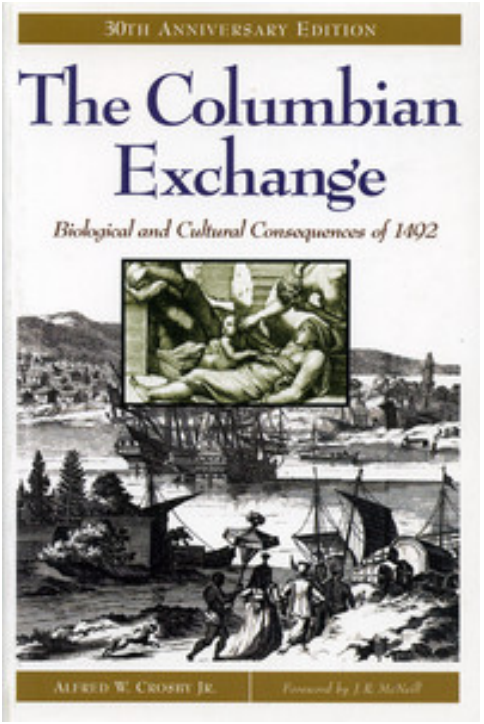
The Columbian Exchange

Unit 5: Old Worlds and New Worlds

What is the Columbian Exchange?

- Term was coined by Historian Al Crosby of the University of Texas
- Contact between any two peoples geographically separated from one another results in an "exchange" of physical elements
- The three main elements exchanged:
  - Animals
  - Plants
  - Microbes



Columbus's ships, ferrying people, plants, animals, and diseases between the Old World and the New, instantly reconnected ecosystems that had developed in complete isolation from one another for millennia.

Animals

- Llama was the only domesticated animal in Latin America
- Cattle, horses pigs and sheep were all taken to the Americas
- None were taken to Europe
- Significant environmental impact
- Animal fertilizer became an important part of the agricultural system
- The horse will have the

From Agrarian TO Nomadic

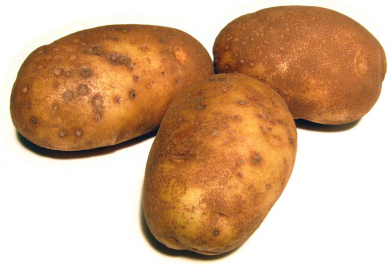
- The horse had an enormous impact on Native Americans
- Plains Indians (previously sedentary and agrarian) became nomadic as they used horses to hunt wild game, especially the bison.
- These hunting practices nearly lead to the extinction of the bison, as only 1000 were left by the end of the 1800's

Plants

- Europeans brought cash crops to Americas and brought crops back

- From the Americas to Europe
  - Maize
  - tomato
  - Beans
  - cotton
  - potato
  - tobacco
  - cacao

- From Europe to the Americas
  - Sugar
  - wheat
  - Bananas
  - rice
  - coffee
  - grapes



Plants

- New crops flourished in Americas
- Many indigenous plants were crowded out by new crops and weeds
- Old world crops stronger because they had a more competitive original environment
- Economy shifts to large scale agricultural production, labor intensive
- Europeans adopt crops from Americas

Old World Disease

- European disease was particularly virulent

- Humans caught smallpox from their cows, influenza from their fowl, bubonic plague from the rats who lived in their houses
- Nearly all of the European diseases were communicable by air and touch

- The pathway of these diseases was invisible to both Indians and Europeans

European Belief

- There was no germ theory at the time of contact
- Illness in Europe was considered to be the consequence of sin
- Indians, who were largely “heathen” or non-Christian were regarded as sinners and therefore subject to illness as a punishment

Disease Raced Ahead

- In most cases, Indian people became sick even before they had direct contact with Europeans
- Trade goods that traveled from tribe to tribe through middlemen were often the vector of disease
- There is little evidence to think that Europeans intentionally infected trade items for trade with Indians to kill them

Smallpox

- Central Mexico – 25 million in 1519 to less than one million in 1605
- Hispaniola – One million in 1492 to 46,000 in 1512
- North America – 90% of Native Americans were gone within 100 years of Plymouth landing

American Indians, with smallpox contracted from Europeans.

Why were Europeans immune?

→ Original environments

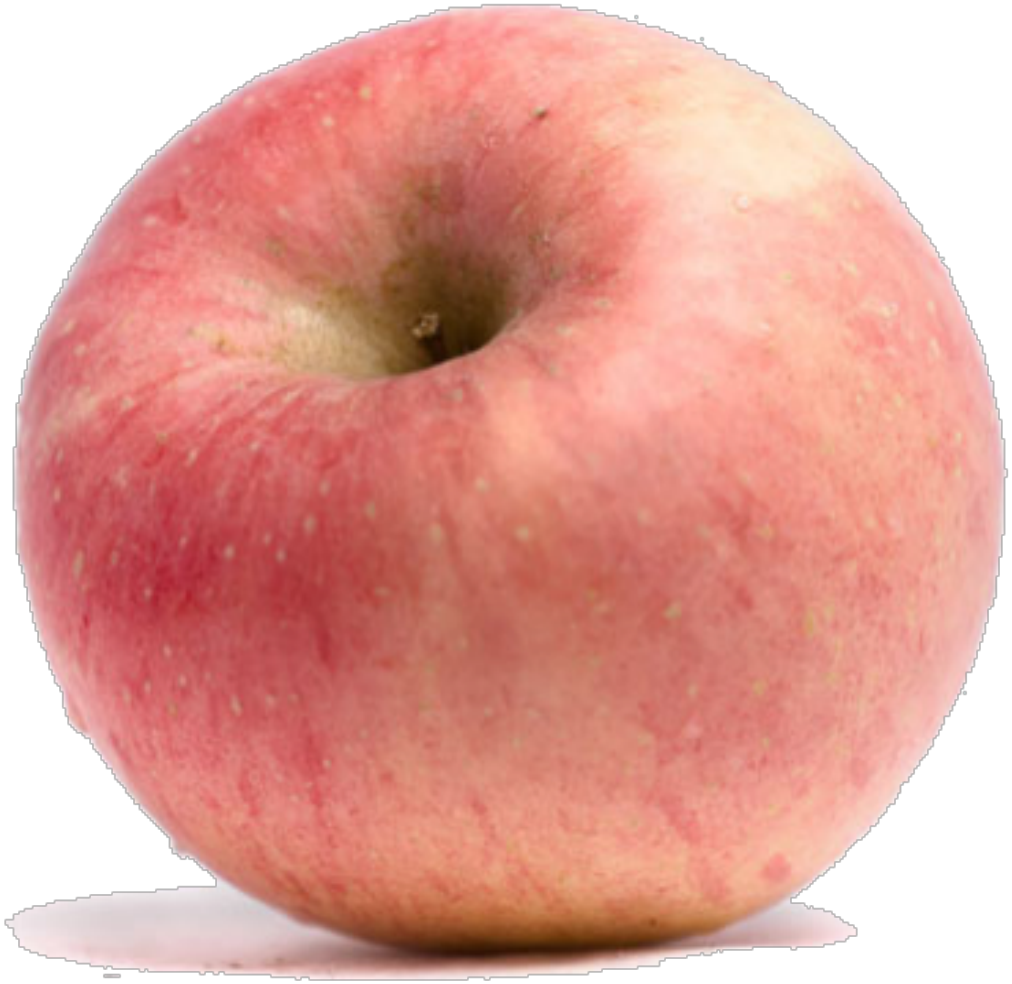
→ Most pathogens originate with animals or insects

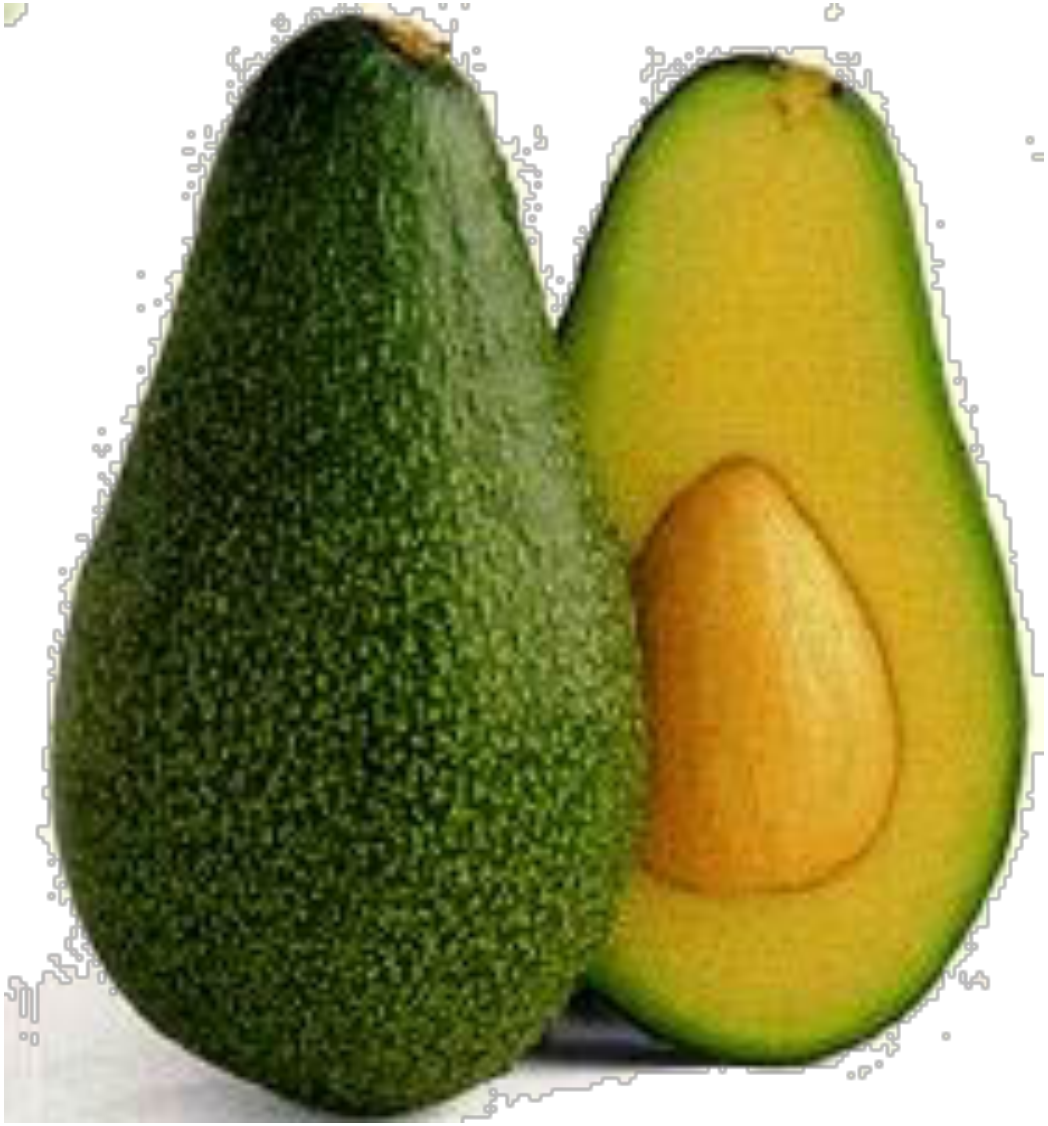
→ Domesticated animals and plants were more numerous in Europe

→ Human exposure to greater diversity meant more ecological protection

Demographic Significance

- Native American population decreases
- Europeans need labor so they import African slaves
- Europeans move to Americas to oversee economic production
- Mixing of all three populations occur in varying degrees



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