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## WHP AP Unit 4 Overview | World History Project

Can you imagine Italian food without tomatoes or Indian food without chilis? It's kind of hard to do, but before the late fifteenth century, people in Afro-Eurasia didn't know about tomatoes or chilis. The transfer of plants, animals, people, ideas, and diseases that occurred between Afro-Eurasia and the Americas after 1492 is known as the Columbian Exchange. Tomato sauce and spicy curries were some of the positive outcomes of this exchange. But there were many negative impacts as well, namely the decimation of Indigenous Americans through the transfer of diseases and the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade.

**0:12**

*A photo of gumbo soup;  
John Arthur speaking*

*Archaic map*

*Photo of fruits and  
vegetables; archaic map*

**1:08**

*Photo of gumbo soup*

*Text bubble: Unit  
overview; transitional  
music*

*Text bubble: Unit  
4: Transoceanic  
Interconnections; clip of  
ship sailing; painting of the  
invention of navigation*

**1:58**

*Painting of medieval  
knights; series of old maps  
and paintings; paintings of  
Indigineous empires*

**2:37**

*Text bubble: Columbian  
Exchange; animated map*

*Painting of sailors;  
painting of Christopher  
Columbus; painting of the  
devastation of indigenous  
empires*

**3:33**

*Illustration of natives dying  
of smallpox*

This is gumbo. If you're not from Louisiana, there's a chance you might not know what it is, how it's made, or where it came from. And you're not alone. It's a complicated dish with a long history and no one can seem to agree on where it originated. In this dish swirls a complicated legacy—along with the meat, vegetables, and a bunch of other stuff.

So, where does gumbo come from? Well, we don't really know. We think people started making it and calling it "gumbo" at the beginning of the 18th century. As to its origins, the answer is probably from many places and from one place.

So what does that mean? Well, gumbo contains foods and techniques from all over the world, but it's also particular to Louisiana, and the ways that cultures intersected there a few centuries ago. This mixing wasn't always peaceful.

The story of gumbo is also a story of inequality and oppression, as ingredients and methods arrived in colonial Louisiana from Africa, Europe, and the Americas, creating this saucy global dish.

How, exactly? Well, to prepare you for that gobsmacking answer, let's take a look at what you'll learn in this unit.

Hi, I'm John Arthur, and this is Unit 4 Transoceanic Interconnections from 1450 to 1750 CE. In this unit, we're turning to the seas, because just as the land-based empires of Afro-Eurasia were expanding their frontiers, Europeans on the far western edge of Afro-Eurasia were taking to the waves on journeys of exploration, commerce, and conquest.

Thanks to innovations in navigation and gunpowder, Europeans were able to undertake trans-oceanic voyages and establish far-flung overseas empires: first the Portuguese and Spanish, and later the Dutch, English, French, and others set sail across the Atlantic Ocean and around the continent of Africa, establishing new oceanic empires. When they arrived in the Americas, these Europeans encountered complex indigenous societies and powerful empires that had developed into a diverse tapestry of communities connected by long-distance networks of exchange.

These trans-oceanic voyages kicked off a process that historians call the Columbian Exchange: the exchange of plants, animals, ideas, people, and diseases across the world's oceans. Did you know that there weren't any tomatoes in Italian food before this unit? Potatoes, corn, and turkeys were also ones found only in the Americas, while wheat, cattle, and horses were found only in Afro-Eurasia.

Christopher Columbus wasn't the first person from Afro-Eurasia to make contact with societies in the Americas, but after his arrival the afro- Eurasian and American systems began a permanent, sustained relationship for the first time. The results transformed our world—and not always for the better. The European conquests of the Americas permanently devastated numerous American societies.

Many of these societies, including the powerful Inca and Aztec Empires, never recovered. We still don't know a great deal about some of these societies and the ways they were organized.

*Illustration of slave ship; series of illustrations depicting the slave trade; text bubble: Transatlantic Slave Trade; paintings of Europeans and their colonies; text bubble: Enslaved plantation labor enriched European empires*

## 4:24

*Photo of silver; European ships; text bubble: Thematic Overview*

*Transitional music; illustration of Afro-Eurasian empires; fleet of ships*

## 5:16

*Narrator speaking*

*Text bubble: Columbian Exchange; paintings of Indigenous people; text bubble: Columbian Extraction*

*Photos of crops and berries; photos of maize and potatoes*

## 6:15

*Text bubble: The Great Dying; text bubble: Illustrative Example; transitional music*

*Old map of Louisiana; text bubble with photo of soup: Roux; text bubble with photo of filé: Choctaw*

At the same time, the transatlantic slave trade became a big part of the Columbian Exchange and caused lasting damage to many African societies. The new European-based empires in the Americas used the resources and people of Africa and the Americas to create vast new systems of wealth. They forced millions of Indigenous Americans and enslaved Africans to work in the plantation system. Enslaved labor and this new system of production allowed Europeans to extract huge amounts of raw materials from their colonies to fuel production at home and trade abroad.

The colonies in the Americas also produced more silver than the world had ever seen. Europeans used this silver to buy their way into the biggest markets of them all—the vast economies of China and South Asia.

In Unit 3, you learned about the world’s most powerful empires in this period: the great land-based empires of Afro-Eurasia. These empires—particularly in China and India—remain the engine of the world economy. But in Unit 4, we’re going to meet some rising contenders that would challenge the old model of empire. The maritime empires that emerged from Western Europe pioneered a new kind of empire, and it was to become the dominant form by the end of this period.

But this story of empire, war, and trade was also a story about how humans interacted with—and transformed—the environment.

Historians might call it the Columbian Exchange, but that’s a deceptively peaceful term that suggests both sides got something from the other. In truth, the process was more about extraction than exchange. Crops, livestock, and diseases flowed both ways across the oceans, but people in Europe gained far more from their counterparts in the Americas or Africa.

Even the crops that came to the Americas from Afro-Eurasia ended up benefiting European empires. Crops like sugar and coffee imported to the Caribbean produced enormous wealth for Europeans. Meanwhile, American crops like maize and potatoes provided a huge new source of calories for people in Afro-Eurasia.

At the same time, Afro-Eurasian diseases like smallpox—combined with war and enslavement—killed as many as 25 million Indigenous Americans.

It was amid this history of violence and enslavement, exchange and innovation, that gumbo was born. The French began their colonization of Louisiana in the 17th century. If you’ve ever had french food, you know that flour is a pretty big part of it, and many french stews call for *roux*—a thickener made from wheat flour. But wheat didn’t grow well in swampy Louisiana. The Indigenous Choctaw people came to the rescue with a thickener called *filé*, made from the leaves of the sassafras tree.

**7:04**

*Narrator head bubble*

But there was more innovation to come. Louisiana's first enslaved people arrived in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

*Text bubble with photo: Ki ngombo*

Enslaved—women who often did the cooking labor in West African societies—brought with them their own culinary methods and ingredients. The word “gumbo” actually comes from the Angolan term for okra: *ki ngombo*. Okra is a vegetable native to Africa that can be ground up and used as a thickener for stews. To this day, it's a key gumbo ingredient.

*Photos of pepper and tomato; illustration of rice farm*

As European empires grew, they displaced more people, brought new people to the region, and new ingredients were introduced to Louisiana's food culture. Peppers and tomatoes arrived from Spanish Mexico, once cultivated by the Aztecs and their neighbors. Rice—native to Africa and Asia—was transported to the Carolinas and the Caribbean, along with the expert but enslaved African rice-growers who knew how to raise it.

**8:04**

*Modern photos of gumbo*

Rice eventually became a key ingredient in gumbo. Later, German migrants posed as French bakers and baked a special bread to accompany gumbo.

And as with many local innovations, later imperialists tried to take credit for gumbo. When 19<sup>th</sup> century cookbooks introduced the dish, they made no mention of its African or Indigenous roots, focusing instead on the ingenuity of French cooks.

Even today there's no single agreed-upon recipe or history of gumbo. It changed as different cultures adapted to the needs and tastes of their time.

In much the same way, the legacy of the Columbian Exchange remains ambiguous. It's a history of violence and human ingenuity. People from all over the world arrived in new places. Their cultures, beliefs, governments, economic systems, and foods all blended, often creating something entirely new.



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