**Columbian Exchange and the Commercial Revolution Test**

Christopher Columbus discovered the New World in the year 1492. When he returned to Spain he brought different types of plants, animals, and even people back with him. This began what is referred to as the Columbian Exchange, the swapping of plants, animals and people between continents. After the Pope gave the New World to Spain, other European nations began sailing North and West from Europe looking for the legendary Northwest Passage. This passage would take ships over and around North America to Asia avoiding Spanish territory.

French explorer Giovanni de Verrazano first discovered the area around present day New York. Other French explorers like Jacques Cartier and Samuel de Champlain explored the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes. The French were not interested in establishing an empire in the New World, Instead they focused their efforts on fur trading. They dropped hundreds of tappers off along the rivers and waterways and would return to buy animal skins and furs. French Jesuit monks Marquette and Joliet explored the Mississippi River looking to spread Catholicism in the New World.

England looked to the New World to establish bases for their privateers, hired pirates, to attack Spanish shipping. Originally called buccaneers, these soldiers for hire attacked other nations ships and shared the wealth with their host country. The most powerful and famous English pirate was Henry Morgan. England’s first attempt at colonizing ended in disaster when the colony of Roanoke simply disappeared. The first permanent English colony in America was Jamestown. Jamestown was established to be a base for English privateers, but ended up getting rich when John Rolfe brought smuggled some seeds in from Spanish Caribbean and quickly became wealthy growing tobacco.

The Dutch turned toward North America simply to build ports for their ships to rest and reload on supplies on their trading voyages. They established a colony on the island of Manhattan which they names New Netherland.

Thanks to the Columbian Exchange, the world’s food supply multiplied. The Americas became a source of food for millions in Europe. One example given in class is the potato. This plant could grow more food per square foot than any other crop and quickly became the main food source for millions of poor Irish. When this crop failed, 1 million people starved to death and 2 million left Ireland in what is known as the Irish Potato Famine. Power in Europe began to shift from kings to the people with boats who controlled the food supply.

A downfall of the Columbian Exchange was the introduction of new pathogens to the New World such as small pox. This killed off 80%-90% of the natives in the Americas. As Europeans struggled to find enough laborers to tend to crops and mines in the New World, they began to look toward Africa to fill this labor need. Portugal was the first country to focus on large scale importation of Africans as slave labor in the New World. Africans made a logical choice for labor because they had immunity to most European diseases so they didn’t die as easily from small pox. Africans planted the same crops in Africa as they were tasked with in the Americans. Africans were less likely to escape because there was no way to get back to Africa. And African’s skin color immediately identified them as servants and made it very difficult to leave.

40% of all Africans imported to the New World ended up in Brazil. A trade pattern emerged where slaves from Africa came to the new World in exchange for sugar, rum, or crops. This went to Europe to be exchanged for cash, iron, gunpowder, or other goods. These goods then travelled to Africa to be exchanged for slaves. This three way pattern of trade became known as Triangular Trade. The longest part was the journey that slaves made from Africa to the New World. This is often referred to as the Middle passage. On this passage, slaves were jammed into tight quarters for long periods of time. Up to 20% of all Africans died on this passage.

With this new international system of trade, countries switched from a local economy to a global economy. Nations began to increase imports (buying from other countries) and exports (selling to other countries). Now that the world’s food was being grown outside of the reach of kings, a new system began to emerge called capitalism that was based on private ownership of goods and money. Under capitalism, a few people will get very rich, most will be comfortable, and some will fall behind. In order for capitalism to work, there must be someone to sell your product to. To ensure that nations had enough money to participate in capitalism, nations turned to mercantilism. This means that a nation must sell more than it buys or it will run out of money.

As we saw on the video, “mother” nations began to establish colonies to get cheap resources to send back to the motherland. The mother country would then raise the price of the cheap goods and sell them for profit. Under this system, production of a product must be kept very low, thus most colonies turned to slavery to keep labor costs down. In England, people began to pool their money in order to afford larger investments. They would then split the profits among them based on how much they had originally contributed. This pooling of multiple people’s money for one company is known and a joint-stock company.

These changes in the world’s economy and the massive flow of people entering the global economy became known as the commercial revolution. As a result of the Commercial Revolution, Europeans had many more products from which to choose and more money to spend on more books and new forms of learning and entertainment, and more choices in occupation as well as consumption. These advances led to a rising standard of living across the globe.

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