

Sugar Cane Spreads Around the Globe

Historic Context:

Sugar cane has been around for a long time. In fact, it's one of the oldest documented commodities. It's known that as early as 8000 B.C. in New Guinea, people had been growing cane for its sweet syrup. As people migrated to different parts of the world so did sugar cane plants.

About 500 B.C. in what is now India, it was discovered that by boiling the syrup, people could produce crystals of sugar. Sugar cane cultivation rapidly spread after that—throughout Asia, Africa and Europe.

Christopher Columbus is credited with bringing the sugar cane plant to the New World on his second voyage. In Europe, in the 1500's, only the very rich could afford sugar. One teaspoon cost about \$5.00 in today's terms. The price of sugar would remain high well until the 19th century and sugar would remain out of the reach of the average person for a long time. This prompted many plantation owners in the Caribbean to cultivate sugar, sometimes referred to as *white gold*.

The first people to grow sugar cane in Louisiana was a group of Jesuit priests who had a church in New Orleans in the mid-1700s. They mostly made molasses out of it. Sugar cane was not yet an important crop in Louisiana in colonial times. People mostly grew it for personal use.

In 1795, a man named Jean Etienne de Boré, born in the colonies but educated in France, whose indigo plantation was on the verge of bankruptcy, decided to take a risk and plant sugar cane instead. As a result of his success, many other Louisiana planters turned to sugar production as well. In the antebellum period, nearly all of the sugar produced in the United States came from Louisiana.



Activity:

On a world map, trace the route of sugarcane around the globe from New Guinea to Louisiana and label approximate dates of transfer.



Answer Key: Courtesy of the Sugar Association
<https://www.sugar.org/sugar/history/>

