LAST TIME

• Biophysical regions of Latin America
• Soils
TODAY

• Peopling of the Americas
• Mesoamerican Cultures
• “Classic” period lowland Maya: ~ 300-900 CE
• Lower Central America
• Circum-Caribbean & Antilles
Peopling of the Americas

- Settled 14,500-25,000 BP (before present) - or even earlier
- Proof of origin
  - Genetics - note that “races” is NOT a scientifically defensible concept
  - Mitochondrial DNA evidence => Amerindians most closely related to E Asians (Siberian especially)
  - Most closely related people
Mesoamerican cultures (highland Mexico and Central America) I

- Distinctive cultural traits
  - Ball games
  - Urbanism and pyramids
  - Blood rituals
  - Markets
  - Key food crops: maize, squash, beans, chilies, etc.
  - Sophisticated ag techniques
Mesoamerican cultures II

- **Population** circa 1492: ~19 - 25 million
- **Settlement** - locally dense and urban
  - Basin of Mexico (current site of Mexico City)
    - *Tenochtitlán* ~ 250,000
    - Texcoco ~ 100,000
    - larger than most anything in Europe at the time
Mesoamerican cultures II

• Major and minor state-like civilizations
  Major- Aztec, Tarascan,
  Minor- Tlaxcalan, Zapotec, Mixtec, Huastec, etc.)
Mesoamerican cultures (highland Mexico and Central America) III

- Complex mix of local languages and polities
  - Nahua peoples (including Aztec) speaking Náhuatl dominate
  - Also: Tarascan, Tlaxcalan, Zapotec, Mixtec, Huastec, various Maya, etc.
  - Grand past (Olmec, Teotihuacán, Tula, and “classic” Maya)
Teotihuacán
Palenque (100 BCE – 900 CE)
“Classic” period Maya I

• ca 1700 bp – 1100 bp (AD 300 – 900)
  i.e., ~ 600 – 1200 years before Columbus

• most advanced society in the Americas
  ➢ large rural and urban populations
    in S and C Yucatan and in the Petén of Guatemala
Farming Maya Lands Today in Peten, Guatemala
"Classic" period Maya I

- most advanced society in the Americas
  - large ceremonial centers/cities (Tikal, Copán, Palenque, Caracol, Uaxactún, and many others)
  - advanced astrometry, mathematics, and, very accurate calendar
  - superb arts and architecture
“Classic” period Maya III

• Livelihood: controversial
  ➢ long-fallow swidden?
  ➢ large rural densities
  ➢ complex of sophisticated agricultures
“Classic” period Maya III

• Collapse ~ 900 CE why?
Stella at Copán with glyphic writing
at Copán
Unexcavated mound at Copán
Lower Central America

- **Area**: coastal lowlands area NE Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama
- **Population and settlement**: small scale polities total population probably not more than 3.5m
Circum-Caribbean & Antilles I

- **Societies** -- Taíno (Arawak), Caribs, Ciboney - all present at time of Columbus; ethnography and history is not well known; linguistic relatives in Amazonia
Circum-Caribbean & Antilles I

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Taino or Arawak

Carib

Ciboney
Circum-Caribbean & Antilles II

• **Population** - uncertainty and controversy about pre-Columbian population - range is from 200,000 to 8-10 million! Best guess is about 3 million for all Caribbean
Circum-Caribbean & Antilles III

- **Livelihood** - rich environment with multiple food sources including seas and shores (thus much from turtles, fish and shellfish)

  - Main agricultural system (especially for Taíno), *conuco* agriculture
Advantages of root crop agriculture:
- Increased caloric volume
- Less demand on soils
- Roots stored in ground
- Manioc - drought/pest resistance

However, very low protein in root crops
Chichimec (arid N. Mexico)

Mesoamerica
Classic Maya

Olmec

Tenochtitlán, Texcoco, Teotihuacán, & Tula