

History

1492 - Lesson 3 of 4

The Columbian Exchange

Why have historians described 1492 as a 'turning point' in world history?

Mr Wallace



Your task is to collect evidence that supports the following statements.

The Columbian Exchange...

Led to improved living conditions in the 'Old World'.	Had a terrible impact on millions of people.	Changed the food that we eat.
Changed different cultures' way of life.	Led to the growth of European empires.	Still affects us in the modern day.



Disease

Diseases such as **smallpox** had never travelled to the Americas. This meant that while many Europeans had built up an **immunity** to certain diseases, the **indigenous** people of the 'New World' had no such protection. These diseases killed millions of people. Best estimates range between 50% and 90% of all indigenous Americans died as a result of diseases introduced by Europeans – especially smallpox and measles. The spread of disease, and the death it brought, had other impacts. For example, it weakened the Aztec Empire, making it easier for the Spanish to conquer it during the 16th century. So smallpox helped the Spanish to begin creating **colonies** in Central America.



Voluntary movement of people

Spain and Portugal were the first two European nations to begin colonising the 'New World' but they were not the only ones. As millions of indigenous Americans died from disease, it became easier to establish settlements and colonies across Central and South America. These settler colonies moved a great number of Europeans to the New World. In these colonies, Europeans began to spread their language and culture, as well as the Christian religion. This weakened the culture of local states. Other European countries such as Great Britain joined in. Britain colonised various Caribbean islands, as well as the east coast of North America. To this day, the different countries of the New World have large percentages of people originally from Europe, such as 84% of Argentina, and 76% of Canada.



Food

European colonies did not just move people to the New World, but crops too. This was especially the case with crops that they desired but couldn't grow in Europe because of the climate, such as bananas, coffee and especially sugar. With new colonies, they could grow these crops without needing to trade with Asian merchants for them. This meant that European nations became less reliant on trade with the East for certain items. The movement of crops was hugely important in the other direction too. Food such as potatoes became available in Europe, and could grow in weak soil. They were also nutrient rich and had more calories so people were able to live longer and had better diets. Other crops such as tomatoes, chilli peppers, peanuts and corn were also moved from the Americas to Europe and Asia.



Forced movement of people

When Europeans started using the New World colonies to grow crops they realised they needed lots of people's **labour** to harvest the crops.. This led to one of the most long-lasting and tragic elements of the Columbian Exchange: the enslavement of people. European nations such as Portugal, Spain, France and Great Britain began enslaving West Africans and shipping them to their new colonies. The enslaved Africans were forced to work on **plantations** growing crops such as sugar. As the Europeans made more money, more labour was wanted, and the cycle continued. In the end, up to 12 million African people were enslaved and forced over the Atlantic Ocean to places such as Jamaica, North America and Brazil. The trade in enslaved people has had long-lasting consequences, as it weakened African countries, and created race-based societies that kept black enslaved people at the bottom. To this day, 98% of the population of Haiti is originally from Africa.



People and Culture

Over time, this mixing of crops, people and animals has had a huge impact on people and cultures around the world. For example, the lifestyle of various indigenous tribes was forever changed by the introduction of horses. The horses allowed indigenous tribes to hunt and live a nomadic lifestyle. Europeans became used to foods that once were luxuries becoming common. For example, sugar became affordable by the late 1600's, as did chocolate drinks. These changed European diets forever. Finally, the movement of crops changed national **cuisine**. Italian pizza or pasta would never have been possible without tomatoes, and curries from India are only possible because of the movement of chilli peppers. What we now consider 'national' food is really a mixing of crops from around the world.



Glossary

Colony - land that is under the control of another country or empire

Cuisine - the style of cooking in a certain area

Labour - workers

Immunity - created or formed

Indigenous - people who are naturally from a particular place

Plantation - a large estate that grows a 'cash crop' such as tobacco or sugar

Smallpox - a deadly disease

