THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 146:
A BRAND NEW WORLD

Presented by Kevin W. Stroud

EPISODE 146: A BRAND NEW WORLD

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 146: A Brand New World. In this episode, we're going to continue our look at the European discovery of the Americas in the late 1400s. We'll look at what happened when Columbus reached the shores of several tropical islands way out in the Atlantic. Those islands were the islands of the Caribbean, and a few years later, he returned to explore the mainland of South and Central America. You may be familiar with parts of this story, but the part that often gets left out is what happened with the European explorers encountered the natives of the region and tried to communicate with them. Obviously, they each spoke very different languages. As the explorers encountered the new culture, and all of the things associated with that culture, they started to pick up new words from the native people, and some of those words eventually made their way to English. So as we look at these events in the late 1400s, we'll focus on the linguistic consequences, and we'll see how those developments impacted the English language.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast and get bonus episodes and transcripts at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

Also, since we're going to be looking at the voyages of Columbus, I should make a quick note about the sources that exist for most of this information. Like most explorers, Columbus kept a daily log book during his voyages, but all of those log books have been lost to history. Fortunately, the log book from the first voyage survived long enough to be copied, so it still exists as a primary source of information. For the other voyages, we have some of his personal letters, and we also have the written accounts of sailors and other people who traveled with him. We also have the written accounts of eye witnesses who traveled to the settlements that were established by Columbus in the Caribbean. And Columbus's son also wrote a biography of his father which was very detailed and was presumably based on his access to papers and documents which no longer exist. Those various accounts are not always consistent, but they provide a lot of information about those voyages.

Also, since I'm going to be talking about the Carribean, let me acknowledge that there are two common pronunciations of that word – especially in American English. We have /CARE-ih-BE-an/ and /cuh-RIB-ee-an/. I will admit that my pronunciation often fluctuates between the two. But for purposes of this podcast, I'm going to use /CARE-ih-BE-an/ which is the older and more traditional pronunciation within English.

Also, one other quick note. Those of you who have been listening to the podcast since the very beginning will remember that Louis Henwood was kind enough to prepare maps to illustrate some of the migrations that I talked about in the early episodes. Well, Louis has returned to prepare a map that shows the voyages that I'm going to be discussing in this episode. You can find the map at the entry for this episode at the main website – historyofenglishpodcast.com – and also under the 'Maps' tab at the website.

Now, let's turn to this episode, and the European discovery of the Americas in late 1400s. Last time, we concluded with Christopher Columbus finally convincing Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain to finance his expedition across the Atlantic. The plan was to sail directly across the ocean to eastern Asia. His arrangement with Ferdinand and Isabella not only gave him the funding he needed to mount the expedition, it also gave him the right to serve as Governor of any lands that he might discover along the way. And since those new lands might contain abundant natural resources, he was promised a percentage of all revenues that might be generated from those lands. Of course, any newly-discovered lands would be claimed for the benefit of the Spanish crown, so Ferdinand and Isabella were willing to make those concessions.

By July of 1492, Columbus had secured three ships and a crew of about ninety men. The ships were called the Niña, the Pinta and the Santa Maria. In August, he sailed out of Spain and headed south to the Canary Islands off the northwest coast of Africa. In that region, the trade winds blow from east to west, so the plan was to catch those winds and ride them westward as far as they would take him. That latitude also matched the supposed latitude of Japan and China as shown on some of the maps that were being produced at the time. [*SOURCE: The Fourth Part of the World, Toby Lester, p. 256-7.*] So theoretically, he could sail straight to Japan and the major ports of China. Columbus stopped in the Canaries to stock up on supplies, and on September 9, he headed westward out to sea.

Columbus was eager to embark on the voyage, and he was willing to sail as far as he needed to go to reach Asia. But he knew that his crew might not be so eager. The further they sailed out to sea, the longer it would take to get back home. And at a certain distance, they would reach a point of no return. Even if they turned around, there wouldn't be enough supplies to sustain the crew on the return journey. Columbus knew that his men would become more and more anxious as they traveled further and further out to sea. In order to manage the fear and apprehension of his crew, he actually maintained a separate fake log book that understated the distance they had traveled each day. That way he could show his crew that they were closer to home than they really were. [*SOURCE: The Fourth Part of the World, Toby Lester, p. 258-9.*]

Columbus was right to suspect that his men might get cold feet at some point. As the ships sailed deeper and deeper into the Atlantic, with the days turning into weeks, his crew started to become restless. After more than a month at sea, they started to demand that he give up the effort and turn around. And had it not been for that fake log book, he probably would have been forced to turn back.

In early October, with his crew on the edge of mutiny, Columbus asked for three more days. If there was still no sight of land after three days, he agreed to turn around and head back to Spain. The next day passed without sight of land, as the did the day after that. But on the third day – the very last day Columbus's three-day reprieve – the crew finally spotted land. On October 12, 1492, Columbus finally reached the New World, only he didn't realize that it was a new world.

The land he spotted was exactly where his maps had indicated that the islands of eastern Asia would be located. Remember from the last episode that Columbus was relying on maps and calculations that underestimated the size of the earth and the size of the Atlantic Ocean. So Columbus fully expected to find land at that point. Of course, it was all a big mistake. Asia wasn't really that close at all, but there was a land mass right where the maps he was consulting said there would be land. And that's why Columbus just assumed that he had reached the islands of eastern Asia. And he continued with that belief until the day he died.

Now when Columbus finally spotted land on October 12, it wasn't the mainland of North or South America. It was actually a small island in the modern-day Bahamas. As Columbus's ships approached the island, he and his men observed native people gathering by the shore to observe what must have been a very unusual sight – three massive sailing ships unlike anything the natives had seen before. Columbus decided to go onshore to speak with the people who had gathered there, so he and several of his men boarded a small boat and rowed to the shore.

The natives were naked, but some of them had painted faces and/or painted bodies. They were very friendly, and they spoke a language that Columbus and his men had never heard before. [*SOURCE: The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus, J.M. Cohen, ed., p. 55.*] He noticed that some of them wore a small piece of gold hanging from their pierced noses. And that suggested there was gold nearby. [*Ibid., p. 57.*]

One of the most interesting – and most disturbing – descriptions provided by Columbus concerned the innocense of the people he met. He said that they had spears made of cane, but they had no knowledge of iron – or swords made from iron. When the Spaniards showed them their swords, the natives grabbed them by the blade and cut their fingers. Columbus wrote that they didn't know how to use European weapons, and if the Spanish monarchs desired, a mere fifty Spaniards could subjugate the whole island and bring all of the inhabitants back to Spain to work as slaves – or the natives could be held as slaves right there on the island. [*SOURCE: The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus, J.M. Cohen, ed., p. 58-9.*] It was a very telling comment, because that's exactly what happened to many of the island natives over the next few years.

In fact, that process began as soon as Columbus encountered those first natives, and it began in part due to language. In his log book, Columbus noted that the natives seemed intelligent and they would repeat anything said to them. He wrote that they could be easily converted to Christianity, and that he intended to bring several of the natives back to Spain when he returned so they could be taught to speak Spanish. That way, they could be used as interpreters on a return trip. Columbus did in fact take several natives back to his ships for that purpose, but they didn't know why they were being taken. Over the course of this expedition, several of the natives that were taken jumped overboard to avoid being taken from their homes. Several others died on the return journey to Spain. Only two of them apparently survived to make it back to the islands a couple of years later. So the first natives taken captive were taken to serve as interpreters. And that illustrates the priority that was placed on language and communication.

So who were these native people, and what language did they speak? Well, modern scholars know that these native people in the Bahamas were part of a native population that lived throughout the northern Caribbean known as the Tainos, and they spoke a dialect of the Arawakan language spoken in parts of South America. At some point, native people from South America had migrated out to the islands of the Caribbean, and they brought their Arawakan language with them. So that language was spoken throughout the Caribbean and in pockets throughout the northern part of South America. But in the years before Columbus arrived, a separate group of native people had migrated from South America and settled in the southern parts of the Carribean, and they spoke a separate Native American language. And I'll have more to say about them a little later in the episode. But again, most of the natives in the northern Caribbean – including the Bahamas – were the Taino people who spoke an Arawakan language.

And some of those Arawakan words started to pass into European languages at this point in 1492. For example, Columbus noted that the natives would carve out logs and use them as small boats. Some of the natives even used those small boats to row out to the Spanish ships anchored offshore. The natives called that type of hollowed-out boat a ***canaoua***, which was borrowed into Spanish as ***canoa***, and then into English as ***canoe***. The word popped up in English documents a few decades later in the mid-1500s. And that became a recurring trend. As early Spanish explorers encountered new objects, and new plants and animals, they often borrowed the native Arawakan word for the thing, and then over the course of the 1500s, that word often passed from Spanish into English. And as we go through this episode, we'll encounter a lot more of those Arawakan terms that made that roundabout trek into English.

As I noted, these native people of the Caribbean are known today as the Taino people, but Columbus thought he had reached the islands of the Indies. So he called them ***Indios*** or ***Indians***, and that term stuck.

So these Taino people who Columbus called 'Indians' were friendly and hospitable. And they were curious about the strange-looking Europeans who had suddenly arrived on their shores. Columbus wrote on several occasions that the natives thought that he and his fellow sailors had come from the sky.

Once he was onshore, Columbus wanted to gather information from the natives. He wanted to know where Japan and China were. And he wanted to know where the natives found that gold that was hanging from their pierced noses.

The problem is that neither group of people understood the language of the other, so they communicated as best they could with hand signs. But that wasn't a very effective means of communication either. As Columbus traveled from one island to the next over the course of his four voyages, he would repeatedly ask the natives where the gold was, and they would repeatedly point to the next island over. Columbus always interpreted the signals as an indication that there were massive gold deposits nearby, but as we know today, there really aren't any large deposits of gold in the Caribbean.

This type of mis-communication may actually explain the name of the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. There are several theories about the origin of that name, but one of the more popular etymologies – at least according to some early Spanish writers – is that the name resulted from linguistic confusion between natives and Spanish explorers. Supposedly, the first explorers in the region asked the natives what the name of the region was, and the natives repeatedly responded with phrases that sounded like 'Tectetan' or 'uh yu ka t'ann,' which were native phrases that literally meant 'I don't understand you' or 'You speak funny.' But the explorers interpreted the responses as the answer to their question. They thought that was the name of the place. So, if that etymology is correct, the Yucatan Peninsula is literally the 'I don't understand you peninsula.'

That type of mis-communication may explain why Columbus was led to believe that there was a very large island with lots of gold located nearby. He understood the natives to be directing him to the south where there was a great king who had lots of gold and other riches. The description sounded like Marco Polo's description of Japan – or Chipangu as it was known as the time. So Columbus and his men raised their anchors and set sail for a large island located in a southerly direction.

A few days later, he found the large island he was looking for. They arrived at the island on October 18. The native people that Columbus had taken with him called the island Colba, which gave us the modern name of the island – Cuba. [*SOURCE: The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus, J.M. Cohen, ed., p. 71*.]

Now Cuba is indeed a large island. It is by far the largest island in the Caribbean. So it is easy to understand why Columbus might have confused this island for the island of Japan described by Marco Polo. Columbus found himself on the northern side of the island, so he decided to sail westward around the island in a counter-clockwise direction. As he sailed along the coastline, he sent two of his men and two of the natives he had taken with him onshore to look for towns and villages, and to look for those large deposits of gold that were supposedly there. His men didn't find gold, but they did encounter more native people. The inhabitants were also Tainos – related to the people who Columbus had encountered a few days earlier in the Bahamas. And they also spoke an Arawakan dialect.

When Columbus's men returned to the ships, they reported what they had seen. They had found a village with about fifty houses. They described native people who put certain herbs in their mouth and lit it on fire and breathed in the smoke. The natives called the plant ***tabaco***, which passed into Spanish, and a few decades later passed into English as ***tobacco***. [*SOURCE: The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus, J.M. Cohen, ed., p. 79*.]

The Spaniards also said that the native people were friendly and offered them food to eat. Meats were cured on a wooden framework called a ***barbakoa***. That word was also borrowed into Spanish, and it eventually passed into English as ***barbecue***. So if you enjoy grilling meats, or if you just enjoy food with a barbecue flavor, you can thank the Taino people for the word we use to describe that type of cooking.

The Cuban natives also ate several foods that the Europeans had never seen before. That included several unusual types of beans and a sweet grain that the natives called ***mahiz***. That word passed into Spanish and then into English as ***maize***. Of course, that was the grain that most Americans and many other English-speakers call ***corn*** today. In Britain, the word ***corn*** retains more of its original sense as any type of grain, so maize might be referred to as ***sweet corn***, ***corn on the cob***, or sometimes simply ***corn***. But whatever you call it, Europeans first encountered the grain at this point in 1492.

Columbus's men also reported that the natives boiled a specific type of root that tasted like chestnuts. Those men were apparently the first Europeans to eat a potato. [*SOURCE: The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus, J.M. Cohen, ed., p. 78*.] The natives called it ***batata***, which Spanish borrowed as ***patata***, and which later passed into English as ***potato***. Now I should note, that the potatoes native to the Caribbean were actually what we call 'sweet potatoes' today. So they were the orange, sweet version – not the white version. The white potato was later encountered by Spanish explorers on the South American mainland. It was assumed that the white potato was just a different version of the orange sweet potato, so it was given the same name. In actuality, the two types of potatoes are barely related at all, but potatoes were soon introduced to Europe, and over time, they became very common throughout the continent.

By the way, later Spaniards who explored modern-day Mexico encountered the fruit that the natives called ***tomatl***. Spanish borrowed the word as ***tomate***, which then passed into English as ***tomato***. And of course, tomatoes became a staple of Spanish, Italian and other Mediterranean cuisines.

Now I mention the word ***tomato*** at this point, even though Europeans discovered it a few years later, because it is interesting to compare the words ***potato*** and ***tomato*** within Modern English since they both came from Native American languages via Spanish. Notice that Spanish had the words as ***patata*** and ***tomate***. So neither word ended in an 'oh' sound. Those final vowel sounds were converted to 'oh' within English. It appears that the vowel was changed in ***potato*** first when it entered English in the mid-1500s, and that may have influenced the vowel change in ***tomato*** when it entered English in the early 1600s.

But what about the vowel sound in the middle of those words? Almost all English speakers pronounce ***potato*** with the /ay/ sound in the middle. But ***tomato*** is generally pronounced as /to-mah-toh/ in Britain. So what happened there? Why do we have /to-MAY-toh/ and /to-MAH-toh/, but not /po-TAY-toh/ and /po-TAH-toh/?

Well, the answer appears to be one of timing. Columbus came across potatoes in the Caribbean early on, and the word for ***potato*** was borrowed into European languages first. It first appeared in English documents in the mid-1500s. Tomatoes were encountered a few decades later, and therefore the word for tomatoes entered European languages a bit later. That time difference may have made all the difference in the way the words were pronounced.

When ***patata*** came into English from Spanish in the early to mid-1500s, the Great Vowel Shift was still underway, and the /ah/ sound was shifting to the /ay/ sound within English. So ***patata*** experienced the vowel shift and became ***potato*** (/po-TAY-toh/). But ***tomate*** (/toh-mah-tay/) was borrowed a few decades later when that specific vowel shift was coming to an end. So that sound was still changing in some places, but it was no longer changing in other places. So some speakers converted ***tomate*** (/toh-mah-tay/) into /to-MAY-toh/, but other speakers retained the original vowel sound as /to-MAH-toh/. And it appears that both pronunciations could be found in early Modern English in Britain. But over time, as often happened, British English settled on one pronunciation and American English settled on the other. And that's apparently why some people say /to-MAH-toh/ and some say /to-MAY-toh/. That word just happened to come into English at a time when that specific vowel shift was coming to an end, so both pronunciations were preserved. But ***potato*** came in early enough that it fully experienced the vowel shift, which is why /po-TAY-toh/ is pretty much universal, and /po-TAH-toh/ is rarely if ever heard.

Now the presence of Native American words like ***potato***, ***tomato*** and ***maize*** within English and within other European languages points to another important development that started to occur at this point in 1492. When we think about the European discovery of the New World and the period of European colonialism that followed, we tend to think about the movement and interaction of people from those different regions. But it wasn't just different people that started to come into contact with each other. It was also different plants and animals. Two ecosystems that had previously existed completely independent of each other now started to come together.

New World plants and animals were introduced to Europe, and European plants and animals were introduced to the Americas. Europeans got potatoes, tomatoes, tobacco and maize from the Americas. They also got turkeys, and new varieties of beans and peppers. In exchange, the Americas received lots of new crops from Europe, Africa and Asia like wheat, barley, rice, sugar cane, coffee, bananas, and citrus fruits like oranges and lemons. The Americas also received animals from Europe like horses, cattle, goats, sheep, chicken and pigs. [*SOURCE: Cathedral, Forge and Waterwheel: Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages, Frances & Joseph Gies, p. 284.*] So these separate ecosystems starts to merge in the late 1400s thanks to human migrations.

Interestingly, cotton was already known in the Carribean. And Columbus noted that the natives of Cuba used cotton to make fabric. But they didn't tend to wear it. In fact, they didn't tend to wear very much at all. The cotton was mostly used to make fishing nets and to make beds out of those nets. [*SOURCE: The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus, J.M. Cohen, ed., p. 79-80.*] The native people called that type of fishing net an ***amaca***. The Spaniards were intrigued by the natives who stretched the nets between two trees and used them as beds. And that native word for those nets – ***amaca*** – passed into Spanish and then into English as ***hammock***.

But Columbus wasn't really interested in hammocks, or cotton, or even potatoes and tobacco. He was much more interested in gold and pearls and Asian spices. And the natives of this large island seemed to have very little, if any, of those things. But when they were asked, Columbus understood them to say that those things could be found to the east. So Columbus decided to reverse direction and head back to the east.

He probably had come to realize that this large island was not in fact Japan as he originally thought. He knew from Marco Polo's accounts that Japan was oriented in a north-south direction, so he should have reached the western side of the island by that point. Of course, today we know that the island was Cuba, which is oriented in an east-west direction, so that's why he hadn't reached the end of the island yet. We know from his accounts that he was starting to suspect that this island was actually part of the Asian mainland. At any rate, he turned around and headed back to the east to find the island which supposedly had all the gold. [*SOURCE: The Fourth Part of the World, Toby Lester, p. 263, 266.*]

When asked what this other island was called, Columbus understood the natives to say that it was called ***Bohio***. In fact, this was another misunderstanding caused by the language barrier. ***Bohio*** was actually the Arawak for their huts. [*SOURCE: The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus, J.M. Cohen, ed., p. 80*.] Nevertheless, Columbus headed east and finally passed beyond the eastern shore of Cuba on his way to this other nearby island.

He reached the next island to the east on December 9. When he arrived there, he saw that the island was very large, and it had fields and trees that reminded him of Spain. The island's natives were catching fish that were also common in Spain. So regardless what the natives called the island, Columbus decided to give it a new name. He called it 'the Spanish island,' or in Spanish 'la isla española.' [*Ibid., p. 85*] That name was gradually slurred into ***Hispaniola***. Today, the island is actually home to two separate countries – Haiti in the west and the Dominican Republic in the east. But the island itself is still known as Hispaniola.

When Columbus arrived at the island, he once again sent his men onshore to encounter the natives and to look for gold. The gold continued to elude them, but they did eventually meet a local tribal leader who welcomed Columbus and his men. One night, a young sailor was put in charge of the Santa Maria, and he accidentally let the ship run aground, and it started taking on water. The ship was lost, and the Spaniards salvaged what they could. Columbus took it as an omen that he should build a permanent settlement there on the island. So the salvaged wood from the ship was used to build a fort there. It was the first European colonial settlement in the New World.

At this point, the natives were still accommodating, but the construction of the settlement marked an important turning point in the relationship between the natives and the Europeans. Conflicts between the two groups soon began to emerge, and they grew much more frequent over time. But initially, the natives saw the Spaniards as potential allies. 'Allies against whom?' you ask. Well, as the fort was being constructed, Columbus found out.

The local tribal leader visited Columbus, and he indicated that the local people were under constant threat from a separate group of native people who lived on the islands to the south and the east. They were called the Caribs, and he told Columbus that they were fierce warriors, and they even ate the flesh of the people they killed and captured in battle. He hoped that Columbus and his men would use their weapons to defend the native people on the island from the savage Caribs who could appear at any time. Columbus agreed that his men would protect the local

natives, and he assured the leader that his people no longer needed to fear the dreaded Caribs. [*SOURCE: The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus, J.M. Cohen, ed., p. 94-5*.]

So who were these Caribs? Well, so far, Columbus had only visited islands in the northern Caribbean – the Bahamas, Cuba and Hispaniola. And the native people who occupied these regions were all of the same ethnic group – the Tainos who spoke related Arawakan languages. Today, these northern regions are sometimes called the Greater Antilles. Well, there is a thin chain of smaller islands that extends from this region southeastward down to the northern part of South America. This island chain is known as the Lesser Antilles. Today, these include popular resorts like Antigua, Montserrat, Martinique, St. Lucia and Barbados. Well, a couple of centuries before Columbus arrived, those regions were still occupied by Taino people related to the people on the northern islands. But in recent years, there had been a separate migration of people from the mainland of South America into this chain of smaller islands to the south. They were part of this separate ethnic group called the Caribs. And initially, they spoke a different native language, but over time, their language blended with the Arawakan languages, so that by the time of Columbus, their language was basically an Arawakan language with a lot of Carib vocabulary.

Well, it appears that these newcomers were very aggressive and warlike. They displaced the native Taino people one island at a time, and when Columbus arrived, they were threatening the Taino people who lived in places like Hispaniola and Cuba. And as you may have figured out by now, the Caribs gave us the word ***Caribbean***. The Carribean is named after this separate native population who occupied those southern islands.

Well, the Taino people in the north were afraid of the Caribs, and they considered them to be flesh-eaters. Supposedly, they would take their enemies captive and eat them. Those descriptions influenced the way the European explorers perceived the Caribs, and that image soon passed into the popular culture of Europe.

As I noted, the Taino people of the north spoke related Arawakan dialects, and in some of those dialects, the 'r' sound was sometimes pronounced as an 'n' sound. So some of the people in the north referred to the Caribs and Canibs. And the Spanish also sometimes referred to them as the ***Caniba***. And you may see where I'm going with this. In Europe, those natives were so closely associated with those stories about eating human flesh, that the term ***Caniba*** gave us the word ***cannibal***. So ultimately, the word ***cannibal*** is derived from the name of people who occupied those southern islands – the Caribs or Canibs – depending on the pronunciation. And that also means that the words ***Carribean*** and ***cannibal*** are actually cognate.

So at this early point, the Taino looked to Columbus for protection, but they would soon fear the European explorers more than the Caribs.

A few weeks after the Santa Maria ran aground and the settlement was built in Hispaniola, Columbus decided to return to Spain for more supplies and to inform Ferdinand and Isabella of his discoveries. He headed back in January of 1493, and he left a contingent of men at the new settlement on the island.

Columbus took back a variety of plant and animal life from the Carribean, as well as six natives. [*SOURCE: 1492: The Decline of Medievalism and the Rise of the Modern Age, Barnet Litvinoff, p. 114-5.*] He arrived back in Spain in March. But during the return voyage, many of the men on the Pinta had become sick, and several of them died. It is generally believed that the men had contracted syphilis – a sexually transmitted disease that was common in the Carribean, but not common in Europe. Sexual contact between the European explorers and the natives was probably common – both consensual and forced. In fact, sexual assaults are specifically described in some of the early accounts. Within a few years, as more ships went to the Caribbean and returned, the disease spread throughout Europe. Though there is some disagreement among scholars, it is generally believed that the natives of the Caribbean had acquired a genetic tolerance of the disease, and they only experienced minor symptoms. But the Europeans had no tolerance, and among them, the disease often resulted in severe illness and even death. Again, there is some dispute about this. There are scholars think the disease was already present in Europe.

But whether or not the disease was imported from the Caribbean, there is no doubt that Europeans exported their diseases to the New World. In fact, the native populations of the Americas were decimated by European diseases. The natives had little or no immunity to diseases like measles, bubonic plague, and especially smallpox. [*SOURCE: Cathedral, Forge and Waterwheel: Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages, Frances & Joseph Gies, p. 286.*] The spread of these various diseases reminds us that when people of different ecosystems encounter each other, sometimes what passes between them is very destructive.

In Hispaniola alone, it is estimated that the native population was cut in half within four years of Columbus's arrival. Some of that was due to violence, but a lot of it was due to disease. Within a half century, virtually the entire native population of the island was gone. [*SOURCE: Dogs of Gold, James Reston, Jr., p. 306-7.*] And that was true throughout the Caribbean. Very few native people survived the 1500s. And throughout the mainland of North and South America, native populations were eventually reduced to a fraction of their original number through contact with European diseases. [*SOURCE: History: The Definitive Visual Guide, p. 232-33.*]

I mention this sad part of history because language scholars have started to realize the role that disease has played in the overall spread of languages over time. Traditionally, the spread of languages throughout history has been attributed to the spread of people and the political, or military, or economic dominance of that new group over the native populations. But more recently, scholars have started to realize that another important factor is the loss of native populations due to diseases brought by the invaders. Recent research has even suggested that this was a major factor in the spread of early Indo-European languages four or five thousand years ago. Recent DNA studies have uncovered evidence that suggests that the original Indo-Europeans brought the Bubonic Plague with them as they expanded out of the Eurasian steppe region. They may have had a tolerance for the bacterium that caused the disease due to centuries of exposure in the steppes, but when they migrated to other regions, they encountered people who had no immunity. Those local populations were significantly reduced when the original Indo-Europeans showed up, and that allowed the Indo-European languages to become the dominant languages in those regions.

So if we look of the long arc of human history, we can see that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Here in the late 1400s, Indo-European languages were about to spread again – this time throughout the New World – and they would do so through some of the same factors that had been at work for thousands of years – migrations, invasions, conquest, and disease.

Now when Columbus returned to Spain from that first voyage, he was greeted as a bit of hero. Again, at the time, it was thought that he had discovered a new route to the Indies. There was no sense that he had actually discovered a new continent. Ferdinand and Isabella were impressed enough that they agreed to fund a second expedition considerably larger than the first, this time with seventeen ships and more than 1200 men. The goal was to establish a permanent settlement on Hispaniola. [*SOURCE: The Fourth Part of the World, Toby Lester, p. 270.*]

In September of 1493, Columbus headed back to the Caribbean, but this time he intentionally headed a little further south. The plan was to explore the southern islands of the Carribean where the Caribs lived. He explored several islands there, including modern-day Dominica, Santa Cruz and Puerto Rico. When he arrived, there were very few Carib men. They were presumably on raiding expeditions to other islands. Columbus mostly encountered Carib women and captives from other islands. Columbus's men did come across some human bones in the camps they visited – which they interpreted as confirmation that the Caribs – or Canibs – did eat human flesh. And that further contributed to the link between the term ***Canib*** and cannibalism. [*SOURCE: Letter Written by Dr. Chanca in The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus, p. 136, 139.*]

Columbus surveyed the islands of the region and the topography of those islands. Some of the islands of the Caribbean have mountains, but many are flat with open grassy areas. And it might come as a bit of a surprise, but the word ***savannah*** for flat, grassy land is actually an Arawakan word used by the natives of the Carribean. Today, we tend to use that word to describe those types of places in Africa, but the word itself was borrowed from the speech of the Taino people.

Now after surveying the smaller islands of the Lesser Antilles, Columbus continued on to the northwest – back to the settlement he left in Hispaniola. He arrived back there in March of 1494, but when Columbus reached the camp, he discovered that the men he had left behind were all dead. [*SOURCE: 1492: The Decline of Medievalism and the Rise of the Modern Age, Barnet Litvinoff, p. 143.*] The details are sketchy, but conflicts had broken out between the natives and the Europeans that were left behind. At one point, the wife of one of the tribal leaders was apparently raped. The natives then retaliated, and all of the settlers were killed. When Columbus arrived, he sought to re-establish the settlement and put down any rebellions by the natives.

Columbus left his men in charge to carry out his orders, and then he set sail a short time later to further explore Cuba. He journeyed west to Cuba, which he still thought might be part of the Asian mainland, and then he sailed down to Jamaica. Columbus called that second island ***Santiago***, but the name didn't stick. The native Arawakan word ***Jamaica*** became the accepted name of the island over time. The word meant 'rich in springs.' After a few months, Columbus returned to Hispaniola where the situation at the settlement had descended into a state of chaos.

Columbus's men had brutally cracked down on the natives who were no match for the Europeans with their iron swords and gunpowder. Many of the natives were killed or captured, and many of those who were captured were forced into slavery. Some were taken back to Europe to be sold into slavery there. [*SOURCE: Dogs of Gold, James Reston, Jr., p. 336.*]

All of this, combined with the impact of European diseases that had been introduced to the island, starts to explain why the native population disappeared so quickly. And it also helps to explain why Columbus's reputation as a great explorer has been marred by the destruction of the native people who stood in the way.

As ships started to return to Spain with slaves from the Carribean, and as more and more people returned to describe what was going on, Ferdinand and Isabella started to become concerned about the situation in Hispaniola. They wanted to convert the native people to Christianity, not kill and enslave them. So an inspector was sent to Hispaniola to see if the stories were true. According to the surviving reports, the inspector confirmed many of the eyewitness accounts. And he also arrived on the island just after it was struck by a major tropical storm which had caused even more destruction on the island. Supposedly, during the storm, the natives had cried 'Huracan!' – the original version of the word ***hurricane***. [*SOURCE: 1492: The Decline of Medievalism and the Rise of the Modern Age, Barnet Litvinoff, p. 149.*] It's another local Arawakan word that was borrowed into Spanish, and then passed into English.

Now, in actuality, it seems much more likely that the natives actually yelled 'Furacan!' with an 'f' sound at the beginning. Spanish actually rendered the word both ways as ***furacan*** and ***huracan***. But the pronunciation of the word with the 'f' sound was much more common early on. Even in English, the word was usually rendered as ***furacane*** in the 1500s. Portuguese still uses a pronunciation with that sound. The Portuguese word for ***hurricane*** is ***furacao***. So how did ***furacane*** become ***hurricane***?

Well, if you speak Spanish, you may instinctively know the answer. This is actually part of a very common sound change within Spanish. Latin words that began with the 'f' sound often experienced a sound change within early Spanish. They came to be pronounced with an 'h' sound, which has since become silent in more recent centuries. This shift from the 'f' sound to the 'h' sound was so strong within Spanish that it even affected words that were borrowed into the language in the 1400s and 1500s. Some of those Latin words were re-borrowed into Spanish directly from Latin or from another Romance language with their original 'f' sound. So Spanish sometimes has two different versions of a root word – one pronounced with its original 'f' sound and one pronounced with an 'h' sound – or pronounced with a silent 'h' that is still retained in the spelling. So for example, the surname ***Hernandez*** is just a variation of the name ***Fernandez***. Similarly, the name ***Hernando*** evolved out of the name ***Fernando***. In fact, Columbus's son who wrote the biography of Columbus was known as Fernando Colon, but his name is sometimes rendered as Hernando Colon.

Well, that common Spanish sound change explains how ***furacan*** became ***huracan***, and then became ***hurricane*** within English. That newer pronunciation with the 'h' sound became common in Spanish over the course of the 1500s, and by the late 1500s, it had become common within English as well, so much so that it pushed out the alternate English pronunciation of ***furacane***.

Now the ***hurricane*** – or ***furacane*** – that struck Hispaniola during Columbus's second voyage only served to highlight the sad state of the island during that period. It was an island devastated by both natural disaster and human conflict.

But there was some good news for the European explorers. The ground proved to be very fertile. According to the surviving reports, melon seeds would ripen into edible fruit within two months. Cucumbers could be grown within twenty days. Wheat, grapes and sugar-cane were all grown from European sources. [*SOURCE: Letter Written by Dr. Chanca in The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus, p. 164-5*.] On this second voyage, Columbus also brought the seeds of oranges, lemons and other citrus fruits. Those fruits also flourished, and they would eventually become staples throughout the Caribbean and large parts of the New World.

A later account of this voyage written by the Spanish historian Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas reported that Columbus and his men saw natives playing a game with a balls made from 'the gum of a tree.' The balls were lighter and bounced better than those used in Spain. This is generally considered to be the first European encounter with the substance that we would come to know as rubber.

Interestingly, the word ***rubber*** was first recorded in English around this same time, but it didn't refer to the bouncy substance that Columbus encountered in the New World. The Oxford English Dictionary cites the first use of the word ***rubber*** in a document composed in 1478 – a few years before Columbus set sail across the Atlantic for the first time. At that time, the word was used in its original sense as a rubbing tool. A ***rubber*** was something you used for rubbing. So how did that word become associated with this bouncy substance found in the New World?

Well, if you live outside of North America, you may instinctively know the answer. In those places, a ***rubber*** is what you use to erase pencil marks – what North Americans tend to call an ***eraser***. Well, this particular substance made from tree gum was used to rub away mistakes made by pencils, so it came to be known as ***rubber***. Here's what happened. Early prototypes of the modern lead pencil appeared in the 1500s, but it was difficult to erase the marks made by the lead. In the mid-1700s, this particular type of gum from the Caribbean started to be exported to Europe. It was of little use at first, but in 1770, an English chemist named Joseph Priestly noted that the gum substance could be used to erase those pencil marks. The substance was then manufactured into small cubes that were used to rub away mistakes, thereby acquiring the name ***rubber***. It was actually called ***India rubber*** at first because the substance came from the Carribean – or the West Indies as it was commonly known. The problem was that the substance wasn't very good for much else because it was very temperature sensitive. It became soft and sticky when it was warm, and hard and brittle when it was cold. In the 1800s, Charles Goodyear figured out that you could heat the substance with a bit of sulphur and it solved the temperature problem and made the substance more stable. The result was vulcanized rubber, and the

Goodyear name became synonymous with the substance, especially when used to make tires. But the story of rubber can be traced back to those balls used by the natives that Columbus encountered during his second voyage. [*SOURCE: Panati's Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things, Charles Panati, p. 164*.]

Now having further explored the islands of the Carribean, Columbus decided to head back to Spain in March of 1496, thereby bringing an end to his second voyage.

Columbus returned home to find that Spain and Portugal had agreed to a division of the Atlantic between them. The agreement, based on a proposal by the Pope, was called the Treaty of Tordesillas. The treaty would prove to be very important to the future settlement of the New World. The treaty established an east-west division of the Atlantic basin. A vertical line was drawn through the middle of the Atlantic with the Portuguese having exclusive rights to colonize the places in the east including west Africa, and the Spanish having the exclusive rights to colonize the places in the west including the islands just discovered by Columbus.

But if Spain anticipated a monopoly on those western regions, that's not what happened. First, no European had discovered the mainland of North or South America yet, so no one in Europe knew what lay beyond those islands that Columbus had discovered. And that meant that no one knew about South America, or the fact that the eastern coast of South America juts way out into the Atlantic. In fact, you might be surprised how far east it extends when you look at a map. And in fact, it extends beyond the dividing line that was agreed upon in the Atlantic, which is why Portugal was able to claim that part that sticks out in the east – the region we know today as Brazil. So Portugal got part of South America due to that geographical feature that was unknown at the time when the Treaty of Tordesillas was agreed upon.

The Treaty also had another short-coming. It was later ignored by other European powers, especially England. In fact, England made its first attempt to explore what lay beyond the Atlantic at this point in the year 1496.

News had reached England that Columbus had sailed across the Atlantic to Asia – or at least what was thought to be Asia. So the English king Henry VII began to entertain the idea that it might be possible to reach Asia via a northern route. In 1496, an Italian merchant named Giovanni Caboto convinced Henry to sanction a voyage to find a route to Asia via the North Atlantic. Today, Giovanni Caboto is better known by the Anglicized version of his name – John Cabot. Cabot sailed out of Bristol on the western coast of England. His voyage was actually funded mostly by local Bristol merchants and Italian bankers in London. They planned to benefit from the trade that would flow through England if a northern route to Asia could be found.

In May of 1497, Cabot sailed out to sea, and a few weeks later, he discovered the northeastern part of modern-day Canada. Scholars aren't exactly sure where he spotted land. Accounts indicate that it was a forested and sparsely populated area probably somewhere in the region from Newfoundland down to Nova Scotia. He returned to England in August, but very little is known about his journey. None of his letters or journals have survived. [*SOURCE: The Fourth Part of the World, Toby Lester, p. 284.*] Most of what is known comes from the second hand accounts of

a couple of Italians who were living in England and spoke with Cabot after his return. They wrote letters back home which have survived, and those letters recalled that Cabot did not meet any natives during his voyage. But otherwise, most of the details have been lost to history. [*SOURCE: A Brief History of British Sea Power, David Howarth, p. 72.*]

Whatever Cabot discovered, it appears that Henry VII was pleased with Cabot's efforts, and he agreed to support a second voyage, but the outcome of that second voyage remains a mystery. Again, no records survive to indicate what happened. The traditional view is that the ship was lost at sea and never returned. But there are records that show one of the crew members was back in England a few years later. So either the crew member wasn't actually on the ship or the ship returned without much fanfare.

Interestingly, there was a new development in this story about a decade ago back in 2009. In that year, a long lost letter composed by Henry VII was published for the first time. It revealed that the English king actually authorized a third voyage in 1499 – the year after Cabot's mysterious second voyage. The letter was written by the king to his Lord Chancellor authorizing the voyage by a Bristol merchant named William Weston. In the letter, Henry included the following line:

> "Soo it is that we entende that he shall shortly with goddes grace passe and saille for to serche and fynde if he can the new founde land."
>
> 'So it is that we intend that he shall shortly with God's grace pass and sail in order to search for and find, if he can, the new found land.'

That reference to the 'new found land' is presumably to the land that Cabot had discovered a couple of years earlier on his first voyage. And it is the first recorded reference to the region as 'new found land' – or 'Newfoundland' as many people know it today.

Now these early English voyages to North America didn't amount to much at first. Henry VII was soon succeeded by his very infamous son Henry VIII. And Henry VIII showed very little interest in exploring the New World. He was too busy divorcing his wives and splitting with the Church in Rome. But those early voyages by Cabot, and presumably by Weston, laid the groundwork for England's later excursions to North America nearly a century later.

During the same period when Cabot was exploring the North American coast, there was another significant development in the southern hemisphere. As I noted in the last episode, the Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias had reached the southern tip of Africa and confirmed that it was possible to sail around the tip. But at that point, he had turned around and sailed back to Portugal. Well, in 1497, another Portuguese explorer – Vasco da Gama – had sailed from Portugal with the intention of sailing around the tip of Africa and continuing on to India. If successful, it would officially open a new trade route to the east. The journey took two years to complete, and it was ultimately successful. It took one year to reach India, and another year to make it back to Portugal. So in 1498, da Gama reached India, but it would take another year for him to return home to report the news. During that year, Cabot was exploring the North Atlantic

and Columbus was back in Spain, and sailors and merchants in Portugal were waiting with bated breath to see if it was possible to reach India by sailing around Africa.

All of that may help to explain how Columbus was able to secure the funds for a third voyage back to the Caribbean. Ferdinand and Isabella were aware of the problems with the settlement in Hispaniola, and weren't happy with those developments. But they also needed to match the potential Portuguese route to India with one of their own. And they may have heard that the English were also exploring the North Atlantic looking for a northern trade route to Asia. Even though Columbus had not found the Asian mainland, the Spanish monarchs thought he might have been close, and they needed to keep up with their European rivals. So they agreed to fund Columbus's third smaller expedition back to the Caribbean. In May of 1498, he left with a contingent of six ships not knowing if Vasco da Gama had actually made it to India. [*SOURCE: The Fourth Part of the World, Toby Lester, p. 288.*]

This time Columbus sailed even further south when he approached the Caribbean, and he actually reached the mainland of South America for the first time. He explored the northeastern coast of the continent – basically modern-day Venezuela. By the way, a separate Spanish expedition reached the same area the following year. They noticed houses built on pilings that reminded them of houses in Venice. So they called it 'little Venice' – or ***Venezuela*** as we know it today. By the way, this later expedition may have included a Florentine merchant named Amerigo Vespucci, who is also important to our story because his name is the source of the name ***America***. But as we'll see a little later in the episode, many aspects of his voyage or voyages remain controversial.

Now when Columbus reached this area in the previous year – 1498 – he continued to believe that it was part of the Asian mainland. So even though he was the first European to reach South America, he never recognized it as separate continent. In September, he made it back to Hispaniola where the situation had gone from bad to worse. Based on several surviving reports, the conflict between the settlers and the natives had continued to worsen, and numerous atrocities were being committed against the natives. Columbus spent the next two years on the island trying to re-establish order.

During that time, Vasco da Gama returned to Portugal from India and confirmed that a new trade route had been opened around Africa. He reported that he had used a special sailing technique to reach the tip of Africa. It was a technique developed by his predecessor Bartolomeu Dias. Rather than hugging the coast all the way down to the tip, he took advantage of the circular wind currents in the South Atlantic. In that region off the southwestern coast of Africa, the wind currents move in a circular counter-clockwise motion. So if you hug the coast, you're actually sailing into the wind. But if you sail out to sea, you can follow the winds in a sweeping arc. The wind currents take you out deep into the Atlantic and then gradually turn you southward and then eastward in that counter-clockwise direction, eventually depositing you near the southern tip of Africa. Well, the year after Vasco da Gama returned to Portugal, another Portuguese sailor named Pedro Cabral tried the same trick. But he sailed a little too far west, and reached land. He had actually come upon eastern tip of South America. And he realized that the land was on the eastern side of the vertical dividing line that I mentioned earlier that separated Spain's territories

from Portugal's territories. Since the land was on the eastern side of that line – on Portugal's side – he promptly claimed the land for Portugal, and that was the beginning of the Portuguese colony that became known as Brazil. By the way, the name of ***Brazil*** is actually named for the brazil wood that was so plentiful in the region.

So by the year 1500, Columbus had thoroughly explored the Carribean and parts of the mainland of South America. Other Spanish explorers had surveyed the coast of Venezuela. And Pedro Cabral sailing for Portugal had reached modern-day Brazil. Meanwhile, John Cabot sailing for England had reached the eastern part of Canada. And none of them had found any signs that any of those lands were part of Asia. So it was starting to become clear that there was a massive landmass out there beyond the western horizon, and it wasn't Asia.

In that same year – 1500 – Isabella and Ferdinand had enough of the mess in Hispaniola. They sent a separate expedition to the island to get an independent account of the situation there, and when the expedition arrived, what they saw was so bad that they arrested Columbus on the spot and brought him back to Spain as a prisoner. [*SOURCE: The Fourth Part of the World, Toby Lester, p. 294-5*.]

Back in Spain, Columbus pleaded his case to the monarchs, and also pointed to the legal agreement he had made with them. He eventually convinced them to let him go. And over the next couple of years, he pleaded with them to let him return to the islands to rectify the situation. Despite the reluctance of Ferdinand and Isabella, they eventually relented. Spain's rival Portugal was getting rich with its new lucrative trade route to India, and with its new foothold in Brazil. Spain desperately needed Columbus to finish the work he started and find that western route to China and India. So in 1502, they agreed to fund Columbus's fourth, and what would prove to be final, voyage to the New World.

This time, he explored the mainland of Central America from modern-day Panama and Honduras up to the southern tip of Mexico. It was there that he encountered a different Native American population – the Maya. According to Columbus's biography written by his son, several Maya natives rowed out to his ship in a canoe. The natives had small beans that looked like almonds. They apparently considered them to be very valuable. Whenever one of them dropped some of the beans, they would all scramble to pick them up as fast as they could. The natives called the small beans 'ka-ka-wa.' Well, those beans were cocoa beans, and 'ka-ka-wa' was essentially an early version of the word ***cocoa***. I should note that even though it is common to refer to cocoa 'beans,' they're not really beans. They're actually seeds found in pods that grow on the cacao tree, which is native to the region where the Maya lived. And those beans – or seeds – were indeed very valuable to the Maya. Later explorers discovered that they actually used them as currency.

So the biography of Columbus indicates that he was the first European to encounter cocoa beans, but to him, they were merely a novelty. About a decade later, Spaniards began the conquest of modern-day Mexico, and they brought cases full of those beans back to Spain, and that's really when cocoa became popular there.

Of course, the native word for this bean – or seed – not only produced the word ***cocoa***, it also produced the word ***chocolate***. So what's the connection between those two words? Well, that's a little bit complicated because not all scholars agree that the two words are actually related. The Aztecs who lived to the north of the Maya in central Mexico had essentially the same word as the Maya. One version of the word – ***cacahuatl*** – referred to the tree and the beans and sometimes a drink made from the beans. That version of the word actually gave us the word ***cocoa***. The other Aztec word was ***chocola-tl***, and it referred to a paste or other food substance made from cocoa beans. That version of the word gave us the word ***chocolate***. Again, it isn't entirely clear if those two words came from the same native root word, but they both referred to the cocoa bean and foods and drinks made from those beans. Spanish borrowed both words, and both words eventually passed into English.

When those words passed into English in the 1600s, they still referred to a type of drink made with cocoa, basically an early form of hot cocoa or hot chocolate. Later in the 1800s, the substance was reduced to a solid form with sugar and other sweeteners, thereby giving us the modern form of chocolate as a type of candy.

Again, the words ***cocoa*** and ***chocolate*** can be traced back to the native language of the Aztecs – not the native language of the Caribbean tribes. But Columbus was apparently the first European to encounter those beans while exploring the Central American mainland during his fourth and final voyage.

After leaving Central America, he made his way back to Jamaica where he was marooned for a year. He eventually made his way off the island, and in 1504 he returned to Spain in poor health. Queen Isabella had recently died. She had always thought more highly of Columbus than her husband Ferdinand. So without Isabella to vouch for him, Columbus didn't find much support in the Spanish court. He died two years later. As far as many were concerned at the time, he was a somewhat obscure Genoese sailor who had discovered some new islands way out in the Atlantic. The notion that those islands were located next to a previously unknown continent was only beginning to take shape among some Europeans who were starting to put the pieces together.

And Columbus's standing had declined so much over the prior few years that the new continent – actually two different continents – were actually named after someone else. They were named after that Florentine merchant and explorer named Amerigo Vespucci. He was the guy that may have been part of the second expedition that reached Venezuela in 1499. So why did he get all the credit? Why do we call those continents North and South America, and not North and South Columbia?

Well, first of all, to be fair, there is a country in South America named Columbia after Christopher Columbus. And there are certainly lots of individual towns and cities named after him throughout both continents. I should also note that the term ***Columbia*** has historically been used as an informal or poetic term for both the Americas in general and the United States in particular. That's why the capital of the US is called Washington, DC meaning 'District of Columbia.' It's not Washington, DA – 'District of America.' The name of the capital reflects that older informal use of 'Columbia' for the United States. That usage is also the basis of the name

of Columbia University in New York. It was previously King's College, but that name fell out of favor after the Revolutionary War, and ***Columbia*** was adopted as a patriotic name to reflect the birth of the new nation.

But while Columbus's name was adopted in certain places, the newly discovered continents were formally named after Amerigo Vespucci. So again, why did he get all the credit? Well, it appears likely that Vespucci made at least two journeys to the New World between 1499 and 1502 around the time of Columbus's final two voyages. And he may have made two other journeys.

The reason for the uncertainty is that almost everything known about Vespucci's travels come from a series of letters attributed to him. The problem is that most scholars agree that the letters that provide the most details and the most interesting information were not actually written by him. The details are inconsistent. In places, his descriptions contradict the known landscape of the region he was purporting to describe. In many places, his account seems to plagiarize Columbus's story. And a few letters which have been discovered in more recent centuries, and which are generally agreed to be his actual letters, contradict the terms of those letters published back in the early 1500s.

Whatever the underlying truth of the letters, one of them was published in the form of a pamphlet in 1503 under the Latin title Mundus Novus – literally 'The New World.' This was still the early age of printing, but the pamphlet proved to be a best seller. It was translated into many other European languages and was printed throughout Europe. The printed letter stated that the regions Vespucci had visited were not a group of isolated islands. They were the mainland of a previously unknown continent. [*SOURCE: The Fourth Part of the World, Toby Lester, p. 302-3.*] That assertion was probably why the pamphlet proved to be so popular at the time. It was a key document during that period were Europeans were starting to put the pieces together and realize that there was a new continent out there on the horizon. The pamphlet seemed to confirm those suspicions.

A couple of years after that pamphlet was first published, a German printer and scholar named Matthias Ringmann decided to publish a new version of the letter. He believed that Vespucci had indeed found a new continent. He became intrigued about Vespucci and his claims, so he searched for more information about his journeys. He soon came across another letter attributed to Vespucci which described an even earlier journey in 1497 – one year before Columbus had reached the mainland of South America. Now today, most scholars doubt the validity of the letter, and they suspect that whoever wrote it intentionally back-dated it so that Vespucci's discovery of the mainland preceded Columbus's discovery – thereby implying that Vespucci had actually been the person who discovered the new continent. Whether or not the letter was true, the German printer Ringmann believed it was true, and he decided to print a translation of it. He brought in a map-maker named Martin Waldseemüller to prepare a map that would accompany the publication. [*SOURCE: The Fourth Part of the World, Toby Lester, p. 348-9.*]

The scope of the project expanded, and the final result was a publication written in Latin – the title of which translates as 'Introduction to Cosmography' in English. The publication included a translation of that second Vespucci letter. And it also included a passage, presumably written by

Ringmann, which specifically stated that a new continent had been discovered by Vespucci, and he added that the new continent should be named either ***Amerigen*** or ***America*** in honor of Vespucci. This was apparently the origin of the modern name ***America***. A thousand copies of the book and the accompanying map were printed in 1507, and it proved popular enough that more and more people started to refer to the newly discovered lands as ***America***. The name may have been based on a fraudulent letter, but it didn't matter. The name stuck. It was an early example of the power of the printed page.

By the way, even though several copies of the book survived the centuries, the maps were all thought to be lost. The maps were too large for the book, so they were printed separately. But in 1897, a copy of one of the maps was discovered in Germany, and it specifically identifies the crudely drawn continent as 'Terra America' – literally 'America Land.' [*SOURCE: The Fourth Part of the World, Toby Lester, p. 10, 12.*] And in 1901, an actual original copy of one of the maps was discovered. It also identifies the continent as 'America.' It is the oldest surviving map to do so. And in 2007, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel officially transferred the map to the United States, where it was put on permanent display at the Library of Congress. (*Ibid, p. 19*.)

Now over the course of this episode, we've seen how Europeans discovered new lands on the other side of the Atlantic that they didn't know existed. And of course, through that process, those native populations on the other side of the Atlantic also discovered the existence of Europeans. They would soon discover the people of Africa as well, as the dwindling native population was replaced with slaves brought from Africa.

Now all of this was a landmark event in human history because it brought together three different ecosystems that had previously existed independently of each other. People began to move back and forth between those regions – either voluntarily or involuntarily. Their specific diseases also moved back and forth with devastating effects. They also carried plants and animals back and forth, introducing those flora and fauna to new environments. That meant that the diet of each region changed. Of course, the people on each side of the Atlantic also exchanged fabrics, clothing, consumer goods, religious ideas, world views, and words and languages. This process paved the way for the development of new cultures influenced by all of those earlier cultures, including the ideas and material goods associated with those earlier cultures.

If you want a great illustration of how the events of this episode shaped our modern world and shaped our modern language, take a trip to your local coffee shop. Even if you don't drink coffee, it might be worth a visit to see how the events of the late 1400s linked the far corners of the world.

When Columbus sailed to the New World in 1492, coffee was still largely unknown in Europe. It was mostly restricted to the Arab world. The consumption of coffee has its origins in the region around the southern part of the Red Sea, specifically Ethiopia to the west in northern Africa and Yemen to the east in Arabia. Much like cocoa beans, coffee beans aren't technically beans. They're the pits or seeds of bright red berries that were native to the region. When people ate the seeds, it had a stimulating effect. About a century before the voyages of Columbus, the people of the region had figured how to brew the seeds into a drink which became very popular throughout

the Arab World. The word ***coffee*** is ultimately an Arabic word. And you may have heard of Arabica beans – one of the two common types of coffee beans. Well, those are literally beans from this same part of the Arab world where coffee was first consumed. That's why they're called 'Arabica' beans.

By the time Columbus sailed for the New World, the center of coffee production was the port city of Mocha on the Red Sea in Yemen. Coffee houses were popular there, and it was the main port for coffee exports. [*SOURCE: Etymologicom, Forsyth, p. 179-80.*] Coffee had started to spread throughout the Arab world and had reached up to Constantinople, but it was still largely unknown throughout most of Europe. [*SOURCE: An Uncommon History of Common Things, p. 25-6.*]

Over time, as coffee made its way across Europe, the word for coffee and coffeehouses reached France, where it produced the word ***café*** – a French version of the same word. And when later scientists identified the component of the drink that made it so stimulating, they called if ***caffeine*** from the same root word. That term was coined in Germany.

Until the late 1600s, coffee production was still limited to the region where it was first consumed in Ethiopia and Yemen. But then, the coffee plant was brought to South and Central America where it flourished. In fact, it grew better there than in Africa and Arabia. Today, over half of the coffee produced in the world comes from the Americas – the bulk of it from Brazil. Only about 5% comes from Africa. Most of the rest comes from Asia. [SOURCE: https://elevencoffees.com/top-coffee-producing-countries/.] So the center of coffee production shifted from Africa to the New World.

But if you don't like coffee, then you might choose to order hot cocoa or hot chocolate when you go to the coffee shop. As we saw in this episode, the tree that produces cocoa is native to the Americas. And the words ***cocoa*** and ***chocolate*** are derived from Native American languages. Well, the tree that produced cocoa was introduced to Africa in the 1800s, and it turned out that it flourished in Africa – the opposite of the coffee plant. Today, most of the cocoa consumed around the world is produced in Africa. About 70% of it comes from West Africa. Only a small percentage is grown in the Americas. So the centers of coffee and cocoa production have switched continents over the past couple of centuries because the plants grew better on the other side of the ocean. The grass really was greener on the other side.

The decline of coffee production in Yemen has been so dramatic that the once vibrant city of Mocha during the era of Columbus is today mostly known as the name of a drink that blends coffee and chocolate together. If you want a chocolate-flavored coffee, you can order a mocha.

As I noted, coffee and cocoa aren't just grown in Africa and the Americas today. Those plants have also found popular homes in southeast Asia in places like Vietnam and Indonesia. In fact, Indonesia is one of the top six producers of cocoa and one of the top four producers of coffee. That's the region that Columbus was trying to reach when he set sail in 1492. And it's the region that he thought he had discovered until the day he died. Well, the island of Java in Indonesia gave us another common term for coffee – ***java***. That term is derived from a type of coffee grown

there. And some sources suggest that ***java*** is also the source of the modern term ***joe*** for coffee – as in 'a cup of joe.' But not everyone agrees with that etymology.

Of course, if you want a fancy coffee drink, you might order a ***latte*** or an ***espresso*** or a ***cappaccino*** – all words derived from Italian where coffee shops are still very popular.

And if you finish your drink, you might order a second one from the ***barrista*** – a completely modern word coined in the 1900s that shows how mixed these etymologies can be. It's another term borrowed from Italian where it literally meant a bartender, but English restricted the meaning to a bartender in a coffee shop. But the Italian word ***barista*** was actually derived from an English word – ***bar*** – in the sense of the place where you go to order drinks, either the tavern itself or the physical part of the tavern where drinks are served. But the English word ***bar*** is ultimately derived from a French and Latin loanword that meant a piece of wood or metal – a sense that still survives today. A bar could be used as a ***barrier*** from the same root. And a barrier that separated the tavern customers from the alcohol came to be called a ***bar***.

So as we look around the coffee shop, we find ***coffee*** which is an Arabic word. And we find ***café***, which is a French variation. They refer back to plants that are native to north Africa, but more commonly grown in the Americas and Asia today. We also look around and find the words ***cocoa*** and ***chocolate***, both from Native American languages. They refer back to trees native to the Americas, but more commonly grown in Africa and Asia today. We find the word ***java*** derived from the name of an island in Indonesia, which reflects the spread of those coffee plants around the world. We find Italian words like ***latte***, ***espresso*** and ***cappaccino***, which reflect the popularity of those products when they were introduced to Europe. And we find the curious word ***barista*** which is based on a word that passed from Late Latin, to French, to English, to Italian and back to English. That word – and all of those words – reflect the complicated history of Modern English. They represent the mixing and diversity of cultures that stemmed from the first attempts to cross the Atlantic in late 1400s. And they also reflect how those separate ecosystems started to mix together in the modern era.

Next time, we'll turn our focus back to Britain to see what was happening to the English language in the first few years of the 1500s. It was a time of rebirth and renaissance in England – literally The Renaissance. That cultural movement had spread from Italy, and finally reached the British Isles around that time. So next time, we'll explore the Renaissance, and we'll see how it impacted the English language.

Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.