Early American Political Structures

Ancient [Maya](http://www.ancient.eu/Maya/) **government** was formed on the basis that rulers were thought to have been god-like, which to some might suggest one unified state. However, the scholars believe that each major Maya [city](http://www.ancient.eu/city/) remained its own independent entity with its own unique struggles for political power. The Maya belief in god-like rulers also made it important to keep the line of power in the family, which would occasionally include a woman ruler.

The rulers of the various Maya city-states were thought to be a kind of human-god hybrid. Men weren’t the only people who were allowed to rule. On occasion, women would rule when the king wasn’t yet of age, when a king was away at [war](http://www.ancient.eu/war/), or if a king was unavailable for some other reason. When a new King took power they would have a symbol of themselves carved on the Sacred Round. The Sacred Round was a 260 day calendar which consisted of 13 20-day months. Each day of the month was represented by a specific god; Ahau day was specifically for kingly rituals. Once a king had achieved the honor of being on the Sacred Round, the depiction became an actual personification of the king and time. Throughout the Maya era, the Maya remained in separate city-states and did not unite as one [empire](http://www.ancient.eu/empire/).

The **Aztec government** was similar to a monarchy where an Emperor or King was the primary ruler. They called their ruler the Huey Tlatoani. The Huey Tlatoani was the ultimate power in the land. They felt that he was appointed by the gods and had the divine right to rule. He decided when to go to war and what tribute the lands he ruled would pay the Aztecs.   
  
When an emperor died, the new emperor was chosen by a group of high ranking nobles. Usually the new emperor was a relative of the previous emperor, but it wasn't always his son.

The second in command of the Aztec government was the Cihuacoatl who was in charge of running the government on a day to day basis. He had thousands of officials and civil servants who worked under him and kept the government and the empire running smoothly.

There was also the Council of Four. These were powerful men and generals of the army who were first in line to become the next emperor. They gave advice to the emperor and it was important that he had their agreement in major decisions.

The Aztecs had a fairly sophisticated code of law. There were numerous laws including laws against stealing, murder, drunkenness, and property damage. A system of courts and judges determined guilt and punishments. They had different levels of courts all the way up to a supreme court. Citizens could appeal rulings to a higher court if they did not agree with the judge. One interesting part of the law was the "one time forgiveness law". Under this law, a citizen could confess a crime to a priest and they would be forgiven. This only worked if they confessed the crime prior to being caught. It also could only be used once.

The center of the Aztec government was the capital city of Tenochtitlan. This was where the emperor as well as the majority of the nobles lived. At its peak under Montezuma II, Tenochtitlan is thought to have had a population of 200,000 people.

The **Incan government** was ruled by an emperor or king of the called the Sapa Inca, which means "sole ruler". He was the most powerful person in the land and everyone else reported to the Sapa Inca. His principal wife, the queen, was called the coya. Below the Sapa Inca were several officers who helped to rule the empire. High ranking officials were often relatives of the emperor and were always part of the upper class. The next king was chosen from the previous kings family by the highest ranking officials.

The Empire was divided up into quarters called "suyu". At the center of the four quarters was the capital city of Cuzco. Each suyu was then further divided into provinces called "wamani". The smallest, and maybe the most important, division of government was the ayllu. The ayllu was made up of a number of families and often acted like a large family. The ayllu was responsible for paying taxes. Also, land was assigned by the government to each ayllu based on the number of people in the group.   
  
In order to run the government, the Inca needed food and resources which they acquired through taxes. Each ayllu was responsible for paying taxes to the government. The Inca had tax inspectors that watched over the people to make sure that they paid all their taxes.   
  
There were two main taxes that the people had to pay. The first tax was a portion of the ayllu's crops. The crops were divided up three ways with the first third going to the government, the second third to the priests, and the final third was for the people.   
  
The second type of tax was called the mit'a. The mit'a was a labor tax that each man between the ages of 16 and 60 had to pay by working for the government for a portion of the year. They worked various jobs such as laborers on government buildings and roads, mining for gold, or even as warriors in the army.   
  
The laws were made by the Sapa Inca and passed down to the people through the tax collectors. Murder, stealing, cheating on taxes, and cursing the gods was all against the law. Punishments were harsh, for example people were often executed for cursing the gods. If they were caught stealing, they would have their hands cut off.