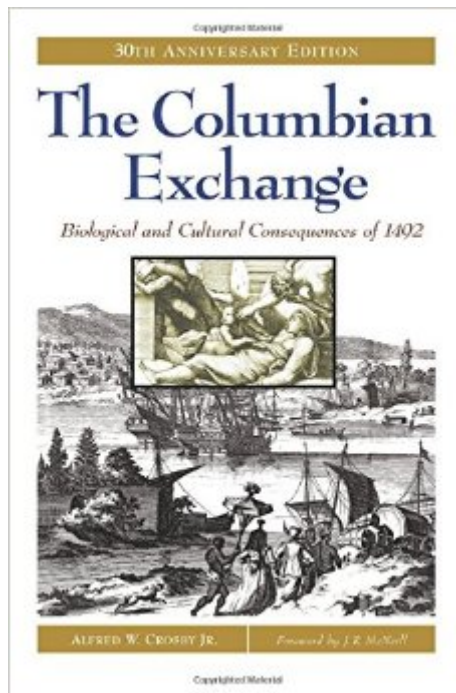


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# The Columbian Exchange: Biological And Cultural Consequences Of 1492, 30th Anniversary Edition



## Synopsis

Thirty years ago, Alfred Crosby published a small work that illuminated a simple point, that the most important changes brought on by the voyages of Columbus were not social or political, but biological in nature. The book told the story of how 1492 sparked the movement of organisms, both large and small, in both directions across the Atlantic. This Columbian exchange, between the Old World and the New, changed the history of our planet drastically and forever. The book *The Columbian Exchange* changed the field of history drastically and forever as well. It has become one of the foundational works in the burgeoning field of environmental history, and it remains one of the canonical texts for the study of world history. This 30th anniversary edition of *The Columbian Exchange* includes a new preface from the author, reflecting on the book and its creation, and a new foreword by J. R. McNeill that demonstrates how Crosby established a brand new perspective for understanding ecological and social events. As the foreword indicates, *The Columbian Exchange* remains a vital book, a small work that contains within the inspiration for future examinations into what happens when two peoples, separated by time and space, finally meet.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Although only a large essay, *Columbian Exchange* was a paradigm shift in how Western historians view biological exchanges between Old & New World after 1492. Besides the exchange in human (mostly African) slaves which was the intended 1st leg of a nefarious Triangular Trade cycle between Old & New Worlds, Crosby also examines the unintended consequences of food crops, pathogens, domesticated animals, and commodity crops (rubber, cotton, etc.) It concerns not only

the cash crops (tobacco, sugar, coffee, rubber, cotton). It also suggests the effect of pigs & horses which readily adapted to the New World. Horses transformed many Amerindian cultures into horse-centered cultures. Many Old World plants & animals transformed the Americas (and Africa). Unintended 'hitchhikers' like smallpox & flu had the effect of a genocidal pandemic upon native Amerindian tribes. New World species, especially potato, once they gained acceptance in Europe, became a staple of the poor, (Ireland & Russia). Not emphasized by Crosby, many exotic New World specimens were returned to the Old World by natural scientists and the idea of natural selection was devised based upon evidence & specimens gathered in New World by European naturalists (i.e., Darwin's studies of finches of Galapagos). These are a few of the effects of the Columbian Exchange. Crosby's work changed the way that historians and scientists understand the Age of Discovery. I read this book 'after the fact', having become familiar with the exchanges by secondary, later sources.

Alfred W. Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* discusses the anomaly of European migration. European colonization of the so-called "Neo-Europes", in particular, is the focus of this work. Crosby argues that the reason for European success in lands, so different than their own, in the temperate zone can be attributed to biology. The temperate climates occupied by European forces across the globe were more accommodating than other zones for habitation, which Crosby explains is the reason that European settlements were able to thrive there. In addition, as well as causing the European cultures to thrive, a biological occupation occurred; European plants, diseases, and species of animals invaded and supplanted the local lands. This combination allowed European colonialists--human, plant, and animal alike--to take control of the temperate zone and, as a result, the agricultural belt of the world. The areas deemed "Neo-Europes" by Crosby are composed of populations of European ancestry, despite the distance from Europe, and produce the most food surpluses; these two facts are not coincidental. Although the nineteenth century saw mass emigration due to a variety of conditions, it was the Neo-Europes which were the most popular. Crosby explains this success in the temperate zones by European imperialists biogeographically, starting with an observation about the respective latitudes of European and the Neo-Europes. The respective latitudes lie in the temperate zones and share similar climates. Therefore, when European plants and animals were transported to the new lands, they found an environment which was able to sustain them; more so, it allowed them to thrive.

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