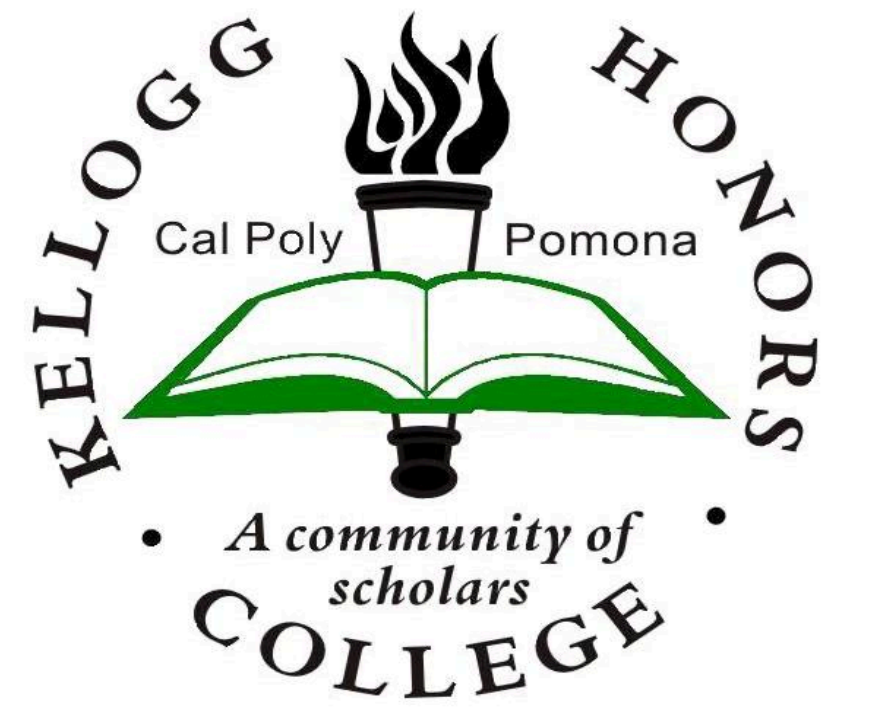




Indigenous Foodways

Before & After Spanish Conquest



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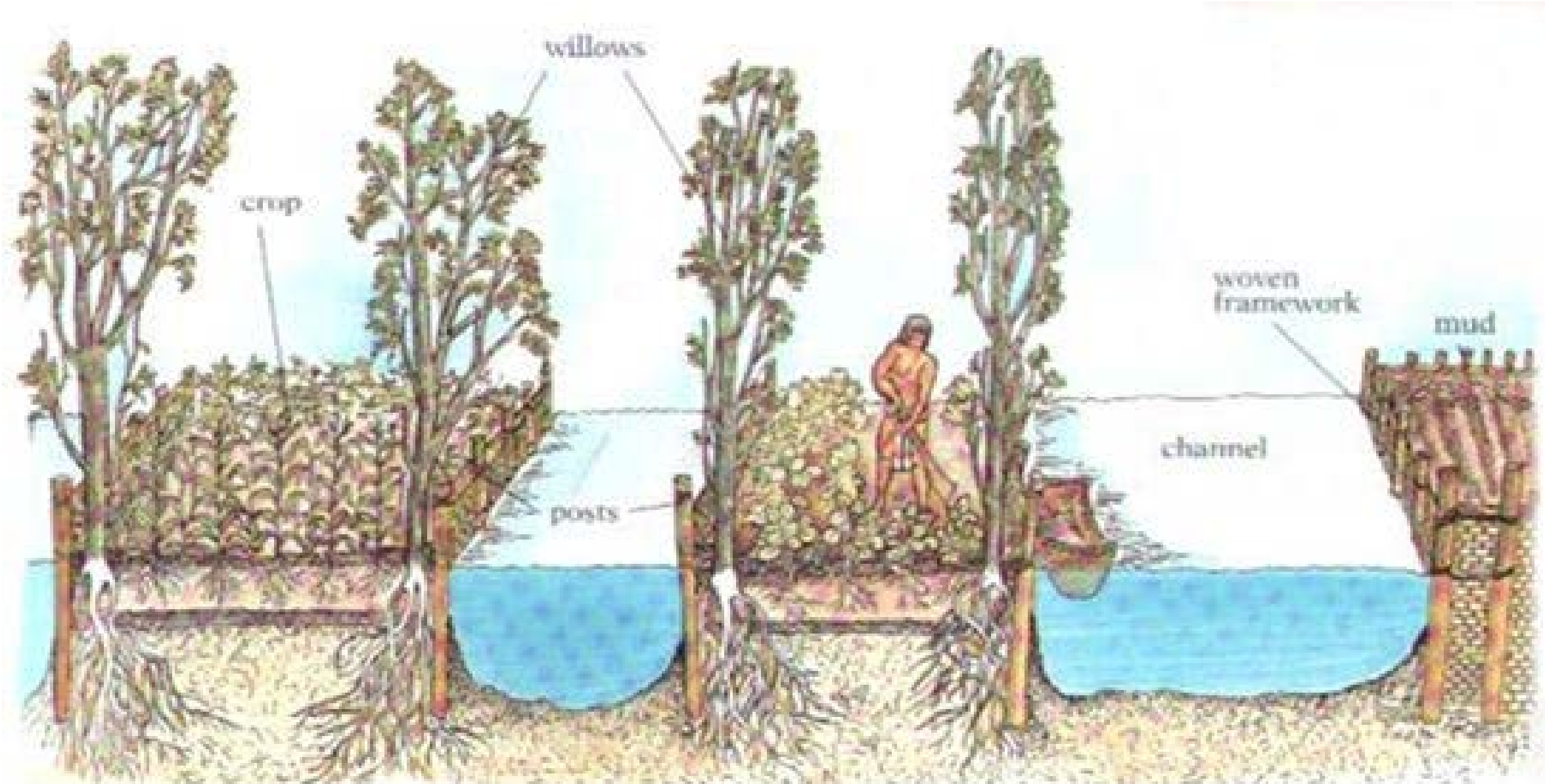
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Abstract “Mexico has a history of uninterrupted cultural exchanges... always enriching from a culinary standpoint” Chef Enrique Olvera of Pujol wrote in his cookbook *Mexico from the Inside Out* (2015). We think we know Mexican food, but not comprehensively. Mexican food as we know it is a tasting menu of indigenous and global foodways. But what was their food like prior to Spanish colonialism? Changes in Mexican foodways had serious implications not only on the diet and health of indigenous people, but also on social hierarchy and the natural environment. This work will increase the understanding of how Mexican food is more than just tacos, but also an expression of colonial political history.

Methodology To gain an interdisciplinary perspective, literature review of primary sources, food history ethnographies, cookbooks, and peer-reviewed medical articles were employed.



Heirloom corn. Source: National Geographic



Chinampas diagram. Source: Midwest permaculture



The three sisters. Source: G. Rasmussen

Conclusion Though many traditions have been lost and forcibly replaced by Western customs, there have been efforts towards returning to indigenous foodways that have been proven to benefit the health of humans, animals, and the Earth. Modern cookbooks such as *Decolonize your Diet* and the namesake blog, includes recipes using indigenous American ingredients such as nopales, and excludes the use of sugar. Pujol, one of the best restaurants in the world, highlights ants and crickets in their tasting menu. The revitalization of indigenous foodways will perhaps repair today’s issues with agriculture and nutrition.



Foodways are the study of a culture through their dietary habits.

Planting corn.
Source: Florentine Codex

	Pre-Colonial	Post Colonial
Agriculture Methods	Indigenous people employed various agricultural methods, lessening the likelihood of crop failure than can cause starvation. Methods included chinampas – a droughtproof and highly productive method consisting of artificial islands where crops grow. Companion planting is when multiple crops are grown together simultaneously enabling availability of additional nutrients and increasing yield per square foot.	Use of monoculture was not only highly prone to crop failure due to disease, but it is less productive , caused erosion , and depleted nutrients from the soil. Slave labor was used in the cultivation of sugar, leading to the indigenous population’s decline, spurring Transatlantic slave trade that changed the demographics of America.
Foods	Amaranth is a highly productive pseudo grain that was once mainstay in the indigenous diet, prior to the Spanish banning the crop. Catholic idolatry is to blame for its decline and obscurity today; prior to colonialization indigenous people created anthropomorphic figures using amaranth for religious purposes. Insects are another food tradition lost due to Westernization despite their healthfulness – high in protein and low in fat.	The introduction of sugar not only caused health issues for the population, but its status as a cash crop had its own implications including triangular trade and health issues. Cattle was introduced to the Americas as the first beasts of burden and new protein source that was high in fats. Increased use of domesticated animals increased the likelihood of zoonotic diseases such as smallpox that eventually devastated the indigenous population.
Cooking Methods	Food was typically grilled or eaten raw; no additional fats are added in these ways.	High-fat method of frying was brought over. Archaeological research has found that frying was not employed prior to colonization.



Pujol’s Baby Corn with Chicatana Ant, Coffee, and Chile Costeño Mayonnaise dish.
Source: Phaidon.