

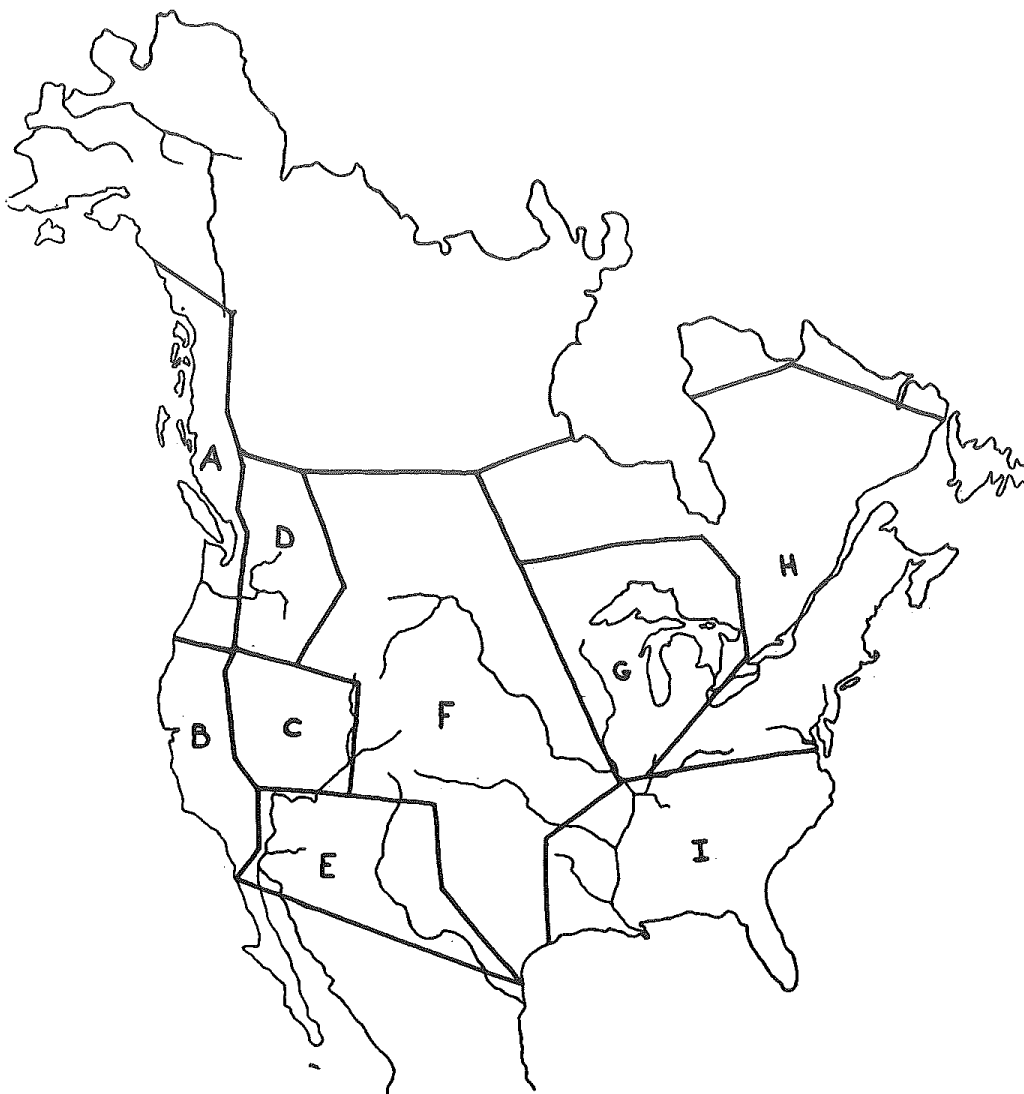
DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET, DENVER, COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

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INDIAN CULTURE AREAS IN THE UNITED STATES

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1. INTRODUCTION. Most people not students of the subject frequently think of all Indians as being alike, and find it difficult to understand the differences between the main geographical groups.

This leaflet is designed to give, through very brief sharp sketches, impressions of these major divisions, stressing the outstanding features of each. These geographical divisions are called culture areas, "culture" in this case meaning "a way of living", not high-brow artistic and society manners. The descriptions apply in general to the early periods of contact with the Whites, and somewhat thereafter.

2. NORTHWEST COAST (A). The Pacific coast line of southeast Alaska, British Columbia and to some extent the Washington coast—about a dozen major tribes and languages—often called "Siwash" from the French word "sauvage", a savage—on the lower Columbia River the heads of babies flattened by pressure in the cradle—the sea and wood, cornerstones of the culture—great forests providing logs for huge dugout canoes and plank houses—totem poles (in this area only)—a universally used grotesque art based on life forms in carved and painted wood, stone and goat horn—fish, sea mammals and wild plant foods to eat, but no farming—clothing of woven cedar bark and skin—generally barefoot—masks of painted wood in bewildering variety, used in the equivalent of theatrical performances—weaving in mountain goat wool of two kinds: one, the Chilkat blanket and shirt with elaborate colored designs; two, the Salish, very coarse and white without design—silver jewelry and woven basketry—great regard for wealth and social standing of haughty ruling noble families with, long ago, slaves for servants.

3. CALIFORNIA (B). Dozens of little groups, each with its own language and mostly living in isolated mountain valleys—the southern groups called "Mission" because of association with Spanish missions—"Digger" applied as nickname to many groups by the Whites—to a great extent peaceful, simple people reduced more in population by the coming of the Whites than any other Indians—more basketry, some with interwoven feathers, than all other Indians put together—dominance of the triangle in basketry designs—very little clothing, largely grass or rush aprons, except skin in northern section—generally barefoot—mostly domed brush huts, with some wood, half-underground houses in the North—travel on foot, except in dugout canoes on northern rivers, and in sea-going plank canoes, unique in North America, in the Santa Barbara region—acorns, wild seeds, some fish and game for food, but no farming—plain pottery to some extent in the South only—no idea of tribes or tribal organization, but fairly complex religious practices—among the Mission groups a use of a narcotic, found in certain *Datura* plants, in ceremonies.

4. BASIN (C). Largely barren desert area in Utah, Nevada, southern Oregon—many bands of Paiute and Shoshone speaking related dialects—the nickname "Digger" applied to them as well as to central California tribes—least developed of all Indians, perhaps of all people in the world—lived at bare subsistence level on wild seeds, roots, insects and a little game, with no farming—the scantiest of clothing, but makers of woven rabbit skin blankets—only brush wind-breaks and huts—coarse, slightly decorated basketry the main craft, with some plain pottery and a little very fine basketry near the Nevada-California border—social and religious organization at the most elementary level, just poor families or bands wandering on foot in search of food.

5. PLATEAU (D). Idaho, Washington east of the coast range, Oregon except the southern part, the inland part of British Columbia—several dozen tribes speaking languages mostly included in two language families, Salishan and Sahaptian—originally lived in semi-underground earth lodges or large steep-roofed mat-covered houses—salmon, wild roots (camas), berries and some game the main foods—several kinds of basketry the largest craft—travel on rivers and lakes by dugout canoes—moderately complex religious and social organization—in Washington a distinctive art style showing people and living creatures in X-ray outline—later, many traits introduced over the Rockies from the Plains. use of horses, the tipi, skin clothing with beadwork decoration.

6. SOUTHWEST: PUEBLO (E). North New Mexico and northeast Arizona—6 languages spoken, but all groups called "Pueblo" from Spanish word meaning "town"—people living in permanent stone or mud towns, often almost like apartment houses—primary dependence on corn, bean and squash farming for food, with some game—very large development of arts and crafts, weaving in cotton and wool, embroidery, painted pottery in large variety and huge quantity, several kinds of colorful basketry, shell and turquoise jewelry, wood carving and painting—wool and cotton clothing for both sexes, but woven by men—highly complex religious and social organization—long annual series

of elaborately costumed ceremonies, many using highly decorated masks—government by priests of native religion, later aided by elected governor and other officials.

7. SOUTHWEST: NAVAHO-APACHE (E). Arizona and New Mexico—two great tribes related closely in language but differing greatly in way of living. Navaho, (now largest tribe in the U. S., 70,000) in north Arizona and New Mexico—Apache, large bands in central Arizona, south and north New Mexico—both tribes are great horsemen.

Navaho: sheep raisers and farmers—most famous and productive blanket weavers and silversmiths—a little plain pottery and some basketry but no beadwork—single families living in log and earth huts (hogans) widely scattered over an immense reservation—wool blankets and shirts for clothing, with skin knee pants and leggings for men—numerous long elaborate religious and curing ceremonies with masked dancers and large many-colored sand paintings, a major specialty of the tribe.

Apache: wandering hunters and warriors, now largely cattlemen—tall grass-covered huts, wickiups, with some tipis among eastern bands—skin clothing with many tin jinglers, and slightly beaded—basketry the great art—no weaving—a little plain pottery—simple social organization in bands—some religious ceremonies, nicknamed “Devil dances”, with use of masks having great fan-like crests.

8. SOUTHWEST: OTHER TRIBES (E). In central and southern Arizona 8 to 10 tribes belonging to two language families, Piman and Yuman—except for the warlike Yuman tribes along the Colorado River, peaceful, unspectacular corn farmers adjusted to life in the desert—considerable dependence on cactus fruit and fish for food—basketry and pottery important crafts largely produced—cotton weaving formerly by some southern tribes—scanty clothing, mostly bark aprons, some skin and cotton skirts—sandals—dwellings ranged from domed earth and log structures to brush huts—social and religious life rather simple, with unusual development of cremation funeral rites in some groups.

9. PLAINS (F). The western prairies from the Rockies to the Mississippi Valley, and from Texas north into Canada—several dozen large tribes belonging to a number of language families but all able to talk through a common sign language—the very large fighting tribes famed in the development of the West in the 19th century—Sitting Bull and the Custer Massacre—great dependence on the buffalo for food, clothing, shelter and many necessities of life—greatest use of horse for travel—slight use of bull boats (coracles) to cross rivers—the tipi or folding conical skin tent—skin clothing trimmed with angular designs in quillwork, and later, beadwork in the fullest development of that art among Indians—hard-soled moccasins—painting on skin and rawhide very common—use of the eagle feather war bonnet (by these tribes only)—no weaving and almost no basketry—plain pottery very long ago, but extinct for generations—well developed tribal organization under chiefs—the Sun Dance the main religious ceremony—many dancing and age-group societies with wide range of costumes.

Many Eastern Plains tribes did considerable corn farming and lived for part of the year in large permanent earth lodges, using only tipis on seasonal buffalo hunts. This type of life appears to have been more widespread before the coming of the horse (1650-1700). The typical way of life outlined above followed the coming of the horse and was at its height for only about half a century, 1825-1875.

10. GREAT LAKES (G). About a dozen tribes belonging to two language families—the Indians of Longfellow’s “Hiawatha”—forest dwellers using the birch bark canoe for travel on lakes and rivers—domed or conical wigwams covered with rush mats or birch bark—game, fish, wild rice and corn the main foods—skin clothing originally, but European cloth introduced centuries ago—soft-soled moccasin—greatest development of silk applique embroidery—pottery once made, but abandoned long ago—some simple plaited basketry—birch bark vessels important and varied—finely carved wood bowls and spoons—no weaving except twined bags and belts using plant or bark fibers, later wool from the Whites, and great development of wide braided sashes—much beadwork and quillwork using curving or floral designs—considerable silver jewelry, mostly round brooches—generally well developed tribal organization under chiefs—main religious activity the Midé Society.

11. NORTHEAST (H). New York, New England and the adjoining parts of Canada—the Six Nations of the Iroquois in New York, and many tribes of the Algonkin language family north and east of them—the Indians of Cooper’s novels, such as “The Last of the Mohicans”.

The Iroquois, hunters and corn farmers living in great forests—the elm bark longhouse as a dwelling for several families—travel in elm bark canoes—much pottery used long ago—quillwork and later beadwork, in delicate lacy designs—deer skin clothing long ago superseded by European cloth—soft-soled moccasins—no weaving, but braiding of wide wool sashes—excellent wood carving of clubs, bowls, spoons, and grotesque masks used in re-

ligious and healing ceremonies, also masks made of braided corn husks—open-work silver brooches based on European forms—greatest development among all Indians of tribal and national government in the League of the Iroquois (1570) a system of representative government under a constitution—great use of wampum (cylindrical purple or white shell beads) for ornaments and treaty belts.

The Algonkin tribes lived much as did those described in Section 10, Great Lakes, though wild rice was not used nor the Midé Society present, but shellfish and maple sugar were important as food—these were the Indians who met the Pilgrims and other early Europeans and gave our language such words as squaw, papoose and wigwam—also the tribes among whom the Dutch introduced wampum (see above) as money—designs in beading, quilling and birch bark based on the double curve, an oval shape with a gap on one side.

12. SOUTHEAST (I). The southern half of the United States from Texas east to the Atlantic. The old life of the southeastern tribes has long disappeared. Most of the Indians were moved to Oklahoma about 1825-30.

Dozens of tribes, some very large, speaking dialects of many language families—in Virginia, Captain John Smith met Pocahontas—villages of cane or rod-and-mud walled huts—extensive development of fishing and corn farming, extensive use of shellfish, with game and wild plant foods as supplements and bear oil an important minor element—dugout canoes for travel on rivers—scanty skin clothing, and use of colorful feather robes; later, adaptations of White clothing with the turban a prominent regional feature—much engraved, and some painted, pottery made, with designs based on the curving scroll—some beadwork using the same scroll designs—wide use of split cane plaited basketry—ornaments of copper, many strings of mussel shell pearls—no true weaving, but considerable plaiting of buffalo wool and plant fibers, and later, braiding of wool sashes, often with interwoven beads—tribal and national organization only second to the Iroquois (Section 11)—harvest dances the main ceremonies, common use of “black drink”, made from *Ilex*, in ceremonies—400 to 600 years ago much influence from Mexico, producing great pyramid mounds for temples and elaborate art in shell, copper and pottery—Sun worship and a definite royal family, unique in the United States, in one tribe (Natchez).

Text by F. H. Douglas. The following references are basic texts or handy compilations:

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