

**U.S. HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS
DUE FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2008**

I. READING - Native American Culture Groups

When Europeans first arrived in America in **1492**, the Native American population north of Mexico was about *15 to 20 million*. Among these millions, there at least 2,000 different groups, or nations. Over time these different groups of Native Americans had formed many rich and diverse ways of life. Some of the culture groups developed into large and elaborate empires, while other remained simple in their organization. To study the many different Native American groups, it is helpful to divide North America into larger culture areas. People who lived in the same culture area often shared many similar cultural traits.

During the thousands of years that Native Americans lived in North America, they developed many different ways to get food, build homes, practice religion, and enforce their laws. They spoke more than 1,000 different languages. There were no typical Native Americans, but there were some similarities among their cultures. A nation of Native Americans was usually made up of people who spoke the same language and shared other cultural traits. The most important division in a nation was the **clan**. The people who belonged to the clan were related to one another by a common ancestor.

Each nation usually had several leaders who made decisions for the entire group. Among some groups, the leaders inherited their positions. Among other groups, the leaders were elected on the basis of their achievements. In some nations, all of the people-not just the leaders-participated in group decision making.

Most Native Americans believed in the power of spirits found in nature. Some believed that spirits dwelled in the sun, moon, wind, rain, and animals. Religious leaders, called **shamans**, were thought to have close contact with the spirit world.

Native Americans tried to live in harmony with nature and the land. They believed that no one person could own land. Land was shared by all members of a nation-not bought, sold, or passed down through inheritance. Many Native American beliefs and related traditions are still observed by Native American groups today and are shared by other Americans as well.

THE ARCTIC AND SUBARCTIC PEOPLES

The people of the Arctic and Subarctic areas settled farther north than any other culture. People in these two regions had to adapt to bitterly cold winters and short summers. The land of the Arctic extends along the northern borders of Alaska and Canada. The two main Native American cultures in this area were the **Aleuts** and the **Inuit**.

Most Aleuts settled on the Aleutian Islands of the Alaska Peninsula. The Aleuts were mainly hunters but they also gathered clams and berries. They hunted in boats made of whale skin stretched over a frame of whale ribs. They used harpoons and nets to snare their prey. Aleut villages usually had from 50 to 150 residents. Many of the homes were made from driftwood, whalebone, sod and animal skins. Men and women usually wore long parkas made from otter or bird skins, furs or animal intestines. Women sewed the clothing together with needles made of fish parts.

The Inuit moved farther inland and populated northern Canada. Like the Aleuts, many lived near the sea and hunted seal, walruses, and whales. In summer, they moved inland to hunt caribou and fish in the lakes and rivers. Nothing was wasted in the Inuit culture. Anything not used for food was made into clothing, shelter, sleds, weapons, or fuel for heating. Wood was extremely rare on these ice covered treeless plains. For homes, they built skin tents or sod houses.

The climate of the Subarctic was also harsh, but much of the land was covered with forest and lakes. Like the people of the Arctic, Subarctic people traveled from place to place hunting, fishing, and gathering food. The caribou was their most important source of meat. They also hunted moose, deer,

beaver, and rabbit. Because wood was plentiful, it was used with sod and other materials to build homes. In this way, the peoples of the arctic and subarctic used their **natural resources**.

THE NORTHWEST COAST

The misty, forested coast of the Pacific Northwest supported many Native American nations. The environment teemed with animal, sea, and plant life. Food was so abundant that the people who lived here had no need to farm. Salmon made up a large part of the diet along with sea otters, seals, bear, and moose. Most villages in the Northwest were near the ocean or rivers.

Wood was plentiful, and most groups used it to make large houses, tools and weapons. The soft inner bark of trees was used for weaving baskets and for making clothing. Large canoes that could hold more than 50 people were built by digging out or burning out the inside of giant redwood trees. Like their early ancestors, these people also made large **totem poles**-tall wooden posts with carvings of faces.

Among most groups of the Northwest, the wealthiest families made the decisions. To show their wealth leaders often hosted **potlatches**. A potlatch was a feast at which the host family gave valuable gifts to members of the community.

CALIFORNIA

The mild climate and plentiful resources of the California area supported a large population of at least 100 groups of Native Americans. On the coast fish, shellfish, and wild plants were plentiful. Away from the coast, people such as the **Pomo** hunted small forest game and gathered acorns to pound into meal. They made a kind of mush from the acorn meal.

The **Chumash** lived on the southern coast and were master ocean fishers. They built long, wooden canoes and traveled many miles out to sea. Simple harpoons and nets made from grass and weighted with stones were used to catch fish.

THE PLATEAU

The Plateau culture area was just east of the Northwest Coast. It was bordered by the Cascade Mountains on the west and the Rocky Mountains on the east. The Plateau is a land of many rivers. Salmon was the main source of food for the people who lived here along with bulbs, roots, and berries. The rivers also served as routes for travel and trade.

To protect themselves from winter cold, many people built homes that were partly underground. In summer, they lived under wooden frames covered with mats. Although this area was not as populated as the Northwest Coast, it supported more than 20 Native American groups including the **Nez Perce** and the **Yakima**.

II. QUESTIONS – Native American Culture Groups

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of loose-leaf paper.

1. What was the approximate Native American population north of Mexico in 1492?
2. How many different languages did these Native Americans speak?
3. What was the most important division in a Native American nation?
4. What did the people who belonged to a clan usually have in common?
5. Name one way a person or group became a leader of a clan.
6. What is a shaman?
7. How were the Aleuts and the Inuit similar to one another?
8. How did the Native American of the Northwest show his wealth?
9. Why do you think there were so many Native American groups living in California?
10. How did the Native American of the Plateau region protect himself from the harsh winters?