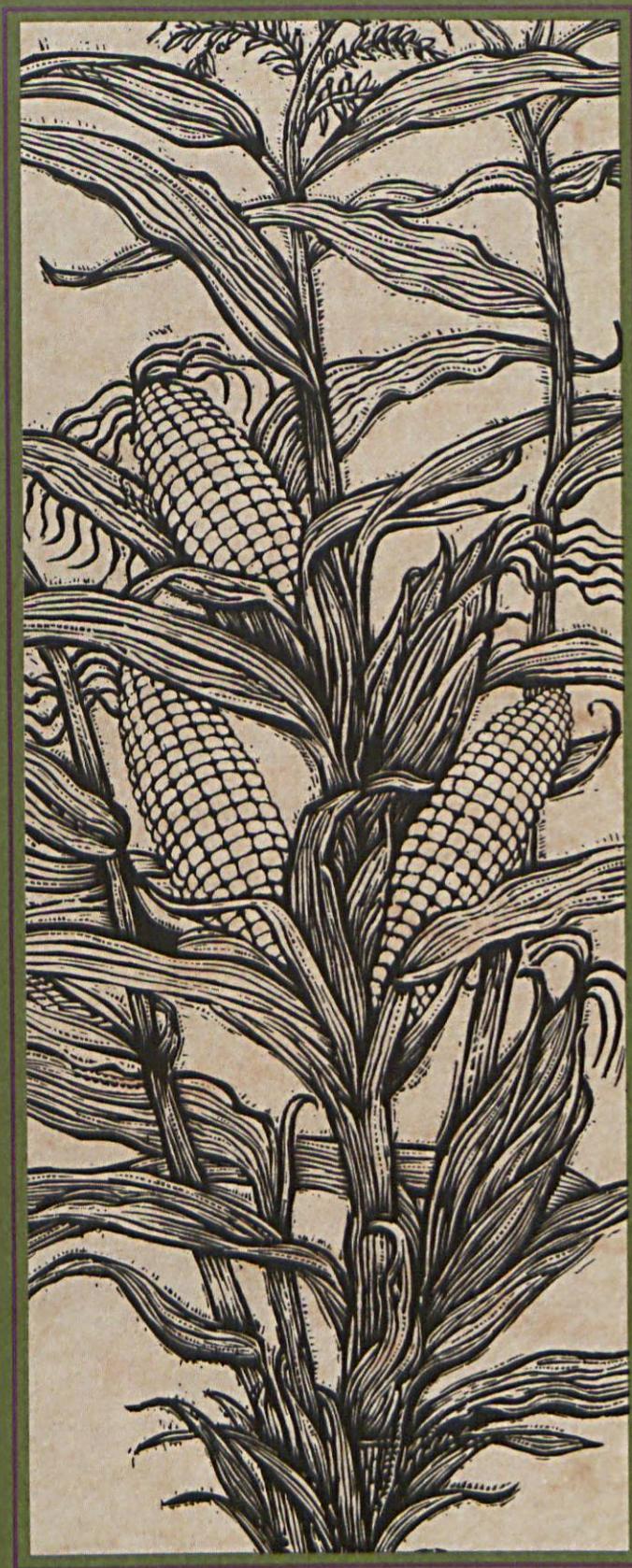


# SEEDS OF CHANGE



500 Years  
of Encounter  
and Exchange



Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University

**The ships of explorers and adventurers filled European ports in the 1400s.**

## Two Ancient Worlds

In 1492, millions of people populated the diverse landscapes of the Americas. There were hundreds of distinctive cultures and languages. Trade networks often spanned thousands of miles, and societies ranged from powerful empires to small bands of hunters pursuing game on foot.

On the other side of the world, Europe was emerging from the Middle Ages, and its voyages of discovery heralded a new world order. As explorers charted new trade routes and opened new sources of wealth, the world's natural and human resources seemed limitless.

Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

**An artist's conception of the marketplace at Tenochtitlán.**





National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

## The Invisible Invader: Disease

Smallpox was one of many infectious diseases unknown in the New World before Europeans and Africans arrived. The pre-Columbian Americans had not been disease-free; but after 1492, the mortality among native communities was unprecedented. By 1900, the native population had declined by 90 percent, largely as a result of deadly epidemics.

As disease spread in the Americas, it often acted as an advance guard, weakening the inhabitants of villages prior to the actual arrival of soldiers or settlers. Native American societies suffered irreparable damage as numerous leaders and adults died, taking with them their precious cultural heritage.

**Above: Running Face, a Mandan Indian who survived a smallpox epidemic in his village in 1837.**

National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

David Castagnaro



**A cornucopia of New World vegetables.**

## The Setting of the Fifth Sun

In Aztec legend, the gods had created and destroyed the universe during four previous suns. The world of Montezuma — the Fifth Sun — would see a time of earthquakes and hunger, and then the end would come.

Hernán Cortéz's conquest of the Aztec empire in 1521 was the first major European effort to penetrate and colonize the American continents. When Cortéz encountered the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, he was unprepared for its splendor and sophistication. Majestic temples gleamed in the sun, canals and roads bustled with traffic, and markets sold an astonishing array of goods to thousands of people daily.

Despite the power and tenacity of the Aztecs, their empire collapsed within two years of the Spaniards' arrival. Guns, horses, and the willing aid of thousands of Aztec enemies all strengthened Cortéz's hand. But disease brought by the invaders — a smallpox epidemic that swept through Tenochtitlán in 1521 — proved to be the Aztec's deadliest enemy and tipped the balance in favor of the Spanish.

## Treasures of the New World

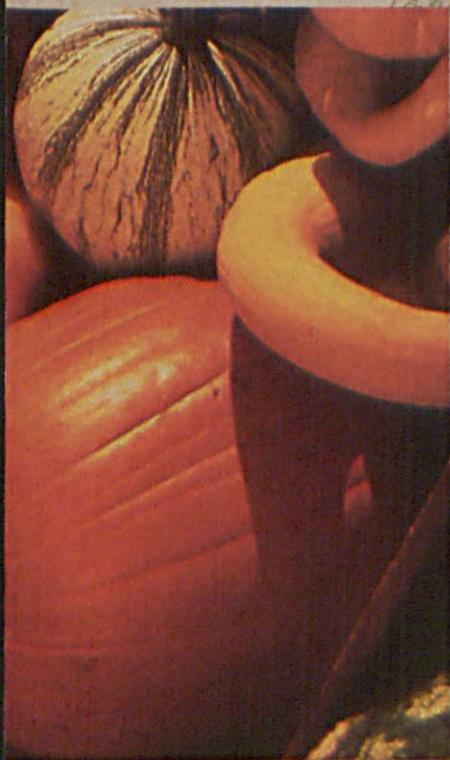
Many of the early explorers ventured across the Atlantic in search of wealth. Shiploads of plundered treasures and tons of precious metals from American mines became the bounty of conquest. In time, however, the enduring treasures of the Americas proved to be the wealth of native plants.

Tomatoes, cacao, potatoes, peppers, rubber, and corn are just a sample of the cornucopia of New World crops.

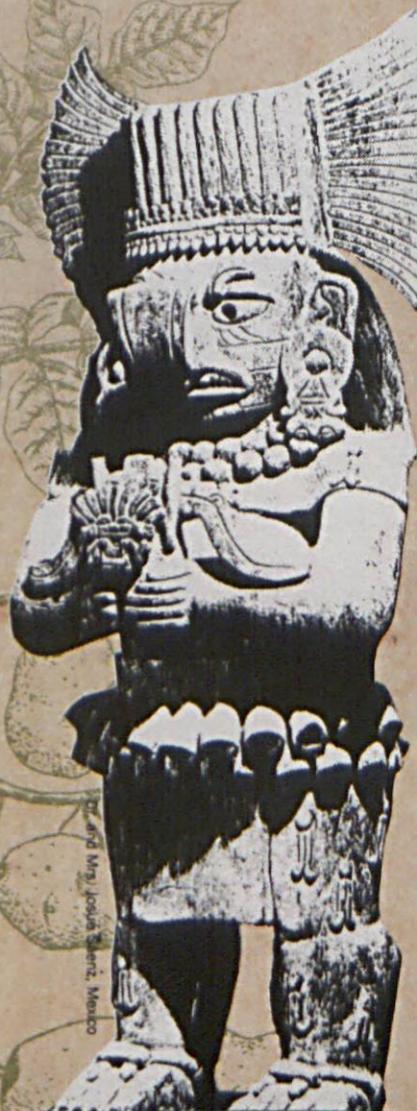
In fact, European explorers unleashed a global exchange of crops. With New World peppers, Asians invented fiery curries; the Swiss combined Old World sugar and New World cacao to produce fine chocolates; and Mexicans adopted Asian rice as a complement to traditional corn tortillas. As immigrant plants took root in alien lands, diets and cuisines changed around the world.

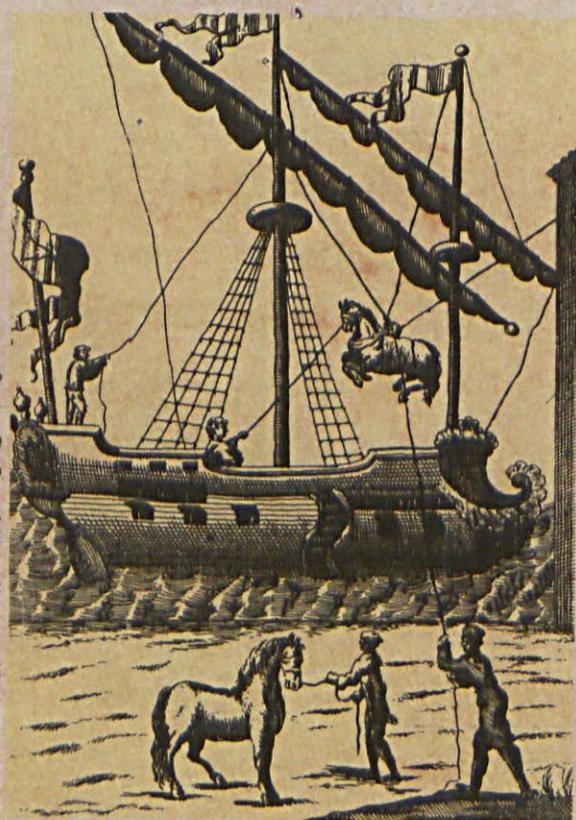
## Enduring Seeds: Corn and Potatoes

Corn and potatoes — two of the world's staple foods — originated in the Americas more than 5,000 years ago. In pre-Columbian America, corn was the most important crop, flourishing in diverse climates from Chile to southern Canada. In the high Andes of South America, however, corn could not grow. There farmers cultivated hundreds of varieties of potatoes as their daily staple. Now grown in more nations than wheat or rice, corn and potatoes revolutionized world nutrition and food supplies. Today, their starches and sugars also contribute to thousands of products from soft drinks to paints. Fuel ethanol and starch-based plastics are among the newest uses for these two versatile, renewable resources.



Mesoamerican sculpture of the god of maize from the sixth century.





### Return of a Native: The Horse

In 1493, Columbus returned to the New World with a Noah's Ark of Old World animals, including horses, cows, pigs, goats, and sheep — all unknown in the Americas. Although horses had evolved in the Americas, they had been extinct there for 10,000 years before Columbus reintroduced them. The horse became the most important possession of the native people of the grasslands in North and South America. The heyday of the mounted hunter, however, lasted barely a century as Indian populations plummeted by the mid-1800s.

The Europeans also brought their skills in raising these animals. The cattle drive, branding, and the roundup were Spanish imports; the first cowboys, or vaqueros, were Indians trained to work cattle by mission priests. Spreading north from Mexico, ranching transformed the economy and ecology of the Great Plains. Today, North America is the world's largest producer of cattle.

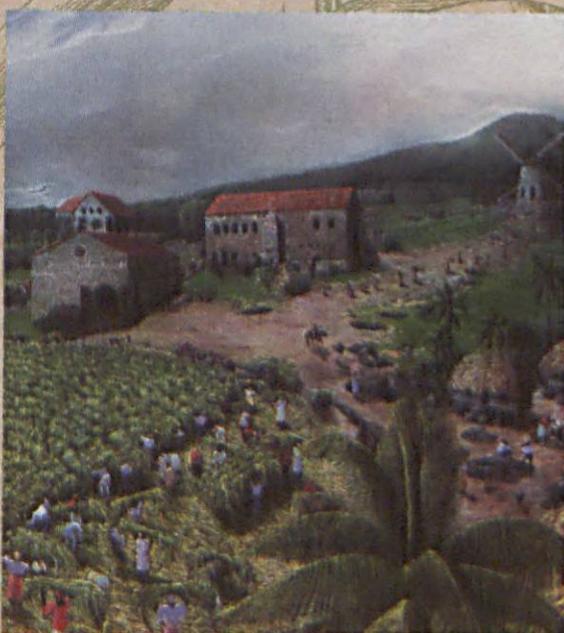
### A Bittersweet Legacy: Sugar

Sugarcane, cargo on Columbus's second voyage, soon thrived in the American tropics. By the 1700s, the lush Caribbean rainforest had been cleared to make way for the world's largest sugar plantations. What had once been an expensive novelty was now an affordable part of the European diet. And millions of slaves from Africa, who made the sugar industry profitable, paid the price.

Triumphing over slavery's horrific effects, Africans forged unique cultures in the Americas. The legacy of their experiences exemplifies the world-wide changes initiated in 1492 — when the ethnic make-up of continents was altered, the diets of people everywhere modified, and the cultures and environments of each nation transformed.

### Above: Unloading a cargo of horses from a Spanish ship.

Courtesy The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley



Hugh and Anne Nickey; Courtesy National Museum of Natural History

### Artist's conception of Galways sugar plantation on Montserrat.



Rob Crandall/Picture Group

**Above: Earth Day 1990 celebration in Washington, D.C. Below: Ecuadoran woman in her field of quinoa, a high-protein grain.**



Matthew DeGalan/CARE

## **The Challenge of Future Change**

The consequences of the European voyages of discovery have been sometimes beneficial, sometimes tragic and painful, often unforeseeable. In 1492, two ancient worlds came together to form the real New World — the world we live in today. We continue to plant seeds of change, but they take root more quickly now. The challenge in 1492 was to conquer vast unknown worlds and to exploit their riches. Today, our challenge is to manage and sustain the gifts of our one, increasingly small world.

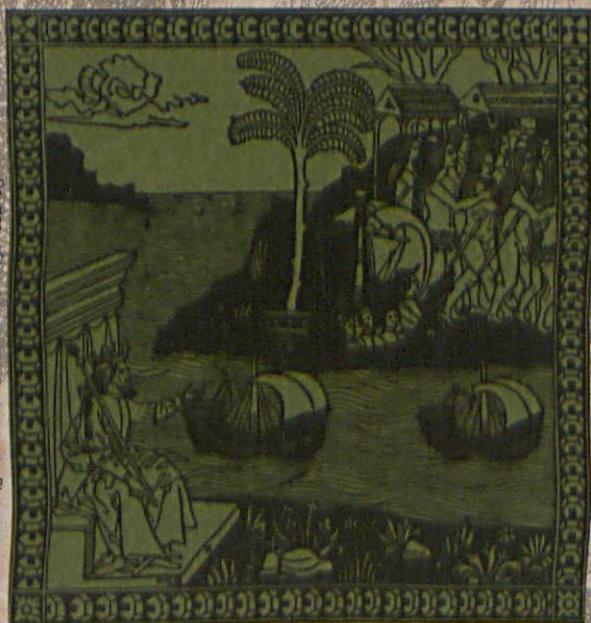
**Right: Portrait of Christopher Columbus. Below: A 1493 illustration depicting Columbus's landing in the New World.**



Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University

When Columbus set sail from Spain in 1492, he speculated that the fastest route to the gold and spices of the Orient was west by sea. After 33 days Columbus was within sight of land and assumed he was approaching the East Indies of Asia. He had no idea that the Caribbean island before him was the doorstep to another world. Neither Columbus nor the island's inhabitants could have predicted the global consequences of the encounter that began that fall day.

“Seeds of Change” commemorates the 500th anniversary of Columbus's first voyage by focusing on the exchange of plants, animals, and peoples that resulted. Five key seeds — corn, potatoes, diseases, horses, and sugar — form the core of this exhibition and underscore the significance of 500 years of interaction between the Old and New Worlds.



Courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



By permission of the British Library

A map by Henricus Martellus of Nuremberg, Germany, shows the world as Europeans knew it in 1490.

SEEDS of CHANGE - Dec. 6, 1992 - Feb. 1, 1993  
Guilford Native American Art Gallery  
200 North Davie Street, Greensboro, NC 27401  
(919) 273-6605

Hours: Tuesday - Saturday from 10 - 5 PM

THIS EXHIBIT IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE SUPPORT OF THE NC HUMANITIES COMMITTEE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE NC INDIAN CULTURE CENTER.