

1200 UNIT 3:

## Transoceanic Connections

1450 to 1750 CE



## Unit 3 Overview

By the fifteenth century, the Afro-Eurasian trading system had recovered from the Black Death. But now, the system was different. With no great Mongol state dominating Eurasia, several large, land-based empires emerged and competed for control of Afro-Eurasian trade networks. With the Mongol state fractured, it was now harder for Europeans to get the goods they wanted from Asia. Going in search of new routes, they encountered the Americas, where other trade networks connected societies across long distances. This collision led to the first truly global network—the Columbian Exchange. American silver, valued in Asia and carried by Europeans, helped to permanently transform the world.



**0:01**

*Kim Lochner and Colby Burnett in conversation. Their videos are filmed separately, and are next to one another.*

*Kim's screen reads "Your transoceanic connection is unstable. The video will resume when Colby gets my joke"*

Good day Colby!

Howdy Kim!

How's my favorite Australian?

Great. Listen, I'm really excited to do the video for this overview. Do you know what the topic is?

It's none other than...

You froze. Are you faking? Last time you were faking.

Did you read it? Your transoceanic connection is unstable. Oh, because the unit is about...

I learned how to do graphics in video calls.

Well, that is certainly one way to keep busy during quarantine, but you know you're allowed to go on a walk now and then. Just saying.

Hi, I'm Kim Lochner. And I'm Colby Burnett. We're introducing Unit 3: Transoceanic Connections 1415-1715.

**0:51**

*Animated map first shows several separate buildings, representing communities, and then shows the networks that would later connect them. As the buildings connect, they grow larger.*

*Montage of artworks that represent the Black Death and show great trading ships*

In the period before 1415, human communities were distinct and diverse. But they became increasingly linked by expanding and thickening networks of exchange. Those networks grew and collapsed and recovered. But in each case, they transformed the societies they linked. Gradually, the global tapestry was taking shape. In the three centuries from 1450 to 1750, dramatic transformations and new connections began to weave together all the far-flung threads of humanity.

By 1450, Afro-Eurasian societies had recovered from the Black Death which devastated them in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. Trade was again growing but the new system was different.

**1:35**

*Map shows the span of the Mongol empire, which covered a large portion of Eurasia*

*A photo of an elaborately-embroidered silk tapestry.*

Previously, the huge Mongol Empire dominated most of Eurasia, imposing stability and keeping overland trade routes safe for merchants and other travelers. But in the period from 1450 to 1750 there was no great Mongol state. Instead, several large, land-based empires emerged and competed for trade, influence, and territory.

This meant it was harder for Europeans to get the Asian luxury goods like silk and ceramics that they craved. So, a small number of Europeans headed west to find an alternate path to those goods. History's most ambitious and destructive shopping spree reached the Americas where these Europeans found another system of exchange already operating. The coming together of these two systems, one American, the other Eurasian and African was a turning point of world history.

## 2:35

*Map shows the oceanic trade routes that would create the first global network.*

*A montage of photos and artworks depict systems, diseases, and plants and animals the Columbian Exchange spread: including corn, cows, enslaved people, and disease*

## 3:31

*A map shows the locations of many land-based empires, such as the Aztec, Inca, Ottoman, Safavid, and Ming, among others.*

*Artworks from the various empires*

## 4:24

*Map shows the location of Manila and Tondo*

In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, oceanic travel across the Atlantic and the Pacific created the first truly global network—a world system. Often called the Columbian Exchange, it brought new economic challenges to different regions.

And that's putting it mildly. The Columbian Exchange sent plants, animals, people, and diseases to completely new regions. This exchange transformed life in every part of the world, immediately in some places and more gradually in others. To respond to the transformations of this period, people had to modify their communities or build new ones. Western European states built empires that stretched across entire oceans as they strived to control the trade and territory of the new world system. Transoceanic connections certainly kicked off massive transformations.

But this period wasn't all about European oceanic empires. In fact, the most powerful states during this period were land based, meaning they ruled vast territories of continuous land masses. These sorts of empires were generally more interested in expanding their inland frontiers rather than seeking out distant colonies.

The mighty Ottoman Empire extended its reach into Eastern Europe. In China, the Ming and Qing Dynasties ruled a vast empire. And along with the Mughal Empire in India, these three powers were the heart of the global economy. Across the world, land-based empires remained a powerful force in this period. Yet, even these giants were transformed by the Columbian Exchange.

So, it becomes important to ask some big questions. "How did transoceanic connections transform global economic systems and societies in different parts of the world?" "How global was this new economic system really?" "And how did people and societies in different regions experience these changes?" We can look at specific examples to answer these questions. And by we, I mean Colby.

You mean the students, but I'll help us get started. One important part of the Columbian Exchange was the city of Manila in the Philippines. Prior to the Columbian Exchange there was only a small town in the spot that would become Manila. The capital of the tiny state of Tondo was a trading society with a small community of Chinese merchants. They sold goods to local traders who traveled around the islands exchanging them for local products. Then, in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish conquistadors captured the region from local authorities. The Spanish saw Manila as a convenient administrative center ruling the surrounding islands. But, more than that, they hoped it could become a hub for the most important trade of all, which I'll reveal soon but not yet.

It's silver, we're talking about silver.

### 5:53

*Animated map shows a trading ship crossing the Atlantic and then the Pacific*

*Chinese artworks from the Ming Dynasty; a photo of two silver coins used as currency*

### 6:38

*Drawings of Indigenous workers working in silver mines, including one of several people climbing a dangerous-looking ladder*

### 7:35

*Maps and drawings of Manila, which became a bustling city*

### 8:19

*Screen reads: Demographics: The structure of human populations, relating to factors like age, ethnicity, sex, religion, location, etc*

*An animated chart shows the population growing throughout this era.*

Through their oceanic travels, the Spanish had discovered the way to acquire the Asian luxury goods that were so desired in Europe. The route lay mainly across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas and then through Spanish territories in what is now Mexico. Next, they went across the Pacific to Manila where Chinese merchants would bring their silk and other goods for sale.

Fortunately for them, the Spanish found what they could give in return for those luxury goods: silver. In particular, silver mined in the Americas. After 1465, the main state in China started requiring all taxes be paid in silver. This created a huge demand for the precious metal in the world's largest economy.

American silver revolutionized global trading in the era of the Columbian Exchange. Much of the world was soon drawn into this system in which American silver bought Asian luxury goods for a growing European consumer class.

Silver mines were owned by the Spanish who forced indigenous Americans and enslaved Africans to work in the mines. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, believe it or not, these mines produced 17,000 tons of silver. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it more than doubled to 37,000 tons. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century it doubled again to 75,000 tons. Most of the silver found its way to China. A lot of it came through Europe, especially early in the era. But by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, much of it was going directly from Latin America to Manila and from there, to China.

In the midst of all this, Manila changed a lot. And fast. Sure, it had already been a commercial city for hundreds of years, but now it's population exploded. New communities made from Europeans joined the Chinese, Malay, and other local groups. Christianity joined Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism in the city. For many people, daily life hardly changed. But life under Spanish colonial control meant new laws, religious rules, and economic systems imposed by a distant empire. Manila and the Philippines would remain under the control of foreign empires for nearly 400 years, finally winning independence in 1946.

Transoceanic connections reduced these kinds of transformations in many parts of the early modern world. The cumulative effects of the Columbian Exchange brought great prosperity to some regions and devastated others.

While silver and empires were altering economic and political systems, massive demographic changes were also underway.

During this era, the global population doubled from about 400 million people to almost 800 million. But looking more closely at this growth, we can see some variation in how and where it happened. While the world population was doubling, the Columbian Exchange caused two massive demographic events that devastated communities in the Americas and Africa.

9:08

*Several drawn representations of Indigenous Americans sick or dying due to disease, warfare, and slavery, brought and spread by the Columbian Exchange*

The first demographic event came to be known as the Great Dying. Europeans arriving in the Americas brought with them diseases common to Eurasia and Africa, but which were completely alien to the Americas. Peoples of the Americas had little resistance to these diseases. The evidence is uncertain but perhaps as many as 20 million people died from these epidemics in Mesoamerica in the 50 years after the Spanish conquest. In the centuries after 1492, tens of millions more indigenous Americans would die in what several historians have called the largest genocide in world history. In some places, particularly in the Caribbean Islands, disease combined with warfare and slavery killed over 90% of some indigenous communities.

10:07

*Artworks depict the Atlantic Slaving system, showing enslaved Africans crowded together on a ship and being forcibly taken hostage.*

The second demographic event was the Atlantic slaving system. 12 million Africans were enslaved and forcibly moved in the four centuries after 1440. The populations of some African regions significantly declined. Societies in West Africa, in particular, were transformed by the loss of so many. Enslaved Africans worked on European plantations in the Americas. They produced the raw materials that fueled global economic growth and helped laid the groundwork for a new economic system: capitalism.

10:46

*Animated map shows the spread of crops and vegetables around the globe.*

These demographic events, while devastating, did not reverse global population growth overall. That's partly because the Columbian Exchange drove forced and voluntary migration into areas where population had declined. The summit of the Americas by Europeans and enslaved Africans is one example. But more important to population growth was how the Columbian Exchange brought together the food systems of the world to make more nutrition available.

Peruvian potatoes became a staple crop in Ireland and sweet potatoes spread rapidly to China. North American corn was quickly adopted in Africa. Eurasian crops like wheat spread quickly in the Americas. Near the end of this period, European mariners introduced cassava from the Americas to the islands of Polynesia where it became a staple crop. As transoceanic connections intensified, no part of the world was left untouched. But, to people living through this period, these massive transformations were less important than their own, individual experiences.

11:52

Bound together for the first time in a world system, societies and people around the world nonetheless experienced these changes in drastically different ways. Many of the transformations started in this period, for better and for worse, continue to unfold today. In this unit you will explore transformations that have lasting legacies in our world like religious syncretism, mass migrations, the birth of capitalism, and the institution of slavery.

"How might your own experiences be linked to connections forged over 500 years ago?"

Wow. So if plants hadn't moved along those transoceanic connections, my continent would be the only one farming corn.

Why are you always in these bits with something corny.

Wait but... that wasn't. And now it is. (music playing)