

Prehistory America



1. The First Civilizations of the Americas

By studying the physical remains, scientists are piecing together the story of the first Americans. The science of studying the physical remains of the past is called *archaeology*.



The first American left no written records to tell us where they came from. Scientists have found evidence that suggests the first people reached the America's sometime during the late Ice Age (about 10000 years ago)



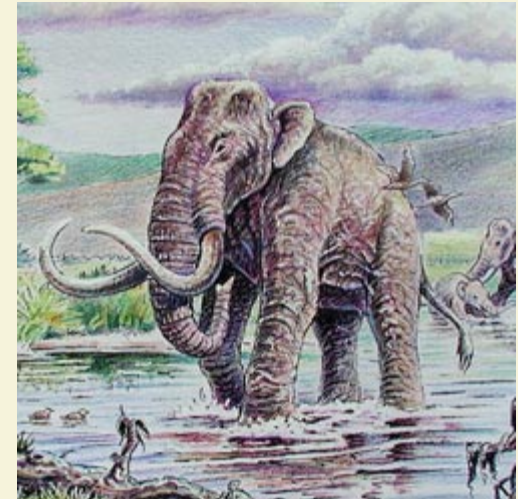
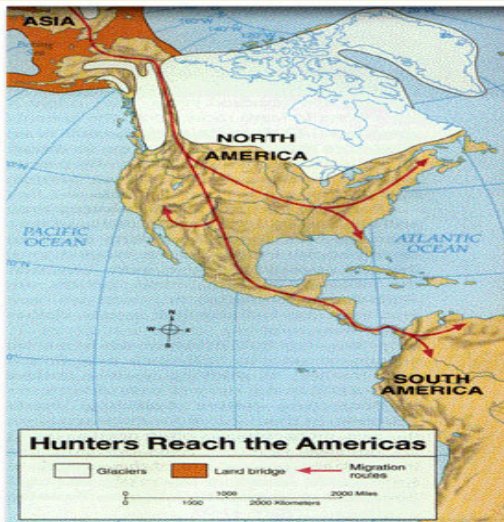
Settlement of the Americas

- The earliest Americans came from the continent of Asia.
- A “**land bridge**” between Asia and North America allowed migration, the movement of people for the purpose of settling in a new place.
- That land bridge, now covered with water, is known as the **Bering Strait**.
- Some experts believe that people migrated to the Americas before the land bridge was exposed, entering from more than one point.

The Bering Land Bridge

12,000 years ago, thick sheets of ice, called glaciers, covered much of the Earth. The glaciers locked up water from the oceans and as a result, land appeared that was once covered by water.

coasts.



Hunter-Gatherers

Scientists think that the first Americans were probably hunters. Traveling in small groups, they followed herds of woolly mammoths and bison. Some groups may have caught fish and sea mammals along the southern coasts.

A hunter-gatherer society is one in which most or all food is obtained from wild plants and animals

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The First Multi-Tasker

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Global Warming

About 12,000 years ago temperatures rose around the globe. The glaciers melted and water covered the United States. People adapted to their new conditions. The woolly mammoth and many other animals died out.



- These ancient Americans and their descendants are known as Native Americans, or Indians.
- Over time, Native American societies settled in different areas and developed a variety of languages and customs.



What is Culture?



Culture is the entire way of life that a people have developed.

- Includes the behavior, customs, ideas, beliefs, and skills that people teach every new generation.
- From artifacts and other evidence, archaeologists form theories about the cultures of ancient peoples.



Native American Cultures



When Christopher Columbus reached the Americas he thought he landed in the East Indies or the islands off the coast of Asia.

He called the people he met there “Indos”. Because of this People often used the term Indians to refer to the Native Americans.





Olmecs

Scientists have found large stone heads carved by the Olmecs. This one is nearly nine feet tall.

The earliest known civilization in the Americas were the Olmecs.

- They were farmers that lived near the Gulf of Mexico.
- They grew a surplus, or extra food to support their large populations. Soon afterwards the first cities emerged.

The Mayas

- Maya people were traders. They traded jade, jewelry, cocoa beans and other goods.
- The Maya's were one of the several Native American people who built great civilizations in the America's.
- A civilization is an advanced culture. It usually includes cities and a well organized government.



A Mayan temple.
And city.



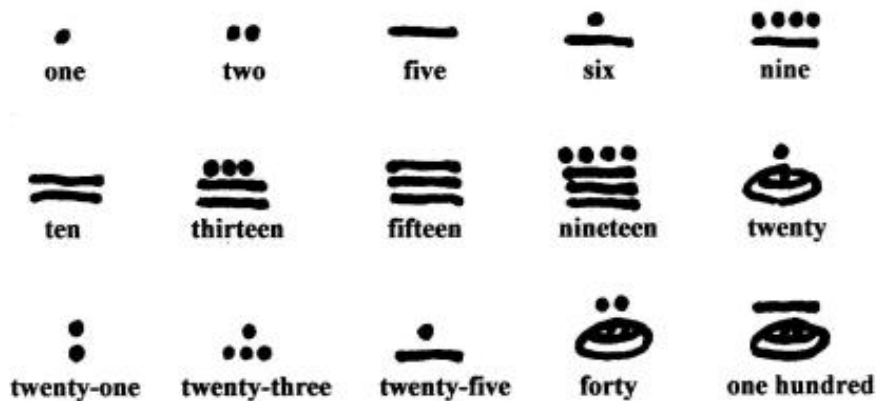
- **Mayan culture existed about 3,000 years ago.**
- **Lived in the rain forests in present day Guatemala and Southern Mexico.**
- **Built temples out of stone**

- **Most Mayans lived in simple homes with mud walls and thatch roofs.**
- **Wealthy people lived in stone houses or palaces.**

- **Mayan cities rose in many parts of Mexico and Central America.**
- **Each city ruled and controlled its surrounding area.**
- **The Mayan people built roads to connect the cities to the oceans. To record their findings.**



Mayan priests invented a system of hieroglyphics, or writing that used pictures to represent words and ideas.



About 900 CE the Mayans left their cities.
Historians do not know why they left their cities.

The Aztecs

To the North of the Mayan people the Aztecs built a powerful empire.

Until the 1300's the Aztecs wandered looking for food and shelter. The Aztecs built their capital in a place where their God said "*the eagle would be perched on a cactus holding a snake.*"

They found this in central Mexico. The Aztecs built their capital city and called it Tenochtitlan. They constructed a system of causeways, or raised roads made of packed earth.



Religion was important to the Aztec people. They sacrificed tens of thousands of prisoners to the Sun God each year.



Huitzilopochtli

By the 1500's the Aztecs ruled millions of people from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. The **emperor** had absolute power and was treated like a god.

The Incas

South to the Aztecs was the Incas. The Incas united the largest empire in the Americas. The Inca's capital was located in the Andes Mountains. By 1492 the Inca Empire stretched more than 3000 miles along the coast of South America.



The Incas

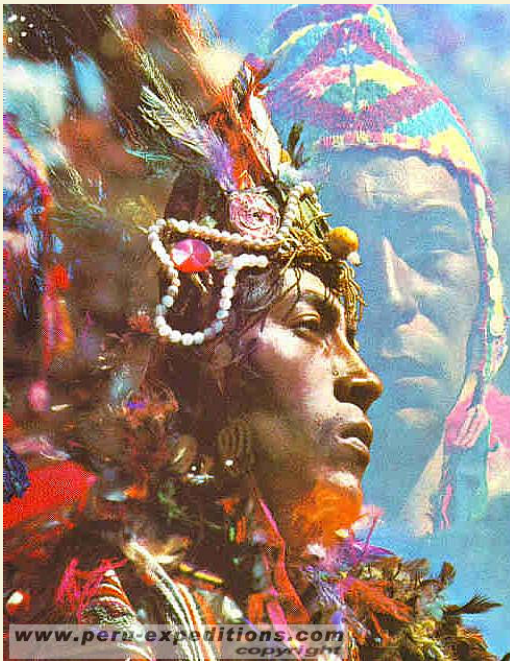
The Incas were excellent farmers like the Aztecs and Maya's.

- They grew more than 100 varieties of potatoes.**
- They carved homes out of the mountainsides**
- The Incas were great engineers.**
- They moved huge stones that weighed more than 200 tons and created temples and buildings.**

MacchuPiccu

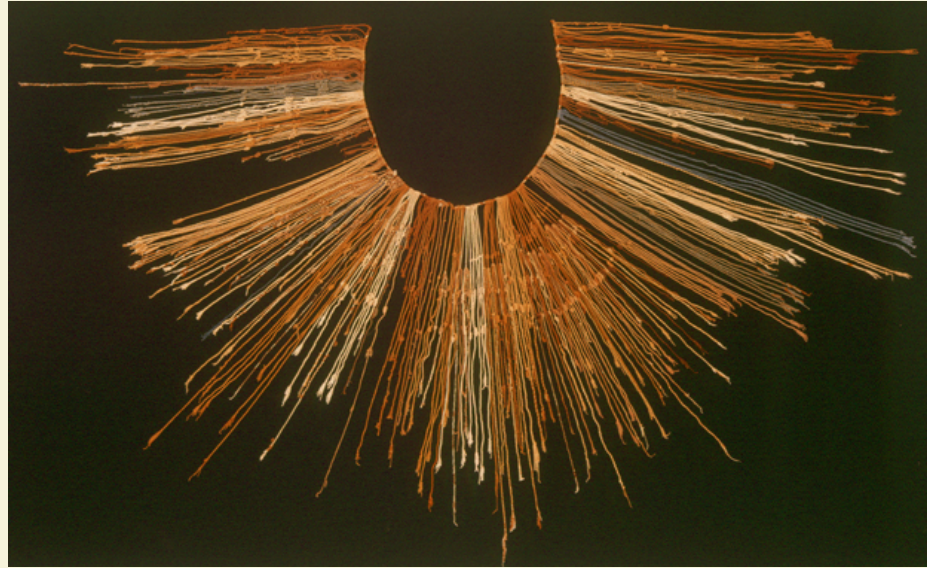


Korikancha (Temple of the Sun)



- The Incas created more than 19,000 miles of roads to connect their Empire.**
- **They made some very important advances in medicine.**
 - **They discovered that quinine could treat malaria.**
 - **They performed successful brain surgery and found medicines to lessen pain.**

They created a [quipu](#), or a string of knots used to record quantities.



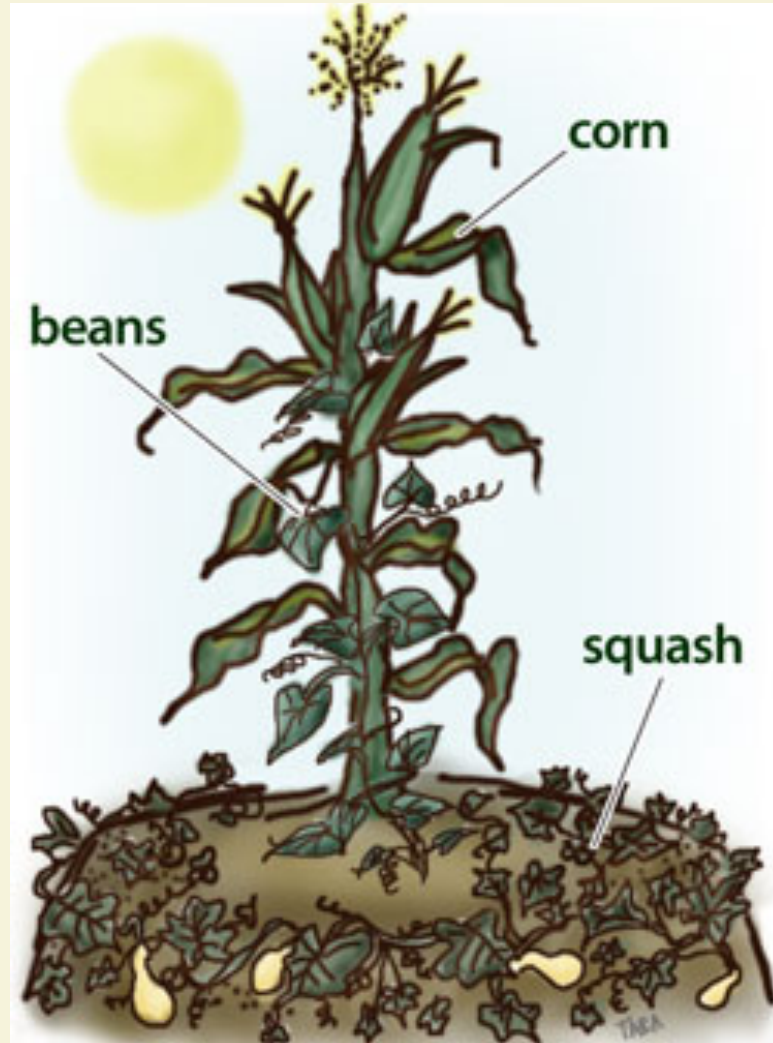
Like the Aztecs, the Inca's worshipped the sun. They worshiped the sun and lined their temples with gold. The gold was called "the sweat of the Gods." In the 1500's the Spanish destroyed the Inca's temples. The Spanish took their gold. How were the Spanish able to defeat the Incas?



*Native American Cultural Regions
North America, 1500*

The 3 Sisters

- Farming practices that began in Central America, spread to the Southwest region of North America.
- The primary crops grown and eaten by many Native American groups were **Maize** (Corn), **Beans**, and **Squash**.
- These were referred to as **the 3 sisters**
- They were often grown all together on the same mound.



*Direct-Sow, Easy-to-Grow:
The Ancient **Three Sisters** Method*

Anasazi

- Means Ancient Ones in Navajo
- They Farmed the desert by using **irrigation** (the moving of water from one place to another for the purpose of watering crops)
- Their buildings and houses were made from sun dried bricks, called **adobe**.
- These dwellings were called **pueblos** or villages.



Mesa Verde Cliff Dwellings in Colorado 26

- Around 1300 c.e. the Anasazi people abandoned their villages.
- Archaeologists believe that a **drought**, (a long dry spell) and **famine** (lack of food) hit this region.





The Mound Builders

- **Lived along the Mississippi and through out the Eastern United States from 1000 b.c.e. till about 1700 c.e.**
- **The first mounds discovered by archeologists were the burial grounds for their important leaders.**
- **At the height of their culture (700 c.e) cities around these mounds grew as large as 30,000 people**

Native American Culture Areas of North America, About 1450

By 1492 America had hundreds of different cultures living on the land

Each area had their own distinct language and culture.



GEOGRAPHY
Skills

North American Life

The Southwest • The Hopis and Zuñis farmed this dry region.

The Plains • Mandans, Wichita, Pawnee, and other groups farmed corn, beans, and squash, and hunted buffalo.
• They used dogs as pack animals when they traveled.

The Northeast • Native Americans in this region fished, hunted, and farmed.
• Iroquois groups formed an alliance—the Iroquois League—to settle tribal matters.

The Southeast • Inhabitants of the Southeast
• region hunted and grew corn for survival.

North American Life

The North

- The Inuit and Aleut peoples were skilled at hunting on ice and snow.
- Other nomadic groups hunted, fished, and gathered food in present-day Canada and Alaska.

The Northwest Coast

- Waterways were the primary source of food for the Native Americans of the Northwest Coast.

California

- The Chumash, Yurok, and other Native American groups ate deep-sea fish, food products made with flour from acorns, and beans from the mesquite plant.

The Plateau

- The Chinook and Cayuse survived on salmon and edible roots. They built villages on high riverbanks.

The Great Basin

- People worked together in small groups to hunt and gather food, including roots, pine nuts, rabbits, and insects.

Cultures of the Far North and Plateau Regions

In the far north, or in the Arctic the temperatures drop to -30 degrees Fahrenheit. Snow was on the ground for most of the year. In the Arctic there are frozen seas and icy frozen plains. The Native American people in this land are called the Inuits.





- For most of the year, Inuits lived in [pit houses](#). Pit houses were shelters dug into the ground that were covered with wood and animal skins.
- In the winter, they built [igloos](#). An igloo was a house made up of snow and ice. Because food was scarce, the Inuits did not live in the same place year round.



Inuit

They made boats out of animal skins.
They called these boats kayak.

During the Summers they would
gather drift wood to create tools from.



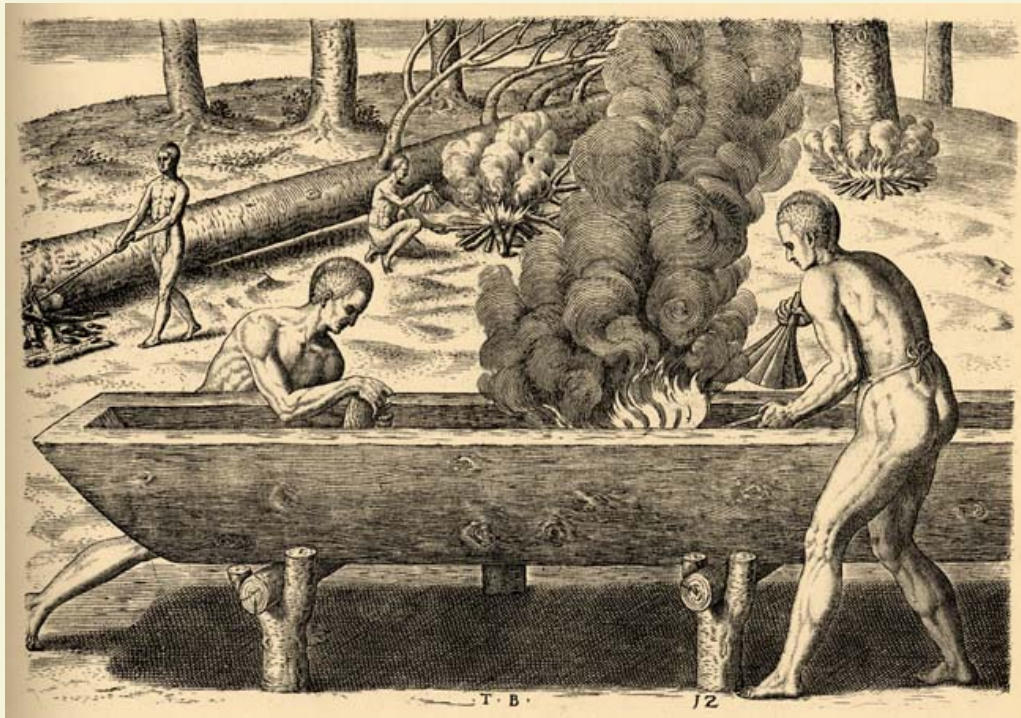
the Plateau Region, of north America

The Utes (yootz) and the Shoshones (shoh shoh neez) lived in the Plateau Region. They were a tribal people organizing their society on a basis of kinship or family relations.



Cultures of the Northwest

In the Northwest the climate was better. Native American had warmer climates than the Inuits.



The Northwest Native Americans had plenty of fish, and plenty of animals to hunt. They also had lumber from trees to make homes and boats. Because the land was plentiful they usually stayed in one place for their entire lives.

Families in the Northwest gained status by how much land they owned. Sometimes families competed against one another to improve their standing (or status) in the village.

To do this the families would hold a special ceremonial dinner to show off their wealth called a potlatch.



Cultures of the Southeast

In the Southeast the climate was also good. Many tribes inhabited the southeastern region of North America. Among them were the Natchez and Cherokees.



The Natchez ruler was known as the Great Sun and was worshiped like a God. The rulers feet never touched the ground. He walked on mats.

Shared Beliefs



Many Native Americans had a wide variety of beliefs. Yet they shared many of the same basic ideas.

- **All Native Americans had a great respect for nature.**
- **Their prayers and ceremonies were designed to maintain a balance between people and the forces of nature.**
- **They believed in unseen forces and spirits and honored these spirits that they thought acted like humans.**



Special Ceremonies

Many Native Americans were farmers. They held special ceremonies to insure a good rainfall and a good harvest.



In the Southwest, they held ceremonies with masked dancers who represented spirits called Kachinas. The native Americans believed that the Kachinas had the power to bring good harvests

Centuries ago great grasslands extended across the Great Plains from the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi River. There were few trees on the Great Plains. The land was flat. People from the plains built their homes from sod (dirt) or grass.

They also used buffalo hides to make cone shaped tents called teepees. These people planted beans, squash and sunflowers. They hunted Buffalo, elk, deer, and big horned sheep.



Native American Trade

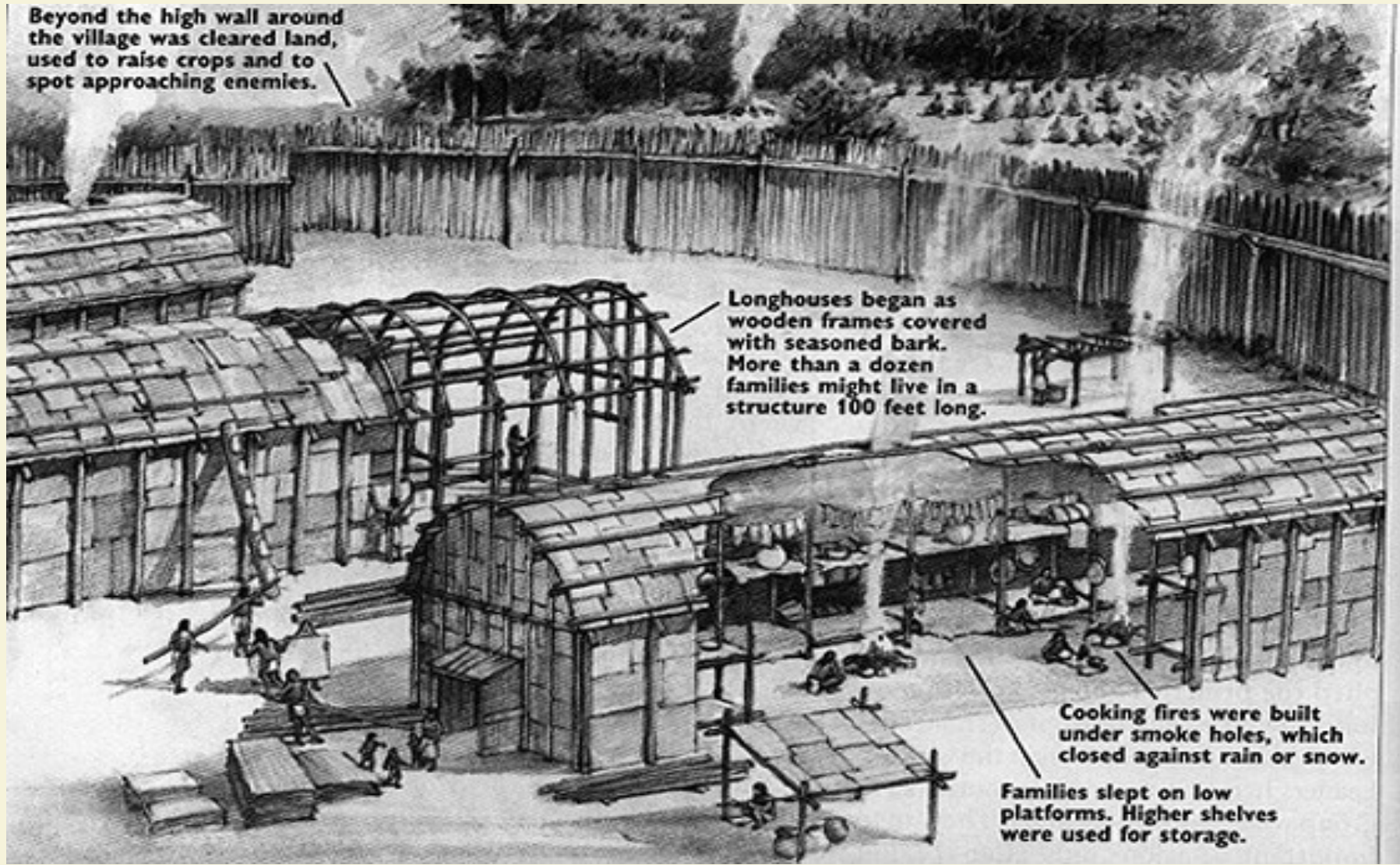
- All Native American groups carried out barter, or trade, both within their group and outside it.
- Trading food and goods was seen as a show of hospitality, friendship, and respect.
- Native American trading routes crisscrossed North America.
- Native Americans used natural trade routes, like the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes, but they also built a network of trading paths.
- These routes often led to centers where Native Americans held trade gatherings during the summer.

Native Americans and Land

- Native Americans did not trade, buy, or sell land.
- They believed that land was part of nature and could not be owned.
- The Europeans who arrived in North America in the 1400s did not understand these Indian attitudes about land.
- Fundamental differences in beliefs about land would have lasting consequences for both the Native Americans and the European settlers.

The Iroquois Confederacy

- The Eastern Woodlands is made up of forests and open lands. The people who lived here hunted deer, moose, and other animals. They planted crops of corn, squash and pumpkins.
- The most powerful people of this region were called the Iroquois (Ih- uh kwoi). They live in the land we call present-day New York State.
- The Iroquois called themselves house builders. They built long houses out of poles sided with bark. A typical long house was about 50 feet long and 20 feet wide. A hallway, with small rooms on either side, ran the length of the long house. Each room was a home to one family. Families living across from each other shared a common fireplace and hallway.



Beyond the high wall around the village was cleared land, used to raise crops and to spot approaching enemies.

Longhouses began as wooden frames covered with seasoned bark. More than a dozen families might live in a structure 100 feet long.

Cooking fires were built under smoke holes, which closed against rain or snow.

Families slept on low platforms. Higher shelves were used for storage.

[The long house](#)



[An Iroquois Long House.](#)

Women had a special place among the Iroquois. They owned all the property in the long house. Also, they were in charge of planting and harvesting crops. When an Iroquois man married he moved in with his wife's family.

Women also held political power. They chose the sachems. A sachem was the tribal chiefs or leaders. The Iroquois included five tribal nations and they are:



Mohawk
Seneca
Onondaga
Oneida
Cayuga

These tribal nations made up the Iroquois Confederacy

These five nations fought constantly. A religious leader inspired Hiawatha, a Mohawk, to organize a union of the five nations. The union or alliance was known as the [League of the Iroquois](#).

According to a legend the League of the Iroquois made this promise:

“We bind ourselves together by taking hold of each other’s hands...Our strength shall be in union, our way the way of reason, righteousness and peace...

*Be of strong mind,
O chiefs, Carry no anger and hold no grudges.”*

What did the founders mean by this statement?



A council of 50 members, chosen by women made all the decisions for the league. Each nation had one vote. The council could only take action if all nations agreed.



Disease



Europeans brought their germs and diseases with them. The Incas and other Native American groups had no resistance to these diseases and died in great numbers. This was called the Great Dying.