tutes to the dominant world history narrative. She advocates a thematic approach to world history and provides a thumbnail sketch of what a global of history of jazz might look like. She contends that this unconventional approach would make Latin America more prominent: "Jazz is a good example of a thematic world history that respects Latin America because so much of the musical exchange provoking and fueling the developments we now call jazz took place south of the Rio Grande and along the border zones within the United States proper."[22] Steven Topik's teaching and scholarship on the global history of coffee is an example of the thematic approach that Seigel advocates.[23]

Articles in this edition of WHB *also make Latin America more prominent by utilizing a strategy that is the antithesis of creating totally new narratives in world history. Ben Leeming's provocative piece on the ancient Americas is the most clear-cut example of this alternative approach, which is the third type of decentering mentioned above. Leeming does not advocate creating a novel story, but rather making Latin America more prominent in the traditional one. He proposes including Peru "as the location of a fifth early complex society alongside those of Sumner, Egypt, Harappa, and China." Currently the Peruvian site is overlooked, as Leeming's review of leading world history textbooks clearly indicates. Leeming's case for including the Peruvian site revolves around queries about the timing and nature of Peruvian societies: when did Peruvian early societies form and how complex were they? He makes a compelling case for including Peru as the fifth early complex society, which is based on an informative discussion of recent research by experts in the field. Rick Warner's short but stimulating essay also makes a strong argument for giving Latin America more visibility in the traditional world history narrative. Warner's topic is important cities in transnational exchange. He laments that "Panama City rarely makes the list of cosmopolitan stopovers in the first half of our modern world history surveys." He makes his case for including Panama based on the city's significant role in the transatlantic silver trade. Along with making Panama an important site in the international economy, silver attracted a colorful cast of cosmopolitan characters — among them pirates — to the city.*

Recent scholarship published in other places also enhances Latin America's place in world history by giving the region a more prominent place in a typical narrative. Work by Carlos Marichal on international debt and finance is a case in point. One of his earlier studies showed that while nineteenth century global financial crises usually originated in Europe, at times they started in Latin America (specifically Argentina).[24] In a more recent study of colonial international finances he elevated New Spain to the level of "sub-empire" within the Spanish colonial system since much of Spain's overseas expansion into the Spanish Caribbean was financed with Mexican silver.[25] Jaime Rodríguez's work on Latin American independence also bolsters the importance of the region by showing the resilience of political democracy.[26] Finally, Kenneth Pomeranz's The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy *elevates Latin America's importance by underscoring the importance of the region to Europe's Industrial Revolution.[27]*

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1 *Hispanic American Historical Review* 84:3 (August, 2004).

2 Jeremy Adelman, "Latin America and World Histories: Old and New Approaches to the Plurbius and the Unum," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 84:3 (August 2004): 404.

3 Micol Seigel, "World History's Narrative Problem," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 84:3 (August 2004): 433.

4 See Robert Tignor et al., *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart: A History of the Modern World from the Mongol Empire to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).

5 Susan Besse, "Placing Latin America in Modern World History Textbooks," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 84:3 (August 2004): 421.

6 Lauren Benton, "No Longer Odd Region Out: Repositioning Latin America in World History," *American Historical Review* 84:3 (August 2004): 423-5.

7 Erick Langer, "Introduction: Placing Latin America in World History," *American Historical Review* 84:3 (August 2004): 395-6.

8 Ibid., 398.

9 Adelman, "Latin America and World Histories," 407.

10 José Vasconcelos, "The Latin American Basis of Mexican Civilization," in *Aspects of Mexican Civilization,* eds. Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), 3-102.

11 Adelman, "Latin America and World Histories," 406.

12 This is my definition of decentering. The decentering endeavor that Adelman and his co-authors engaged in was more specific than this. Adelman, "Latin America and World Histories," 407.

13 An anthology on borders in Latin American history that I co-edited posed a question: to what extent is globalization a new phenomenon? See Raúl Galoppe and Richard Weiner, eds., *Explorations on Subjectivity, Borders, and Demarcations: A Fine Line* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005). For an excellent essay that questions the novelty of globalization see Michael Lang, "Globalization and its History." *The Journal of Modern History* (December 2006) 78:4 [forthcoming].

14 See Steven Topik, Carlos Marichal, and Zephyr Frank, eds., *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin America Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

15 For a sophisticated classic in this genre see Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). For an extremely popular work in this vein see Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997).

16 Besse, "Placing Latin America in Modern World History Textbooks," 413-414.

17 Seigel, "World History's Narrative Problem," 431.

18 Stephen Haber, ed., *How Latin America Fell Behind* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). John Coatsworth has done some excellent research in a similar vein. He uses statistics to chart changes in comparative regional growth over time. See his work, "Structures, Endowments, and Institutions in the Economic History of Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 40: 3(October 2005): 126-144. By the same author see "Presidential Address: Welfare," *American Historical Review* 101: 1 (February 1996): 1-12.

19 Even though Haber's focus is not helpful for elevating Latin America's place in world history I still think it is very useful. The questions he poses were also articulated by 19th century Latin American intellectuals: why are we behind? For studies that examine the ways 19th and 20th century Mexicans wrestled with this question see Richard Weiner, "Economic Thought and Culture in Revolutionary Mexico: Carlos Díaz Dufoo's Critique of the Humboldtian Narrative of Mexico's Legendary Wealth," *História e Economia* (Fall, 2006) [forthcoming]; and Richard Weiner, "El declive económico de México en el siglo XIX: una perspectiva cultural," *Signos Históricos* 12(July-December, 2004): 68-93.

20 Octavio Paz, "Development and Other Mirages," in *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*, Octavio Paz (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 238-284.

21 E. Bradford Burns, *The Poverty of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

22 Seigel, "World History's Narrative Problem," 445.

23 See Steven Topik and William Gervase Clarence-Smith, eds., *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 1500-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

24 Carlos Marichal, *A Century of Debt Crisis in Latin America: From Independence to the Great Depression, 1820-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

25 Carlos Marichal, *La bancarrota del virreinato: Nueva España y las finanzas del imperio español, 1780-1810* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999).

26 Jaime Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

27 Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy.*

Cooking a Cuban *Ajiaco*: The Columbian Exchange in a Stewpot

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[*Images added by WHB*]

Ajiaco is a multiethnic stew popular in many parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. The Cuban version of this highly-adaptable dish dates back to the sixteenth century. From the beginning, it mixed meats, vegetables, and condiments originating from all over the world. Cuban *ajiaco* provides an ideal vehicle for illustrating the geographical patterns and historical processes of the Columbian exchange: the global interchange of animals, plants, and microbes between the Old and New Worlds in the wake of the Columbian voyages of the late

fifteenth century. It is particularly suitable for emphasizing the influence of Africans in this process and for correcting Alfred Crosby's ethnocentric presentation of ecological imperialism as "the biological expansion of *Europe*."[1] *Ajiaco* also played a significant role in twentieth-century discussions of Cuban national identity. But unlike highland Colombia's version of the *ajiaco* (based on chicken and potatoes) and the Dominican Republic's *sancocho* (virtually identical to Cuban *ajiaco*), this simple, working-class dish — typically served to agricultural laborers at the main, midday meal — has never achieved a high status in Cuba's national cuisine. This fact reveals the sort of prejudices that go into the "invention of tradition."[2]

Thanks to the accelerating globalization of our food supply, the varied (and variable) ingredients of a Cuban *ajiaco* are readily available in the United States, not only in traditional centers of Caribbean immigration like New York and Miami, but also in an ever-increasing number of "heartland" cities with Hispanic immigrant enclaves. For example, in the northern suburbs of Nashville, Tennessee, where I grew up, I can now purchase all the ingredients for a Cuban *ajiaco* at a large, but otherwise unexceptional supermarket located just down the street from President Andrew Jackson's former plantation home. Cooking an *ajiaco* only requires the most basic of cooking skills: peeling, cutting, chopping, boiling, and stirring. Even novice cooks can produce a good *ajiaco*. It is also highly suitable for hands-on, interactive teaching and can be adapted to a wide-range of classroom settings (for example, I have cooked stews for a third-grade bilingual classroom and for my university-level course in world environmental history). Therefore, I have organized the following history of the *ajiaco* in the form of a recipe. Its ingredients can be shown to, fed to, or (with some prior, time-saving or safety-conscious preparation) cooked by a class.

The following recipe for *ajiaco criollo* derives from three sources, themselves representative of Cuba's recent history:

1. a 1960s cookbook compiled by home economist Nitza Villapol, "a Cuban Julia Child of sorts." She starred for years in the TV show *Cocina al minuto* (Cooking to Order) and converted from a pre-revolutionary shill for U.S. consumer goods into a post-revolutionary activist responsible for teaching Cuban homemakers how to put a cheerful face on shortages.[3] This book is widely available in English translation — although often under different "authorship" — thanks to a shameful tendency among some Cuban exiles to appropriate trademarks and intellectual property without permission as recompense for property lost since the 1959 Cuban Revolution.[4]

2. a nostalgic cookbook compiled by Cuban exile Mary Urrutia Randelman that recalls her "joyous, hopeful, and privileged life" as a child in "prosperous postwar Cuba." Its excellent recipes are far better adapted to North American ingredients and tastes, and its autobiographical vignettes to ruling-class sensibilities: "*Papitas del Yacht Club*: more like manna than potato chips, . . . were the favorite of children and adults at the Havana Yacht Club."[5]

3. ample experience and conversation in the kitchens of my wife's family, on both sides of the Florida Strait. This oral tradition is rooted in the countryside and cities of Holguín province in eastern Cuba, and it provides a corrective to the tendency of histories of cuisine to rely heavily on cookbooks authored for a bourgeois audience. (Perhaps most importantly, the *ajiacos* I have cooked based on this training have met with enthusiastic approval from Cuban nationals.)

Besides explaining how to prepare each ingredient for an *ajiaco*, I will also trace a likely path for most of its ingredients from their initial domestication in ancient times to their place in the modern Cuban diaspora.[6] Ideally, to provide a hands-on spatial activity, teachers should provide students with a series of blank world maps and have them draw these routes for each ingredient. The following interpretation portrays the Columbian exchange as one, relatively late phase of a long, global history of crop and animal exchanges. It also makes clear that the Columbian exchange has never really ended — and that even the most traditional dishes are capable of change over time as societies adapt to new circumstances.

***Carnes* (meats)**

Cut ½ ***pound of*** **tasajo** ***(salt-dried beef)*** *into 3-4 large pieces and soak overnight in a large bowl; throw away the water when finished. Place the tasajo and ½* ***chicken*** *in a large stewpot* (cacerola)*, cover with plenty of water, bring to a boil, then simmer for approximately* ***1 hour****. Add* ***1 lb. of flank steak (*****falda*****) or stew meat (*****carne de res*****), 1 lb. of pork (*****carne de puerco*****), 1 lb. of pork trotters (*****agujas de puerco*****)*** *and boil for an additional* ***1 hour****; skim off any scum that develops. If the pork pieces are fatty, skim off some of the lard to prepare the* sofrito *(see below). Equivalent portions of* ***beef and beef short ribs, or chicken*** *can be substituted for the pork.*

The cow (*Bos taurus*) and pig (*Sus scrofa*), both originally native to western Eurasia and North Africa, have played an important role in Old World agroecosystems since their initial domestication by Neolithic farmers in the ancient Near East approximately 10,000 years ago. As cud-chewing herbivores, cows convert plant tissues inedible to humans into meat, hides, and tractive power. As omnivores, pigs compete more directly with humans for food, but they have long provided a valuable way to dispose of garbage. All cattle produce manure that can be used to maintain the fertility of agricultural fields. According to Jared Diamond's Anna Karenina principle, "domesticable animals are all alike; every undomesticable animal is undomesticable in its own way."[7] Because of highly uneven patterns of megafaunal extinction before the advent of agriculture and herding, mainland regions of Africa and Eurasia retained a far greater variety of large animals with domesticable characteristics than did the Americas, Australia, and the islands of the world. With the marked exception of the Andean llama (*Lama glama*) and alpaca (*Vicugna pacos*),[8] the Americas — the evolutionary birthplace of the horse (*Equus caballus*) — came to lack large mammals suitable for domestication. Symbolic of this process, Cuba's first indigenous inhabitants are probably responsible for driving its only large mammal, the giant sloth (*Megalocnus rodens*), into extinction approximately 4,400 years ago.[9] Nevertheless, Cuba's indigenous inhabitants at contact, the Ciboney and Taíno peoples, continued to depend primarily on wild marine and woodland animals for protein, supplemented by household raising of guinea pigs (*Cavia procellus*, first domesticated in the Andes), a barkless dog bred for eating, and the aquaculture of mullet (*Mugil curema*), a small estuary fish.

The predominantly one-way exchange of people, animals, and diseases East to West across the Atlantic contributed to the single most important result of the Columbian exchange for Cuba: the virtual extinction of its indigenous population. Living in close proximity with animals has its downside, since it exposes humans to the transfer of macro-parasites and microbial diseases

across the species barrier. As a consequence, in order to survive to adulthood and reproductive age, European- and African-born individuals had to pass a gauntlet of diseases harbored by human-animal interaction — and, in the process, acquired robust immune systems.[10] Two viral epidemic diseases, influenza (derived from pigs and chickens) and smallpox (derived from cows), had a particularly deadly impact on previously unexposed indigenous populations of the Greater Antilles between 1493 and 1525.[11] Feral pigs and cows made matters far worse by eating away at the Amerindians' basic source of subsistence (see below): cows consumed leaves and flowers, while pigs consumed fruits and the all-important roots. In the absence of human and natural predators, pigs and cows far outnumbered people in Cuba until the full emergence of an economy based on military garrisons and plantation slavery at the end of the eighteenth century. In this context, cattle provided an abundant source of food and trade articles (leather and candles) for Cuba's sparse, multiethnic, early colonial population.

Before the widespread diffusion of refrigeration technologies in recent decades, all human societies depended on curing and cooking techniques to preserve the meat of butchered animals. One of my wife's most vivid memories from the 1970s concerns watching her great uncle, a peasant farmer living in the "deep countryside," dig a pit and fill it with salt and large slabs of beef in order to prepare *tasajo*. The prolonged boiling process involved in preparing an *ajiaco* not only provides a convenient way to make *tasajo* palatable again, but also provides a way to arrest the decomposition of whatever fresh (or not-so-fresh) meat happens to be at hand. Chunks of beef and pork are the favored ingredients for a Cuban *ajiaco*, but the American turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo* and *M. ocellata*, brought to Cuba after 1492), African guinea fowl (*Numida meleagris*, brought via the slave trade), and Southeast Asian chicken (*Gallus gallus*, introduced via both Europe and Africa) are also welcome additions to the stew pot.

Cheap *tasajo* made up a significant portion of the rations provided by plantation owners to their field slaves. This virtually assured that slow-boiled dishes like *ajiaco* remained standard fare in nineteenth-century Cuba. Through the *tasajo* supply, the "ecological footprint" of Cuba's plantations extended, historically, not only to the dry scrublands of eastern Cuba, but as far as the Pampas grasslands of southern South America. Echoes of this old Atlantic economy still reverberate: *tasajo* in U.S. Hispanic groceries often carries the mark "Made in Uruguay." Meanwhile, fresh beef has almost disappeared from *ajiacos* produced in today's Cuba. Unlike with smaller livestock, Cuba's command economy appropriated all cows and oxen as property of the state. The revolutionary government has carefully controlled the slaughter and consumption of beef (and given out long prison sentences to those breaking the rules). Even in cattle-raising regions, fresh beef has become a rare commodity — and the *ajiaco* much more centered on pork.[12] But because *ajiaco*'s ingredients are so adaptable, it has survived even the most dramatic transformations of Cuban history.

***Sofrito* (seasoned sauté)**

While the meat is cooking, prepare the sofrito *and peel the vegetables. In a large skillet over medium heat, heat* ***2 tablespoons of lard*** *(*manteca*) or* ***¼ cup of olive oil*** (aceite de oliva)*. Peel and crush* ***3 cloves of garlic*** *(*ajo*); chop* ***1 large onion*** *(*cebolla*) and* ***1 large, seeded green bell pepper*** *(*ají pimiento verde*); add to the fat at medium-low heat and sauté, stirring occasionally for* ***6-8 minutes****. Add* ***one small can of tomato sauce*** *(*salsa de tomate*) and* ***½ tsp. of ground cumin*** *(*comino*) and sauté an additional* ***5 minutes****, stirring occasionally. After the meats are cooked, add the* sofrito *to the stewpot with the vegetables. Note: to save effort, it is possible to omit the* sofrito *and simply add these ingredients directly to the stewpot.*

In a wide variety of Cuban dishes, the *sofrito* adds taste (*gusto*) to ingredients that otherwise would be bland or insipid. Animal fats or vegetable oils convey the flavor of condiments added to a *sofrito*. Since the era immediately following the Spanish conquest, and thanks to the multiplication of Old World livestock, animal fats (especially lard) have been easiest to obtain in Cuba. Nevertheless, the earliest supply ships from Europe brought cargoes of oil pressed from the fruit of olive trees (*Olea europaea*), one of the most distinctive domesticates from the ancient woodlands of the eastern Mediterranean. Along with grape wine and wheat flour, the consumption of imported olive oil has long been a symbol of both Spanish descent and class status among Cubans. In recent years, Spanish-produced olive oil has become the cooking fat of choice among health- (and race-) conscious Cuban immigrants to the U.S., but the high cost of imported vegetable oils has always placed limits on their consumption in Cuba. Cooks pressed for time (or hard currency) often dispense with the *sofrito* altogether when preparing an *ajiaco* and add whatever condiments they have access to and can afford directly to the stewpot; in fact, Nitza Villapol explicitly recommended this tactic as a general cooking practice.

The earliest recorded account of a Cuban *ajiaco* got its name from an ancient South American domesticate: the chili pepper (*Capsicum* spp.). A disparaging 1598 description of Havana by Hernando de la Parra, a member of the Spanish governor's household, noted that "The foods here are seasoned in a way that is so strange that they are repugnant at first, but Europeans eventually become so accustomed to them that they forget those of their own country and give them preference. The principal dish . . . that is served by these primitive inhabitants is a union of fresh and salted meats cut into small chunks, boiled with various roots, spiced by means of a small, caustic pepper (*aji-ji-jí*), and colored with a small seed (*vija*) that grows spontaneously even in household corrals."[13] Christopher Columbus interpreted capsicum peppers as evidence that he had reached the Spice Islands of the East Indies, his real goal. European gardeners soon began cultivating several American capsicum varieties, most notably, the mild bell pepper (a variety of *C. annuum*), and Hungarian cuisine eventually became famous for its use of bell peppers to make paprika (known by Cubans as *pimentón*). Many modern regional cuisines would be unrecognizable if not for their adoption of spicy capsicum varieties: for example, Thai curries. But unlike Creole (American-born) Mexicans, Peruvians, Louisianans, and early Cubans, today's Cubans rarely cook with spicy chilies. Instead, they rely on the bell pepper or the small *ají cachucha* (a mild variety of *C. chinense*). New Cuban immigrants to the United States often make the mistake of purchasing another, look-alike variety of *C. chinense*, the habanero. It is all the more puzzling to Cubans experiencing the painful consequences of this error that these extremely hot peppers are named for Cuba's capital, where they are now virtually unknown. (They probably diffused from Cuba to the Yucatán, their current home range, during the colonial period.) Ground cumin seeds (*Cuminum cyminum*), original-

ly native to the ancient Near East, are a common, modern ingredient of Cuban *sofrito*; the combined scent of hot oil, garlic, and cumin gives today's Cuban kitchens their distinctive smell. The marked influx of Spanish and Lebanese immigrants to Cuba during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, along with their cultural preferences, likely played a role in the Cuban *ajiaco*'s historical transformation from piquant, Amerindian to mild, Mediterranean flavorings. Interestingly, the parallel migration of South Asians to the British Caribbean after the abolition of slavery played an important role in the reintroduction of spicy capsicum peppers into cuisines elsewhere in the Antilles.[14]

Many peoples in the tropical Americas still use the ground bija seeds (*Bixa orellana*) mentioned in de la Parra's account — better known in today's Cuba as *achiote* — to give foods a yellow-orange color.[15] *Achiote* frequently finds its way into Cuban *sofritos* prepared for rice dishes (and an occasional *ajiaco*) though many Cuban-Americans now substitute bright, synthetic vegetable dyes or expensive Mediterranean saffron (*Crocus sativus*). Condiments provide the clearest indication of change over time in Cuban tastes and of the *recent* development of "traditional" Cuban cuisine.

***Viandas* (stew vegetables)**

While the meats are cooking, peel the vegetables and cut into large chunks. After the meats are cooked, add them to the stewpot at medium heat in the following order at approximately ***5-minute intervals****; make sure the vegetables are well-covered with water:* ***1 lb. of yellow or white*** **malanga** *(yautía or cocoyam),* ***1 lb. of*** **yuca** *(manioc or cassava),* ***2 green*** **plátanos** *(plantains or cooking bananas),* ***1 lb. of*** **boniato** *(white sweet potato, NOT orange American sweet potato),* ***1 lb. of*** **malanga isleña** *(taro or dasheen),* ***1 lb of*** **ñame** *(white tropical yam, NOT orange American yam),* ***2 very ripe*** **plátanos** *(plantains, NOT sweet bananas),* ***2 cups of chunked*** **calabaza** *(orange tropical pumpkin; can substitute Hubbard or butternut squash). After all vegetables are added, reduce to low heat and simmer approximately* ***45 minutes****, stirring occasionally. Then add* ***2 ears of corn*** *(maize) cut into two-inch rounds; cook an additional* ***10-15 minutes****.* ***Add salt to taste****. Serve hot in bowls accompanied by* ***lime wedges*** *(*limón criollo*); squeeze lime juice over* ajiaco *to taste at the table. Makes approximately 12 large, meal-sized servings.*

Tuber crops have traditionally received short-shrift in world histories of food and agriculture.[16] True, seed crops have left far more visible evidence in the archaeological record (though new techniques for examining plant remains and for tracing genetic relationships have begun to resolve this technical problem). But Northerners' understandable preference for studying the environments and agricultural practices of their temperate homelands has contributed the most to the paucity of research in ancient centers of domestication in lowland South America, Africa, and New Guinea. This maldistribution of scientific resources has impeded historical understanding of the role of tropical societies — particularly Africans — in domestication and long-distance crop exchanges.

Vegetable Stands in Mercado Tacón
Havana, Cuba. 1904
(Library of Congress Reproduction No. LC-D401-17664)

Yellow *malanga* (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium*) of various types and *yuca* (*Manihot esculenta*) were originally domesticated in South America, and they were widely distributed in lowland regions of the American tropics by the fifteenth century. The Taíno depended on an elaborate system of *conuco* (garden) cultivation founded on the vegetative propagation of these and other crops. *Conuco* plots typically incorporated several different crops at a time; this helped mitigate against climate variability and the depletion of soil nutrients and helped keep out weeds. Bitter varieties of *yuca* (which require additional processing before use) were capable of good yields even on depleted soils and could be stored for long periods.

Another major Taíno crop, *boniato* (*Ipomoea batatas*), illustrates the regional diversity of crop varieties, the antiquity of transoceanic crop exchanges, and the controversy that often surrounds the origins and dispersal of tropical cultivars. This light-colored variety of sweet potato grows well in warm, humid, lowland regions and should not be confused with its sweeter, dark-orange cousins which thrive in more temperate climates. Recent genetic research has revealed a primary center of maximal sweet potato diversity in Mesoamerica, a secondary center in Oceania, and a minor center in Peru and Ecuador. Meanwhile, archaeological research has firmly established that the New Zealand Maori cultivated *I. batatas* at least 1000 years ago. This strongly suggests that this cultivar diffused in ancient times from Mesoamerica across the Pacific (and then back, toward the southeast, as far as Pitcairn and Easter Island) and from Mesoamerica to the Andes (where it is known by the Nahuatl-derived word *camote*). Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl may have been correct about the antiquity and direction of sweet potato exchange, just not about the role of Andean mariners in their dispersal.[17] We may never know who accomplished this ancient transfer, but we do know that the rapid globalization of transoceanic trade in the wake of the Columbian voyages accomplished the further diffusion of sweet potato cultivars to Africa, China, and highland New Guinea, where they contributed to rapid population growth and the conquest of new, montane environments by agriculture.[18]

This process also worked in the opposite direction. Several Old World cultivars accompanied African slaves across the Middle Passage to the Americas. In fact, several varieties of plantains and bananas (*Musa* spp.) made this trip so soon after 1492 that European botanists long assumed they were native to the American tropics. Excavations in Kuk Swamp have provided tantalizing evidence that New Guinea highlanders independently domesticated bananas and taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) by 6500 years ago. New Guineans or Melanesians also probably domesticated a tropical yam variety now commonly grown in Cuba (*Dioscorea alata*), as well as sugar cane (*Saccharum officinarum*) — the Americas' first major export crop.[19] These cultivars diffused eastward to remote parts of the

Pacific with Polynesian mariners and westward by a variety of routes. In the case of sugar cane, they reached the Caribbean as early as 1493. African-born slaves likely contributed vital know-how for their transplantation into West Indian *conuco* systems, and their descendants — both enslaved and free — undoubtedly perpetuated their cultivation.

Slaves all over the Atlantic World sought the right to tend their own food crops. This was their most basic strategy to establish a life separate from their master's will. Of course, this helped masters save money on imported and estate-grown rations, but "by appropriating their labour for themselves, slaves articulated their own interests and the means of achieving them."[20] Sometimes, by participating in local markets, slaves even saved up enough money to buy their own freedom. Slave tastes obviously contributed to the East-West transfer of Guinea yam (members of the *Dioscorea cayenensis-rotundata* complex), a major West African domesticate, and the enduring popularity in Cuba of *fufú*: boiled and mashed *ñame, malanga*, or *plátano*.

Two American domesticates, tropical pumpkin (*Cucurbita moschata*) and maize (*Zea mays*), take the least time to cook and are the last ingredients added to an *ajiaco* before serving. (Wait to squeeze the juice of fresh lime (*Citrus aurantifolia*) — an early Spanish transplant to the West Indies, first domesticated in southeast Asia — over piping-hot bowls of ajiaco at the dinner table.) American squashes (*Cucurbita* spp.) rank among the world's earliest domesticates, and they probably played a significant role in the transition from hunter-gatherer-fisher to agricultural livelihoods in the Western Hemisphere. The widespread dispersal of squashes, sweet potatoes, Mesoamerican-domesticated maize, chilies, and other domesticates throughout the ancient Americas falsifies Jared Diamond's hypothesis that the "North-South axis" of the Western Hemisphere acted as a geographical barrier to cultural exchange and advancement. But the two-way, East-West exchange of cultivars *did* contribute mightily to patterns of New World colonization. The Columbian exchange enabled a number of European, African, and Asian societies to export enormous numbers of people to the Western Hemisphere (and other world regions) without suffering depopulation — and, in turn, it enabled these immigrants to make decent lives for themselves as farmers or herders after they arrived.

A Metaphor for Cuban Nationality

The Greater Caribbean Basin and coastal regions of tropical South America are also "Lands of Demographic Takeover."[21] In Cuba, Old World immigrants (from Europe, Africa, and more recently, Asia) intermingled with and eventually swamped the small indigenous population that survived the Spanish conquest. Like the temperate regions of the Americas, these tropical regions are dominated by an ethnic hodgepodge of Old World peoples, and there is no compelling *biological* reason to differentiate between the populations of these two domains unless one believes skin color and other inherited characteristics are important determiners of the course of modern history.

As the inheritors of a society once based on race slavery, Cubans have long been masters at making distinctions motivated by racial prejudice. Following the lead of nationalist ideologues elsewhere in Latin America, in 1940, white Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz proposed adopting the *ajiaco* as a culinary emblem for Cuba and a multicultural metaphor for racial and cultural mixing throughout the Americas. In his view, the process of cooking an *ajiaco* formed a new, unified entity out of multicultural diversity, and an *ajiaco* could be infinitely replenished with new ingredients to make additional meals without losing its basic identity. Ortiz explicitly hoped this home-grown concept would displace a term derived from the the United States, the melting pot (*crisol*), as a popular metaphor for the formation of national identity. Unlike the industrial melting pot of the Colossus of the North, which homogenized everything into a single alloy, the ingredients of an *ajiaco* never completely lost their distinct flavors and textures: "For us, *America, all of America, is an ajiaco*."[22]

Other Cubans never embraced Ortiz' proposal. As a working-class food, *ajiaco* failed to convey the cultivated sense of national greatness (and whiteness) preferred by most of Cuba's pre-revolutionary ruling class, and this unassuming dish (almost never found on tourist menus) simply could not compete for foreigners' attention with Cuban music, cocktails, and fried foods.[23] At least in ideological terms, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 abruptly converted much of Ortiz' social vision into a material reality. Even though Ortiz' *ajiaco* metaphor seems adaptable to these new circumstances, perhaps its subtle suggestion that "Cuba is fated to suffer . . . a never-ending state of ferment" and doomed to "lack a stable, enduring core of cultural indic[ators]" was too radical even for revolutionaries to accept.[24]

If anything qualifies as Cuba's national dish, it is *lechón asado* (roast suckling pig). As Mary Urrutia Randelman notes, roast pork has long been associated with family celebrations on *Noche Buena* (Christmas Eve). Cuba's revolutionary government overtly sought to redirect this religious tradition to New Year's Day, the anniversary of the Revolution's triumph. Neighborhood Committees for the Defense of the Revolution provide loyalists with plenty of pigs to roast and beer to drink. But in Cuba, an *ajiaco* is never far off. Leftovers from this sort of celebration have a far better chance of ending up in the stewpot than a landfill. The next pig in line for slaughter, meanwhile, will get to enjoy a mash of leftover vegetable peelings.

ENDNOTES

[1] Emphasis added; Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972); Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Crosby's seminal work, nevertheless, provided the basic inspiration for this essay. Judith A. Carney uses the transoceanic exchange of rice cultivars and agricultural practices to make a forceful case for crediting Africans (especially African women) as major agents of economic change in the early modern Atlantic World in *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); while James J. Parsons examines the role African grasses have played as agents of ecological change in lowland tropical (but also montane and temperate) regions of the Americas in his classic article, "The Africanization of the New World Tropical Grasslands," *Tubinger Geographische Studien* 35 (1970): 141-153.

[2] Jeffrey Pilcher, *¡Qué vivan los tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Arjun Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 1 (1988): 3-24; Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 211-262.

[3] Nitza Villapol, *Cocina criolla* (Mexico City: Ediciones Zócalo, 1979); Fabiola Santiago, "Nitza Villapol, 74, Cuban Cooking Advisor," *Miami Herald* 21 Oct. 1998, available at http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/cuba/nitza.htm (accessed 28 Sept. 2006).

[4] For example, Raquel Rábade Roque, *The Cuban Flavor: A Cookbook* (Miami, FL: Downtown Book Center, 1979).

[5] Mary Urrutia Randleman and Joan Schwartz, *Memories of a Cuban Kitchen* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), xvii, 23.

[6] A rigorous review of the often contentious literature on each ingredient would require far too much space. I will only cite specialized works for particularly controversial cases or as suggestions for further reading. Important general references

include: Peter Bellwood, *The First Farmers: The Origins of Agricultural Societies* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005); Daniel Zohary and Maria Hopf, *Domestication of Plants in the Old World: The Origin and Spread of Cultivated Plants in West Africa, Europe, and the Nile Valley*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Neil Roberts, *The Holocene: An Environmental History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998); David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change since 1492* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 3rd ed. (New York. Oxford University Press, 2005). All common and scientific plant names can be confirmed with Miguel Esquivel, et al., "An Inventory of Cultivated Plants in Cuba," *Die Kulturpflanze* 37 (1989): 211-357.

7 Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: Norton, 1997), 157. Contrary to Diamond's diffusionist assumptions, there is clear evidence that the cow was independently domesticated from the now-extirpated aurochs in the ancient Near East, South Asia, and northern Africa and widely diffused from these three separate centers of domestication. Indian cattle (*zebú*) and North American pure breeds have virtually supplanted Cuba's original *criollo* cattle since their introduction in the mid-nineteenth century.

8 Miranda Kadwell, et al., "Genetic Analysis Reveals the Wild Ancestors of the Llama and the Alpaca," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 268, no. 1485 (2001): 2,575-2,584.

9 David W. Steadman, et al., "Asynchronous Extinctions of Late Quaternary Sloths on Continents and Islands," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 102, no. 33 (2005): 11,763-11,768.

10 Most resistance to these maladies had to be acquired in the womb or after birth, and recent research suggests that childhood exposure to animals and some level of disease is necessary for the development of an immune system that is not subject to allergies and autoimmune disorders; see T. V. Rajan, "Remembrance of Pathogens Past," *Natural History* Feb. 2002: 28-33.

11 Noble David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), ch. 1.

12 Perhaps in reaction, the "classic recipe" for *ajiaco criollo* in Randleman and Schwartz, *Memories of a Cuban Kitchen*, 104-105, only calls for beef.

13 Quoted in José M. de la Torre, *Lo que fuimos y lo que somos ó la Habana antigua y moderna*, ed. Fernando Ortiz (1857; Havana: Librería Cervantes, 1913), 19-20.

14 Jean Andrews, *Peppers: The Domesticated Capsicums*, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

15 There is no historical connection between widespread indigenous use of achiote seeds in red body paints and the much later categorization of Indians as "redskins"; Nancy Shoemaker, "How Indians Got to be Red," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (June 1997): 625-644; Alden T. Vaughan, "From White Man to Redskin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian," *American Historical Review* 87, no. 4 (Oct. 1982): 917-953.

16 Jared Diamond's obsession with "large-seeded grass species" in ch. 8 of *Guns, Germs, and Steel* provides a notorious example of this. Except for a chapter on the "Potato Revolution" in Europe, Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat's encyclopedic *History of Food*, trans. Anthea Bell (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992) devotes only nine pages to root crops, tellingly, in a chapter devoted to the "history of gathering" full of tropical stereotypes, pp. 63-71, 711-728.

17 G. Rossel, A. Kriegner, and D. P. Zhang, "From Latin America to Oceania: The Historic Dispersal of Sweetpotato Re-Examined using AFLP," *CIP Program Report 1999-2000* (2001): 315-321; Dapeng Zhang, et al., "Assessing Genetic Diversity of Sweet Potato (Ipomoea batatas (L.) Lam.) Cultivars from Tropical America using AFLP," *Genetic Resources and Crop Evolution* 47 (2000): 659-665; Thor Heyerdayl, *Kon-Tiki: Across the Pacific by Raft*, trans. F. H. Lyon (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1950).

18 Other American domesticates commonly added to ajiaco, yuca and maize, also contributed significantly to this Old World demographic explosion; see Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, ch. 5. The introduction of the white potato (*Solanum tuberosum*), an Andean domesticate, likewise contributed to population growth and agricultural change in northern Europe. Cuban-American cooks sometimes add potatoes to an ajiaco. You can, too, to make use of locally available ingredients and further illustrate these processes.

19 Katharina Neumann, "New Guinea: A Cradle of Agriculture," *Science* 11 July 2003: 180-181; V. Lebot, "Biomolecular Evidence for Plant Domestication in Sahul," *Genetic Resources and Crop Evolution* 46 (1999): 619-628.

20 Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, "Introduction" to "The Slave's Economy: Independent Production by Slaves in the Americas," special issue of *Slavery and Abolition* 12, no. 1 (May 1991): 2. See also, Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), esp. ch. 1, 7; B. J. Barickman, "'A Bit of Land, Which They Call Roça': Slave Provision Grounds in the Bahian Recôncavo, 1780-1860," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (1994): 649-687.

21 Alfred Crosby deploys this concept most clearly—but for temperate regions only—in "Ecological Imperialism: The Overseas Migration of Western Europeans as a Biological Phenomenon," *The Texas Quarterly* 21 (Spring 1978): 10-22, reprinted in *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, ed. Donald Worster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 103-117.

22 Ortiz's emphasis, quoted in Gustavo Pérez Firmat, "From Ajiaco to Tropical Soup: Fernando Ortiz and the Definition of Cuban Culture (Dialogue #93)," LACC Publications Network, Occasional Papers Series, *Dialogues* (1980-1994), Florida International University (1987), p. 11, available at http://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/laccopsd/16 (accessed 11 Apr. 2006). See also, José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Didier T. Jaén (1925; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

23 Ortiz extended these concepts to his interpretations of Cuban music; see Gregory T. Cushman, "¿De qué color es el oro?: Race, Environment, and the History of Cuban National Music," *Latin American Music Review* 26, no. 2 (2005): 164-194.

24 Pérez Firmat, "From Ajiaco to Tropical Soup," 13.

CONSIDER PANAMA

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To place a human face on the complexities of global interaction, world historians focus on specific cities as sites of economic and cultural interchange. Think of the importance of Malacca, Goa, and Aden in the Indian Ocean world. Due as much to trade as to military force, these "pressure points" or entrepôts become home to ethnically and socially-diverse peoples. These cities were fought over by imperial powers and were also the site of cross-cultural interaction between diverse individuals.[1] In the early-modern world, these were colorfully cosmopolitan spaces. The multivalent connections that often define world history can be seen in the urban areas, and they are as much "melting pots" as "salad bowls" in terms of cultural production. The rich stories from these communities can enliven world history narratives.

Panama City rarely makes the list of cosmopolitan stopovers in the first half of our modern world history surveys (1500-1800). Of course, awareness of the global importance of the later story of the Panama Canal is widespread, but one hears less of the earlier period. Yet the canal itself is not a bad place to begin thinking about the importance of Panama. That the United States was able to triumph where the French had failed, in completing the canal, is part of a familiar U.S. historical narrative. The Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty (signed 1903, ratified 1904) between Panama and the United States granted unusual rights to the northern neighbor, which surely reflects the imperialist spirit of the day.[2] The construction of the canal is also a story of human misery, as thousands of working people who built the project succumbed to disease in the process. However, in the end, the canal must be seen as an engineering triumph, helped along as it was by an intensive effort to eliminate the scourges of yellow fever and malaria. The world historical moment as the canal opened in 1914 is clear to every student: the world was now stitched together at another spot.

However, Panama was instrumental in linking the world long before the canal was built. Arguably, this process began in the Age of European Exploration and Exploitation. Columbus himself traveled to the coast of Panama during his fourth and final voyage, though the first European visitors had already sailed a few years earlier under Rodrigo de Bastidas. On that particular ship was the better known Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, who returned to become the first European to traverse the mountains to the other side of the isthmus. He first saw the Pacific, facing south (since the isthmus runs east-west), on 26 September 1513.[3] At the time, this must have been viewed as quite an achievement, since several attempts to settle the Caribbean shore were stifled by native tribes. The life of Balboa, on the other hand, was ended by the founder of Panama City, Pedro Arias de Avila (known as Pedrarias). For ordering the 1517 beheading of Balboa and for various violent intrigues against native Panamanians, Pedrarias is not remembered kindly.[4]

Shortly after its founding in 1519, Panama became an important hinge in the global economy. The royal road (*Camino Real*) built between the city and the northern coastal towns of Nombre de Dios and, later, Portobello, was instrumental in the movement of goods from South America to Europe. The most important of these was the Peruvian silver taken by Spaniards and their forced laborers from the "red mountain" at Potosí. The Panama route was a pleasant alternative to the rigors of sailing around Tierra del Fuego or the dangerous overland route to Buenos Aires.

. . . Panama was instrumental in linking the world long before the canal was built.

Imperial competition in the centuries following the Columbian encounter played out in Europe as well as the Americas. The notion of all that silver passing through Panama was quite tempting to pirates, privateers, and the crowned heads of Europe. The