

The Columbian Exchange

The phrase “Columbian Exchange” was popularized by University of Texas historian Alfred W. Crosby, Jr. in 1972. It refers to the flow of organisms among the continents of the Eastern and Western Hemisphere after European contact. Below is a chart summarizing some of the main organisms which were transplanted and shared as a result of the interaction between east and west.

<i>From the Americas:</i>	<i>From Europe, Africa, Asia:</i>
corn (maize) tobacco potato tomato squash turkey avocado bell and hot peppers pineapple cassava cacao bean peanut beans vanilla manioc (tapioca) persimmon pumpkin sweet potato wild rice blueberry cranberry syphilis	onion citrus fruits grapes banana turnip coffee bean sugar cane peach pear cucumber apple cabbage olive grains (wheat, barley, oats, rice) honeybee cattle (sheep, pig, horse) smallpox influenza typhus measles malaria diphtheria whooping cough

Situations of Interaction to consider:

- Dependence on one New World crop exacerbates to Irish potato famine, which leads to massive Irish immigration to America
- Increased caloric intake from New World foods introduced to Africa fuels population boom, increasing opportunities for slavery’s expansion
- Note the high number of diseases which were introduced into the Americas through contact with Europeans—although European settlement in what is now New England did not begin until the early 17th century, fisherman from Europe and Norse explorers had had contact with Natives in that area since the late 1100s for the Norse and 1500s in the case of fishermen. It is believed that European diseases began making their way through Native populations from at least that time in the area, and due to trading networks, spread rapidly ahead of the European line of settlement. This is why the Pilgrims settled in an area that was already cleared of trees and why they felt that God had provided them with a deserted village—the Natives were wiped out with possibly a 95% mortality rate. On the other side of the ledger, syphilis was introduced to the Eastern Hemisphere from the Americas, probably as conquistadores and others who did not seek to permanently settle returned to their countries of origin. Perhaps we could call this “Montezuma’s second revenge.”

Source (other than this instructor): Scoop on History