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World History

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Columbian Exchange: New Food in Return for Death

For a long time history taught us how great the Columbian Exchange was for the native populations in the New World. We learned about new food crops, domesticated farm animals, and spices that the Europeans brought to the Americas. Among these developments there are many more negatives that the native people in the New World experienced.

Europeans brought many diseases to the people of the New World. Many of these diseases were extremely harmful and also very fatal because the Native Americans had no exposure and therefore no immunity to these diseases. If the Columbian Exchange wouldn’t have happened then the diseases would have never reached the people of the New World and not as many deaths would have occurred. Some historians believe that small pox and other European diseases caused native people to lose as much as 80 percent of their population.

Slavery was also established because of the Columbian Exchange. Native Americans of the New World were forced into slavery on their own land. The Natives were forced into slavery because the Europeans wanted them to work in mines, rubber plants, and on farms. Africans were also brought to the New World to work as slaves on the plantation complex.

Another negative impact of the Columbian Exchange on the New World was the displacement of native populations. This happened for several reasons. European settlers planted crops, built homes, and built towns, all of which took up land that native people hunted and lived on. Basically, Europeans wanted to exploit the land in the New World and were driven to kick native people off the land that they wanted. This led to the Europeans forcing Native Americans onto reservations, which drastically altered their way of life and also decreased their likelihood of reproducing as much as they needed to.

In addition to forcing Native Americans onto reservations, settlers simply killed them as a way to get rid of them and clear them off the desired land. This was easy to do because the Europeans had gunpowder, guns, muskets, and swords. In general these weapons from Europe increased killing in the New World.

Although many new foods and spices were brought to the New World because of the Columbian Exchange, there were more negative impacts on the society then there were positive.