

NATIVE TRIBES OF NORTH AMERICA, CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



Historically, for uncountable times, native tribes in the Americas have been on the move. Few remain in what they would consider the specific land of their ancestral origin. Moves were by choice or forced. Where many tribes are now, those who survived the holocaust since 1492, or where they were even hundreds of years ago, may be a far distance from the ancient origins of the people.

This map gives a Native American perspective by placing the tribes when they were in full flower ~ the "Glory Days". It is pre-contact from across the eastern sea or, at least, before that contact seriously effected change. Stretching over a 400 year span the time of contact was quite different from tribe to tribe. For instance, the "Glory Days" of the Maya and Aztec came to an end very long before the interior tribes of other areas, with some still resisting almost until the 20th Century.

At one time numbering in the millions, the native peoples in the Americas spoke close to 4000 languages. This map could not possibly list every tribe and sub-group or band. My apology to descendants of any such groups not listed and to any descendants of tribal leaders not pictured. I could only rely on photos available to me, earlier artist portrayals before photography, and my own imagination.

People need to understand and respect the fact that, although our Native American peoples are of great cultural diversity, they have common roots throughout the entire vastness of the Western Hemisphere. Despite cultural differences, speaking different languages, and geographic barriers, our Native American peoples are all relatives, each with their own history, traditions, dignity, pride, and a strong foundation in spirituality. Learn and enjoy ~ *Nadoma*

The arctic area, stretching 5,000 miles, from Siberia to Greenland, is a land of extreme cold, snow and ice, tundra, craggy coasts, and rocky islands. Winters are long and only a few short hours of daylight. Temperatures average 0 to -50°F, and oceans freeze to depths of 6-7 feet. The subsoil is frozen year around (permafrost) and wind intense, blizzards and drifting. The Inuit and Aleuts all speak dialects of a common language. Eskimo is an Algonquian word meaning "raw flesh eaters". The Inuit is more proper and means, as does the original name for most tribes, "the people". Transportation by dog sled and kayak. Dwellings vary, including igloo; stone and turf; wood where available; semi-underground pits roofed and banked with timber and sod; and hide tents using driftwood frames.

There were a number of tribes that formed alliances for strength, defence and commerce. In the east they include the Powhatan, Montauk, Abenaki, Iroquois, Shawnee, and Creek (Muscogee) Confederacies. The Iroquois League of Five Nations was formed about 1570 by the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The Five were the last clans; they lived in various styles of wigwams or in large communal houses, such as the longhouse of the Iroquois and Huron. Others made squared lodges of wood and some villages were palisaded.

The Southeast, wooded with trees such as the cypress and southern yellow pine, varies in climate, but generally mild and wet. There are mountains and grassland and many marshes and swamps. There is both sandy and fertile soil. The native peoples were hunters, gatherers, fishers, and farmers. Villages were mostly set along the waterways and there was great diversity of lodges. Some, like the Natchez, were descendants of the ancient Mississippian Temple Mound Builders and built large towns with temples atop mounds.

Many tribes existed at one time on the Florida coasts and interior, many now extinct. Other area tribes: Tacatacuru, Yustaga, Satiriba, Tocobaga, Marracoon, Mikasuki, Chiaha (v. on map means villages).

The Caribbean's Taino Arawak and Carib lived as far as Guayana and Florida. Peaceful farmers of maize, cotton, manioc, sweet potato, peanut, sugar cane and tobacco, they were also hunters, gatherers and fishermen. Palm tree and bamboo were in great supply. Made dugout canoes.

In very ancient times the native peoples of what is now called Mexico were hunters and gatherers, some settling into agriculture. Over the centuries several groups became strong and formed complex societies, including the Olmec, Maya, Teotihuacan, and Aztec. The Olmec, Maya, Teotihuacan, and Aztec, the three great empires, were under their control. Great cities and temples were built, with very formalized religion, art, and science highly developed.

Many other cultures flourished in what is known as Mesoamerica. Among them, located south and southeast of the ancient Olmec area, were the following: Chicomealtepec, Chontal, Pokoman, Motocintec, Chimaltepec, Quiche, Chichimec, Tzeltal, Chorti, Toluca, Chuj, Lenca, Chiapanec, Kekchi, Choltec, Aztec, Kanjobal, Achi and Pipil.

Many tribes occupied the Alaskan interior, part of the sub-arctic, and were hunters, trappers, gatherers, and fishers. The north and western coastline is arctic and the peoples much dependent on the sea. The Inuits all along the coastline and Bering Strait islands, plus the Aleuts on the long peninsula and islands stretching almost to Asia, were expert whalers, harpooning from their boats of driftwood and hides. Among the game were caribou, polar bear, wolf, seals and walrus. Many of the homes were made of whale bone, driftwood and earth. Besides those listed on the map there were more than 50 other Inuit groups, names ending in the suffix "miut", such as Kuvuimut, Nuktoomut, Nuktagamut, and Agluimut.

Extending for more than 2,000 miles, from north of California to the Alaskan panhandle, is a rugged coastline, with a maze of inlets and islands. Temperature is moderate and rainfall abundant. Mountain glaciers melt, rivers running to the sea. Forests provided much wood for spacious dwellings, boats, and the skillfully carved totem poles of some of the tribes.

Many of their cultures were affluent and complex, and the potlatch give-away was a major tradition. The term "tribe" does not always fit, as many villages were kin groups or extended families. Such is also the case in other areas of the map.

The California area had great many tribes, speaking over 100 different dialects and, for the most part, having a peaceful co-existence. Hunters, gatherers and fishers, the acorn made into flour was a favorite food, and baskets, a special craft. Rafts were typically used on waterways, though the Chumash made boats of split cedar planks. Basically in permanent settlements, after contact some came to be known by the mission they were near, and thus the term "Mission Indians".

Other tribes of California area: Achomawi, Konowi, Nongatl, Sinkiyone, Kawaiw, Mattole, Nomlaki, Chumash, Ohlone, Gwamienka, Wiyot (v. on map means villages).

Borders between tribes were generally vague, as the concept of "owning" an area of Sacred Mother Earth did not exist. Life has centered on family and community support, spiritual renewal, and harmony with nature. Large tribes had many bands and villages. The Pueblo alone had 275 villages. Democratic in nature, a tribe usually had more than one chief, each with separate responsibilities, such as for civil matters, hunts, and wars. Decisions were handled in council with prominent elders and shamans. Leadership was earned based on good sense and virtues, honesty, personal responsibility, courage, even temper, and generosity.

The horse was adapted into the life-style of tribes, particularly on the plains where following game, and changing camp necessitated a nomadic life. The horse greatly increased movement and the tribe was very practical. To the west of the plains, over the Rocky Mountains, lay the Great Basin area, dry and sparse vegetation. The native peoples hunted, gathered and dug for roots. The Plateau region to the north, with its mountains, plains, valleys and rivers, including the Columbia, held an abundance of food and water source for the native peoples.

The Southwest, generally little rain fall and arid, has a diversity of land, with mountains, deserts, mesas, plateaus, and canyons. Though some tribes were nomadic, most were farmers and herders, with permanent villages.

