

“We want a better trade route” the European people said. The Silk Road was their trading route and it was very dangerous and slow. It took a long time to get spices across land when the Europeans were travelling by foot. The road was also crawling with bandits who would steal the goods people were bringing back.

In 1419, Prince Henry the Navigator brought together cartographers, shipbuilders, and navigators to design and develop new technologies to help make ocean travel faster. Everyone he brought together looked at the pros and cons of Viking ships and developed new type of ship called the caravel with lateen sails. The navigation tools they made were the compass and the astrolabe (which was later replaced by the sextant). The effects of these new technologies helped Europe begin the race for exploration.

Europe's mission was to find a faster trading route to India. In 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed west to try and make it around the world to India (Asia). Little did he know that there was two continents in front of his destination. He arrived at the Caribbean islands, which he thought were islands of the coast of India. He wouldn't come to know that he had found a new continent until his third voyage in 1496. He returned to Europe with new resources such as potatoes and tobacco. Europe sent more people to the Americas to bring back goods. This was the start of the Columbian Exchange

The Columbian Exchange brought together two very different ecosystems with different diseases, two different sets of flora and fauna. It exposed many people across the world to new animals, new food, and unfortunately new diseases. While some people's lives were improved by the new resources, others' lives were destroyed by the impacts of the diseases they were exposed to. Although it was called the Columbian Exchange, it was more one-sided. While Europe bloomed with this new trade because more food and resources meant their population grew and their economy grew, the Americas suffered a great deal due to the loss of people from diseases. Within 150 years of the Columbian Exchange over 80% of the indigenous population died.

New European colonies were built in the Americas because of the growth in the trade market and they thrived off of the money made by the new plantation system. The plantation system relied on enslaved labour. From 15-1800s over twelve million people were forcibly taken from Africa and sold to the slave trade to work in the Americas. They worked in fields harvesting sugarcane amongst other things.

Now how has all of this impacted us today? The Columbian Exchange has changed the world forever based on the things that were traded. I bet the food you ate for today was affected by the Columbian Exchange whether you had bacon or hash browns. Now, the impacts of the Columbian Exchange have a dark side, because of the devastating effects of the slave trade, we still struggle with racism, equality, and the value of one's life over another.

The End, But Not Really