

The Columbian Exchange

After the Age of Exploration, the economies of Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas changed. As Europe traded with the world, a global exchange of people, goods, technology, and diseases began. This is known as the Columbian Exchange named after Christopher Columbus. This exchange of goods was one of the most significant events in the history of world ecology, agriculture, and culture.

Two important foods - corn and potatoes - were taken to Europe from North America. Corn was used to feed animals. Larger, healthier animals resulted in more meat, leather, and wool. The potato was also important. Europeans discovered that if they planted potatoes instead of grain, about four times as many people could live off the same amount of land. Other American foods, such as chili peppers and peanuts, were taken to Europe, but they also made their way to Asia and Africa where they became popular. Both Europeans and Asians also began smoking tobacco, an American plant.

Many European and Asian grains, such as wheat, oats, barley, rye, and rice, were planted in the Americas. The United States is recognized as the breadbasket region of the world. Coffee and tropical fruits, such as bananas, were brought to America as well. Eventually, coffee and banana farms employed thousands of workers in Central and South America.

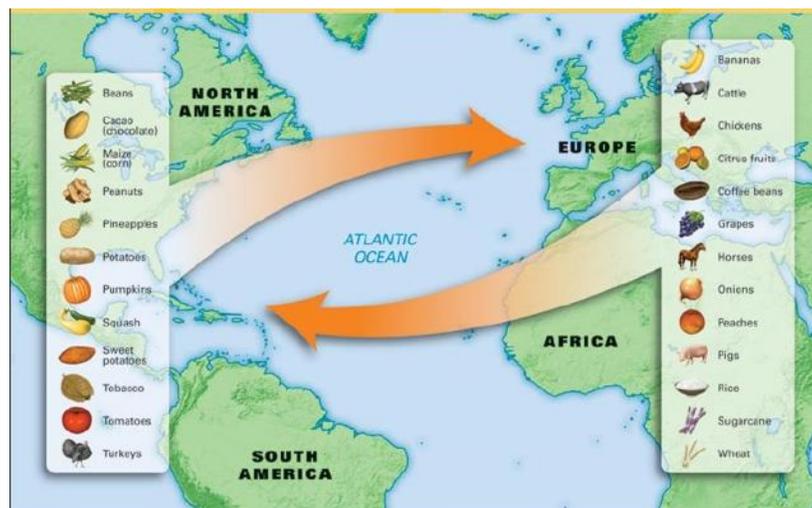
New animals such as pigs, sheep, cattle, chickens, and horses were also brought to America. Chickens changed the diet of many people in Central and South America, while horses changed the lives of Native Americans on the Great Plains. Horses provided a faster way to move from place to place. As a result, Native Americans began hunting buffalo as their main food source.

A huge movement of people also took place after Europeans obtained sugarcane from Asia and began growing it in the Caribbean. To plant and harvest the sugar cane, they enslaved millions of Africans and moved them to the Americas.

Europeans also changed Asian society. With their guns and powerful ships, the Europeans easily defeated Arab fleets and Indian princes. Across Asia, the Europeans forced local rulers to let them set up trading posts. Within a short time, the East India Company of England had built an empire in India, and the Dutch East India Company had built an empire in Indonesia.

The arrival of Europeans in Japan also changed society. Using guns and cannons imported from Europe, a new shogun was finally able to defeat the feudal lords, the daimyo, and reunite Japan.

Not everything exchanged between Europe and America was good. When Europeans arrived in America, they were carrying germs that could kill Native Americans. The Native Americans were not immune to diseases the rest of the world had. Many of these diseases, including small pox, measles, and malaria, swept across the Americas killing millions of people. For example, in Central Mexico in 1519 there were 25



million people, and in 1605 there were only one million people. In Hispaniola, the population decreased from one million in 1492 to 46,000 in 1512, and in North America, 90% of Native Americans were gone within 100 years of the Plymouth landing.

1. Describe the Columbian Exchange.
2. What were the causes and effects of the Columbian Exchange?
3. Do you think the Columbian exchange was beneficial or more harmful? Justify your answer with evidence from the article.
4. Who do you think benefited most from the Columbian Exchange? Explain/Justify your answer.
5. The exchange of goods still exists today. What are some present-day exchanges among different countries and continents? (Try to brainstorm at least 3).