

Columbian exchange

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The Columbian Exchange “ Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492” is a common expression used today about the discovery of the Americas. What happens after the discovery of the Americas?

Transculturation. This is the mixing of cultures in which both sides change in one way or another (Murphy, 1-14-13). The Columbian Exchange happened when people from Europe and Africa settled into Latin America and the Caribbean after the discovery of the Americas. The Columbian Exchange brought over diseases to the Americas, plants and animals, and the exchange of silver.

The colonization of the Americas made exchanging animals and plants happen daily. Sugar was one plant that was brought over. Sugar was brought over to Brazil from the coast of Africa (Crosby, 69). Towards the end of the 16th century, Brazil became the biggest producer of sugarcane. At first, sugar was only bought by the rich but over time it was an important crop in everyone’s day to day life. Sugar could be boiled down into concentrated, making it easy to fit in ships, causing it to become the cash crop for centuries (Chasteen, 24).

Brazil was producing 57,000 tons of sugar annually in 1610, in which the English started to produce sugar which drove the production down in Brazil (Crosby, 69). Sugar created harsh working environments and ended up having slaves do all of the work. Slaves were purchased and brought in from West Africa (Wolfe, 150). Maize, potatoes, tomatoes, and many other plants were added to European and Africa diets. Many crops that exist in European nations have come from the Americas during the Columbian Exchange.

Tomatoes were grown in the Americas before they made their way to Italy. Italy is known for their food that uses tomatoes and many people think that the tomato originated in Italy. The tomato got brought back to Italy throughout the trips from the Americas. Maize was introduced to Asia in the 16th century, which was a factor for population growth in Asia (Crosby, 65). As Winn states " But not much of the Columbian exchange was not positive for the indigenous people of the Americas" (Winn, 43), most of the Columbian exchange was lop sided.

Europeans and Africans got the better end of the Columbian exchange due to the fact that they transferred many of the diseases instead of receiving them. Along with plants, imported animals arrived in the America during Columbus's second voyage in 1493 (Crosby, 75). Horses, dogs, pigs, cattle, chickens, sheep, and goats all arrived in the Americas in the 16th century. Pigs were the first animals to blow up, with 30, 000 pigs in Cuba by 1514 (Crosby, 76). Cattle, like pigs, reproduced in great numbers and quickly adapted to the new environment.

All of these animals were used some way or another to produce a profit. Skin became the biggest export from America to Europe after colonization to the America's happened (Murphy, 1-23-13). The fat was used to produce animals and sheep were used to produce clothing (Murphy, 1-23-13). Horses gave Bernal Diaz the advantage in defeating the Aztec to claim Mexico. Cattle provided meat which would not have been there if it wasn't for the colonization. The Spaniards realized that silver from the America's could bring them indefinite money, while the silver lasted.

There was virtually no silver being exported from the Americas to Europe before Columbus discovered the Americas. At the beginning of the 16th century, silver production in the Americas started to sky rocket due to the Spaniards discovering the benefits of silver. In the 1540's, a silver mine located in Potosi, Peru was opened up by the Spaniards (Chasteen, 50). The town of Potosi blew up due to this new economic growth that was happening. The working environments were harsh; men had to carry pounds and pounds of silver down the mountain (Murphy, 1-28-13).

From 1503-1660, 700 million pounds of silver gets exported from the Americas to Europe (Murphy, 1-28-13). The problem with silver is that it has boom and bust cycles, where one year silver may be at its all-time high and the next the economy takes a beating. The money being made was through the taxing of this silver. The exchange of silver brought the Americas and the rest of the world together. This was due to the trade that was happening with the silver. The crown in Spain received around 40 percent of all the silver profits (Wolfe, 139).

The crown received this money due to the royal fifth or settlement of American taxes (Wolfe, 139). Around 30 percent of the silver was illegally traded to the crown did not receive that money (Murphy, 1-28-13). No food is able to grow at Potosi so all of it had to be imported from other countries. This created huge trade relations across the world. The food from Potosi would be imported from elsewhere because it was cheaper, causing the prices to rise in the Potosi economy (Wolfe, 139). In the early 1800's, the silver ran out and the town of Potosi went down with it.

This shows how much the Spaniards had an impact on the Americas, Peru in this instance. The diseases that Europe and Africa brought in during colonization to the Americas were the biggest negative impact of the Columbian Exchange. Diseases wiped out populations in the Americas. Native Americans had no immunity towards the diseases that were coming in. Diseases like smallpox, measles, malaria, plague, and many others were killing native people uncontrollably. In lower and upper Peru, the population declined from 5 million to less than 300 thousand in 1780-1790's (Wolfe, 135).

As shown in this quote by Winn " The result was the greatest demographic disaster in history" (Winn, 43), this epidemic effected wherever colonization happened in the Americas. The old world diseases were not intentionally spread to the Americas but were a side effect of transculturation. The Columbian exchange was a major factor in the Colonization of the Americas. New foods were exchanged between the Americas and Europe and Africa. Animals were also swapped during this exchange, which created economic opportunities.

The finding of silver in Potosi helped Spain gain money through taxes. This was a boom and bust cycle which leads to Potosi becoming a ghost town. With colonization happening, diseases brought from the Europeans and Africans killed an uncountable amount of people in the Americas. The Columbian Exchange changed Latin America and the Caribbean fully. The real question is what would Latin America and the Caribbean be like if the Columbian Exchange never happened? Works Cited Chasteen, " Encounter," in *Born in Blood and Fire*, pp. 11-42 (3rd ed), 25-53 (2nd).

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