

# APUSH UNIT 1 REVIEW GUIDE (1491–1607)

For Students Preparing for the AP® United States History Exam



## 4–6%

of the APUSH exam

The first unit of the AP® United States History (APUSH) course begins with pre-Columbian Native Americans and focuses on the early (pre-English) exploration and colonization of the Americas.

This unit may be assessed on the multiple choice section, LEQ #1, and SAQ #3 – NOT on the DBQ.

## NATIVE AMERICAN SOCIETIES BEFORE EUROPEAN CONTACT



Native American societies in North America varied based on the climate of each region, as these societies lived on the resources supplied to them by their natural environments.

The history of the United States began thousands of years before European contact. This period before European contact is often referred to as **1491** – a symbolic date used because of the scarcity of written records. Before European contact, Native American societies across North America adapted their lifestyles to their environments. The cultivation of **maize** (corn) began in the Southwest region and expanded across North America. In the Southwest, which had very little rainfall, Native Americans used irrigation techniques to bring water to their fields. In the Great Plains, most Natives lived as migratory hunters following the plentiful herds of **bison** that fed on the region's lush grasslands. Settled agriculture was a common practice in the Northeast and Southeast regions. Native Americans in these regions tended to live in permanent settlements, growing crops such as corn, squash, and beans to supplement hunting and gathering. In California and the Northwest Coast, Native tribes supplemented their diets with fish and sea animals.

## EARLY EUROPEAN EXPLORATION OF THE AMERICAS

In the 1400s, European nations along the Atlantic Coast, such as Spain, France, and England, competed with each other for land and resources. After completing the *Reconquista* (the Christian reconquest of Muslim-held lands) in Spain, **Ferdinand and Isabella** commissioned **Christopher Columbus** to sail west and establish a direct trade relationship with Asia that would bring new wealth to Spain and new converts to the Christian religion. In 1492, Columbus made landfall in the Americas, mistakenly believing that he had reached the “Indies,” and claimed the new lands for the Spanish crown. After it was confirmed in the early 1500s that Columbus had discovered new lands, Spanish, French, and English monarchs financed voyages of exploration to establish land claims in the Americas.

## THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE

The **Columbian Exchange** is a term that scholars use to describe the exchange of crops, animals, diseases, ideas, technologies, and people that created a permanent trade relationship between the **Old World** (Europe, Africa, and Asia) and the **New World** (the Americas).

### NEW WORLD ORIGINS

Maize (Corn)  
Potatoes  
Tomatoes  
Tobacco  
Chocolate

### OLD WORLD ORIGINS

Livestock  
Horses  
Sugar  
Christianity  
Diseases



New World foods like turkey, pumpkins, and potatoes are key parts of traditional Thanksgiving dinners.

The Columbian Exchange also played a major role in shifting the European economy from **feudalism** (an agriculture-based economy where wealth was measured by land ownership) to **capitalism** (an economy based on trade and exchanging money).

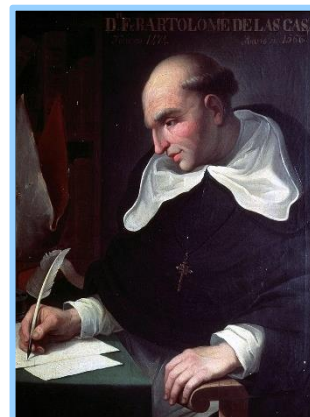
## SPANISH EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST

The Spanish were the first Europeans to successfully colonize the Americas. **Conquistadors** (conquerors) sailed to the Americas with armies to build a Spanish empire in the New World. The most famous of these conquistadors was **Hernán Cortés**, who conquered the **Aztec Empire** in present-day Mexico. Although equipped with superior technologies, such as firearms, horses, and steel swords, the success of the Spanish conquest was also aided by a number of deadly diseases, such as **smallpox**, which wiped out a significant portion (up to 90 percent) of the Native population. The horses introduced by the Spanish made their way to the Great Plains, where American Indians began using them in their bison hunts.

## LABOR, SLAVERY, AND CASTE IN THE SPANISH COLONIES

The Spanish sought to turn their newly claimed lands in the Americas into profitable enterprises. They used the **encomienda** system to extract labor from Natives. The terms of the *encomienda* required local tribes to provide labor each year mining precious metals and working on **plantations** (large farms where cash crops are grown). The terms of this labor system were especially harsh and unfair to the Natives, prompting **Bartolomé de las Casas**, an early Spanish colonist who witnessed many of its abuses, to enter the priesthood and become an advocate for Native Americans. He published *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, detailing many of the abuses in order to encourage the Spanish monarchy to reform the system. In 1542, the *encomienda* was abolished and replaced with a less harsh labor system. Catholic priests, such as de las Casas, journeyed to the New World primarily to spread their religion among the Natives. The Spanish were very successful in spreading Catholicism in Latin America, where it was often blended with indigenous practices.

In the mid-1500s, the Spanish began importing enslaved Africans to the Americas to labor in mines and plantations. In the Spanish colonies, Africans, Natives, and Spanish colonists often intermarried, creating blended ethnicities and cultures. The Spanish developed a **caste system** that classified the inhabitants of the Spanish colonies based on race. Historians debate as to the extent that the Spanish used this system to create a racial hierarchy.



Bartolomé de las Casas was a Catholic priest who advocated on behalf of Native Americans who suffered under the *encomienda* system in the Spanish colonies.

### UNIT TIMELINE

- **1491** This symbolic date applies to any point before European contact with the Americas.
- **1492** Columbus's first voyage establishes a permanent exchange between the Old and New Worlds.
- **1521** Spanish conquistadors led by Hernán Cortés conquer the Aztecs.
- **1542** Bartolomé de las Casas reports to the Spanish government on the abuses of the *encomienda* system.
- **1565** The Spanish establish the first permanent settlement in the present-day U.S. at St. Augustine, Florida.
- **1585** Sir Walter Raleigh establishes the ill-fated "Lost Colony" at Roanoke.
- **1588** The English Royal Navy defeats the Spanish Armada.
- **1607** The English establish the Jamestown colony.

### CULTURAL INTERACTIONS: EUROPEANS, NATIVES, AND AFRICANS

The contact between European colonists and Native Americans resulted in many misunderstandings. While European men spent their days raising livestock and plowing fields, Native American men hunted for wild game while women planted and harvested crops. Since Europeans considered hunting to be a leisure sport, this led European colonists to believe that Native American men were lazy. Europeans had developed a system of **private property** (individual ownership of land and resources), while Native American customs viewed land as being primarily owned by the tribe. For Native Americans, trade was a key part in cementing bonds between two groups of people, while Europeans traded goods primarily for profit.

Despite misunderstandings, Europeans and Native Americans were parties to a mutually beneficial exchange of goods and cultures. Europeans grew corn and smoked tobacco, and Native Americans used metal tools for everyday tasks.

European views of cultural and racial superiority were often used to justify the forced labor of Native Americans and enslaved Africans. **Sepúlveda**, a Spanish scholar, justified the use of Native American labor by describing Natives as barbarians who needed to be civilized by Christian Europeans. He also justified forced religious conversions on the basis that Native American religious beliefs were false.

### EARLY ENGLISH EFFORTS TO COLONIZE THE AMERICAS



Sir Walter Raleigh stands for a portrait with his son (circa 1602)

While the Spanish built a large empire in the Americas in the 1500s, the English struggled with internal religious struggles and wars with Spain. When King Henry VIII left the Catholic Church and started the **Church of England**, it made an enemy of Spain, a nation committed to the Catholic Church. **Sir Walter Raleigh**, an English gentleman who had made some money raiding Spanish shipping, resolved to start an English colony in North America. In the 1580s, Raleigh established the **Roanoke Colony**, but the colony failed because the English were unable to resupply it in the early years of the Anglo-Spanish War. The fate of the "Lost Colony" remains a mystery to this day.

In 1588, the English defeated the **Spanish Armada**, which marked the beginning of England's rise as a naval power. After making peace with Spain, the English started their first permanent settlement at **Jamestown** in 1607.