to the Americas, as the ocean and wind currents are more favorable for western sailing in the Southern Hemisphere than in the Northern.

Certainly we don't give our ancestors enough credit. They had the same three-pound brains we have. The fact that humans are still here attests to their intelligence and ingenuity. However, just because people could have done something doesn't mean they did. We need archaeological or biological evidence to demonstrate that Africans or Asians sailed to the Americas. And if they did, what impact did they have? Further archaeological inquiry will help to either prove or disprove these hypotheses.

From the story at the beginning of this section we see that Native American societies have their own beliefs about where they came from, but not all Native American societies have the same beliefs. In 1491, over 700 languages were spoken in what is now North America. Each one of those languages represents a different society with its own set of customs and beliefs. So there may well have been 700 stories about each society's origins. However, these Native stories seem to fall into two categories, and the stories at the beginning of this section illustrate both: Emergence from the Underground and Earth Diver stories.

In Emergence stories people once lived underground. For various reasons, they embark on a journey that eventually leads them to emerge into the above-ground world. Societies that have emergence tales are able to point out where their ancestors emerged from the underground. In Earth Diver stories, people once lived in the Sky World above Earth, which was a great body of water with only aquatic animals living in it. For various reasons, a pregnant woman (Sky Woman) falls from the Sky World. The water birds see her falling and fly up to cushion her fall with their wings. They put her on the back of a turtle. An Earth Diver (often a beaver, otter, or muskrat) dives to the bottom of the water to bring up a paw-full of earth, which Sky Woman takes and spreads over the back of the turtle. As she does so, the Earth spreads to become the land the Natives knew. That is why many Native Americans refer to their world as the Island on the Back of the Turtle, or Turtle Island.

## How Long Ago?

The United States and Canada are young countries. Perhaps for that reason some Euro-Americans or Euro-Canadians find it very important to be able to establish how long their ancestors have been



in their respective countries. People will do extensive research to show when a certain ancestor came to North America and from where, or which ancestors fought in the American Revolution or the War of 1812. Native Americans tend not to worry too much about these matters; their ancestors have always been here.

But for many others, and certainly for historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists, the questions of how long people have been here are important ones. As has already been shown, only fully modern human remains are found in the Americas, which means migration would have occurred less than 100,000 years ago. The availability of the Bering Bridge would have been important for at least some migrations. Geologists believe the land bridge was in existence three times in the last 100,000 years: between 28,000 and 10,000; 50,000 and 40,000; and 100,000 and 70,000 years ago. Consequently, people could have been migrating to the Americas over different routes and at different times. Archaeological and linguistic (language) data certainly indicate this.

Archaeology has been very important in helping to determine how long people have been in the Americas, but it is far from perfect. Archaeological research done in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries relied on the concept of **superposition** to determine how old artifacts were. This basically means that the deeper down in the ground an artifact is found, the older it is. A nineteenth-century archaeologist would assume that artifacts found 6 inches under the ground are more recent than artifacts found a foot down. This makes sense, except that a number of factors can disturb areas in which artifacts are found. The freezing and thawing of water in lakes and rivers (where most early settlements are found), the freezing and thawing of the ground itself; earthquakes; and the effects of farming, such as plowing—these all may shift layers of dirt, moving artifacts farther up or down in the ground.

In the 1950s the use of carbon 14 (radiocarbon dating) was developed for dating purposes. In this technique, the amount of carbon 14, a chemical found in all living things, is measured. When an **organism** dies, the amount of carbon 14 starts to decay. By measuring the amount of carbon 14 left in the artifact, archaeologists can estimate how old an **organic** artifact is.

Using this technique archaeologists were able to estimate the age of a mastodon butchering area to 8,500 years. Found with the mastodon were very unique **projectile points**, called **Folsom Points**.

The organic bones of the mastodon supplied the dating information, while finding a projectile point embedded in one of the bones clearly indicated the animal had at least been butchered, if not killed, by the people who made the Folsom Points.



*Courtesy of the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Bureau of Land Management*

*A Folsom Point from the Paleo-indian Lithic stage Folsom tradition.*



*Courtesy of the Government of the Commonwealth of Virginia*

*Clovis point: Example of a Clovis fluted blade that is 11,000 years old.*

Problems associated with carbon 14 dating are that it can only be done with organic materials, so projectile points or pottery cannot be dated. Another problem is that the testing process destroys a large part of the artifact. Archaeologists and geologists also use **potassium-argon** dating which can be used to determine the age of igneous and volcanic rock. In potassium-argon dating, the radioactive isotope of potassium 40 decays to the gas argon 40. By comparing the proportion of potassium 40 to argon 40, the date of rocks can be determined. However, the rocks must be carefully collected, and it can be difficult to determine if any marks or wear on the rocks are the result of human activity or natural erosion. Additionally, the **standard deviations** for age estimates are very large (Fagan 1989).

Archaeologists, especially those within the subfield of bioarchaeology, have long used biological material such as skeletons, especially skulls, to make hypotheses and draw conclusions about where Native Americans may have originated and possible relationships to other populations. However, skeletal material is very **plastic** or flexible; it is changed, sometimes within a generation, by environmental factors such as diet. So, drawing comparisons between skeletons from one continent to another, or even on the same continent, can be tricky.

However, with the ability of biologists to now isolate and study genetic material, a new area of data is available to bioarchaeologists. In the 1980s, Glen Doran of Florida State University conducted excavations at peat bogs at the Windover Site in Florida. The low oxygen levels and neutral pH of the bog preserved burials that were between 7,000 to 8,000 years old. Thanks to earlier research done in extracting DNA from brain tissue (see Allan Wilson 1977 and Svante Paabo 1988), Doran was able to extract DNA from the brain tissue of 60 mummies. Microbiologists discovered that the genetic material of the brain tissue from the bog mummies varied very little, even though the bog had been used as a burial site for thousands of years (Thomas: *Skull Wars*).

Research such as Doran's leads other microbiologists and bioarchaeologists to study the genetic make-up of Native Americans. At this time, research such as this indicates the indigenous populations of the Americas probably **diverged** from common genetic ancestors between 15,000 and 40,000 years ago. Combined with what we know about geology, this divergence would have occurred after humans came to the Americas. Data such as these helped scientists determine that the genetic differences between Asian and Native Americans populations would have occurred between 21,000 and 42,000 years ago (Thomas).

Another type of research that can be helpful in illustrating the differences between Native American and other world populations and how long ago they occurred is linguistics, the study of languages. Linguists have been studying the relationships between languages for hundreds of years. Typically they analyzed sets of **cognates** (common words) to find language families (languages that descend from a common proto or mother language). In this way the American anthropologist Alfred Kroeber postulated the possibility of seven American Indian languages in the early twentieth century.

More recently Joseph Greenberg of Stanford University hypothesized three language families that he called **Amerind**, **Na-Dene**, and **Eskimo-Aleut**. He suggests that the Eskimo-Aleut and Na-Dene speaking populations had arrived in the Americas more recently than the Amerind-speaking populations. Greenberg thinks that the speakers of Amerind would be responsible for the Clovis

projective points found by archaeologists. However, many experts in Native American languages discount Greenberg's (an expert in African languages) hypothesis.

Attempts to merge theories from archaeology, microbiology, and linguistics to make hypotheses about the origin and time of migrations to the Americas have run into much criticism, largely because the data used by these sciences are so very different. The data from archaeology and geology can be very useful, as can data from archaeology and microbiology. But including linguistics can be very problematic, as languages can be both conservative (resistant to change) and flexible. The rate of language change can be dependent on a number of factors; including how many other populations and languages one society encountered, and if that society decided to use language as a means to maintain cultural identity in the wake of encountering other cultures, or to incorporate new words and phrases as has often been done in our English language.

However biological, archaeological, geographic, and linguistic evidence indicates that the peoples of the Americas have been a unique population for more than 10,000 years. Peoples from other parts of the world may have found their way to the Americas, but there is no evidence these visitors had any impact on the peoples or the societies already here until the events of 1492.

It is interesting that the questions about how long Native Americans have been in the Americas, and what other populations may have influenced them, is such a hot issue of debate, especially in the popular media. In Europe, Germans or Spaniards seldom have to defend how long ago their ancestors arrived in Europe. If asked, they would probably say their ancestors were always in Europe, just as Native Americans would say their ancestors were always in the Americas. However, with the exception of the Basque people, the ancestors of Europeans migrated to Europe as well, many of them in time frames similar to that of the migrations to the Americas. This shows us the mobility of those ancestors and raises questions about why they migrated. It doesn't call into doubt the identity or sovereignty of those peoples. Like questions about how many people were in the Americas in 1491, the subtext of such questions by Euro-Americans about how long ago Native Americans got here can be, "Well, they

weren't here that long ago. They are immigrants, just like us." Like the concept of Manifest Destiny this underlying message undermines the validity of Native American claims for sovereignty.

More interesting questions than how long have people been in the Americas, and how many were here in 1491 are: What did they do once they got here? How did those societies organize their kin groups? What resources did they have? What was their political organization? Were the roles of women and men similar or very different? What were their religious beliefs? What did their expressive culture (art) sound like and look like? How did those societies survive (or not) their encounters with Europeans and Euro-Americans? What do Native American societies look like today? These questions, and many more, will be addressed in the following chapters.

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## Suggested Questions

What theories do you have about how humans came to the Americas? Are you familiar with the book *Chariots of the Gods*? Have you heard other theories about how other non-Native American peoples came to the Americas and what influence they had? Why would aboriginal people be upset by these theories?

Much of the discussion about the impact or influence of Europeans, Asians, or possible extraterrestrials on Native American societies focuses on the building of monumental architecture like that found among the Incas in Peru, the Mayas and Aztecs in Mexico and Central America, the pueblos in the southwestern United States, and mounds in the Ohio and Mississippi river valleys. Yet monumental architecture is found everywhere around the world. Why do you think the idea that indigenous Americans did not build monumental architecture persists?

The *Human Genome Project* is attempting to gather DNA from people across the world to “map” genetic differences and similarities. Despite the scientific importance of DNA research, most indigenous Americans are opposed to being part of such a study. Why do you think this is so?

What is **genocide**? In what context have you heard this word before? The application of the word genocide to the experiences of the indigenous peoples of the Americas after European contact is controversial. Why do you think this is so?

Many families have members who are involved in genealogical research. What do you know about the origins and history of your family? Why do you think genealogical research is important to some people? Why would genealogical research be difficult for people of Native American ancestry?

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## Suggested Resources

Good references for pre-European contact indigenous populations and environments is *The Pristine Landscape* by William Denevan, published in *The Wilderness Debate*, edited by J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, and *The First Americans: In Pursuit of America's Greatest Mystery*, by J.M. Adovasio with Jake Page.

Carole Mandryk's article “Invented Traditions and the Ultimate American Origin Myth: In the beginning...there was an ice free-corridor,” in *The Settlement of the American Continents*, edited by C. Michael Barton, et al., is an excellent presentation of recent archeological investigations into alternative indigenous migration

routes and dates to the Americas, as well as *Quest for the Lost Land*, by Renee Hetherington et.al. that appeared in the February 2004 issue of *Geotimes*.

*Windover: Multidisciplinary Investigation of an Early Archaic Florida Cemetery*, by Glen Doran, is an excellent presentation of archaeological and biological evidence about a unique Native American burial site.

The article “How Columbus Sickened the World: Why Were Native Americans so Vulnerable to the Diseases European Settlers Brought With Them,” by D.J. Meltzer (*New Scientist*, 1992:30-38) is a good summary of the consequences of European diseases in the New World.

For more information about Bartolome’ de las Casas, an accessible article is “Prophet and Apostle: Bartolome’ de las Casas and the Spiritual Conquest of America,” in *Christianity and Missions: 1450-1800* edited by J.S. Cummins.

*American Indian Population Recovery in the 20th Century* by Nancy Shoemaker, is a good historical discussion of indigenous population loss and recovery.

In addition to the archaeology resources cited in the Introduction, *An Introduction to Archaeology*, by Brain Fagan, is a good presentation of how archaeology is done, with particular reference to North America.

If your library has a copy of the pricey *American Indian Linguistics and Literatures* by William Bright (English publication by Mouton de Gruyter, 1984) it is an excellent source of information about American Indian languages.

*The Oldest Europeans: Who are we? Where do we come from? What made European women different?* by J.F. del Giorgio, discusses human migrations to Europe and the history of the Basque people.

There of a number of websites (many of them free) which help people in doing genealogical research about their families.



## Chapter 2

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# ALL OUR RELATIONS

## The Neglectful Mother (Cochiti)

*Crow had been sitting on the eggs in her nest for many days, and she got tired of it and flew away. Hawk came by and found nobody on the nest. Hawk said to herself, "The person who own this nest must no longer care for it. What a shame for those poor little eggs! I will sit on them, and they will be my children." She sat for many days on the eggs, and finally they began to hatch. Still no Crow came. The little ones all hatched out and the mother Hawk flew about getting food for them. They grew bigger and bigger and their wings got strong and at last it was time for the Mother Hawk to take them off the nest.*

*After all this while, Crow finally remembered her nest. When she came back to it she found the eggs hatched and Hawk taking care of her little ones.*

*"Hawk!"*

*"What is it?"*

*"You must return these little ones you are leading around."*

*"Why?"*

*"Because they are mine."*

*Hawk said, "Yes, you laid the eggs, but you had no pity on the poor things. You went off and left them. I came and sat on the nest. When they were hatched, I fed them and now I lead them about. They are mine, and I won't return them."*

*Crow said, "I shall take them back."*

*"No, you won't! I worked for them, and for many days I fasted, sitting there on the eggs. In all that time you didn't come near them. Why is it now, when I've taken care of them and brought them up, that you want them back?"*

*Crow said to the little ones, "My children, come with me. I am your mother."*

*But the little ones said they did not know her. "Hawk is our mother." At last when she couldn't make them come with her, she said, "Very well, I'll take Hawk to court, and we shall see who has the right to these children."*

*So Mother Crow took Mother Hawk before the king of the birds. Eagle said to Crow, "Why did you leave your nest?" Crow hung her head and had no answer to that. But she said, "When I came back to my nest, I found my eggs already hatched and Hawk taking charge of my little ones. I have come to ask that Hawk return my little ones to me."*

*Eagle said to Mother Hawk, "How did you find this nest of eggs?"*

*"Many times I went to it and found it empty. No one came for a long time, and at last I had pity on the poor little eggs. I said to myself, 'The mother who made this nest can no longer care for these eggs. I will be glad to hatch the little ones.' I sat on them and they hatched. Then I went about getting food for them. I worked hard and brought them up, and they have grown."*

*Mother Crow interrupted Mother Hawk and said, "But they are my children. I laid the eggs."*

*"It's not your turn. We are both asking for justice, and it will be given to us. Wait till I have spoken."*

*Eagle said to Mother Hawk, "Is that all?"*

*"Yes, I have worked hard to raise my own two little ones. Just when they were grown, Mother Crow came and asked to have them back again, but I won't give them back. It is I who fasted and worked, and they are now mine."*

*The king of the birds said to Mother Crow, "If you really had pity on your little ones, why did you leave the nest for so many days? And why are you demanding to have them now? Mother Hawk is the mother of the little ones, for she has fasted and hatched them, and flown about searching for their food. Now they are her children."*

*Mother Crow said to the king of the birds, "King, you should ask the little ones which mother they choose to follow. They know enough to know which one to take."*

*So the king said to the little ones, "Which one will you choose?"*

*Both answered together, "Mother Hawk is our mother, She's all the mother we know."*

*Crow cried, "No, I'm your only mother!"*

*The little Crow children said, "In the nest you had no pity on us; you left us. Mother Hawk hatched us, and she is our mother."*

*So it was finally settled as the little ones had said: they were the children of Mother Hawk, who had had pity on them in the nest and brought them up.*

*Mother Crow began to weep. The king said to her, "Don't cry. It's your own fault. This is the final decision of the king of the birds." So Mother Crow lost her children.*

Recorded by Ruth Benedict in 1931. (Erdoe and Ortiz)

The study of families or **kinship** is essential to anthropology. Often the first thing an anthropologist does during **fieldwork** is start collecting information about families: who's related to whom? How are they related—by birth or by marriage? Do marriage partners come from the same village or not? How do people set up residence after they are married? This information tells us a lot, not only about family structures, but also about how the larger society is organized, the economic obligations between people, and even how people acquire and maintain status in the larger society. Frequently there are religious and other traditions that explain and uphold ideals about kinship.

It is often assumed that in **post-Industrial** societies like the United States or Canada, kinship is less important than in the small-scale societies typically studied by anthropologists. Unlike people in traditional small-scale societies, most people in the United States or Canada are highly mobile; we often don't live in the same town or city in which we grew up, much less the same area where our grandparents grew up. We are hard-pressed to identify distant cousins, or the generations of ancestors beyond our great-grandparents. But are ideas about kinship so different? Who is helping most students pay for college? Who do you look to when you need money? Who do you turn to if you are sick or feeling down and need emotional support? Despite distance, expense, and hassle, people go to great extremes to celebrate important days such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, birthdays, and anniversaries with family members. In societies around the world, families provide economic and emotional support to its members. Societies differ when it comes to: who is a member of my family, to whom may I go for support?

It is an axiom in anthropology that one of the most important things kinship structure tells an individual in a society is who they can marry and with whom they can have sex. In the early twentieth century, the anthropologist Branislaw Malinowski wrote the **ethnography**, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North Western Melanesia*. It was one of the first books in anthropology to gain a wide, general readership. But the title is deceiving. The book isn't about sex, it is about kinship. Because, as the readers of this book soon learned: a society's acknowledgement of whom an individual is related to by blood or birth then determines whom that individual may have sex with or marry. In the United States, Canada, or any other society, who you are related to by blood has been determined by your society.

No matter how liberal a particular society's attitudes about sex or marriage may be, there are always rules. The most basic rule for all societies is the **incest taboo (tabu)**: an individual may not have sex with or marry someone who is a close blood relative. One of the most basic kinship differences between societies is the determination of who is a blood relative. In anthropology, people biologically related to each other are called **consanguine kin** (from the Latin word for blood). It may seem obvious who your consanguine kin are, but there is a lot of variety among humans and their societies.

Like all other scientists, anthropologists put the data or information they collect into categories. In examining the information about consanguine kinship, anthropologists use the following categories:

**Matrilineal**—kin relationships are traced through the mother, children belong to the kin group of their mother.

**Patrilineal**—kin relationships are traced through the father, children belong to the kin group of their father.

**Bilineal (bilateral)**—kin relationships are traced through both the father's and mother's kin groups.

**Ambilineal**—kin relationships are different for men and women. All men belong to the same kin group, which is usually headed by the ruler of the society. He is often considered to be descended from a god. Women all belong to the same kin group, headed by the queen of the society. She is considered to be descended from a goddess. This arrangement occurs in very few societies, so it will not be discussed in great detail.

These categories may seem relatively simple, but they can have strong impacts on other aspects of society, as we will discuss in Chapter 4. And are they so simple? How would you categorize the dominant kin groups of the United States and Canada? Bilineal? If so, why do most of us have the last names of our fathers, as in patrilineal societies? Further, in a patrilineal or matrilineal society the incest taboo is applied differently to the mother's or father's side of the family. So whether a society is matrilineal or patrilineal can determine with whom you can have sex and marry and who you cannot.

The most obvious way to see how important being patrilineal, matrilineal, or bilineal can be is in the concept of **cross and parallel cousins**. In a matrilineal society your parallel cousins are your mother's siblings' children; your cross cousins are your father's siblings' children. In a patrilineal society your parallel cousins are your father's siblings' children; your cross cousins are your mother's siblings' children. In a bilineal society there are no distinctions between cross and parallel cousins. So why make such a distinction? Because in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies, you may (it is sometimes encouraged) marry your cross cousins, but never your parallel cousins.

So why doesn't marrying your cross cousins violate the incest taboo? Because in a matrilineal society you belong to the kin group of your mother; your father is of another kin group entirely. In a patrilineal society, you belong to the kin group of your father; your mother is from another kin group, and generally remains so even after marriage. Thus, cross cousin marriage in matrilineal or patrilineal societies does not violate the incest taboo. In some instances cross cousin marriage may even be encouraged because of another concept that can limit who you can marry, within the group or outside of the group.

Anthropologists will often refer to societies as being either **endogamous** or **exogamous**. In an exogamous society people typically (in some instances must) marry someone from outside of their group or **locality** (where they live, their village or town). In an endogamous society people typically marry someone from their community. Cross cousin marriage are typically found in endogamous societies and the practice helps to increase the relationships between families, which encourages those related families to work with each other in getting resources. In an exogamous society, individuals and families build relationships with families in other localities.

Anthropologists have another category when examining the kinship organization of society: **moieties**. In moieties the kin groups of a particular society are divided into two groups, which may be exogamous. Moieties often function as ceremonial divisions in a society. For example, among the Iroquois, when a member of your kin group dies, the members of a different moiety will plan and conduct the funeral to "help wipe the tears from your eyes." Among the Tewa, a Puebloan group living in the southwestern part of the U.S. moieties function as a very important part of the ritual and ceremonial aspect of the society. Men and women must marry someone from another moiety, and women will be adopted into the moiety of their husbands after they marry (Ortiz 1969).

There is one more concept to discuss within consanguine kinship: that of **Lineage** and **Clans**. In societies that recognized lineages (they are often patrilineal), the members of the lineage can trace their descent from a common ancestor. In the United States and Canada, people may be able to trace their descent from Thomas Jefferson or John MacDonald. (the first prime minister of Canada) All people who can trace their descent to Jefferson or MacDonald, particularly

through the patrilineal line, belong to the same lineage. A clan is harder to define. The members of a clan believe they are related, even if they cannot trace their descent to a common ancestor. Both lineages and clans are exogamous. Having sex with or marrying someone from your clan or lineage would be considered incest. Lineages are often found in patrilineal societies, clans in matrilineal societies. Many Native American societies recognize clans. While European societies are now generally patrilineal, (although, less than a 1,000 years ago the Irish were matrilineal), Native American societies can be matrilineal, patrilineal, or bilineal. Further, these kinship organizations are very flexible and have changed within the last 200 years.

In Tewa society there are two patrilineal clans: Summer and Winter. Ortiz says that children are not automatically born into those clans, but must go through several rituals of “incorporation.” Women are generally adopted into the clan of their husbands after marriage. Further, children may be adopted into the other clan, even after being incorporated into a clan. Ortiz gives an example of a man who had only daughters. When they married, they were adopted into the clan of their husbands. The father then adopted a son of his oldest daughter into his clan. Medicine people and healers would also adopt apprentices who were not of their clan into their clan. All these adoptions involved rituals of incorporation (Ortiz 1969).

The Iroquois (Haundenosaune) society is a group of Native Americans linked by language, political organization, and kin groups. They have and continue to occupy the area of what are now northern New York and southern Quebec and Ontario for around 2,000 years. The Iroquois are a matrilineal society in which the consanguine kin groups are organized into clans: Bear, Wolf, Deer, Hawk, Snipe, Heron, Turtle, Beaver and Eel. The Iroquois don't believe they are descended from these animals, but in the ancient times of oral tradition, the relationship between animals and people was so close they could even communicate with each other. As you read in the story about Sky Woman, the Turtle provided a place for her to land and on which the Earth now resides. The women of the Bear clan learned about medicinal plants from a shape-changing bear.

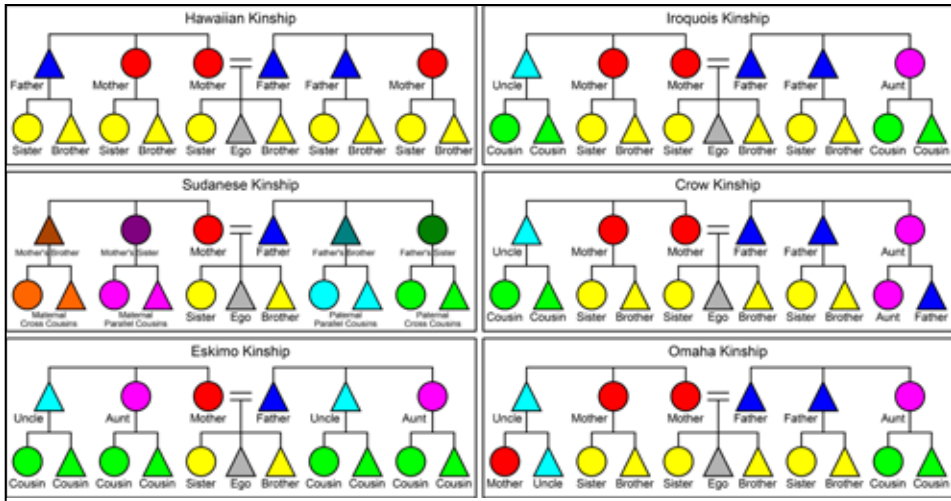
The Navajo (Dine') are also considered to be a matrilineal society. Unlike the Iroquois, a Navajo would say s/he is born **to the clan of his/her mother and for the clan of his/her father**. Further, the Dine'

recognize their relatedness to their maternal and paternal grandfathers' clans. The incest taboo would apply to all four clans. The Navajo are considered matrilineal because the inheritance of **usufruct rights** (the rights of individuals to use land or other resources) transfers from mother to daughters.

The Inuit of the Arctic are an example of a bilateral society. Kinship is equally traced through both the mother's and the father's side. The Inuit live in a treacherous natural environment. Their kinship organization may be because the people of this society must depend on one another for survival. The more people you can call on for help, the more likely you (and they) will survive. Bilateral societies are typically foragers, traveling from area to area to get needed resources. They may have been mobile and bilateral for centuries, like the Inuit. Others, like the Cheyenne and Sioux, may have become bilateral after changes in economic and settlement patterns caused by Euro-Americans intrusions into their territory resulted in them morphing from settled, horticultural societies to foraging societies. Bilateral kinship organization was more adaptive to the mobility of foragers and increased kin networks.

As stated previously, one of the first things an anthropologist does in the field is to gather information about kinship. A narrative about kin organization for a society would be long and confusing. Instead, anthropologists utilize **kinship charts** to organize and present information. The structure of kinship charts is standardized, so any anthropologist can understand the data presented, whether they are familiar with the society being described or the language of the anthropologist. Kinship charts for matrilineal, patrilineal, and bilateral societies are subtly different, but they do show the differences in the kinship organization.





Courtesy of Zander Schubert: based on information from "Systematic Kinship Terminologies": <http://www.uminitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/kinterms/termsys.html>. CC-BY 3.0

*A two-generation comparison of the six major kinship systems (Hawaiian, Sudanese, Eskimo, Iroquois, Crow and Omaha). Circle=female Triangle=male. Relatives marked with the same non-gray color are called by the same kinship term (ignoring sex-differentiation in the sibling/cousin generation, except where this becomes structurally-relevant under the Crow and Omaha systems).*

Much of the importance of determining consanguine kin is for purposes of marriage. Marriage gives not only the individual, but also his/her entire family a whole new set of kin or family members. People who are related by marriage are called **affine** or **affinal kin**. Affinal kin broaden the social and economic networks for individuals in a society. Through marriage, your affines provide more people you can turn to for economic help and resources. Your affines can help in raising children or raising your family status. They may even provide a place for you to live.

The expectation in societies like the United States or Canada is that when a young couple gets married, they will establish their own **residence**. In anthropology this is called **neolocality**. It is further expected that, generally, this new marriage will lead to children, who will live with their parents. In anthropological terms this is a **nuclear family**: parents and children living in the same residence. When our politicians talk about family values, they are referring to nuclear families. But for most of human history, and still in many societies, people live in **extended families** that include grandparents,

aunts, uncles, and cousins and two— sometimes more—generations. Societies usually have expectations about how residence patterns are established, and anthropologists have terms for them:

**Matrilocal**—when a couple gets married they reside with the wife’s extended kin group.

**Patrilocal**—when a couple gets married they reside with the husband’s kin group.

**Bilocal**—when a couple gets married they may reside with either the wife’s or husband’s kin, but they do not establish a new residence.

**Avunculocal**—when a couple has sons they go live with the mother’s brothers. This residence pattern occurs in some matrilineal societies.

Frequently, but not always, a matrilineal society will be matrilocal or avunculocal, while a patrilineal society is typically patrilocal, and bilateral societies are typically bilocal.

For most of human history, marriage was not a romantic arrangement between two individuals, it was an economic relationship between two families. Because consanguineal and affinal kin depend upon each other for economic resources, the marriages between members of their kin groups are very important. Elder family members will arrange marriages for younger members to ensure the most advantageous economic arrangement. The individuals seeking a marriage, and their families, must show or exchange their economic resources. Again, anthropology has categories for the different ways resources are exchanged between families:

**Bride wealth**—The intended groom and his family provide economic resources to the intended bride and her family. This is not “buying a wife.” The groom and his family demonstrate they can contribute resources to the bride and her family. The groom and his family also acknowledge the labor and economic value of the bride. In a patrifocal society the groom’s family is compensating the bride’s family for the loss of her and her labor. Women have relatively high status in societies that practice bride wealth. The exchange of bride wealth is found in many Native American and African societies.

**Bride service**—The intended groom must provide labor to the bride's family for a period time, or in a matrilineal society, the rest of his life, as he will be living with his wife's extended family. Again, the groom is showing he can make economic contributions to his bride's family. A number of Native American societies, like the Navajo, have bride service. The practice is also found in the Old Testament (for example, Abraham must work 14 years for his intended father-in-law in order to marry Rebekkah).

**Gift exchange**—The families of the bride and groom exchange gifts as part of the marriage ceremony. Again, the families demonstrate they can help support the bride and groom, and each other. However, status may be achieved through the exchange of the gifts. If one side of the family can offer gifts of greater value, they have attained a higher level of status than the other family. This is particularly true among societies of the Northwest Coast who have **potlatches** (a redistribution of resources by giving them away during a ceremony).

**Dowry**—In societies that have dowries as part of the marriage, women and their families must provide economic resources to the groom and his family. In order for a woman to get married, she must provide a dowry. If her family is able to provide a sizeable dowry, she may be able to marry into a higher status family and thus improve the status and resources of her children. Dowries indicate that women hold a lower status in a society and are rare in Native American societies. European and many Asian societies have, or historically had, dowries, which put women in a very vulnerable position, as they couldn't get married without resources, and they lost control of those resources when they got married. If the husband were to waste those resources, the woman and her children could be left destitute. If the husband died before a woman bore a son who could provide for her, she was often sent back to her family, who may or may not have taken her back in.

These are traditions that were practiced until fairly recently around the world. In some places they are still practiced. Societies of the Northwest Coast still have potlatches, though the gifts given away are different than they were 200 years ago. In addition to fishing, people of the Northwest also gathered a wide array of edible and medical plants. While men and women had specific jobs in securing resources, both contributed to the wealth of families and the community, and

shared in the labor to get that wealth. As a result, women had fairly equal status with men in their societies. This equal status was reflected in the fact that both men and women of rank and wealth could be chiefs and have more than one spouse. Because the area is so rich, the people of the Northwest were probably one of the only foraging societies worldwide able to have resource surpluses. These surpluses became very important in the status hierarchy of these societies. Such hierarchy sets the Northwest societies apart because foraging societies are generally **egalitarian**, that is, there is very little status or rank between the members of the society. These two factors make the societies of the Northwest unique.

Most societies of the Northwest were matrilineal. Extended families lived in large houses constructed of various kinds of timber available in the area. Each nuclear family had separate quarters in a partitioned part of the house. Extended families and individuals within the family all participated in a very complex system of social rank and status. There were three ranks in these societies: **nobles**, **commoners** and **slaves**. Particularly in the northern part of the Northwest, the distinction between nobles and commoners was of great cultural significance. Despite the fact that the difference between the two groups was really a continuum of differences, rather than a divide between the two groups, people strove to acquire and enhance their social rank.

Nobles held high-ranking names and titles. They owned ceremonial property such as masks, ancestor crests, songs, dances, and rituals. Commoners lacked these culturally prestigious items, but they could acquire noble status by their inheritance. Slaves were war captives and along with their children, they lived in their masters' households doing menial labor. They were generally freed after one generation, but even then they were excluded from the status system. Status and rank are interconnected with marriage patterns. Parents attempted to arrange marriages for their children with people of equal or greater status.

Marriages, along with other important life events such as birth, death, puberty rites, and the naming of a chief, were marked with **potlatches**. A potlatch is a public feast to which the entire community is invited. In addition to the feasting, singing, and dancing, it is a confirmation of the new status of an individual (adult status for a young girl, for example), and community witnessing of the inheritance

of ceremonial property, such as masks, songs, or the rights to fish or harvest berries at particular locations by specific individuals. Ceremonial property is often displayed, and often there is a **give-away**. Those sponsoring the potlatch give away resources to those attending. Status can be maintained or increased by value of the items given away. The potlatch system also helps in the distribution of resources throughout the community. Even the poorest people receive items, though they cannot gain status by giving away valuable items themselves.

In the past, the governments of the United States and Canada have restricted these practices. This topic will be further discussed in Chapter 6. However, one practice still restricted by both governments is having multiple marriage partners at the same time. This practice is called **polygamy**. There are actually two types of polygamy: **polygyny** and **polyandry**. In societies that practice polygyny, men may have multiple wives. However, in those societies most men have one. Having multiple wives is a sign of status and wealth for a man, but he usually must have the wealth and status before he can have more than one wife. In many societies, a man must provide bride wealth or bride service before he can get additional wives, and then he must provide for all the wives and their children. Most men do not have that wealth. Even in societies that have dowries, for example, Islamic societies, the *Koran* (the holy book of Islam) demands men must provide equally for all wives and their children. In some societies, many in Africa for example, that have bride wealth, the first wife may help her husband build the wealth to acquire an additional wife, generally a female relative, to help in the labor. Women will work to increase their bride wealth to help provide the bride wealth for their sons.

Many Native American societies historically practiced polygyny. In some societies they practiced patrilocality, in which a sister or other unmarried female relative might move in with the family when a young woman gave birth. Often she would then become a second wife. This is called **sororate**, when close female relatives marry the same man. But some Native American societies, Cherokees, for example, may have practiced polyandry. Typically polyandry, in which a woman has more than one husband, is found in patrilineal and patrifocal agricultural societies in which land is passed from a father to his sons. Parts of Tibet and Sri Lanka have communities that practice polyandry. Typically, sons would inherit part of the farm when they married or their father

died. But in instances in which the availability of farmland is severely limited when one son marries, his brothers marry the woman as well. More than three brothers will marry two sisters. In North America early Spanish and French documents indicate that among some Native American societies, women, generally those of high status, had more than one husband, but not because of limited farmland. The women who had multiple husbands generally had land and resources. From the written documents it appears that these women had multiple husbands for the same reasons men in other societies have multiple wives, for the status.

In Europe, the United States, and Canada, until recently, it was very difficult for a woman to initiate a divorce, and she might well lose custody of her children. In Native American societies, particularly those that were matrilineal or matrifocal, divorce was fairly easy. If a couple was not getting along, or a man was not getting along with his wife's family, or he was not contributing resources, he could be sent back to his family—the equivalent of divorce. The Cherokees are such a society, historically matrilineal and matrifocal, in which women have high status and both women and men can easily get a divorce. Women who divorced a first husband could have a second. This may illustrate the high status women had in some Native American societies, just as having multiple wives demonstrates the status of a man.

As stated before, kinship organization impacts a society in many ways. One of these is the roles and status of women. Societies that demand dowries for women to marry see the value and status of women very differently than those who expected bride wealth or bride service. With bride wealth or service the society recognizes that women have material value, they contribute resources and status to their families. In societies that expect a dowry women also contribute to the wealth of their families, but it is not recognized or valued. But where do these different views of women come from? It may be that the kinship organization of a society has a significant impact on the roles and status of women in that society.

In a patrilineal society, more than just a lineage association passes from a father to his children. His resources, inheritance, and his status are also passed, typically to his sons. It is very important to men in a patrilineal society to know that the children who are inheriting their wealth and status are indeed children of their lineage. In the days before

DNA testing and paternity tests (which are very recent), the only way to ensure this was to restrict the sexual behavior of women. To restrict the sexual behavior of women was to restrict their overall participation in society. In societies throughout the world, women have been restricted to their households, or even to the private parts of the households. In these societies, women must be accompanied by a male member of her family or respected older woman if they are to leave the house. Women in such societies may not speak to men to whom they are not related. In these kinds of circumstances, it is obviously very difficult for women to participate fully in their society. They may not leave the household to participate in the trade or exchange of resources, and most certainly not participate in the political organization or activities of their society. They are often restricted from participating in religious activities, especially those that bring status to men. In societies that have an education system outside of the household, women may be restricted from attending schools. The tenets of the society's religion may rationalize or justify this treatment of women

In such societies, and there are many and have been many throughout the world, the ability of women to participate fully, particularly in obtaining economic resources and status, are severely restricted. However, in matrilineal societies, children belong to the clan or kin group of their mothers. So the concern of ensuring the paternity of children for inheritance is not an issue. Children, typically daughters, inherited the status and access to resources (like the use of a particular plot of farmland) from their mothers. Sons typically inherited resources (tools and hunting materials for example) from their mother's father or brothers. There is no reason to restrict women's sexual behavior; therefore there is no reason to restrict participation in their society. Women may engage in resource-getting activities such as foraging for wild edibles, fishing, farming and even hunting. They participated in, and in some societies like the Iroquois and Ojibwa, controlled the trade of resources. Their exchange of resources, either through trade or gift-giving resulted in higher status for themselves and their families. They were valued members of the society, as is seen in the expectation of bride wealth or bride service upon marriage. This participation in the economy of their society can result in women holding prestigious political positions, whether as a chief (and there were many), or through membership in women's councils. Both the Iroquois and Cherokees, matrilineal/matrifocal societies in which

women had high status, had women's councils who could, and did, overturn the decisions of the men's councils. It was the sons of a woman's clan who went to war. It was the women who decided if indeed they would go to war. Iroquois and Cherokee women could also be chiefs. Their power was such that British agent Sir William Johnson fought to restrict the involvement of the Mohawk Women's Council in negotiations with the British, despite the fact that the status he held with the Mohawks came from his association with Molly Brant, a high-status Mohawk woman. Women also participated in religious rituals, though they might have different roles than men. And as you have seen have through the different stories recounted thus far, women had important roles in the origin stories of Native American societies.

European, Canadian, or U.S. women would not obtain the status of women in many Native American societies until the twentieth century. Some people have referred to societies such as the Iroquois or Cherokees as **matriarchies**. From an anthropological perspective, a matriarchy is a society governed by a woman or women; a **patriarchy** is a society governed by a man or men. There have been thousands of patriarchies in the history of the world, but few, if any, matriarchies. Having matrilineal descent or matrifocal residence patterns does not make a society a matriarchy. Societies such as the Iroquois, Cherokees, Navajo, and many others are not governed by women; they are governed by women and men. Each sex has their roles in a society, each are valued and needed for the survival of the society. Some anthropologists have referred to such societies as demonstrating **separate but equal spheres of influence**. These spheres of influence may overlap, as they do among the Iroquois and Cherokees, or not, as among the Navajo, Zuni, and Hopi. But both women and men make important contributions to the society, and those contributions are recognized and valued. The wealth and status of a family depend on the contributions of both women and men.

It may seem like we are leaving out a very important part of families: children. Children are essential to the survival of any society. Without them, the society becomes extinct. In most Native American societies, children belonged to the clan of their mothers. Some Native American societies were bilateral, and children belonged to the kin groups of both their mother and father, much as the United States and Canada today. A very few Native American societies were patrilineal.



As stated before, the Tewa are an example of a Native American patrilineal society. Typically, women would be adopted into their husbands' clan after marriage, except then the women's clan was of a higher status than her husband's.

Typically in patrilineal or patrifocal societies, female children have less status than male children. They will leave the household; their children will not be part of their lineage. They will require dowries. If their sexual behavior is suspect, they will bring dishonor to the family. In many patrilineal societies, even today, girls or women who bring dishonor to their families can be killed, even when the behavior is not their fault, as is the case in rape. The value of sons is such that families will allow female children to die, or in modern circumstances, abort female fetuses. In matrilineal societies, girls are as equally valued as boys, maybe even more so. Girls will remain in the household and continue to contribute both resources and more children to the clan. Mohawk parents I know speak of the difficulty in raising sons to be good, honorable men who will follow the right path in life, but daughters are a joy.

All societies value and love their children, but the structure of the society, the kinship, may determine how boys and girls are treated. Other social expectations and beliefs also affect how children are treated. In their early contacts, Spanish, French, and British commentators all remarked on the love bestowed on children by Native Americans, and not just their own biological children. Native Americans often adopted the children of others. A woman or man without biological children of his or her own would adopt a child of a sibling. Children taken as captives in times of war (including European children) were often adopted by kin groups.

Europeans noted the excellent behavior of Native children, despite the fact their parents did not practice corporeal punishment. At this time, it was generally assumed that children had to be beaten from time to time to ensure good behavior and morals. Native Americans did not think it ever appropriate to hit or beat children. A look, word, or story, particularly from a grandparent, was usually enough to chastise a child. A minister traveling along the St. Lawrence River related an instance in which a British drummer boy insulted a visiting Mohawk warrior. The Mohawk demanded a gift to excuse the insult. The British commander responded that the boy would be punished in

the British way. The warrior asked what would that be. When he was told the boy would be beaten, he threw his blanket over the boy and ran off with him. He would not return the boy until he was assured he would not be beaten. All societies love their children, but that love is demonstrated in different ways.

Marriages and the birth of children are events that are often accompanied by rituals and ceremonies in societies throughout the world. Marriage ceremonies acknowledge the new relationship between the bride and groom and their families. In patrilineal societies, the marriage ceremony will also acknowledge the legitimacy of future children. Marriage ceremonies can be very elaborate, or very simple. Elaborate marriage ceremonies are often a means to demonstrate the status and wealth of the bride and/or groom's family. Smaller wedding ceremonies are simply an recognition of the new relationship between the bride and groom, their families, and future children.

Many practices and rituals surrounded the birth of a child. Women might engage in various behaviors to help promote pregnancy (or prevent it). Some behaviors or food would be encouraged to ensure a healthy child; others that were thought to be harmful would be avoided. Various practices were performed at the birth of a child to ensure the health and recovery of both child and mother. Ceremonies, such as naming ceremonies, took place after the birth. In our modern societies, it is hard for most of us to conceive of the heartbreak of the death of a child. However, societies around the world continue to experience high rates of infant mortality. Native American societies also had rates of infant mortality higher than those experienced today. Families engaged in various practices to help ease the grief suffered from the death of a child. Not naming a child is one such mechanism. The ceremonies surrounding the naming of a child typically came when it seemed clear the child would survive. Children who did not survive were often buried near the home so that they were easily re-born into the same family.

Women and men of Native American societies would also strive to limit the number of children they had to better ensure the health and survival of existing children. Women would take medicinal plants to help prevent pregnancy, and, in extreme cases, take those that would induce abortion early in a pregnancy. Most often, both parents would take vows of sexual abstinence after the birth of a child to ensure

another child would not be born until the first child was at least weaned. Iroquois men would not sleep with their wives until a child was weaned, generally between 2 and 3 years old. Cheyenne parents would declare vows of abstinence, sometimes up to 7 years after the birth of a child to ensure that child would have the resources necessary for survival. There were also beliefs that encouraged small families, for example stating that younger children in a family would be smaller, sicklier, and not as smart as older siblings. As a result, family size in Native American families was smaller than was typical for European or Euro-American families until the middle of the twentieth century. A family of four children in a Native American family was considered large, until Native peoples starting converting to Christian religions that encouraged having many children.

Native American societies started altering their kin organization and expectations in response to European influences, particularly missionaries. Missionaries preached against the practice of polygyny, and abhorred the practice of polyandry and divorce. In fact, they preached against the high status and independence of Native American women. They felt Native women should be like European women, subservient to their husbands. Europeans referred to the Iroquois and Cherokee political systems as “petticoat governments” because of the roles of women and women councils. Native American women were seen as “drudges” and Native American men as lazy, because women primarily did the farming, while men engaged in hunting, a recreational activity from the perspective of Europeans. Early suffragettes (those who fought for equal rights for women, especially the right to vote) would remark on the status women in Iroquois society. They missed the concept that women had that status in part because of the “drudge” labor they did, and the fact they had control over the products of that labor.

Contrary to what our contemporary politicians may say, kinship can be a very flexible aspect of society. It can change to accommodate other changes in a society. An excellent example of this is the changes that occurred among the Siouan-speaking peoples of the Midwest. Up until the 1700s the Sioux, Lakota, Dakota, Yankton, and Oglala peoples lived in what are now midwestern areas like Minnesota. Most communities were close to water and practiced horticultural combined with fishing, foraging, and hunting. These peoples even had

**corn women** stories much like those of the eastern Native societies. In horticultural or even foraging societies, the roles of women and men were fairly equal, as both contributed to their families' and communities' resources and wealth.

But starting in the late 1700s, more and more Native peoples were pushed farther and farther west as Euro-Americans moved west. Many Native societies like the Siouan peoples were pushed out into the **plains** and **prairie** areas. But those environments are not well suited for horticulture. Rainfall is limited and the growing season is short. Additionally the grasses in the plains are short and the roots grow in dense tangles that contribute to the development of **sod**. Sod provided natural "bricks" for the construction of "sod houses" for both Native peoples and early Euro-American settlers in the area, but sod made it very difficult to farm in these areas without steel plows. Native farmers had digging sticks. An old, derogative term for American Indians is "diggers," probably in reference to this form of planting technology.

The Native peoples who migrated to the plains and prairies gradually adapted to getting resources there, due to the reintroduction of horses. The arrival of horses coincided with the expansion of a European presence and trade along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. This may be why so many Euro-Americans can only imagine the Native peoples of the plains (and in much of popular culture all Native Americans) hunting bison on horseback. However, the French explorer LaSalle encountered horticultural societies along the southern Missouri River in the seventeenth century. The arrival of horses made the peoples of the prairie and plains much more effective hunters, and they were better able to follow the migratory bison. The meat and furs of bison and other animals also became important items to trade with the encroaching Euro-Americans.

As hunting to trade with the Euro-Americans became more important, various structures within Siouan societies started to change. The autonomy of women was undermined. A family's wealth became dependent on the amount of hides they traded with Euro-Americans and Canadians. A single man could hunt many animals, but the hides he could trade were dependent on the number of women who did the time-consuming preparation of the hides. As a result women, no

longer controlled their own labor; the men of their families controlled it. Polygyny (having multiple wives) increased. More wives and children meant more laborers in the hunting and preparation of hides.

The success of these hunting societies, as opposed to more generalized foraging societies that also obtained resources from fishing and gathering wild edibles, also depended on horses. The larger the horse herd, the more men (and sometimes women) could go hunting. The more horses a man had, the more a man and his sons could offer as a bride price for more wives. The social and economic status of men came to depend on the number of horses and wives he had. This led to the development of a more **ranked** society: more horses, more wives, more resources, more wealth, more status, in societies that had previously been **egalitarian**. Political leadership became more formalized and centralized.

Women retained only some of their previous status, particularly in religious rituals, and as healers and midwives. Some women chose to participate in male-dominated activities such as hunting and warfare. They were often referred to as **Big Hearted Women**. Because Native American societies traditionally honored individual choice, these women were not seen as deviant, they were simply fulfilling their own visions and destinies. The changes in kinship and the roles of women in Siouan societies were not intentional, but were a consequence of other changes in the society. This was not always the case. The U.S. and Canadian governments often imposed changes.

The laws of the United States and Canada did not recognize the variety of marriages and family organization that existed in Native American societies; they only recognized nuclear families with neolocal residence patterns. At times in both U.S. and Canadian history, the marriages of Euro-American men with Native women were not recognized. Their children were considered illegitimate, and they could not inherit from their fathers. In other instances, the governments of the United States and Canada did not recognize as Native the children of Native American mothers. Following the patrilineal history of Europe, the governments would only recognize the children of Native men as Native.

Kinship and marriage were aspects of societies that were severely impacted by European contact. Europeans simply did not accept matrilineal or matrifocal practices, and thought that the practice of polyandry and polygyny demonstrated the savagery of Native societies. But the indigenous societies had a very different perspective. Individual indigenous societies often encountered other societies with varying customs. Many Native societies, like the Iroquois, for example, had a mechanism for incorporating newcomers into their kin groups, primarily through adoption and marriage. As was stated previously in this chapter, adoption was common in many Native American societies, and not just of children. Adults might also be adopted. People might be adopted as apprentices to shamans. Adoption of war captives was common, as was adoption and marriage with new people encountered. For Native groups such as the Iroquois, Hurons, Ottawa, Abanakis, and many more, marriage was a way to incorporate newcomers into existing families and communities.

There were occasional marriages between the English and Natives as well, but these were certainly not encouraged. By the time of Metacom (often called King Phillip by Americans), it was English policy to separate English and Native populations as much as possible. Even those Native Americans who had converted to Christianity were isolated in “Praying Towns.” However, the Jesuit missionaries in what became known as “New France” encouraged intermarriage as a way to convert the Native peoples and to make them good Catholics and French citizens. The Jesuits even raised dowries from patrons back in Europe for Native women to give to their husbands in the patrilineal, European tradition. For the French *voyageurs* and *coureurs de bois*, intermarriage was a necessity. Marriage with Native women gave these men the family connections that secured them guides, aides in procuring skins, help in the preparation of skins, shelter over their heads, and food in their bellies. If a foreigner to an area and society hoped to have the support of the members of the society to survive, marriage was a good way to ensure that, if he recognized that he had kin responsibilities as well.

Native Americans still continue aspects of their traditional kin organization. While Iroquois children may have the last names of their fathers, their clan association is still that of their mothers. At **pow-wows** young people will still inquire about the clan association

of a potential love interest, continuing to avoid clan incest taboos. Women sometimes live in extended family households, or live in close proximity to their mothers and other female members of their families. The Navajo, who typically do not like living too close to each other, have households in “camps”—areas in which households are linked by matrilineal ties.

While the laws and influences of the U.S. and Canadian governments have changed the kin organization of Native American societies, many of them continue to follow practices such as clan association and residence locality. These factors can be very important in the practice of rituals, as we will see in Chapter 6.


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## Suggested Questions


You may have done your family tree in elementary school. Anthropologists do kinship charts. Try doing one for your family using the following format.

### Creating a Kinship Chart

**Symbol Key**

male — 

female — 

(Note: a square  is used to specify a person whose sex is unknown or not relevant.)

father	F
mother	M
son	S
daughter	D
brother	B
sister	Z
husband	H
wife	W
child	C

Use the diagrams and notation system in this slideshow to help you construct your kinship charts for Writing Assignment 6. Also refer to Chapter 13 in your textbook and the Week 9 Lecture video for more detailed information.

Illustration by the author

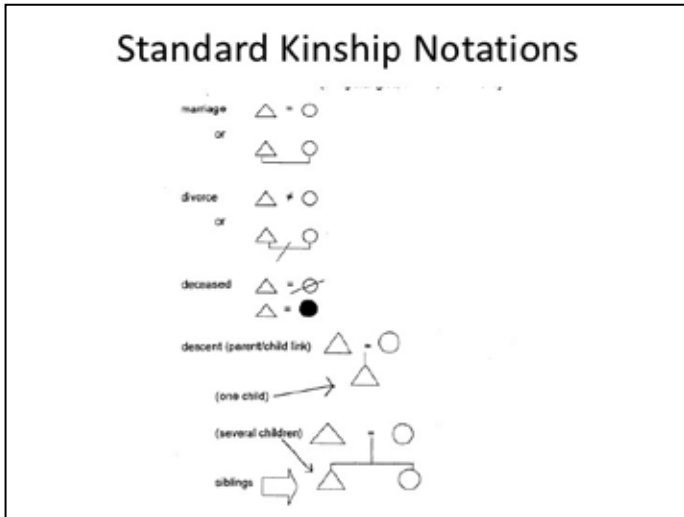


Illustration by the author

These symbols are used in a very basic kinship chart. You can easily Google other. Compare them to yours. You might also want to compare your chart to others in your class. What kind of differences do you see? Why do you think there are those differences?

People in non-western societies can often trace their ancestry back many generations. How far back can you name your ancestors?

Interview an older member of your family. How far back can they trace their/your ancestry?

Many societies have "fictive kin", that is someone who is not related to you by descent or marriage but whom you consider to be "family". Do you have any examples of this?

An important function of any kin group is sharing or providing resources. Do you have an example of this?



The Iroquois societies practice exchange of resources between a bride and groom at marriage ceremonies. What do most Euro-American or Canadian cultures do?

In what ways is adoption in contemporary U.S. or Canadian societies different than the way adoption functioned in indigenous American societies?

U.S. and Canadian family life has changed a great deal over the last fifty years. Discuss some of the cultural changes that contributed to this.

How do you think the concept of kinship in your society may change in the next fifty years?

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## Suggested Resources

While not specially about Native American societies, anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday has two books that are very important in examining kinship and the roles of women in society. The first, *Male Dominance, Female Power*, looks at women's roles in a number of societies and what happens to those roles during cultural changes. One of her case studies is the Lakota. In *Women at the Center: Life in a Modern Matriarchy*, Sanday argues that the Minangkabau of West Sumatra are an example of a matriarchy.

*League of the Houdenosaunee or the Iroquois*, is an ethnohistorical account of the Houdenosaunee by Lewis Henry Morgan, originally published in 1851. While much of it reflects 19th century biases, Morgan's description of Houdenosaunee kinship is important and has influenced much subsequent anthropological research on kinship.

The novel *Waterlily*, by Ella Cara Deloria is a wonderful account of Lakota life in the early 1800's. Included is much information about Lakota kinship and how it functioned in the broader society.

Other books of interest are:

*The Tewa World: Space, Time & Becoming in a Pueblo Society*, by Alfonso Ortiz.

*Women of the Earth Lodges: Tribal Life on the Plains*, by Virginia Bergman Peters.

*Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*, ed. by Nancy Shoemaker.

*Sifters: Native American Women's Lives*, ed. by Theda Perdue.

*Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870*, by Sylvia Van Kirk.

## Chapter 3

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# RESOURCES AND THEIR DISTRIBUTION

*Coyote was out hunting and found a dead deer. One of the deer's rib bones looked just like a big dentalia (mollusk) shell, and Coyote picked it up and took it with him. He went up to the frog people. The frog people had all the water. When anyone wanted any water to drink or cook with or to wash, they had to go and get it from the frog people.*

*Coyote came up. "Hey, frog people, I have a big dentalia shell. I want a big drink of water—I want to drink for a long time."*

*"Give us that shell," said the frog people, "and you can drink all you want."*

*Coyote gave them the shell and began drinking. The water was behind a large dam where Coyote drank.*

*"I'm going to keep my head down for a long time," said Coyote, "because I'm really thirsty. Don't worry about me."*

*"Okay, we won't worry," said the frog people.*

*Coyote began drinking. He drank for a long time. Finally one of the frog people said, "Hey Coyote, you sure are drinking a lot of water there. What are you doing that for?"*

*Coyote brought his head up out of the water. "I'm really thirsty."*

*"Oh."*

*After a while one of the frog people said, "Coyote, you sure are drinking a lot. Maybe you better give us another shell."*

*“Just let me finish this drink,” said Coyote, putting his head back under the water.*

*The frog people wondered how a person could drink so much water. They didn’t like this. They thought Coyote might be doing something.*

*Coyote was digging out under the dam all the time he had his head under water. When he was finished, he stood up and said, “That was a good drink. That was just what I wanted.”*

*Then the dam collapsed, and the water went out into the valley and made the creeks and rivers and waterfalls.*

*The frog people were very angry. “You have taken all the water, Coyote!”*

*“It is not right that one people have all the water. Now it is where everyone can have it.”*

*Coyote did that. Now anyone can go down to the river and get a drink of water or some water to cook with or just swim around.*

A Kalapuya story told by Barry Lopez in 1927 (Erdoes and Ortiz)

Until the twentieth century, the availability of resources (food and material for making clothing or building houses or tools) depended on where the people of a particular society lived. This was especially true for food. People might be able to travel long distances to get materials for tools, or trade for materials with other people, but food was perishable. It would go bad very quickly, long before it could be transported long distances. The climate of an area could also determine resources. Farming would be difficult to impossible in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic. People living in those areas would have to rely on **foraging**, a method of getting resources through a combination of gathering wild edibles, fishing, and hunting. People who lived in more temperate areas with long growing seasons, like the southeastern part of what today is the United States, would have more options available to them, including the development of agriculture. However resources are obtained, food is a limited resource. Animals can be over-hunted,

leading to their extinction, as can fish be over-fished. Even wild edibles can be exploited. But as the story about Coyote and the frog people shows, the most important resource is water.

Human living sites are always found around water, such as lakes, rivers, streams, and creeks. Habitation sites might be found along the ocean shore, as in the Northwest coastal areas, but there would also have to be sources for drinking water. Water was not only necessary for drinking, cooking, and washing; it was also an important food source. Fish, shellfish, waterfowl, and water plants were all important foods. Water could also be an important transportation route, allowing fairly easy access by canoe or boat to additional areas for the gathering of resources. Water sources, the climate, and environmental factors like rainfall and the length of growing seasons are all important in determining the resources people have available. Different societies living in the same area might utilize their environments and resources in different ways. What and how a society gets and utilizes its resources is its **economy**. Today in the United States and Canada, we think of economy as referring to money, jobs, and businesses. But this perspective would not describe most of human history. In a broader perspective, economy refers to the resources available to a society, how they are obtained, and how those resources are distributed. Anthropologists have four categories that describe the ways societies utilize or exploit their environments for food resources: **foraging**, **pastoralism**, **horticulture**, and **agriculture**.

**Industrialization**, in which people work largely in factories or other business for a wage is the type of labor with which you are familiar. But this is a relatively recent (in the last 120 years) way of getting resources. In an industrial society, people work for a wage and use that to buy the resources they need or can afford. For most of human history, people worked directly for resources they needed. The way most people in Western societies get resources is changing again, as most of us are and will be employed in service industries such as teaching. This is often referred to as “post-Industrialization.” Beginning in the nineteenth century, many Native peoples started participating in wage labor on ranches and farms. With relocation to cities in the twentieth century, many Native Americans started working in construction and factories in the United States and Canada. In the twenty-first century, many Native American communities and individuals have started

their own businesses. Best known are casinos, but they have also started ski resorts, water-bottling plants, golf courses, small-engine manufacturing facilities, and greeting card companies.

**Pastoralism** refers to the domestication of animals. Societies domesticated animals like horses, cattle, sheep, goats, and reindeer to obtain needed resources from the animals themselves or by trading the animals and their by-products (milk or meat) with other societies. For example, in the Congo, the cattle-herding Zulu will trade milk and meat with their foraging neighbors, the Mbuti, for the roots and fruits they gather. Few societies in North America practiced pastoralism to any extent, although some raised turkeys or other fowl. The Aztec of Mexico raised domesticated deer, and the Incas of South America raised llamas, but for the most part Native Americans did not adopt the practice of domesticating animals until after European colonization, so the practice will not be discussed in great detail.

**Foraging** societies get food resources through a combination of the collection of wild edibles, fishing, and hunting. In the twentieth century, the anthropological emphasis in examining and describing foraging societies focused on hunting. The assumption was that most of the food in foraging societies came from hunting, and that men were doing the hunting. This assumption often formed the hypothesis for why men had more status in their societies: they provided the food. We now know that in foraging societies in temperate climates, up to 75% to 80% of food comes from the gathering of wild edibles, work that is generally associated with women (Slocum 1975). Further, in Arctic and Sub-Arctic societies in which wild edibles are limited, women participated, and continue to participate in hunting, including the hunting of elk, moose, and caribou.

More than 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, all human societies were foragers. In places like northern Europe, Asia, and North America, now-extinct animals were hunted. In North America these animals included mastodons, giant beavers, and ground sloths. Because of the size of animals hunted, these societies are referred to as **big game hunting societies**. In such societies, not just men participated in the hunting of large game, but the entire community took part. The community would work together to drive animals into corrals or over cliffs where they would be butchered, and the meat and skins prepared. Around 10,000 years ago these large animals started becoming extinct

due to a number of environmental factors, including climate change and perhaps over-hunting. As a consequence, these **Paleo-Indian** (early Native peoples) foraging societies adapted to hunting smaller game—such as elk, moose, caribou, and deer—whatever was available in a particular area.

Often overlooked in examining a foraging society is the importance of fishing. Remember, early human living sites—including those in the Americas—are found around water. Getting needed resources through fishing does not have the same romantic allure as big game hunting or tracking bison, but it is a very important way of getting food. A fish diet is highly nutritious and healthier than a red meat diet. Further, it supplies important omega-3 fats that are important to brain development. Many members of the community could fish, not just strong, healthy men. Archaeological sites often have artifacts that were used to fish, including **weirs** (an enclosure of stakes and nets to trap fish), nets, fishing spears, hooks, and weights. Current archaeological estimates suggest that up to 75% of the non-vegetable part of foraging peoples' diets came from fish (Bonvillain 2001). Fishing and fishing rights continue to be very important to contemporary Native communities.

Another important way of getting food in foraging societies was the gathering of wild edibles. In order to get enough food in this way, foraging societies would typically be **mobile**, traveling from area to area to find the resources they needed. Exceptions to this lifestyle were found in societies in the northwestern area of what are now the coast of Canada and the United States. The Tlingit, Haida, Niska, Gitkan, Tsimshian, Bella Coola, Salish, and Kwakwaka'waku lived in such a rich environment they were able to live in settled villages along the coastal area, where they utilized resources from the sea, fresh water, and plants. Most other foraging societies had to travel to different areas to find needed resources. These societies did not travel constantly; they might settle in an area for weeks or even months. In some instances Natives would have summer and winter camps and migrate between the two areas seasonally. They learned the areas in which particular resources could be found and when they would be available, then settled in these areas utilizing the resources to be found.

By necessity, foraging societies were typically small, no more than 500 people in a community. Foraging societies must have enough people to successfully exploit the resources available, but not so many that they over-exploit those resources. Foraging societies would often split into smaller groups in the winter when resources were harder to secure, then come together again in larger groups in the summer.

An example of a foraging society would be the **Innu** or **Montagnais**, who continue to live in what is now northeastern Quebec along the St. Lawrence River basin. Historically the Innu focused on hunting and fishing for resources; gathering was a less significant part of their economy. They hunted moose, caribou, beaver, porcupines, bears, and several varieties of birds. It appears that the Innu traded with the Huron of Lake Ontario for fishing nets. They also used weirs for trapping eels. The Innu would use the animals they hunted for other purposes. Clothing was made from the skins of moose and caribou. Bones, teeth, and other parts of animals would be used to make other household utensils.

The size of communities would vary depending on the season. In fall and winter people lived in scattered camps. Typically these winter camps were made up of extended bilateral kin groups. In the spring, larger groups gathered along waterways such as the St. Lawrence River or the Gulf of the St. Lawrence and got resources from them. In contemporary times, a small number of Innu continue to practice the historical foraging economy of their ancestors; however most are engaged in wage labor. Those who do continue hunting have adopted many European and Canadian technologies such as guns, and there is a greater emphasis on trapping using steel traps (Bonvillain 2001).

The cultural-geographic area called the **Great Basin** is a large region, but because of the scarcity of resources and the fragile environment, it was home to a relatively small number of Native Americans. This area is referred to as the Great Basin because it only has interior drainage; all its rivers and streams flow into lakes, with no waterways that flow to the ocean. The Great Basin covers an area that includes the present-day states of Nevada, Utah, northern Colorado, southern Oregon, Idaho, western Wyoming, eastern California, northern Arizona, and New Mexico. The area is bounded on the west by the Sierra Mountains and on the east by the Rocky Mountains. The climate is largely arid except at the high altitudes of the mountains.



There are large lakes such as Pyramid Lake, Walker Lake and Lake Tahoe, but about 5% of the land is desert. Precipitation, as well as flora and fauna, are all dependent on the altitude.

Before European contact, most of the Native American Great Basin population was found between altitudes of 5,000 to 7,000 feet. It was here the Utes, Washoes, Paiutes, and Shoshones were best able to find needed resources. The Native peoples of the Great Basin were foragers, relying on plant and animal resources. Unlike the Native American foragers of the Northwest, the Native peoples of the Great Basin were mobile, moving from place to place to utilize the resources found in different areas, while not over-exploiting the resources of any one area. The anthropologist Julian Steward, who largely examined how people adapt to their environments, said the Great Basin peoples relied on various “**microenvironments**” that changed from season to season, and from place to place.

The resources the Great Basin peoples relied on included: fish, deer, bighorn sheep, elk, antelope, rabbits, birds, and waterfowl. They ate wild plants such as pinion nuts, pinecones, acorns, beans from mesquite, screwbeans and agave, cattails, rice grass, bullrush, and fruits and berries. Southern Paiutes, Utes, and Shoshones learned horticulture from neighbors in the Southwest. Like the Native peoples of the Southwest, they grew corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, and melons. Other Great Basin peoples helped the growing of wild plants by burning brush, sowing seeds, and watering and pruning plants. Some foods were dried and **cached** (stored) in underground pits for later use. But people often were nearly out of food by the end of winter. The most important resource in the arid Great Basin was and remains water.

The Native peoples of the Great Basin had learned to adapt and survive in this fragile environment. People lived in small “clusters” of related nuclear families. Each individual shared in the labor and resources of the kin network. Kinship within the family was **bilateral**—each individual belonged to the lineage of her/his father and mother. After marriage, a young couple would join the cluster of either the man or woman, depending on which family had enough resources or needed additional labor. In the fall, clusters of families would gather together to harvest pinion nuts, feast and celebrate, and to trade resources.

As with most foragers around the world, the peoples of the Great Basin had informal and flexible political organizations. The leader of a group was generally the head of a family who had gained the respect and trust of his community.

Because of the remoteness and aridness of the environment, the Native peoples of the Great Basin were spared incursions by Europeans until the 1770s. However, they were influenced by neighboring societies who had already had contact with Europeans. Thus, peoples of the Great Basin did have European trade goods, and most importantly, horses. The arrival of horses enabled the eastern and southern Utes and Shoshones to better hunt bison. The Utes would also later use horses in their attacks on Spanish settlements.

In 1776, an expedition led by the Franciscan priests Francisco Dominguez and Silvestre Velezde de Escante traveled to Ute territory at Utah Lake, opening the doorway to other Spanish missionaries. They were also followed by settlers engaged in slaving expeditions, particularly focused on children, who were sold to farmers in New Mexico.

In 1805, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark led an expedition through Shoshone territory in Idaho, on their way to the Pacific. Canadian and U.S. trappers followed them. Spain considered the Great Basin to be Spanish territory and tried to stop others from trading with the Native peoples there. When Mexico gained its independence from Spain, the country lost more control over trade and Euro-American settlements in the Great Basin. Permanent Euro-American settlements started in the mid-1800s when Mormons (members of the Church of Latter Day Saints) settled in the Salt Lake Valley. At this time, Mexico still claimed the territory of the Great Basin. Mormon leadership widely stated their wish to avoid conflict with the Native Americans, but their very presence created environmental, economic, and cultural pressures.

From the glut of Spanish and Euro-American settlers arriving in Native American territory, the fragile environment and its resources were soon depleted. Native beliefs were threatened also, as the Mormons sent missionaries to the Native communities of the Great Basin, believing them to be one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. Native children were often “adopted” by Mormon families to be educated

in Mormon beliefs and behaviors, and to supply domestic and farm labor. The Native peoples of the Great Basin suffered population loss due to disease and the slave trade. Euro-American trade routes and settlements were established on the areas with the most resources, particularly where water was readily available. This disrupted the fragile balance with the environment and led to malnutrition and starvation of Native Americans.

With the discovery of gold and silver, first in California and later in Nevada, the number of travelers through the area increased, creating further environmental destruction. The visitors who decided to settle in the area further restricted the Native peoples' access to water and other resources. The Natives reacted in two ways: armed conflict and religious rituals (see Chapter 5 on religion and spiritual beliefs). In 1860, the Paiutes around Pyramid Lake started to defend their lands against Euro-American settlers. The Shoshones of Owens Valley soon followed the Paiutes in defense of their lands. The U.S. Army broke the Native resistance, and "pacified" the area largely by moving the Native peoples to reservations. The Native peoples were forced to sign more than 12 treaties, each of which ceded what had been their land to the United States in exchange for reservation land away from the new Euro-American settlements and provided military protection to the Natives' remaining land. Congress never ratified most of these treaties and the protection from future Euro-American incursions was never fulfilled. Further, because the reservation land was so poor, upwards of 60% of the Native peoples of the Great Basin could not survive living on their reservation land.

As Euro-American settlements grew, pressure began in the states of Utah and Nevada to deprive the Natives of more land. In 1887, the General Allotment Act, also called the Dawes Act, decreed that there would be no more tribally or family owned property for Native peoples. Each head of government would be allotted 160 acres of land; single persons and those under the age of 18 were allotted 60 acres. Any land not allotted in this way was declared "surplus" and sold to Euro-American settlers. With the General Allotment Act, the people of the Great Basin, like Native peoples throughout the United States, had most of their tribal lands declared "surplus" and opened for settlement to Euro-Americans.

In the mid-twentieth century, the Native peoples of the Great Basin started to regain a portion of the land they had lost, often in legal suits brought forward in U.S. courts. In 1910, the Utes won a court case in which they were awarded \$3.5 million in compensation for lost land. In the 1930s, John Collier became the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs during the administration of Franklin Roosevelt. Collier worked to salvage and restore much of the Native American traditions, particularly religious traditions, and to secure and increase the land base of Native American societies. The loss of land through General Allotment was stopped, and in 1946, the Indian Claims Commission was established. The total compensation awarded through the commission to Native American communities for the loss of land came to more than \$130 million.

Originally, the money was divided among community members, providing only a temporary aid to their economic situations. Since the 1960s, Native American tribal nations have utilized the money for tribal purposes and investments such as tribal enterprises, infrastructures, and living conditions.

In 1999, 84,000 acres of land were returned to Utes at the Uintah and Ouray reservations by the U.S. government. Unfortunately, this land was severely contaminated by shale oil extraction and low-level radioactive waste from the milling for the shale. The Utes have pledged 8.5% of future profits from tribally owned oil drilling to clean up the sites they did not contaminate.

The economic conditions of Native peoples in the Great Basin vary from location to location, and are dependent on the specific type of resources, such as oil, that are found on their reservations. However, the economic conditions of all Native peoples in the Great Basin are far below those of Euro-Americans in the area.

Geographically, the Great Basin is adjacent to California, but there are enormous differences in the societies found in the two areas. Prior to European contact, the very diverse Native peoples of California were foragers, getting their food and resources largely from fishing and gathering, and to a lesser extent, hunting. Like most foraging societies they lived in small, scattered communities. Living in large or closely spaced communities may well have over-taxed the environment

and the resources they depended on. Unfortunately, being small and scattered also made them very vulnerable to conquest—first by the Spanish and later by the Euro-Americans.

In 1542, Juan Cabrillo sailed up the California coast to the San Diego Bay. Cabrillo did not establish settlements; he was looking for the mythic Northwest Passage, a water passage that would go from the West Coast of North America to the East Coast. (Many British and American sailors were simultaneously looking for the same passage from the East Coast.) Spanish settlements in California started in 1769. By the early 1800s, Spanish missionaries and soldiers had established 21 missions, stretching from what is now San Diego to Sonoma. These **Presidios** (military forts and missions) enslaved thousands of Native peoples who were captured by the military and then forced to provide agricultural labor for the priests and soldiers of the missions.

In addition to what was basically enslavement, the missionaries also tried to change or eliminate the traditional customs and beliefs of the Native peoples. For example, they forced Native peoples of California to convert to Catholicism. The community-recognized chiefs were replaced with **alcaldes** (Spanish-appointed leaders). Despite the best efforts of the Spanish, through the provision of needed resources and favors, the alcaldes never gained prestige among the Native peoples. The missionaries enforced changes in the Native peoples' diets, not allowing them to leave the missions to fish or gather food, but instead supplying European grains, such as wheat, and occasional animal proteins, such as beef. Families were broken apart, as unmarried women and men were forced to live in dungeon-like dormitories. As among other Native societies, disease killed thousands. Among the California Natives, the most catastrophic diseases were pneumonia, diphtheria, measles, dysentery, influenza, and syphilis. Most of the diseases were spread by the Spanish, fostered by the unhealthy living conditions and complicated by malnutrition. Syphilis was the result of the Spanish persistently raping Native women (Heizer and Almquist 1971). It is estimated that by the nineteenth century, 300,000 Native Californians died as a result of the Spanish invasion.

The Native communities did their best to resist the Spanish, but their small, scattered numbers made an effective resistance against the Spanish all but impossible, and retaliation by the Spanish was brutal. Many Native peoples tried to escape, both in small and large numbers,

despite the fact that capture by the Spanish military usually resulted in death. There were also consequences for those who did escape, for with them often went the Spanish diseases, which then spread to new communities.

In 1821, the administration of California was transferred to the newly independent Mexico. While the Native Californians were technically citizens with legal rights, in reality their lives were changed very little, except that as Spanish and Euro-American settlement began to grow, Natives' enforced labor increased. In 1832, Mexico started the process of secularizing the missions. While the government removed the priests, they established a system of **peonage**—political appointees who held power. The Native peoples continued to provide labor for the Mexican civilians in political power.

With the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo at the conclusion of the Mexican-American War, Mexico lost land and political power in California to the United States. This, coupled with the discovery of gold, increased the hardships for the Native peoples of California. While Spain and Mexico had needed the labor of the Native peoples, the Euro-Americans did not. All they wanted was land and gold. The Native peoples were obstacles, and the new Californians hunted down and murdered thousands of Native peoples in their quest for land and wealth.

The California state government supported militias and vigilantes who killed Native Californians by paying a bounty of \$5 per child and \$10 per adult to those with proof of a slain Indian. Proof constituted of the scalp: the pair of slain individual's ears with the flesh and hair connecting them. Over \$500,000 in bounty was dispensed between 1850 and 1870 in payment for these deaths. Laws furthered the discrimination against the Natives. For example, a Native American could be forced into labor for 40 days for "loitering." Children were often kidnapped and forced into labor on Euro-American farms, with no legal recourse. Rape of a Native woman by a Euro-American man was never prosecuted. The legal system also protected the continued loss of Native land and resources (Heizer and Almquist 1971, 215).

Responding to accounts of these atrocities, often covered in newspapers, the United States government established temporary reservations for the Native peoples in California in the 1850s. These

reservations were meant to offer personal protection for the Natives, and stop the further confiscation of land by Euro-Americans. The government also arranged for the distribution of needed rations, such as food and blankets.

The Indian agents (government-appointed personnel who were supposed to protect the Natives and enforce government regulations) often stole the rations. Euro-American livestock often destroyed native farm crops. Any retaliation on the part of the Natives resulted in their imprisonment or death. And Euro-Americans continued to force Natives off their land. Under pressure from settlers who wanted more and more land, the California state government withdrew support for the reservations and allowed more Euro-American settlement. Native Californians were forced off their lands and left to survive as best they could. In 1870, the federal government again tried to establish reservations, this time mainly in northern California. The government also allotted funding for aid in farming and schools. But once again, the state of California allowed for the settlement of Euro-Americans on Native lands. It was not until the twentieth century that California's Mission Indians would be able to regain land, get compensation from the state and federal governments, and start their own wage economic systems.

The Northwest coastal areas of the United States and Canada might seem to be a continuation of the California coast, but, both environmentally and culturally, the area and its people are unique. The Native peoples of the Northwest were foragers who lived in a resource-rich area. They secured the majority of their food, however, through fishing, both in fresh water and in the ocean, using large dugout canoes.

The **Kwakwaka'waka**, or **Kwakiutls**, of the Northwest coast of what is now British Columbia, is an example of societies found in the Northwest. The resource focus of Kwakwaka'waka society was fishing, both in the ocean and rivers; gathering of plants; and some hunting of land animals. Their diet consisted of salmon, halibut, eulachon, cod, herring, sea urchins, clams, and mussels. The Kwakwaka'waka had specialized technology for catching different water animals: barbed harpoons were used to hunt sea lions and seals; codfish and halibut were caught with fishing lines made of kelp; while salmon were trapped in weirs as they swam upriver (Bonvillain 2001). The Kwakwaka'waka did

not have to travel from area to area to get needed resources; they were able to live in large, permanent settlements. Their houses were large structures made from the cedar trees found in the area. The style of the houses changed over time, gradually becoming the painted structures with a central door found today. Many Kwakwaka'waka continue to be involved in the fishing industry of the Northwest coast, but in wage labor jobs that include fishing and working in area canneries. The **maritime** societies of the Northwest do not fit the Native Americans stereotype held by most Euro-Americans and Canadians.



*Skidegate Indian Village of the Haida tribe. Skidegate Inlet, British Columbia, Canada. Photograph by George M. Dawson, July 1878.*

European contact in the Northwest did not start until the late eighteenth century. Russian, Spanish, British, French, and American merchants all tried to establish trading posts for the fur trade. The Russians were the first to establish a permanent fort in 1799 at what is now Sitka, Alaska. This fort became the center of the Russian-



American Company. In 1827, the Hudson Bay Company established Fort Langley on the Fraser River in British Columbia. Unlike other cultural-geographic areas of the Americas where trade had devastating results on the Native societies, this was less so in the Northwest. The Northwest societies were already involved in long-distance trade. The items the Europeans brought to trade: food, alcohol, blankets, firearms, copper, and body ornaments were incorporated into the pre-existing status system, but generally the Natives did not rely on them. The Europeans depended on the trade system, and they complained about the shrewd bargaining of the Northwest peoples. If Natives did not find a price to be agreeable, they would simply refuse to trade.

Because of the Europeans' dependence on trade, they did not interfere with Native culture to the extent that they did in other parts of the Americas. However, there were changes within the Northwest societies. They gradually shifted their focus from getting resources for subsistence to getting trade items. In some cases, this led to over-exploitation of some resources. Because the Europeans did not like to trade with women, a task in which they traditionally participated, the status of women became reduced. The arrival of missionaries in the nineteenth century further reduced women's standing. The chiefs became richer, and their political power solidified, because the Europeans preferred to work with one individual they saw as being in power. Subsequently, the society became more traditionally European, with the status of women being lowered and one man being in charge.

As Euro-American and Canadian settlements grew, Native population numbers and lands declined. Both the Canadian and U.S. governments tried to extinguish all land titles held by Native peoples, but the Native communities refused to concede to those demands. The lack of treaties, particularly in Canada, became the impetus for land claims in the twentieth century. Native communities began to organize for economic and political rights. As the northwestern Native communities traditionally had extensive trade networks, their organizing networks were also far-reaching. Their political networking triumphed in 1997, when the First Nations of Canada attained an important ruling from the Supreme Court of Canada that stated First Nations' rights to land and resources must be considered when mining, logging, and resource exploration are undertaken in their territories.

Early in their encounters with Europeans, the Native peoples of the Northwest were better able than many other Native peoples of the Americas to adapt to the impacts of Euro-American and Canadian settlement and **hegemony** (social and political power) to their traditions. Many Northwest communities continue to adapt, especially within the fishing industry. This adaptation is reflected in economic data demonstrating that the Native peoples of the Northwest, in both Canada and the United States, have the highest standard of living of any Native American/First Nations group. It must be remembered, however, that the standard of living for the Native peoples of the Northwest is still far below that of average Euro-Americans and Canadians.

## Horticulture

More stereotypical examples of American foraging societies would be found in the prairies and plains (both terms refer to flat, grassy land) of the United States and Canada. The Arikara, for example, lived on the plains along the Missouri River for thousands of years. The Arikara practiced a combination of foraging and horticulture. Through a trial-and-error method that is typical of how humans make important discoveries, people found that some of the plants they were gathering in the wild could be **domesticated**, that is, they would become dependent on human cultivation for reproduction. Seeds or pods of the plant would not be eaten or thrown away, but kept and used to grow the plant in the next year. People might plant these seeds close to dwelling areas where they could be watched, watered, and protected from birds and other animals. Among the first plants to be domesticated in the Americas were squash and beans. Between 8,000 to 12,000 years ago we see people around the world starting to rely more and more on domesticated plants.

Initially, people planted domesticated crops but continued to rely on foraging, fishing, and hunting. This is called a **horticultural** society. Societies that had summer and winter camps could grow domesticated crops during the summer, and hunt and/or fish in the winter. Gradually, many, societies relied more and more on their domesticated crops. Planting, tending, and harvesting domesticated crops required people to live in more settled communities rather than be mobile.

Among the Arikara, women farmed bottomlands along the river, where they planted corn, beans, squash, and sunflowers. They also foraged for wild edibles, such as wild potatoes, turnips, various grasses, fruits and berries. The men fished in the Missouri River using spears and wooden traps, and caught turtles and waterfowl. The men also hunted, bison being the most important source of meat. Before the arrival of the Spanish in Meso-America, there were no horses on the plains to help in the hunting of bison. Instead, the entire community would construct corrals into which they would then drive the bison and kill them with spears and bows and arrows. The community would then work together to butcher the animals and prepare the meat and skins, as well as tools made from bone, sinew, and internal organs.

Currently, most Arikara live on the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota with two other societies: the Hidatas and Mandans. Together they are known as the “The Affiliated Tribes.” Farming continues, especially the farming of European crops such as wheat, and the ranching of both cattle and bison.

A more stereotypic plains or prairie society would be the Teton Lakota. The typical image of the Lakota depicts hunters and warriors mounted on horseback. But the word Lakota means “friends” or “allies,” and Teton comes from “tetonwan” which means “dwellers of the prairie”( Bonvillain 2001). So how did the friendly people of the prairies become feared warriors of the plains? Before 1750, the Teton Lakota lived in what is now the state of Minnesota, along the Missouri and Minnesota rivers. The French explorer LaSalle encountered horticultural societies along the southern Missouri River in the seventeenth century. The Spanish sent out expeditions from their settlements in the southwest, but these were short-lived. Like the Arikara, Lakota women grew corn, beans, and squash along the rivers and gathered wild rice and other edible plants. The men hunted bison, elk, and deer. The Lakota also had extensive trade networks that extended north, south, east, and west.

In the 1700s, the Lakota started experiencing difficulties, as more and more Europeans and displaced Native American societies started moving farther and farther west. The effect was much like a line of dominoes: when the first one falls, it knocks down the next, and so forth on down the line. As Europeans started establishing settlements farther west, they pushed Native American communities out of their

traditional homelands, destabilizing many societies. Ultimately this is what happened to the Lakota; they were continually pushed westward, away from the rivers where they lived and farmed, to the Great Plains.

The plains and prairie geographic areas are hard to define. This area extends west from the Mississippi River to eastern California, from the timberline of the Canadian Prairie Provinces to what is now northern Texas. As large as this geographic area is, it looms even larger in the American imagination. Say “Indian” or “Indian lands” and this is the image people see in their minds: a half-naked man in a feathered headdress riding a horse across the flat plains in pursuit of bison. This vision of American Indian life only applied to a relatively small number of people for a very short period of time.

The land of the Great Plains tends to be flat. It does not have much forests and the rainfall is typically not sufficient for agriculture. The main difference between the plains and the prairies are the types of grasses. Prairie grass grows much taller than the short plains grasses, sometimes as much as 6 feet in height. The roots of the shorter plains grasses grow in dense tangles that contribute to the development of what is termed **sod**, a substance that could be made into bricks to construct sod houses for both Native peoples and early Euro-American settlers in the area. While sod is a good building material, it makes it very difficult to farm in these areas without steel plows. Euro-American farmers used steel plows to remove the sod holding the lower layers of soil in place. However, when droughts occurred, as in the early twentieth century, the near-constant winds stirred up the unprotected loose soil and resulted in the infamous dust storms of the 1930s. Many areas are still recovering from the environmental damage of what was known as the **Dust Bowl**, which, along with cattle overgrazing, has nearly wiped out the native grasses that helped maintain the protective layer of sod.

The arrival of horses on the plains coincided with the expansion of a European presence and trade along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. This may be why so many Euro-Americans can only imagine the Native peoples of the plains (and, in much of popular culture, all Native Americans) on horseback, hunting bison. Few Plains peoples encountered Europeans until the early 1800s when fur traders arrived. After the French and Indian War in 1763, France ceded all its territory east of the Mississippi to England, and west of the Mississippi to

Spain. At that point, Spain started more frequent incursions to the plains, establishing a fort at what is now St. Louis and starting a trade network to the south and central plains. Around this same time, British/Canadian explorers made contact with farming villages on the upper Missouri. The United States became a rival in this area with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, and soon after the Lewis and Clark expedition set out to explore and map the area.

At first, trade between the Plains peoples and Europeans and Euro-Americans was balanced. The Plains peoples only gradually accepted European trade goods, while the Europeans and Americans wanted animal furs. Some Native societies such as the prairie horticultural **Mandan** and **Pawnees** raised surplus crops for trade with the Euro-Americans and foraging Plains societies. Other horticultural societies functioned as brokers or intermediaries between Euro-Americans and mobile foraging societies.

The increase in population and hunting for trade soon had negative consequences. Competition for resources made the permanent horticultural villages on the prairies vulnerable to attack, as people grew desperate for food and supplies. Increased population density made these settled villages more vulnerable to diseases because the people were living close together—a situation that always increases the transmission of disease. Those societies that adapted to foraging to obtain resources expanded, while horticultural societies experienced a loss of territory. Both foraging and horticultural societies experienced social change and instability.

After arriving on the plains, the Lakota found it difficult to continue their horticultural economy. Their farming technology of digging sticks was not successful on the thick sod of the plains. Ultimately, the Lakota became highly mobile foragers, relying largely on hunting. Over the next century, the Lakota adapted well to their new environment. One reason they adapted so well was the arrival of the horse around 1750. To the Lakota, horses are “*sunka wakan*” or “sacred dog” (Bonvillain 2001), which illustrates how important the horse became to the societies of the plains.

The change in the economy of societies like the Lakota had consequences throughout their social organization. While women did participate in hunting, their roles in providing resources decreased,

which in turn decreased their social and political status. Warfare between Plains societies, now competing with each other for horses and limited resources, increased. Warfare grew even greater as more and more Euro-Americans first traveled through and then settled on the plains. In a little more than a century the Lakota went from the friendly farmers on the prairies to the stereotype of Native American hunters and warriors on the Great Plains.

The Haundenosaune or Iroquois are another example of a Native American society that is not typically thought of as horticultural. But archaeological evidence indicates that the Haundenosaune have been producing domesticated food resources for close to 1,000 years. The Haundenosaune are a group of Native American societies (the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca) that share similar languages (Iroquoian), kin, political and economic systems, and a similar oral tradition and spiritual beliefs. Archaeological, linguistic, and oral tradition all indicate that the Haundenosaune migrated to the Northeast over 1,000 years ago. Their languages are related to other languages, such as Cherokee, Tuscarora, Huron, Caddoan, and Siouan. Like many societies of the northern and southern woodlands, the Haundenosaune have a matrilineal and matrilocal kinship system and a rank political system. The oral tradition of the Haundenosaune, particularly the story of Sky Woman, is similar to other societies, like the Ojibwa, which were found along the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes. One of the big questions of the archaeology done in the northeastern part of what is now the United States is: did the Iroquois migrate to the Northeast as a horticultural society, or did they develop horticulture, particularly the cultivation of corn, once they were in the Northeast?

Archaeological evidence indicates that the Iroquois domesticated different crops at different times, with beans, squash, and sunflowers being domesticated first, followed by corn (sometimes called **maize**). Corn is a very unique crop in the Americas. Most other domesticated crops were grown directly from the seeds of wild plants, but corn is an example of a crop that the Native peoples, in what is now Mexico, selectively bred and hybridized from the wild grass **Teosinte** (pronounced *tA-O-'sin-tE*) somewhere between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago.



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*Teosinte, a Maize-teosinte hybrid, Maize or modern corn*

Corn cobs found at archaeological sites show the development of corn from a grass looking much like wheat, to a cob about the size of your thumb with only a few kernels of corn, to larger and larger cobs that resemble the corn we know today. Further, the Native peoples developed a wide variety of hues in their corn. The farming of corn soon spread from Mexico to many other parts of the Americas, both north and south. Early Spanish explorers in the Southwest wrote about the rainbow of colors of corn drying on pueblo roofs. The various colors of corn indicate different breeds of corn grown for specific reasons. Some corn was bred to arid areas with little rainfall, others to the short growing season of the Northeast. Some breeds of corn were planted on the borders of cornfields to fight off blight and pests. The Native peoples of the Americas developed over 30 varieties of corn to be used in different environments and for different purposes.

In time, corn came to the northeastern and southeastern woodlands, including Haundenosaune territory. Corn became one of the staple crops of the horticultural and agricultural Native peoples, along with beans and squash. These three crops were grown together and often eaten together, so among the Haundenosaune they are referred to as **the Three Sisters** and are very important to the economies of these Native peoples. A cycle of ceremonies is conducted throughout the year to ensure the growth of and to give thanks for these crops.

While the Haundenosaune grew crops, they also continued to gather wild edibles such as roots, tubers, greens, berries, fruit, nuts and seeds. Wild strawberries and maple syrup were important foraged crops and there are thanksgiving ceremonies for them. They also hunted animals such as deer, squirrel, beaver, and bear, along with birds and waterfowl, but fish provided most of the non-vegetable food (Bonvillain 2001). The Haundenosaune, like other Native American horticultural societies, did not plow and plant on huge tracts of land. They planted on small tracts of land with digging sticks. They did not irrigate their crops, but depended on rainfall, which is called dry land farming. There is some evidence that they used natural fertilizer, such as uneaten parts of fish. When the land grew **fallow**, meaning it no longer supported crops, they would move their farmland or entire village to a new area. Contemporary farmers allow fields to go fallow (do not plant crops on them) for a year or two. Farming was done on a relatively small scale as compared to agricultural communities in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but it was very successful. It is estimated that the women, who did most of the farming of eastern woodland societies, produced three to four times the amount of food produced by contemporary European farmers (Weatherford 1991).

Native American farming societies are generally referred to as horticultural, not **agricultural**. In agricultural societies, most of the food consumed by a society is produced through farming, and there is little gathering of wild edibles or fishing and hunting. Indeed, the large scale of farming in agricultural societies, with acres of plowed fields, use of irrigation and fertilizers, and frequently domesticated animals, such as cows, horses, sheep, goats, and pigs, makes the diversified means of getting food found in horticultural impossible.



In *Ancient Drums, Other Moccasins*, Harriet Kupferer refers to southwestern Pueblo societies as **intensive farmers**. Like European agricultural societies, the people of the Pueblos got most of their food from farming; they did not have domesticated animals. They did irrigate their crops, built permanent villages and had—and still have—a complex social and political organization.



Courtesy of NASA & commons.wikimedia.org

*A digital model of ancient Pueblo Bonito (Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, U.S.) before it was abandoned. The circles in the picture are kivas.*



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*A kiva, a subterranean religious structure at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico.*

Archaeological sites of societies in the Southwest have attracted much attention because many of them are quite spectacular. Chaco Canyon, Monte Verde, the pictographs of Red Rock Canyon, and the misnamed Montezuma's Castle all demonstrate the skill, ingenuity, and diversity of the Native peoples who lived there. The peoples of the Southwest have been researched and studied by generations of anthropologists. Like all scientists, archaeologists and anthropologists like to categorize the information (**data**) they gather. Thus, there are a lot of categories for the information we have about the Native peoples of the Southwest. Anthropologists and archaeologists put the **pre-historic cultures** of the Southwest into four categories: the **Puebloan**, **Mogollon**, **Hohokam**, and **Patayan**. The present-day societies of the Southwest are also divided into four categories on the basis of cultural and linguistic similarities: the **Puebloan**, **Apachean**, the Tohono O'odham, Akimel O'odham, and **Yuman**.

The Ancestral Puebloans, also known as the Anasazi, lived on the Colorado Plateau, and were probably the ancestors of today's Pueblo peoples who continue to live and farm in the Southwest. This development may have been in response to climatic changes, or it may have been that their ancestors were such successful foragers that they had to develop horticulture to feed their increasing populations. In the

Americas this is called the **formative era**. People still got food through fishing, hunting, and gathering wild edibles, but they also started to depend on an increasing number of crops that they grew.

In their developmental period, Ancestral Puebloans lived in **pit houses** in small villages. The pit houses, because they were partly underground, would stay cool in the hot climate. The climate of the Southwest gradually changed, making horticulture more productive. The Ancestral Puebloan people developed above-ground masonry houses and crop storage rooms, some of which still exist today. The pit houses developed into **kivas**, a semi-subterranean ceremonial structure. Chaco Canyon has many masonry-style houses and kivas. About 500 years ago drought conditions forced the Ancestral Puebloan peoples to consolidate their communities and migrate. Anthropologists refer to these consolidated groups as the Western and Eastern Pueblos. Despite the invasions by Spain and then the United States, the present-day Pueblo communities demonstrate a great deal of **cultural continuity** with their ancestral groups.

The Mogollon people lived in the eastern Southwest in what is now northern Mexico. Like the Ancestral Puebloans, they lived in pit houses, but changed to Pueblo-style architecture much later than did the Ancestral Puebloans. The Mogollon people also prospered until the climatic changes and drought that occurred about 500 years ago. Some archaeologists and anthropologists think they were the ancestors of the Zuni, in what is known today as New Mexico, which would mean that, like the Puebloans, the Mogollon peoples migrated.

The Hohokam lived in the Sonoran Desert, along the Gila and Salt rivers. This was a hot region, with little rainfall. The Hohokam people foraged and also produced food through agriculture. They developed extensive irrigation systems that were possible as their towns were usually along rivers. The Hohokam also built hundreds of miles of canals. The cultural artifacts of the Hohokam show an influence from Meso-America: stepped pyramids, ball courts, platform mounds, and the use of turquoise, copper, and pyrite for jewelry and household items. Just as with other pre-historic groups of the Southwest, archaeologists see great changes in the Hohokam culture around 500 years ago. Their irrigation systems and canals started to deteriorate, and apparently were not repaired, although their towns began to show evidence of fortification. It could be that the Hohokam people were experiencing

pressures from societies to the north, along with the climatic changes occurring throughout the Southwest. The Tohono O'odham and Akimel O'odham people now live in Hohokam territory, but it is not clear if they are descendants.

The Patalyan peoples continued foraging until fairly recently, about 1,000 years ago. They occupied the area around the Colorado and Gila rivers, and developed into the Yuman cultures.

In addition, several different Athabascan-speaking groups (such as the Navajo and Apache) currently live in the Southwest. Each of these groups has an origin story, in most cases involving some process of emergence from one or more underworlds, anchoring them to a particular place. Scholars claim, however, that these groups migrated into the region from the north sometime after 1200.

The historian Richard White has shown that Native American societies were very flexible in the way they obtained resources. When a society could no longer get enough resources using one method, they would try another. In the Southeast for example, societies would alternate between foraging and horticultural depending on environmental factors. A society might engage in horticulture for decades, but as the land grew fallow, they would rely more on hunting. Allowing farm fields to go fallow would attract animals and fowl, so hunters would not have to travel far for successful hunting. When hunting resources grew scarce, a society would return to horticulture on reinvigorated land. As the society shifted between ways of getting resources, their social structure also changed. While engaging in horticulture the society would be larger and live in semi-permanent settlements; when engaged in foraging, the society would split into smaller groups and become semi-mobile (White 1983). This flexible approach to getting resources helped Native American societies avoid many of the pitfalls experienced by food-producing societies in other parts of the world.

The cultural geographer Jared Diamond has referred to agriculture as *The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race* (1987). This is an unusual statement and position. In Western society agriculture is seen as the epitome of civilization: with agriculture comes settled communities, the development of written languages, mathematics and science, more leisure time for the development of arts, and a

structured political system. Founders of the United States, such as Thomas Jefferson, saw agriculture as necessary for a democracy. But as Diamond points out, foraging and horticultural societies had many of these things. Science and scientific thinking, along with mathematics was needed for people to be successful foragers and horticulturists. These societies had (and continue to have) very elaborate arts. Their kinships systems can be very complicated and political systems can be democratic.

Foraging and horticultural societies gather from a wide variety of resources. If one or more resources are not available, other resources can generally be found. The variety of grains, grasses, fruits, fish, and some meat makes for a very healthy diet—the kind our doctors wish we would eat today. There is a continuing myth that foraging was a hand-to-mouth existence, with hunger always lurking. This is true of Arctic or Sub-Arctic societies, where resources might be very scarce, hard to find, and very dependent on the skill and luck of the hunters. But in foraging societies found in temperate climates, people might spend 20 hours a week gathering food, while in an agricultural society people might spend 20 hours a day during planting and harvest time to produce food. The time spent in most foraging societies gathering food would leave plenty of time for the development of storytelling, music and dancing, and other arts. Further, Diamond says, agriculture had a lot of negative consequences.

Agricultural societies tend to focus on a few crops. As a consequence, the diet of an agricultural society is often less healthy than those in foraging societies, as agriculturalists are frequently missing important nutrients not found in their crops. Additionally, if the crops fail because of drought, too much rain or hail, an early or late frost or blight, entire communities could find themselves on the brink of starvation. Large-scale agriculture makes it difficult for people to fall back on other methods of getting food. If the community has domesticated animals, how are they to be fed? Additionally, wild game would have been driven from the area, and wild foods have been eliminated. The runoff from farm fields and the waste left from domesticated animals fouls the water, so even fishing is often not an option.

The histories and oral traditions of agricultural societies around the world illustrate the consequences of crop failures and shows how early government systems worked to enforce the storing of some crops in case of famine. For example, in the Old Testament, Joseph convinced the Egyptian Pharaoh to store twice the amount of grain usually kept for emergencies such as a coming blight or drought. Continued famine due to drought caused many southwestern agricultural societies like the Pueblos to move or revert to horticulture or foraging as some of the negatives of agriculture were realized.

Another factor associated with agricultural societies is the increase in communicable diseases. As more and more people lived together in close proximity in settled communities, diseases and illnesses quickly passed throughout the entire community. You may have noticed similar incidents in your dorms. One person gets a cold and pretty soon everyone on the floor has a cold. We now have many medicines and antibiotics to treat illnesses that previously killed large percentages of agricultural communities. Many serious diseases, such as typhoid and cholera, were spread by water that was contaminated by human and animal waste. Water that had formerly been a source of nourishment became a source of disease, because people had unknowingly dumped their waste, garbage, and even bodies into water sources. Foraging and horticultural societies with smaller communities that moved around were less likely to experience the epidemics found in the cities that developed as people settled down and lived in growing urban areas as a result of agriculture.

A less visible consequence of settled agricultural societies was the changes in the access to resources, and how those resources were distributed throughout communities. In foraging societies everyone helps in getting needed resources, and everyone shares them. Foraging societies are very **egalitarian**—everyone had fairly equal access to resources and participation in the political structure (see Chapter 4). There was not a distinct **division of labor**, in which some people did particular work, some of which had more status than others. Everyone contributed to the labor needed to obtain resources and shared those resources through a process called **reciprocity**. Reciprocity simply means that everyone in a community shares needed resources on either an informal or formal basis. In informal reciprocity people would simply share whatever resources they had. This was not necessarily altruism on

peoples' parts, but good sense. There was no way to preserve foods for long periods of time, so if it was not consumed, it would go bad. Better to share food with your community members, particularly when they were kin. It would then be more likely that they would share with you when they had resources and you did not. The extended kin groups of foraging and horticultural societies were essential to the success of systems of reciprocity. Furthermore, the sharing of resources helped ensure the survival of kin and maintain the bonds of both existing and future affine kin.

In more formal systems of reciprocity, the exchange of food and other resources were part of community-wide rituals. Many of the Northwest societies practiced the **potlatch**. Potlatches were held to mark various life events like birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. During the potlatch, the kin group of the honored individual would give away resources, knowing that at some point in the near future another kin group would be honoring one of their members with a potlatch, and they would in turn receive resources. Plains societies had **give-aways** that functioned in a similar way. Whether a society practiced formal or informal reciprocity, it did two important things for individuals and the community in general. First, it distributed goods throughout the community. Everyone helped get needed resources and everyone shared them. Some people might have a bit more than others, but various social expectations and religious beliefs encouraged people to share what resources they had. As long as resources were available, everyone shared a portion of them. Among foraging and horticultural societies it is unusual to find that some people hold the bulk of the resources while other portions of the population have little or none.

Second, the sharing of resources would give a kin group and individuals within that kin group **status**. The sharing of resources, the following of religious and other social beliefs about the value of sharing, brought status to people. In the next chapter about political organization, we will see how the practice of reciprocity could bring political power to kin groups and individuals within those kin groups. If the way you were brought up and your religious beliefs were not enough to encourage you to share resources, the fact that reciprocity was how an individual would get status in his/her community encouraged you to share.

Reciprocity was absolutely necessary to the survival of a foraging society. Everyone worked together and shared the results of their labor. Reciprocity continued to be important in horticultural and pastoral societies. Being able to depend on others increased the likelihood that all people in a community, who were basically extended kin members, would have the resources necessary for survival. But as Diamond points out, the system of reciprocity and the status it brought started to break down in agricultural societies. The larger these societies got, the more likely some people had better access to resources than others. If people were not related to you through descent or affinity, there was less reason to share resources with them. Status became more dependent on access to resources, not the sharing of resources. In time, the access to resources became inherited within kin groups and individuals, along with the political power that came from having resources. Excess resources, more than you need to survive, can be defined as **wealth**. Over time in agricultural and then industrial societies, a few people have access to resources, while most people have limited access or none. Within agricultural and industrial societies, access to resources meant a wealthy family or individual also had access to power, and vice versa. Another reason, says Diamond, from the perspective of what is best for an entire community, agricultural was a big mistake.

In many ways the history of the European invasion of the Americas demonstrates how the indigenous peoples lost the ability to get or produce their own resources and control the distribution of those resources. The loss of land, people and control of resources changed Native societies, and had such severe economic and political consequences that most of them are only now starting to recover. The previous example of the Teton Lakota being pushed west out of the prairies to which they had adapted is but one example of the experiences of most indigenous peoples in the Americas. From the seventeenth to the twentieth century, most indigenous societies were pushed from their homelands to reservations and urban areas.

Among the first of these relocations of Native peoples were **prayer towns** in New England. After King Philip's (Metacom) War in 1676, surviving Native peoples in New England were forced from their homelands into shantytowns that were often built on islands or land so poor white settlers did not want it. In 1835 the **Five Civilized Tribes** of the Southeast—so called because they were horticultural-



agricultural societies that had adopted many European customs including Christianity, domesticated animals, clothing, housing, fenced-in farmland, a written language, and slavery—were forced from their farmlands west to the Oklahoma Territory. Their removal is known as **The Trail of Tears**, a forced march during which an estimated 25% of the population died. During the later part of the nineteenth century, most western Native societies were either removed from traditional homelands, or restricted to **reservations**. The expectation of U.S. and Canadian governments, as well as their white citizenry, was that these Native peoples would achieve “civilization” through agriculture. However, reservation lands were typically too small and poor to support a farming economy. This policy also ignored both that many of these societies were and had been horticultural or agricultural.

In the twentieth century, many Native Americans living on reservations experienced **relocation** and **termination**. During periods of relocation, people were coerced into moving to urban areas with the promise of better jobs and housing. What Native peoples typically found were low-wage jobs and housing in urban slums. Termination was a U.S. governmental policy to end the special trust status of Native lands (reservations) and end government funding—often treaty obligations owed for the previous loss of land suffered by Native American societies. All of these factors, along with environmental changes, required that Native peoples find new ways of getting needed resources. While some continue historical methods of getting resources part-time, most are also engaged in the wage labor force of the United States and Canada. Unfortunately, many governmental policies in both countries limit the success of Native communities to sustain themselves and their self-determination.

In the twenty-first century, most peoples of the Arctic and Sub-Arctic area are members of the wage-earning population of Canada and the United States, but some are still foragers, if only for part of the year, to supplement low wages for the little work available. Consequently, the First Nations of these areas are very concerned about governmental policies that could affect their ability to obtain resources in traditional ways, or that would alter their environments. One of the most significant of such projects is the Hydro-Quebec project to get power from dams on lakes and rivers in the reserve areas of the James

Bay Cree of northern Quebec. This project flooded thousands of acres, displacing not only the James Bay Cree, but also the flora and fauna of the area.

The Cree and Inuit populations of northern Quebec, along with sympathizers from around the world, organized to stop the development of the hydropower program that would harm them. They won the first round of legal battles in the Canadian Superior Court, only to have the ruling overturned by the Quebec Court of Appeals, not on the legal issues of the case, but because the Court cited the “interests of the larger society.”

The Cree and Inuit population negotiated the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975, which relinquished their rights to the land in exchange for an immediate payment of \$60 million, and an additional \$30 million to be paid in the future. The impact of the James Bay hydroelectric projects on the environment was enormous. Beaver, muskrat, otter, hare, and mink became nearly extinct. Migration routes for both birds and animals were changed, resulting in the deaths of thousands of caribou. Rotting wood and silt build up in the rivers caused the death of fish and water birds. As a consequence, when Hydro-Quebec proposed another James Bay project in 1983, there was overwhelming opposition. The primary beneficiaries of the project, the states of New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine, canceled their contracts with Hydro-Quebec, defeating the project.

After the James Bay project, the First Nations of the Arctic and Sub-Arctic areas realized that by working together they could influence the government of Canada. In the Northwest Territories, the Canadian government and multi-national companies had been mining various minerals (zinc, nickel, uranium, and diamonds) that disturbed the environment and did not benefit the First Nations peoples whose land was being mined. Projects such as these and the James Bay project made it virtually impossible for the peoples of the Arctic areas to continue their traditional lifestyles that had provided for them for over 10,000 years. In 1979, the Inuit filed a legal suit against the multi-nationals and the Canadian government to stop further mining. The court ruled against the Inuit, however, claiming that the 1670 royal charter to the Hudson Bay Company stripped them of property rights. The court maintained the people had land-use rights but not land-ownership rights.

Justifiably angry, the Inuit started advocating for self-determination, the ability to determine for themselves the relationships they would have with the government and businesses. They formed the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC), while Canadian First Nations peoples formed the Committee for Original People's Entitlement. The goals of both organizations are to protect and advance First Nations rights and to better their economic, political, and social welfare. In the early 1980s the ITC proposed dividing the Northwest Territories into two regions: one to be under the control of the Inuit (and to be known as Nunavut) and the other to remain under the control of the provincial and federal governments. In 1982 a plebiscite was held in which 85% of the Inuit voted in favor of the formation of Nunavut, while the majority of Euro-Canadians voted against the plan. The Inuit and Canadian governments reached the historic "Nunavut Final Land Claim Agreement" in 1993. As agreed, the territory of Nunavut was established April 1, 1999, with ceremonies in the capital of Igloolik.

While the establishment of a First Nations territory is worthy of celebration, it by no means solves the problems of the peoples of the Arctic. These are still very poor, remote communities suffering from the problems of limited educational opportunities, few wage-earning jobs, and severe health problems. Additionally, the environment continues to suffer contamination and the loss of plants and animals, not to mention the increasing effects of climate change. The First Nations peoples of the Arctic and Sub-Arctic will have to continue fighting the impact and consequences of Manifest Destiny well into the twenty-first century.

Like that of the Inuit and James Bay Cree, the lands held by Native American communities are often poor and polluted by mining and other industries that have not and do not benefit them. Indigenous-held lands (reservations in the United States and reserves in Canada) are often in remote areas, in which education, employment, and health facilities are scarce. Native peoples are often in the conflicting situation of no longer being able to practice the traditional resource-getting and production methods of their ancestors, but not having the resources for typical wage-earning jobs that would give them the same standard of living as the majority of Euro-Americans and Canadians.

Currently over 60% of Native peoples in the United States live in urban or suburban areas. Growing numbers of them have the educational opportunities for well-paid wage jobs. But most still feel a connection with their homelands; returning for pow-wows, potlatches, give-aways, and other family celebrations. Many of them return to their families' traditional homelands to teach, practice medicine, and as lawyers who work to protect what remains of those homelands.

The earth will no longer support large numbers of egalitarian foraging societies in which all people have equal access to resources. Can human societies find ways to make sure all people have access to enough resources to survive? This requires much more than reciprocity within a community; this requires that all of us think differently about the resources we consume, and those that are available for others and for the future. The Iroquois believe that decisions should be made with consideration for seven generations: our generation, the three generations that came before us that will hold us accountable for our decisions, and the generations that come after us who will have to live with the consequences of our decisions. Perhaps even more difficult is to think differently about the access to power that some people have because of their access to resources. That is the subject of the next chapter.

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## Suggested Questions

What resources do you depend on? How do you get them? What would happen if the stores in which we get our resources were to all close, how would you get needed resources?

We are beginning to see consequences to climate change in our time. Can you name some of these consequences?

Climate change has occurred in the past and has had consequences for historical societies. For example, early societies

in the Southwest experienced cultural changes and migration because of climate change. What might we experience in the future because of climate change?

We all want to have good jobs in our future. What is a “good job”? What jobs have high status; what have low status? Why do some jobs have greater status than others?

Diseases go through an evolutionary process, as do any other life forms. New diseases evolve, old diseases mutate. Can you think of any recent examples of this?

The Mohawk leader Joseph Brant visited England several times in the seventeenth century. He was impressed by Britain’s military power, but shocked by the sight of people begging and living on the streets. Why do you think he was shocked? What would be the expectation about resources in a Native American society?

How might factors like climate change and the need for new sources of energy effect the way humans get their resources in the future?

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## Suggested Resources

For more information about the role of women in pre-historic economies, see *Woman the Gatherer*, edited by Frances Dahlberg, which includes the article “Woman the Gatherer: Male Bias in Anthropology,” by Sally Slocum.

Peggy Sanday's works previously cited are also good references for the role of women in economies.

Richard White's *The Roots of Dependency* offers excellent case studies of the economic flexibility of indigenous American societies and how those economies were undermined by European intrusion.

Robert Jarvenpa's *Northern Passage* illustrates how the contemporary Na Dine'h people attempt to maintain their economy within the larger political structure of Canada.

While not about indigenous American societies per se, books by Jared Diamond, such as *Collapse* and *Guns, Germs and Steel*, offer insights into how and why indigenous societies in Africa, Asia, and the Americas were overwhelmed by European intrusions.

The pre-historic societies of the southwestern part of the United States are good case studies for the consequences of climate change. In addition to the previously mentioned *Life in a Pueblo* by Kathy Kamp, I also recommend *Those Who Came Before: Southwestern Archaeology in the National Park System*, by Robert Lister and Florence Lister, and its companion video of the same title.

Excellent studies of the food and medicinal resources of the Americas are *Indian Givers* and *Native Gifts*, by Jack Weatherford.

## Chapter 4

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# STATUS, RANK AND POWER

*The Lords of the Confederacy of the Five Nations shall be mentors of the people for all time. The thickness of their skin shall be seven spans—which is to say that they shall be proof against anger, offensive actions and criticism. Their hearts shall be full of peace and good will and their minds filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the Confederacy. With endless patience they shall carry out their duty and their firmness shall be tempered with a tenderness for their people. Neither anger nor fury shall find lodgement in their minds and all their words and actions shall be marked by calm deliberation.*

From Gayanashagow, *The Great Law of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy*

As was discussed in the last chapter, control over resources and their distribution contributes to the status kin groups and individuals have within their societies. This status is the path to political power. Political power gives kin groups or individuals greater access to surplus resources (wealth), their distribution, and influence or control over the lives of other people. Political power can be **ascribed**, meaning a person is born to it, inherits resources (wealth) and power; or a kin group or individual can **achieve** it through the actions of those within a kin group or an individual. These two ways of obtaining political power have consequences for the societies in which they exist.

Formerly anthropologists, when talking about the political organization of Native American societies would categorize them as **bands, tribes, and chiefdoms**. These terms are still frequently used in referring to indigenous societies around the world. A band would refer to a small, usually migratory, foraging society in which there was little division of labor and political power was egalitarian, that is, everyone

shared resources and any political power was achieved within a kin group. A tribe would refer to a larger society that got its resources through foraging, pastoralism, or horticulture. In a tribe, there was a greater division of labor, and individuals within some kin groups had greater rank than others in the community, who could in turn give them greater political power; but it was still generally achieved power, not ascribed. Chiefdom societies were larger than tribal societies, but were still foraging, pastoral, or horticultural. In chiefdoms, some individuals would have greater political influence or power than others, but the foundation of this power came from their high status kin groups. Power was ascribed within kin groups, but achieved by individuals within that kin group.

You may find these categories to be somewhat confusing. And you may be asking some questions: Do societies change from bands to chiefdoms? What characteristics would define a society that moved from one category to another (population size, are they foragers or engaged in food production)? What happens when a society adapts to environmental changes, as in the Southwest? Terms such as bands are also applied to kin groups. Many Plains' societies, such as the Lakota, are organized around kin groups called bands; for example, the Hunka Punka, of which Sitting Bull was a member, and the Crow Dogs, a common family name in the Dakotas. The Lakota had chiefs, particularly in times of war, so, are the Lakota a band, tribal, or chiefdom society? In *The Roots of Dependency*, the historian Richard White points out that Native peoples were flexible in the way they obtained resources—sometimes largely through foraging, other times through horticulture. When Native American societies changed the way they got resources, they also changed their political organization. So, in one time period they might be a horticultural society with chiefs, and a few decades later they might be foragers with a more equalitarian political system.

There is a fourth category, **kingdoms**, that is seldom applied to indigenous societies in North America. Generally a kingdom refers to societies in which an individual inherits ascribed power on the basis of his (or her if there are no males heirs) kin group and is usually only applied to European and some Asian societies. But archaeological evidence from societies in the Mississippi River Valley of 1,000 years ago, and those found in the Great Lakes area of 2,000 years



ago indicates these societies were very similar to European societies of the same time. These were horticultural/agricultural societies in which people lived in villages with populations of up to 30,000 people (Cahokia or the Fatherland Site of the Natchez, for example). Some individuals within these societies certainly had more status than others. That status is demonstrated by where they lived, frequently on top of mounds constructed by community labor; and where and how they were buried, frequently on the top of mounds with valuable grave goods. Biological examination of skeletons shows that these individuals had a better diet and fewer injuries and diseases than others in the community and generally lived longer. If you were to read the archaeological reports from sites in the Mississippi River Valley and Ireland or Britain from 1,000 years ago, you would have a hard time determining which are from North America and which are from Europe. Yet, the European societies are referred to as kingdoms, while the Mississippi River Valley societies would be called chiefdoms.



*Mississippian and Related Cultures*

So why do Euro-Americans or Canadians so frequently see great political distinctions between societies in the Americas and those in Europe, and based on those distinctions find Native American societies to be inferior to those from Europe? Societies in Europe and Asia benefit from having written records. Native American societies of North America have their oral traditions, archaeological evidence, and the written documents of European explorers and conquerors, which were often quite biased. But these documents can still be informative, so let us look at a society that was documented by early French and Spanish explorers, the **Natchez**.

### Hierarchical Society or Kingdom?

The name “Natchez” probably came from French explorers who were among the first Europeans to have contact with the people who called themselves Theloe. The Theloe homeland was along the Mississippi River, in what are now the states of Louisiana and Mississippi. Their capital city was located southeast of what is now the city of Natchez, Mississippi. It is hypothesized that some elements of Theloe culture were influenced by societies of Meso-America through a process called **diffusion**: two societies have contact through trade, migration, or warfare and each influences the other. Like societies of Meso-America, the Theloe practiced skull **deformation**, (cradleboards were designed to gradually mold the skull of a baby into an angular shape), worshiped a sun deity, and had very complex social and political structures.

The oral tradition of the Theloe influenced their political and social organization. Their origin story tells of a man and a woman who came to a Theloe village. They were so bright it was assumed they had come from the sun. The man told of the Great Spirit and told the people not to drink, lie, steal, or commit adultery. He commanded the people to build a temple mound to better communicate with the Great Spirit. This man became the first Great Sun.

The Great Sun was the leader of the Theloe and held the dual offices of king and high priest. In many ancient societies the political leader, such as the pharaohs of Egypt, was also the religious leader. Like many ancient societies the Great Sun was a **theocratic** ruler, meaning that he ruled in the name of the society’s god. Unlike the

leaders of most Native American societies, who achieved power within their lifetimes and could be removed from power if they abused it, the Great Sun had ascribed and complete power over the people of his society; he could even order them to be executed if they displeased him, much like a European king. Like a European king, people bowed in the presence of the Great Sun, and he and his family were carried about on **litters**.

The Great Sun lived at the capital city, now referred to as the Fatherland Site. This ancient city (it was occupied at least 500 years before French contact) covered hundreds of acres around a central plaza that was used for public ceremonies. The Great Sun and his family lived in a house built on a platform mound on the north end of the plaza. Directly across from the Great Sun's house was another platform mound on the south side of the plaza where the main temple stood. Inside an eternal flame was kept. The layout of the Fatherland Site is much like that of ancient cities found in Meso-America.

The Theloel were an agricultural society. Their main crops were corn, beans, pumpkins, and tobacco. Because of the long growing season and the fertility of the soil, two corn crops could be grown annually. Although it was a matrilineal society, it appears that the oldest male was the leader of extended families. Men were warriors, but they also hunted and fished, cleared fields, helped in the planting and harvesting of crops, and built the houses. Women were primarily responsible for the weeding the fields, along with general domestic duties that included basketry, pottery, and making fishing nets. Both men and women worked the farm fields, and, while men did the hunting, the meat belonged to the women of the family of the hunter. Men and women worked in the construction of the society's mounds.

Just like in many societies around the world, warfare was very important. The second most important person in Theloel society was the war leader, called Tattooed Serpent, who was always a brother of the Great Sun. However, warfare among the Theloel was different than that found in Europe. It generally was not to gain additional land or force people to change their religion, but to capture men, women, and children for slaves or sacrifice without suffering any casualties. The war chief was required to pay compensation to the families of men of his society who were killed in raids.

We have only French and Spanish documents that describe the social organization of the Theloel, so there are many disagreements among anthropologists and historians about the details. We do know the Theloel were matrilineal. The mother of the Great Sun, through whom he inherited his office, was known as White Woman. When a Great Sun died, one of his sister's sons would inherit his rank, role, and power. The society consisted of four major classes of people: sun, noble, honored, and commoner (also called stinkards). The three highest classes were small but held most of the political power. Most Theloel people were commoners. However, unlike similarly structured European or Asian societies, there was social mobility among the Theloel because the upper classes were required to marry commoners. The class of the commoner spouse did not change, but it did for the children. The Theloel were matrilineal, so a child of a commoner father and a sun mother would inherit her class. If the mother was a commoner and the father was a sun the children would be of the next lower class (in this case noble).

Clearly, the Theloel should be considered a kingdom within the categories of political organization. In many ways, Theloel social and political organization was much like that of the European powers that would ultimately cause their extinction.

### Equalitarian Societies

Currently anthropologists typically categorize the political organization of societies as **equalitarian**, **rank**, and **hierarchical**. The Theloel are an example of a hierarchical society: one in which economic, political, and frequently religious power are interwoven and invested in a small percentage of the population. A small percentage of people, generally men, inherit ascribed power and have control over the lives of others and their access to resources. Hierarchical societies are rare in North America. The hierarchical political organization of the Theloel may well show contact and influence from Meso-American societies such as the Maya or Aztecs. More typical of Native North America are equalitarian or rank societies.

Generally foraging societies, in which everyone participates equally in obtaining and sharing resources are equalitarian. Political power is flexible and often dispersed among most of the population.

The **Innu**, or **Montagnais**, of the northern St. Lawrence River Basin are an example of an equalitarian society. Their economy focused on hunting and fishing and the gathering of wild edibles. Kinship was reckoned bilaterally, the more formal kin groups as found among the Haundenosaunee did not exist. Residence arrangements (called lodge-groups) were flexible. Generosity (especially as demonstrated by reciprocity), hospitality, cooperation, and loyalty were considered important attributes for all society members, especially for leaders. The Innu valued individual autonomy and the rights of women and men to make their own decisions and act independently. The members of the society made decisions. The absolute power of the Theloe Great Sun would not have been tolerated. Any kind of coercion of others was not tolerated, including in marriage. People who did not behave appropriately were ridiculed or ostracized, thus inappropriate behavior did not happen often. Leadership of a group was diffused, flexible, and depended on personal qualities (being generous and hospitable to all, including strangers, cooperating with others, rather than trying to control any task) and skills in obtaining or making resources. While an individual's skill and advice would be asked for, their influence was temporary and they could not exert authority or control. Europeans would refer to some men within these groups as chiefs, but within their society these men did not exercise any formal authority or power.

Europeans may have referred to some men as chiefs in an attempt to control the Innu in order to better exploit their resources. Instead of trying to deal with heads of families or individuals, European powers would try to work only with men who seemed to have some respect within the community, and, more importantly, were willing to serve as intermediaries between the Europeans and the Native communities. In many instances the men were bribed or given other incentives for working with the Europeans. In many of their encounters with Native Americans, Europeans would try to alter traditional leadership patterns to better suit their purposes, which in turn disrupted the traditional system of achieved power and resource distribution.

### Rank Societies

The **Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutis)**, although foragers, were an example of a rank society. Kwakwaka'wakw kin groups (numayms) were part of a system of social rank in which all kin groups were ranked

in relation to others. Additionally, each kin group “owned” names or positions that were also ranked. An individual could hold more than one name. Names were inherited from parents and grandparents, (generally by **primogeniture**, to the firstborn, who, whether a son or daughter, would take an ancestral name when she/he inherited from her/his father) and could be acquired through marriage. Thus, while an individual did not have an ascribed rank, he or she could acquire rank through kin associations. Kin groups did have ascribed rank. Individuals worked to enhance and validate the status of their families largely through **potlatches**. Potlatches were public feasts, open to the entire community, with economic, social, and ritual purposes. It was, and still is, an often-ostentatious distribution of property by an individual of rank to enhance or increase his or her status. A potlatch benefitted both the individual and their kin group and the whole society because, while it helped increase status for families, it also distributed resources throughout the community. Even the poorest people with no status were invited and received gifts.

People of the highest ranks (these high-ranking men were called chiefs by Europeans, but the translation from Kwakwaka’wakw would be closer to “Big Man”) were the leaders of their kin groups and their villages. They were exempt from most subsistence activities, so members of their community would contribute food to them. The Big Men would organize cooperative labor, such as the building of houses, whale hunting, and warfare. While Kwakwaka’wakw society had three ranks: nobles, commoners, and slaves, the rank of any individual or kin group was flexible. If the family were noble, their rank would have been maintained through the distribution of resources in potlatches. The greater the wealth of resources distributed, the more likely the status of the individual or kin group would be increased. Individuals could also move from one social rank to another by acquiring a “seat” or position of rank, or through the manipulation of kinship ties, as well as the accumulation of valued resources (wealth) through hard work. Big Men would also utilize gossip or their ties to the spiritual powers of **shamans** to increase their status or decrease that of others. As in most political systems, those who have wealth and power are more likely to keep it or increase it. Among the Kwakwaka’wakw, power was maintained through wealth that was redistributed in potlatches. But those who already had wealth and power were more likely to increase it, because it was they who organized communal work projects—

especially the important whale hunts. Individuals could rise in status, wealth, and power, but they had to have the cooperation of their kin group to accomplish this.

Early in their encounters with Europeans, the societies of the Northwest were able to conduct trade on their own terms. They had long been involved in long-distance trade with other Native societies; they never became dependent on the European trade items and would refuse to trade if they did not find the price to be agreeable. The Europeans were much more dependent on the trade goods they got from the societies of the Northwest than the Native peoples were on the trade goods of the Europeans. Because of the Europeans' dependence on the Native trade goods, they did not interfere with Native culture to the extent found in other parts of the Americas. However, there were changes within the Northwest societies. They gradually shifted their focus from getting resources for their own subsistence to getting trade items. In some cases this led to the over-exploitation of some resources. Also, the Europeans did not like trading with women, a task in which they had traditionally participated. The arrival of missionaries in the nineteenth century further reduced the status of women, as they did not see trade as an appropriate role for women. As a result, the status of women became reduced. The chiefs became richer and their political power solidified because the Europeans preferred to work with one individual they saw as being in power.

Although the Zuni had a **matrilineal** kinship organization, politically they were **hierarchical**. Their matrilineal households are the central focus of their society and function as social, economic, and ceremonial units. The senior woman of a household is responsible for organizing economic, social and ceremonial activities, as well as running her household and settling family disputes. The village leadership, like that of the Theloel, is a theocracy, with civil and religious authorities.

The Zuni socio-religious system is composed of five interlocking subsystems, each operating independently, yet synchronically to provides for the physical and social needs of the people. There are 15 clans extant at Zuni today; six **Kashina** societies; 12 separate curing societies, including eight Societies of the Completed Path (members of these societies perform ceremonies to cure the sick); and there is the Rain Priesthood and the Bow Priesthood.

Leaders of each organization plan and execute esoteric, non-public ceremonies that must be conducted in order to keep the world in beauty and harmony. These are done in private 40-day cycles. Only members of the individual society in question know when these ceremonies are performed, and they are the only ones present during the ceremonies. Only Rain Priesthood ceremonies are exclusively private. All other religious organizations have some parts of their religious ceremonies that are open to the public. The men and women who are members of the various Kashina societies perform public dances in the plazas.

Unlike the female heads of households, the leaders of these multiple religious organizations do not involve themselves in disputes but lead by moral example and speeches they make to the entire village. Because these religious leaders are not supposed to engage in any kind of conflict, the members of the priestly council the Bow Priesthood are responsible for carrying out such decisions. Formerly the Bow Priests were warriors responsible for military protection and defense of the Zuni people. Now they are charged with disciplining Zuni people for infractions. They implement decisions made by the leaders of religious organizations. Religious leaders also appoint a village “house chief” or **Pekwin**, who is always a member of the Dogwood clan. The Pekwin has Bow Priesthood assistants who aid him in settling disputes and protecting a village. The Pekwin can be removed from office if the people of a village complain to the Council of Priests about inappropriate behavior.

Contemporary Zuni political structures are an excellent example of **syncretism**, the blending of two or more cultural traditions. In addition to this socio-religious system, the Zuni now have a Constitution (ratified in 1970) and an elected system of governor, lieutenant governor, and tribal council, these officials take an oath of office from a traditional **Head Rain Priest** who reminds them they have responsibility for all their people whether “rich or poor, clean or dirty” (Ladd 1979). Recently, the Zuni have been remarkably successful in winning legal decisions that have returned land, particularly sacred sites such as Kolhuwala:wa and Zuni Salt Lake. The traditional social systems of the Zuni people, such as their clans, the practice of reciprocity, and their religious traditions have enabled them to maintain a high degree of cultural continuity.



An example of a very elaborate, extensive, and codified rank society was the **Iroquois** or **Haundenosaune Confederacy**. This Confederacy consisted of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas and Senecas (joined by the Tuscaroras in the seventeenth century), all societies that spoke similar Iroquoian languages and had similar social organizations. All were matrilineal and horticultural. Together, the Confederacy covered an enormous territory, from what is now Quebec City, south to the city of Schenectady, New York, and east from the Hudson River to the border of what are now the states of New York and Pennsylvania—an expanse larger than many European countries at the time of European contact. Through the Confederacy, these six societies bound themselves together to maintain peace among them and to act as a collective voice in their actions with other societies, including the Europeans when they arrived. In the oral tradition of the Haundenosaune, the Confederacy was founded by **The Peacekeeper**, a Huron (a society that spoke an Iroquoian language, but never joined the Confederacy) who established peace among the five nations and a codified social and political system which is laid out in **The Great Law**. Among the Haundenosaune, leadership was vested on the village, national, and confederacy level, much like the towns, states, provinces, and the nations of the United States and Canada today.

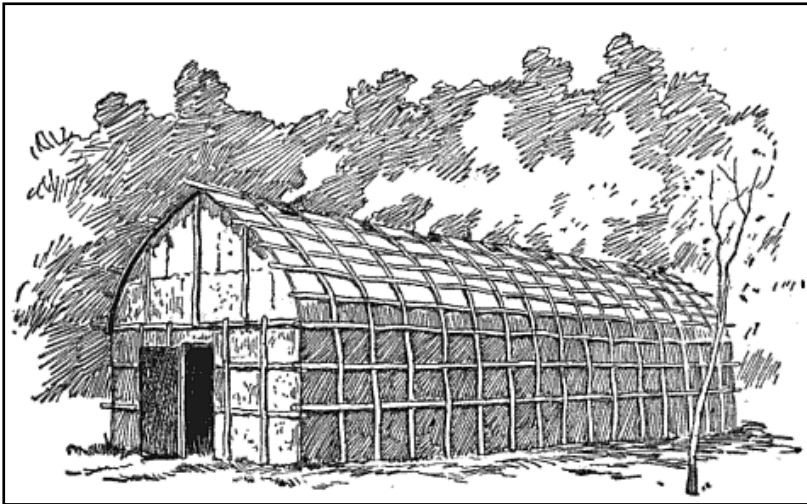
On the village level, clan chiefs were appointed by their **clan mothers** or **matrons**, the leading women of their extended matrilineal families. A chief was appointed for life, but he could be removed from office if his behavior was considered inappropriate by his village, especially the clan mothers. Each chief had a council of advisors, men and women, who could also be removed from office if the community considered their behavior inappropriate. These chiefs or sachems were not war leaders—indeed the Great Law stated that before appointment they should not have shed blood. Their duties involved settling disputes and making sure that each individual within the village had the resources they needed to survive. As the Iroquois highly valued the independence of individuals, a chief could not order people to take care of each other; he had to lead by example—by getting the resources for a poor family or doing whatever labor was necessary. It is said that the chiefs lived in the poorest-looking longhouses of a village, because so much of their time was spent in seeing to the welfare of their neighbors. If a chief did not live up to these expectations, he could be recalled and replaced by the clan mothers.

Each Haundenosaune village had three councils that would express opinions and decide on village policies: one council of elder men, one of women, and one of younger men (sometimes wrongly referred to as warriors). In debating public policy, it was the goal of these councils to reach a unanimous opinion, a collective voice. This does not mean that individuals strove to get the councils to do what he or she wanted; collective action meant that all could voice their opinions, but they were then expected to want what was for the best for their society. A speaker from each group would then present its decision in a meeting of all three councils. If the decisions of the three groups did not agree, further discussion and debate was needed to reach a collective voice for the village. Some Iroquois, such as the Seneca Red Jacket, were renowned for their rhetorical skills as speakers for the councils.

When conditions deemed it necessary, villages would send representatives from all three councils to either national meetings (all Mohawk villages for example) or of the Confederacy. Confederacy meetings involved trade, diplomatic, and military relations with other societies, but might also honor the lives of respected members of the community when they died and included discussions regarding whom to appoint as a new chief upon his death. A year of “condolence” typically followed the death of a chief. His successor would inherit his chief name, which was one of the names of the chiefs who first followed The Peacekeeper. Chiefs appointed in this method were called “hereditary” or “condoled chiefs,” as their appointments followed this mourning period.

Confederacy meetings were and are typically held once a year, but could be called more often if necessary, at Onondaga the geographic center of Haundenosaune territory. Onondaga holds a symbolic importance for the Confederacy as well. According to Haundenosaune oral tradition, the Confederacy was founded, perhaps as early as the 1100s, by The Peacekeeper and an Onondaga man named Hiawatha (no relation to the Longfellow poem, which is based on an Ojibwa story). While the Senecas and Mohawks accepted the words of the Gyanashagowa or Great Law (even adopting The Peacekeeper and Hiawatha as chiefs) the Onondaga were slow to do so. A man named Adodarhoh, crazed by the murder of his wife and daughters during warfare, became a cannibal who terrorized the Onondaga territory. The Peacekeeper went into the forest and found this man, whose hair hung

in locks that looked like snakes, and who resembled an evil spirit. The Peacekeeper was able to bring Adodarhoh back to himself, to his right mind. Because of The Peacekeeper's accomplishment, the Onondaga accepted the Great Law. The Peacekeeper appointed them to be the **Firekeepers** of the Confederacy, with Adodarhoh as their chief. In time the Cayugas and Oneidas joined the Confederacy.



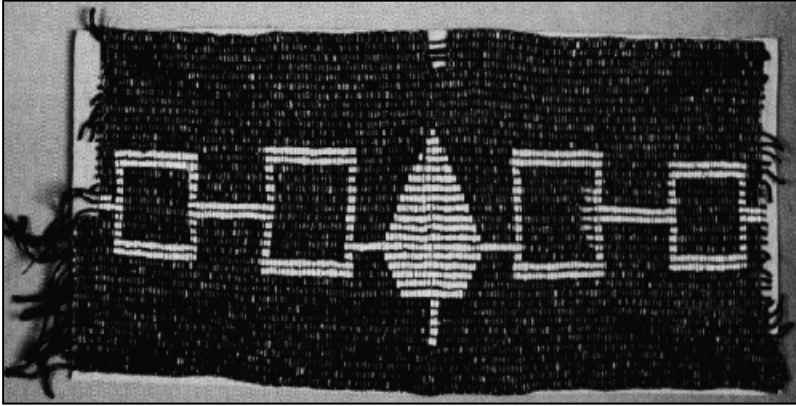
From *Stories of American History* by Wilbur F. Goady, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913, Pg. 20.

*An Iroquois Longhouse*

The Haundenosaune use their household structure, the **longhouse**, as a metaphor for the Confederacy, with each nation occupying a fire under the rafters, as families each had their place around a fire under the roof rafters of the longhouse. Each longhouse had an eastern and western door. In the Confederacy, the Mohawks occupy the eastern territory and are called the **Keepers of the Eastern Door**, while the Seneca occupy the western territory and are called the **Keepers of the Western Door**. The large Mohawk and Seneca nations, the first to follow The Peacekeeper, were named the **Elder Brothers**, protectors of the territory. The Onondagas, occupying the central area of **Iroquoia**, serve as the **Keepers of the Fire** of the Confederacy. The Cayugas and Oneidas, smaller in population and later in joining the Confederacy were the **Younger Brothers**.

In addition to visualizing the Confederacy as a longhouse, the Haundenosaune also used a **wampum belt** to show their unity. Wampum belts, made from purple and white shells found along the

coast of New England and used by many northern societies, were and are not money; they are equivalent to written documents. Relatively simple belts of strung beads record agreements between individuals or families. More elaborate belts are documentation of important events or treaties. The **Washington Belt** marks the Treaty of 1789, in which the design illustrates the Iroquois and Euro-Americans joining their hands in peace.



*Hiawatha's wampum belt.*

The Hiawatha Belt illustrates the Hauodenosaune Confederacy. At the right and left ends of the belt (east and west) are squares that represent the Mohawks and Senecas; the Keepers of the Eastern and Western Doors. A path of white shells leads to two larger squares that represent the Cayugas and Oneidas. A path from the larger squares leads to the center, a symbol of the fire kept by the Onondagas. Look carefully and you will see a small path of white shells on the outside of those squares representing the Mohawks and Senecas. You will remember from Chapter 2 on kinship, the Haundenosaune were generally willing to accept new members into their clans and villages through adoption or marriage. They were also willing to accept new members into the Confederacy, as illustrated by those two white paths leading out from the Eastern and Western Doors. Because of warfare between Native groups and American colonists, in the early 1700s an Iroquoian speaking group called the Tuscaroras left their Southern lands and moved north, asking for refuge among the Confederacy. They were admitted as **Nephews**, but did not receive any of the traditional confederacy chief titles.

There are fifty chiefs representing the nations who joined the Confederacy and followed The Great Law of The Peacekeeper. While the Mohawks and Senecas had (and continue to have) larger populations, they did not have the greatest number of chiefs. The Mohawks and Oneidas each have nine, the Onondagas have fourteen, the Cayugas ten, and the Seneca have eight. This distribution of power ensures that larger nations, like the Seneca or Mohawk, do not have more power than smaller nations like the Cayugas. Except for the names of the founders of the Confederacy, The Peacekeeper and Hiawatha, the names of the original fifty chiefs are passed on to those who inherit their positions and names after their deaths. Upon the death of a chief there is a period of mourning, called a condolence. During this time the clan mothers start discussing who will assume the position and name of the deceased chief. This successor will come from the clan of the deceased chief, typically a son of one of his sisters who has demonstrated the qualities important to the Iroquois: bravery, loyalty, patience, and willingness to work for the betterment of the entire community. At the end of the condolence period, the new chief is **raised up** and receives the name and **kasto':was** (Mohawk spelling of the ceremonial headdress) of the condoled chief. The ceremonial Chief of Chiefs of the Confederacy inherits the name of Adodarhoh, the Onondaga man who The Peacekeeper brought back to his right mind. Even these Confederacy chiefs can be recalled from power if they do not meet the expectations of their people. They are literally "dehorned" as the clan mothers will remove their the kasto':was and give it to the new chief.

Other Native American societies also organized themselves into confederacies, such as the confederacy brought together by Powhatan, Pocahontas's father. But few had the longevity, political institutions, or sheer territorial expanse of the Haundenosaune. Benjamin Franklin, by his own account (Johansen 1998) adapted the Haundenosaune concepts of divisions of political power and recall into his Albany Plan, which was then incorporated into the American Constitution. The traditional system of Haundenosaune chiefs still exists in the United States, along with governments of elected chiefs. Generally the U.S. government and state of New York conduct business with the elected government, not the traditional chiefs.

When the Europeans first came to the eastern part of North America, they either recognized the political power of chiefs or sachems in rank societies such as the Haundenosaune, or identified particular men as chiefs in equalitarian societies. Europeans lived in societies in which political power was ascribed and sanctioned by religious belief and authorities. When the Europeans encountered the indigenous peoples of the Americas, they assumed they would also have leaders with ascribed power. Certainly the first encounters of the Spanish in Meso-America supported this. However, this was not the case in the eastern woodlands. Among rank societies like the Haundenosaune, chiefs were often identified by Europeans as kings and were assumed to have the same ascribed power as kings in England. The long councils that were part of any treaty discussion often confused the Europeans, as did the distribution throughout the community of gifts given to chiefs, and the role of women in politics. As mentioned in Chapter 2, societies like the Iroquois and Cherokees were referred to as “petticoat governments,” because of the power of the women in political affairs. Europeans were equally confused by equalitarian societies in which no one seemed to be in charge. Europeans assumed that such political organization was primitive and a further example of the inferiority of Native peoples.

Native societies functioned quite well with their diversity of social and political organization. When they encountered a society with a different type of organization, Natives did not tend to try and change that society socially, economically, or politically. Yet European societies did try to change the indigenous peoples they encountered, and Euro-Americans and Canadians continue to do so. One of the foremost issues among Native peoples in Canada and the United States today is the issue of **sovereignty**, the authority of Native American societies to govern themselves. Despite the fact that Britain, France, the United States, and Canada all had or have **treaties** (formal agreements) with Native American societies, the governments of the United States and Canada both categorize the Native Americans societies that live within their borders as “wards of the state,” which means individual Native peoples were formerly considered to be unable to make their own decisions. The governments of the United States and Canada have recognized as leaders people who have no standing in their communities; have insisted that Native communities elect representative governments much like those of the United States and Canada; have taken land

over the protests and wishes of the Native communities; and despite occasional concessions to Native communities (the building of casinos, for example) have insisted that Native communities follow the laws of the dominant societies (for example, the taxation of goods like cigarettes or gasoline). This is a historical process that started with the control of land and resources.

In the period of European conquest of the Americas, European societies came to both continents to gain land and resources. The Americas were not empty lands, but were occupied by many people, and like Europeans, these peoples spoke many different languages and lived in different societies with unique beliefs, traditions, and organization. Unlike European societies, the peoples of the Americas, North America in particular, had highly individualist social systems. The political organization of these societies did not infringe on individuals unless the behavior of an individual put the community at risk. It was kin groups and the practice of **reciprocity**—the sharing and exchange of resources—that held communities together. Sometimes kin association and give-aways were not enough to support a society, and one or more segments would splinter off and form their own community. This was true of societies around the world until the political leadership of societies started designating **geopolitical boundaries** and recognized all people living within those boundaries as citizens who were expected to abide by laws made by the political hierarchy. Frequently, in this form of political organization, only people of status, usually men who were landowners, had any influence in the political organization.

In their encounters with societies that had very different ideas about social membership, political power, and geographic boundaries, the Europeans would often recognize a man, usually one who cooperated with them, as the chief. They assumed that agreements made with this man would apply to the entire community. This assumption was absurd among highly individualist Native American societies. When these societies were foragers, the Europeans would first exercise control over them through the trade of animal furs. In the Canadian Sub-Arctic European societies, the French, and later the British, formed trade and political alliances with the First Peoples they encountered. These alliances often did not benefit the First Peoples. In addition to the introduction of new diseases, the Europeans brought

firearms and alcohol. The firearms made it possible to kill many more animals than was possible with the Native technologies of spears and bows and arrows. That, along with the increasing European market for animal furs, led to the near extinction of many animals. Additionally, the indigenous peoples would focus on obtaining animals, such as beavers, for trade, not for food. They would purchase food and other resources, including now-needed guns and ammunition, and alcohol with the profits from the fur trade. European companies, such as the Hudson Bay Company, had monopolies over the trade, and as a result, the Native hunters usually ended up in debt to the company.

The interference of European powers in the traditional equalitarian organization of foraging societies, along with the impact of trade and resulting environmental damage, had devastating consequences for these societies. Additionally, religious missionaries tried to change the kinship of societies, particularly if they were matrilineal, and the system of status associated with the practice of reciprocity. For example, among societies on the western coast of the United States, the potlatch was outlawed from the 1880s until 1935. Basically, it became the goal of U.S. and Canadian governments, through religion, education, and control of the political economy to assimilate Native peoples into a wage-earning underclass—no longer Indian, but not really white either. For many foraging societies, threats to the environment, which in turn threatened their livelihoods and lifestyles, were what spurred them to take political action.

Even the powerful Haundenosaune Confederacy suffered from the impacts of Euro-American and Canadian governmental policies. Early in its encounters with Europeans, the Haundenosaune functioned as brokers between European powers and other Native societies. European governments wanted to trade with these prosperous peoples. Good relationships with the Haundenosaune assured safe passage in a large expanse of the Northeast. And during times of war, everyone wanted the use of Haundenosaune warriors. The Haundenosaune were able to play the competing interests of the Dutch, French, and English off one another for their own benefit. As the Dutch presence in New York waned, the Haundenosaune continued their trade and diplomacy with the French and English. The decline of the Confederacy started during the **French and Indian War** (called the Seven Years War in Europe). During this war, large numbers of Haundenosaune warriors were



drawn into battles as allies with the French or the British. However, most battles were far from the farms and homes in what was then the Haundenosaune heartland.

The defeat of the French lessened the power the Haundenosaune had in playing one European power off another. Only the British remained, and their colonists wanted more and more land. The British government tried to appease the Haundenosaune (and other Native societies) and build up their power within the colonies by decreeing that British colonists would stay east of the Allegany Mountains, respecting the treaty and land agreements made with Native societies. However, the colonists did not stay east of the Allegany Mountains.

One of the justifications given by the colonists for the Revolution in the Declaration of Independence was that His Majesty's government refused to protect the colonists from "attacks from the wild savages;" whose land they had taken against British governmental policy. Once again Native Americans, particularly the Iroquois, were drawn into warfare, this time between Britain and her colonies. The American Revolution nearly pulled apart the Confederacy. Most Mohawks fought on the side of the British, while the Seneca largely fought for the colonists. In part, Iroquois alliances were based on previous trading partnerships. The Mohawks, through the British agent William Johnson, had very strong trade ties with the British. Mohawk leaders, such as Joseph Brant, a friend and brother-in-law of Johnson, had traveled to England and had been educated at colonial schools. The Seneca did not have these ties with the British. Further, there was self-preservation to be considered. The Mohawks, many of whose leaders had been to England, could not imagine how a small, poorly armed army could possibly defeat England, the world power of the time. It was in their best interests to ally with the British. Meanwhile, the colonial government had assured the Seneca, along with other Native societies like the Delaware, that their land and rights would be protected by the future American government. Unfortunately for the Native Americans, neither side was right. The British did lose, and completely left their Native American allies out of treaty negotiations. The Continental Congress soon forgot its promises to its Native allies.

Further, the Iroquois heartland was severely affected by the Revolution. While Iroquois warriors were fighting on the boundaries of their territory, General John Sherman marched through the

interior, from one Iroquois village to another, burning the towns, fields, and orchards. The end of the war found the Iroquois population much reduced, with the survivors starving and demoralized. Many, particularly among the Mohawks, fled from their homelands of over 1,000 years for new communities in Canada, such as Grand River.

Consequently the power of the Confederacy is diffused between Canada and the United States. For example, the U.S.-Canadian border cuts through the Mohawk reservation of Akwesasne (also called St. Regis). Documents from both the United States and Canada state Akwesasne is “adjacent “ to New York state and the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. However, to get from the southern part of the reservation to the part on the north side of the St. Lawrence River, one must go through Canadian Immigration and Customs and show a passport or tribal identification. How can Akwesasne function as a sovereign entity when it is divided by two other powerful sovereign entities? On June 1, 2009, residents of Akwesasne protested at the border crossing dividing their territory in response to the arming of Canadian border guards. Because of previous hostile actions on the part of border guards, the people of Akwesasne were fearful of the possible consequences of an armed patrol. The Akwesasne protestors did not block the bridge or stop traffic. They were simply protesting on the side of the road. However, the Canadian Office of Customs and Immigration closed the bridge, stopping traffic along a very important economic route for both Canada and the United States. The closing did not stop travel at Akwesasne. The Mohawk people simply set up a system of boats and ferries that transported people from the south side of the river to Cornwall Island, the north side of the river. After six weeks, Canada moved their Customs and Immigration station to Cornwall, Ontario. This was, however, a short-lived victory for the people of Akwesasne who wish to go to Cornwall Island (which is part of the reservation), as they are now required to drive into Cornwall to check in at the customs station and then drive back across the bridge to Cornwall Island.

While a little more complex because of the border issues, Akwesasne is an example of the clash that develops as two or more societies with very different ideas about political and social organization encounter one another; and of the outcome when one is able to gain more power and control over land and resources than the other. This is the dilemma

of Native societies in the Americas today if they have state-province or federal recognition. On one hand they are sovereign entities with their own laws, land, and social organization; on the other, they are citizens of much larger nation-states and must abide by those legal and political systems. Another issue is that an estimated 64% of Native peoples in Canada and the United States do not live on reservation-reserve lands, but in cities, towns, and suburbs, often far from their traditional homelands. What is their legal and political relationship to their tribal nation as well as the nations of Canada and the United States? Additionally, there are communities who consider themselves to be Native American, but through treaties and the policy of **termination** do not have tribal lands or federal recognition. Many of these societies, such as the Abenaki of Vermont and the Lumbee of North Carolina, have waged legal battles with state and federal governments to gain recognition.

Another issue is the recognition of people with mixed Native American and Euro-American or African-American heritage. Before European contact most Native societies, through their kin groups, easily assimilated individuals from other societies through adoption. Early in their encounters with Europeans, this practice continued, and in some instances continues today. For example, President Barack Obama was adopted by the Crow Nation and given a Crow name (One Who Helps People Throughout the Land). In Canada the **Metis**, the descendants of French, Irish, and Scots traders who intermarried with various Native American groups are a recognized political-ethnic minority. While there are similar groups in the United States, there is no similar recognition. In the United States, governmental agencies such as the **Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)** instituted a policy of federal recognition of Native peoples based on **blood quantum**. This is not a policy based on the DNA profiles of individuals (which were not available decades ago when this policy was established), but on the family genealogies of individuals; you were considered Indian based on the number of your ancestors who could be determined to be Indian from written documents. The U.S. government collected this information as part of the Dawes Act, which functioned largely to terminate the federal government's treaty responsibilities to indigenous societies. The family genealogies they collected are called the **Dawes Rolls**. This policy is fundamentally different than another governmental policy of the same time in U.S.

history that stated if a person had “one drop of Negro blood,” no matter how many generations ago or the **phenotype** (physical appearance) of an individual, that individual was Negro (African-American) and was subject to the Jim Crow and **miscegenation** laws (laws that sought to prevent marriage or sexual relations between people of different races). While the “one drop rule” functioned to preserve the African identity of people for the enforcement of Jim Crow and miscegenation laws, blood quantum and documents like the Dawes Rolls sought to reduce or eliminate the identity of Native peoples and the government’s treaty obligations to them.

As in the situation of armed representatives of another political entity on tribal land, such as that at Akwesasne, an important issue for Native peoples in twenty-first century America will be their continued attempts to have control of their lands, resources, and identities while remaining citizens of the United States and Canada.

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## Suggested Questions

Can you cite an example of ascribed power?

Have you had experiences with organizations that have achieved power?

Have you had experiences with organizations that you would describe as being egalitarian?

What do you think about when you hear of a society being described as a tribe? What stereotypes are associated with tribal societies?

Why do you think hierarchical indigenous American societies whose leaders have ascribed power are not typically referred to as kingdoms?

How could ridicule or ostracizing work to promote socially recognized good or appropriate behavior by individuals? Can you give any examples?

I have heard it said that indigenous American societies lost their battles with U.S., British, and Canadian military forces and should accept their defeat and not insist on political sovereignty. Japan and Germany also lost battles to U. S., British, and Canadian military forces and yet they remain sovereign political entities. Why the difference?

Do you know of any American or Canadian organizations that function like the socio-political organizations of the Zuni?

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## Suggested Resources

*The Roots of Dependency*, by Richard White, has excellent descriptions of American Indian political organizations and their flexibility.

The classic book about the Natchez/Theloele, *The Choctaw, Chickasaws and Natchez Indians*, by H.B. Cushman and Angie Debo, is once again available with an introduction by Clara Sue Kidwell.

For more about both the issue of Native American lands being settled by colonists as a reason for the American Revolution and the role of the Haudenosaune Confederacy in Benjamin Franklin's ideas

for the U.S. Constitution, I recommend *Forgotten Founders: Benjamin Franklin, the Iroquois and the Rationale for the American Revolution*, by Bruce E. Johansen.

## Chapter 5

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# RELIGION AND SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

### *The White Buffalo Woman (Brule Sioux)*

*One summer so long ago that nobody remembers how long, the Oceti-Shakowin, the seven sacred councils fires of the Lakota Oyate, the nation, came together and camped. The sun shone all the time, but there was no game and the people were starving. Every day they sent scouts to look for game, but the scouts found nothing.*

*Among the bands assembled were the Itazipcho, the Without-Bows, who had their own camp circle under their chief, Standing Hollow Horn. Early one morning the chief sent two of his young men to hunt for game. They went on foot, because at that time the Sioux didn't yet have horses. They searched everywhere but could find nothing. Seeing a high hill, they decided to climb it in order to look over the whole country. Halfway up, they saw something coming toward them from far off, but the figure was floating instead of walking. From this they knew that the person was wakan, holy.*

*At first they could make out only a small moving speck and had to squint to see that it was a human form. But as it came nearer, they realized it was a beautiful young woman, more beautiful than any they had ever seen, with two round, red dots of face paint on her cheeks. She wore a wonderful white buckskin outfit, tanned until it shone a long way in the sun. It was embroidered with sacred and marvelous designs of porcupine quill, in radiant colors no ordinary woman could have made. This wakan stranger was Ptesan-Wi, White Buffalo Woman. In her hands she carried a large bundle and a fan of sage leaves. She wore*

*her blue-black hair loose except for a strand at the left side, which was tied up with buffalo fur. Her eyes shone dark and sparkling with great power in them.*

*The young men looked at her open-mouthed. One was overawed, but the other desired her body and stretched his hand out to touch her. This woman was lila wakan, very sacred, and could not be treated with disrespect. Lightning instantly struck the brash young man and burned him up, so that only a small heap of blackened bones was left. Or some say that he was suddenly covered by a cloud, and within it he was eaten up by snakes that left only his skeleton, just as a man can be eaten up by lust.*

*To the other scout who behaved rightly, the White Buffalo Woman said: "Good things I am bringing, something holy to your nation. A message I carry for your people from the buffalo nation. Go back to the camp and tell your people to prepare for my arrival. Tell your chief to put up a medicine lodge with twenty-four poles. Let it be made holy for my coming."*

*This young hunter returned to the camp. He told the chief, he told the people, what the sacred woman had commanded. The chief told the eyapaha, the crier, and the crier went through the camp circle calling: "Someone sacred is coming. A holy woman approaches. Make all things ready for her." So the people put up the big medicine tipi and waited. After four days they saw the White Buffalo Woman approaching, carrying her bundle before her. Her wonderful white buckskin dress shone from afar. The chief, Standing Hollow Horn, invited her to enter the medicine lodge. She went in and circled the interior sunwise. The chief addressed her respectfully, saying: "Sister, we are glad you have come to instruct us."*

*She told them what she wanted done. In the center of tipi they were to put up an owanka wakan, a sacred altar, made of red earth, with a buffalo skull and a three-stick rack for a holy thing she was bringing. They did what she directed, and she traced with her finger on the smoothed earth of the altar. She showed them how to do all this, then circled the lodge again sunwise. Halting before the chief, she now opened the bundle. The holy thing it contained was the chanunpa, the sacred pipe. She held it*



*out to the people and let them look at it. She was grasping the stem with her right hand and the bowl with her left, and thus the pipe has been held ever since.*

*Again the chief spoke, saying: "Sister, we are glad. We have had no meat for some time. All we can give you is water." They dipped some wacanga, sweet grass, into a skin bag of water and gave it to her, and to this day the people dip sweet grass or an eagle feather in water and sprinkle it on a person to be purified.*

*The White Buffalo Woman showed the people how to use the pipe. She filled it with chan-shasha, red willow bark tobacco. She walked around the lodge four times after the manner of Anpetu-Wi, the great sun. This represented the circle without end, the flame to be passed on from generation to generation. She told them that the smoke rising from the bowl was Tunkashila's breath, the living breath of the great Grandfather Mystery.*

*The White Buffalo Woman showed the people the right way to pray, the right words and right gestures. She taught them how to sing the pipe-filling song and how to lift the pipe up to the sky, toward Grandfather, and down toward Grandmother Earth, to Unci, and then to the four directions of the universe.*

*"With this holy pipe," she said, "You will walk like a living prayer. With your feet resting upon the earth and pipestem reaching into the sky, your body forms a living bridge between the Sacred Beneath and the Sacred Above. Wakan Takan smiles upon us, because now we are as one: earth, sky, all living things, the two-legged, the four-legged, the winged ones, the trees and grasses. Together with the people, they are all related, one family. The pipe holds them all together.*

*"Look at this bowl," said the White Buffalo Woman. "Its stone represents the buffalo, but also the flesh and blood of the red man. The buffalo represents the universe and the four directions, because he stands on four legs, for the four ages of creation. The buffalo was put in the west by Wakan Tanka at the making of the world, to hold back the waters. Every year he loses one hair, and in every one of the four ages he loses a leg. The sacred hoop will end when all the hair and legs of the great buffalo are gone, and the water comes back to cover the earth.*

*The wooden stem of this chanunpa stands for all that grows on the earth. Twelve feathers hanging from where the stem—the backbone—joins the bowl—the skull—are from Wanblee Galesbka, the spotted eagle, the very sacred bird who is the Great Spirit's messenger and the wisest of all flying ones. You are joined to all things of the universe, for they all cry out to Tunkashila. Look at the bowl: engraved in it are seven circles of various sizes. They stand for the seven sacred ceremonies you will practice with this pipe, and for the Ocheit Shakowin, the seven sacred campfires of our Lakota nation."*

*The White Buffalo Woman then spoke to the women, telling them that it was the work of their hands and the fruit of their bodies which kept the people alive. "You are from mother earth," she told them. "What you are doing is as great as what the warriors do."*

*And therefore the sacred pipe is also something that binds men and women together in a circle of love. It is the one holy object in the making of which both men and women have a hand. The men carved the bowl and make the stem; the women decorate it with bands of colored porcupine quills. When a man takes a wife, they both hold the pipe at the same time and red trade cloth is wound around their hands, thus tying them together for life.*

*The White Buffalo Woman had many things for her Lakota sister in her sacred womb bag—corn, wasna (pemmican), wild turnip. She taught them how to make the hearth fire. She filled a buffalo paunch with cold water and dropped a red-hot stone into it. "This way you shall cook the corn and meat," she told them.*

*The White Buffalo Woman also talked to the children, because they have an understanding beyond their years. She told them that what their fathers and mothers did was for them, that their parents could remember being little once, and that they, the children, would grow up to have little ones of their own. She told them: "You are the coming generation, that's why you are the most important and precious ones. Some day you will hold this pipe and smoke it. Some day you will pray with it."*

*She spoke once more to all the people: "The pipe is alive; it is a red being showing you a red life and a red road. And this is the first ceremony for which you will use the pipe. You will use it to keep the soul of a*

*dead person, because through it you can talk to Wakan Tanka, the Great Mystery Spirit. The day a human dies is always a sacred day. The day when the soul is released to the Great Spirit is another. Four women will become sacred on such a day. They will be the ones to cut the sacred tree—the can-wakan—for the sun dance.*

*She told the Lakota that they were the purest among the tribes, and for that reason Tunkashila had bestowed upon them the holy chanunpa. They had been chosen to take care of it for all the Indian people on this turtle island.*

*She spoke one last time to Standing Hollow Horn, the chief, saying, “Remember: this pipe is very sacred. Respect it and it will take you to the end of the road. The four ages of creation are in me; I am the four ages. I will come to see you in every generation cycle. I shall come back to you.”*

*The sacred woman then took leave of the people, saying: “Toksha ake wacinyanktin ktelo—I shall see you again.”*

*The people saw her walking off in the same direction from which she had come, outlined against the red ball of the setting sun. As she went, she stopped and rolled over four times. The first time she turned into a black buffalo; the second time into a brown one; the third time into a red one; and finally, the fourth time she rolled over, she turned into a white female buffalo calf. A white buffalo is the most sacred living thing you could ever encounter.*

*The White Buffalo Woman disappeared over the horizon. Sometime she might come back. As soon as she had vanished, buffalo in great herds appeared, allowing themselves to be killed so that the people might survive. And from that day on, our relations, the buffalo, furnished the people with everything they needed—meat for food, skins for their clothes and tipis, bones for their many tools.*

Told by Lame Deer at Winner, Rosebud Reservation, South  
Dakota, 1967 (Erdoes and Ortiz)

This story is a **genesis or origin story**. Such a story tells people of the societies from which they come where they come from, their origins. They tell people of the society to whom they belong, how

they are expected to interact with each other, with other elements of creation or nature, and with spiritual beings. Origin stories are an important part of the religious or spiritual beliefs of any society. This story is quite different than the Judeo-Christian story of the Garden of Eden that you may be familiar with. The origin stories of Native peoples throughout North America are also quite different from each other. Each Native American society has its own origin story; there is no one story as there is in Christianity and Judaism.

Origin stories are just one aspect of religious or spiritual beliefs for any society. Spiritual beliefs tell us where we come from, where we are going after death, and what is expected from us while we are in this world. Spiritual beliefs function on an individual and community level. They tell individuals what they must do to be considered a good person by their family, society, and by the spiritual beings. Spiritual beliefs also tell societies what is expected from them as a community: how individuals within the community should be treated, what qualities are needed for leadership, and how outsiders should be treated. Spiritual beliefs also tell kin groups and communities the consequences of inappropriate behavior. In this way, spiritual beliefs function as a form of social control. They tell individuals within a community what behavior is desired and appropriate, and the consequences of inappropriate behavior.

In Native American origin stories, animals, plants, and even forces of nature like the snakes that ate the disrespectful young man, are active participants in the story. Unlike the Judeo-Christian story in which the serpent is the only animal to have a part mentioned, in Native American stories the animals are very important to the action of the story; often they help humans to survive. Animals may sometimes be **tricksters**, like Coyote of southwestern stories or the Great Hare of the Southeast, but even they sometimes help humans. You may notice from many of the stories included in this book, humans and animals cooperate and work together. Many Native American societies believe that all things in the world have souls or spirits: therefore all things in the world must be treated respectfully. Anthropologists and others who study religious beliefs call this **animism**, the belief that key parts of nature have spirits. In foraging societies there are thanksgiving rituals for the animals that give their lives for us to eat. Failing to enact the rituals may result in the animals **withdrawing** themselves. For all

living things there are expectations of behavior, and when humans or animals do not meet these expectations, there are consequences. For example, in the Apache story told at the beginning of Chapter 1, the gray crow eats carrion and is turned black for this inappropriate behavior.

The stories from Native American societies included in this book are parts of much longer cycles of stories that tell what all religious texts tell its followers: where people came from; what will happen to you in the afterlife; and what is expected from you while you are in this world. In telling people what is expected from them while they are in this world, religious or spiritual beliefs function as part of the larger social order. People behave properly because their families and their spiritual beliefs tell them what is appropriate behavior and what will happen to them if they don't behave appropriately. In any society the stories that relate religious beliefs also tell what is considered appropriate behavior in a society. Origin stories are told and retold within family and community groups. In Native American societies, if a child misbehaves, they are told a story about the consequences of similar behavior for a human or animal.

Ceremonies and rituals are another important part of any religious tradition. Ceremonies are formal religious or public occasions that are performed according to a traditional or prescribed form. There are secular ceremonies like the inauguration of a new president or prime minister, as well as sacred ceremonies that mark religious occasions such as Easter and Passover. Among many Native American societies there are rituals or ceremonies that re-enact aspects of origin stories. Among the Hidatsa this ceremony is called the **Naxpiké** or **hide beating**, and has many of the elements common to the Sun Dance practiced by societies throughout the plains. The ceremonial grounds where the ritual will take place are prepared and blessed by the elder women, then a post made from a cottonwood tree is placed in the middle of the grounds by the elder men. Young men volunteer to re-enact the suffering and torture of **Spring Boy**, the first to person to do the Naxpiké. By doing so they achieve individual visions and help renew the earth for their community (Bonvillain 2001). As with origin stories, rituals and ceremonies vary from society to society.

In many predominately Christian countries, new governmental leaders often take an oath of office with their hand on the Bible. Among many Native American societies, such as the Haundenosaune or the southwestern societies, the raising up of a new leader also has heavy religious overtones; the chiefs are fulfilling religious obligations laid out in their origin stories.

A ritual is much like a ceremony, except there is an emphasis on the actions that are done according to a prescribed order. Think about the order of rituals you might be familiar with, like a wedding or services at your church, temple, or mosque. Everyone knows what is coming next in the ritual and there is significance to the order. Among foraging societies, there are rituals to thank the animals, birds, and fish that gave up their lives to be killed for food, and rituals to ensure there will continue to be animals, fish, and birds for the coming years. These rituals are called **renewal ceremonies**. Foraging societies may also have rituals for the growth of plants, particularly plants that are important for medicines. If the rituals are not done, or done incorrectly, the animals or plants may withdraw themselves and no longer be available.

Rituals and ceremonies can meet the needs of individuals and the community. For instance, horticultural or agricultural societies have ceremonies or rituals to ensure the growth of their crops. Among the Haundenosaune, there are ceremonies for the coming of maple sap and strawberries. There are several for corn: the planting of the seeds, the “greening of the corn,” when the plant “tassels,” and the harvesting of the crop. Many societies also have rituals that renew the earth itself, such as the Hidatsa’s Naxpike or the Sun Dance practiced by many Plains societies. The Naxpike or Sun Dance may be done to fulfill an individual’s vow or to invoke a vision. These rituals also fulfill community needs, bringing the community together and renewing the earth for the upcoming year.

Some rituals are done as called for, a thanksgiving ritual when an animal is killed, for example. Additionally, foraging, horticultural, and agricultural Native American societies typically have a cycle of ceremonies that are done on a yearly or **calendric** basis. The cycle of ceremonies includes those having to do with important foods and crops, such as the **Mid-Winter Ceremony**, typically held in January. Many Native American societies have yearly rituals to renew the earth. The Plains’ Sun Dance is an example of such a ritual. Foraging

societies have yearly rituals done to ensure the renewal of needed animals. Horticultural and agricultural societies have ceremonies, of which feasts were an important part, to celebrate and thank the earth for a successful growing season and to ask for a successful succeeding year. These feast-ceremonies often included speeches by leaders about community responsibilities, speeches by ordinary people about the responsibility of the leaders, and games. An important game among many Native societies was a ball game, from which the modern game of lacrosse is probably derived.

In addition to offering thanks, these ceremonies were and are also an opportunity for the community to come together, iron out grievances, have a good time, and look for potential marriage partners. Modern-day **pow-wows** function in a similar way for contemporary Native American communities. While the traditional ceremonies are still practiced by many societies, pow-wows are an opportunity for those who no longer live on the reservation or reserve to come home to celebrate their culture and family connections. Pow-wows are used to honor respected members of the community, and currently are often held to welcome returning war veterans and incorporate them back into the community. These gatherings are an example of how rituals function on a societal level, bringing the community together for mutual purposes and benefits.

Among Native American societies, rituals and ceremonies may be carried out by ordinary people, or they may be officiated by religious specialists. For example: everyone is expected to do a thanksgiving ritual when hunting or fishing. Any man may pledge himself to do the Sun Dance; but respected women bless and prepare the dance grounds. Respected older men who have already participated in the Sun Dance chop down the cottonwood tree that will be used for the dance pole, and they erect of the pole. Among the Dine' important rituals are performed by a **singer**, a man (women have recently started assuming this role as well) who has spent his life learning a cycle of over 250 chants or songs that are used in curing and other ceremonies, along with the technique and designs of sand paintings that are a part of the rituals. Many of the songs or chants are **curing** ceremonies, used to help cure an individual or even the community. People in Native American societies generally know what available plants are useful in treating illnesses or diseases. As Jack Weatherford has pointed

out in *Indian Givers* and *Native Gifts*, a number of these plants are now essential to many modern-day medicines. In addition to these medicinal plants, religious practitioners could call upon spiritual powers for help in curing someone. Many medicinal plants themselves were thought to have spiritual powers.

Among the most specialized of spiritual roles is that of a **shaman**. The word “shaman” is Siberian in origin and refers to a man or woman who is able to travel to the spirit world through a trance state. In Native American societies, all people have some access to spiritual power and knowledge. Shamans typically work for the entire community to find out why the crops have failed or why hunting has been unsuccessful. In many Arctic societies, it is believed that the animals they depend on were made from the fingers of a woman named Sedna, the guardian of the animals. Sedna will withdraw or remove the animals if hunters have not treated them respectfully and done the thanksgiving rituals after killing them. If hunting becomes unsuccessful, the community’s shaman will enter a trance state and travel underwater to where Sedna lives to find out why the animals have been withdrawn and what must be done to bring them back. To appease Sedna, the shaman will comb her hair, which she can no longer do because of the loss of her fingers.

Shamans and trances are part of the spiritual traditions of many societies around the world. In some societies, anyone may attain a trance through dancing, drumming, chanting, or the use of hallucinate drugs, but they are not recognized as shamans because their trances are typically for individual purposes, while a shaman typically goes into a trance state to benefit his/her community. Shamans are usually called to what can be very difficult roles in their society. An individual may be called through dreams. In many Native American societies, people who have nearly died, particularly through an illness, are thought to have the power to become a shaman because they have already traveled to the spirit world and returned. Among the societies of the Northwest coast, individuals might spend their lifetimes training to become a shaman, often apprenticing themselves to a shaman and inheriting their teacher’s powers upon their death.

As with the specialized, religious practitioners of any society, shamans undergo much training and must live according to many **taboos** (also spelled **tabu**). Taboos are things shamans are not suppose to do, though other members of their society may do them. For



example, Catholic nuns and priests take vows of celibacy, something the rest of us are not expected to do. Some taboos apply to everybody, such as the taboos prohibiting incest or cannibalism. Taboos may also be temporary. For example, Catholics used to not eat meat on Fridays. In some foraging societies, pregnant women will not eat rabbit meat because they believe it will cause their children to be timid and fearful. In the United States and Canada, athletes may abstain from certain foods or behaviors, believing they will be weakened. For shamans, taboos are usually life long.

In addition to abiding by the taboos, shamans typically live very solitary lives. They must spend much time learning their skills. In turn, their skills make them very powerful, and potentially very dangerous. Those who have the power to heal, also have the power to injure or kill. As a result, shamans are often feared and somewhat distrusted by their societies. Among the Northwest coast societies, who typically live in large, extended families, shamans live alone in the woods. When they die, their homes are abandoned and allowed to decay. Because of their power, special funeral rites and burial methods are often accorded to shamans. Despite the power a shaman may have, it is not a life to which many people aspire.

While shamans have special spiritual powers, Native American societies believe all people—indeed, all living things—have access to spiritual power. One of the ways spiritual power is attained is through dreams. Revitalization movements were often started in response to dreams. Dreams are seen as a conduit between people and the spirit realm. Through dreams the spirits tell people how to live their lives, what they're doing wrong, even warning them of danger. Many Native American societies have rituals in which people seek advice about their dreams. A person with a troubling dream may go to a shaman; or, as among the Haundenosaune, they may tell it to the entire community for advice about its meaning. The Iroquois, and many other Native American societies, believe the messages of dreams must be acted upon or there will be negative consequences for the individual and the entire community.

Another way individuals have access to spiritual power is through visions. Men and women will undertake a **vision quest** as a way to attain spiritual power. In a vision quest individuals will go to a solitary

place and go without food, water, and sleep in order to obtain a vision. It is believed the spirits will tell individuals what is expected from them through visions.

The vision quest can be part of **life cycle rituals**—rituals that mark important transitions in a person's life. Not all Native American societies have the same life cycle rituals, but there are typically rituals to mark birth, the attainment of **personhood**, adulthood, marriage, and death. A mother (and sometimes the father) may begin rituals before a child is born. A mother may abstain from some foods, such as rabbit, to ensure the child will be brave and not run away from danger. Rituals are done to ensure an easy delivery and a healthy child. Among the Dine', a **blissingway** song is sung over the mother to ensure an easy birth and protect the child and mother from evil spirits. The mother may also be given medicinals, and the women in her family may manipulate her abdomen to aid in the birth. After birth and bathing, the baby is sprinkled with white and yellow corn pollen, and the women of the mother's family will gently press the baby's body to ensure good health.

It is a sad fact that not all children who are born survive. Factors like malnutrition, diseases, and poor water supplies can all affect the survival rates of infants. In non-industrial societies, infants who die are generally not given their society's typical burial rituals. Many societies believed the infant's soul enters the body of another newborn, went into an animal or bird, or returned to the spirit world until it could be born again. So while ceremonies may be done at birth, a child is often not considered a person or given a name until she or he has lived for a time. Such rituals are **personhood** rituals, as they incorporate the child into his or her society. Among the Tewa Pueblo, for example, children are incorporated into their moiety and given a moiety-specific name during the **water-giving** ritual when they are eight days old. The Zunis believe a newborn child is **soft** or not yet ripened, so it is kept in the house away from the sun for eight days after birth. Before dawn on the eighth day the child's umbilical cord is buried, connecting the child to Mother Earth and the underworld from which its ancestors emerged. The baby is washed, put in its cradleboard, and cornmeal is put in its hands. Its paternal grandmother will carry the baby outside, facing the

rising sun. The baby usually does not receive a name then. Its family will wait until the baby has **hardened** and are confident the child will survive (Bonvillain 2001).

Among the most important rituals for any individual are **coming of age rituals**. Adolescence (teen years), when one is not a child but not yet an adult, is the invention of industrial societies in which young people are not supposed to engage in adult behaviors and are not supposed to be engaged in wage-labor, but instead go to school. In non-industrial societies, individuals are considered either children or adults. Even children may engage in labor that provides resources for their families and communities. Coming of age rituals mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. The vision quest is an example of a coming of age ritual for young men. Often, for the first time, they must go into the woods, mountains, or desert by themselves, fast, and try to stay awake until they receive a vision. Killing an animal for food or fighting an enemy may also be part of a young man's coming of age ritual. The young man's family will hold a feast and often give-aways, in which goods and resources are given away, to mark his transition to adulthood.

Young women also go through coming of age rituals, usually when they start menstruating. Among the most elaborate is the **kinaalda**, girl's puberty rite, of the Dine'. The kinaalda is a four-day ceremony. At dawn and noon on each day, the young woman, accompanied by friends and family members, races to the east to build up her strength and endurance. A respected older woman will knead her body (as newborn babies are kneaded) to mold her to also become a respected woman. The young woman and her family prepare large amounts of food, particularly corn, to be part of a community feast held on the fourth day. On this day the young woman washes, and then her face is painted with white lines. She then distributes food to all the guests (Schwarz 1997).

Coming of age rituals have several purposes. They show that young men and women have acquired the skills and knowledge needed for adulthood. They mark the transition from childhood to adulthood in front of the entire community. Historically, after a coming of age ritual, newly anointed men and women are able to marry. Thus, like many religious beliefs and rituals, it functions on the individual and societal level.

In historical Native American societies, marriage ceremonies were not as elaborate as those of contemporary U.S. and Canadian societies. The ceremony would often consist of the exchange of gifts between the bride and groom and their families and a feast. Of more importance were death or funeral rituals. Like birth and adulthood, death is a transition, so anthropologists often call rituals that mark them **rites of passage**. For many Native American societies, birth is the transition from the spirit world; death is a transition back to the spirit world. Death rituals may be started before the individual dies to help in this transition. Among the Dine', for example, a **night way** ceremony may be held to help prepare the individual and his/her family for the death. The Dine' have a great fear of ghosts; so much of the behavior at the funeral ritual is to ensure the ghost of the dead does not stay around kin members. The body is carefully washed and dressed by kin members, but the left moccasin is put on the right foot and the right moccasin is put on the left foot, to make it difficult for the ghost to walk. If the person dies at home, the body is carried out through a hole cut into the wall so as to not contaminate the usual paths of the living. If the deceased dies in a **hogan**, the traditional house-structure of the Dine', the hogan is abandoned or burnt down. The body is transported in silence to a remote spot. Burial typically takes place in the ground, or a rock niche that is then sealed. The mourners return by a different path, go through a purification ceremony, and never speak the name of the deceased. These observances help to ensure that the ghost of the deceased does not follow or return to haunt family members (Bonvillain 2001). The Dine' believe the deceased must become part of nature or the cosmos, "as a drop of water is part of a rain cloud."

Unlike the Dine', the Lakota have a ritual to keep the spirit of the beloved family member close, at least a period of time. Called the **Ghost Bundle** ritual, the belongings, cloths, hair, tools, or ornaments of the deceased are kept in a bundle. The keeping of a Ghost Bundle requires a great commitment on the part of the family. A woman of the family is required to always be with the Ghost Bundle. When the Lakota were on the plains and living in teepees, the Ghost Bundle was the first item to be removed, and held by the woman in charge of it when the community moved. She then carried it to the new living site. The first thing to go into the teepee when it was re-erected was the Ghost Bundle. After the end of a year the bundle is opened, the spirit or ghost released to the spirit world, and the items distributed

to family members (Deloria 1988). A give-away usually occurs during the opening of the bundle, so the family must also have economic resources to conduct this ritual. The time and resources required for keeping a Ghost Bundle all serve to prohibit families from holding such a ceremony for all deceased family members, only their most honored members, such as grandparents.

Missionaries and government agents all strove to convert Native American societies to Christianity, or to at least to stop them from practicing their own religious traditions. In the United States, from the 1880s until John Collier's administration of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1930s, Native American religious practices were openly prohibited. It was not until 1978 that The American Indian Religious Freedom Act, which guaranteed the rights of American Indians to practice their religions, was passed by the U. S. government. The act was amended in 1993 and 1994, largely to protect the right of Native Americans, particularly those who are members of the **American Indian Church** to use **peyote** as part of their rituals. Peyote is a hallucinogenic cactus found in the Southwest. The **Huichol** people of northern Mexico have used peyote for thousands of years to attain a trance state to commune with **Brother Deer**, the creator-spirit of the Huichol. Members of the American Indian Church also use peyote to attain a trance state. In 1999 the Religious Freedom Act was further amended to allow Native American prisoners the right to have their own religious rituals while in jail.

The American Indian Church is a part of the **Pan-Indian Movement** in the United States. Because of population loss, the loss or removal from traditional lands, and the boarding school experience, many Native peoples have lost parts of their culture, such as language and religious rituals. When Native peoples from across Canada and the United States would meet through boarding schools, the military, and college, they would practice what they remembered of their rituals and combine them with those from other Native peoples they encountered who might have very different practices. For instance, not all Native peoples partook in **sweat baths**, the practice of enduring a very hot steam bath for an extended period of time for both physical and spiritual cleansing. Sweat baths, like pow-wows, are practices that have been adopted by many Native American groups throughout North America and are part of the American Indian Church. Through

a process called **syncretism**, the amalgamation or combining of religions or cultures, practices of the American Indian Church may also include Christian beliefs. Some people who have taken peyote as part of rituals in the American Indian Church say they see Jesus Christ while in a trance.

Christian missionaries of all denominations liked to think they were successfully converting Native Americans to their churches. But in many instances the traditional religions went “underground,” and were practiced secretly in isolated spots. In other instances, Native American religious traditions were combined with Christian traditions, as in the American Indian Church. The Christian celebration of Christmas is an example of syncretism. We have no idea when Jesus Christ was born; but Christians celebrate it on December 25 because that date coincides with the Roman holiday of Saturnia, a winter solstice ceremony in which gifts are exchanged. Many attributes of Christmas, such as lights, trees, and mistletoe are northern European traditions also associated with the winter solstice. As Christianity spread throughout Europe, its leaders found it was often better to incorporate these **pagan** (which simply means “of or from the country”) traditions into their own, rather than try to eliminate them. The same process of syncretism happened in Native American societies.

In the Southwest, pueblos where churches were built with Native slave labor are found the Stations of Cross, statues or paintings that depict events from the crucifixion of Christ. In the Pueblo churches, in front of each station is a small pot or bowl that contains the corn pollen that is essential to all Pueblo rituals. In front of grave markers and crosses there are small bowls containing corn pollen. So while the Puebloan peoples may attend the Catholic churches, it contains elements of the pre-Christian Pueblo traditions. In the Northeast, at the St. Regis Catholic Church at the Akwesase, Mohawk church hymns are often sung in Mohawk, and sweet grass is burnt during Mass instead of incense.

These are just a few examples of the syncretism found in many Native American communities. People might attend Christian church on Sunday, but they will also attend the cycle of rituals to thank the earth for its plants and animals, and people will still have potlatches or kinaaldas to mark the coming of age of their sons and daughters. People do not randomly adopt new traditions alongside old beliefs.

The people of a society will adopt or accept new traditions and beliefs that best fit with their existing beliefs and traditions. The Pueblo peoples of the Southwest used corn pollen as part of religious rituals for thousands of years before the arrival of Christian missionaries, and they still use corn pollen within the Catholic churches. Just as Christians around the world may celebrate Christmas, they celebrate it differently because the Christmas celebrations are combined with the celebrations of previous societies. In the United States and Canada people from all over the world have settled here and brought their traditions with them, which through syncretism have become part of the Christmas traditions practiced here.

Religion and spiritual beliefs were/are important ways the indigenous peoples of the Americas adapted to and survived the consequences of European contact. After the American Revolution, the Seneca prophet Handsome Lake was gravely injured, and while in a coma he had visions. When he regained consciousness, he told those gathered around him that in his visions he had seen The Peacekeeper *and* Jesus Christ. Handsome Lake went on to preach a new religious doctrine called the **Good News**. This doctrine included the centuries-old beliefs of the Seneca and Haundenosaune, along with elements of Christianity, particularly as presented by Quaker missionaries that fit with existing Iroquois beliefs. Handsome Lake didn't think he was undoing any aspect of **The Great Law**, but some aspects of the new beliefs taken from the Christian missionaries showed to be of benefit to his people. The anthropologist Anthony Wallace, in *Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, suggests it was the new beliefs and practices of the Good News that helped enable the Seneca to survive their devastating losses after the American Revolution and adapt to the changes occurring around them.

Whether Wallace is correct in his assessment, Handsome Lake's visions and preaching about the Good News is an example of a **revitalization movement**. Revitalization movements have occurred in societies around the world and throughout history. They continue to occur. These movements are ways for people to cope with and adjust to societal and cultural changes. Sometimes revitalization movements work with other societal elements, such as the political system. Such was the case with the Shawnee Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa, better known as the Shawnee Prophet.

Unlike many other Native American leaders who would try to hold on to at least some land and sovereignty by accommodating to European, American, and Canadian demands, Tecumseh maintained that all land in North America was Indian land and that no Native American individual or tribe could sell what belonged to all Native Americans. Tecumseh's ideas of Native American unity was aided by his brother Tenskwatawa, whose visions told him that Native peoples had been corrupted by adopting white ways. Tenskwatawa told the Shawnee to get rid of these corrupting influences, which included drinking, domesticated animals, and the goods from European trade, such as guns, and return to their traditional ways. According to Tenskwatawa, if enough Native peoples would do this, the Europeans, Americans, and their effects on Native societies would be supernaturally swept away.

In 1808, Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa established a village called **Prophet's Town** on Tippecanoe Creek in what is now Indiana. Using Prophet's Town as his base, Tecumseh traveled down the Mississippi, across the southeast to Florida, west to the Osages in what is now Missouri, and east to the Iroquois. In his journeys, Tecumseh did his best to arouse these various Native American societies to join forces against the Europeans and Americans. Some, particularly in the Old Northwest, joined him, while others like the Iroquois, still recovering from the ravages of the American Revolution, welcomed him politely, but did not join him.

On June 18, 1812, the United States declared war against Great Britain. Almost immediately, the United States launched invasion forces against the British in Canada. Once again, Native American communities were torn apart by the enticements of Great Britain and the United States to join them in war against the other. Like most Iroquois, Tecumseh saw alignment with the British as the best opportunity to maintain the sovereignty and land base of Native peoples. Tecumseh and his warriors joined England's General Isaac Brock and his soldiers and helped capture Fort Detroit and later Fort Dearborn.

Tecumseh's diplomacy in the Southeast paid off as the Creeks initiated attacks in Georgia and Tennessee. In the fall, Tecumseh visited the Creek territory with a promise of British support. He left a bundle of red sticks, one of which was supposed to be broken every



day, with the day of the last stick signaling the day of a concerted attack. Thus, the battles in the Southeast have become known as the **Red Stick War**. In 1813, some of Tecumseh's followers were overeager and started attacks before the prescribed day. As a result, the American Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins demanded the guilty parties be punished. Afraid to start a full-blown conflict and fighting among their own people, the chiefs sent out enforcement parties against the hostile forces, killing eight of Tecumseh's warriors.

Unfortunately for Tecumseh and his followers, the able leader Brock, a man Tecumseh respected, was killed in battle. The incompetent Colonel Henry Procter replaced Brock and allowed the massacre of survivors who had advanced to retake Detroit. When he heard this news, Tecumseh was equally enraged at Procter and his own troops. Procter was again allowing the killing of prisoners taken when William Henry Harrison advanced to build Fort Meigs. When Tecumseh heard this from one of his soldiers, he galloped to the scene, throwing himself upon the killers and stopping another massacre. Tecumseh is said to have told Procter he was unfit to command and "to go on put on petticoats." Two days later, Procter lifted the siege and returned to Fort Malden, over the protest of Tecumseh.

On September 10 1813, American Admiral Matthew Perry achieved his famous naval victory on Lake Erie, cutting off the British supply route to the West. Procter retreated from Detroit, abandoning the Native troops. Harrison eventually caught up with Tecumseh's army at the Battle of the Thames on October 5. Tecumseh, the man who had tried to unify eastern Native Americans against further British or American invasion, was killed in fierce fighting among his troops; a monument topped by a Canadian flag marks the spot.

The peoples of the Northwest also turned to religion and revitalization movements to adapt to changes brought by Euro-American power. In 1881, a Salish man in Washington state named John Slocum grew very ill. His wife Mary and the rest of his family thought he had died and were preparing him for the funeral when he revived. Slocum said God told him the Native peoples would be saved if they gave up drinking, smoking, and gambling and returned to their traditional ways of sharing resources and cooperation. However, Slocum warned against some of the traditional rituals, including healing rituals practiced by shamans.

Slocum's family and friends organized a church for him to preach from in Shake Point, Washington. The following year he again became very ill. Contrary to his instructions, his family brought in a shaman to cure him. His wife Mary became so distraught about the presence of the shaman, she left their house, crying and praying. She started to shake and tremble. Returning to their home in this condition, she began to pray over her husband. He soon returned to health. News of her curative powers—supposedly brought on by the shaking—soon spread throughout the Northwest and California, which attracted new members to the church. Many members of Slocum's Church started to shake at services.

Missionaries and federal and local authorities were critical of what soon became known as the Shaker Church. To protect their form of religious practice, the Shakers formerly constituted themselves as a church in 1892. The Church's governing body is based on the structure of Protestant churches, with an elected bishop and board of elders.

The Shaker Church is an excellent example of the **syncretism** of Christian and Native American beliefs. Members of the Shaker Church make the sign of the cross and believe in God, Jesus and the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is manifested in them when they start to shake. Church members believe the shaking gives them the power to heal, foretell the future, and battle evil, all skills of traditional shamans. The Shakers' belief in the Spirit of God and "Shaker Spirits," who guide them to heaven after death, is also consistent with traditional beliefs about the power to contact the spirit world through trances or visions, the ability to prophesize, and the existence of helping spirits. The Shakers' healing trance is similar to shamanistic healing through a shaman's trance. The ethical principles of the Shaker Church are similar to those of other Native American revitalization movements that stress sharing, cooperation, and refraining from alcohol and disruptive behavior, usually associated with Euro-American influence. The beliefs of the Shaker Church also fit into the traditional qualities valued by Northwest societies, especially traditional patterns of status and rank. Although members of the Shaker Church are often a minority in Northwest Native communities, they are often the communities' most influential members.

What is now known as the first **Ghost Dance** began in 1869 with the spiritual visions of a prophet named **Wodziwob**, a Northern Paiute from the Walker River Indian Reservation in Nevada. In his vision, Wodziwob was told that the Indian dead would return and with them the old, happy life, provided that Native people tirelessly devoted themselves to round dances. Native adherents assembled for dances that lasted four or five days. Dancers collapsed from exhaustion and received visions in which they saw their deceased relatives. This Ghost Dance spread throughout native California and up into Oregon in the 1870s. As the 1870 Ghost Dance grew, three separate cults developed among certain tribes in Native California: the Earth Lodge Cult, the Bole-Marú, and the Big Head Cult, an offshoot of the Bole-Marú.

The Earth Lodge Cult came from the practice of the Ghost Dance among the severely depopulated Northern Yana. It spread from them to various groups including the **Pomo** of the southwest. It was similar to the Ghost Dance proper in its excitement over immediate supernatural phenomenon. But, whereas the Ghost Dance stressed the return of the dead, the Earth Lodge cult stressed the end of the world. The faithful would be protected from this catastrophe by semi-subterranean structures built for this specific purpose. The cult's basic tenets were that world destruction was imminent and only performing religious rituals in large, specially constructed ceremonial earth lodges, which usually spanned 40 to 60 feet in diameter, could ensure survival. Followers of the cult also prophesied that the Native American dead would rise.

Local prophets appeared in each tribe—each bringing his own special message and form of enlightenment. For example, in 1871 through 1872, a Long Valley Cache Creek Pomo medicine man named Richard Taylor preached that to bring on the end of the world, Pomo people needed to come together in round houses and follow specific standards of behavior associated with those of white society. They must refuse alcohol and limit their contact with Euro-Americans. In addition, they must practice the songs and prayers obtained by Taylor in a vision. This was a powerful and seductive message for people ravaged by years of conquest. A thousand Pomo people constructed 7 roundhouses in which participants could congregate. They danced

faithfully for days, but the world did not end. The Native American dead did not return. Some might consider this religious movement to have, therefore, been a failure. Further reflection is warranted, however.

This religious movement arose during a time of tremendous social upheaval. We need to consider what it provided for the people involved. It gave Pomo people a new spiritual life upon which to focus, that helped to meld divergent people—remnant groups from populations devastated by European-introduced diseases and conquest—into a new community. This gave them hope and out of it another new form of spiritual life arose, the **Bole-Marú**.

The Bole-Marú name comes from the combination of Patwin and Pomo words for the Ghost Dance cult, which developed among the California Hill Patwin. Followers of the Bole-Marú cult emphasized individual salvation through a Supreme Being and a ceremonial **dreamer**—a person who could see into the future. The Big Head Cult, which used special masks, was a ceremonial variation of the early Bole-Marú. Both the Bole-Marú and the Big Head cults prophesied the resurrection of the American Indian dead, though both downplayed this idea in favor of other religious prophecies. The Big Head cult continued among some native Californians throughout the 1880s.

The Bole-Marú gradually abandoned the doctrines of imminent world catastrophe and instead stressed concepts of afterlife and of the Supreme Being. Because members of the Bole-Marú cult held to this particular belief, many scholars have understood this religious movement to be the transition to adoption of Christianity. More recently, others have taken into consideration the time at which the Bole-Marú developed and do not believe it was a transition to Christianity. This was a time when governmental officials had tremendous power over the lives of American Indian people. Native American religions were frowned on as primitive and counterproductive. In fact, Indian religions were formally outlawed with the **Religious Crimes Codes of 1883**. The Bole-Marú evolved, therefore, during a time of extreme repression of Native life. As a result, many traditional practices went underground. Pomo people could not afford to show how the blending of different religious and cultural ideals laid the foundation for a fierce form of Indian resistance.

Perhaps the best-known rituals of Native peoples to Euro-Americans are the **Sun Dance** and **Ghost Dance**. Many people of the Plains have a ritual called the Sun Dance. While the way the Sun Dance was and is done varies from one society to another, there are many similarities. Traditionally, the Sun Dance is held during the summer when groups of communities come together to trade, dance, and feast. Marriage partners were often found during the dancing and feasting. The Sun Dance was an important part of these activities. A temporary encampment of **tipis** was set up in a circle, with a cleared area in the middle. The trunk of a cottonwood tree was set up in the middle of this cleared area. Many rituals accompanied the clearing of the area, the selection, cutting down and setting up of the pole, often directed by women. Men would purify themselves in **sweat baths** and refrain from eating or drinking before starting to dance around the pole. They would not eat or drink during the day as they were dancing, sometimes for up to four days. In some societies, men pierced the muscles on their chests and backs with hooks connected to leather thongs attached to the pole. The men would dance until the hooks broke through the muscles.

For the community, the Sun Dance was performed in thanksgiving for a bountiful year and a request for another year of food, health, and success. Individual men would pledge to do the Sun Dance to honor a lost family member and in thanks that a family member (particularly a child) had recovered from injuries or illness. Today men and women will pledge to do the Sun Dance to maintain their sobriety from alcohol or drugs, as well as to honor lost family members or in thanksgiving that a family member has recovered from illness. I know one young man who was told by an elder he should pledge the Sun Dance in thanksgiving for the birth of his daughter and to understand the pain her mother went through in giving her birth. Many veterans pledge the Sun Dance in thanksgiving for returning home safely and to help recover from the horrors of war.

Missionaries and government officials tried to stop the Sun Dance among the Plains peoples. While its practice was reduced, for many reservations the ritual went underground and was practiced in secret at remote spots. In the United States the **Freedom of Religion Act of 1928** guaranteed the rights of Native Americans to practice their religious ceremonies and rituals, including the Sun Dance, although

missionaries and government representatives still tried to stop many practices. During his tenure as director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, John Collier tried to eliminate restrictions on Native American religious rituals and other cultural traditions. Some of the varieties of the Sun Dance may have been lost, but in general, the memories of communities kept the ritual alive. Following times of war, many veterans returning to both reservation and urban homes sought out elders to show them how the Sun Dance was done. As a result, the Sun Dance has experienced a resurgence. Native men and women from around the country, along with some Euro-Americans, often travel to the plains to participate in the Sun Dance.

Many societies of the plains also adopted an outgrowth of the 1869 Ghost Dance as part of their religious rituals. Among the Plains peoples, the Ghost Dance largely consisted of people dancing in a circle for hours or even days at a time. It was their belief that if they danced long enough, the Creator would wipe the Euro-Americans away by rolling the surface of the earth up like a giant carpet. Under that surface would be a new and pristine earth where lost family members and the important bison would be found again. After the victory at Little Big Horn, the Cheyenne and Lakota tried to evade the U.S. Army that was pursuing them. For a time, Sitting Bull and his people resided in western Canada. Ultimately, the Cheyenne and Lakota returned to their homelands. Many were rounded up by the Army and placed on reservations. Remember the Ghost Dance is an example of a revitalization movement. In this time of distress, many Plains peoples started doing the Ghost Dance in an attempt to bring back their traditional lifestyles. Government officials were convinced that the Ghost Dance was dangerous and the Lakota were planning another uprising. Indian agents decided to withhold rations until the Ghost Dance stopped. Ethnologist **James Moody** submitted a report to government officials, assuring them that the Ghost Dance was a peaceful religious ritual to help the Native peoples adjust to the trauma they were experiencing and that rations and blankets should be immediately given to the people, but government officials remained unconvinced. On December 15, 1890, Sitting Bull was shot and killed while being arrested, apparently by a Lakota policeman. The Ghost Dance continued and tensions continued to escalate among the U.S. government officials and the Lakota. At dawn on December 29, the Army attacked the encampment of **Big Foot** and his followers at

**Wounded Knee Creek.** More than 300 men, women, and children were massacred and buried in a mass grave. Ironically, Big Foot was traveling to the **Pine Ridge Reservation** to negotiate a resolution to the tensions.

Reports of the massacre in newspapers and by military officials resulted in an official investigation. The investigation found the government had:

Failed to provide the seeds and agricultural implements promised for farming,

Failed to provide the cows and oxen promised,

Failed to issue the annuity supplies to which the Lakota were entitled through treaties,

Failed to pay for the horses taken from the Indians

(Mooney 1965:79-80)

In the past, as today, the dominant culture can be very uncomfortable with religious practices that are different than their own. In any society, religious and spiritual beliefs and practices are important to most individuals in that society, and to the society itself, as it adjusts and adapts to new cultural circumstances. Sometimes these changes are part of the natural evolution or change in a society: such as in the United States or Canada in which people have to adjust to changes brought about by science and technology or in the cases of indigenous peoples who have to adjust to changes brought on by dominant political entities. Human societies have had to adapt to another since one group of extended kin met another group of extended kin—in other words for thousands of years. As humans, we have adapted in various ways. Religious and spiritual beliefs have been and continue to be one of those ways.

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## Suggested Questions

What does the story about White Buffalo Woman tell you about Sioux society?

Write a description of a ritual you have witnessed or participated in. Would this ritual tell a visitor something about your society?

Can you give an example of a ritual you are familiar with in which playing games is an important part?

Does the society or community in which you live have any rituals, such as the Sun Dance, to help soldiers who have participated in warfare re-integrate himself or herself back into broader society? Do you think this would be a good idea? Why?

What is an example of a taboo in your society?

Does your society have a coming of age ritual? Can you write a description of it?

If you don't think your society has a coming of age ritual, do you think it should? Can you give some suggestions as to what the ritual would be like?

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## Suggested Resources

For more about Dine' ceremonies, I recommend the previously mentioned *Molded In the Image of Changing Woman*, by Maureen Trudell Schwarz.



There is a lot of false information about shamans available. For information that is based on research, I recommend looking up the topic in any of a number of books about the anthropological study of religion.

For more information about rituals and religious beliefs of the Puebloan peoples, I recommend *The Tewa World: Space, Time Being and Becoming in a Pueblo Society*, by Alfonso Ortiz.

Ella Deloria's *Waterlily* contains much information about religious rituals, including the Sun Dance and Ghost Bundle.

## Chapter 6

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# IS THERE A WORD FOR ART?

## The Legend of the Flute (Brule Sioux)

*Many generations ago, the people had drums, gourd rattles, and bull-roarers, but no flutes. At that long-ago time a young man went out to hunt. Meat was scarce, and the people in his camp were hungry. He found the tracks of an elk and followed them for a long time. The elk, wise and swift, is the one who owns the love charm. If a man possesses elk medicine, the girl he likes can't help sleeping with him. He will also be a lucky hunter. This young man I'm talking about had no elk medicine.*

*After many hours he finally sighted his game. He was skilled with bow and arrows, and had a fine new bow and quiver full of straight, well-feathered, flint-tipped arrows. Yet the elk always managed to stay just out of range, leading him on and on. The young man was so intent on following his prey that he hardly noticed where he went.*

*When night came, he found himself deep inside a thick forest. The tracks disappeared and so had the elk, and there was no moon. He realized he was lost and that it was too dark to find his way out. Luckily he came upon a stream with cool, clear water. And he had been careful enough to bring a bag of wasna—dried meat pounded with berries and kidney fat—strong food that will keep a man going for a few days. After he had drunk and eaten, he rolled himself into his fur robe, propped his back against a tree, and tried to rest. But he couldn't sleep; the forest was full of strange noises, the cries of night animals, the hooting of owls, the groaning of trees in the wind. It was if he heard these sounds for the first time.*

*Suddenly there was an entirely new sound, of a kind neither he nor anyone else had ever heard before. It was mournful and ghost-like. It made him afraid, so that he drew his robe tightly about himself and reached for his bow to make sure that it was properly strung. On the other hand the sound was like a song, sad but beautiful, full of love, hope, and yearning. Then before he knew it, he was asleep. He dreamed that the bird called wagnuka, the redheaded woodpecker, appeared singing the strangely beautiful song and telling him: "Follow me and I will teach you."*

*When the hunter awoke, the sun was already high. On a branch of the tree against which he was leaning, he saw a redheaded woodpecker. The bird flew away to another tree, and another, but never very far, looking back all the time at the young man as if to say: "Come on!" Then once more he heard that wonderful song, and his heart yearned to find the singer. Flying toward the sound, leading the hunter, the bird flitted through the trees, while its bright red top made it easier to follow. At last it alighted on a cedar tree and began hammering on a branch, making a noise like the fast beating of a small drum. Suddenly there was a gust of wind, and again the hunter heard that beautiful sound right above him.*

*Then he discovered that the song came from the dead branch that the woodpecker was tapping with his beak. He realized also that it was the wind that made the sound as it whistled through the holes the bird had drilled.*

*"Kola, friend," said the hunter, "let me take this branch home. You can make yourself another."*

*He took the branch, a hollow piece of wood full of woodpecker holes that was the length of his forearm. He walked back to his village bringing no meat, but happy all the same.*

*In his tipi the young man tried to make the branch sing for him. He blew on it, he waved it around; no sound came. It made him sad, he wanted so much to hear that wonderful sound. He purified himself in the sweat lodge and climbed to the top of a lonely hill. There, resting with his back against a large rock, he fasted, going without food or water for four days and nights, crying for a vision which would tell him how to make the branch sing. In the middle of the fourth night, wagnuka, the bird*

*with the bright-red top, appeared, saying, "Watch me," turning himself into a man, showing the hunter how to make the branch sing, saying again and again: "Watch this, now." And in his dream the young man watched and observed very carefully.*

*When he awoke, he found a cedar tree. He broke off a branch and, working many hours, hollowed it out with a bowstring drill, just as he had seen the woodpecker do it in his dream. He whittled the branch into the shape of a bird's head with a long neck and an open beak. He painted the top of the bird's head with washasha, the sacred red color. He prayed. He smoked the branch up with incense of burning sage, cedar and sweet grass. He fingered the holes as he had seen the man-bird do in his vision, meanwhile blowing softly into the mouthpiece. All at once there was the song, ghost-like and beautiful beyond words drifting all the way to the village, where the people were astounded and joyful to hear it. With the help of the wind and the woodpecker, the young man had brought them the first flute.*

Told by Henry Crow Dog in New York City, 1967 and recorded  
by Richard Erdoes (Erdoes and Ortiz)

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Western anthropologists and the general public frequently referred to non-Western societies as being in stages of savagery, barbarism, or civilization. Assumptions were made about societies based on elements such as religion, language (particularly having a written language), kinship organization, political and economic organization, how a society gathered or produced resources, and the arts, or expressive culture, of the society. Societies were ranked based on these elements and how they compared to Western societies. Nomadic societies were thought of as being in a state of savagery; horticultural and pastoral societies were seen as being in a state of barbarism; and the agricultural Western societies were seen as civilized. The defining attribute of a civilized society was agriculture, although non-Western agricultural societies were often categorized as barbaric. At this time in history, it was thought that agriculture made it possible for societies to develop mathematics, science, and the arts. In order to survive, all humans and their societies must have mathematical and scientific knowledge. To survive, humans have made observations about their surroundings and drawn conclusions from those observations. Today, scientists refer to

this process as the **scientific method**. Mathematics is necessary to determine when plants or animals will be available, if they are growing scarce in a particular area, and how much food is necessary to feed a group of people.

This concept of science and mathematics may be different than what we typically think of when we hear the words, but these kinds of observations, conclusions, and calculations are the basis of the mathematics and science of twenty-first century post-Industrial societies. The same can be said about the art of indigenous societies. Their works may not look like Western art, the society may not even have a word for “art,” but it is artistic expression nonetheless. In Native American societies, artistic expression was used in the making of utilitarian items such as blankets, pottery, weavings, pipes, jewelry, drums, cradleboards, clothing, shoes, and even skins used for housing. Artistic expression was also shown in music, dance, and storytelling. Anthropologists and archaeologists use the artistic artifacts found in contemporary societies and burial sites of others as a way to identify one Native American society from another. Different Native American societies used different artistic elements in their pottery, weaving, and beading designs. Stories, songs, chants, and dances can be considered the property of a particular society, and, in some cases, of a particular kin group. The elements of these art forms changed over time before the Europeans came, and continued to change after, just as European and American artistic styles have changed throughout time.

The oldest form of art is **storytelling**. Humans have been capable of speech for 100,000 years. Archaeologists have evidence of ritual behavior in human habitation and burial sites between 60,000 and 80,000 years ago. This is significant, because if humans were engaged in symbolic behavior, then they were also capable of symbolic language—language that told of the past and speculated about the future. Symbolic language would be part of the rituals and ceremonies performed and of the stories people told each other. These stories could be about ancestors and the history of the society, but could also be about questions such as: Where did we come from? Why are we here? Why do we perform ceremonies and rituals? What are our relationships with each other and other aspects of the world? Each chapter of this book has started

with an example from the oral tradition—the stories—of a different society, and each of these stories has addressed one or more of these questions.

Stories have been told by all societies throughout human history. Storytelling occurred when human societies were all nomadic and foragers and have continued to the present. There is evidence of very ancient stories in much of the folklore from societies through all parts of the world. Much of this ancient folklore is retold in what are now children's fairy tales and stories of heroes. With the development of writing, stories started to be documented for others to read. The Greeks and Romans even wrote down plays that reflected their oral traditions; some that are still extant today. In the early part of the twentieth century motion pictures (movies) started telling stories, both old and new. But even the new stories had elements from the past. Today, some of us sit around campfires listening or telling stories, but most of us sit around our digital campfires—televisions and computers—watching stories. As with our books and movies, many of these stories reflect elements of our own and others' oral traditions.

Think about the movies, television shows, or even plays that you've seen recently. Some of them are simply entertainment: to make you laugh, cry, or even scare you. But others can be of educational or inspirational value. An example is the movie *Schindler's List*, the story of a man who saved many Jewish people from the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. The movie told people about a little-known man—one who should be known and remembered for his heroism. The movie will continue to educate people about the Holocaust for generations to come, much like the plays of Shakespeare continue to inform us about Elizabethan England. The film also inspires people. As one woman I know said after seeing the film, "I'll never knowingly hurt anyone ever again." The stories of pre-Industrial societies also informed and inspired the people who heard them. Oral traditions taught the origins and history of the society, illustrating what was important to them and how people should behave toward one another. Each chapter in this book begins with a story from the oral tradition of a Native American society that illustrates the topic being discussed in the chapter: the importance of kin groups, political organization, resource-getting, origin stories, and in this chapter, how the flute came to the Sioux people. What have you learned from these stories about the

Native societies from which they came? Based on these stories, what do you think was of importance to these societies? What similarities do you see about the different societies who tell these stories? What similarities do you see reflected in these stories with Euro-American or Canadian societies; what differences?

While oral tradition continues to be of great importance to Native American societies, many Native peoples have also adapted written and visual arts to tell stories. Contemporary Native American writers work within the forms of novels, short stories, essays, and poetry, as well as history and anthropology books. Like Euro-American and Canadian poets, many Native American poets participate in poetry slams and utilize the styles of spoken word, rap, and hip-hop. Native American writers such as Sherman Alexie (*Smoke Signals*, *The Fancy Dancer*), Greg Serris (*Grand Avenue*), and Tom King (*As Long as the Grass Grows and the River Runs*, *Medicine River*) have had their novels and short stories made into movies. Chris Eyres has directed many films, including *Smoke Signals* and the *We Shall Remain* series for PBS in the United States. In Canada and the United States, there are many Native filmmakers who have made films about their communities or issues important to Native peoples. For example, the Choctaw writer LeAnne Howe (*The Shell Shaker*, *The Miko Kings*) has written the scripts for films about Native American baseball including, *Playing for Time*, and a study of the Qualla Cherokee community in North Carolina, *Spiral of Fire*.

In contemporary Native American societies, some people use modern technology to tell stories. The Tewa musician and storyteller Robert Maribell uses performance to illustrate Tewa stories. He dresses puppets and actors in elaborate masks and costumes, and they perform stories on stage. Many of these have been filmed and can be bought or viewed online. The Akwesasne Mohawk artist and high school teacher Katsitsionni Fox video records her students performing the Haundenosaune origin stories in Mohawk. The Onondaga writer Eric Gansworth has filmed parts of the Haundenosaune oral tradition, but with some twists to reflect modern concerns, as has Mohawk multimedia artist Shelly Niro. Canadian author Thomas King writes contemporary novels and short stories that incorporate traditional elements like tricksters. Coyote, in one example, gets on an airplane

and goes to Ottawa to straighten out Parliament. Across Indian Country, artists, writers and storytellers continue to tell the stories of their societies—both as they were and as they are.

The list of Native American authors is vast and ever-growing. There are a number of fairly up-to-date websites that list authors and their works. It has been harder for Native storytellers to break into movies and television, but some have succeeded. In Canada, for instance, in addition to movies like *Dance Me Outside* and *Medicine River*, there have been some television shows, such as *North of 60* and *Artic Air* that have primarily focused on contemporary indigenous communities. The important word in that sentence is “contemporary”. Literature, movies and television shows that have Native American influences are contemporary, taking place in the present, not the past.

Some recent movies from the United States also reflect contemporary Native American storytelling. For example, *Smoke Signals* was based on the stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, by the well-known Coeur d’Alene writer Sherman Alexie and also features a cast of Native American actors. *Smoke Signals* is a contemporary story about two young men on the Spokane Reservation. Unlike in Canada, the United States has no television shows that I am aware of that are focused on contemporary Native peoples. Native American appearances on U.S. television are scarce. Adam Beach, one of the stars of *Smoke Signals* and *Artic Air*, was briefly on *Law and Order, SVU*. The series *Longmire* takes place in a small town that is adjacent to a Cheyenne reservation. A number of episodes have focused on contemporary issues, such as the adoption of children away from the reservation and disenrollment of tribal members. Lou Diamond Phillips co-stars as Henry Standing Bear, a character that straddles both a contemporary and traditional role in his community. Other examples are few and far between, but let us hope that the United States follows Canada’s example and that novels and television shows begin to feature more Native Americans.

Storytellers of all kinds will continue to tell and perform the oral traditions of their society. Please be aware of them, support them, and remember: the stories of one society are not reflective of all societies.



**Masks** were and are an important component of Native American storytelling, as were rituals and ceremonies. The nations of the Northwest coast, the Haundenosaune, the Zuni, and the Hopi are just a few examples of Native societies whose masks are desired by museums and individuals who collect Native American artifacts. Many masks are housed in museum collections to protect them. But for these Native American societies, masks have special religious purposes. For the Zuni and Hopi the masks represent spirits who visit their villages during religious festivals. It is an honor for an individual to wear a mask, which among the Zuni can encase the whole body, to take on the role of the god or spirit represented. Dances are often an important part of the spirits' visit. After they leave the village, children are given small dolls called **kachinas**, which also represent the gods and spirits and will remind the children of the lessons they each teach to the society.

The Haundenosaune have **False Face Masks** that depict **Flint**, one of the twin sons of Sky Woman. His face is distorted because he was hit in the face by a tree while attempting to cheat his twin Sapling in a contest. Honored Haundenosaune men belong to False Face Societies. Each society has a **Mistress of the Masks**, a woman who takes care of the masks and sees they are regularly "fed" tobacco. The men of these societies use masks in healing ceremonies, particularly for ailments involving the face and neck. False Face Masks should only be seen during such ceremonies.

Some of the most elaborate masks are made by the societies of the Northwest coast. The masks are often referred to as **spirit masks**, because they represent the spirits and gods of these peoples. The masks also can reveal the spirits of individuals, particularly shamans. Some very special masks can open to reveal an inner mask, just as people may have an outer mask hiding an inner spirit.

While museums or private collectors may think they are protecting such artifacts, for Native peoples these are sacred items that should be returned to Native communities according to laws such as the Native American Repatriation and Graves Protection Act, as discussed in the Introduction. While this process is slowly taking place with museums in the United States, Native communities have asked that artifacts such as masks and kachinas that have religious significance not be put on

public exhibition. Some museums are complying with these requests; others are not. You may notice I have not included any pictures of these items.

Art almost always has important significance for a society; and art can tell us much about that society. Art may provide an outsider with the only understanding they may have about another society. What do you think the average person knows about ancient societies like Greece or Rome? Is the average person knowledgeable about their political organization? What resources they depended on and how they were distributed? How their kin groups were organized? Most are unaware of any details regarding these areas, but they do recognize one thing: the art. Greek and Roman sculpture, architecture, surviving paintings and murals, and even stories and plays that continue to be told and performed in our societies are what most of us know and remember about these ancient societies. What do you think will be remembered about the contemporary United States or Canada centuries from now?

Both traditional and contemporary styles of music continue to be played by Native American musicians and singers. Traditional music is essential for the dancing at any **pow-wow**. Pow-wow music typically consists of chanting and drumming. The pow-wow tradition of dancing, chanting, and drumming that developed is largely inter-tribal—it incorporates elements from many tribes and is not specific to any one particular group. Within the overall tradition, the style of chants, as well as the structure of the drums, and the drumming styles, vary from society to society insofar as there are northern styles and southern styles. Men typically do the drumming and chanting, but as fewer men are able to go through the required training, women have started to take on these roles to ensure traditions will continue. The words and vocal styles—which range from high-pitched to low registers—of the chants vary from area to area. In pow-wow dance, the style of the dancing, drumming, and chanting will identify the society from which it originated. Chanting and drumming styles, as well as dancing styles, are also often borrowed, and guest drummers and dancers may participate in pow-wows, particularly in dances specifically called **inter-tribal**. Traditional chanting and drumming are also important to the healing ceremonies that are still conducted in many societies.

While traditional music continues to be of importance to Native societies, some artists have also adapted to modern styles. Robert Mirabell is such an artist; he presents music and stories in a way that makes them better understood by non-Native people. Perhaps one of the best-known Native musicians is the flutist R. Carlos Nakai. Nakai plays traditional southwestern flutes and music, but he also plays contemporary music on the flutes. Country music is typically very popular in Indian Country, so many musicians may play both traditional music and perform in a country band. Some write songs that reflect concerns of their Native communities, as do blues groups like Corn Bread. Some Native American musicians have adapted the musical styles of the dominant culture, including hip-hop (the Mohawk rapper Lightfoot), or have joined jazz, rock, blues, and other bands, or classical orchestras. Some musicians, for example, folk singer Buffy Saint-Marie, have become very well-known performing popular styles of music that include Native American issues (“Now That the Buffalo Are Gone”) as well American or Canadian standard styles of popular music. St. Marie wrote the song “Up Where We Belong” for the movie *An Officer and a Gentleman*, which is not a Native-themed movie. Native musicians may also sing songs in a contemporary style, but in their own languages, or translate popular American or Canadian songs into their languages. While driving through the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation one afternoon, I heard the popular country song “Jackson” being sung in Mohawk by a father/daughter duo. In this version of the song, Kahnawake, a Mohawk reserve in the province of Quebec, in Canada replaces the city of Jackson.

Dancing is another form of artistic expression that continues to be important in Native American societies. Dance was so important to Native communities that it is hard to list all the ways it was incorporated into daily life. Native peoples danced to celebrate births, marriages, successful harvest or hunts, to ask the spirits for a successful harvest or hunt, to mark a death, to prepare for war, to celebrate victory over enemies, or just because they wanted to dance. Dance was also an important part of special religious occasions like the Sun Dance. As people in the plains were striving to survive deaths and displacement in the 1870s, the Ghost Dance brought them hope that their society could be revitalized. The Sun Dance and the Ghost Dance are still regularly performed in many Native societies.

One of the most visible ways dance continues to be of importance to contemporary Native American societies is as part of a pow-wow.

Over time, pow-wows evolved into a much larger artistic expression. They are performed in most Native communities, and in cities that have a large number of Native residents, pow-wows are held by Native Cultural Centers. Many pow-wows welcome Native drummers (drumming is the only musical accompaniment to the dancing) and dancers from around the Americas. Societies have different dances and protocol, but during the twentieth century, many societies have borrowed from others. For example, a popular Haundenosaune social dance is the Alligator Dance, obviously borrowed from societies to the south. Generally social or tribal dances are done by women and men and are frequently open to anyone who would like to participate. There are men's and women's dances that have turned into competitions in the twentieth century, such as Shawl Dress dancing for women and Fancy Dance for men.

A pow-wow generally starts at noon with a **grand entry** in which all the dancers, in their tribal regalia, dance to the drums into the pow-wow grounds. Most pow-wows have multiple drumming groups that will take turns throughout the day. A veteran and mother of a veteran, followed by the head woman and male dancers, lead the grand entry. They are followed by the male dancers, often in groups based on the type of dance they will do (Smoke Dance, Eagle Dance, Fancy Dance) and the women dancers, also in groups of Traditional, Shawl or Jingle Dress dancers, followed by children referred to as Tiny Tots. The regalia generally change to match the different styles of dancing. The regalia worn by women, men, and children are art forms in themselves, typically made by the dancers and their families. The regalia incorporate traditional and modern elements. A few years ago, old CDs were very popular on the male Fancy Dancers.

The women and men are also generally divided by age: seniors, adults, teens, and children under 12, although the Tiny Tots often dance with a parent. It is not unusual to see a baby, in regalia, carried by a parent during Grand Entry. An Honoring Dance, to mark the death of an individual, the success of community members, or to honor returning veterans, may follow the Grand Entry. One of the most moving Honoring Dances I have seen was on the Akwesasne Mohawk Reservation shortly after 9/11. The dance honored men who

had been working construction in New York City when the Twin Towers were destroyed. Many of these men rushed to the scene to help rescue people. Some of these men had worked to construct the towers years before.



*Drummers at the Seafair Indian Days Pow-wow*

During a pow-wow, which generally starts on Friday and goes through Sunday, there are social dances, in which anyone may participate, and the more competitive tribal dances. Competitive dancers, both men and women, have registered to compete; observers will see numbers on their regalia. There are referees on the dance grounds that judge the skill of the dancers and make sure protocols are followed. For example, a dancer will be disqualified if a part of his/her regalia falls to the ground. The falling of an eagle feather, used in the regalia for the men's Eagle Dance, requires that the dancing stop and the grounds be re-blessed. Dancers are awarded cash and other prizes for winning the competitive dances.

Pow-wows are now held around Canada and the United States during the summer. There are families who spend summer weekends on the "Pow-Wow Circuit," traveling from Native community-to-community and camping at the pow-wow grounds for the weekend. Pow-wows have become a way for Native peoples to continue to participate in and demonstrate their culture, and to meet people from other Native communities. People who no longer live at their home

reservations will come home for the pow-wow. In urban areas it is an opportunity for Native peoples to come together and participate in their society's music and dance traditions. Young people continue to look for possible marriage partners at pow-wows. But it is not just the drummers, dancers, and tourists who come to pow-wows; there are also native vendors who are selling other forms of expressive culture such as weavings, pottery, and baskets.

For thousands of years, pottery and baskets have been utilitarian items found in all societies around the world. Pottery was used to carry water and to store seeds or wine and to cook. Baskets were also used to carry and store items. Weaving designs are found in clothing, rugs, blankets, and housing materials. People around the world have created such art, though those in Western societies often refer to these items as "crafts." These were items to be used in day-to-day activities, not simply to put on the walls and shelves to be looked at and admired. While societies in Europe and Asia developed art forms to be admired and not used, these all evolved from earlier utilitarian art forms. Colors, designs, and techniques all continued to be used as people settled into permanent households and had the resources or wealth to create or buy items that had no utilitarian use or value. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when anthropologists or people in the general public said that indigenous peoples around the world did not have art, they were operating under the perception that art cannot be utilized in everyday life. But indigenous people around the world did have art that was expressed as part of utilitarian items. Imagine the commitment and care of a woman beading her children's moccasins that she knows will soon be outgrown or worn out, and still taking the time to bead elaborate designs that have been handed down from mother to daughter for generations in her family. Imagine a potter taking the time to paint designs on a pot he knows may be broken the first time it is used to store corn kernels. Imagine the value people of the society would give to these items made with such care and attention by their family members.



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*Seed pot pottery from Acoma Pueblo.*



Displayed at Museum of Man, San Diego, California. Dec. 2007 CC-BY-SA 3.0 by Durova

*Beaded moccasins originally from the estate of Chief Washakie, Wind River Reservation (Shoshone), Wyoming*

It is difficult to write about the art of Native American societies from a general perspective, because artistic designs varied according to the communities who made them. If you have taken art history classes, you know the art of Renaissance Italy was very different than that of France or northern Europe. The same is true of Native American art. Examples of pottery, baskets, and sometimes weavings are found in archaeological sites. As in dance and chant styles, designs, and techniques pottery and weaving vary from society to society. These **artifacts** can be used to identify a society or those that might be related to or descended from one another (often called **Mother and Daughter Cultures**). These items can be useful to track the migrations of societies, whether those societies are migratory, or horticultural that migrated because of environmental factors. These artifacts can also illustrate how a society might expand. The Haundenosaune and Cherokees both grew to cover a vast territory in the Northeast and Southeast. Researchers today can tell a site is Iroquoian or Cherokee by the designs and techniques used in tools, weavings, and pottery. So while a particular artifact may be identified as belonging to a particular society, it by no means is indicative of all American Indian art.



In the nineteenth century, many Euro-Americans and Canadians thought those First Peoples caught inside their political boundaries would become extinct or assimilate into the dominant society. This belief, along with the rise of museums that sought to preserve the arts and crafts of lost societies, led to the collection of artifacts of indigenous societies around the world. Anthropologists, trading posts owners, missionaries, teachers, and many others started collecting artifacts from the Native societies with which they worked. Anthropologists generally collected for museums, while many others collected for their own private collections. Items were sometimes given as gifts by Native peoples, but more often were bought from people desperate for money. Items were taken from archaeological sites, and even from burial grounds. Museums in the United States and Canada (as well as in Europe) often had exhibit halls containing the artifacts and art of Native Americans. Typically the items were displayed by **cultural-geographic** area. Museum curators believed societies living in the same geographic area would share cultural traits, thus their artifacts would display commonalities. This thinking does not take into account that a given society might be a recent arrival to a geographic area, or that societies occupying an area might have very different languages, religious beliefs, and cultural histories. Indeed, some art forms may be found only in a few societies. The carving of soapstone and whalebone, for example, is generally only found in Arctic and Sub-Arctic societies.



Photo rights held by the author

*Sculpture of a seal hunter in soapstone.*

Perhaps some of the earliest examples of visual art were also the most permanent: rock art. Centuries ago, people around the world painted or craved designs onto rock walls. These **pictographs** used symbols to convey information that would have been understood by the contemporaries of the people who made them, if not by researchers today. Rock art may have been used to indicate the location of a stored **cache** of food, may have given directions to where people had moved, may have told of a great battle or hunt, or may have simply stated that a group of people occupied that space. Many figures found in rock art may have had religious or other social purposes. Snakes (associated with the coming of rain), as well as rainbows, thunderbolts, and other illustrations of rain are found throughout the Southwest. As are human shapes with horns, often indicative of a shaman. Perhaps the best known of southwestern rock art figures is **Kokopelli**. Kokopelli is an obviously male figure often shown with a flute and also as a hunchback, though some interpretations are that he is carrying a bag of seeds on his back. Kokopelli has been associated with agricultural and fertility. He's also sometimes known as a trickster. Whatever the people who originally carved his image into rock thought him to be, today Kokopelli's image is found on jewelry and t-shirts, an example of the evolution of an art style.



CC-BY-SA 3.0 by Einar Einarsson Kauran

*Kokopelli petroglyph in New Mexico, June 2009.*

While changes in expressive culture changed from society to society in the Americas before European contact, weavings, textiles, baskets, and pottery changed dramatically with the new introduction of new materials (for example, glass beads replacing porcupine quills) and designs brought by the settlers. Pre- and post-contact weavings and textiles deteriorate easily in most climates. Fortunately some were collected in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries and preserved in museums. Textiles would include the animal skins Native peoples would prepare to use as clothing, blankets, and, in some cases, the walls of their housing. The technology of preparing the skins is a long, labor-intensive process that was typically done by women. Native women knew that the skins of animals killed in the late spring and summer typically had been affected by parasites and would not last long, thus were good material for children who would soon outgrow their clothing. They knew how to make the skins waterproof, typically by rubbing the skins with animal brains, and they sewed stitches (with needles made from animal bones and thread made from animal sinew) that did not leak in water or snow. In addition to the time needed to prepare skins, women would also take the time to paint or bead elaborate designs on the materials. Vivid colors were typically used in the traditional designs of the society or a kin group. Thus, collectors can typically tell the society of the women who made the textiles.

Native women would also bead designs on clothing and footwear that are often called **moccasins**, although that is not a word used by all Native peoples. Before European contact, porcupine quills, often dyed different colors, were used as decorating materials. After contact, glass beads became important trade items for this purpose. Like the painted designs, beaded designs would also be handed down from mother to daughter in a society.



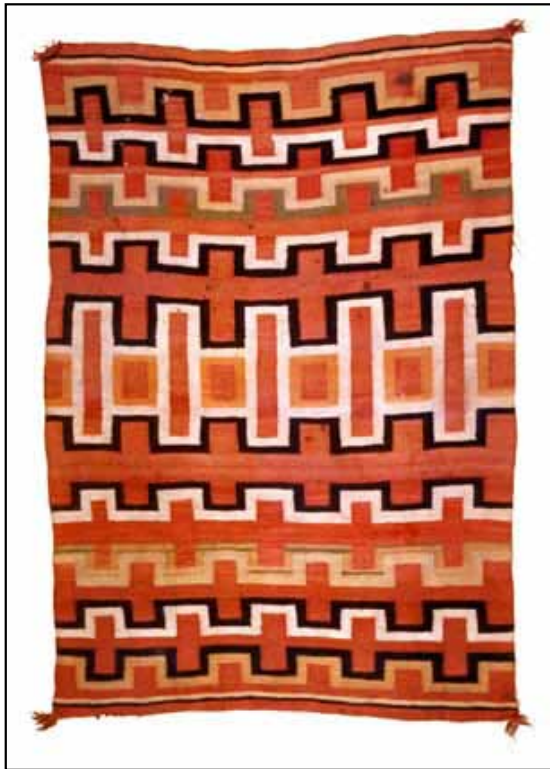
CC-BY-SA 3.0 by Wójcicie Staber

*Sioux parfleche (saddle bag), circa 1900, Gilcrease Museum.*

The use of glass beads in the textiles made by Native women is but one example of how Native peoples adapted to trade goods within the context of their own culture. A further example is how Native women used beaded goods (and blankets, baskets, and pottery) for economic survival. In the late nineteenth century, Euro-American and Canadian peoples started to acquire the “crafts” made by Native Americans as curios; not considered art, but as curiosities collected from a vanishing race. Native women soon learned that they could contribute to the economic resources of their families in a new way, by making beaded goods or baskets specifically for the tourist trade. Soon Native women started making non-utilitarian goods such as purses, pincushions, scissor holders, and “whimsies” specifically for this trade. Trips to trading posts, towns, and tourist destinations such as Niagara Falls were made by the women of families to sell their “crafts,” which became important sources of income to Native families.

Perhaps the best-known example of how the making of utilitarian items became an important economic resource for Native peoples is the making and selling of Navajo/Dine’ blankets. Native peoples around North America used various materials for weaving; including cotton in the Southeast, as well as milkweed and grass fibers. The Spanish brought southeastern cotton to the cultures of the Southwest and

forced the Native peoples there to plant and harvest it. Many peoples in the Southwest, especially the Dine, Zuni, and Hopis, quickly adapted cotton to weaving clothing and especially blankets. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the designs on the blankets were relatively simple, with a few colors and designs of horizontal lines. Over time, the use of color and design became much more complicated. Among the Dine', these designs often incorporated images from their oral tradition: images of Father Sky, Mother Earth, snakes, and rainbows. Weavers, women among the Dine', but men among the Hopi, showed their increasing skill in the use of colors and design. These types of blankets quickly became items sold at trading posts, and are now shown and sold in art galleries in cities in North America and Europe.



Courtesy of the Arizona State Museum. [http://www.asimuseum.arizona.edu/exhibits/museum/exhibits/history/blankets/8169\\_d1114.html](http://www.asimuseum.arizona.edu/exhibits/museum/exhibits/history/blankets/8169_d1114.html)

*Navajo blanket from Transitional Period.*

For centuries, Native peoples in the Americas used whatever resources were available to them to weave baskets. Pine needles, willow, sweet grass, tree bark, and wood splints have been and are all used to make baskets. The materials used depended on the society's

environment. Sweet grass and black ash trees, commonly used in the Northeast are not found in Oklahoma, where willow strips are often used, or in the Great Basin where Native peoples will use pine needles. As with beading and weaving, the people of different societies will incorporate traditional designs into their baskets. Native peoples would use natural dyes made from berries or different soils to color strips that were woven into the baskets. Different materials and styles of weaving would also be used to create baskets. For example, among the Haundenosaune, sweet grass and black ash splints were the most common materials used in baskets. Baskets could be made with either or both the sweet grass and black ash, which could create designs and different textures in the baskets. Different weaving techniques were also used, along with designs of dyed strips of wood splints.

As with beaded work and blankets, baskets became important trade goods by which Native weavers contributed important economic resources to their families. In the twentieth century, baskets became larger and incorporated more and more different techniques and designs. For example, among many Haundenosaune basket makers the traditional **wedding basket** (a simple basket with a handle that carried the corn and dried fish and meat to be exchanged by the newlywed couple) started to look like the multi-tiered wedding cakes of Euro-Americans and Canadians.

Pottery is yet another example of how Native Americans developed technologies and utilized mud and natural dyes found in their environments to make necessary items, which then became tourist trade goods that contributed important economic resources to families and communities. Archaeologists and museum collectors know that one way pottery can be traced to a particular community is by the materials used. In the Arctic and Sub-Arctic, soapstone is shaped into bowls and lamps that hold oil that is lit to provide light. Soapstone would also be shaped and craved into animal, human, and spirit shapes. South of the Arctic, as humans around the world did, Native peoples learned how to shape and fire mud found in their areas to form pottery. The soil and techniques used to make the pottery and the designs all help determine who made the pottery.

Some of the most unique styles of pottery are the **storytellers** made by Pueblo peoples in the Southwest. Storytellers are female figures with open mouths covered with smaller, child-like figures sitting and climbing all over the mother-like storyteller.



CC-BY-SA 3.0 by The Children's Museum of Indianapolis. Photo by Wendy Kaveney, sculpture by Rose Peco-SunRhodes.

*“Storyteller Under Sunny Skies,” a clay sculpture by Rose Pecos-SunRhodes, Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico, in the permanent collection of The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis.*

While the various arts made by Native peoples became important sources of economic resources in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they also became an important way for Native peoples to maintain their indigenous identities. As a consequence of the colonization, forced assimilation, and termination discussed in other chapters, many Native peoples in Canada and the United States lost their homelands. As Native peoples became dispersed, they stopped speaking their indigenous languages and often converted to Christianity. Residential schools prohibited the speaking of Native languages, which contributed to the extinction of many languages. Governmental policy made it impossible for societies to maintain matrilineal kinship patterns and women’s involvement and power in the political organization of their societies. Traditional methods of obtaining or producing resources became more and more difficult. Often the one thing maintained by Native peoples from their

traditional culture was their expressive culture in storytelling, music, and dance, and economically important weavings, beadwork, baskets, and pottery. These art forms helped to maintain Native peoples both economically and culturally.



*Sampler of beadwork*

In contemporary Native communities, whether on reservations or in rural, suburban, or urban communities, people continue to learn how to make items of expressive culture that is not always for sale to museums, galleries, or pow-wows. Young people learn how to create the art of their societies as a way to help maintain their Native identity within the dominant culture of the twenty-first century. Often the younger Natives will also learn the words associated with the materials and techniques used to make items, along with the name of the items themselves. This has helped keep some indigenous languages from becoming completely extinct. Expressive culture is also a way for young people to demonstrate the skills they have in their traditional societies. For example, communities across Indian Country, like Euro-American or Canadian communities, hold contests in which young women are named the “Princess” of their community. In such contests, the young women are expected to display some Native traditional skills in language, dance, and art in beadwork, basket-making, or pottery.

Some Native American artists have maintained or reclaimed the traditional methods of making items of expressive culture such as carving soapstone or making canoes, masks, baskets, or pottery. Perhaps the most famous are Maria and Julian Martinez of the San Ildefonso Pueblo, who were able to recreate traditional Puebloan methods of making pots. They first experimented with black-on-red and polychrome painting on pottery. After World War I, the archaeologist Edgar Hewitt asked them to try and recreate the **black-on-black**



**pottery** he was finding in Frijoles Canyon (Bandelier National Park). The black-on-black pottery had a highly polished background with matte designs. The Martinezes were successful in re-creating the technique, which they then taught to other members of their family, providing important economic resources to their community (Penny 2004). After the death of Julian, Maria Martinez would make pottery for tourists and even take special orders. The photographer Ansel Adams ordered a full set of dinnerware from her, which is now in the collection of the University of Arizona's Museum of Anthropology. The Martinez potteries are now very valuable items in museum and private collections around the world.



Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Interior, Indian Arts and Crafts Board.

*Maria Martinez preparing pottery for firing*

Many contemporary Native American artists continue to incorporate traditional features into modern art techniques. For example, the Mohawk multimedia artist Shelley Niro has an installation depicting the fall of Sky Woman at the First People's Hall at the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa.

Other artists use photography or computer generation. While some, like Niro, incorporate traditional elements into their art, others use it to make political statements about the history and present-day situation of Native peoples. Others make art for art's sake and may not necessarily be identified as a Native American artist. The Mohawk artist Alex Jacobs, who is also a spoken-word poet, has many pieces that satirize the popular culture images of Native peoples, such as a series of very modern cigar store Indians. He also has a series of watercolors of the St. Lawrence River that contain no traits or elements of what would generally be considered Native American art.



*Skywoman, Kateri:kahaka (Mohawk): Ontario, 2001. Made By Shelley Niro (1954). Foam, fiberglass resin, oil paint, canvas and metal. Located at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2000.129.1.1-10, D2004-1129*

*Skywoman, an installation piece at the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa by Shelley Niro*

So what is Native American art? The cigar store Indians or the watercolors of the St. Lawrence River? The dinnerware pieces made by Maria Martinez? Beadwork, pottery, and baskets made for the tourist trade? The photography of Tuscarora artist and art professor Jolene Rickard or the sculpture of Alan Houser or Stan Hill? Must the art look “Indian” or have American Indian themes to be considered Native American Art? Who is considered a Native American artist? The investigation of those questions is very much a part of the story of the continued identity of Native peoples in the twenty-first century.

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## Suggested Questions

What does art tell us about a society?

What art do you think the United States or Canada will be remembered for 500 hundred years from now?

Non-Native authors have written about Native peoples and their societies. What do you think the differences are between a non-Native person and a Native person writing about American or Canadian indigenous culture?

Movies and television shows often depict stereotypes, sometimes very negative stereotypes, about Native peoples. Why do you think this is so?

What First Peoples writers or artists do you know about? How did you learn about them?

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## Suggested Resources

For more information about the role of artistic expression in indigenous societies, I recommend *Exploring World Art* by Eric Venbrux, Pamela Sheffield Rosi, and Robert Welsch, especially the essay “Do We Still Have No Word for Art?: A Contemporary Mohawk Question” by Morgan Perkins.

For those who need further convincing that indigenous people in “hostile” environments like the Arctic and Sub-Arctic have the time or imagination for artistic expression, I recommend *Inuit Art: An Anthology*. Additionally, if you are ever in Ottawa, Ontario, I recommend a visit to the Museum of Fine Arts and the Museum of Civilization, both of which have excellent collections of historical and contemporary pieces.

*North American Indian Art*, by David Penney, is an excellent introduction to both historical and contemporary examples of American Indian art.

There is a relatively new video available through Visionmaker Video and PBS about Dine’ (Navajo) weavers called *Weaving Two Worlds: Tradition and Economic Survival*. An older video, simply called *Maria Martinez*, may be available in your library, and there are a number of websites devoted to her art and life story.

Paul Chaat Smith’s *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong* is an insightful collection of essays about American Indian stereotypes and Native American art and artists.

There are also a large number of websites devoted to Native American writers, both as groups and individually. There is no reason not to read about American Indians by American Indian writers.

A video about Native American dance styles called *Native American Men’s and Women’s Dance Styles* is available through Full Circle Videos at [www.fullcir.com](http://www.fullcir.com).

# Conclusions

*I believe one of our greatest traditions is precisely this. In earlier eras, Indians were suppose(d) to surrender; instead we fought. We were suppose(d) to die off from war and starvation and disease; instead we survived. We were suppose(d) to assimilate; instead we kept our traditions and languages. We were suppose(d) to leave reservations for cities; instead we live in cities, towns and reservations.*

Paul Chaat Smith, *Everything You Know about Indians is Wrong*  
(Pg. 185)

Recently I was driving to Montreal, Quebec with a friend. We had to take a longer-than-usual route to get there because the International Seaway Bridge across the St. Lawrence River had been closed by the Canadian government in response to protests by Akwesasne Mohawks. I didn't mind; it was a beautiful drive through farmland and small villages along the St. Lawrence River. I appreciated the Akwesasne Mohawks standing up in a democratic and non-violent manner to the Canadian government's new policy to have armed border guards—guards who have harassed Mohawks. Because of the reasons we were taking this longer route, my friend was asking me about the situation at Akwesasne, and what I foresaw for the future. I don't remember how the issue of assimilation came up but it did, and my friend was very surprised when I said I didn't think the Akwesasne Mohawks or the indigenous peoples of the Americas in general would ever totally assimilate, nor should they.

**Assimilation** is basically the adoption by individuals or a group, aspects of another, usually dominant, culture. It can be voluntary, or it can be forced. For example, if you travel to other countries known to be very different than those of the United States or Canada, the countries of Africa for example, you might be surprised to see people dressed very much as they would in your home country. I have heard people who had visited the Holy Land be very disappointed to see people dressed in Western style clothes as opposed the robes of the Bible. The first time I went to Mexico City I saw young girls wearing leg warmers in the fall heat, because that's what they saw in U.S. movies

and magazines. Just about anywhere you go, you will hear American popular music. One of my professors from graduate school told a story about traveling for days on a donkey to get to a remote Maya village in southern Mexico to study a nearly extinct dialect of Quiche' (one of the major languages of the Maya) that was still spoken in the village. As he and his donkey came over the last hill to the village, he could hear the then-popular pop group the Bee-Gees blaring from a radio in the village. These are examples of voluntary assimilation. Or are they?

One of the reasons people around the world wear our clothes, watch our movies and television shows, and listen to our music is because we are a dominant world power culturally, politically, economically, and militarily. (I am referring primarily to the United States, but those of you who live in Canada know what I mean. I live close to the Canadian/U.S. border. I can watch two Canadian television networks. One of them broadcasts Canadian shows, and the other one airs U.S. shows like *The Sopranos*.) A factor that gets left out when discussing assimilation is that of **hegemony**: the dominance of one social group over another. The dominance of hegemony can be based on gender, race, economic class, and language—any number of factors. For example, when people immigrate to the United States, they are expected to learn English. But when people of the United States travel to other countries they expect people wherever they go—France, Italy, Germany, Ghana, or Thailand, for instance—to speak English. They do not consider that they should learn at least a few words in the language of the country they are visiting. And they expect they should be able to eat American food, not the cuisine of the country. That's hegemony. I'm not saying that U.S. travelers never attempt to learn the language or try the food of the countries they visit. But while traveling, I have observed and talked to people who see no reason to learn a bit of Spanish while traveling in Mexico. The early European immigrants to the Americas did not learn Algonquin, or Mohawk, or Cherokee. But they did expect the indigenous peoples to learn the language of the incoming settlers, either English, French, or Spanish.

In the nineteenth century, Christian churches and the U.S. and Canadian governments established residential schools to, in the words of William Pratt, “kill the Indian” in the children who were forcibly removed from their families and taken to the schools. When children arrived at the residential schools, their hair was cut, their clothes were

burned, and they were given new, often ill-fitting, clothes to wear. In the case of Pratt's Carlisle Indian School, those clothes were altered military uniforms. The children were punished if they spoke their own languages or practiced their religious rituals. They were forced to attend Christian church services. Residential schools had cemeteries where the children who died from malnutrition, disease, abuse, and loneliness were buried. The education the children received was third-rate compared to that of Euro-American children. Children at residential schools spent most of their time working in the school buildings doing the cooking and cleaning if they were girls, or farming the surrounding fields if they were boys. What education they did receive was Euro-American, designed to lead to the extinction of their languages and cultures.

At the same time, their families and communities were forced to live on reservations or reserves, sometimes at great distances from their homelands. In the twentieth century, the land bases of many reservations-reserves were reduced or entirely eliminated. In the United States some reservations and the treaty obligations that went along with them were terminated. Across the country, Native peoples were coerced into relocating to slums and tenements, taking low-wage jobs in cities such as Oakland, Milwaukee, and Chicago. These are examples of forced assimilation. Yet despite all this, the First Peoples of the Americas remain. According to census counts in both the United States and Canada, their populations are growing. While over 60% of Native peoples live in towns and cities, not reservations or reserves, they still have ties with their home communities, speak their languages, and practice their ceremonies. As I told my friend during our drive, if Native peoples haven't assimilated yet, despite the worst that was thrown at them, what makes you think they will now or in the future?

Not entirely assimilating doesn't mean Native peoples don't usually dress as most other Euro-Canadians or Americans dress. It doesn't mean that they don't drive cars and trucks instead of ride horses—which, remember, were introduced by the Europeans. Euro-Canadians and Americans don't dress or drive around in a horse and buggy like their founding mothers and fathers. Does that mean they're not American or Canadian? I sometimes feel that the indigenous peoples of the Americas are like the Geico cavemen on television

commercials. First, non-cavemen are surprised to find out they're still around; and then media advertisements continue to portray the urban Cavemen wearing animal skins and carrying clubs. The First Peoples of the Americas are still here; they still do their traditional dances, but they also go to country music dances on Saturday night at the VFW or to dance clubs, classical concerts, and operas. Sometimes they are the performers. Was Maria Tallchief any less Indian because she was a ballet dancer?

When I told my friend that I didn't think Native peoples would ever totally assimilate, I was referring to the Akwesasne Mohawk demonstration. Despite the fact that Akwesasne may look like any other rural community in northern New York, southern Ontario and Quebec, it is not. Despite the fact that people at Akwesasne typically dress like other people in the area and shop at many of the same stores doesn't mean they aren't culturally different. They are, and throughout 400 years of encounters with Euro-Americans and Canadians they have been constantly reminded of how different they are. In the couple of hours it took my friend and I to get to Montreal, the discussion about assimilation led to a discussion about another issue of great importance to aboriginal peoples of the Americas: that of sovereignty.

Sovereignty is the right to exercise within a specific territory the highest authority of law. In other words, the Akwesasne Mohawks, as other Native peoples on reservations and reserves, expect to be able to exercise their laws in their territory, such as to not have armed border guards on their territory. There are over 200 treaties that ensure that Native communities can exercise their own laws on their own lands "for as long as the sun shines and rivers run," as the law that removed the Cherokees to Oklahoma states. But as you read throughout this book, these treaties and laws have been violated time after time. As I write this, it remains to be seen how the Akwesasne Mohawks and the government of Canada will resolve the issue of the bridge closure. This is but one issue of sovereignty in one reservation. It is one example of the ongoing struggles of Native communities in Canada and the United States.

Basic to the issues of assimilation and sovereignty is the issue of **identity**; not only who is an American Indian or First Peoples, but what does it mean to be an American Indian or First Peoples. It often seems like non-Native peoples want to control aboriginal identity. The



U.S. and Canadian governments, through agencies like the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada have attempted to control the identity of Native peoples through various policies like blood-quantum (Chapter 1). Native peoples often hear, “Well you don’t look like an Indian,” or “Can you speak any Indian?, or “What part of you is Indian?” or “Some of my best friends are Indian and they think...” (this last one was published by a reporter in the *Albany Times Union* newspaper).

Identity is essential to the issues of assimilation and sovereignty: if you look like us, and dress like us, you must be like us—so why should you be treated any differently? American aboriginal people may at times, like peoples in Mexico or Ghana or Thailand, choose to dress like people of the dominant culture, or eat the same food and listen to the same music. That doesn’t mean they have assimilated, or given up their identity or sovereignty.

Within these issues of assimilation, sovereignty, and identity, are many other issues: hunting and fishing rights, land and mineral rights, and water rights. As issues of population growth, economic fluctuations, and climate change continue in the twenty-first, the sovereignty and identity of indigenous peoples and nations will be challenged. These issues will establish the patterns of encounters between Native peoples and nations and the United States and Canada. As you have read in the various chapters, in the late twentieth century continuing into the twenty-first century, the courts and even occasionally the governmental agencies of Canada and the United States, have been more willing to acknowledge that past interactions with Native peoples have been wrong, illegal, and uncertainly have not lived up to their expressed ideals of justice for all.

Will the indigenous peoples of the North America assimilate to the dominant cultures that surround them? Remember in Chapter 1 you read about the Basque people of Europe, those who are probably the descendants of the people who made the cave paintings found around Europe 30,000 to 40,000 years ago? The Basque were in Europe when very different Indo-European peoples migrated to western Europe and pushed them to the margins and no doubt tried to assimilate them. We don’t know much about the process because people weren’t writing back then. What we do know we must infer from archaeology, linguistics, and the oral tradition. Surrounded by dominant cultures for

thousands of years, the Basque adopted some traditions, for example, they are Christian. But the Basque still have their own language, they tend to still live in the mountains between France and Spain. When they migrate, they tend to keep their language, and seek the same type of labor they did in their homeland, largely sheep-herding and fishing. In Europe the Basque have been very active politically, sometimes violently, in trying to establish their autonomy from Spain and France and create their own nation-state. Thinking about the Basque and what you've read in the previous chapters, do you think the indigenous peoples and nations of North America will ever fully assimilate to the dominant societies of the United States and Canada?

In these aspects, it is frustrating to write a book about the indigenous peoples of North America because there is still so much that should be written and shared. I've written about the border closure at Akwesasne, but across Indian Country there many other events occurring that also demonstrate the continued identity and sovereignty of Native peoples. Do you know about any of these incidents around your home? For all the examples I included in this book, there are hundreds of other incidents that I could have written about. I hope this book will inspire you to learn more about the First Peoples of the Americas. Each chapter has a list of resources that will be a good place to start. Remember, the ongoing history of Native peoples hasn't stopped, any more than the ongoing history of Canada or the United States has stopped. The other knowledge I hope you take away from this book is the amount of diversity among the aboriginal peoples of the Americas. In my classes, I tell my students if they remember nothing else from class to remember that the Native peoples of what is now the eastern United States were farmers, as were the peoples of the Southwest. Those peoples who were foragers may have gotten most of their food through fishing, not hunting, certainly not hunting on horseback more than 500 years ago. Some Native societies had chiefs, some had kings, and in some it would be difficult to tell who was in charge—true democracies. The roles of women in societies such as the Haundenosaune would inspire women in the United States to campaign for full political and economic rights. Over 700 languages were spoken across these societies, and so much more. Indian Country was and continues to be a very diverse place.

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# Videos

An excellent source of videos about Native Americans in the United States is Native American Public Telecommunications, 1800 N. 33rd. St., Lincoln, NE 68503 and in Canada the National Film Board of Canada, PO Box 6100, Station Centre-Ville, Montreal, Quebec.

*Black Indians: An American Story.* Rich-Heape Films, Inc. 5952 Royal Lane. Suite 254 Dallas, TX 75230.

*Daughters of the Country.* National Film Board of Canada. PO Box 6100. Station Centre-Ville, Montreal, Quebec.

*House Made of Dawn.* New Line Home Video.

*500 Hundred Nations.* Warner Home Video.

*How the West Was Lost*, volumes I and III. Discovery Enterprises Group, Bethesda, MD 20814.

*In Whose Honor: American Indian Mascots in Sports.* New Day Films. 22D. Hollywood Ave. Ho-ho-kus, NJ 07423.

*Indian Country Diaries.* Native American Public Telecommunications. Visionmaker Videos. Box 83111, Lincoln, NE 68501.

*Medicine River.* Sterling Entertainment Group. Fort Mill, SC 29708.

*Mountain Wolf Woman.* Women's History and Literature Media. PO Box 5264, Madison, WI 53705.

*Myths and Moundbuilders.* PBS Video, Public Broadcasting Service.

*Native American Men's and Women's Dance Styles*, volumes I and II. Full Circle Videos. [www.fullcir.com](http://www.fullcir.com).

*Smoke Signals.* Buena Vista Home Entertainment. Burbank, CA 91521.

*The People Today: Native Americans Examine the Impact of the Catholic Church on the Tribes of the Plateau and Northern Rockies.*  
DeSmet Project, Washington State University, Pullman.

*Those Who Came Before.* Southwestern Parks and Monuments Association, Tucson, AZ.

*Weaving Two Worlds: Tradition and Economic Survival.* PBS Video, Public Broadcasting Service