Political Life: Tribes

- Tribes: semi-sedentary sodality based societies that lack a fulltime government; their economies are based on horticulture and/or pastoralism.
- Sodalities: formal institutions that cross-cut communities and serve to unite geographically scattered populations.

Political Life: Tribes
Sodalities

- They are often based on common age or gender or on kinship.
- Some sodalities are confined to a single village.
- Some sodalities span several villages; these are called pantribal sodalities.
- Pantribal sodalities tend to be found in areas where two or more different cultures come into regular contact (especially when warfare is frequent).

Political Life: Tribes
Leadership

- Leadership is achieved like in band level societies
- Leadership is based on skill or personal strength
Political Life: Tribes

- Leadership is never permanent
- A leader's authority is based on his ability to persuade instead of ordering
- Punishments for transgressions have to be agreed upon by both parties
- Population density is low

Political Life: Tribes

The Shuar

- Some tribes are based on kinship
- Shuar of Ecuador
  - Shuar are based on matrilocal and matrilineal nuclear family households that are part of a larger neighborhood of extended family relatives

Political Life: Tribes

The Shuar

- Shuar leaders are mainly for intragroup warfare
- Leaders lead raiding parties and have great prestige
- Punishments for transgressions are usually punished with some sort of violence
Political Life: Tribes

- Other tribal groups place more emphasis on non-kin relations
- Cheyenne of the Great Plains
  - numbered 3,000 to 3,500 in early-1800's
  - mainly hunted buffalo and herded horses
  - 10 main nomadic 'villages'
  - membership in a village not based on kin
  - village composition was very fluid

Political Life: Tribes
Cheyenne continued

- villages did not have a mythical founder
- naming of villages where just nick-names, e.g. Grayhairs, Hiar-rope, etc.
- Villages did not own a territory, use rights were communal for the whole tribe

Political Life: Tribes
Cheyenne continued

- All 10 villages would come together once a year in the early summer to plan hunting and war activities
- At these gatherings several religious rites would take place, e.g. the Sun Dance, the Arrow of Renewal, or the Animal Dance.
Political Life: Tribes
Cheyenne continued

- The whole tribe was led by the Council of Forty-four and the warrior societies.
- Council of Forty-four was responsible for political and religious leadership.
- The leader of the Council was the Sweet Medicine chief, who was responsible for the Sweet Medicine bundle.

Political Life: Tribes
Cheyenne continued

- Under the Sweet Medicine chief there were four sacred chiefs.
- Under these five were the 39 “ordinary” chiefs.
- Chiefs were expected to be the ideal humans; generous, kindly, even tempered and aloof in daily disputes.

Political Life: Tribes
Cheyenne continued

- Chiefs had to settle disputes, take care of the poor, and be responsible for the sacred rituals that protected the tribe.
- Chiefs were selected from older men who were fierce warriors.
- Chiefs served for 10 years and had to leave their warrior society to be a chief.
Political Life: Tribes
Cheyenne continued

- Most daily political activity occurred in the five warrior societies
- Membership into a society was limited to men
- Members of these societies was voluntary and was not based on the village you came from

Political Life: Tribes
Cheyenne continued

- Each society was lead by a tribal war chief
- These chiefs were responsible for the sacred rites of the society as well as planning military strategy
- In battle men acted as individuals however
- At the summer festival one warrior society would be selected to police the camp

Political Life: Tribes
Final Points

- On the whole tribal societies are still egalitarian in the sense that men all had about the same power
- Political leadership was temporary and ephemeral, e.g. leaders did not stay leaders for all of their lives
- Little economic specialization, each family unit produced what it needed for daily life
Political Life: Tribes
Final Points

- What would cause bands to join together into a tribal based society?
- Warfare is cited as the most common reason
- Note that both groups we discussed have resources to defend; Shuar their gardens, the Cheyenne their buffalo