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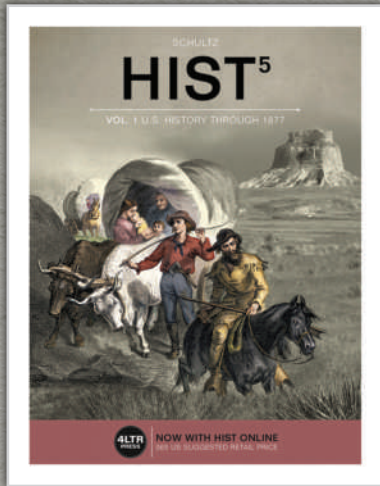
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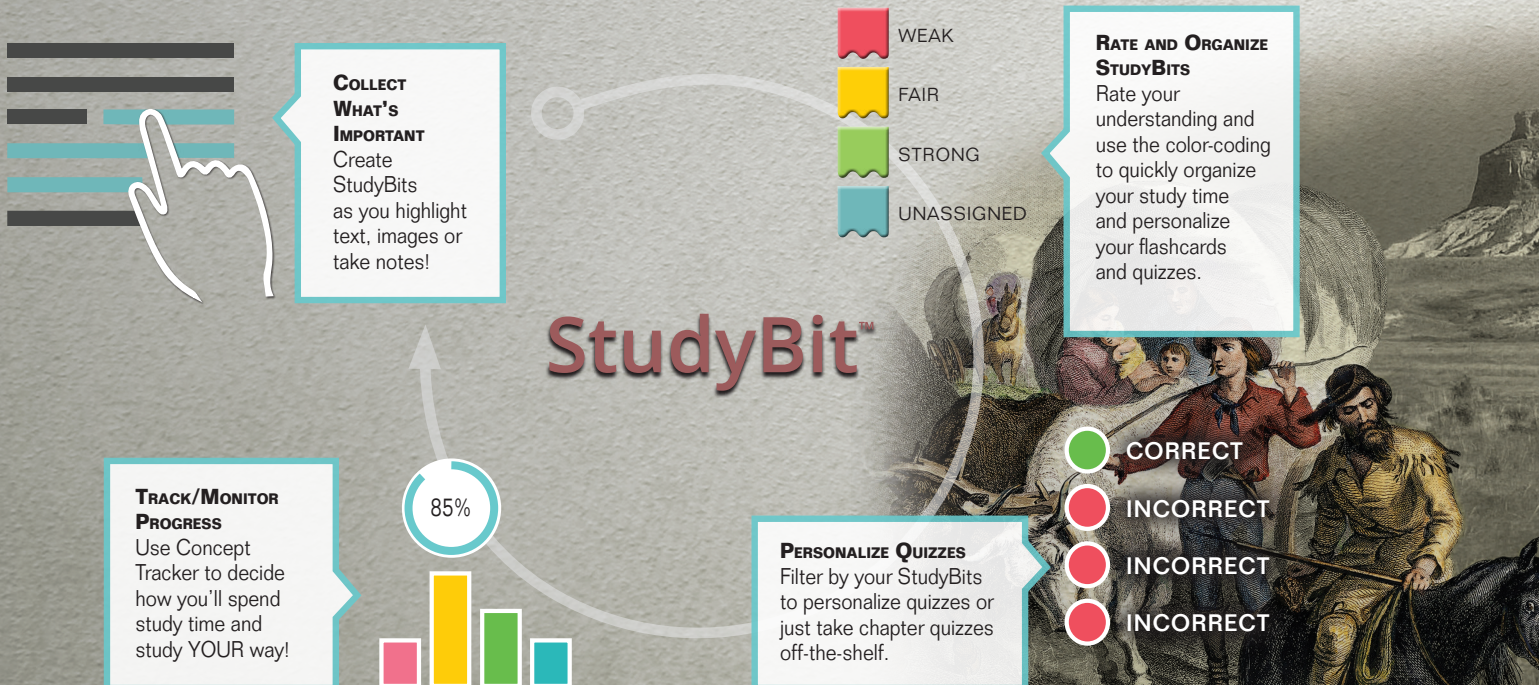
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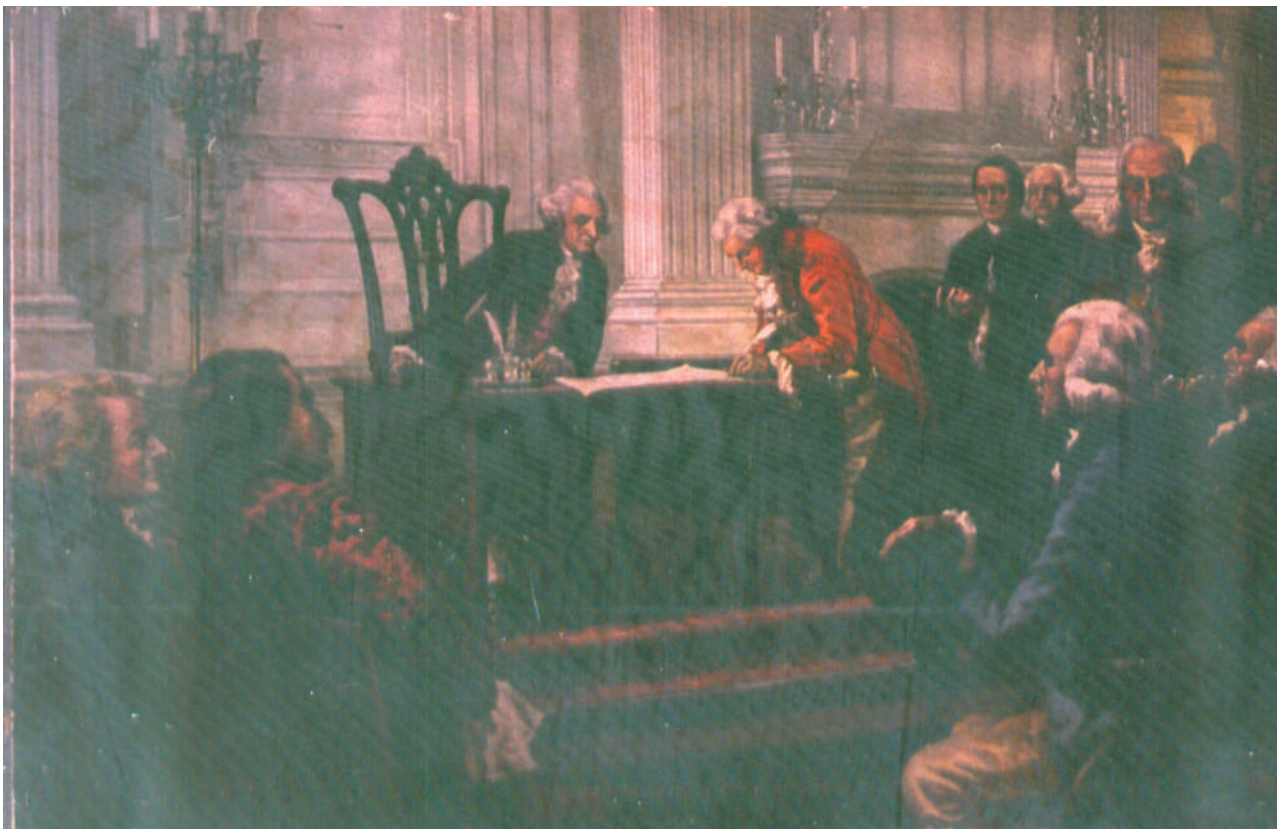
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About the Author

Kevin M. Schultz is an award-winning historian and bestselling author. He is currently a Professor of History at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), where he has won several awards for his teaching and writing. He is the author of two other books: *Buckley and Mailer: The Difficult Friendship that Shaped the Sixties* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2015), which was an Amazon #1 New Release in American History; and *Tri-Faith America: How Postwar Catholics and Jews Helped America Realize Its Protestant Promise* (Oxford University Press, 2011), which is used in both graduate and undergraduate classes across the country. He has published widely for popular audiences, too, including having had a journal article appear immediately before one written by the Pope. He received his BA from Vanderbilt University and his PhD from UC Berkeley.

1 | Three Societies on the Verge of Contact



John Sordanius/Fotolia

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 1-1 Explain current beliefs about how the first peoples settled in North America, and discuss the ways in which they became differentiated from one another over time.
- 1-2 Describe the African societies that existed at the time the first Africans were brought to the New World as slaves.
- 1-3 Describe Europe's experiences during the last centuries before Columbus made his first voyage to the New World in 1492.

AFTER FINISHING
THIS CHAPTER
GO TO PAGE 20
FOR STUDY TOOLS

People have been living on the landmass we now know as the United States for at least the past 12,000 years—long before civilizations emerged among the ancient Egyptians, the ancient Greeks, and the ancient Romans. It was even 10,000 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, whose estimated time of arrival, however incorrect, is the measure by which western European time came to be measured. As a political nation, however, the United States is less than 250 years old, encapsulating roughly just nine or ten generations. Although this book is mostly about that relatively recent political nation and the people who lived in it, this chapter examines the three groups of people—Indians, West Africans, and Europeans—who came together in North America more than five hundred years ago, setting in motion the process by which the United States would become an independent nation. This chapter begins in the Ice Age and ends as Christopher Columbus sets foot in North America in 1492, an arrival initiating the contact of cultures that would thereafter shape the development of the continent.

1-1 NATIVE AMERICA

Early human life in North America can be divided into three periods: (1) the Paleo-Indian, (2) the Archaic, and (3) the pre-Columbian.

1-1a The Paleo-Indian Era: The First Settlers (10,000–15,000 years ago)

The first settlers of the Americas appeared in what we call the Paleo-Indian era. Although we will probably never know when the first people set foot on what we now call the United States, it seems they may have come earlier than was thought not too long ago.

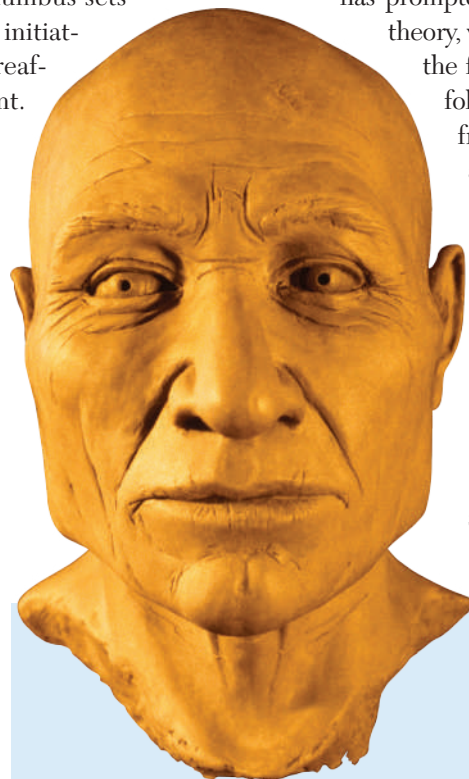
ARRIVAL

For a long time, archeologists believed that the first people came not for fame, fortune, or freedom (as subsequent

immigrants would), but simply because they were hungry. According to this theory, about 12,000 years ago, thousands of young adults and their families left their homes in Asia and crossed a narrow passage of iced-over land called Beringia, southwest of today's Alaska. These people were supposedly following herds of woolly mammoths, intending to hunt the animals to feed and clothe their families. Many of these hunters followed herds south along the western coast of present-day Canada and ended up in what is now the United States. Many of their latter-day ancestors continued southward and, after many generations, made it all the way to the southernmost tip of South America, a place now called Tierra Del Fuego.

Recent evidence casts doubt on this theory. Carbon dating suggests that the first people on the continent were probably here much earlier than 12,000 years ago. This has prompted a reevaluation of the Beringia theory, with some scholars suggesting that the first settlers came on boats, either following whales across the Pacific from Asia, or coming from Europe, along Greenland, in search of fish, or following the Pacific Coast of today's Alaska, British Columbia, and Washington State (see Map 1.1).

In 1996, two men watching hydroplane races in Kennewick, Washington, discovered what turned out to be a 9,000-year-old skeleton. The skeleton, dubbed Kennewick man, baffled scientists, mainly because a physical reconstruction of the skull revealed a man who looked, according to one scientist, "more like a middle-aged European accountant than he did a Paleo-Indian hunter." People with European features were not thought to have been in North America for another 8,500 years, so Kennewick man presented the possibility that North American



>> The discovery of "Kennewick man" in 1996 challenged scientists to rethink when people first came to North America.

Emmanuel Laurent/Science Source

◀◀ As people moved their way south and inland into the interior of North America, they had to be creative in securing housing. Here, the "Cliff Palace" from the twelfth or thirteenth century is one of the best preserved dwellings of the Ancestral Pueblo peoples, located in Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado.



Map 1.1 Settlement of the Americas

>> This map details the imagined southward migration of the first peoples to inhabit the Americas and shows their journey from Beringia, through today's Canada and United States, ending all the way in the southern tip of South America.

settlement happened in different waves from a variety of locations, with older groups dying out and being replaced by yet newer immigrants. Another scientist then suggested that Kennewick man's features resembled those of people living in specific parts of Asia rather than Europe, further complicating our understanding of the origins of humankind in North America. Was he a man with European origins, an Asian man, or did he resemble one of America's indigenous Indians? As the battle raged on among scientists, white supremacists claimed Kennewick Man demonstrated that the first people in North America were "white" and thus served as the foundation for American civilization. Native American tribes, meanwhile, sued to have the man's remains returned to ancient burial grounds. Finally, in 2015, conclusive DNA evidence demonstrated the Kennewick Man was, in fact, of Native American origin, thus upholding the validity of the Beringia theory.

Regardless of the dispute, and regardless of when or from where Kennewick man came, his age suggests that calling North America the "New World" might be a mistake. England, for instance, was not inhabitable until 12,500 B.C.E., suggesting that the "New World" may actually have a much longer human history than what we now think of as the "Old World." Today we call these initial North American settlers the **Paleo-Indians**.

Although the initial origins and timing are in question, what is known for certain is that the greatest flow of people in this early period came between 20,000 and 10,000 B.C.E.; we also know that sometime between 9500 and 8000 B.C.E. the ocean level rose because of what we would today call global warming. With water covering the Bering Strait that connected Asia to North America, the first major wave of immigration came to an end. The path has remained submerged ever since.

EXPANSION AND DEVELOPMENT

As these migrants moved from region to region across North America, they adapted their lifestyle according to the climate and the land, as people do. The people of the **Paleo-Indian era** (10,000 to 15,000 years ago) thus lived a wide range of lifestyles, developing many languages



>> Stone tools for grinding maize. The complex genetic engineering of maize some 6,000 years ago was vital to the development of sedentary cultures.

and belief systems along the way. Some of the most ancient peoples made spears by flaking stones and then chose "kill sites" where large herds traversed. Others hunted herds of animals across great distances. Still others slowly began to cultivate complex systems of sustainable agriculture that allowed them to remain in a single area for years. And still others depended on fishing and the riches of the seas to provide a stable life for their families. Over time, the population of Native North America grew.

Nancy Carter/North Wind Picture Archives

1-1b The Archaic Era: Forging an Agricultural Society (2,500–10,000 years ago)

Between 5,000 and 8,000 years ago, a monumental transition occurred in how people lived. During the **Archaic era**, agriculture, not hunting, gradually became the primary source of sustenance for most of the people of Native North America. This trend was perhaps the most significant development in American prehistory, because settled agriculture permitted the establishment of a **sedentary existence**, without the need to pursue herd animals. Maize, a form of corn, was one key element of this existence. Maize is a highly nutritious cereal, containing more nutrients than wheat, rice, millet, and barley. Its development was a remarkable feat of genetic engineering. Some 6,000 years ago, Indians in today's southern Mexico cultivated the crop through the careful selection of desirable seeds, ultimately producing corn. It still stands as one of the most significant instances of crop cultivation in world history.

Paleo-Indians The first people to settle North America, roughly 10,000 to 15,000 years ago

Paleo-Indian era Era beginning about 15,000 years ago and ending about 10,000 years ago, characterized by initial North American settlement

Archaic era Era beginning about 10,000 years ago and lasting until about 2,500 years ago, characterized by increased agricultural development

sedentary existence Life in which settlers can remain in one place cultivating agriculture, instead of pursuing herd animals

Over time, populations grew larger, not only because food supplies increased, but also because group size was no longer limited by the arduous demands of hunting. Many tribes became semi-sedentary, settling in camps during the growing season and then breaking camp to follow the herds at other times of year. Others became increasingly centralized in their development, building permanent cities, some of monumental proportions.

The Archaic era was the formative period of the first settled tribes in North America—the immediate ancestors of many of the Indian nations with which we are most familiar today. The Mesoamerican civilization, founded and developed by the Olmec people, thrived in today’s Mexico and served as a precursor to the many maize-based societies that developed throughout North America. Some 5,000 years

ago, another successful ancient civilization—the people of Norte Chico in today’s Peru—flourished by cultivating cotton, which they used to weave nets and catch the plentiful fish off the Pacific Coast; they then transported the fish to high-altitude cities in the Andes. Although nature has reclaimed much of what these early civilizations created, their developments and accomplishments are testaments to the capacity of humankind to create and develop monumental societies. One historian has argued that the only way to fully grasp the earth-changing significance of these early civilizations is to take a helicopter ride over undeveloped parts of Mexico and Central and South America, realizing that many of the hills and creeks below are actually the buried remains of temples and canals built by those early civilizations.

1-1c The Pre-Columbian Era: Developing Civilizations (500 B.C.E.–1492 C.E.)

Of all the people living in North America before contact with Europeans, we know the most about the people of the **pre-Columbian era** (500 B.C.E.–1492 C.E.). The great



>> A gigantic, 20-ton Olmec head. Under the canopies of the rain forest, the mysterious Olmec developed the oldest of all Mesoamerican civilizations.

civilizations of the pre-Columbian world (the phrase means “before Columbus”) usually based their economy on agriculture and for that reason were able to endure in a single location long enough to create complex, hierarchical societies and to develop long-standing trading networks.

The largest Indian civilization in this period was that of the Incas, who lived on the western coast of South America, from the equator to the southern tip of Chile. The Incas built large cities and fortresses on the steep slopes of the Andes Mountains (and were the beneficiaries of fish deliveries from the people of Norte Chico). Other impressive pre-Columbian societies include the Maya, who, with their step-tiered temples, dominated southern Guatemala and the Yucatan Peninsula (in present-day Mexico) from the fifth to the eighth centuries until an

internal civil war weakened the civilization so much that it dissipated. The Teotihuacán society built a city (named Teotihuacán, about an hour’s bus ride from Mexico City) that accommodated perhaps as many as 200,000 souls during the fifth century. The Mexica (later labeled “the Aztecs”) developed a complex urban society that ruled central Mexico from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries. These were all large, complex societies that, in scientific knowledge, governing capacities, and artistic and architectural development, rivaled any in the world at the time of their particular dominance.

THE ANASAZI

In the present-day United States, two of the largest pre-Columbian cultures were the Anasazi and the Mississippians. In the American Southwest, the Anasazi founded a vast civilization by combining hunting and gathering with sedentary agriculture in order to sustain a large population in the arid desert of present-day New Mexico. As a testament to the grandness of their civilization, between 900 and 1150 C.E. the Anasazi built fourteen “great houses” in the Chaco Canyon, each one several stories tall and containing more than two hundred rooms. They were perhaps used as large apartment buildings, as the canyon served as the major trading post for turquoise and other material goods. Several of these great houses still stand near Albuquerque, New Mexico.

pre-Columbian era North American era lasting from 500 B.C.E. to 1492 C.E., before Columbus landed



Richard A. Cooke/Getty Images

>> The Serpent Mound in Ohio, nearly a quarter of a mile long, is the largest and finest surviving serpentine earthwork, putting on dramatic display the pre-Columbian peoples' capacity to transform their world.

THE MISSISSIPPIANS

A second large, pre-Columbian culture to develop on the land now known as the United States was that of the Mississippians, whose many different tribal groups lived at about the same time as the Anasazi, from 700 to 1500 C.E., with their civilization reaching its peak at around 1100 C.E. The largest Mississippian city was called Cahokia, located eight miles east of present-day St. Louis. Inhabited by more than 20,000 people (comparable in size to London at that time), Cahokia served as the civilization's crossroads for trade and religion. Webs of roads surrounded the city, connecting rural villagers for hundreds of miles in all directions. The Mississippians developed an accurate calendar and built a pyramid that, at the time, was the third largest structure of any kind in the Western Hemisphere. The Mississippians also left many earthen mounds dotting the landscape.

Some of these early civilizations, like the Anasazi, declined about two hundred years before the first contact between Europeans and Africans. Others, such as the Aztecs and some of the Mississippians, were still thriving in 1492. Why did these powerful civilizations decline? There is no single answer to the question. Some scholars say that certain civilizations outgrew their capacity to produce food. Others say that battles with enemy tribes forced them to abandon the principal landmarks of their civilization. Still others cite major droughts.

And indeed, not all of these civilizations did decline by the time of first contact with Europeans. Scholars estimate that in 1491 North and South America had perhaps as many as 100 million inhabitants—making it more populous than Europe at the time. Although these numbers are greatly disputed, the idea that the Americas were barren “virgin” land before first contact with Europeans is clearly wrong.

Scholars estimate that in 1491 North and South America had perhaps as many as 100 million inhabitants, making it more populous than Europe at the time.

In 1491, American Indians were thriving and transforming the land to suit their needs.

1-1d North America in 1491

By the late 1400s, then, North America was home to numerous civilizations and tribes, some of which were sizeable, dominating large swaths of land. More than two hundred languages were spoken among hundreds of tribes. It would be as if each of today's cities spoke its own language and had unique social rituals. Diversity abounded in this land. So did conflict.



>> Aztec calendar.

SOME SOCIAL SIMILARITIES OF NATIVE NORTH AMERICANS

Despite the wide variety of lifestyles developed by the pre-Columbian peoples, there were some broad general similarities among the tribes in North America during the late 1400s. Most of the tribes, for instance, were based on a **clan system**, in which a tribe was divided into a number of large family groups. They were also mostly **matrilineal**, meaning that children typically followed the clan of their mother and that a man, when married, moved into the clan of his wife. Matrilineal societies usually develop when agriculture is the primary food source for a society. In these societies women are in charge of farming (Europeans were universally surprised to see women working in the fields). Thus Indian women maintained the tribe's social institutions while men were hunting, fishing, or off to war. This system was by no means universal in Native North America, but it does signify a level of sexual equality absent from Europe at the time. Indeed, women were just as likely as men to wield political power in some of

clan system Living arrangement in which a tribe was divided into a number of large family groups

matrilineal Family arrangement in which children typically follow the clan of their mother and married men move into the clan of their wives; most often seen in agricultural societies

polytheistic Belief system consisting of belief in many deities

animistic Belief system consisting of belief that supernatural beings, or souls, inhabit all objects and govern their actions

Iroquois Confederacy Group of northeastern tribes that joined to form a political and trading entity and later created an elaborate political system; also known as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy

these societies. Many Algonquian nations, for instance, had a female tribal leader.

Land was customarily held in common as well, although there are some instances in which individual rights are said to have existed and others where clan rights existed. Enslavement (usually of captured enemies) was relatively common, especially in the tribes of the American Southeast, but Indian enslavement varied in severity, and it is unlikely that enslavement was inherited, meaning that the children of slaves were usually not, by accident of birth, born as chattel.

Most Indian religions were **polytheistic** (believing in many deities) and **animistic** (believing that supernatural beings, or souls, inhabit all objects and govern their actions). Indian religions were usually closely related to the physical world, and local terrain was naturally imbued with spiritual meaning. Placing an emphasis on this world (and not on the next), typical ceremonies featured rain and fertility prayers. Many New England tribes, for example, believed in a ruling deity whom they called Manitou and looked to a dramatic local site (such as Mount Katahdin in Maine) as the source of divine power.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS

These broad similarities aside, the tribes of Native America were rich in regional variety (see Map 1.2). Most variations depended on how a tribe adapted to its surrounding terrain, and thus it is possible to make generalizations based on region.

The Northeast Several sizeable societies lived in the northeast corner of the United States, in the area now called New England. These nations included the Wampanoag, Narragansett, Massachusetts, Mohawk, Oneida, Erie, and Pequot. In general, these groups subsisted on hunting and agriculture, although most of their foodstuffs derived from agriculture. Those that lived along the coast relied on the riches of the ocean. Most of these nations lived in small villages that were closely surrounded by forests that protected them from attack—something that was always a possibility in the congested northeastern region. Indeed, fear of attack was part of the reason that several of these northeastern tribes came together to create the **Iroquois Confederacy**, a political