

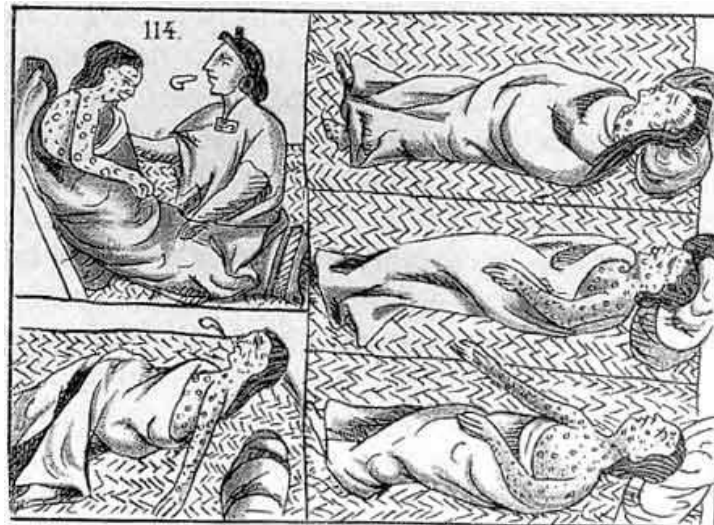
Read the following lecture by Dr. Ian Carr, Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Medicine of the University of Manitoba: *The Columbian Exchange*.

Questions to Answer:

1. How does this article reinforce your reading of the Zinn article?
2. Why did many Europeans account for the disease in terms of beginning with a woman transmitting the disease of syphilis?
3. Describe the evidence that syphilis came with Columbus from America in 1493?
4. Why does Dr. Ian Carr state that *trouble really started, when long distance sailing ships were developed*?
5. Why is disease part of the *Columbian Exchange*?
6. What conclusions does Dr. Ian Carr make? Do you agree with his assessment?
7. Why might many wish to portray the origins of syphilis lie with the natives?
8. – 10. You create 2 provocative questions you could pose after reading this article.

Plagues and Peoples: The Columbian Exchange

The Columbian Biological Exchange		
	Old World to New World:	New World to Old World:
Diseases:	Smallpox , Measles, Chicken Pox, Malaria, Yellow Fever, Influenza, and Common Cold	Syphilis?



The **Columbian Exchange** started when Christopher Columbus petitioned Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain for a grant, to explore westward. Everyone knows the name of Columbus -- the upwardly and westwardly mobile Genoese mariner. All accept that he sailed from old Europe to the New World, -- but there is little agreement beyond that -- gold digger, slave master, visionary or all of these. Nothing is certain about this man -- not even his picture. But there is no doubt that his voyages occasioned a century long episode of genocide, even worse than the Jewish holocaust by many millions.

The voyages of Christopher Columbus were shining maritime achievements in themselves. Columbus set sail for the first time from Palos on August 3 1492, leaving a Europe wracked by

war, and a Christianity menaced by Islam. The population had been halved a century before by the Black Death, and its shadow still darkened men's memories. ... Columbus sailed perhaps with a secret map, and certainly in fear of crossing the line into the waters allocated to the Portuguese. Men were killed for betraying navigational secrets in those days. He landed perhaps on Watling Island on Friday October 12, 1492, and he early wrote back to Ferdinand and Isabella how docile the natives were and how very unskilled in arms. *"They could all be subjected and made to do as one wishes."* He soon after landed on Hispaniola, and enslaved its inhabitants. From the beginning the Europeans were hardly kind to the indigenous peoples. Within a year or so they had enslaved most of the people of Hispaniola, (Haiti and the Dominican Republic); in 1493 500 Arawak people were shipped back to Spain as slaves. Five shivering captives actually reached the streets of Barcelona.

Natives were grossly maltreated, often in the name of religion; *"they were hanged in groups of 13 in memory of our Redeemer and his apostles."* There was considerable papal thought before they were declared to be human. Of 500 hapless Arawaks taken back to Spain as slaves, only seven survived. In succeeding voyages Columbus explored the West Indies, and reached the mainland coast of South America. After Columbus returned to Spain, and as he traveled to Cadiz in 1492 two small boys may have huzza-ed his passage – Cortes and Pizarro. Their ambition must have been fired, and the conquest of Meso-America was triggered.

By 1522 much of Yucatan, Mexico and Peru were under the Spanish heel. It was December 1518 when the smallpox began in Santo Domingo, and soon spread to Yucatan, Mexico, and less immediately Peru. The disease had a 12 day incubation period, and started with a rash, fever and vomiting. It did not at first cross the Atlantic because the voyage took more than the natural life history of the disease, but the protection was only temporary, since the virus was buried in the scabs. The attack rate in a virgin population was nearly 100% and the mortality rate over 50%. *"Viruelas"* the Spaniards called it; it was unmistakable, but was accompanied by measles, typhus, and later yellow fever, so not all the epidemics were pure, single diseases; and it had vicious respiratory complications. So it was not always the virus which killed.

The population of Hispaniola was exterminated, and there was a massive die-off in the rest of Meso-America. Estimates vary from 50% to 90%; certainly more than 20 million people died. The leaders were killed off. Cortes won Tenochtitlan as much by the virus as the sword. Before the arrival of the Spaniards these societies had been prosperous, and healthy. After the conquest of Yucatan a Mayan wrote:

" There was then no sickness; they had no aching bones; they had then no high fever; they had then no smallpox; they had then no abdominal pain; they had then no consumption; they had then no headache. At that time the course of humanity was orderly. The foreigners made it otherwise when they arrived here." (Chronicle of Chilam Bayam.)

Golden Ages are in the past; what followed was dreadful:

"It was the month of Tepeilhuitl when it began and it spread over the people as great destruction. Some it quite covered with pustules on all parts -- their faces, their heads, their breasts, etc. There was a great havoc. Very many died of it. They could not walk; they only lay in their resting places and beds. They could not move ; they could not stir; they could not change positions , nor lie in one side; nor face down , nor on their backs. And if they stirred, much did they cry out. Great was its (smallpox) destruction. Covered , mantled with

pustules, many people died of them. " (Sahagun - Florentine Codex)

Similarly Cakchiquel Mayan annals recorded : "*Great was the stench of the dead. After our fathers and grandfathers succumbed, half of the people fled to the fields. The dogs and vultures devoured the bodies. The mortality was terrible. Your grandfathers died, and with them died the son of the king, and his brothers and kinsmen. So it was that we became orphans, oh my sons. So we became when we were young. All of were thus. We were born to die!*"

^The people died, the leaders died, the agriculture was crippled, and famine followed pestilence; they could not defend themselves, they could not feed themselves. The Horsemen of the Apocalypse had come to Meso-America. It was only five hundred years ago, not quite beyond folk memory. Similar things happened a little later further north; in 1622 around Boston Bay the Indians

"died on heapes, as they lay in their houses; and the living, that were able to shift for themselves, would runne away and let them dy, and let their Carkasesly above the ground without burial....And the bones and skulls upon the several places of their habitations made such a spectacle after my coming into these partes, that as I travailed in the Forrest nere the Massachusetts, it seemed to me a new found Golgotha."

Similar things happened in Western Canada even more recently. Disease also went back eastward with Columbus -- the **Columbian exchange**. The tale of syphilis is picturesque, and probably but not certainly true, since it is not absolutely certain whether syphilis existed in Europe before 1490.

In 1495 when Charles VIII of France led an army of 50, 000 to besiege Naples; after he took the city, Ferdinand and Isabella sent an army of Spaniards. A new disease developed. The new disease was said to have been brought from America by Columbus' sailors, or more likely by the Indian captives. The French called it Neapolitan disease and the Spaniards called it the French disease. Charles disbanded his army in Lyons in December 1495, and they spread over Europe, selling their mercenary swords. Remember that five shivering Indians had survived the first trip, and reached Barcelona. There was a severe outbreak of contagious disease with widespread skin eruptions. John de Vigo wrote of syphilis:

"In the yeare of our Loard, 1494, in ye monethe of December when Charles ye Frenche kynge toke hys jorney into the partes of Italy, to recover the kyngdome of Naples, there appered a certayne dysease through out al Italy of an unknown nature, whych sondry (many) nations hath called by sondry names. The Frenche men call it the dysease of Naples, bycause the soulders brought it from thence, into France.

... Thys dysease is contagious, chiefly ... through copulation (sex) of a man wyth an unclene (diseased) woman (because of course it is the woman's fault) ... the begynnyng (beginning)... with lytle pustules (sores) blewe colour, ... blacke, sometyme of whytyshe... pustules could not be healed by medicine ... (the disease) wold embrace the hole bodye, wyth ulceration... (spreading) ... chiefly in the joyntes, in the armes, under the knees, & in the foreheade, and welnye spredde through all the body, & yet at thys tyme they begyn euen so, but it is not so contagious as it was at the begynnyng."

How good is the evidence that syphilis came with Columbus from America in 1493? True in 1493 Villalobos described an outbreak of a venereal disease in Salamanca, a town some way

from the ports. But the best historical record is probably that of Bartholome las Casas, whose father and uncle sailed on Columbus second voyage. Casas was in Seville around the time, and had questioned natives of Hispaniola, and established to his satisfaction that there was a syphilis like disease there, before Columbus arrival, although a mild one. He did not write of it till 1530 in his *Apologetica Historica*. Oviedo, the other reputable historian shared his view. Moreover syphilitic bone lesions appeared in many Meso-American burials, and were rare unknown in Europe.

Ruy Dias de Isla (1539) wrote that he had treated men with syphilis in Barcelona, shortly after Columbus return. While there are reports that syphilis like illness had come back from Africa earlier, these are less well founded. It seems almost certain that syphilis came back with Columbus. It was shortly named syphilis by Fracastorius, a student of Copernicus. He wrote in verse the tale of a mythical shepherd called Syphilos. "He first wore bubos dreadful to the sight. First felt strange pains and sleepless passed the night. From him the malady received its name, the neighboring shepherds caught the spreading flame."

In Scotland an edict of the Town Council of Aberdeen dated 21, April 1497 refers to syphilis. It was "statuted and ordained by the Aldermen and Council that all the light women of the town should desist from their sins of venery." The disease had fairly high initial mortality and was highly contagious and not merely venereal. It was treated with mercury and with infusions of a bark obtained from an island of the West Indies. Syphilis was one of the scourges of society for the next four hundred years - with several names, notably the "Great Pox". True it quieted down over the centuries into a slower but no less certain killer.

By Dr. **Ian Carr**, Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Medicine