

Contact and Consequences ^[1]

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Not only people crossed the Atlantic Ocean after 1492. They carried with them livestock, crops, and diseases that had been unique to Eurasia and Africa or to the Americas, and that “Columbian Exchange” of life forms reshaped the world. Some aspects of the exchange were beneficial: Corn and potatoes, native American crops, became important sources of food to the world’s people. But the diseases that Europeans carried to the Americas killed more than 90 percent of the population of those two continents, wiping out entire cultures that had existed for thousands of years.

In the final chapter of this module we’ll weigh the biological, ecological, and human consequences of contact between Europeans and Americans. After considering the impact of new crops, new livestock, and especially new diseases on the world’s peoples, we’ll end this module where we began — with a look at the landscape of North Carolina, and how both American Indians and European colonists molded it to suit their needs.

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