The maritime fur trade, although often overlooked in textbooks, was a crucial phase in the early history of the Pacific Northwest.

First, the opportunity to make money attracted non-aboriginal peoples to the region much more quickly than they otherwise might have come, so that dozens of ships sailed to the Northwest Coast within two decades of the first explorers' arrival. It is unlikely, for example, that British interest in the region would have been so keen had not Cook's crew discovered the profitability of sea otter pelts in Chinese markets.

Second, early maritime fur traders behaved as explorers because, in seeking more furs, they scouted a great deal of the coastline in the region, filling in the many gaps that "real" explorers like Cook and Vancouver had left in their maps.

But the most important aspect of the maritime fur trade was that it brought natives and non-natives into immediate and close contact, with profound ramifications for both peoples and for regional history. The maritime fur trade accelerated the pace of change by increasing the amount of interaction between different peoples.

Trading Relationships…aboriginal peoples were traders by nature. It’s how the lived!

The maritime fur trade on the Northwest Coast created a situation in which natives and non -Natives needed one another.

European and American traders needed the Natives because they were the only ones who could provide the desired pelts. In other words, Natives monopolized the supply of fur by hunting the pelts themselves or by acquiring them by purchase or by theft from other Natives. At the same time, Natives with furs to trade needed the non-native traders, who monopolized a new supply of exchange goods that was coveted for its ability to enrich native society.

Some native groups clearly profited more than others. Some tried to monopolize the trade with Europeans for themselves and drive other native competitors away. Most bands that did a lot of trading did not acquire the majority of pelts by themselves, but rather traded with or raided other Indian groups for them. Overall, the maritime fur trade likely increased divisions between different bands or groups of natives.

Natives did not automatically become pawns of European capitalism, but they did grow more reliant on manufactured goods produced elsewhere (think for a second about the impact of acquiring and using firearms in the trade)

Trade did change some subsistence patterns in order to meet the market demand for sea otter pelts. When those pelts became scarcer and the sea otter increasingly bordered on extinction in certain parts of the Northwest Coast (Nootka Sound had no more sea otter to hunt by 1795, ten years after the opening of the trade), additional adjustments were needed.

The most destructive effect of the maritime fur trade was the spread of epidemic diseases among native peoples. Natives of the Americas had no immunity to the diseases that Europeans imported from the Old World, which meant that outbreaks of such illnesses as smallpox, measles, and malaria could be tremendously destructive.

A rough estimate holds that Old World diseases depopulated native societies by about 90% within the first century of contact.

Colonialism…the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.

Is this the Maritime Fur Trade?? Why / Why not????