

The Columbian Exchange



Background

The term, “Columbian Exchange” refers to the exchange of biological commodities(see below) and ideas between the Old World and the New World as a result of the European voyages of exploration that started with Christopher Columbus. “Biological commodities” means living things, or things that were once alive. Examples would include domestic animals, agricultural products, microbes (bacteria and viruses), and even people—some of whom (slaves) were actually treated as commodities to be bought and sold. Prior to 1492, many of these biological commodities had never crossed the ocean. When the two hemispheres finally came into contact, the Columbian Exchange would dramatically and permanently affect human societies and the natural environment on both sides of the ocean.

1. What does the term Columbian Exchange mean?
2. For whom is the Columbian Exchange named?
3. What is a biological commodity?
4. What type of people were treated as commodities?
5. According to the reading many commodities never crossed the ocean prior to 1492, what does this mean and state why you believe that to be true.
6. List at least 3 ways the Columbian Exchange “permanently and drastically” affected the world?

Document 1

The Arrival of Europeans

The arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Caribbean in 1492 had a tremendous impact on the future of that region. The passage below describes that arrival. It is taken from an abridgement of Columbus' personal journal made by Bartholome de las Casas.

“In order to win the friendship and affection of that people, and because I was convinced that their conversion to our Holy Faith would be better promoted through love than through force, I presented some of them with red caps and some strings of glass beads which they placed around their necks, and with other trifles of the insignificant worth that delighted them and by which we have got wonderful hold on their affections.”

From the diary of Christopher Columbus during his first voyage of exploration.

Saturday, 13 October. [1492] At daybreak great multitudes of men came to the shore, all young and of fine shapes, very handsome; their hair not curled but straight and coarse like horse-hair, and all with foreheads and heads much broader than any people I had seen; They came loaded with balls of cotton, parrots, javelins, and other things too numerous to mention; these they exchanged for whatever we chose to give them.

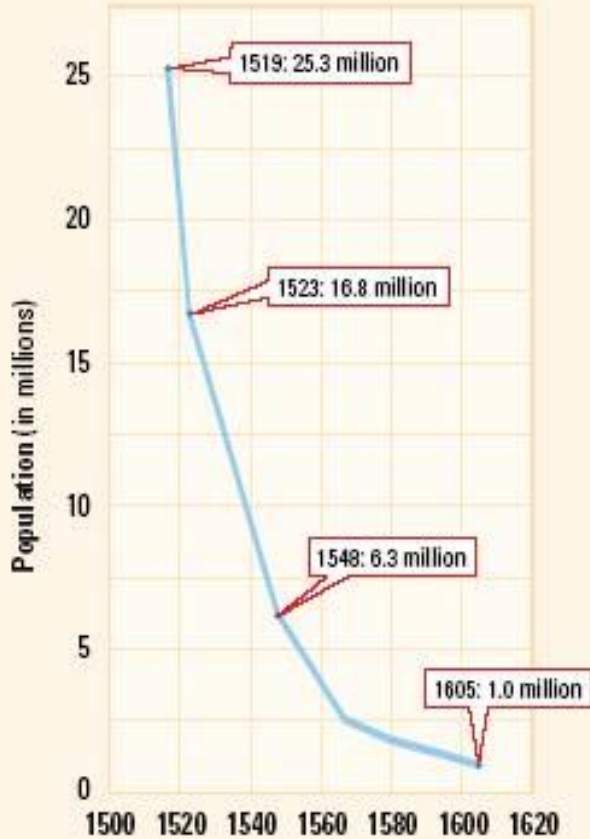
1. *What is the topic of this document?*
2. *Above are two excerpts from a diary or journal. Who is being quoted in both entries?*
3. *According to the first quote what were the Europeans planning for the natives? How did he intend to accomplish his goal?*
4. *How did the Europeans describe the natives? Why do you believe this was important information for the Europeans?*
5. *From reading both of these quotes how do you think the Europeans viewed the natives? Site evidence to support your answer.*

Document 2

The Impact of Disease

The charge of genocide is largely sustained by figures showing the precipitous decline of the Indian population. Although scholars debate the exact numbers, in Alvin Josephy's estimate, the Indian population fell from between fifteen and twenty million when the white man first arrived to a fraction of that 150 years later. Undoubtedly the Indians perished in great numbers. Yet although European enslavement of Indians and the Spanish forced labor system extracted a heavy toll in lives, the vast majority of Indian casualties occurred not as a result of hard labor or deliberate destruction but because of contagious diseases that the Europeans transmitted to the Indians. The spread of infection and unhealthy patterns of behavior was also reciprocal. From the Indians the Europeans contracted syphilis. The Indians also taught the white man about tobacco and cocaine, which would extract an incalculable human toll over the next several centuries. The Europeans, for their part, gave the Indians measles and smallpox. Since the Indians had not developed any resistance or immunity to these unfamiliar ailments, they perished in catastrophic numbers.

Source: "The Crimes of Christopher Columbus" Dinesh D'Souza



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1. What is the topic being discussed in this document?
2. The term genocide should be familiar from the holocaust, what is the words meaning?
3. Look at the chart, what information is the chart showing us?
4. The Source is from a book "The crimes of Christopher Columbus" Why do you believe the author chose that title for the book?
5. The picture is an original drawing from the Mesoamerican natives. Describe what you see in the photo.
6. The author shows bias in their writing. What do you believe their bias to be? Provide support.
7. Natives were the first slaves in America, And this took its toll on the native population. But what was the number one killer of the natives? Why did the natives die form such things.



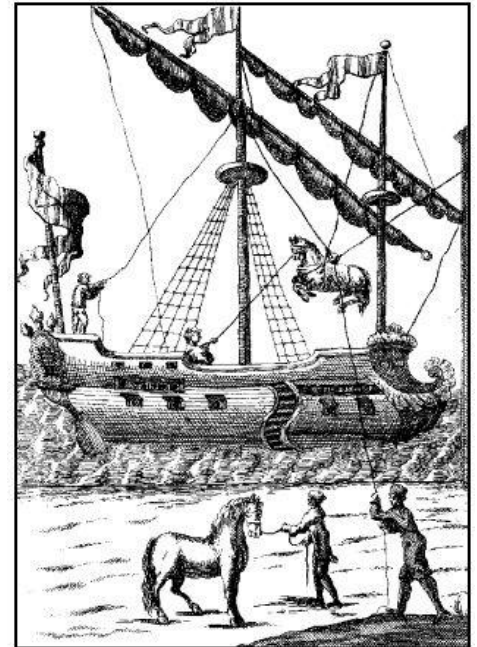
Document 3

Agricultural Change

Exchanging crops proved to be a far more intricate, involved process than ever could have been imagined at the time. Remarkably, the people of the Americas realized that crops with higher caloric value could not only feed more people, but also allowed people to work harder because they were more energized. This led to an adoption of American crops by European peasantries that changed entire cuisines in various cultures and spread rapidly through the Americas, Europe and finally, Africa. An important crop in Europe was potatoes, as they could be left in the ground until they were ready to be eaten and allowed many Europeans to evade taxes, as tax collectors did not go so far as to dig up not yet harvested crops. Similarly, potatoes were also a helpful crop and food source because when armies invaded and rounded up food for themselves, they were similarly unable to steal the potatoes; thereby, leaving food for the European people. Animals were also a key part of the Columbian Exchange. Horses, pigs, sheep, and cattle were all European animals that flourished rapidly in the Americas because they were able to reproduce without being hindered by predators. Pigs were also a key animal used during ocean travels because they could be dumped on the way to a country or place and then picked up and eaten on the way back. The horse, too, was also a very useful animal as it helped with battle; it allowed for faster travel, it allowed for the surprising of opponents, and allowed people to fight from a higher level.

“Columbian Exchange” March 31, 2006 Lauren Rees

1. What is being discussed in document 4?
2. What is the source of this document?
3. What were the benefits of the crops from the Americas? How did these crops effect European culture?
4. The potato became an important crop in Europe, why?
5. Animals played an important role in the Columbian Exchange. Which animal do you believe had the biggest impact in America? Support your answer.



Document 4

A New Economic System

When they established colonies in the Americas, the Spanish created a new economic system, the *encomienda system*, in which Native Americans worked on Spanish-owned estates. The basis for that system was laid out in a letter from King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella to the governor of Hispaniola in 1503.

“Our desire is that the Christians not lack people to work their holdings and to take out what gold there is. It also is our desire that the Indians live in community with the Christians, because they then will help each other cultivate and settle the island, take out the gold, and bring profit to Spain. Therefore, we command you, our governor, to compel the Indians to associate with the Christians. The Indians should work on the Christians’ building, mine the gold, till the fields, and produce food for the Christians. This the Indians shall perform as free people, which they are, and not as slaves. Also, see to it that the Indians are well treated, with those who become Christians better treated than the others. Do not consent or allow any person to do them any harm or oppress them.”

1. What is the topic of document 5?
2. Define encomienda system.
3. What is the source of this text? How do you know?
4. By reading the above text was seemed to be the main goal of the Spanish? Why?
5. Explain how the author(s) of the text felt the natives should be treated. Was everyone to be treated the same, why or why not?

Document 5



Technology:

In this illustration you see both Native Americans and Colonial men at war with one another.

1. What is the major weapon being used by either side?
2. Why do you think these two sides are fighting?
3. Which group do you believe had an advantage? Explain.
4. Who do you believe is more likely to win the battle, why?

Document 6

Religion and Language:

1. Examine the picture. Write a description of the people shown in the picture.
2. What is the building in the background?
3. What were some of the things Europeans brought in the picture? Why are they significant?
4. Think back to the exploration and imperialism. Why were Europeans bringing manufactured goods to the New World?
5. Spanish/Portuguese missions were used to both spread a religion and language. Looking at Latin America today how much influence did the missions have on Latin America? Explain.

