

Native America Prior to European Contact

- **Agriculture key to growth of civilizations in Americas**
 - Maize particularly important for emerging societies
 - Mesoamerican maize cultivation highly developed
 - **Greatest transformations took place where surplus food could be produced**
- Maize-based farming spread throughout Mesoamerica
 - Eventually spread throughout Americas – **a key development**
 - **Some societies with surplus traded with lesser groups – established wealth and power**
 - Mesoamerican cities socially unequal – wealthy elites and hereditary rulers
 - Laborers built elaborate religious temples
- Teotihuacan near modern Mexico City
 - Near 100,000 people at its height
 - Dominated people of valley of Mexico
 - **After decline – still influenced others through religion, government, etc.**
 - Greatest influence on the **Maya** of southern Mexico and parts of Central America
- **Aztec** civilization developed later
 - Migrated from north in 13th century
 - **Conquered surrounding groups & sacrificed their blood and hearts to appease gods**
 - Capital – **Tenochtitlan** – Modern-day Mexico City on lake Texcoco
 - **Aztecs maximized food production** – used fertile soil from drained swamps
 - Engineers also devised irrigation
 - Fed large population
 - **Aztec empire defeated by Spaniards and local enemies**
- **Incas** of Peru controlled much of the Andes and adjacent regions after 1438
 - **Again – surplus food key** (maize, beans, potatoes, etc)
 - Empire was **still expanding until Spanish** invaders arrived
- **Experimentation by native people helped development of better quality grains**
 - Maize moved north and south from Mexico
 - Reached eastern North America c. 300 BC but remained a minor crop for several centuries
 - **Columbian Exchange** would spread products of the Americas to Europe and elsewhere
- **Southwest**
 - Maize farmed full-time around 400 BC
 - **Hohokam** (Southern Arizona) and **Anasazi** (Four Corners area) the most influential groups
 - **Anasazi ancestors of modern Pueblo Indians**
 - **Anasazi known for architecture** – elaborate villages with attached apartments and Kivas – religious structures
 - Reached height between 900 and 1150

- Chaco Canyon a center for development and trade
- Extended drought brought Anasazi and Hohokam to an end
 - Pueblo descendants face the Spanish colonizers
 - During this time – non-farming Apaches and Navajos moved in from north
- Eastern Woodlands
 - Abundant water and rich variety of food
 - River systems allowed long-distance communication and travel
 - Established large villages and complex confederations
 - Maize arrived east of Mississippi river by 300 B.C.
 - Agriculture not prime food source until between 7th and 12th centuries
 - Mississippian culture flourished – sun worshiped as a god of fertility
 - Major population center – Cahokia – near modern St. Louis
 - Large population eventually drained food supplies
 - Resulted in warfare – survivors fled to prairies and plains
 - Mississippian culture spread to Southeast – forerunners to Cherokees, Creeks and other Southeastern groups
 - Life as far north as the Great Lakes and Southern New England revolved around village-based farming unless too far north for a long enough growing season
- Non-Farming Societies
 - Northwest coast to northern California and in Columbia Plateau, Native Ams devoted time to fishing so that they could preserve fish to last until next spawning season
 - Resulted in more settled lifestyle
 - Coastal villages numbered several hundred people
 - Wealth developed – wealthiest families held the potlatch – giving away wealth to guests – somewhat of a contest to see who could give away more wealth
 - California very fertile but groups tended to be small
 - Plains Indians pursued wild game – most importantly the buffalo
 - All parts of buffalo used – revered as a gift from gods
 - Some eastern Plains groups engaged in farming
 - Mandans, Pawnees
 - Sioux and Comanches forced west by European settlement
 - Western Alaska – Aleuts migrated in search of sea mammals and caribou
 - Used weapons of ivory and bone – also introduced bow and arrow through contact with Siberia
 - Many spread across upper Canada and toward Greenland
 - Traded with Norse c. 1000 – eventually chased Norse out of Newfoundland
- On the eve of contact
 - Small, mobile hunting bands in Arctic, Subarctic, Great Basin, much of Plains
 - Less mobile fishing societies along Pacific Coast
 - Village-based Eastern Woodlands tribes and river valleys of Southwest and Plains
 - Large urban centers in Southeast
 - Smaller urban or village centers in Southwest
 - Spanish contact diminished power of Mexican and South American groups

- **Spiritual and Social Values**
 - **Prayed to things of nature, ghosts, and witches.** Especially spirits of animals
 - **Vision quests**
 - **Power-seeking rituals** such as the Sun Dance on the Great Plains and Great Basin
 - **Principal of reciprocity** – mutual give-and-take
 - Helped to maintain equilibrium and interdependence
 - Powerful gave to weaker in exchange for tribute (material goods, submission)
- **DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SPREAD OF MAIZE CULTURE**