

Period 1: 1491-1607

AP US History ■ Period 1

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What we will cover

- 1 Native American Societies Before Contact
- 2 Why Europeans Crossed the Atlantic
- 3 The Columbian Exchange
- 4 Labour, Slavery, and Caste in Spanish America
- 5 Worldviews in Conflict
- 6 Thinking Like a Historian in Period 1



Native American Societies Before Contact

Period 1 runs from 1491 to 1607 – from the eve of European contact to the founding of Jamestown. It exists to explain what the Americas were like *before* Europeans arrived, and what happened when three worlds met.

- In the **Southwest**, the spread of **maize** cultivation northward from present-day Mexico supported permanent settlement, **advanced irrigation**, and greater social complexity.
- In the **Great Basin** and the western **Great Plains**, dry conditions produced largely **mobile lifestyles**.
- In the **Northeast**, the **Mississippi River Valley**, and along the **Atlantic seaboard**, societies developed **mixed agricultural and hunter-gatherer economies**, which favoured permanent villages.
- In the **Northwest** and present-day **California**, abundant ocean resources allowed settled communities without farming.

One mechanism, four different inputs

Environment shapes society: maize irrigation in the Southwest, mobility in the Great Basin, mixed economies in the Northeast, ocean resources in the Northwest.

One mechanism, four different inputs, in detail

REGION	ENVIRONMENT	WHAT IT PRODUCED
Southwest	maize spreads north from Mexico	permanent settlement, advanced irrigation
Great Basin & western Plains	dry conditions	largely mobile lifestyles
Northeast, Mississippi Valley, Atlantic seaboard	mixed farming and hunting-gathering	permanent villages
Northwest & California	abundant ocean resources	settled communities WITHOUT farming

The CED's four regional groupings: one mechanism - environment shapes society
- with different inputs

Monks Mound at Cahokia



Monks Mound at Cahokia
- the scale a Mississippian settlement reached without draught animals or the wheel

Cliff Palace, Mesa Verde



Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde
- permanent settlement
where maize agriculture
could support it



Why Europeans Crossed the Atlantic

European exploration was driven by a search for **new sources of wealth** , expanded trade routes, and the spread of **Christianity** . Spain and Portugal moved first, and Spain's American empire followed.

Two changes made the voyages possible: improvements in **maritime technology** , and more organised methods of financing trade, especially the **joint-stock company** , which spread the risk of a voyage across many investors.



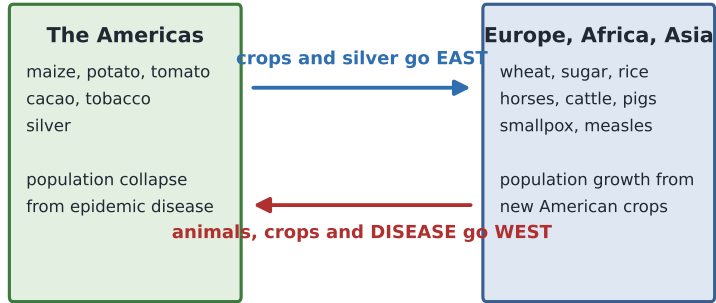
Both directions, and very different consequences on each side

Moving **east** to Europe: American crops – **maize** and the **potato** – raised nutrition and helped drive **European population growth**, while American **silver** reshaped global trade.

Moving **west** to the Americas: European animals, European crops, and – decisively – **epidemic disease**, reaching populations with no prior exposure.

Keep the exchange **two-directional**. Europe gained calories and bullion; the Americas suffered a **demographic collapse** that accompanied and enabled the conquest. An answer that describes only what Europe gained misses half the concept.

Both directions, and very different consequences on, in detail



disease → demographic collapse → labour shortage → encomienda → Atlantic slave trade

the causal chain Period 1 exists to explain

Crops and precious metals move east; animals, crops and disease move west – with very different consequences on each side.

The Columbian Exchange

The **Columbian Exchange** is the transfer of plants, animals, people, and diseases between the Americas and the rest of the world. It is the single most important development of Period 1, because almost everything else follows from it.

American **silver** reshaped global trade.

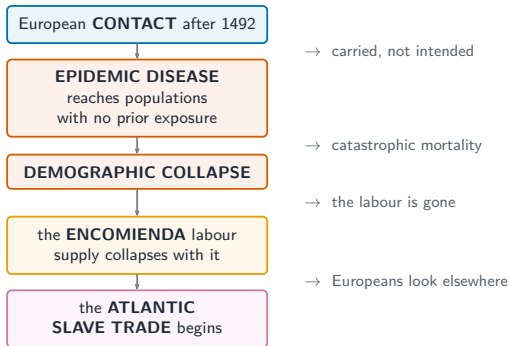
The chain the marks are given for

The clearest causal chain in the whole course, and the one to memorise:

contact → epidemic disease → demographic collapse
→ the **encomienda** labour supply fails → the **Atlantic slave trade** begins

Causation is marked on the **links**, not the endpoints – name the mechanism that moves each step to the next: carried, not intended; catastrophic mortality; the labour is gone; Europeans look elsewhere.

The chain the marks are given for, in detail



The Columbian Exchange as a causal chain: the marks are for the **links** between the steps, not the steps themselves.

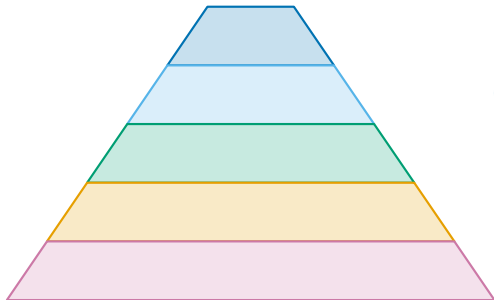


Labour, Slavery, and Caste in Spanish America

Spain built an economy that needed labour it did not have.

When that labour collapsed with the population, Europeans turned elsewhere: traders **partnered with some West African groups** who already practised slavery to forcibly extract enslaved people, beginning the **Atlantic slave trade**.

A hierarchy fixed by ancestry, and by law



PENINSULARES — born in Spain

CRIOLLOS — Spanish parents, born in the Americas

MESTIZOS & MULATTOES — mixed ancestry

NATIVE AMERICANS — the *encomienda* labour force

ENSLAVED AFRICANS — no rights at all

Your place was fixed by **ancestry**, not by wealth or achievement – and it was written into **law**, which is what makes it a caste system rather than a class system



Worldviews in Conflict

Europeans and Native Americans held **divergent worldviews** on religion, gender roles, family, land use, and power. Two ideas about land were especially incompatible: European **private property** against Native American systems of shared use.

As European demands on land and labour grew, Native peoples **resisted** – through accommodation, alliance, trade, and armed conflict.

What contact did to Europe itself

the argument at home

extended contact with Native Americans and Africans fostered a **debate over the nature of these peoples** – and over how they should be treated

mutual misunderstanding

each side read the other's practices through its own categories, over land, religion and authority

epidemic disease

the largest demographic consequence: Native populations fell by up to 90% in some regions

the encomienda system

Spanish forced labour, and the argument it provoked in Spain itself

mining and the potato

American silver financed European states; American crops drove **European population growth**

The Columbian Exchange runs **both ways**. An answer that describes only what Europe did to the Americas has told half the story the CED asks for.



Thinking Like a Historian in Period 1

Every AP question about Period 1 is really a question about **causation** or **context** .

- **Contextualization** means placing a development in the broader circumstances that produced it. Period 1 supplies the context for almost every later question about colonisation.
- **Causation** asks what produced a change and what followed from it. The Columbian Exchange is the clearest chain in the whole course: disease caused demographic collapse, which caused a labour shortage, which drove the Atlantic slave trade.

Worked example – earning the contextualization point

2023 long essay: *“Evaluate the extent to which the growth of transatlantic trade changed British North American colonial society.”*

- **Scoring:** *“Transatlantic trade grew out of the Columbian Exchange begun after 1492, which linked the Americas, Europe and West Africa in a single Atlantic system and established the plantation agriculture and coerced labour that later colonial trade depended on.”*
- Period 1 is not the answer – it is the **context** the answer opens with.

The context sentence must connect *to the prompt*, not merely precede it in time. That connection is the marked part.

Exam tips

- Period 1 is short but supplies **context** for later questions. Learn it as the origin of the Atlantic system, not as a list of dates.
- The strongest causal chain to memorise: **disease → demographic collapse → labour shortage → encomienda → Atlantic slave trade**.
- Name specific regions when describing Native societies. "Native Americans farmed" is too general; the Southwest, Great Basin, Northeast, and Northwest each had a distinct adaptation.

Exam tips, continued

- Keep the **Columbian Exchange** two-directional. Answers that only describe what Europe gained miss half the concept.
- **Encomienda** is a labour system, not a land grant, and the Spanish **caste system** is a social hierarchy defined by ancestry.
- For any prompt, identify the **task verb** first: describe, explain, compare, or evaluate the extent. Each earns points differently.



Period 1 – key takeaways

1

Native societies

name the region: maize, mobility,
mixed, ocean

2

Causal chain

disease → collapse → labour
shortage → slave trade

3

Columbian Exchange

two directions – Europe *and* the
Americas

4

Labour

encomienda is labour, not land;
caste is ancestry

Check yourself

- 1 Why is “Native Americans farmed” too weak?
- 2 Write the Period 1 labour chain in four steps.
- 3 What did the Americas send east besides crops?
- 4 Is encomienda a land grant?

Answers: name the region ▪ disease → collapse → shortage → Atlantic slave trade ▪ silver ▪
no – a labour system