

AP US History Notes: Period 1 (1491-1607 C.E.)

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Five Things to Know about Period 1:

1. Before the Europeans arrived in the Americas, there were many American Indian tribes scattered across North and South America. These tribes had complex societies with unique religious, political, and cultural beliefs.
2. European countries sought to conquer the New World in order to gain wealth and military status, and to spread the ideas of Christianity. European exploration often resulted in negative consequences for native populations, such as widespread epidemics and forced labor systems like the Spanish encomienda system.
3. Relationships between the Europeans and American Indians were often fraught with misunderstandings and conflict regarding not only land and resources but also differing cultural beliefs.
4. The Columbian Exchange resulted in tremendous social, cultural, and political change for both the Europeans and the American Indians. New food crops and new sources of mineral wealth brought about extensive demographic, economic, and social change in Europe. The introduction of new food crops and animals also impacted the Americas.
5. As native populations dwindled, Europeans turned to Africa as a new source of forced labor, giving rise to the early plantation system and widespread system of slavery in the Americas.

Key Topics--Period 1 (1491-1607 C.E.)

Remember that the AP US History exam tests you on the depth of your knowledge, not just your ability to recall facts. While we have provided brief definitions here, you will need to know these terms in even more depth for the AP US History exam, including how terms connect to broader historical themes and understandings.

Native Populations Before European Arrival

- **Three Sisters:** Three staple crops (corn, beans, and squash) favored by many native tribes in North America. Their collective name references their interdependence: the cornstalks provided a structure for the beans to grow up, and the squash held moisture in the soil for all three.

- **Great League of Peace:** Also called the Haudenosaunee. A political confederation of five (later six) Iroquois tribes, which sought to coordinate collective action. Each tribe maintained its own political system and religious beliefs. Believed to have formed around 1450.

The Columbian Exchange

- **Christopher Columbus:** Italian explorer and colonizer. While attempting to prove a westward sea route for East Asian trade existed, he stumbled across the Bahamas in October 1492. The first European to visit the islands of Hispaniola and Cuba.
- **Amerigo Vespucci:** Italian explorer and cartographer. His 1499–1502 trip along the South American coast determined that the New World was a distinct continent from Asia.
- **Columbian Exchange:** The transmission and interchange of plants, animals, diseases, cultures, human populations (including slaves), and technologies between the New World and the Old World. Greatly benefited Europe and Asia while simultaneously bringing catastrophe to American Indian populations and cultures.

European Expansion

- **Jacques Cartier:** French explorer. Cultivated a fur trade with American Indians. Dubbed the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and its surroundings as “the Country of Canadas,” a term derived from the St. Lawrence Iroquoian word for village/settlement.
- **Samuel de Champlain:** French explorer. Known as the “The Father of New France.” Founded Quebec in 1608. Made the first accurate maps of what is modern-day Eastern Canada.
- **Treaty of Tordesillas:** Signed between Spain and Portugal in 1494, it decided how Christopher Columbus’s discoveries of the New World would be divided. It established the zone of Portuguese influence in what would become Brazil.
- **Spanish Requirement of 1513:** Spain asserted its divine right to conquer the New World, stating that its main concern was to rescue the natives from hedonism.
- **Vasco Nuñez de Balboa:** Spanish explorer and conquistador. In 1513, he led the first overland expedition by Europeans to reach the Pacific, specifically crossing the Isthmus of Panama.

- **Juan Ponce de León:** Spanish explorer and conquistador. Led the first European expedition to Florida in 1513, an area which he named. Commonly said to have been hunting for the Fountain of Youth, although that motivation is considered a myth.
- **Ferdinand Magellan:** Portuguese explorer. From 1519 to 1522, he led a Spanish expedition that was the first to circumnavigate the Earth. Magellan died in battle in the Philippines in 1521, and command was transferred to Juan Sebastián Elcano.
- **Hernán Cortés:** A Spanish conquistador whose expedition conquered the Aztec Empire and brought large swaths of modern-day Mexico under Spanish authority. Famous for intentionally destroying his own ships in order to force his men not to abandon their campaign.
- **Conquistadores:** Generalized term for soldiers and explorers of the Spanish and Portuguese Empires. Colonized what became Latin America in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.
- **Encomienda:** A legal system established by the Spanish crown. Conquistadores or other officials were given a set number of American Indians from whom they would extract tribute while instructing in the Roman Catholic faith. In practice, it was a form of slavery. Contrast with: repartimiento.
- **Repartimiento:** Replaced the encomienda system. American Indians living in native villages were legally free. This system legally rendered indigenous slavery nonexistent; natives were allowed land, received pay for labor, and could not be bought and sold. However, they were still abused by Spanish authorities and working conditions could still be brutal.
- **Juan de Oñate:** A conquistador born in New Spain (modern-day Mexico). Established the first permanent colonial settlement in what is the modern-day American Southwest. Infamous for the 1599 Acoma Massacre, which saw over 800 American Indians killed. Later recalled to Spain and convicted for cruelty toward natives and colonists alike.
- **Sir Walter Raleigh:** English polymath. One of the most important figures of the Elizabethan era. Granted permission by Queen Elizabeth I to explore and colonize the New World in exchange for one-fifth of all the gold and silver this venture obtained. Founded Roanoke.
- **Roanoke:** Nicknamed “the Lost Colony.” First attempted English colony in the New World. Founded in 1585 by Sir Walter Raleigh on an island off the modern-day North Carolina coast. By 1590, its inhabitants had vanished for reasons that still remain unknown.
- **Virginia Company:** The collective name for two joint stock companies (one of London, the other of Plymouth) that had identical charters but different (if

overlapping) territorial claims. Chartered in 1606 by King James I in order to settle the North American eastern coastline.