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THE IMPACT OF THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE ON LATIN AMERICA AND EUROPE

Christopher Columbus “discovered” the New World in 1492. This event started an exchange between the Old World (Europe) and the New World (the Americas). As the Spanish spread their empire, the indigenous population (or native people) began to decline. The Europeans introduced Africans in the New World as slaves. The Africans also became a part of this exchange. Today we know this as the Columbian Exchange, since it began as a result of Columbus’s discovery.

One important part of the Columbian Exchange was the exchange of food plants. Cocoa, corn, potatoes, peppers, and tomatoes grew in Central and South America. The Spanish and Portuguese discovered these foods and took them back to Europe. European crops brought from Europe and Africa to the New World included coffee, peaches, sugar, and wheat. Farming changed in the New World. Large plantations with slave labor were started. Sugar cane was one important plantation crop.

The indigenous population was defeated by diseases that were also part of the Columbian Exchange. The Europeans brought with them many diseases that the native people had not seen before. Their bodies did not have immunity (natural resistance) to the diseases, and their healers did not know how to treat the diseases. Some of the diseases brought to the New World were influenza, measles, smallpox, and typhoid fever. Between 50 and 75 percent of the population of some native tribes may have lost their lives to these diseases.

Europeans introduced certain animals to the New World. These included pigs, cows, goats, and bees. The horse was a culture-changing animal. It allowed native people to travel further and faster. The horse was useful in battle and hunting. Horses helped the indigenous people spread their territory and trade with other tribes.

1. What is the Columbian Exchange? _____

2. What plants were exchanged during the Columbian Exchange? _____

3. Why did diseases kill more Native Americans than war and guns? _____

4. What animals were part of the Columbian Exchange? _____
