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Impacts of European Colonization during Early American Development

When Europe discovered America, their actions heavily impacted the inhabitants physically, mentally, and culturally. The Natives of America were tormented and used by the Europeans. Moreover, the Europeans brought diseases and colonization disturbed many of the ecosystems. Overall, European colonization in North America had a negative effect on the natives and the future of America.

It’s a reoccurring statement and common knowledge that Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue and “discovered” America in 1492 while trying to find new trade routes to Asia. Although people continue to debate who initially came to America first, it is certain that North America had a dynamic and vibrant history of society and culture way before Columbus and his crew had step foot in North America. The real date of the origins of habitants in America is unknown and the best guesses entail more speculation than actual science. Due to the lack of evidence and information, scientists have estimated human habitation in North America went back to 12,000 years and even as far back as 40,000 years ago. A quote from an article validates this fact, “Estimates about human habitation in North America run from as much as 40,000 years ago to 12,000 years ago as the starting point. Even the best estimates involve more speculation than science.” The first indications of human activity in North America predates back to 8,000 years ago when scientists carbon dated the skeleton remains of a man who died in America. The description, genetics, and physiology of the man, who the scientist named, Kennewick Man, didn’t match up with the Native tribes among the Northwest region nor Eastern Asia. There were many questions about Kennewick Man and most of them remain unsolved. Questions such as his origins, if he predated Eastern Asian immigrants, and who he was. Moreover, one explanation to how people came to America was Bering Land Bridge Theory. This was the speculation that there was a strait between North America and East Asia at one point, which connected the two continents together. American naturalists and scientists during the early 1800s looked into the coasts of the United States. They explored and investigated the east coast of America first, then began working their way to the west coast, scanning for any evidence of the origins of Native Americans. Their research concluded people had not come from North America but had occupied the continent from another location.

After the emigration to America, the inhabitants of America began to build societies and begin colonization. Initially, the first Natives in the Southeast were nomadic, moving from place to place, hunting, and gathering for food. These nomadic Natives used stone tools such as scrapers and knives, along with the use of spears and clubs. Then, during the Archaic period, the people would gain more specialized knowledge about their local surroundings, animals, and environment. Archaic people began to develop bone tools, better stone tools and basketry. Bartering during the Archaic Period was prevalent, and this developed their connections with other tribes and bands. Furthermore, agriculture became a source of food when the native people during the Woodland period settled near rivers and streams, which enabled the soil to be rich. Although hunting was still the primary method to acquire food, agriculture was always there when there was a lack of meat. Crops such as corn, squash, beans, corn, and sunflowers were planted along with animals being able to supply a plethora of necessities. These necessities include food, blankets, clothing, and bone tools from a deer. In addition, permanent wooden settlements began to appear around this period because of agriculture, which eliminated the need to be nomadic to follow food sources. Fishing was another way to get food and involved the use of spears, hooks, traps, nets, dugout canoes and weirs. The bow and arrow would be used more during the middle and late Woodland period and artistic pieces would begin to show, such as pottery, basketry, and utensils. Furthermore, government and beliefs began to show during this time as well. For instance, an important ritual was the Green Corn Ritual and served as a time to clean up the village’s community and environment. Forms of government called chiefdoms were developed by the Natives. Needless to say, the Natives were already discovering new technology with better tools to have better survival and their technological progress isn’t slowing down.

The Kingdom of Portugal was considered one of the most powerful states in the world during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One reason to this power is because of Portugal’s geographic location on the western side of the Iberian Peninsula on the Atlantic Ocean, which provided flourishing trading ports and port cities. Portugal was one of the leading countries in exploration at the time. An example was Bartolomeu Dias, who was a Portuguese explorer, was the first European to sail around the Cape of Good Hope at the very southern tip of Africa which made a route to the Indian Ocean, desired by the Europeans and made Portugal a leader in the spice trade. On the other hand, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Kingdom of Spain was one of the most powerful and biggest empires in the world and controlled territories in Asia, Oceania, Africa, and the Americas. The reason for Spain’s rise in the trading and exploration scene was Spain’s geographical location being part of a peninsula with the Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean Sea and the Bay of Biscay bordering. Also, being near other important European cities and Africa allowed Spain to thrive in trading. In 1469, the marriage of Ferdinand II and Isabella I united the kingdoms of Aragon and Castiel into the Kingdom of Spain. A realization the two had was, other countries would discover treasures and riches first if Spain did not act first. Thus, Spain had became a major sponsor of explorers and navigators who in turn, enormously changed the history of the planet.

In 1492, Italian explorer Christopher Columbus is known for discovering the New World of the Americas while on a journey sponsored by King Ferdinand II of Spain. The Italian navigator and explorer had a goal in mind, to find new routes to India and East Asia. Thinking the world being flat at the time, he sailed across the Atlantic Ocean from the port of Palos de la Frontera in Spain with three ships, the Santa Maria, the Nina and the Pinta. Columbus made a combined total of four voyages to South America and the Caribbean, and he was notorious for opening the Americas to Europeans colonization. On October 12th, 1492, Christopher Columbus and his crew entered the present-day Bahamas and claimed it for Spain. At this island, Columbus and his crewmen ran into a shy, friendly group of Natives, open to barter with the navigators. The natives exchanged items such as spears, parrots, glass beads and cotton balls with the sailors, along with the Europeans noticing the gold worn by the Natives. Then, Columbus and his gang went on their way, hopping from island to island, encountering and interacting with the local Natives. They visited Cuba, thinking it was mainland China and Hispaniola, which is now Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Columbus thought Hispaniola was Japan, and at the time, Santa Maria wrecked on a reef near Hispaniola. With the assistance of the Natives, Columbus and his crew gathered what they could and built a little settlement with wood from the ship. The settlement being named Villa de la Navidad. Columbus mistakenly called these natives Indians, after thinking he was in India. Columbus would make multiple trips back and forth to Europe and to the Americas. When he came back for his second trip to Hispaniola, Columbus and his men found la Villa de la Navidad in rumbles with all of the sailors slaughtered. Columbus ignored the Queen’s wishes to not use slavery and made a forced labor policy on the natives to rebuild his settlement and find gold for him. Columbus believed this act would be very profitable, but he was in fact wrong, as it only brought massive hatred between the natives and tiny amounts of gold. He allowed his son and brother, Diego, and Bartholomew to govern the settlement on Hispaniola and believed he discovered the outer islands of China, when he was only at the Caribbean islands. After his third voyage, when Columbus step foot on the mainland of South America, he would explore for a bit. But the Hispaniola settlement has become very worn down since many of the settlers were misled, stating Columbus promised riches along with the poor leadership and management of the Columbus family. Spanish royal officials arrested Columbus and got rid of his authority, removing his title of governor, and lost many of his riches. King Ferdinand allowed Columbus to go on another voyage, as Columbus promised him, he would receive the copious amounts of riches and goods. Unfortunately, during this fourth voyage, a ship was wrecked by a storm and stranded the captain and his crew on Cuba. Furthermore, due to the abuse and neglect of the local islanders, the Natives refused to give food to the sailors. Then in a moment of encouragement, Columbus hired an almanac and had an idea to punish and scare the islanders by removing the moon. A lunar eclipse happened on February 29, 1504, and this frightened the islanders enough to begin trade again with the Spanish. Columbus and his men were taken back to Spain with the help of a rescue party sent by the royal governor of Hispaniola. Although Columbus never got his prestigious titles back, he got some of his riches.

After the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, many European countries began to come to the Americas for the prospect of riches and increase their influence over world affairs. England establishes a wide presence on the Atlantic coast of North America. The American colonies, or thirteen colonies as they were known as, reside on the east coast of America. The colonies expanded and grew geographically along the coast of the Atlantic and in quantity until their independence from Great Britain. The Colonial Period, the period when Europeans conquered and colonized the American continent. This meant having a very complicated relationship with the existing Natives in America, as they have lived on the land for hundreds of years. The Natives had resisted many of the European’s efforts to control the Natives through diplomacy and warfare, in addition to their efforts to obtain more land from the Natives. Other problems began to appear as a result of European colonization over the Americas, such as bringing diseases the Native Americans weren’t immune to, the growing European population in the Americas, and the slave trade. Although the Europeans were friendly when they first met with the Natives, eventually, this relationship would spiral downward. Europeans began to exploit the Natives for their land, goods, services, and entertainment. The Native Americans were prone to European diseases and were very vulnerable. This is due to the fact that they weren’t ever exposed to these European diseases before and had no immunity. Disease began to populate amongst the Native population as European settlements grew. Alone, these diseases weakened and killed off as much as 90% of the Native population. With the Native population weakening and decreasing, it became more difficult to resist European colonization. Moreover, another detail during the Colonial Period that exploited the Native Americans was the slave trade. Sometimes, the Native Americans were shipped out to other countries and colonies for forced labor. Slavery began growing as Natives were forced into slavery and allied with the losing side of the war. The French and Indian War had devastating consequences and had long term effects. European countries rushed to claim the already occupied land in the Americas during the 17th century and nation leaders would form alliances with the local Native tribes to fight against other countries. Alliances started to appear, and the two examples are the Spanish and French pairing with the Algonquian-speaking tribes, on the other hand, the Iroquois Confederacy allied with the English. Overall, the English had won the war and claimed all of the land east of the Mississippi River. The Iroquois were only given a portion of that land, which they had hoped would stop European expansion and colonization. This would be further from the truth as it only delayed it. Other European countries kept coming to America and continue their violence and harsh treatment towards the Native Americans. A big consequence from the battles was due to allying with the Europeans, the Native Americans were forced to fight neighboring tribes who were once on-terms with. This conflicted relationship amongst the Natives kept them from forming together to stop the European conquests.

The American Natives were forced into slavery by the Europeans and had very harsh treatment. In truth, without the slave trade, forced labor and other methods of unfree labor, European colonization would not have flourished and would have remained very limited in the Americas. Although slavery has existed for thousands of years before the Colonial Period, the European expansion altered slavery. Slavery took a changed and racialized form that involved millions of people based on skin color and the creation of massive slave plantations that was essential in the globalization and the modernization of the economy of the world. Africans make up most of the forced labor in this new slavery system, yet a large number of American Natives were forced to do slavery as well. Many slaves were mistreated, for instance, not being fed, working out in the hot sun for hours, and little rest. This weakened them physically and mentally, in addition to their already weakened body because of disease. Furthermore, much of the Native culture was wiped due to slavery, but some of the culture was passed on and survived. The loss of Native land resulted in losing cultural identity and traditions. With the labor high in demand in the colonial American economy, there was a surplus amount of people looking to buy slaves for their own benefit. Native Americans were forced to work as slaves, working on plantations, apprentices, domestics and in the mines. Many of the Natives were shipped to locations hundreds of miles away from their home for slavery. A common destination for Natives were the West Indies. There were many consequences of colonial in the Americas and slavery is an example of how racism became a strong ideology of the modern world.

Indubitably, the European colonization of North America was a double-edged sword. On one hand, it greatly benefited the world economy and allowed America to prosper. Then, on the other hand, colonization caused the loss of Native culture, millions of Native deaths and the rough treatment of Native Americans. The vast history and traditions of the Native Americans was destroyed due to captivity and the loss of Native land. The discovery of the “New World” influenced nations to come to the Americas to obtain wealth and power, but it came with many negative consequences towards the Native people and their land.

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