

North American Societies Around 1492

MAIN IDEA

The varied landscapes of North America encouraged the diversity of Native American cultures.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Many modern Native American groups maintain ancient customs of their respective cultures.

Terms & Names

- Kashaya Pomo
- Kwakiutl
- Pueblo
- Iroquois
- kinship
- division of labor

One American's Story

Essie Parrish, a Native American storyteller and medicine woman, kept alive stories from a time when her people, the **Kashaya Pomo**, flourished along the northern California coast. She invited Robert Oswalt, an anthropologist, to time-travel with her to the 1540s. As Parrish spoke, the centuries rolled back.

A PERSONAL VOICE ESSIE PARRISH

“In the old days, before the white people came up here, there was a boat sailing on the ocean from the south. Because before that . . . [the Kashaya Pomo] had never seen a boat, they said, ‘Our world must be coming to an end. Couldn’t we do something? This big bird floating on the ocean is from somewhere, probably from up high. . . .’ [T]hey promised Our Father [a feast] saying that destruction was upon them.

When they had done so, they watched [the ship] sail way up north and disappear. . . . They were saying that nothing had happened to them—the big bird person had sailed northward without doing anything—because of the promise of a feast. . . . Consequently they held a feast and a big dance.”

—quoted in *Kashaya Texts*

The event became part of the Kashaya Pomo’s oral history. Stories like this have provided us with a broad picture of the Native American world before it came into contact with the world of European explorers and settlers.



Dressed for a ceremony in the 1950s, spiritual leader Essie Parrish wears a feathered headdress and holds two bead-covered staffs.

Native Americans Live in Diverse Societies

The native groups of North America were as diverse as the environments in which they lived. The North American continent provided for many different ways of life, from nomadic to the kind of fixed, nonmigratory life of farming communities.

CALIFORNIA Not one land, but many lands—that's how the Kashaya Pomo and other native peoples regarded the region that is now California. The land has a long coastline, a lush northwestern rain forest, and a parched southern desert.

The peoples of California adapted to these diverse settings. The Kashaya Pomo hunted waterfowl with slingshots and nets. To the north, the Yurok and Hupa searched the forests for acorns and fished in mountain streams. **A**

NORTHWEST COAST The waterways and forests of the northwest coast sustained large communities year-round. The sea was of prime importance. On a coastline that stretched from what is now southern Alaska to northern California, peoples such as the **Kwakiutl** (kwā'kē-ōōt'l), Nootka, and Haida collected shellfish from the beaches and hunted the ocean for whales, sea otters, and seals.

Peoples such as the Kwakiutl decorated masks and boats with magnificent totems, symbols of the ancestral spirits that guided each family. Kwakiutl families also displayed their histories on huge totem poles set in front of their cedar-plank houses. A family's totems announced its wealth and status.

Leading Kwakiutl families also organized potlatches, elaborate ceremonies in which they gave away large quantities of their possessions. A family's reputation depended upon the size of its potlatch—that is, on how much wealth it gave away. A family might spend up to 12 years planning the event.

SOUTHWEST In the dry Southwest, the Pima and Pueblo tribes, descendants of the Hohokam and Anasazi, lived in a harsh environment. By 1300, the **Pueblo** and a related tribe, the Hopi, had left the cliff houses of their Anasazi ancestors. The Pueblo built new settlements near waterways such as the Rio Grande, where they could irrigate their farms. However, the Hopi and the Acoma continued to live near the cliffs and developed irrigation systems.

People lived in multistory houses made of adobe or stone and grew corn, beans, melons, and squash. Like their ancestors, they built underground kivas, or ceremonial chambers, for religious ceremonies and councils.

Science & Technology

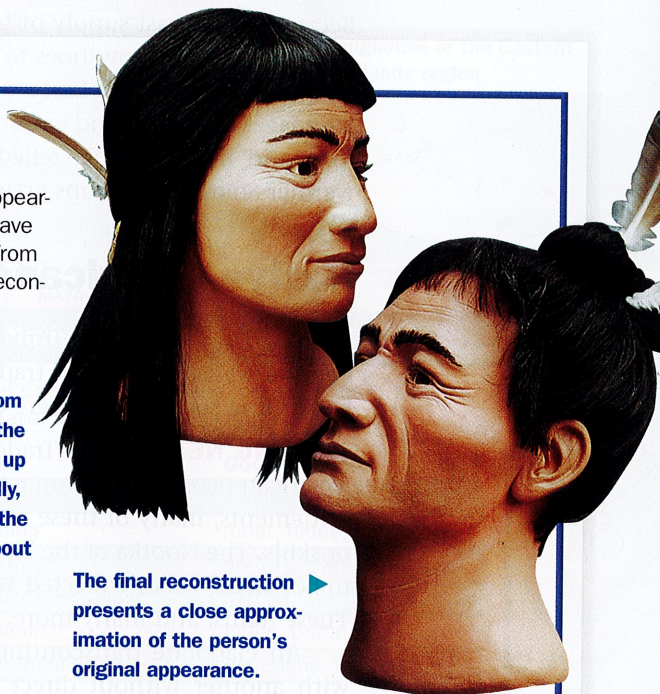
GENETIC RECONSTRUCTIONS

We now are able to recreate the facial features of ancient peoples. The appearance of Native Americans who died sometime between A.D. 1000 and 1400 have been reconstructed from skeletal remains. These remains, removed from a site in Virginia, have since been returned to the Monacan tribe. The reconstructions bear a remarkable resemblance to modern Monacans.



◀ The forensic artist first makes a plaster cast from the original skull. Then the artist uses clay to build up the facial features. Finally, the artist individualizes the head, based on clues about the subject's weight, muscularity, and environment.

The final reconstruction ▶ presents a close approximation of the person's original appearance.



SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Visual Sources

1. What strikes you most about these reconstructed faces?
2. How might forensic reconstructions contribute to our understanding of the past?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R22.

The lyrics to the ritual songs they sang may have resembled the ones recalled by a Hopi chief named Lololomai at the start of the 1900s. “This is the song of the men from my kiva,” Lololomai explained. “It tells how in my kiva the chief and his men are praying to make the corn to grow next year for all the people.”

A PERSONAL VOICE LOLOLOMAI

“ Thus we, thus we
The night along,
With happy hearts
Wish well one another.

In the chief’s kiva
They, the fathers . . .
Plant the double ear—
Plant the perfect double corn-ear.
So the fields shall shine
With tassels white of perfect corn-ears.

Hither to them, hither come,
Rain that stands and cloud that rushes!”

—quoted in *The Indians’ Book*



◀ This kachina doll represented the corn spirit in Hopi religious ceremonies.

EASTERN WOODLANDS The landscape of the Southwest contrasted sharply with the woodlands east of the Mississippi River. Here, hardwood forests stretched from the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River in the north to the Gulf of Mexico in the south.

The tribes that lived in the Eastern Woodlands had much in common. Native peoples like the **Iroquois** (ir’ə-kwoi’) built villages in forest clearings and blended agriculture with hunting and gathering. They traveled by foot or by canoe. Because of the vast supply of trees, most groups used woodworking tools to craft everything from snowshoes to canoes.

The peoples of the Eastern Woodlands also differed from one another in their languages, customs, and environments. In the Northeast, where winters could be long and harsh, people relied on wild animals for clothing and food. In the warmer Southeast, groups grew such crops as corn, squash, and beans. **B**

MAIN IDEA

Contrasting

B In what ways did food production differ among Native American societies?

Native Americans Share Cultural Patterns

Although no two Native American societies were alike, many did share certain cultural traits. Patterns of trade, attitudes toward land use, and certain religious beliefs and social values were common to many cultures.

TRADING NETWORKS Trade was one of the biggest factors in bringing Native American peoples into contact with one another. As tribes established permanent settlements, many of these settlements became well known for specific products or skills. The Nootka of the Northwest Coast mastered whaling. The Ojibwa of the upper Great Lakes collected wild rice. The Taos of the Southwest made pottery. These items, and many more, were traded both locally and long-distance.

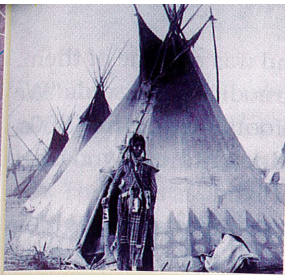
An elaborate transcontinental trading network enabled one group to trade with another without direct contact. Traders passed along items from far-off, unfamiliar places. Intermediaries carried goods hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles from their source. So extensive was the network of forest trails and river roads that an English sailor named David Ingram claimed in 1568 to have walked along Native American trade routes all the way from Mexico to the Atlantic Coast. **C**

MAIN IDEA

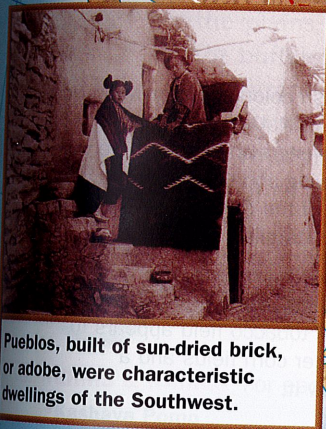
Forming Generalization

C In what ways did trade link Native Americans?

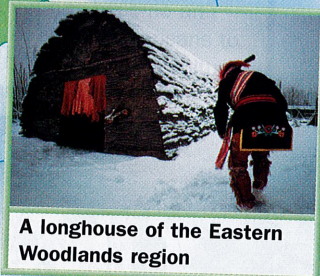
North American Cultures in the 1400s



Teepees could be quickly dismantled and were well suited to the nomadic lifestyle of the Plains.



Pueblos, built of sun-dried brick, or adobe, were characteristic dwellings of the Southwest.



A longhouse of the Eastern Woodlands region

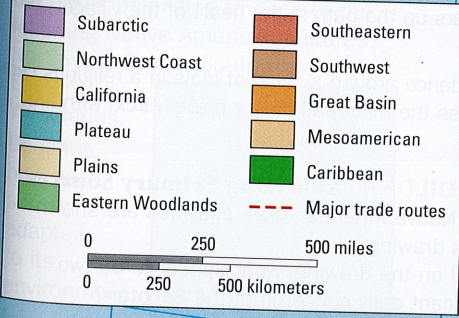
Native American Trade

Before the arrival of Columbus, the trade routes of North America allowed goods to travel across the continent.

Group and Region	Goods Traded
Algonquin of the Eastern Woodlands	colored feathers, copper
Apaches of the Plains	meat, hides, salt
Navajo of the Southwest	pottery, blankets, crops
Kwakiutl of the Northwest Coast	fish oil
Ute of the Great Basin	hides, buffalo robes
Choctaw of the Southeast	deerskins, bear oil

GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

- Region** What does this map reveal about North America in the 1400s?
- Location** Why do you think some regions had more trade routes than others?



LAND USE Native Americans traded many things, but land was not one of them. They regarded the land as the source of life, not as a commodity to be sold. “We cannot sell the lives of men and animals,” said one Blackfoot chief in the 1800s, “therefore we cannot sell this land.” This attitude would lead to many clashes with the Europeans, who believed in private ownership of land.

Native Americans disturbed the land only for the most important activities, such as food gathering or farming. A female shaman, or priestess, from the Wintu of California expressed this age-old respect for the land as she spoke to anthropologist Dorothy Lee.

A PERSONAL VOICE WINTU WOMAN

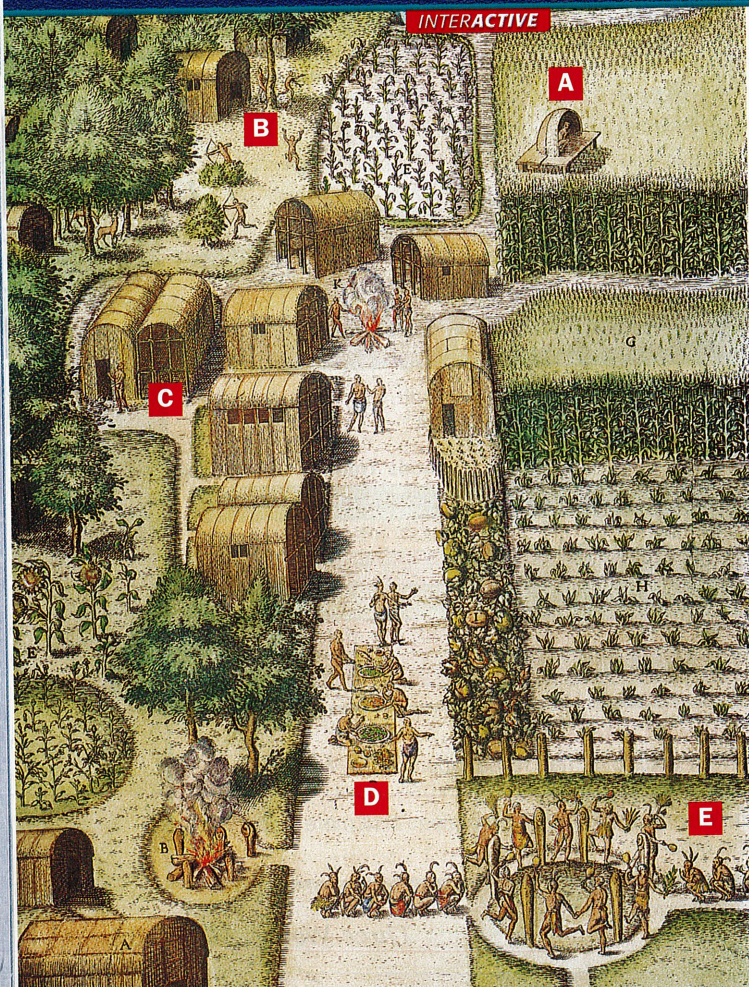
“When we dig roots, we make little holes. When we build houses, we make little holes. . . . We shake down acorns and pinenuts. We don’t chop down the trees. We only use dead wood [for fires]. . . . But the white people plow up the ground, pull down the trees, [and. . . the] tree says, ‘Don’t. I am sore. Don’t hurt me.’”

—quoted in *Freedom and Culture*

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS Nearly all Native Americans thought of the natural world as filled with spirits. Past generations remained alive to guide the living. Every object—both living and non-living—possessed a voice that might be heard if one listened closely. “I hear what the ground says,” remarked Young Chief of the Cayuses, who lived in what is now Washington and Oregon, in 1855. “The ground says, ‘It is the Great Spirit that placed me here.’ The Great Spirit tells me to take care of the Indians. . . .” Some cultures believed in one supreme being, known as “Great Spirit,” “Great Mystery,” “the Creative Power,” or “the Creator.”

Vocabulary
commodity: an article of trade or commerce

Native American Village Life



John White, one of the first English colonists to arrive in North America, made several drawings of Native American life in the Chesapeake region in 1585. The engraving shown here was copied from White’s original drawing and published in 1590. The image shows the village life of the Secotan people, who lived near Roanoke Island, North Carolina.

A Agriculture

A Secotan guards the ripened corn crop to keep away hungry birds and animals. A tobacco field appears to the left of this field, and other corn fields and a pumpkin patch appear below it.

B Hunting

Men hunt for deer.

C The Home

Huts, whose sides can be rolled up for ventilation, are woven from thick plant stems.

D Social Life

Villagers prepare for a community feast. The fire for this feast appears up the path in the heart of the village.

E Religion

Residents dance around a circle of idols in a religious ceremony. Across the main path lies a prayer circle with fire.

SKILLBUILDER Analyzing Primary Sources

1. What Native American work activities are shown in this drawing?
2. Based on the drawing, what appear to be two significant daily concerns of the Secotan?

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION Bonds of **kinship**, or strong ties among family members, ensured the continuation of tribal customs. Elders instructed the young. In exchange, the young honored the elders and their departed ancestors.

The tasks assigned to men and women varied with each society. Among the Iroquois and Hopi, for example, women owned the household items, and families traced their ancestry from mother to grandmother to great-grandmother, and so on. In other Native American cultures, men owned the family possessions and traced their ancestry through their father's kin.

The **division of labor**—the assignment of tasks according to gender, age, or status—formed the basis of social order. Among the Kwakiutl, for example, slaves performed the most menial jobs, while nobles ensured that Kwakiutl law was obeyed.

The basic unit of organization among all Native American groups was the family, which included aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives. Some tribes further organized the families into clans, or groups of families descended from a common ancestor. Among the Iroquois, for example, members of a clan often lived together in huge bark-covered longhouses. All families participated in community decision making.

Not all Native American groups lived together for long periods of time. In societies in which people hunted and gathered, groups broke into smaller bands for hunting. On the plains, for example, families searched the grasslands for buffalo. Groups like these reunited only to celebrate important occasions. **D**

In the late 1400s, on the eve of the encounter with the Europeans, the rhythms of Native American life were well-established. No one could have imagined the changes that were about to transform the Native American societies.



SCHEMITZUN

The sights and sounds of the Native American world come alive each August for several days on the Connecticut reservation of Mashantucket. Here, performers and visitors from nearly 500 Native American tribes meet under a massive tent for Schemitzun, the “World Championship of Song and Dance.”

Schemitzun was traditionally a dance to celebrate the corn harvest. Today it has become an occasion for Native Americans to meet, share their art and culture, and celebrate their heritage.

MAIN IDEA

Comparing

D What similarities and differences existed among Native American social structures?

SECTION 2

ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

•Kashaya Pomo
•Kwakiutl

•Pueblo
•Iroquois

•kinship

•division of labor

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

Copy an outline of North America like the one below. Then shade in the areas belonging to each of the following Native American cultures: Northwest Coast, Southwest, and

Eastern Woodlands.

Describe how each society adapted to its environment.



CRITICAL THINKING

3. COMPARING

In your opinion, were the differences between Native American groups greater than their similarities? Cite specific examples to support your answer. **Think About:**

- adaptation to physical settings
- the role of tradition
- the variety of goods and languages encountered in trading

4. SYNTHESIZING

Describe the relationship between the individual and his or her social group in Native American society. Use details from the text to support your description.

5. HYPOTHESIZING

Why did Native American societies not wish to buy and sell land?