

Columbian Exchange

The Columbian Exchange--the exchange of European products to the Americas and vice-versa--invites discussion and evokes controversy to this day

The Columbian Exchange is one of the most significant results of the Age of Exploration and the First Global Age. Food products, livestock and diseases are but three elements of the Columbian Exchange.

As Columbus "discovered America" and Western Europe discovered the various economic opportunities available in the New World, agricultural exchanges between the two regions led to exchanges of other items. Within decades of Columbus' voyages, the trans Atlantic slave trade had begun and hundreds of thousands of native Americans died of diseases brought to America by Europeans and Africans.

The early Spanish conquistadors brought gunpowder and the horse to America as well as the Catholic Christian Church. Indeed, the conquistadors brought priests with them and established missions such as St. Augustine, San Diego and San Antonio. The Spanish also brought African slaves to work on sugar plantations.

New foods for both Europe and the Americas was a major part of the Columbian Exchange. The Americas provided such new foods as corn, the potato, the tomato, peppers, pumpkins, squash, pineapples, cacao beans (for chocolate) and the sweet potato. Also, such animals as turkeys provided a new food source for Europeans. Tobacco, an American product, was also carried to Europe.

From Europe, the Americas were introduced to such livestock as cattle, pig and sheep as well as grains such as wheat. African products introduced to the Americas included items originally from Asia were brought to the west by European traders and African slaves. These items included the onion, citrus fruits, bananas, coffee beans, olives, grapes, rice and sugar cane.

More negative items introduced to the Americas were diseases. Smallpox, influenza, malaria, measles, typhus and syphilis were brought to the Americas as a part of the Columbian Exchange. Also, African slavery was introduced by the Spanish as native Americans were decimated by these diseases.

While many elements of the Columbian Exchange can be considered positive--new food supplies, livestock and better diets--negative aspects include diseases which wiped out American populations, the African slave trade and eventual conquest of the Americas by Western European nations.

Read more: "The Columbian Exchange: Food, Livestock and Disease All Crossed the Atlantic" - <http://weuropeanhistory.suite101.com/article.cfm/columbianexchange#ixzz0AEEMWSSA>