

# The American Nation

## Chapter 2 / Section 2

### *Before the First Global Age – Prehistory – 1600*

#### *Native American Cultures*

*When Christopher Columbus reached the Americas in 1492, he thought he had landed in the East Indies --- islands off the coast of Asia. So he called the people he met, “Indio’s” or “Indians”.*

#### **I. Culture Areas of North America**

A **culture area** is a region in which people share a similar way of life. Each culture area was home to many different tribes. A **tribe** is a community of people who share common customs, language, and rituals. Members of a tribe saw themselves as a **distinct people** who shared a common origin.

##### ***A. Hunting, Gathering, and Fishing***

Native Americans developed a variety of ways to meet their basic needs for **food, clothing, and shelter**. In some culture areas, tribes hunted animals and gathered the nuts and fruits that grew in the wild. Other tribes depended on the **sea** for food.

##### ***B. Farming***

Other tribes lived mostly by **farming**, planting corn, beans, and squash. Over time, farmers improved their crops. For example, more than 5,000 years ago, **wild corn** was tiny, about the size of a human finger.

### ***C. Trade***

Indian tribes traded with each other for goods **not found** within their own region. Trade networks **linked** people across large distances. Goods sometimes traveled **more than** 1,000 miles from where they were made.

## **II. Climate, Resources, and Culture**

Climate and natural resources **helped shape** Native American culture in different regions. Climate and natural resources **influenced** the crops people grew and the animals they hunted. Climate also affected people's needs for **clothing and shelter**.

### ***A. Cultures of the far North and Plateau Regions.***

Frozen seas and icy, treeless plains made up the world of the **Intuits**, who lived in the Arctic region. For most of the year, the Intuits lived in **pit houses**, houses dug into the ground and covered with wood and skins. Lamps filled with **seal oil**, kept their homes warm even in the bitter cold.

The plateau region has a cold and dry environment. Surprisingly however, numbers of **hardy plants and animals** thrive in the region. Among the people of the plateau region were the Ute's and Shoshones. They collected **pine nuts** and dug for **roots** in the dry soil. The Native Americans of the region had **few possessions** beyond digging sticks, baskets, and tools and weapons needed for hunting.

### ***B. Cultures of the Northwest***

Elsewhere in North America the climate was kinder, which helped more **complex cultures** emerge. The people of the Northwest Coast enjoyed **milder temperatures** and abundant food supplies. With plenty of food, the people of the Pacific Northwest **stayed in one place**. They built **permanent** villages and prospered from trade with nearby groups. Within a village, a family gained **status** according to how much it owned. To improve its standing, a family might hold a **potlatch**, or ceremonial dinner, to show off its wealth. The potlatch could last for many days.

### *C. Cultures of the Southeast*

Many tribes **inhabited** the southeastern region of North America. Among them were the Natchez. They **benefitted** from the region's warm, moist climate. They hunted, fished, and farmed along the fertile coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

The ruler of the Natchez was known as the **Great Sun** and was worshipped as a god. The Great Sun's feet never touched the ground. Either he was **carried** on a litter or he **walked** on mats. Below the Great Sun were members of his family, called Little Suns. Next came Nobles, then Honored People, and finally Stinkards, or commoners, who made up the majority of the people.

Marriage laws ensured that membership in each class **kept changing**. **By law**, Nobles had to marry Stinkards. Even the Great Sun chose a Stinkard as a wife.

## **III. Shared Beliefs**

The many Native American groups had a **wide variety** of beliefs. Yet, they **shared some** basic ideas.

### *A. Respect for Nature*

Central to Native American beliefs was a **deep respect for the earth**. People felt a **close bond** to plants, animals, and the forces of nature. Whether hunting, fishing, farming, or gathering wild plants, Native Americans had a **great respect** for the natural world. Their prayers and ceremonies were designed to **maintain a balance** between people and the forces of nature.

### *B. Special Ceremonies*

In farming areas, tribes held **special ceremonies** to ensure good rainfall. **Religious leaders** prayed to the spirits and gave them gifts. Only if the spirits **were treated well** would they return each year with rain for the Pueblos' crops.

In the Southeast, many tribes held a Green Corn Ceremony when the **corn ripened** in the fall. The ceremony lasted for several days. It marked the end of the old year and the beginning of a new one.

## **IV. The Iroquois Confederacy**

Among the many Native Americans in the **Eastern Woodlands** were the Iroquois people. They lived mostly in present-day **New York State**. The Iroquois called themselves "The People of the Long House." They took **great pride** in their dwellings, called long houses. A typical long house

was about 150 feet long and 20 feet wide. **Twelve or more** families lived in a long house.

Women had a **special place** in Iroquoian society. They owned all the household property and were in charge of planting and harvesting. When a man married, he **moved in** with his wife's family. Women also had political power. They chose clan leaders. If a clan leader did not do his job well, the women could remove him from his position. The Iroquois included **five nations** that spoke similar languages. Until the late 1500s, the five Iroquoian Nations were **frequently at war**. Then around 1570, the five Iroquoian formed an **alliance** to end the fighting. According to legend, a religious leader named Dekanawida inspired Hiawatha to organize the alliance. It became known as the **league of the Iroquois**.

In 1712, Europeans drove the Tuscarora, an Iroquois people, out of North Carolina. When the Tuscarora came north looking for a new home, the five nations welcomed them. Thus, the league of Five Nations became the **League of Six Nations**.