The Simple AP® US History Unit 1 Cheat Sheet

1.1 Contextualizing Period 1 (1491–1607)

The Big Story

Before 1492: many different Native societies, each adapted to its own environment & resources.
After 1492: European contact → disease, conquest, new trade, new labor systems.
Why it matters: sets up later fights over land, labor and race in every period of U.S. history.
Europe in 1491: Renaissance, new kingdoms, Ottomans block trade east → look west.

Timeline Anchors

Year	Event
1492	Columbus sails
1494	Treaty of Tordesillas
1519–21	Cortés vs. Aztecs
1532–33	Pizarro vs. Incas
1542	Spain's New Laws
1550–51	Valladolid debate
1565	St. Augustine (FL)
1607	Jamestown → Period 2

Themes Most Tested

GEO (environment), **MIG** (migration), **WXT** (work & trade), **SOC** (social hierarchy) themes.
Skills: causation, comparison, change over time (before vs. after 1492 contact w/ Europeans).

✓ Contextualization = the bigger picture before your topic, in 2–3 full sentences.

⚠ Only 4–6% of the exam, but its ideas (labor, race, land) return in Periods 2–3 & later.

1.2 Native Societies: The West

Maize Spreads North

Maize (corn) spread from Mexico → Southwest → extra food → villages, irrigation, more people.
Key idea: environment & resources decided if a society moved or stayed put (farmed or foraged).
Trade: networks linked regions (shells, turquoise, obsidian) long before Europeans arrived.

Regions Compared

Region	Food	Society
Southwest	Maize	Pueblo towns
Great Basin	Hunt/gather	Mobile bands
Plains	Bison	Mostly mobile
Pacific NW	Salmon	Settled
California	Acorns, fish	Small groups

Key Examples

Ancestral Puebloans: multistory adobe towns, cliff homes (Mesa Verde, Chaco Canyon).
Hohokam: irrigation canals in the Arizona desert.
Great Basin (dry land): small family bands moved w/ the seasons to gather seeds & hunt game.
Plains: bison for food, hides, tools. No horses yet.
California: many small groups; acorns, fish, game.
Pacific NW: rich ocean → permanent villages w/o farming; **potlatch** (gift feast shows status).

⚠ No horses on the Plains in 1491. They arrived later from the Spanish (1600s–1700s).

✓ Settled ≠ farming: the Pacific NW stayed put b/c of abundant salmon, not crops or farming.

1.2 Native Societies: The East

Mississippian Culture

Mississippians: maize farmers; big towns w/ earthen **mounds**; ruled by chiefs.
Cahokia (near St. Louis): largest town north of Mexico, ~10,000+ people; declined before 1400.
Social ranks: chiefs and priests at top; mounds held temples & elite burials; ranked society.

Northeast & Atlantic Coast

Mixed economy: farming + hunting + fishing + gathering → lasting, permanent villages.
Three Sisters: maize, beans, squash grown together in 1 field; beans enrich the soil.
Iroquois Confederacy: 5 nations allied for peace (Great Law of Peace); lived in **longhouses**.
Matrilineal: family traced through mother; women farmed and clan mothers chose the chiefs.
Algonquian peoples: coastal & Great Lakes villages, farming + fishing, wide trade ties.
Diplomacy: alliances & rivalries between Native nations shaped later ties w/ European newcomers.

East vs. West

	East	West
Food	Farm + hunt	Varies
Homes	Villages	Mixed
Politics	Confederacies	Bands

⚠ Don't call all Native peoples "nomadic." They were very diverse in how they lived.

✓ Natives shared land use; Europeans owned land. This clash returns in every period.

1.3 European Exploration

Why Explore? (God, Gold, Glory)

Gold: all-sea route to Asian spices, silk & profit.
God: spread Catholicism to new peoples.
Glory: rival kingdoms competed for power.
Reconquista: Spain drives out Muslims (1492) → eager for new wealth & converts.
Ottomans control land routes east (1453) → Europe looks for an all-sea route.

How? (Technology)

Navigation: caravel (fast ship), compass, astrolabe, better maps & sea charts (portolans).
Strong monarchs: Ferdinand & Isabella unite Spain (1469), fund Columbus' voyage.

Who Went Where

Power	Key voyages
Portugal	Dias, da Gama
Spain	Columbus 1492
England	Cabot 1497
France	Cartier 1534

Portugal: coastal West African trade posts; Atlantic island **sugar plantations** w/ enslaved Africans (model for the Americas).
Treaty of Tordesillas (1494): Spain gets west, Portugal gets east (→ Brazil); Pope backs it.
England & France: late starters; seek a Northwest Passage; little settlement before 1600.
Spain in N. America: St. Augustine (1565).

⚠ Columbus thought he reached Asia. He wasn't proving Earth was round; experts knew that.

1.4 Columbian Exchange

What Moved

Columbian Exchange: swap of plants, animals, germs & people between hemispheres after 1492.

Americas → Europe	Europe → Americas
Maize, potatoes	Horses, cattle, pigs
Tomatoes, cacao	Wheat, sugarcane
Tobacco, beans	Smallpox, measles
Silver, gold	Enslaved Africans

Effects on the Americas

Disease: no immunity → up to ~90% died in some areas → huge labor shortage for the Spanish.
Timing: smallpox hit Aztecs in 1520.
Labor shortage → Europeans bring in enslaved Africans to the Americas by force.
Animals: livestock ruined Native crops; **horses** later changed Plains life (hunting).
Cash crops: sugar → plantations w/ forced labor.

Effects on Europe

New foods (maize, potatoes, tomatoes) → better diets → European population ↑ over time.
Silver → Spain rich → inflation (price revolution), funds wars; trade shifts to the Atlantic.
Economic shift: power moves to Atlantic nations.
Africa: slave trade drains people, fuels wars.

⚠ Disease, not guns, killed the most Native people, often before any direct contact.

✓ SAQ chain: item (smallpox) → effect (mass deaths) → later result (more African slavery).

1.4 Spanish Conquest & Empire

Conquistadors

Hernán Cortés (1519–21): conquers the **Aztec** capital Tenochtitlán w/ Native allies.
Tenochtitlán: island city bigger than any in Spain.
Native allies: Tlaxcalans and others hated Aztec rule & tribute and joined Cortés' forces.
La Malinche: Native woman who translated & advised Cortés; key to talks w/ Aztecs.
Francisco Pizarro (1532–33): conquers the **Inca**, weakened by smallpox & civil war.

Why So Few Won

Factor	Impact
Disease	Killed armies
Native allies	1000s joined Spain
Divisions	Rivals, civil war
Tech	Steel, guns, horses

Running the Empire

Crown control: viceroys rule New Spain, Peru.
Missions: priests convert Natives, often w/ forced labor, harsh discipline & bans on Native rituals.
Mercantilism: colonies exist to make the home country rich (silver shipped → Spain).
Northern frontier: Spain pushes into Florida and New Mexico (Oñate, 1598; Acoma massacre).
Black Legend: English, Dutch spread stories of uniquely cruel Spanish rule (propaganda).

⚠ Germs and allies mattered as much as guns.

✓ Spain: conquer, convert, take wealth. Compare to France and England in Period 2.

1.5 Labor, Slavery & Caste

Labor Systems

System	What it was
Encomienda	Natives owe labor
Mita	Silver mine draft
Hacienda	Big estates, debt
Slavery	Africans as property

Encomienda: colonists get Native labor in return for converting them. Really: abuse.
New Laws (1542): Crown limits encomienda after Las Casas' protests; colonists resist.

Atlantic Slave Trade

Why Africans: Native deaths → planters need sugar workers in the Caribbean & Brazil.
Middle Passage: deadly ocean crossing. Most went to Brazil & the Caribbean, not N. America.
Scale: ~12.5 million Africans shipped (1500s to 1860s); only ~3–4% to mainland N. America.

Casta System

Caste: rank by birthplace + race. Top: **peninsulares** (born in Spain), then **criollos**.
Mixed groups: **mestizos** (Spanish + Native), **mulattoes** (Spanish + African).
Bottom: Natives and enslaved Africans.

⚠ Spain's system had many ranks. Later English colonies drew a strict Black/white line.

✓ Link labor to race: need for workers → racist ideas used to justify slavery (SOC theme).

1.6–1.7 Cultural Interactions & Causation

European Debates

Bartolomé de Las Casas: priest who exposed Spanish abuse of Natives (1542).
Valladolid debate (1550–51): Las Casas (Natives fully human) vs. **Sepúlveda** (force OK).
Racial ideas: Europeans called Natives "uncivilized" to justify conquest.
Requerimiento (1513): Natives told to accept Spain + the Church or face war; justified conquest.

Native & African Responses

Adapt: used horses, guns, metal; mixed Christianity w/ own beliefs (**syncretism**).
Resist: war, flight, keeping traditions. Africans kept their culture, fled to maroon groups, revolted.
Native strategies: played rival Europeans against each other to gain trade goods, guns & allies.

View of	Natives	Europeans
Land	Shared use	Private
Farming	Women	Men
Religion	Spirits	Christianity

1.7 Causation

Short-term: conquest, epidemics. **Long-term**: African slavery, racial hierarchy, lost Native land.
Big shift: an Atlantic world links the Americas, Europe & Africa into 1 new global economy.

✓ For a source, name the author's purpose and audience (HIPP), then explain its effect.

⚠ Las Casas first suggested African labor to spare Natives, then deeply regretted it later.