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**Define the Columbian Exchange-**



“The Columbian Exchange”

J.R. McNeill

*The Columbian Exchange had dramatic and lasting effects on the world. New diseases were introduced to American populations that had no prior experience to them. The results were devastating. The populations were introduced to new weeds, pests, livestock, and pets. The Natives also sent an addictive crop, tobacco, to Europe. Native American populations had no immunity to these diseases and were stricken by wave and wave of epidemics, which produced a catastrophic mortality throughout the Americas. On some Caribbean islands, the Native American populations died out completely. In all, between 1492 and 1650, perhaps about 90% of the Native American population died.*

*When the first inhabitants of the Americas crossed the land bridge 20,000 years ago they brought few diseases with them. Why? For one reason, they had no domesticated animals. These domesticated animals were the original source of human diseases such as small pox and measles. In addition, the first Americans spent many years in the extreme cold, which eliminated many disease-causing agents.*

*On the other hand, the Columbian Exchange also introduced new foods and fiber crops improving diets and increasing trade. In addition, it also brought horses, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and a collection of other useful animals to the Americas. Of all the animals introduced by the Europeans, the horse held particular attraction. Native Americans encountered it as a “fearsome war beast”; however, they soon learned to ride and raise horses themselves. The introduction of the horse revolutionized hunting buffalo in the Great Plains. Eventually, cattle ranches became widespread. Ranching economies emerged throughout the Americas.*