

ALAN TAYLOR

Colonial Era: Understanding the Columbian Exchange

Author's Note from the Teacher's Edition

The first European explorers were stunned by the distinctive flora, fauna, and human cultures found in the Americas. In the West Indies, Christopher Columbus marveled, "All the trees were as different from ours as day from night, and so the fruits, herbage, the rocks, and all things."

Subsequent explorers recognized the obvious: that the Americas constituted a distinctive, hitherto unknown hemisphere. During the 1550s the explorer Jean de Lery reported that America was so "different from Europe, Asia, and Africa in the living habits of its people, the forms of its animals, and, in general, in that which the earth produces, that it can well be called the new world."

But the differences began to diminish as soon as they were recognized. The invasion by European colonists, microbes, plants, and livestock eroded the biological and cultural distinctions formerly enforced by the Atlantic Ocean. Newly connected, the two "worlds," old and new, became more alike in their natures, in their combinations of plants and animals. In 1528 the Spanish writer Hernan Perez de Oliva explained that Columbus's voyages served "to unite the world and give to those strange lands the form of our own." American colonization wrought an environmental revolution unprecedented in pace, scale, and impact in the history of humanity.

from American Colonies: The Settling of North America

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About the Author

Alan Taylor, Professor of History at the University of California, Davis, earned his Ph.D. in history from Brandeis University and did a postdoctoral fellowship at the Institute of Early American History and Culture in Williamsburg, Virginia. He teaches courses in early American history and the history of the American West. Taylor is the author of five books, including *American Colonies* and *William Cooper's Town*, which won the Bancroft and Beveridge prizes, as well as the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for American history. He is a contributing editor for *The New Republic*.

