

Period 1.1

Key Concepts

There are three broad ideas that a student really needs to understand in order to be successful when questioned about this topic on the AP US History exam:

1. **Native Americans were diverse** - get rid of any stereotypical image that you may have in your own mind that represents ALL Native Americans.
2. **There were many different language and culture groups**, with over 150 distinct ethnic groups in the Americas and ten broadly characterized culture groups in North America.

Each tribal group interacted differently with its environment. While native tribes in colder climates subsisted exclusively by hunting and gathering, most tribes also practiced some form of agriculture. Each geographical culture group adapted to and interacted with its distinct regional environment.

Nomadic vs Settled Tribes

While some tribes - especially in the North - subsisted exclusively on hunting and gathering, most Indian tribes employed agriculture for at least part of their food supply. Tribes that subsisted on hunting and gathering tended to be nomadic, while tribes that depended more heavily on agriculture built more permanent settlements. Those living close to rivers, lakes, and oceans also fished.

Some European innovations impacted the lifestyles of the natives they encountered. The introduction of horses influenced the lifestyles of the Plains Indians, who began hunting bison on horseback as a result of the European encounter. (This lifestyle would later be threatened by the construction of the transcontinental railroads after the Civil War.)

Geographical Culture Groups

Native tribes in North America have been divided into ten distinct culture groups, of which I examine five:

ARCTIC - Tribes in the frigid northern climates, such as the Eskimo and the Inuit, subsisted entirely by hunting, gathering, and fishing. Seal meat provided the primary source of sustenance for these Arctic tribes.

PLAINS - After the introduction of horses from Europe, most Plains Indians became migratory bison hunters. The teepee dwelling, which many see (falsely) as a stereotypical dwelling for all Native Americans, was especially popular with the nomadic tribes living in this region. Some tribes in the Plains, such as the Wichita, grew crops in settled communities, trading their produce with the nomadic hunting tribes, such as the Sioux.

NORTHEAST / GREAT LAKES - Tribes in the Northeast and Great Lakes regions subsisted through a combination of hunting and gathering and **slash and burn** agriculture, in which areas of forestland were burned to create fields that would be abandoned after a few seasons. This form of agriculture, based on the "three sisters" (corn, squash, and beans), was not as labor intensive as European settled agriculture and the fields were primarily tended by women.

The dominant tribal groups in the Northeast were the **Iroquois Confederation** and the Algonquian tribes. These groups were often engaged in inter-tribal warfare, in which the Europeans took part by siding with favored groups and supplying them with European weapons in exchange for furs.

The Iroquois, known by the British as the "Five Nations," were a confederation of five (later six) distinct tribes who maintained a permanent peace and military alliance with each other.

SOUTHWEST - Native tribes in the Southwestern United States subsisted primarily by maize (corn) agriculture. Some tribes constructed cliff dwellings that provided defense against attacks, while other tribes, such as the Hopi, built large apartment complexes out of mud bricks.

SOUTHEAST - Indian tribes in fertile Southeastern region of the United States relied primarily on settled agriculture for food production. Ruins from **Mississippian** societies that thrived in the centuries preceding European contact include large **mounds** and the remains of large cities, such as Cahokia outside of St. Louis, which at one point had a population of around 40,000 people



Iroquois and Algonquians in Battle

Gender Roles

In societies that practiced hunting, gathering, and agriculture, women tended to do the lion's share of agricultural labor, while men spent most of their time hunting. Early European colonists believed that Native men were lazy and oppressed their women, but from their cultural standpoint, this was simply a different division of labor (Native men wondered why European men did "women's work" on the farm)