The Ultimate AP® US History Unit 1 Cheat Sheet

1.1 Contextualizing Period 1 (1491–1607)

The Big Story

Before 1492: diverse Native societies adapted to local environments; no single "Indian" culture.

After 1492: European contact → disease, conquest, Columbian Exchange, new labor systems, new racial hierarchies, lost Native land & sovereignty.

Why it matters: Period 1 sets up every later clash over land, labor, race and who counts as "American."

Europe c. 1491: Renaissance, new monarchies, Ottoman control of east trade → push west into the Atlantic.

Timeline Anchors

Year	Event
c. 1050–1350	Cahokia peaks (Mississippian)
1492	Columbus; Reconquista ends
1494	Treaty of Tordesillas
1519–21	Cortés conquers Aztecs
1532–33	Pizarro conquers Incas
1542	New Laws; Las Casas' Short Account
1550–51	Valladolid debate
1565	St. Augustine (FL) founded
1607	Jamestown → Period 2 begins

Themes Most Tested

GEO (environment shapes society), **MIG** (who moved, why), **WXT** (trade, labor, tech), **SOC** (hierarchy, caste, gender).

Reasoning: causation (why contact → change), comparison (Native vs. European views), CCOT (before vs. after 1492).

✓ Contextualization: 2–3 sentences on broader forces (Renaissance, Reconquista, rival monarchies, Ottoman trade), not vague "throughout history" lines.

⚠ Period 1 is only 4–6% of the exam, but its ideas (labor, race, Native resistance) set up Qs across Periods 2–3.

1.2 Native Societies: The West

Maize Spreads North

Maize spread from Mexico → Southwest & beyond → surplus food → settled villages, irrigation, social hierarchy, pop. ↑.

Key idea: environment + resources determined how mobile or settled a society was (maize vs. none).

No maize (Great Basin, NW, CA): stayed mobile or relied on hunting, fishing, foraging for food year-round.

Trade: networks moved goods (turquoise, shells, obsidian, copper) & ideas long before Europeans arrived.

Regions Compared

Region	Economy	Society
Southwest	Maize, irrig.	Settled pueblos
Great Basin	Hunt/gather	Mobile bands
Great Plains	Bison hunts	Mobile (+ some farms)
Pacific NW	Salmon, whales	Settled, ranked
California	Acorns, fish	Small, diverse

Key Examples

Ancestral Puebloans (Anasazi): multistory adobe/stone towns, cliff dwellings (Mesa Verde), Chaco Canyon trade hub.

Hohokam: canal irrigation in Arizona desert. Drought (late 1200s–1400s) → abandonment of big sites.

Great Basin (e.g., Shoshone, Ute): dry land → small family bands, seasonal moves for seeds, game.

Plains: bison for food, hides, tools. Some farmed river valleys (Mandan, Pawnee). Horse comes later via Spanish.

Pacific NW (e.g., Chinook, Kwakiutl): rich ocean → permanent villages w/o farming, cedar plank houses, totem poles, **potlatch** (gift-giving shows status).

⚠ No horses on the Plains in 1491. Horse-mounted bison hunting comes after Spanish contact (1600s–1700s).

✓ Settled ≠ farming: Pacific NW peoples stayed put b/c of abundant salmon & whales, not from growing crops.

1.2 Native Societies: The East

Mississippian Culture

Mississippians: maize farming along Mississippi, Ohio valleys → large towns, earthen **mounds**, chiefdoms.

Cahokia (near St. Louis): peak pop. ~10,000–20,000; Monks Mound; long-distance trade. Declined before 1400.

Social structure: chiefs + priests at top; mounds held temples, elite burials; ranked society.

Northeast & Atlantic Seaboard

Mixed economy: farming + hunting + fishing + gathering → permanent or semi-permanent villages.

Three Sisters: maize, beans, squash grown together (beans fix nitrogen; squash shades out weeds & holds moisture).

Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) Confederacy: 5 nations (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca); **longhouses**; Grand Council settles disputes peacefully.

Matrilineal: clan passes through mother; clan mothers chose sachems (chiefs). Women farmed; men hunted, fought.

Great Law of Peace: Iroquois constitution; some link it to later U.S. federalism (the claim is debated by historians).

Southeast (e.g., Creek, Cherokee ancestors): maize towns, chiefdoms; de Soto's 1539–42 trek met them.

Diplomacy: rivalries, alliances, trade between nations shaped how each later dealt w/ European newcomers.

Algonquian peoples (coast, Great Lakes): villages of wigwams, farming + fishing, trade networks.

East vs. West

	East	West
Food	Farming + hunts	Varies by region
Settlement	Villages, towns	Mobile → settled
Politics	Confederacies	Bands, chiefdoms

⚠ Don't call Native societies "primitive" or "nomadic" as a group. MCQs reward knowing their diversity.

✓ Native land use: communal use rights, not private ownership. This clash drives conflict in every later period.

1.3 European Exploration

Why Explore? (God, Gold, Glory)

Gold: new trade routes to Asian spices, silk; bypass Ottoman & Italian middlemen. **God**: spread Catholicism.

Glory: new nation-states (Spain, Portugal, France, England) competed for power, prestige, land & trade routes.

Reconquista: Spain expels Muslims (Granada, 1492) → crusading zeal + soldiers seeking new wealth.

Ottomans take Constantinople (1453) → control routes east → Europe seeks all-water routes around Africa or west.

How? (Tech & Money)

Navigation: caravel (fast, maneuverable), magnetic compass, astrolabe, better maps (portolan charts).

Centralized monarchies: Ferdinand & Isabella unite Spain (1469) → can fund risky voyages, e.g., Columbus.

Who Went Where

Power	Key voyages
Portugal	Dias 1488, da Gama 1498
Spain	Columbus 1492, Magellan
England	Cabot 1497; Roanoke 1587
France	Cartier 1534 (St. Lawr.)

Portugal: Prince Henry the Navigator; West African trade posts; Atlantic island **sugar plantations** w/ enslaved Africans (Madeira, São Tomé; the model for the Americas).

Treaty of Tordesillas (1494): Pope-backed line splits non-Christian lands: Spain west, Portugal east (→ Brazil).

Spain in N. America: Ponce de León (FL, 1513), Coronado (SW, 1540s), de Soto (SE, 1539–42), searching for gold.

Cabral (1500) lands in Brazil → Portugal's only big American colony. **Balboa** (1513) crosses Panama, sees the Pacific.

England & France: late starters; search for a **Northwest Passage** to Asia; little settlement before 1600.

⚠ Columbus wasn't proving Earth round (educated Europeans knew it). He underestimated its size and died believing he had reached the East Indies (Asia).

1.4 Columbian Exchange

What Moved

Columbian Exchange: transfer of plants, animals, germs & people between Eastern and Western hemispheres after 1492 (term coined by historian Alfred Crosby).

Americas → Old World	Old World → Americas
Maize, potatoes	Horses, cattle, pigs
Tomatoes, cacao	Wheat, rice, sugarcane
Tobacco, squash, beans	Smallpox, measles, flu
Silver, gold	Enslaved Africans

Effects on the Americas

Disease: no immunity → smallpox, measles kill up to ~90% in some areas → labor shortage → demand for African slaves.

Livestock: pigs, cattle trampled Native crops. **Horses** later remade Plains life (mobile bison hunting, warfare).

Epidemic timing: smallpox hit Aztecs 1520, Incas ~1527 (killed Inca emperor) → helped conquest.

Cash crops: sugar, later tobacco & cotton → large plantation economies built on coerced & enslaved labor.

Environment: Old World weeds, grazing remade landscapes.

Effects on Europe & Africa

Food: maize, potatoes → better nutrition → European pop. ↑. Maize, cassava also spread in Africa.

Africa: slave trade drains people, fuels wars.

Silver (Potosí, Zacatecas) → Spanish wealth → inflation (**price revolution**) across Europe, funds wars.

Economic shift: feudalism → capitalism; power moves from Mediterranean to Atlantic states; **mercantilism**.

⚠ Disease, not guns, was the #1 killer. Most Native deaths came from epidemics, often before Europeans even arrived.

✓ Causation SAQ: name the item (e.g., smallpox) → its effect → a later consequence (labor shortage → African slavery). Use specific, named evidence each time.

1.4 Spanish Conquest & Empire

Conquistadors

Hernán Cortés (1519–21): conquers **Aztec** capital Tenochtitlán; Native allies (Tlaxcalans) hated Aztec rule.

La Malinche: Native woman who translated, advised Cortés. Smallpox (1520) devastated Tenochtitlán.

Francisco Pizarro (1532–33): conquers **Inca**; seizes Atahualpa during Inca civil war; Cuzco falls.

Tenochtitlán: island city of ~200,000; bigger than any Spanish city. Aztecs ruled by tribute + sacrifice.

Why So Few Won

Factor	Impact
Disease	Killed armies, leaders
Native allies	1000s joined Spanish
Divisions	Aztec rivals, Inca war
Tech	Steel, guns, horses

Running the Empire

Crown control: Council of the Indies; viceroyalties of New Spain (1535) and Peru (1542) rule in the king's name.

Missions: Franciscan, Dominican, Jesuit priests convert Natives; mix of protection & forced labor.

Mercantilism: colonies exist to enrich the mother country; silver shipped to Spain (treasure fleets).

Motives: gold, land, titles; many were minor nobles (hidalgos) seeking status they couldn't get at home.

Northern frontier: Spanish push into FL, SW. Oñate's brutal NM expedition (1598) → Acoma massacre (1599).

⚠ "Guns, germs, and allies," not guns alone. Exam answers that skip Native allies and disease are incomplete.

Colonial society: Spanish men + Native women → mestizo pop.; Church remakes Mexico, Andes.

Black Legend: English/Dutch propaganda painting Spain as uniquely cruel; partly built on Las Casas.

✓ Spanish model: conquer, convert, extract. Compare later to French (trade) and English (settle) in Period 2.

1.5 Labor, Slavery & Caste

Labor Systems

System	How it worked
Encomienda	Colonist gets Native labor
Repartimiento	Rotating forced Native draft
Mita	Inca draft → Potosí mines
Hacienda	Large estate, debt labor
Chattel slavery	Africans as property

Encomienda: the Crown grants colonists Native tribute + labor in exchange for Christianizing & protecting them. In practice: brutal abuse, near-slavery, many Native deaths.

New Laws (1542): Crown limits encomienda after Las Casas' protests; colonists resist, system fades slowly.

Atlantic Slave Trade

Why Africans: Native pop. collapse + resistance → demand for labor on sugar plantations (Caribbean, Brazil).

Middle Passage: brutal Atlantic crossing; high death rates. Most enslaved went to Brazil & Caribbean, not N. America.

Scale: ~12.5 million Africans shipped 1500s–1860s; ~3–4% to mainland North America. Starts w/ Caribbean sugar.

Casta System

Caste: rank by birthplace + race. Top → bottom: **peninsulares** (Spain-born), **criollos** (American-born), **mestizos** (Spanish + Native), **mulattoes** (Spanish + African), **zambos** (Native + African), Natives, enslaved Africans.

Why: few Spanish women came → intermarriage → mixed pop. Spanish defined status by ancestry to keep power.

⚠ Spain's casta system was flexible but hierarchical. Compare to later English colonies' rigid Black/white racial line (Period 2, esp. Virginia & the Carolinas).

✓ Link labor to race: coerced labor needs → racial ideas used to justify slavery. Strong for complexity points.

1.6–1.7 Cultural Interactions & Causation

European Debates

Requerimiento (1513): read to Natives in Spanish: accept Crown + Church or face war. Justified conquest.

Bartolomé de Las Casas: priest; *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1542) condemns abuse.

Valladolid debate (1550–51): Las Casas (Natives fully human, convert peacefully) vs. **Sepúlveda** (natural slaves, force OK).

Racial ideas: Europeans saw Natives as "uncivilized," heathen; used to justify conquest, land seizure, labor.

Native & African Responses

Adapt: adopt horses, metal tools, guns; blend Christianity w/ Native beliefs (**syncretism**, e.g., Virgin of Guadalupe).

Native strategies: diplomacy, playing rival Europeans off each other; alliances for trade + protection.

Resist: war, flight, keeping traditions. Later: **Pueblo Revolt** (1680, Period 2). Africans: keep culture, revolts, escape to maroon communities in the hills & swamps.

View of	Natives	Europeans
Land	Shared use	Private property
Gender	Women farm	Men farm
Religion	Nature, spirits	Christianity

Africans: brought foods (rice, okra, yams), music, farming skills, faith → shaped colonial culture & diets.

1.7 Causation

Short-term: conquest, epidemics, Spanish wealth. **Long-term**: Atlantic economy, African slavery, racial hierarchy, Native dispossession, mixed cultures & religions.

Big shift: Atlantic world links 4 continents; global economy centers on Europe; Native power ↓ but not gone.

✓ Sourcing (HIPP): for a Las Casas excerpt, name his purpose (reform Crown policy) + audience (Spanish king).

⚠ Las Casas first suggested African labor to spare Natives, then regretted it. Shows how ideas about race evolved.