

# Northwest Coastal Peoples

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## Family

- In Northwest Coast culture, there were specific roles for both the men and women.
- Men were responsible for all the hunting and fishing.
- Men also did all the building (longhouses) and carving (canoes, totem poles).
- Women stayed near the home, doing work on land.
- The women were responsible for all of the chores related to keeping the home: they cleaned, cooked, and looked after the children.
- Women dug for clams and shellfish, and collected berries from nearby forests.
- The women also pounded and softened cedar bark for weaving and making clothes.
- Marriages were always between people from different clans. When a man decided to marry a woman, he paid her father an agreed amount before the wedding.
- After the birth of the couple's first child (born into the mother's clan), the wife's clan paid her husband an amount equal to the initial wedding payment. After the payment, then the marriage was annulled and the woman could chose to stay with her husband or leave him.



*Men did all the carving*

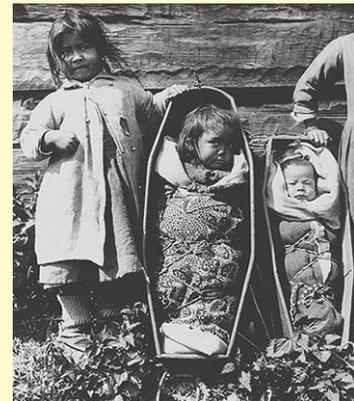


*Haida woman weaving*



*Kwakwak'wakw wedding party*

## *Tsimshian children*



## Social Structure / Leadership

- The Northwest Coast people never developed a democracy. Instead, their society was ruled by wealth. The wealthiest clan had the most power.
- Their society included different classes: nobles, commoners, and slaves (acquired through War or purchase).
- Northwest Coast groups were divided into basic social units: extended families with a common ancestor. In these family groups, the oldest and highest ranking individual (closest link to the common ancestor) was named the Chief of the family. Then within each family, a person's rank was determined by their relationship with the Chief.
- Chiefs were responsible for distributing wealth amongst the people. Those who had a higher social status received more, all the way down to the lowest ranked individual.
- Groups of families lived together, forming larger villages. Within each village, families were also ranked. The Chief of the most powerful family also became the village Chief.
- Village Chief displayed his family's crest on the village totem poles.
- All of the groups of Northwest Coast people are divided into two or more family 'clans'. The Tlingit and Haida, for example, had two clans: the Raven and the Eagle clans, while the Tsimshian had four: the Raven, Wolf, Eagle, and Killer Whale.
- Clan membership was always inherited through the mother's side of the family.
- A person always married outside of their own clan.
- Membership was proclaimed through: crests, totem poles, canoes, cedar boxes, masks.
- One thing that set the Northwest Coast people apart from other First Peoples groups was their recognized ownership of land and property. Families claimed sites for fishing and gathering, and owned land. The amount of property that a family owned further contributed to their amassed wealth.

*Tsimshian high class individuals*





*Northwest Coast Chief*



*Raven clan totem*



*Massett, Haida village*



*Crest of Haida Raven clan*