

Unit Activities, cont'd.

Activity 2: Menus Over Time—60 minutes

Using information from the sources below, create the following menus over time.

- Spanish royal menus before Columbian voyages and afterwards.
- Kongolese royal menus before Columbian voyages and afterwards.
- Sixteenth-century Caribbean plantation dinner, and dinner in Jamaica after influence of Maroons.
- Chinese wealthy and peasant families before and after foods arrived from the Americas.

Sources for Menus

On Columbus's second voyage from 1493 to 1496, royal physician Diego Alvarez Chanca wrote about the flora, fauna, and peoples of the Caribbean:

Always the land was of the same beauty and the fields very green and full of an infinity of fruits, as red as scarlet, and everywhere there was the perfume of flowers and the singing of birds, very sweet. The people come laden with 'ages,' which are like turnips, very excellent for food ... It is so sustaining to eat that it comforts us all greatly, for in truth the life which has been spent on the sea has been the most difficult that ever men went through. (Cecil Jane, *Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus* [Hakluyt Society, 1930; Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1967] 1:132. Citation is to Kraus edition.)

The cultural patterns of enslaved African peoples had a definite impact on their slave masters. On the island of Jamaica, the cuisine of Maroons—communities of freedom fighters and runaway slaves—influenced the new British overlords of the island. The jerked hog was a tradition invented by Maroons, which came out of African culinary traditions of smoking meat and cooking it very slowly. Cassava was indigenous to the Americas and an essential part of many pepper pots, which were single stew dishes. In addition, a number of the other ingredients came from different parts of the world.

Lady Maria Nugent, the wife of the Jamaican governor, writes, "The first course was entirely of fish, excepting jerked hog, in the centre, which is the way of dressing it by the Maroons." In her diary entry of March 1802, Lady Maria Nugent describes an elegant estate dinner that offered tables laden with foods derived from many cultures:

There was also a black crab pepper-pot, (confides) for which I asked the recipe. It is as follows; a capon stewed down, a large piece of beef, and another of ham, also stewed to a jelly; then six dozen of land crabs, picked fine, with their eggs and fat, onions, peppers, ochra, sweet herbs, and other vegetables of the country, cut small; and this, well stewed, makes black crab pepper-pot. (Lady Maria Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica, From 1801 to 1805* [Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Jamaica, 1966]: 70.)

Within a century, huge population growth marked the success of the Chinese agricultural system and the benefits of newly imported crops. China's numbers increased from 165 million in 1500 to 310 million in 1650. In 1720, Frenchman Pierre Poivre traveled to China and marveled at the country's agricultural success. By Poivre's time, markets, merchants, and the Chinese state made it possible to transport grain up to a thousand miles. Trade, innovation, and adaptation were changing the landscape of food in China. The slopes of southern China now grew American foods like sweet potatoes, beans, peanuts, cocoa, pineapple, squash, tomatoes and maize.

Pierre Poivre writes,

By what art can the earth produce subsistence for such numbers? I examine, and pursue the farmers through all their operations, and observe that their secret consists simply in manuring fields judiciously, plowing them to a considerable depth, sowing them in the proper season, turning to advantage every inch of ground which can produce the most considerable crop, and preferring to every other species of culture that of grain, as by far the most important. (Robert Marks, *Tigers, Rice Silk and Silt: Environment and Economy in Late Imperial South China* [Cambridge University Press, 1998]: 284–85.)