Mesoamerica

• The term *Mesoamerica* – literally, “middle America” in Greek
• The term was coined by Paul Kirchhoff, UCLA.
• Olmecs first complex culture
Similarities in Mesoamerica

• Pictographic and hieroglyphic writing systems.
• The practice of various forms of sacrifice and a complex of shared ideological concepts.
• Ball courts
• The cultures were sedentary.
• Agriculture relied on the cultivation of maize.
• A 260 day ritual calendar
• A number system base on the number 20
Cultural Diversity, 2500 B.C.E.-C.E.1500

• Mesoamerica
  – In Mesoamerica maize-cultivating societies emerge.
  – **Olmecs** first writing system
  – Trade networks and city-states follow: earliest is **Teotihuacan** 100-600 C.E.
  – Teotihuacan declines, Mayan city-states spread through southern Mexico and Central America: calendar, number and writing systems.
  – 1400s, Aztecs
Cultural Diversity, 2500 B.C.E.-C.E.1500

• The Southwest
  – Hohokam and Anasazi cultures emerge.
  – Hohokams build extensive canal systems for irrigation: villages with several hundred people.
  – Anasazis dominate for 600 years: Chaco Canyon.
  – Droughts 12th-13th cultures decline.
Cultural Diversity, 2500 B.C.E.-C.E. 1500

• The Eastern Woodlands
  – 1200 B.C.E. Poverty Point emerges on the Mississippi River, LA (population of 5,000).

• Mississippians
  – Mississippians become first agriculturalists by 700 C.E.
    • Incorporates ideas from Mesoamerica
    • Center Cahokia
    • 13th century food shortage leads to decline.
    • Permanent agriculture spreads the eastern tribes.
Cultural Diversity, 2500 B.C.E.-C.E.1500

• Nonfarming Societies
  – From Alaska to northern California, Native Americans fish for salmon, dry, and store catch year-round; established permanent villages.
  – California Native Americans reside in permanent villages sustain themselves by collecting and grinding acorns.
  – Only the Mohave and Yuma Indians practiced agriculture in California
1492

- population of Western Hemisphere 75 million
- North America 7 to 10 million
- Hundreds of tribes and languages, CA the most diverse
Native American Peoples

• Kinship and Gender
  • Extended family far more important than nuclear family
  • Women farm (except in Southwest)

• Spiritual and Social Values
  • All nature, including humanity, is interrelated suffused with spiritual powers.
  • Native Americans rely on reciprocity: giving gifts, trading goods in exchange for prestige, deference, authority