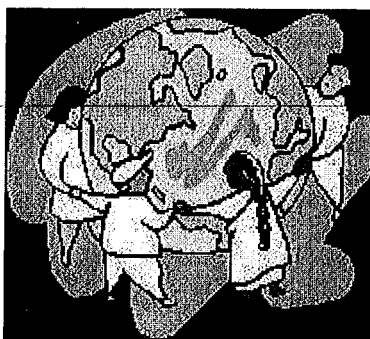


Cultural Diffusion



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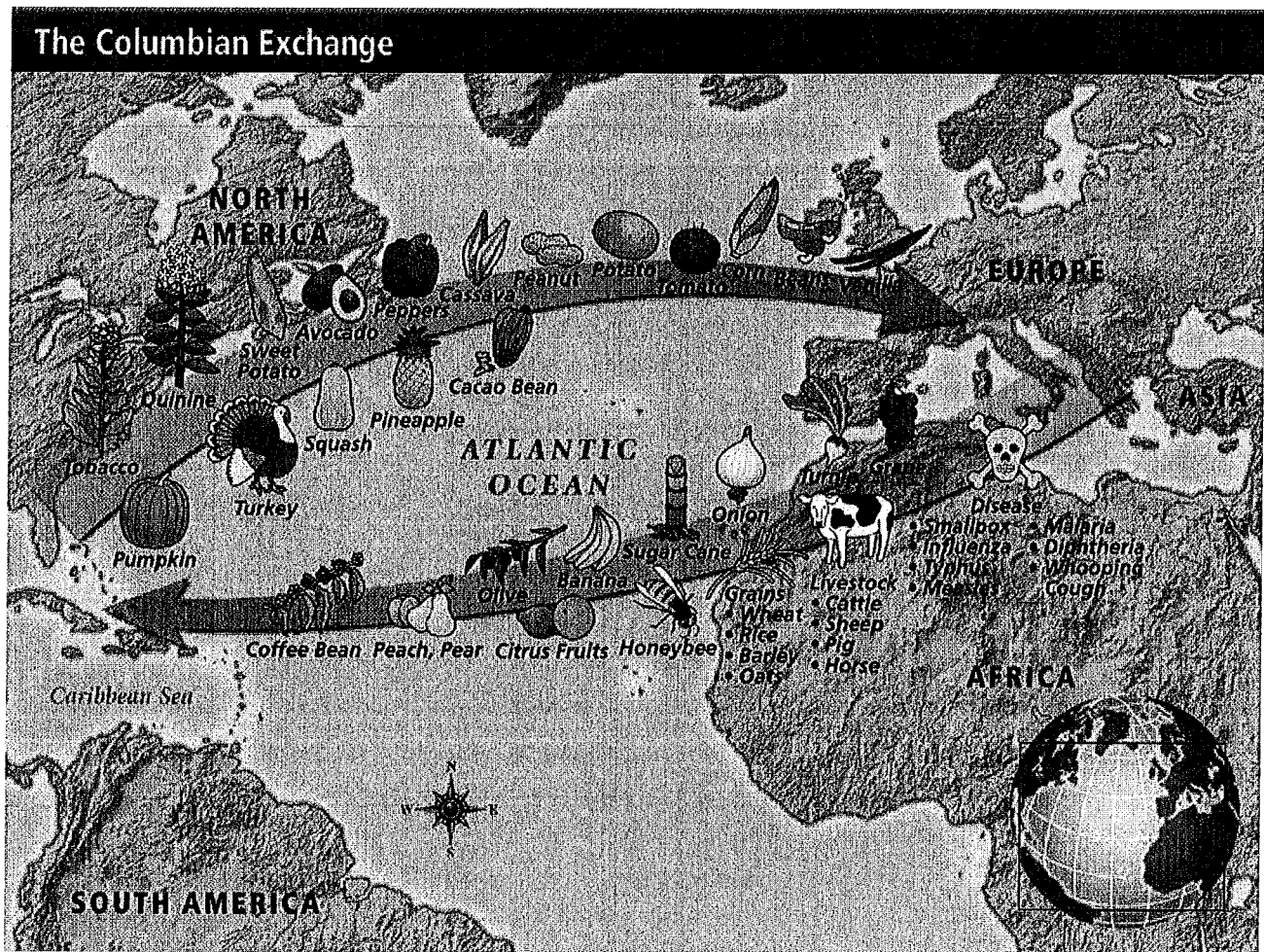
In a very simple definition cultural diffusion is when different cultures are spread into different areas. It is the mixing or blending of different ideas, beliefs, and innovations from one group to another. Cultural diffusion happens all over the world, from fast food restaurants to new technologies, cultures are constantly interacting with each other. These interactions lead to cultural diffusion. Cultures can adopt new ideas and use them as they are or they can adapt these foreign ideas to suit their own needs and wants.

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There are three basic ways that cultural diffusion takes place. The first way is through trade. When various areas of the world trade goods, these goods are incorporated into different cultures where they may not have been before. The goods can be adopted or adapted for use in these new areas. In Ancient times, caravans would travel along the Silk Road to trade items between Asia and Europe. Now, we use planes, ships, and trains to transport goods around the world. Warfare can also lead to cultural diffusion. Any time two or more groups come together, cultures can be blended. A major effect of the Crusades was the opening cultural diffusion that took place between Europe and the Middle East as the soldiers traveled. The last way cultural diffusion takes place is through migration. The mass migration of Irish to America in the 18th and 19th centuries, led to a increase in Irish culture in North America.



There can be many positive effects of cultural diffusion. Many cultures have benefited from cultural exchanges. During the Colombian exchange both the Americas and Europe gained new foods and animals that they had never seen before. This changed both cultures as each place was able to expand their diets as well as benefit from the newly domesticated animals which were brought over. Another positive effect of cultural diffusion is when new technologies are shared around the world. Inventions such as the telescope, the printing press, steam engines, cars, and computers have all had big impacts on how people live in every area of the world. These inventions also increase the rate at which cultural diffusion can take place.



New items gained during the Colombian Exchange

Cultural diffusion does not always lead to positive exchanges. Sometimes when different cultures come into contact with each other conflict occurs. There are many examples of when differences in cultures have led to war. An example of a negative effect of cultural diffusion would be when the European explorers decimated the Native American population during the Age of Exploration. New weapons and diseases brought to the Americas by the Europeans directly led to hundreds of thousands of deaths of the natives who had never had contact with the new weapons or diseases. The spread of diseases is another negative effect of cultural diffusion. Diseases such as AIDS , Smallpox , and the Bubonic Plague have killed millions of people as they were spread from one are to another.

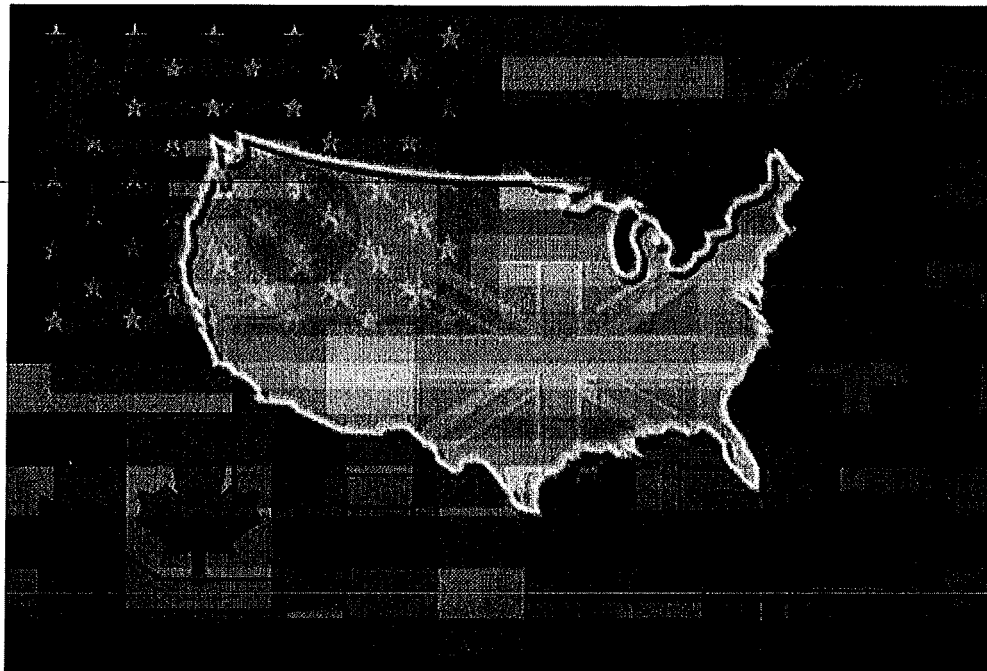


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There have been many groups who, throughout history, have not welcomed the process of cultural diffusion. For hundreds of years, both China and Japan did not allow foreigners to enter their countries, they also did not allow trade with outside countries. These countries limited their interactions with other cultures well into the twentieth century. Both China and Japan were concerned that their cultures would be weakened by the introduction of ideas from other cultures. China had an ethnocentric view, they believed that no other culture was worth coming into contact with since China believed itself to be the best culture in the world. With the inventions of such things as the computer and the Internet, these countries have since allowed contact with other areas of the world to occur and have welcomed cultural diffusion.



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The United States of America was built on the concept of cultural diffusion. This country is made up of thousands of different cultures, many have blended into each other to create a melting pot culture. There are Mexican and Chinese restaurants next to stores which sell African and European goods. Americans come into contact with many different cultures on a daily basis. Our clothing is often manufactured in other countries and then shipped to the United States, food that we eat has origins in the Caribbean and Asia, and the language that we speak often includes words and phrases from language from other countries. Cultural diffusion happens every day, and will continue to occur due to the fact that new technology has caused our world to become completely interdependent .

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