

The Columbian Exchange and Its Consequences

- ✦ Widespread transatlantic transfer of plants, animals, diseases, people, technologies, and ideas after 1492
- ✦ Alfred W. Crosby Jr.'s 1972 book coined the term
- ✦ Helped found the field of environmental history
- ✦ Course arc: pre-contact worlds to modern consequences
- ✦ Includes biological transfers, demographic catastrophe, coercion, and cultural blending



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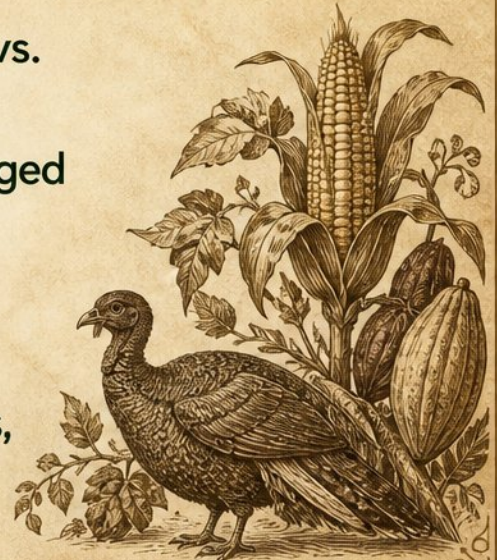




Pre-1492 Worlds: Afro-Eurasia and the Americas



- Contrast crop systems: wheat, rice, horses, cattle vs. maize, potatoes, manioc, cacao
- Challenge the Pristine Myth: landscapes were managed through fire, raised fields, and agroforestry
- Amazonian Dark Earths and Maya polyculture show large cities and diverse, managed crops
- Old World disease pools grew from dense populations, livestock, and long-distance trade



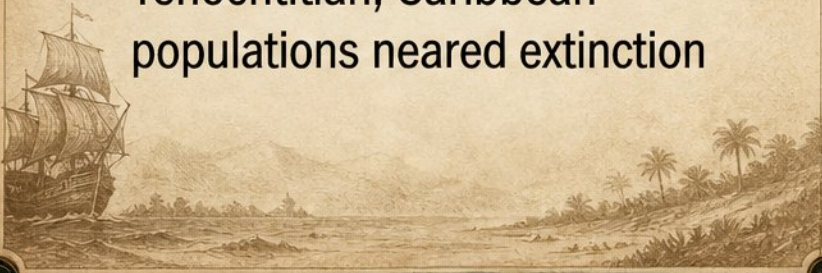
The Biological Exchange: *Crops and Animals*

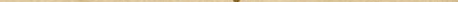
- ◆ New World crops: maize, potatoes, manioc, tomatoes, cacao
- ◆ Old World arrivals: wheat, sugarcane, horses, cattle, pigs
- ◆ Ranching cultures emerged; feral livestock spread widely
- ◆ Monocultures displaced indigenous agroecosystems in many regions



Old World Pathogens and Demographic Collapse

- ❖ Smallpox, measles, influenza, typhus struck non-immune populations
- ❖ Mortality often cited at 50% to 90% in first century
- ❖ 'Virgin soil' model later critiqued by scholars
- ❖ Disease compounded by war, forced labor, malnutrition
- ❖ 1520 smallpox devastated Tenochtitlan; Caribbean populations neared extinction

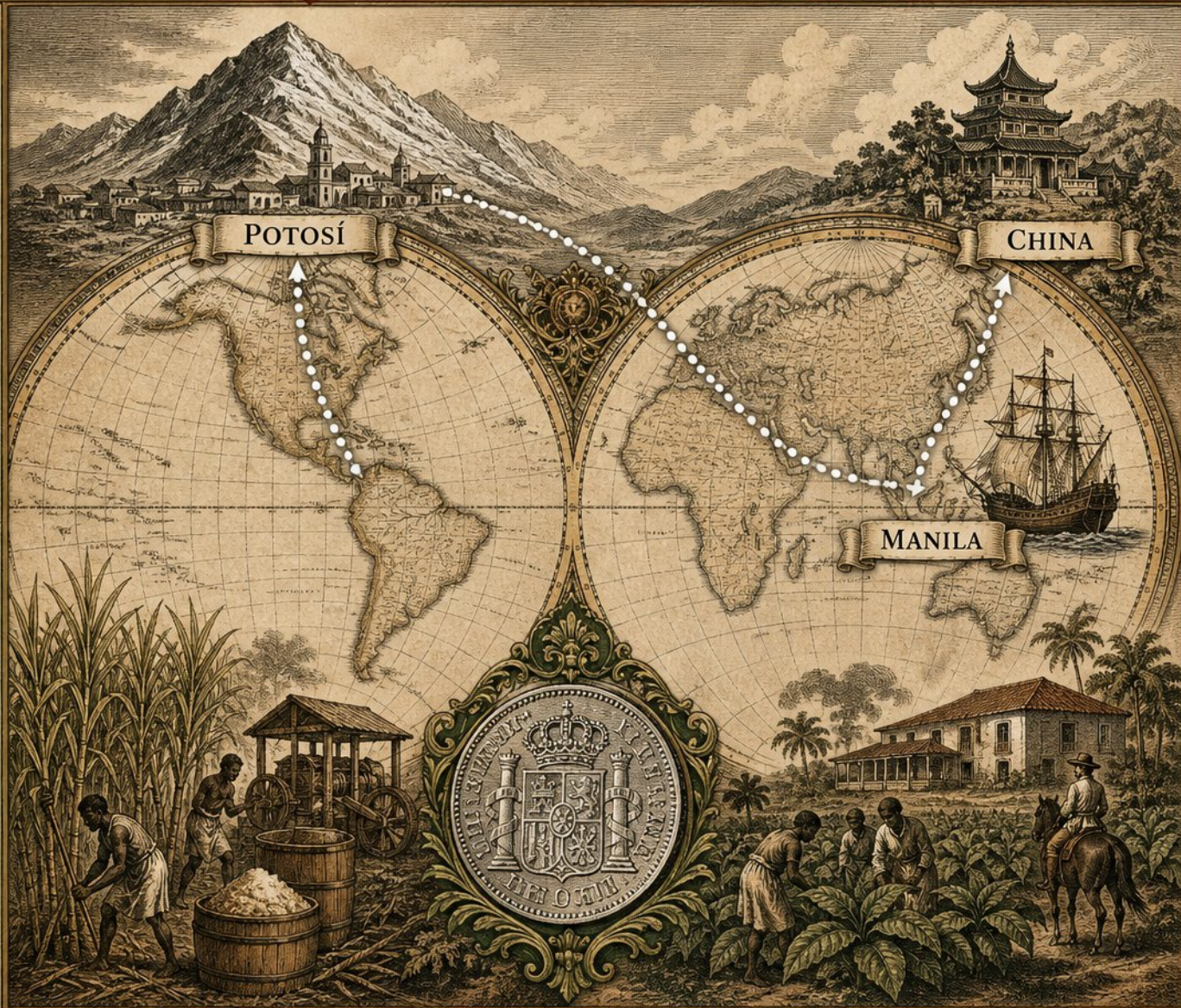


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Silver, Sugar, and the Making of a Global Economy

- Potosí and Mexican silver supplied most early modern global currency.
- Spanish American pesos became a widely trusted international money standard.
- Manila galleons linked American silver with Chinese demand for specie.
- Sugar and tobacco depended on enslaved labor and European capital.
- Colonial extraction fueled mercantilism and early modern capitalism.



Cultural Blending and Culinary Globalization

- ✿ - Religions, languages, and law adapted across the Atlantic
- ✿ - Vodou and Santería: African responses to displacement
- ✿ - American foods became regional staples: tomatoes, chilies, chocolate
- ✿ - Adoption was uneven—some blending was coerced, not voluntary



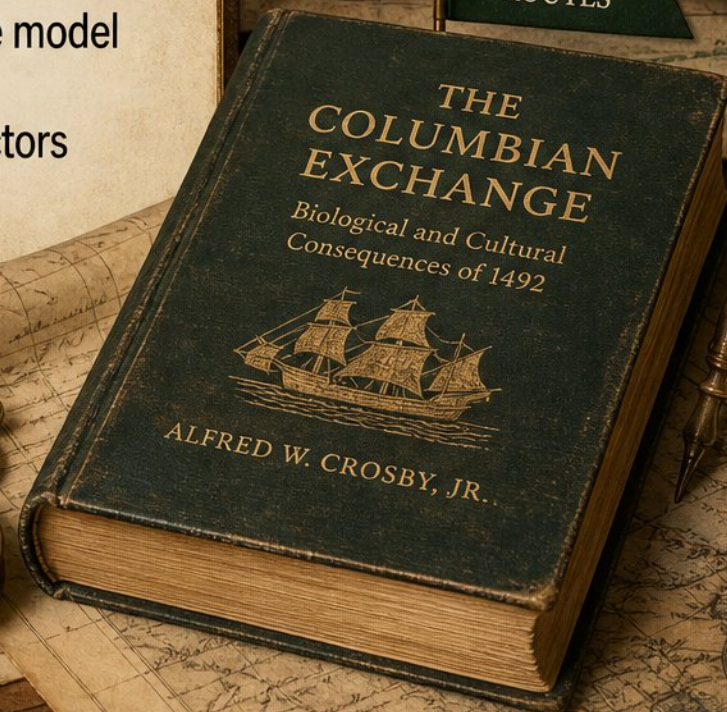
Ecological Imperialism and Environmental Transformation

- ◆ - Crosby's 'portmanteau biota' remade colonized temperate landscapes
- ◆ - Rats, earthworms, and feral livestock disrupted native ecosystems
- ◆ - Deforestation fueled silver refining, plantations, and ranching
- ◆ - Colonial rule suppressed indigenous fire and polyculture practices
- ◆ - Paleoecology shows uneven change tied to settlement patterns



Revision and Debate: *Rethinking the Exchange Narrative*

- Recent work moves beyond Atlantic and biological focus
- 'Exchange' term softens violence, extraction, slavery
- Scholars now emphasize indigenous and African agency
- West Pacific, Islamic world, Indian Ocean complicate model
- Adoption and rejection varied by region and local factors

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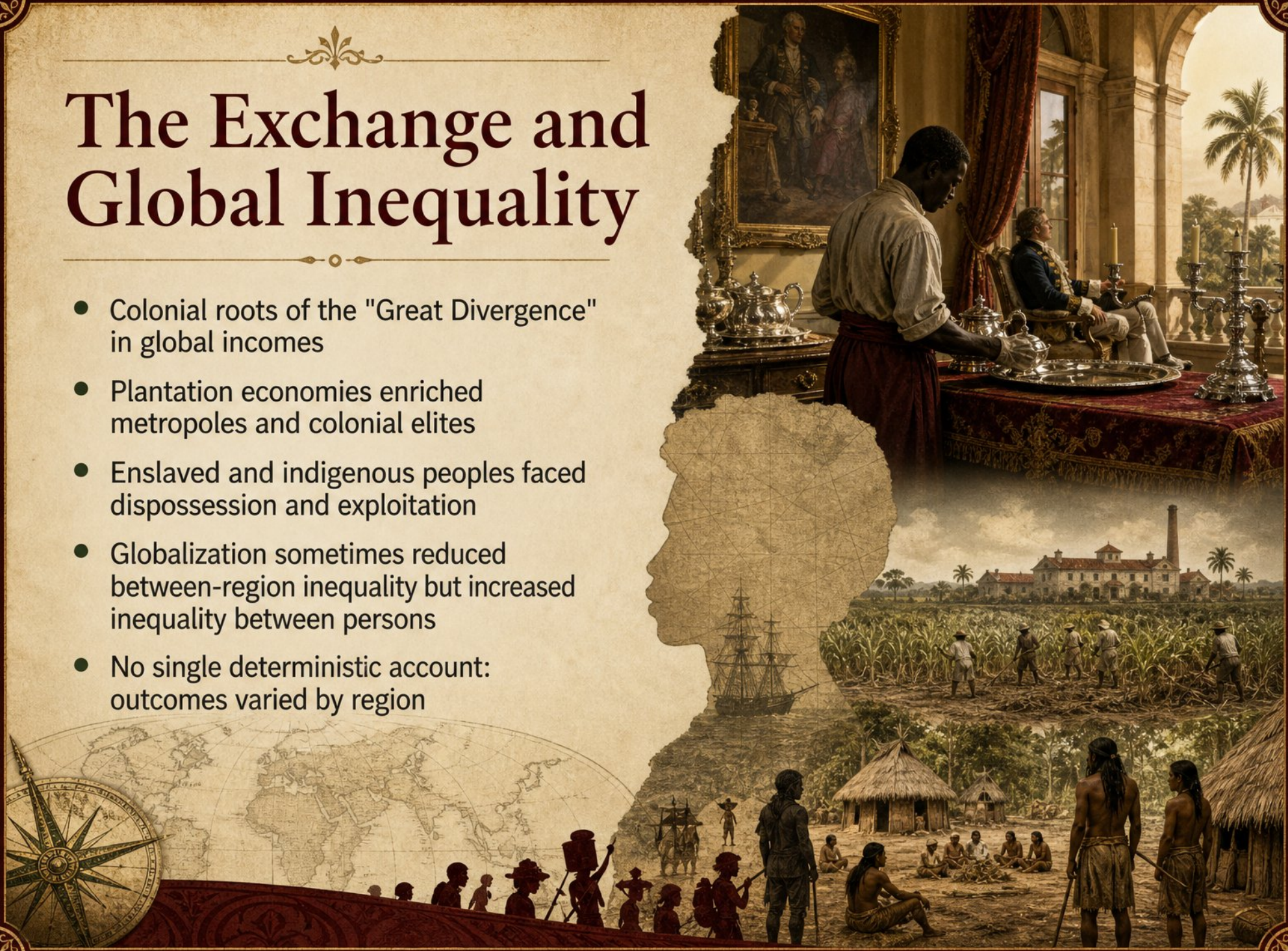
Legacies in Food, Health, and Biodiversity

- American crops remain global dietary staples today
- Colonial monocultures displaced indigenous food systems and agrobiodiversity
- Old World pathogens shaped modern health landscapes
- Global interdependence on a narrow set of crops creates risks
- Examples: cassava in Africa, potato monocultures, tobacco's global spread



The Exchange and Global Inequality

- Colonial roots of the "Great Divergence" in global incomes
- Plantation economies enriched metropolises and colonial elites
- Enslaved and indigenous peoples faced dispossession and exploitation
- Globalization sometimes reduced between-region inequality but increased inequality between persons
- No single deterministic account: outcomes varied by region





Teaching and Presenting the Columbian Exchange



- Emphasize multidirectional movement, regional variation, and human consequences



- Replace simple Atlantic arrows with cartography including Africa, Asia, and the Pacific



- Foreground indigenous and African agency, resistance, and selective adoption



- Use object biographies to trace crops, diseases, and migration routes



- Debate the term "exchange" itself as a classroom exercise



Contemporary Relevance and Final Reflections

- ❖ - Shaped global food, migration, disease, and cultural mixing
- ❖ - Legacy of conquest, coercion, and uneven power
- ❖ - Ongoing impacts: invasive species, crop dependence, health gaps
- ❖ - "Exchange" as metaphor vs. extraction and violence
- ❖ - How should we remember and teach it now?



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