



Major Indian Groups

Focus

When the Europeans came to the Western Hemisphere, they found all kinds of Indians. The Indians did not all look alike. They lived in different kinds of dwellings. They had different languages and customs. Some were warlike. Some were peace-loving. Indians also differed from one another because they had different customs and beliefs.

The American Indians lived in many different kinds of **natural environments**. A natural environment is the natural world around you, including the land, water, climate, plants, and animals. The Indians made the best use they could of the plants, animals, and natural features of the places where they lived.

Look for these important words:

Key Words

- natural environments
- shamans

Look for answers to these questions:

1. What did Indian groups have in common?
2. In what ways did Indians learn from each other?
3. How did life change for the Indians after the Europeans came?

1. INDIANS OF NORTH AMERICA

American Indians all had a form of religion. Many thought of the earth as a mother and of the sky as a father. Indians claimed land for their use, but they did not believe any person could own a part of Mother Earth. Many believed that all the parts of nature had spirits. They believed in living in harmony with these spirits.

The Indian groups had **shamans** (SHAH•muhns). Shamans were both priests and healers. Shamans could answer questions about disease, about life and death, about right and wrong. Shamans tried to explain to people why things happened the way they did. Shamans knew the stories of how the world came to be. Because there were many different Indian groups, there were many different stories.

The Indians had ceremonies that included dancing and singing to drums. Sometimes dances were held for important religious reasons, such as to pray for rain or good crops. Sometimes they were held before or after a battle.

Warfare was common among many Indian groups. Some fought only to

protect the land they used. Others fought to get personal glory, territory, slaves, and wealth. Such ways were not limited only to Indians. For thousands of years people in all parts of the world have lived in conflict.

Learning from Each Other











Traveling long distances by canoe or on foot, Indians were able to trade with each other. As they traded different objects of value, they also exchanged ideas and new ways of doing things. For hundreds of years the American Indians learned from each other. They learned how to grow corn, how to build mounds, how to make pottery, and how to weave cloth.

When the Europeans came, the Indians continued to learn. They quickly learned to use whatever helped them. They welcomed iron tools and eagerly traded for iron knives, kettles, and axes. The sheep, goats, cattle, and horses brought by the Europeans became the basis of new Indian cultures.



INDIAN CULTURES OF NORTH AMERICA

Main Culture Areas

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
|  Arctic |  Great Basin |  Southwest |
|  California |  Middle America |  Subarctic |
|  Columbia Plateau |  Northwest Coast | |
|  Eastern Woodland |  Plains | |





Religion was important to all Indian cultures. In this model, Iroquois dancers in the False-Face ceremony seek to cure a person's toothache.

Many Indian cultures did not survive the coming of the Europeans. One reason for this was that many Indians were forced to give up the land of their ancestors. This land was productive. Losing the land destroyed the foundation of many cultures. Another reason Indian cultures did not survive was disease. European diseases like measles, flu, and smallpox killed millions in North America.

With more advanced tools, the Europeans changed the land the Indians knew so well. The Indians could no longer live as their ancestors had. The history of American Indians for the last

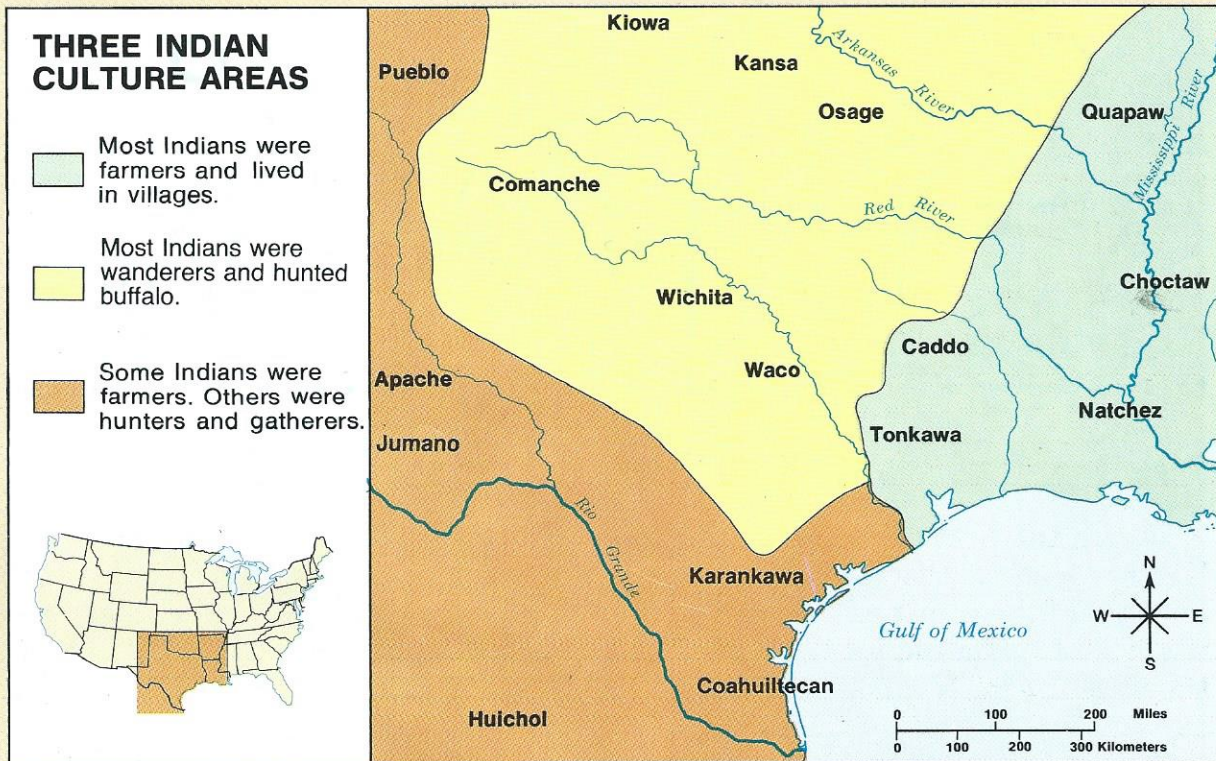
300 years is a history of a people trying to keep their chosen ways. Many Indian cultures are now gone. Yet countless numbers of places—cities and towns, rivers and mountains—carry the names and memories of these first Americans.

Reading Check

1. What is a natural environment?
2. What is a shaman?
3. Name four ways in which the Indians learned from each other.
4. Why did many Indian cultures not survive the coming of Europeans?

SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

USING CULTURAL MAPS



A cultural map shows the location of particular cultures. A culture is a group of people who share a similar way of life. On a cultural map, each culture is identified by a name placed in the center of its territory. Look at the cultural map above.

This map shows parts of Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. On it are the names of the Indian groups who once lived there. Find the homelands of the Wichita group. Did the Kiowas live north or south of the Wichitas?

A color key is used to show three regions on the map. Find the lands of the Caddo Indians. As you can see, they are green. The map key gives the meaning of green. It tells you that the Caddo farmed and lived in villages as did other Woodland Indians.

CHECKING YOUR SKILLS

Use the cultural map above to answer these questions:

1. Did the Comanche Indians farm or hunt buffalo?
2. Would you find buffalo hunters among the Choctaws or among the Kiowas?
3. Does the map tell you whether or not the Apaches were farmers?
4. Were the Wichita Indians more like the Natchez or more like the Comanches?
5. How did the Indians living in the areas shown in green get their food? How does this compare with those living in the cultural areas shown in yellow?

Look for these important words:

Key Words

- palisade
- slash-and-burn
- extinct
- wigwams

- longhouses
- wampum
- league
- Six Nations
- Five Civilized Tribes

People

- Hiawatha

Look for answers to these questions:

1. How did the Woodland Indians use the forests around them?
2. How did the Woodland Indians clear land for farming?
3. What was life like in an Iroquois village?
4. What was life like among the Creek Indians?

2. WOODLAND INDIANS

When the first Europeans came to North America, they found the eastern part of the continent covered with vast forests. The Indians who lived in the forests of the Northeast and Southeast are called Woodland Indians.

The kinds of trees and shrubs varied from north to south, but everywhere they sheltered many kinds of animals. Swift deer, shy elk, and fat bears fed in the woods. In the streams and meadows were sleek beaver and muskrats. There were squirrels, opossums, and many birds, including wild turkeys.

The Woodland Indians made use of the trees for many things. They used trees and tree bark to make canoes and shelters. They used some trees for food. Nuts came from trees like the walnut and hickory. In the Northeast maple sugar was made from the sap of the maple tree.

The Woodland Indians were farmers, gatherers, and hunters. In the

Northeast the Indians did more gathering and hunting than farming. In the Southeast the soil and climate were better for agriculture. There the Indians depended on farming for their food. In their fields, the Woodland Indians raised corn, beans, squash, and pumpkins.

Because they farmed, the Woodland Indians lived in villages. The villages of the Woodland Indians often included a community building for meetings and ceremonies. Surrounding each village was a wall made of sharpened tree trunks. Such a wall is a **palisade**. The fields lay outside the wall.

The Indians made clearings in the woods for their fields. They had no tools sharp or powerful enough to cut down trees. They killed a tree by cutting away a circle of bark in the fall. By spring the tree was dead. With its leaves gone, the sun shone through the branches to the ground. Among the dead trees, Indians planted crops.

After a year or two the Indians burned the dead trees. After several more years a field might be completely cleared. This method of agriculture is called **slash-and-burn**.

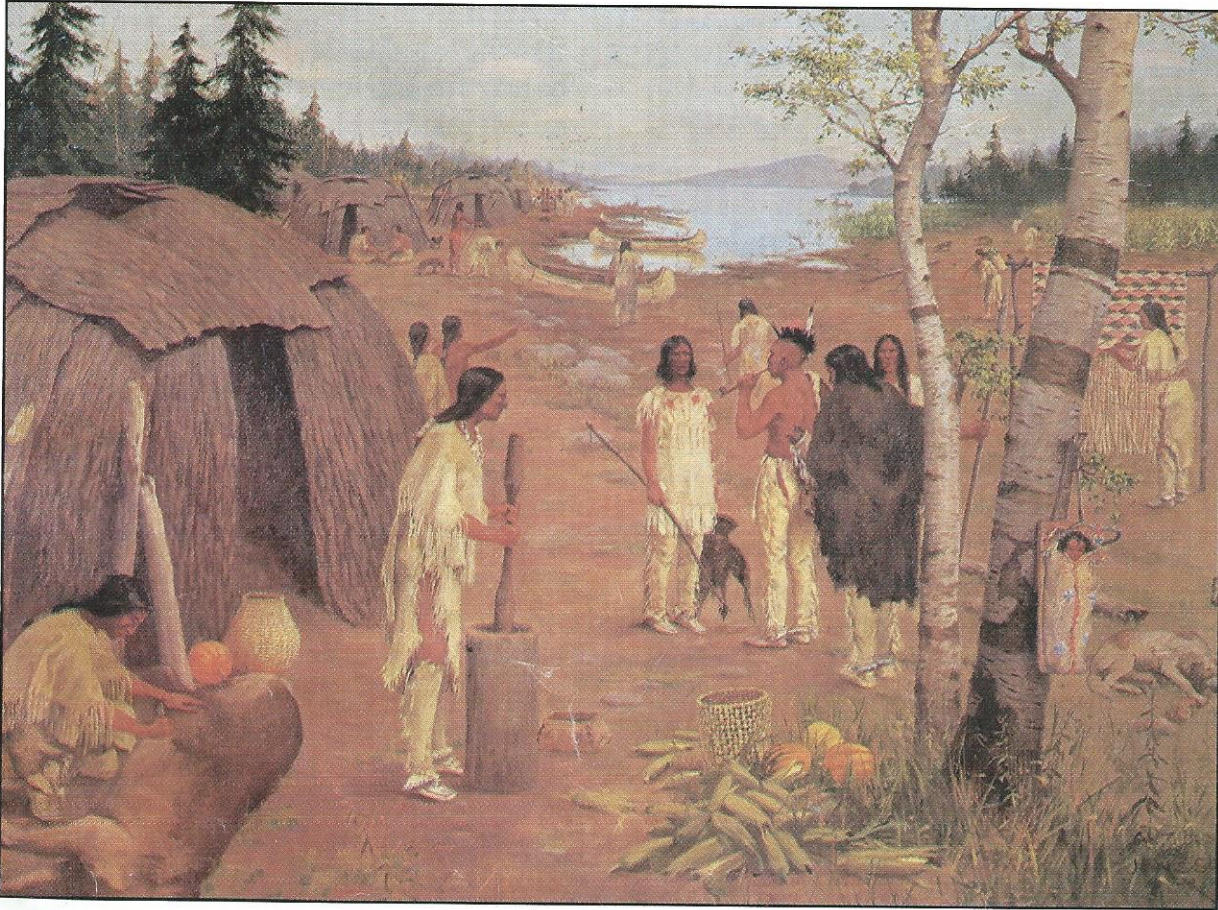
Some Indians used fish as a fertilizer. Others did not. Without fertilizer a field wore out in about ten years and no longer produced good crops. Then the village moved to a new location and started clearing new fields.

Although the Woodland Indians raised much of their food, they also gathered and hunted. They gathered nuts, berries, wild fruits, greens, and shellfish. They caught fish and hunted bear, beaver, porcupine, deer, and birds.

The most common food bird was the passenger pigeon, which traveled in flocks of hundreds of thousands. Sometimes so many flew overhead that the sky was dark for hours. At night they roosted in trees, weighing down the branches. There they were easy to catch and kill. Early white settlers also killed and ate great numbers of passenger pigeons. Today they are **extinct**. That means there is not one left.

Woodland Indians also hunted to get animal skins for clothing. Furry beaver and bear skins made warm robes, capes, and blankets. Scraped and tanned deerhide made soft buckskin for lighter clothes.

This scene shows daily life in an Algonquian village. At left, a woman prepares to skin a deer. What other activities do you see?





This cut-away model shows a cooking scene in an Iroquois longhouse. Notice the high shelf for storage.

The Northeast Indians

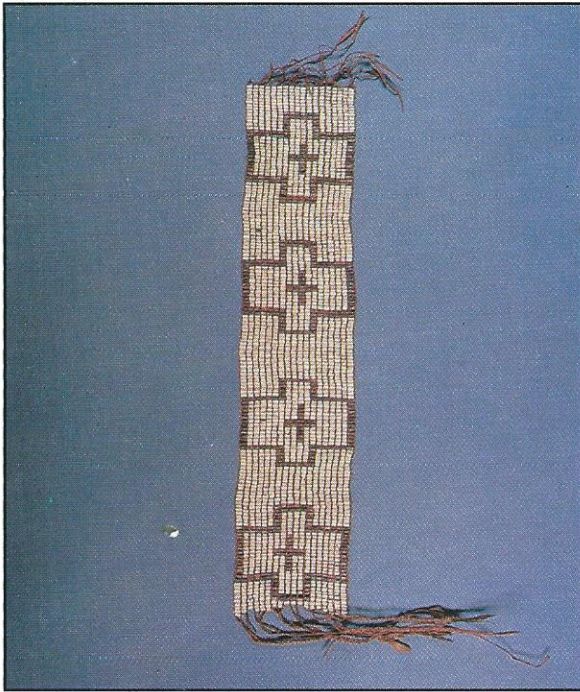
The Woodland Indians of the Northeast included two main language groups, the Algonquian (al-GAHN-kwee-uhn) and the Iroquois (IR-uh-kwoy). The Algonquian lived along the Atlantic coast. In their villages they lived in round, bark-covered shelters called **wigwams**.

The Iroquois lived inland. Their dwellings are called **longhouses**. The Iroquois longhouses were made of poles covered with elm bark. Each longhouse had a hall down its middle with small, open rooms on each side. One family lived in each room. From eight to ten families lived in each longhouse. The families in each longhouse were related to the woman who was head of the longhouse.

Women were important in Iroquois culture. Women owned the longhouse, the farming tools, and the fields. Women did the farming. The women also decided which men would be chiefs.

Families cooked their meals on fires built in the main hall of the longhouse. On high shelves each family kept mats, baskets, buckets made of bark, pots, tobacco pipes, and wooden bowls. There might also be digging sticks for planting corn and snowshoes for getting around in the winter.

The shelves also held **wampum**. Wampum were beads made from porcupine quills or seashells. Wampum was woven into belts or strung into necklaces. The Iroquois used wampum to help them remember important events. They also used wampum as money.



This wampum belt was made in 1683 by Delaware Indians as a gift of peace.

The Iroquois were famous warriors. About 1570 the shaman **Hiawatha** (hy.uh.waw.thuh) persuaded five of the Iroquois tribes to stop fighting each other and to unite in a **league**. A league is a union of people joined for a common purpose. By the middle of the 1600s the league used armies of 500 to 1,000 men to conquer its Indian neighbors. After a sixth group joined the league, it was called the **Six Nations**. The Iroquois became the most powerful of the Indian groups in the Northeast.

Indians of the Southeast

The Indian peoples of the Southeast also lived in farming villages. Their villages were scattered along the fertile coastal plain, in the foothills of the mountains, and along the rich valley of the Mississippi River.

The villages of the Southeastern Indians often contained as many as 100 dwellings built around a central square. The dwellings were made of a framework of poles and covered with grass or mud plaster. In the Deep South, where the weather was warm, dwellings were often roofed platforms. Wealthy families might have as many as four dwellings, to be used as storehouses, a summer house, and a winter house.

The Creek Indians of the Southeast divided their year into two seasons: winter and summer. The year started with the corn harvest in the month of Much Heat (August). The months that followed were Little Chestnut (September), Big Chestnut (October), Frost (November), Big Winter (December), and Little Winter (January). Their summer started with the month of Wind (February). The months after Wind were Little Spring (March), Big Spring (April), Mulberry (May), Blackberry (June), and Little Heat (July).

After the corn had been harvested in the fall, the Creek men went hunting. These hunting parties lasted as long as five and six months. The men returned in time to work the fields and plant the crops in the spring. Both men and women had to work in the fields. There were fines for those who tried to avoid work. The people worked and planted to songs in the morning. In the afternoons they played ball games. In the evenings they danced.

When summer came, war parties left to attack their enemies. The war parties often brought back captives. The captives became slaves, but children of slaves were born free.

