

Paragraph

New World Epidemics

► When colonists from Europe traveled across the Atlantic to explore the New World, they never imagined what they would find, nor did they envision the devastation suffered by the native tribes of the Americas because of diseases that they carried with them. Though it was surely unintentional, these diseases effectively reduced well over half the population of Native American tribes, with some estimates claiming the loss of up to 99 percent of the original inhabitants of the New World.

► This huge loss of life resulted from the introduction of Old World diseases into the Americas in the early sixteenth century. The inhabitants of the Americas were separated from Asia, Africa, and Europe by rising oceans following the Ice Ages, and, as a result, they were isolated by miles of ocean. These native tribes had developed across the ocean, such as measles, smallpox, pneumonia, and malaria. While Pre-Columbian Americans did transmit infections among their own people, their living environment, which allowed them plenty of fresh air and wide-open spaces, meant they had a relatively disease-free environment when compared with residents of distinctly more crowded cities and towns in Europe. As a result of the lack of exposure to these more serious infections, native tribes lacked the antibodies needed to protect them from bacteria and viruses introduced into their environment by European settlers.

► The most prevalent and deadly disease of this time period that affected Native Americans was smallpox, which often resulted in feverish sores, and ultimately death, without proper medication. Once this phenomenon was observed by Europeans, reactions varied from fascinated scientific interest to compassion, which led to educating the natives or conversely, to a calculated strategy for conquering the land by purposely spreading the disease. At least one British general, Lord Jeffrey Amherst, took advantage of the compromised immune systems of Native Americans to spread the disease. He employed the strategy during the French and Indian War (1756–1763) by distributing blankets that had been used by previous smallpox sufferers to unsuspecting Native Americans, who were likely grateful for what they viewed as a kind gesture at the time.

► Even though other Europeans may not have shared the brutal perspective of Amherst, nor his intentions to eliminate the New World's inhabitants, many believed they possessed innately superior immune systems to those of the Native Americans. Ignorant of the reality of how the human body develops resistance to infection and disease, Europeans were often convinced that their relative health in the New World was a spiritual indication that they were destined to conquer the land. This viewpoint was further reinforced as the Europeans witnessed the natives' often futile attempts to overcome the sickness with their natural remedies. The indigenous tribes attempted to adapt their homegrown medicines composed of plants and roots, but these were often ineffective. For this, often, they turned to European attempts. Used to living in communal environments, whether in small or large groups, Native Americans were slow to realize that quarantine, or isolation of the sick, was one of the most effective methods to slow or stop the spread of the disease. Eventually, compassionate Europeans educated the native people and assisted them in finding better ways to combat the fatal infection, but not before a vast majority of them had been wiped out.

► Although smallpox may have been the most devastating disease, it was not the only one Native Americans contracted from Europeans. Colonists brought a variety of infections to the New World with them, including measles, tuberculosis, diphtheria, and influenza. Each of these presented new and seemingly insurmountable challenges to Native American populations, and each had its own tragic effect on the mortality rate of indigenous tribes. As with smallpox, the transfer of these diseases likely started slowly, rapidly increasing as more settlers arrived on the shores of the Americas and gradually pushed further inland. A widespread consensus among experts exists that indicates these various diseases reduced far greater numbers of native people in the New World than the many battles that were fought to gain control over the land.

17. The word "them" in paragraph 1 refers to

- native tribes
- diseases
- colonists
- Americas

18. The word "they" in paragraph 2 refers to

- the inhabitants
- this watery barrier
- virulent epidemic diseases
- the ocean

20. The word "which" in paragraph 3 refers to

- scientific interest
- compassion
- reactions
- phenomenon

21. The word "who" in paragraph 3 refers to

- Lord Jeffrey Amherst
- sufferers
- blankets
- Native Americans

22. The word "those" in paragraph 4 refers to

- Europeans
- intentions
- immune systems
- inhabitants

23. The word "them" in paragraph 4 refers to

- effective methods
- Europeans
- native people
- better ways

24. The word "these" in paragraph 5 refers to

- Europeans
- colonists
- measles
- infections

Paragraph

Horatio Alger, Jr.

► Horatio Alger, Jr. (1832–1899) was the author of more than 100 books for boys in the second half of the nineteenth century; both the author and his characters, according to those who work hard to achieve success. The majority of Alger's stories highlighted a "rags-to-riches" triumph based on integrity of character and persistent personal effort, a tendency that may have been influenced by Alger's childhood. Though Alger grew up as the eldest son of a respectable Massachusetts family, his early years were marked by financial struggle. As the namesake of his father, Horatio Alger, Sr., Alger's professional course was determined while he was still a youth: to follow in the path of his father, a Unitarian minister. Ultimately, Alger was not able to follow his father's wishes, instead becoming a highly popular writer of books for juvenile boys.

► Horatio Alger set out to be a minister for which his father had prepared him. He graduated with honors from Harvard in 1852 and graduated from the Cambridge Divinity School eight years later. Alger did in fact serve as a minister in a congregation in Massachusetts for a short time, but his term of service ended abruptly in early 1866. This event resulted in Alger permanently moving to New York City in 1866 to devote his time to writing inspirational books for boys.

► As an author, Alger established a recurring theme in virtually all of his stories. Typically, he wrote about the poor and homeless children of the slums of New York City, seeing them as unfortunate pawns of society, who, if only given the opportunity, could improve their lot. A general plotting that followed often was of a poor boy who managed to achieve a respectable and successful life through a combination of hard work and a series of opportunities presented. Though his writing style was characterized by simplicity and repetition, it was at first well received by his target audience: his books were enormously popular, selling millions of copies well into the first few decades of the twentieth century.

► There is widespread belief that Alger created his stories not only from his childhood observations, but also as a direct result of the environment he found himself in as an adult. Both in his ministry and his ensuing work as a tutor, the prominent author came across boys from opposite ends of the social classes. His constant championing of the poor youth rising above his circumstances through honesty, hard work and the generosity of an affirming adult, became the core message of his books, helping the youth around him to reach across social barriers and benefit one another. In his own life, Alger informally adopted young boys, usually impoverished, and took delight in their success as they escaped the poor surroundings they had been born into.

► Unfortunately for Alger, during the latter part of his lifetime, his novels experienced a decline in popularity, when he was criticized for his formulaic writing style, which critics claimed invariably presented the same plot, differing only in the settings and minor details, such as the names and occupations of the various characters. The writer added a darker tone of violence in an attempt to appeal to the new generation of youth he was writing for, but he was rebuffed by critics and, as a result, when the country declared his new works inappropriate for young boys, and called for restrictions on who could read his novels. By the end of Alger's life, his viewpoint had become so inconsequential that his death went nearly unnoticed outside of the circle of family and friends.

► However, after Alger's death, a resurgence in the popularity of his work occurred in the early part of the twentieth century, with a bulk of his book sales coming from the first two decades of the 1900's. This revival of his popularity in turn inspired a number of organizations that honored the extraordinary accomplishments of struggling youth. That is despite the fact that his works are rarely read in current times, his influence lives on through these groups that offer acknowledgement to individuals who persevere through adversity to achieve the "American Dream" of prosperity, one that is based on the principles outlined in Alger's writings.

25. The word "it" in paragraph 1 refers to

- the second half
- nineteenth century
- theme
- success

26. The phrase "this event" in paragraph 2 refers to

- serve as a minister
- congregation
- term of service ended
- moving to New York City

29. The word "his" in paragraph 4 refers to

- poor youth
- Alger
- tutor
- prominent author

30. The word "which" in paragraph 5 refers to

- lifetime
- popularity
- writing style
- plot

27. The word "them" in paragraph 3 refers to

- books
- children
- slums
- stories

28. The word "it" in paragraph 3 refers to

- simplicity
- style
- repetition
- audience

31. The word "this" in paragraph 5 refers to

- names and occupations
- a darker tone of violence
- attempt to appeal to a new generation
- youth he wanted to reach

32. The phrase "one" in paragraph 6 refers to

- youth
- adversity
- the American Dream
- prosperity