

Prompt: Evaluate the extent to which European contact and colonization impacted the indigenous populations and cultures in the Americas between 1491 and 1800.

Essay:

From the moment Christopher Columbus set foot on the shores of the Americas in 1492, the destinies of European and indigenous civilizations became irreversibly intertwined. European exploration was largely driven by a thirst for wealth, new trade routes, and religious expansion, with nations like Spain and England taking the lead. As Europeans settled and explored, the indigenous populations faced consequences both negative and positive.

One of the most immediate and tragic impacts of European contact was the introduction of diseases such as smallpox, measles, and influenza. These diseases decimated native populations, with estimates suggesting that up to 90% of the indigenous people died due to lack of immunity. This sudden depopulation disrupted social structures and led to the collapse of great empires like those of the Aztecs and the Incas.

In terms of politics and society, many indigenous groups were subjugated by European powers. The encomienda system in Spanish territories, for instance, virtually enslaved native populations, forcing them to labor in mines and fields. However, not all interactions were hostile. The French, especially, developed trade relationships with tribes like the Huron and Algonquin, leading to a unique blend of cultures.

Resistance was not uncommon. The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 saw the indigenous Pueblo people successfully expel Spanish colonizers for over a decade. Likewise, many tribes formed confederacies to resist European encroachment.

Culturally, the Americans experienced a melding of European and indigenous traditions. While many indigenous practices were suppressed, especially by religious missionaries, others blended with European customs, creating syncretic belief systems and art forms. The introduction of new crops and livestock from Europe, such as wheat and horses, transformed indigenous agriculture and lifestyles.

In conclusion, the impact of European contact and colonization on indigenous populations and cultures in the Americas between 1491 and 1800 was profound and multifaceted. It brought about demographic collapse, political subjugation, and cultural transformation, but it also witnessed resistance, adaptation, and the emergence of new hybrid societies. The consequences of this interaction continue to shape the Americas

today, making it a pivotal period in history.

Feedback:

Thesis/Claim (1 point): The essay presents a clear and defensible thesis in the introduction. The thesis is evident in the statement, “The impact of European contact and colonization on indigenous populations and cultures in the Americas between 1491 and 1800 was profound and multifaceted.” This thesis directly addresses the prompt and sets the stage for the arguments that follow.

Contextualization (1 point): To earn this point, students must describe a broader historical context relevant to the prompt. The essay provides context by mentioning European motivations for exploration, such as wealth, trade routes, and religious expansion. This provides readers with a clear backdrop against which the main arguments of the essay are set.

Evidence (2 points): The APUSH standards require students to support their thesis with specific evidence. In the sample essay, there’s a plethora of evidence cited, such as the introduction of diseases, the encomienda system, the Pueblo Revolt, and the cultural blending of traditions. Each piece of evidence is directly related to the thesis and supports the argument that European contact and colonization had a significant impact on indigenous populations and cultures.

Analysis and Reasoning (2 points): This is where students must demonstrate a deeper understanding of the topic. The essay does this in several ways. First, it analyzes the significance of each piece of evidence, explaining, for example, how the introduction of diseases decimated native populations and disrupted social structures. Second, it shows a complex understanding by discussing both the negative and positive impacts, resistance, and cultural adaptation. This comparison not only reinforces the thesis but also provides a nuanced view of the period.

Total Score: 6

In conclusion, this sample essay would earn a total of 6 points based on the APUSH LEQ scoring rubric. It meets all the criteria by presenting a clear thesis, providing relevant historical context, supporting arguments with specific evidence, and demonstrating a deep and complex understanding of the topic.