EARLY SOCIETIES OF MESOAMERICA
EARLY PRE-HISTORY

- **Migration to Mesoamerica**
  - Humans traveled from Siberia to Alaska, 40,000 years ago
  - Probably came in search of big game
  - By 7000 B.C.E., reached southern-most part of South America
  - As hunting became difficult, agriculture began, 7500 B.C.E.
  - Modern theorists question Bering Strait migration

- **Early agriculture in Mesoamerica**
  - Valley of Mexico was first center of agriculture
  - Beans, chili peppers, avocados, squashes, gourds cultivated
  - By 5000 B.C.E., discovered potential of maize, the staple food
  - Later, developed tomatoes

- **Agricultural villages appeared after 3000 B.C.E.**
  - No large animals, no wheeled vehicles
  - Ceremonial centers, by the end of the 2nd millennium B.C.E.
THE OLMECS

- Olmecs: The "rubber people"
  - Earliest center, on the coast of Mexico Gulf, 1200 B.C.E.
  - The other two later centers: La Venta and Tres Zapotes

- Olmec society
  - Authoritarian in nature
  - Colossal human heads - possibly likenesses of rulers
  - Rulers' power as shown in construction of huge pyramids

- Trade in jade and obsidian

- Decline and fall of Olmec society
  - The cause remains a mystery
  - Olmecs systematically destroyed their ceremonial centers
  - Most likely, civil conflict ruined their society
  - By 400 B.C.E., other societies eclipsed the Olmecs

- Influence of Olmec traditions
  - Maize, ceremonial centers were common to later societies
  - Other legacies: Calendar, rituals of human sacrifice, ballgame
  - Olmecs did not leave written records
OLMEC ART
The Maya
• Earliest heir of the Olmecs, lived in highlands of Guatemala
• Kaminaljuyú, a ceremonial center, but not a full-fledged city
• Teotihuacan became dominant during the 4th century C.E.
• After the 4th century, society flourished in lowlands
• Besides maize, also cultivated cotton and cacao

Tikal
• Most important Maya political center, 300 to 900 C.E.
• A bustling city of 40,000 people
• Enormous plazas, scores of temples, pyramids, palaces

Maya warfare
• Victorious warriors won enormous prestige
• War captives became slaves or sacrificial victims to gods

Chichén Itzá
• Rose as a power by the 9th century
• Organized a loose empire in the northern Yucatan

Maya decline
• Began in 800 C.E., the Mayas (except in Chichén Itzá) deserted their cities
• Causes of decline remain unclear
Maya society
- Kings, priests, and hereditary nobility at the top
- Merchants were from the ruling class, served also as ambassadors
- Professional architects and artisans were important
- Peasants and slaves were majority of population

The Maya calendar
- Maya priests understood planetary cycles and could predict eclipses
- Besides the solar year, also had a ritual year of 260 days and 20 months
- Combined attributes of two calendars determined the fortune of activities

Maya writing
- Contained both ideographic elements and symbols for syllables
- Maya scribes used writing extensively
- Only four books survived the destruction by Spanish conquerors

The Maya ballgame
- Played by two individuals or two teams
- Very popular, every ceremonial center had stone-paved courts
MAYAN RELIGION

- Religious thought
  - Popol Vuh, a Maya creation myth
  - Gods created humans out of maize and water
- Gods maintained agricultural cycles
  - Gods placated
  - Exchanged for honors and sacrifices
- Bloodletting rituals
  - The most important rituals, to honor the gods for rains
  - Sacrificing captives let to many wars for victims
  - Also voluntary bloodshedding
MAYAN TRADE
The city of Teotihuacan
- Built in the highlands of Mexico
- Colossal pyramids of sun and moon dominated the skyline
- Between 400 and 600 C.E., the city had 200,000 inhabitants
- Paintings and murals reflect the importance of priests

Teotihuacan society
- Rulers and priests dominated society
- Two-thirds of the city inhabitants worked in fields during daytime
- Artisans were famous for their obsidian tools and orange pottery
- Professional merchants traded extensively throughout Mesoamerica
- No sign of military organization or conquest

Cultural traditions
- Inherited Olmecs' culture
- Honored an earth god and a rain god

Decline of Teotihuacan
- Military pressure from other peoples since 500 C.E.
- Began to decline 650 C.E.; Invaders sacked city, mid-8th century
EARLY ANDEAN SOCIETY

- **Early migration**
  - By 12,000 B.C.E. hunter-gathers reached South America
  - By 8000 B.C.E. began to experiment with agriculture
  - Complex societies appeared in central Andean region 1000 B.C.E.
  - Andean societies located in modern day Peru and Bolivia
  - Geography hindered communication between Andeans and Mesoamericans as well as within the Andean region

- **Early agriculture in South America**
  - Main crops: beans, peanuts, sweet potatoes, cotton
  - Fishing supplemented agricultural harvests
  - By 1800 B.C.E., produced pottery,
  - Temples and pyramids appeared
CHAVIN AND MOCHÉ

• The Chavín Cult
  • Very popular around 900 to 800 B.C.E.
  • Vanished completely by about 300 B.C.E.
  • Cult was probably related to introduction of maize
  • Cult left large temple complexes and elaborate art works

• Complexity of Andean society
  • Techniques of producing cotton textiles and fishing nets
  • Discovered gold, silver, and copper metallurgy
  • Cities began to appear shortly after Chavín cult
  • Early Andeans did not make use of writing

• Mochica (300-700 C.E.)
  • One of several early Andean states, located in northern Peru
  • Mochica ceramics: lives of different social classes
  • Mochica did not integrate the whole Andean region
ANDEAN GEOGRAPHY

ECUADOR
- Loma Negra
- Sipán
- Vicús
- Salinar
- Chan Chan

PERU
- Moche
- Chavin de Huántar
- Recuay
- Wari
- Pachacamac

PACIFIC OCEAN
- Paracas
- Nasca

▲ = Land over 3000m
TOLTECS AND TULA

- **Toltecs**
  - Collapse of Teotihuacan in central Mexico, 9th and early 10th century
  - Toltecs migrated to central Mexico about the 8th century
  - Established large state, powerful army from mid-10th to mid-12th century

- **Tula**
  - Capital city of Toltecs, center of weaving, pottery, and obsidian work
  - Maintained close relations with societies of the Gulf coast and the Maya

- **Toltec decline**
  - Civil strife at Tula, beginning in 1125
  - Nomadic incursion of 1175
  - By the end of the 12th century, no longer dominating Mesoamerica

- **Quetzalcoatl**
  - Originally a human prince of Tula, dedicated to his people
  - Tricked, driven from power
  - Gradually became a hero, god in struggle with evil deities
EARLY AZTECS

The Mexico
- Known as Aztecs, arrived in central Mexico about mid-13th century
- Rough-tough people, wandering, fighting for a century in central Mexico
- Settled at Tenochtitlan (modern Mexico City) about 1345
- Plentiful food supplies and chinampas by Lake Texcoco

The Aztec empire
- Military campaigns against neighboring societies, mid-15th century
- Conquered and colonized Oaxaco in southwestern Mexico
- Made alliance with Texcoco and Tlacopan
- Empire ruled 12 million people and most of Mesoamerica

Tribute and trade
- Tribute obligations were very oppressive
- Empire had no bureaucracy or administration
- Allies did not have standing army
- Tribute of 489 subject territories flowed into Tenochtitlan
AZTEC WORLD
MEXICA SOCIETY

- **Warriors**
  - Military elite at top of rigid social hierarchy
  - Mostly from the Mexica aristocracy
  - Enjoyed great wealth, honor, and privileges
- **Mexica women**
  - No public role, but enjoyed high honor as mothers of warriors
  - Honor of bearing children was equal to that of capturing enemies in battle
- **Priests**
  - Ranked among the Mexica elite; specialized in calendrical and ritual lore
  - Advisers to Mexica rulers, occasionally, became supreme rulers themselves
- **Cultivators and slaves**
  - Cultivators worked on *chinampas* (small plots of reclaimed land)
  - Often worked on aristocrats’ land
  - Paid tribute and provided labor service for public works
  - Large number of slaves, worked as domestic servants
- **Craftsmen and merchants**
  - Skilled craftsmen enjoyed some prestige
  - Tenuous position of merchants:
    - Supplied exotic goods and military intelligence
    - Under suspicion as greedy profiteers
• Mexica gods
  • Tezcatlipoca: giver/taker of life, patron deity of warriors
  • Quetzalcóatl: supporter of arts, crafts, and agriculture

• Ritual bloodletting: common to all Mesoamericans

• Huitzilopochtli: the war god
  • Human sacrifice encouraged by devotion to Huitzilopochtli
  • Large temple at the center of Tenochtitlan
  • Hundreds of thousands sacrificed to this war god

• Rivalry between Huitzilopochtli, Quetzalcoatl
  • Quetzalcoatl protector of humans, tricked by some gods
  • Driven into exile with promise to return
SOCIETIES OF THE NORTH

- Pueblo and Navajo societies
  - Two large settled societies in the contemporary American southwest
  - By about 700 C.E., began to build stone and adobe buildings

- Iroquois peoples
  - Agricultural society in the woodlands east of the Mississippi River
  - Five Iroquois nations emerged from Swasco society, 1400 C.E.
  - Women were in charge of Iroquois villages and longhouses

- Mound-building peoples
  - Built earthen mounds throughout eastern North America
  - Mounds used for ceremonies, rituals, dwelling, burial sites
  - Showed influence of contacts with Mesoamericans, Mayans

- Cahokia
  - The largest mound at Cahokia, Illinois
  - 15-38,000 people lived in Cahokia society, c. 12th century
  - Burial sites reveal existence of social classes and trade
INDIGENOUS AMERICAN CULTURAL REGIONS
GEOGRAPHIC MAP

[Map of the Anasazi region in the southwestern United States, highlighting areas like Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico.]
COMING OF THE INCA

• After Chavin and Moche
  • Several regional states dominated Andean South America
  • All built upon previous accomplishments, civilizations

• Chucuito
  • Chucuito dominated highlands around Lake Titicaca
  • Cultivation of potatoes, herding llamas and alpacas
  • Traded with lower valleys, chewed coca leaves

• Chimu
  • Powerful kingdom in lowlands of Peru before mid-15th century
  • Irrigation networks, cultivation of maize and sweet potatoes
  • Capital city at Chanchan, massive brick buildings
THE INCA

- The Inca empire
  - Settled first around Lake Titicaca among other peoples
  - Ruler Pachacuti launched campaigns against neighbors, 1438
  - Built a huge empire stretching 4000 kilometers from north to south
  - Ruled the empire with military and administrative elite
  - Inca bureaucrats relied on *quipu*
    - Mnemonic aid made of an array of small cords to keep track of information

- Cuzco and Machu Picchu
  - Capital of the Inca: had 300,000 people in the late 15th century
  - Machu Picchu hidden in mountain, jungles: last retreat of Inca

- Inca roads
  - Two major roads linked the south and north
  - Runners carried messages across empire
  - Paved with stone, shaded by trees
  - Supported centralized government, facilitated spread of Quechua
THE INCA WORLD
INCA SOCIETY

- **Trade**
  - No large merchant class
  - Incas bartered agricultural surplus locally
  - Not much specialization
- **The chief ruler**
  - Chief ruler was viewed as descended from the sun
  - In theory, the god-king owned everything on earth
  - After death, mummified rulers became intermediaries with gods
- **Aristocrats and priests**
  - Aristocrats enjoyed fine food, embroidered clothes, and wore ear spools
  - Priests led celibate and ascetic lives, very influential figures
- **Peasants**
  - Delivered portion of their products to bureaucrats
  - Besides supporting ruling classes, revenue also used for famine relief
  - Provided heavy labor (mita) for public works
- **Society ruled as a socialist type centralized state**
INCA RELIGION

• Inca gods: Inti and Viracocha
  • Venerated sun god called Inti
  • Considered some other natural forces divine
  • Also honored the creator god, Viracocha
  • Sacrifices of animals, agricultural products, not humans

• Moral thought
  • Concept of sin: violation of established order
  • Concept of after-death punishment and reward
  • Rituals of absolving sins through confession, penance