



AMERICAN HISTORY 101

PRE-COLONIAL TO CIVIL WAR

A 48 LESSON COURSE

- **A Comprehensive 48 Lesson Course**
- **Includes Lesson Quizzes & Final Exam**
- **Special Alternative Perspectives on Key Turning Points**
- **Designed for High School, Homeschool, and Adult Education**

Clyde J. Cleveland
Eric B. Randall

Copyright © 2026 Liberty Tree University,
Clyde J. Cleveland and Eric B. Randall.
All Rights Reserved.

Dedication

The American History 101 and 102 textbooks are dedicated to Keith Broaders, the founder of Liberty Tree University. A true Patriot, Keith Broaders has devoted countless hours putting together courses, interactive quizzes, and links to videos and other information, all in the name of educating students and citizens about our country's founding fathers and our country's foundational documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States.

You can view his classes, quizzes, videos, and other resources by going to: <https://www.quia.com/profiles/libertytreeuniversity>

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	i
UNIT I — Foundations of America: Pre-Colonial Through the Colonial Era.....	1
Lesson 1 - America Before Columbus: The First Peoples.....	3
AMERICAN HISTORY 101 — FINAL EXAM.....	5
Lesson 2 - An Ocean Crossed: European Exploration and the Age of Discovery.....	9
Lesson 3 - Spain and France in the New World: Conquest, Conversion, and the Fur Trade.....	15
Lesson 4 - England Enters the Race: Jamestown and the Virginia Experiment.....	21
Lesson 5 - Pilgrims, Puritans, and the New England Way.....	27
Lesson 6 - The Middle Colonies: Where America Learned to Be Diverse.....	33
Lesson 7 - The Southern Colonies: Tobacco, Rice, and the Roots of Slavery.....	39
Lesson 8 - Colonial Self-Government: Town Meetings, Assemblies, & the Seeds of Revolution.....	45
UNIT II — The Road to Revolution: 1754–1776.....	51
Lesson 9 - The French and Indian War: A Continent in the Balance.....	53
Lesson 10 - The Parson's Cause: When a Jury Defied a King.....	59
Lesson 11 - Taxation Without Representation: The Stamp Act Crisis.....	65
Lesson 12 - The Townshend Acts and the Art of Colonial Protest.....	71
Lesson 13 - The Boston Massacre: Propaganda, Truth, and the Power of Narrative.....	77
Lesson 14 - The Boston Tea Party: Liberty, Law, and Civil Disobedience.....	83
Lesson 15 - The First Continental Congress: America Finds Its Voice.....	89
Lesson 16 - Lexington, Concord, and the Shot Heard 'Round the World.....	95
Lesson 17 - Common Sense and the Case for Independence.....	105
UNIT III — Revolution and Founding: 1775–1783.....	111
Lesson 18 - The Declaration of Independence: America's Founding Creed.....	113
Lesson 19 - The Revolutionary War: How a Colony Defeated an Empire.....	119
Lesson 20 - Valley Forge: Crisis, Endurance, and the Soul of the Revolution.....	125
Lesson 21 - Yorktown and the End of the Revolution.....	131
Lesson 22 - The Articles of Confederation: First Government, First Crisis.....	137
Lesson 23 - The Constitutional Convention: Building a More Perfect Union.....	143
UNIT IV — The Bill of Rights and the Early Republic: 1789–1800.....	149
Lesson 24 - Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists: The First Great American Debate.....	151
Lesson 25 - The Bill of Rights: Protecting the People from Their Government.....	157
Lesson 26 - Washington's Presidency: Setting the Precedents.....	163
Lesson 27 - The Whiskey Rebellion: Testing Federal Authority.....	169
Lesson 28 - The Alien and Sedition Acts: The First Test of the First Amendment.....	175
Lesson 29 - The Revolution of 1800: Power Changes Hands Peacefully.....	181
Lesson 30 - Marbury v. Madison: The Supreme Court Finds Its Voice.....	187
UNIT V — Expansion, Democracy, and Growing Tensions: 1803–1850.....	193
Lesson 31 - The Louisiana Purchase: Doubling the Nation.....	195
Lesson 32 - Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery.....	201
Lesson 33 - The War of 1812: National Identity, Maritime Rights, and the Struggle for the Continent.....	207

Lesson 34 - Era of Good Feelings and the Rise of Nationalism.....	213
Lesson 35 - The Missouri Compromise: Slavery, Sectionalism, and the Limits of Compromise.....	219
Lesson 36 - Jacksonian Democracy: Popular Sovereignty, Executive Power, and the Limits of Democracy	225
Lesson 37 - The Indian Removal Act and Trail of Tears.....	231
Lesson 38 - The Industrial Revolution in America: Technology, Labor, and the Transformation of American Life.....	237
Lesson 39 - The Abolitionist Movement: Moral Courage, Radical Reform, and the Conscience of a Nation	243
Lesson 40 - Women's Rights and the Seneca Falls Convention.....	249
Lesson 41 - Manifest Destiny: Expansion, Empire, and the Question of Who America Is For.....	255
UNIT VI — The Road to Disunion and Civil War: 1848–1865.....	261
Lesson 42 - The Compromise of 1850: Sectional Crisis and the Limits of Union.....	263
Lesson 43 - Bleeding Kansas and the Collapse of Compromise.....	269
Lesson 44 - John Brown and Harpers Ferry: Radical Action, Moral Conviction, and the Coming Storm.	275
Lesson 45 - The Election of 1860 and Secession: Constitutional Crisis and the Meaning of Democratic Elections.....	281
Lesson 46 - The Civil War: The First Years, 1861–1862.....	287
Lesson 47 - The Emancipation Proclamation and the War's Turning Point, 1863.....	293
Lesson 48 - The End of the War and Lincoln's Vision for Reconstruction.....	299
AMERICAN HISTORY 101 — FINAL EXAM.....	305

Foreword

This course provides the history of the United States from before the Mayflower to the present day — but with a perspective you won't find in most American history textbooks.

For example, in typical history courses, you'll read the Federalist Papers but never encounter the Anti-Federalist Papers — the writings of the patriots who opposed ratifying the Constitution because they feared it created a government too powerful and too distant from the people. I was a political science major in college, and the Federalist Papers were required reading. I didn't learn the Anti-Federalists even existed until I was 59 years old, doing research for my first book, *Restoring the Heart of America: A Return to Government by the People*. Yet there were more Anti-Federalist writers than Federalist ones, and their warnings about centralized power are at least as important to understand as the arguments that won the day. In this course, you'll meet both sides.

You'll also get the full story of the First Continental Congress, held in Philadelphia in September and October of 1774 — an event most courses skip over entirely, or cover only partially. Delegates from twelve colonies, including men like Patrick Henry and Sam Adams who were meeting in person for the first time, gathered to address two urgent questions: how to resist British tyranny without provoking a war, and what kind of nation they wanted to build. They answered with two major actions. First, they organized a sweeping boycott of British goods — the Continental Association — designed to pressure Britain economically. Second, and far less well known, they agreed to end the importation of enslaved people into the colonies, effective December 1, 1774.

That second action deserves far more attention than it usually receives. It tells us something important: many of the men who would go on to found this nation already understood, in 1774, that slavery contradicted the very principles of liberty they were fighting for. They could not yet abolish slavery — the political coalition needed to resist Britain could not have survived that fight — but they took the first concrete step. That this moment has been largely written out of our shared memory is itself worth examining.

Throughout this course, you'll encounter other perspectives that challenge the standard narrative — on the Federal Reserve, on America's wars, on the growth of federal power, and more. We don't ask you to accept these perspectives uncritically. We ask you to read them, weigh the evidence, and think for yourself — which is exactly what the Anti-Federalists asked of their fellow citizens 238-239 years ago.

Our country remains a work in progress. We hope this course gives you the historical grounding to participate in that work — as a citizen who understands not just what happened, but why it still matters, in the tradition of George Mason, Patrick Henry, and Sam Adams, who believed that liberty survives only when citizens stay informed, engaged, and willing to ask hard questions.

Clyde J. Cleveland

UNIT I — Foundations of America: Pre-Colonial Through the Colonial Era

(Lessons 1-8)

Unit I surveys the land and peoples of North America before European arrival, traces the age of exploration, and examines how England's thirteen colonies took shape — each with its own character, economy, and idea of self-government. By the end of this unit students will understand why colonial life laid the groundwork for the American Revolution and the Constitution.

Lesson 1 - America Before Columbus: The First Peoples

THEME

Long before Europeans arrived, sophisticated nations governed themselves, traded across continents, and built cities — showing that self-government is a deeply rooted human capacity.

Summary

Thousands of years before Christopher Columbus set sail, millions of people already called North America home. From the mound-building Mississippians of the heartland to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy of the Northeast, from the Pueblo peoples of the Southwest to the salmon fishers of the Pacific Coast, these First Peoples developed languages, legal traditions, trade networks, and systems of government. When we study their world, we are not merely studying a footnote to American history — we are studying part of its foundation. Understanding who was here first, and how they organized their lives, helps explain much of what came afterward.

Learning Objectives

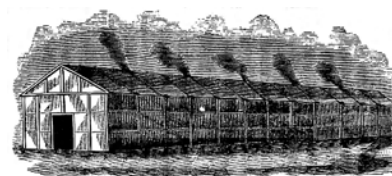
By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Identify at least four major cultural regions of pre-contact North America and name a representative people from each.
- Describe how geography shaped the economies and societies of different Indigenous groups.
- Explain the political structure of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and its significance for later American thinking about union and self-government.
- Compare how different Native nations approached land use, trade, and community decision-making.
- Evaluate the importance of studying Indigenous history as part of the American story.

Visual Context



Monks Mound, Cahokia — 1882
Engraving
Source: Wikimedia Commons



Iroquois Longhouse Cross-Section
Source: Wikimedia Commons



Pueblo Bonito — 1888 Watercolor
by De Lancey Gill
Source: Smithsonian American Art
Museum

Key Vocabulary

TERM	DEFINITION
Indigenous	Native to a place; referring to the original peoples of a land.
Confederacy	A union of separate groups or nations that agree to cooperate while keeping their own governments.
Oral Tradition	The practice of passing history, laws, beliefs, and culture from generation to generation through spoken stories, ceremonies, and teachings.
Subsistence	A way of life focused on producing enough food and goods to sustain a community, rather than primarily for sale or profit.
Matrilineal	Tracing family descent, inheritance, or clan identity through the mother's side of the family.

Story & Historical Narrative

A. Opening Lead

In the year 1000 CE — five hundred years before Columbus — the city of Cahokia stood near the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. At its height, it may have held 10,000 to 20,000 people, making it one of the largest cities north of Mexico and possibly larger than London at the same moment in history. Its great central mound rose about ten stories high. Its people traded copper from the Great Lakes, shells from the Gulf Coast, and other goods across vast distances. Cahokia's leaders organized labor, ceremony, agriculture, and trade on a scale that would have impressed any European king. Then — mysteriously — Cahokia declined. By the time Europeans arrived, forests and fields had reclaimed much of the city. But the people had not simply vanished. They had dispersed, adapted, and continued.

B. Historical Background

Scholars estimate that somewhere between 7 million and 18 million people lived in North America when Europeans first made contact. They were not one people. They spoke hundreds of languages, worshipped in different ways, and organized their societies according to very different principles. Some were mobile hunters following the great bison herds across the Great Plains. Others were settled farmers who had been cultivating corn, beans, and squash — the Three Sisters — for thousands of years. In the Pacific Northwest, abundance was measured in salmon, cedar, and trade, and potlatch ceremonies redistributed wealth and reinforced community relationships. In the desert Southwest, Ancestral Puebloans built multistory dwellings into cliffs and constructed complex communities long before Europe entered its modern age. Archaeological discoveries over the past century have transformed historians' understanding of pre-contact North America, revealing cities, confederacies, trade routes, agricultural systems, law, ceremony, and political traditions across the continent.

C. Main Events / Key Developments

Many historians place the formation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, historically called the Iroquois Confederacy by Europeans, sometime between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, though the exact date remains debated. Five nations — the Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, Oneida, and Seneca — united under what they called the Great Law of Peace. Later, the Tuscarora joined, and the Confederacy became known to many outsiders as the Six Nations. The Haudenosaunee developed a constitutional tradition preserved orally for generations and later recorded in written form. Decisions required consensus. Each nation kept its own internal sovereignty while agreeing to cooperate in matters of peace, diplomacy, and collective defense. When Benjamin Franklin later urged the English colonies to unite, he pointed to the Haudenosaunee as an example. 'It would be a very strange thing,' he wrote, 'if six nations of ignorant savages should be capable of forming a scheme for such a union... and yet that a like union should be impracticable for ten or a dozen English colonies.'

D. Important Figures

Hiawatha, a Mohawk or Onondaga leader, is credited in Haudenosaunee tradition alongside the Peacemaker, also known as Deganawida, with helping to found the Confederacy. According to tradition, the Peacemaker brought a message of peace and unity, and Hiawatha helped carry that message to warring nations. Together, they persuaded the nations to bury their weapons beneath the Great Tree of Peace. Their achievement — building durable governance among former enemies — stands as one of the most remarkable political acts in North American history.

E. Constitutional & Philosophical Issues

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy raises a question that runs through all of American history: what makes a government legitimate? The Haudenosaunee answered with consent, representation, and accountability. Chiefs were nominated by clan mothers and could be removed for misconduct. Decisions affecting all member nations required agreement. Each nation retained its own identity while participating in a larger union. The United States would later wrestle with a similar problem: how can separate states unite for common purposes while preserving their own governments? The extent of Haudenosaunee influence on the American Founders remains debated among historians. But there is no doubt that colonial leaders, including Franklin, knew of the Confederacy and saw in it a powerful example of separate peoples joining together without surrendering their identity.

F. Long-Term Historical Impact

European colonization devastated Indigenous populations through warfare, forced displacement, and — above all — disease. Estimates suggest that 50 to 90 percent of the Native population died in many regions within a century of sustained European contact. Entire communities were shattered. Languages disappeared. Nations were pushed from their homelands. Yet Indigenous peoples survived, adapted, and continued to shape American history. Their land-management practices influenced colonial agriculture. Their trade routes became colonial roads. Their diplomacy shaped imperial rivalries. Their political traditions challenged Europeans to think more deeply about union, consent, and self-government. The American story cannot be told honestly without them.

**WHY IT
MATTERS
TODAY**

Understanding pre-contact America is not just about honoring the past. It challenges us to think carefully about government, rights, and what it means for a people to govern themselves. Many political ideas later debated by Europeans and Americans had already been practiced for centuries by nations that rarely appear in older textbooks. A complete citizen should know this history.

Key Takeaways

- North America was home to millions of people with complex societies long before European arrival.
- Different geographic environments produced radically different cultures, economies, and governments.
- The Haudenosaunee Confederacy developed a durable system of union, representation, consensus, and shared governance.
- European contact brought catastrophic population loss through disease and violence.
- Indigenous history is not a prologue — it is part of the main story of America.

Quiz

1. What was Cahokia, and why is its size significant? (Short answer)
2. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy was originally made up of which five nations? (Short answer)
3. True or False: Benjamin Franklin mentioned the Haudenosaunee Confederacy as an example when arguing for colonial unity.
4. What were the 'Three Sisters,' and why were they important? (Short answer)
5. Multiple choice — What does 'matrilineal' mean? (A) Power passes through the father's line; (B) Descent is traced through the mother's line; (C) Women rule as queens; (D) Land is owned by women only.

Short Writing Assignment

Imagine you are a European explorer arriving in North America for the first time. You encounter the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Write 1–2 paragraphs describing what surprises you most about their system of government and how it compares to what you left behind in Europe.

Extended Learning (Optional)

Expanded Writing Assignment

Benjamin Franklin wrote that the Haudenosaunee Confederacy demonstrated a model worth noticing. In 3–5 paragraphs, compare the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace to the United States Constitution. Consider: How is power distributed? Who can remove leaders? What rights do member nations keep? What are the biggest similarities and differences? What does this comparison tell us about where American political ideas can come from?

Discussion Question

If the Haudenosaunee Confederacy was already governing effectively before Europeans arrived, what does that tell us about human nature and self-government? Is self-governance a product of one particular civilization — or is it a broader human capacity?

Primary Source Spotlight

"It would be a very strange thing, if six nations of ignorant savages should be capable of forming a scheme for such a union, and be able to execute it in such a manner as that it has subsisted ages, and appears indissoluble; and yet that a like union should be impracticable for ten or a dozen English colonies."

— Benjamin Franklin, letter to James Parker, 1751

Franklin was not merely flattering the Haudenosaunee — and he was still using the prejudiced language of his time. His argument was aimed at his fellow colonists. If the Six Nations could build a lasting union, he suggested, the English colonies had little excuse for failing to do the same. This letter was written more than two decades before the Revolution, showing how early Americans were already thinking about unity and governance.

Extension Activity

Visit the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian online and explore one Native nation's history. Write a short paragraph about one thing you learned that surprised you. Alternative: Watch a documentary or classroom video on the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and bring one key fact to share with your class or family.

Explore Further

Read the Evidence

Benjamin Franklin, *Letter to James Parker (1751)* — Franklin points to the Six Nations as an example when urging the English colonies to unite.

The Great Law of Peace — Read selections from English translations of the Haudenosaunee constitutional tradition and notice how it addresses peace, unity, leadership, and responsibility.

Learn More

Charles C. Mann, 1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus.

Colin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*.

Explore

Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian — a strong starting point for learning about Native nations, including the Haudenosaunee.

Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site / UNESCO World Heritage listing — useful for learning more about Cahokia, Monks Mound, and Mississippian civilization.

Lesson 2 - An Ocean Crossed: European Exploration and the Age of Discovery

THEME

When Europeans sailed west, they were driven by faith, greed, and curiosity — and the collision of worlds that followed changed every civilization on earth.

Summary

In the late 1400s, European nations began sending ships into unknown waters in search of new trade routes to Asia. What they found instead was a hemisphere they had never known existed. Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English explorers mapped coastlines, claimed territories, and set off a chain of consequences — conquest, colonization, disease, and the transatlantic slave trade — that would define the next five centuries of world history. Understanding the motivations and methods of European exploration is essential to understanding why America was colonized the way it was.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Explain the economic and religious motivations behind European exploration.
- Identify the major European nations involved in exploration and their primary areas of colonization.
- Describe the Columbian Exchange and explain its long-term consequences for both hemispheres.
- Evaluate the impact of European exploration on Indigenous peoples of the Americas.
- Compare the Spanish, French, and English approaches to colonization.

Visual Context



Voyages of Columbus — 1906 Map
Source: Wikimedia Commons



Spanish Armada Engraving, 16th century
Source: Wikimedia Commons



The Port of Seville — Gateway of New World Trade
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Key Vocabulary

TERM	DEFINITION
Columbian Exchange	The transfer of plants, animals, diseases, and ideas between the Americas and the Old World following Columbus's voyages.
Conquistador	Spanish word for 'conqueror' — refers to Spanish soldiers who conquered indigenous civilizations in the Americas.
Mercantilism	An economic theory holding that a nation's power depends on accumulating gold and silver and maintaining a favorable trade balance.
Encomienda	A Spanish colonial labor system in which the Crown granted colonists the right to demand labor or tribute from indigenous people.
Northwest Passage	A hoped-for sea route through or around North America connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans — a key motivation for early exploration.

Story & Historical Narrative

A. Opening Lead

On August 3, 1492, three small ships slipped out of the Spanish port of Palos before dawn. Their commander, an Italian mariner named Christopher Columbus, had spent seven years (from roughly 1485 to 1492) trying to convince European monarchs to fund his plan — a westward voyage to reach the riches of Asia. Everyone knew the Earth was round. The question was whether a ship could survive the crossing. Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain finally said yes. Ten weeks later, lookout Rodrigo de Triana spotted land. The world would never be the same.

B. Historical Background

Europe in 1400 was hungry for spices, silk, and gold from Asia — but the overland routes were controlled by Ottoman Turks who taxed every shipment. Portugal had been probing southward along the African coast for decades, searching for a sea route around Africa to India. Spain wanted a shortcut. Columbus's idea — sailing west to reach the East — was not crazy, but he badly underestimated the size of the Earth. He calculated the distance to Japan at about 2,400 miles. The actual distance is closer to 12,000. Fortunately for Columbus, there was an entire unknown continent in the way.

C. Main Events

Columbus made four voyages between 1492 and 1504, exploring the Caribbean, Central America, and the northern coast of South America. He died believing he had reached Asia. It was Amerigo Vespucci who first argued, in 1503, that these lands were a distinct continent — 'a New World,' he called it. German

mapmaker Martin Waldseemüller named it 'America' in Vespucci's honor in 1507. Within decades, Spain had sent conquistadors: Hernán Cortés toppled the Aztec Empire in 1521; Francisco Pizarro destroyed the Inca Empire in 1532. Gold and silver poured into Spain — and with it came the seeds of inflation that would eventually weaken the Spanish economy.

D. The Columbian Exchange

Perhaps the most consequential — and least discussed — result of 1492 was the exchange of living things between hemispheres. Europeans brought horses, cattle, pigs, wheat, and sugar cane to the Americas. The Americas sent back corn, potatoes, tomatoes, chocolate, tobacco, and rubber. Potatoes alone may have doubled the population of Europe over the following two centuries. But the exchange also carried death: smallpox, measles, influenza, and typhus were diseases Europeans had built some immunity to over centuries. Indigenous Americans had none. In some regions, 90 percent of the population died within a generation of first contact — not from war, but from germs.

E. Constitutional & Philosophical Issues

The conquest raised immediate moral questions. Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas witnessed Spanish atrocities firsthand and spent decades arguing before the Spanish Crown that Indigenous people had natural rights and could not lawfully be enslaved. In 1550, the famous Valladolid Debate pitted las Casas against theologian Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who argued that 'barbarians' could be conquered for their own good. The debate was never formally resolved — but it was the first time a European power was forced to publicly justify its treatment of conquered peoples. The ideas of natural rights and human dignity that las Casas championed would eventually find their way into the Declaration of Independence.

F. Long-Term Historical Impact

The age of exploration permanently altered the balance of global power, created the transatlantic slave trade, destroyed entire civilizations, and connected the world's economies for the first time. It also set the stage for the distinctly English experiment that would become the United States — shaped by competition with Spain and France, funded by mercantile ambition, and haunted from the beginning by the contradiction between liberty and conquest.

WHY IT MATTERS TODAY

The world you live in — its crops, its diseases, its borders, its racial categories — was shaped by the choices made in the 1400s and 1500s. Understanding exploration means understanding how global economics, migration, and power still operate today. It also means grappling honestly with the gap between the ideals of discovery and the brutal realities of conquest.

Key Takeaways

- European exploration was driven by economics (spice trade), religion (missionary zeal), and competition between nations.
- Columbus's voyages in 1492 connected two hemispheres that had developed entirely separately for thousands of years.
- The Columbian Exchange transferred plants, animals, and diseases with massive long-term consequences — including catastrophic death among indigenous peoples.
- Spain, France, England, and Portugal colonized differently: Spain through military conquest, France through trade and alliance, England through settlement.
- The moral debates over conquest planted seeds for later arguments about natural rights and human dignity.

Quiz

1. What were Columbus's three ships called? (Short answer)
2. True or False: Amerigo Vespucci was the first European to reach the Americas.
3. What is the Columbian Exchange? Give two examples of goods transferred in each direction. (Short answer)
4. Multiple choice — Bartolomé de las Casas is significant because: (A) He led the conquest of Mexico; (B) He argued for the natural rights of Indigenous people; (C) He discovered the Northwest Passage; (D) He drew the first map of the Americas.
5. Why did disease kill so many more Indigenous people than European weapons did? (Short answer)

Short Writing Assignment

Read the quote from Bartolomé de las Casas below. In 1–2 paragraphs, explain: What is he arguing? Do you agree? What does his argument suggest about the limits of conquest and power?

Extended Learning (Optional)

Expanded Writing Assignment

The Columbian Exchange was one of the most consequential events in world history — but it affected different people very differently. In 4–6 paragraphs, write a comparative analysis: How did European settlers benefit from the exchange? How did Indigenous peoples suffer? What long-term effects do we still see today? Include at least three specific examples of exchanged goods and explain their impact.

Discussion Question

Bartolomé de las Casas argued in 1542 that no people could be conquered or enslaved simply because they were 'different' or 'uncivilized.' Juan de Sepúlveda disagreed. Whose argument do you find more persuasive, and why? How does this debate connect to ideas about natural rights that appear later in the Declaration of Independence?

Primary Source Spotlight

"The Indians are our brothers, and Christ has given his life for them. Why, then, do we persecute them with such inhuman savagery when they do not deserve such treatment?"

— Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 1542

Las Casas became one of the most important early European critics of colonial cruelty. His writings shocked European readers and helped pressure Spain to revise its colonial laws — though enforcement was weak. His core argument — that all human beings possess natural dignity — echoes through later debates over natural rights, slavery, empire, and human freedom.

Extension Activity

Research the 'Doctrine of Discovery' — the legal concept European nations used to justify claiming land already inhabited by Indigenous peoples. This doctrine remained part of U.S. law until a Supreme Court case as recently as 2005. Write a paragraph: How does a legal doctrine from 1493 still matter in the 21st century?

Explore Further

Read the Evidence

Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1542) — a powerful critique of Spanish colonial cruelty.

Papal Bull Inter Caetera (1493) — one of the key documents associated with the Doctrine of Discovery.

Learn More

Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*.

J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*.

Explore

Library of Congress and National Humanities Center collections on early contact, exploration, and colonial encounters.

Lesson 3 - Spain and France in the New World: Conquest, Conversion, and the Fur Trade

THEME

Spain and France built empires in the Americas through very different strategies — and their choices help explain why the United States eventually developed from English, rather than Spanish or French, colonial foundations.

Summary

After Columbus, Spain moved quickly to build the largest empire in the Western Hemisphere — stretching from the tip of South America to what is now the American Southwest and Florida. France focused on the St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi Valley, building alliances with native peoples through the fur trade. Both empires shaped the continent England's settlers would eventually inherit. Understanding Spanish and French colonization is essential to understanding the full picture of early America — and why English approaches to settlement were so different.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Describe the structure and goals of the Spanish colonial empire in the Americas.
- Explain how the encomienda system worked and why it was controversial.
- Identify the major areas of French colonization and describe the French approach to indigenous relations.
- Compare Spanish and French colonial strategies and explain the advantages and weaknesses of each.
- Explain why England's later colonies developed differently from those of Spain and France.

Visual Context



The Alamo (Mission San Antonio de Valero), Founded 1718
Source: Library of Congress



Samuel de Champlain Portrait
Source: Library of Congress



Map of New France, 1756
Source: Library of Congress

Key Vocabulary

TERM	DEFINITION
Encomienda	Spanish colonial labor system granting settlers the right to extract labor or tribute from indigenous people in exchange for Christian instruction.
Mission	A religious settlement established by Catholic priests to convert indigenous people to Christianity.
New France	The French colonial territory in North America, centered on the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes region.
Coueurs de bois	French term for independent fur traders who lived and traveled among indigenous peoples — literally 'runners of the woods.'
Mestizo	A person of mixed European and indigenous American ancestry — a significant part of the Spanish colonial social structure.

Story & Historical Narrative

A. Opening Lead

In 1519, Hernán Cortés landed on the coast of Mexico with 500 soldiers, 16 horses, and a plan to conquer an empire of millions. Within two years, the Aztec civilization — one of the most complex societies in the Western Hemisphere — had been destroyed. How? Partly by Spanish steel and gunpowder. Partly by smallpox. But most importantly, by alliances. The Aztec Empire had enemies, and Cortés found them, armed them, and used them. The conquest of Mexico was not a Spanish victory over Indigenous people — it was a coalition war in which Spanish technology played a decisive role.

B. The Spanish Colonial System

Spain organized its empire through a rigid hierarchy. At the top was the Crown in Madrid. Below that, two great viceroyalties governed New Spain (Mexico and Central America) and Peru (South America). Governors, judges, and bishops reported to Spain. The encomienda system gave Spanish settlers the right to demand labor from Indigenous people — in theory, in exchange for Christian education and protection. In practice, it often amounted to slavery. When las Casas's protests led Spain to theoretically ban indigenous enslavement in 1542, settlers simply imported African enslaved people instead. The Spanish built universities, cities, and cathedrals across the Americas — but they were built on the backs of conquered peoples.

C. New France: A Different Model

France wanted a different kind of empire. With a smaller population and less interest in large-scale

settlement, France pursued wealth through the fur trade — and that required indigenous cooperation. French traders, missionaries, and explorers traveled deep into the continent, learning indigenous languages, marrying into tribal communities, and building networks of alliance. Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec in 1608 and established alliances with the Huron and Algonquin peoples. René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, paddled the entire length of the Mississippi in 1682 and claimed the entire drainage basin for France — naming it Louisiana after King Louis XIV. At its peak, New France stretched from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico.

D. Constitutional & Philosophical Issues

The Spanish and French colonial systems raise a fundamental question: What does it mean to govern justly over people who were not consulted? Spain at least debated the question publicly — the Valladolid Debate of 1550 forced Spanish theologians to argue about whether Indigenous peoples had natural rights. France generally avoided the debate by building relationships rather than using brute force — but that too came at a cost, as French missionaries worked aggressively to destroy indigenous religious practices. Both empires assumed that European civilization was superior. Both paid little attention to what the people they governed actually wanted. These assumptions would not go unchallenged forever.

E. Long-Term Historical Impact

Spain and France left deep marks on North America. Spanish place names dot the map from Florida to California. The legal tradition of Louisiana is still based on French and Spanish civil law rather than English common law. Catholicism, brought by Spanish and French missionaries, remains a major religious force across Latin America. And the political vacuum left when France lost most of its mainland North American empire in 1763 — after the French and Indian War — helped set the stage for the American Revolution.

WHY IT MATTERS TODAY

The United States shares its hemisphere with nations built on Spanish and French colonial foundations. Understanding their history — and how it differed from English colonization — helps make sense of ongoing relationships, immigration patterns, and cultural ties that shape American foreign policy and domestic life today.

Key Takeaways

- Spain built a massive empire through military conquest, the encomienda system, and Catholic missions.
- France built its empire through the fur trade and alliance with Indigenous peoples, resulting in less settlement but vast territorial claims.
- Both empires raised moral questions about the rights of conquered peoples — questions that echo in later American history.
- France's loss of most of its mainland North American empire in 1763 removed the main check on British power in the colonies — helping create the conditions that led to the Revolution.
- Spanish and French cultural, legal, and religious influence persists across North and South America today.

Quiz

1. What was the encomienda system, and why was it controversial? (Short answer)
2. True or False: France primarily colonized through military conquest, as Spain did.
3. Who founded Quebec, and in what year? (Short answer)
4. Multiple choice — La Salle's 1682 expedition claimed the Mississippi River basin for France and named it: (A) New France; (B) Louisiana; (C) Quebec; (D) Acadia.
5. Why did France's fur trade model require good relations with indigenous peoples? (Short answer)

Short Writing Assignment

Compare the Spanish and French approaches to colonization in 1–2 paragraphs. Which approach do you think was more respectful of Indigenous peoples, and why? Which do you think was more effective as a colonial strategy?

Extended Learning (Optional)

Expanded Writing Assignment

Imagine you are an indigenous leader in North America in 1600. Spanish missionaries have arrived in your southern territories. French fur traders are making alliances in the north. English settlers are beginning to appear on the eastern coast. In 4–6 paragraphs, write from your perspective: What do you observe about each group? What are their goals? Which seems most dangerous to your people's way of life? What strategy would you recommend to your nation?

Discussion Question

The Spanish debated whether conquered people had natural rights. The French built alliances and trade networks, even as missionaries pressed for conversion. The English increasingly pushed Indigenous peoples aside. Which approach, if any, was more just? Is there such a thing as 'just colonization' — or is that a contradiction in terms?

Primary Source Spotlight

"I saw here cruelty on a scale no living being has ever seen, heard or read of. Several times it happened that I watched them cut off the hands, arms and legs of the Indians, and sometimes their heads at one stroke..."

— Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 1542

Las Casas's accounts were graphic by design — he wanted to shock European readers into demanding reform. His writings were translated across Europe and used by England and France as anti-Spanish propaganda. But his core argument — that all human beings possess inherent dignity regardless of race or religion — was a powerful challenge to the assumptions of empire.

Extension Activity

Research the California Mission System (1769–1833). What was its stated purpose? What actually happened to the indigenous populations who lived near the missions? Write a one-page analysis: Was the mission system a humanitarian project, a form of cultural destruction, or both?

Explore Further

Read the Evidence

Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1542) — read a short excerpt and ask what Las Casas believed Spain owed to Indigenous peoples.

Learn More

Canada History Museum, Virtual Museum of New France — useful for understanding French colonial alliances and the fur trade.

David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*.

Explore

Library of Congress maps and documents on New France, New Spain, and early colonial North America.

AMERICAN HISTORY 101 — FINAL EXAM

Multiple-Choice Final Exam

Liberty Tree University

From First Peoples to the New Nation — Lessons 1–48

INSTRUCTIONS

This final exam consists of 48 multiple-choice questions — one for each lesson in American History 101. For each question, circle or mark the letter of the single best answer.

The column labeled 'L' indicates which lesson each question draws from. Each question is worth equal value toward the final score.

Name:

Date:

UNIT I — Foundations of America: Pre-Colonial Through the Colonial Era

Questions 1–8

1

L1
Multiple
Choice

Which feature of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy's political system helped colonial leaders such as Benjamin Franklin think about union and self-government?

- A. A hereditary monarchy with absolute royal authority
- B. A council system that combined local self-government with a unifying confederation
- C. A single all-powerful war chief who appointed all other leaders
- D. A strict caste system that determined political office by birth

2

L2
Multiple
Choice

The Columbian Exchange refers to the transfer of plants, animals, people, and diseases between the Americas and Europe after 1492. Which pairing correctly matches an item with its origin?

- A. Horses originated in the Americas and were introduced to Europe
- B. Smallpox originated in the Americas and devastated European populations
- C. Potatoes and corn originated in the Americas and were introduced to Europe
- D. Wheat and sugarcane originated in the Americas and were introduced to Europe

3	L3 Multiple Choice	Which statement best compares Spanish and French colonial strategies in North America? A. Spain relied primarily on alliance and trade with Native peoples, while France relied on military conquest B. Spain relied heavily on military conquest and forced labor, while France relied more on alliance and the fur trade C. Both Spain and France refused to interact with Native peoples in any capacity D. Spain and France pursued identical strategies based on large-scale agricultural settlement
4	L4 Multiple Choice	What was the House of Burgesses, established in Virginia in 1619? A. The first representative legislative assembly in the English colonies B. A royal council appointed directly by the King with no colonial input C. A religious court that tried cases of heresy in early Virginia D. A military council that governed Jamestown during wartime only
5	L5 Multiple Choice	What principle of government did the Mayflower Compact (1620) establish? A. Government should be ruled by a hereditary governor appointed by the king B. Government authority should rest on the consent of the governed, formalized through a written agreement C. Only church elders could hold political office D. Colonies should be governed directly by Parliament with no local self-rule
6	L6 Multiple Choice	What made Pennsylvania unusual among the English colonies under William Penn's 'holy experiment'? A. It banned all forms of organized religion B. It required all settlers to belong to the Anglican Church C. It practiced religious toleration and built relatively peaceful relations with Native peoples D. It was governed entirely by military officers