

Fall 2018

HI 518/MET/ML 633

**Histories of Food and Society**

Professor James C. McCann

T 6:30-9:15

Classroom 226 Bay State Road #304

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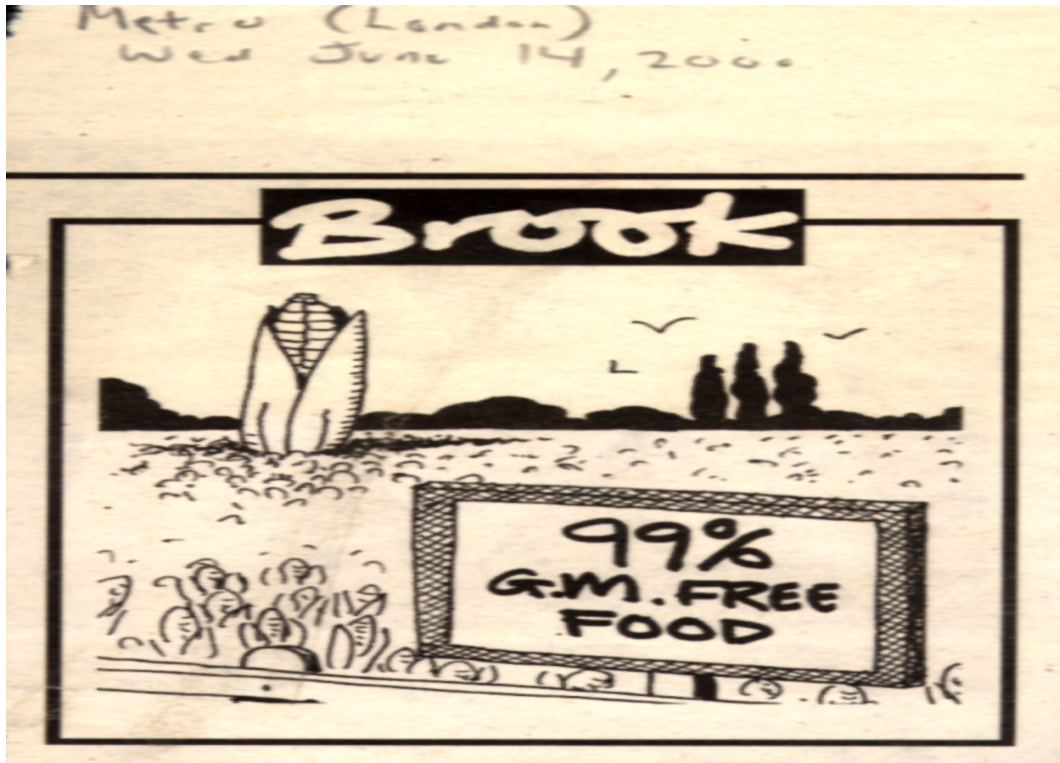


**Course Objectives:**

This course will introduce students to themes in the history of food – production, consumption, aesthetics, and ritual -- through specific historical examples. We will explore the question of how our current system of global agriculture and food supply came to be as it is today. The course focuses on key themes and cultural traditions of producing food, and eating it – cuisines and how they change over time. It will highlight food as a feature of nature, its physical transformation, and its appearance at a critical feature of culture and identity. The course explores culinary culture with examples of different times and places, including the non-western world and diasporas. We want to know why people ate as they did in the past and how culinary cultures are formed and

influenced one another. Students will also practice writing in various formats and group work.

Image from Metro (London) June 14, 2000



### **Course Topic: Histories of Food, and Society**

The purpose of this seminar is to examine the ways that historians understand and describe the interactions between humans and their physical world, an interaction that expresses itself in terms of landscapes of vegetation, population, disease, built settings of cities, and, especially, cooking as an act of environmental knowledge. Environmental history has its methods defined by the parameters of science and the natural world—flora, fauna, topography, seasons—as well as human elements of technology, cultures of taste, and social organization. Cooking and cuisine is at the apex of these interactions. This course will examine the work of key historians in this emerging sub-field of environmental history and the role of food/cooking in that human/nature interaction.

The course begins with historical/cultural landscapes and ends up in landscapes, the archaeological and pre-modern history of food on farms and in bistros, food trucks, groceries, and storefront restaurants. It will include small group sessions that will focus on particular dishes/cuisines, for example from Africa, the American South, or Italy to demonstrate the movement of ingredients, ideas, and techniques. The course pays

particular attention to the growth of diaspora food systems and the adaptations. The goal is to explore ingredients and the ecologies of cuisine.

This course at its core is a reading seminar that will also provide students with an opportunity to evaluate scholarly and popular writing in the field of food/cuisine as a subset of environmental history. The course will include reading exercises, including questions submitted for each reading, weekly précis and a final project that will take the form of a 10 -15 page research paper on the Historical Ecology of a Recipe/Cuisine that analyzes the deeper context of a team's chosen project. That writing project will include each student's exploration of a body of primary sources, secondary literature, and research methods. In this format students will gain exposure to several approaches to culinary history as well as to focus on their own areas of geographic and thematic interest. This course contains comparative materials in North American, African, Asian, Atlantic, and European content.

### **Assignments and Final Project:**

#### **Assignments:**

1. For every class each member will prepare discussion questions that arise from the week's reading. These should be turned in to the instructor at the beginning of class, but students should also be prepared to present a question for the class discussion. For book length readings, please write two questions; for articles and chapters, please write one question for each reading.
2. The principal written assignments for the course will include a group classroom presentation, and a ten to fifteen page research paper that describes a topic in food/environmental history, a set of primary sources appropriate to that topic, and a literature review that indicates the context of the research (historical writing, and/or science-based literature). In addition, students will prepare four short (one page) précis on a week's core reading. Twice over the course of the semester, each student will prepare a book review that describes and evaluates one of the readings from the comparative list provided for each of the themes.

Book precis statements (one page each week).

Weekly questions on reading (3 questions each week)

1 Comparative book review 2 pages/500 words

(Choose one book from Comparative readings on weekly syllabus) 10%

Final class group presentation 25%

Final paper (Ecological History of Cuisine) 30%

Class (group project) participation 15%

Books for required reading are available at the BU Bookstore or on Blackboard (for out of print materials). Other excerpted readings are on Blackboard. Please consult instructor on any problems on access to readings.

All written assignments will be doubled spaced, using bibliographic formats from the *Chicago Manual of Style* (15<sup>th</sup> edition) and 10 or 12 point fonts and one-inch margins. Each assignment should include a full bibliographic citation at the top of the page.

### **Course Requirements:**

At Boston University class attendance is not optional. Students are expected to attend class except in the case of illness or other valid excuse approved by the instructor. Students should submit missed or delayed assignments as soon as possible. Unexcused late submissions will receive a half grade reduction (e.g. B+ becomes B) for every day they are late. Students should, however, always submit late work as soon as possible. Students must submit all written work in hard copy. If a student cannot submit the paper in class he/she should place it in the instructor's mail box (or after hours slot next to History Dept. door (226 Bay State Road, 3rd floor).

Finally, students must adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty as outlined in the College of Arts and Sciences *Academic Conduct Code*, copies of which are available in CAS 105. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the instructor or your academic advisor.

### **Grading Criteria:**

A: Exceptional. No major errors of grammar or logic. Original research that is grounded in historical method, analytical, and theoretically informed. Starts to make or makes a scholarly contribution to the field.

B+: Very good. Some minor grammatical or compositional errors. Solid research that shows an ability to apply historical frameworks of analysis and theoretical concepts.

B: Good. Some grammatical errors and/or weak argumentation. Good research and use of historical method and an attempt to apply theory to the analysis. Grammatical errors and/or weak argumentation. Research has some holes. Some attempt at historical method and to apply theory.

B-: Sufficient. Grammatical errors and weak argumentation. Research has some holes. Little attempt to use historical method and apply theory.

C+: Needs improvement. Grammatical errors and weak argumentation. Research has holes. No attempt to apply theory and historical method, but some effort to fulfill assignment requirements.

C-F: Unacceptable to not passable work. Major grammatical errors and weak argumentation. Research has major holes. No attempt to use historical method or apply theory.

### **Seminar Schedule**

**(Readings should be completed by the day for which they are listed):**

Week 1 (Sept 4) Introduction: Food as History

What is environmental history/what is food history? (pass out charts "When the Raw Gets Cooked")

Pass out syllabus and Food and Nature Chart

Form working groups

Discuss two images (Polenta and 99% GM Free Food) from ML633/HI518 syllabus.

## **SECTION ONE: The Ancient Kitchen/Food History**

### Week 2 (Sept 11) The Food as History/Archaeology: continuum

Guest lecture: Ilaria Patania, Ph.D, "The Archaeological Kitchen"

Reading: Food and Nature Chart (Course template on Blackboard course site)

"3,000 Year-old Cooking Fail Found at a Danish Dig Site" Sept. 21 1996, *the salt npr now WBUR* (on Blackboard).

2010. "With Flights Grounded, Kenya's Produce Wilts" *New York Times*, 4/20/2010

Assignment: Questions turned in and Group Discussion

*Assignment:*

-Write a one-page (double-spaced) précis of one of the Core Readings.

### Week 3 (Sept 18) Foods as Pre-industrial Historical Actor

Core Reading: Pollen, *Botany of Desire*, Introduction and Chapter 1 (Sweetness)

Film, Excerpts from Olmi, *Tree of the Wooden Clogs* (pre-industrial food production)

Class Discussion with Ilaria Patania.

Assignment: Questions (turned in and discussed in groups);

Precis of the Core reading chapter

### Week 4 (Sept 25) Food as History (northern Italy)

Lecture: The Story of Polenta (lecture/images)

Core Reading: Diner *Hungering for America*, pp. (1-83)

Ragu website page (on Blackboard course site)

McCann, *Maize and Grace* "Seeds of Subversion in Two Peasant Empires" (PDF on Blackboard)

"Polenta vs Cous Cous. Legally Banning Ethnic Food from Northern Italy" *i-Italy*, April Blackboard

Questions for group discussion/Precis of one of Core Readings (Diner, or McCann)

Groups will discuss and choose topic cuisine for Group Project

### Week 5 (Oct 2) Ethnicity/History of an Ethnic soup: Ramein and Post-modernity

Film and discussion: Tampopo

Food in the post-modern world

Core Reading: Groups search for sources on group topics

Assignment: Group internal reports on library and internet searches on topics (preliminary).

Discuss film, Orwell on Paris restaurant life and individual role in group presentation, sources, and rationale of choices.



Week 6 (Oct 9) **No class** Monday schedule

Week 7 (Oct 16) Ethiopia, Africa, and the Atlantic World

Core Reading: James McCann, *Stirring the Pot*. Pp. 1-106.

Comparative Reading #1:

Judith Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff, *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the New World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009)

Assignment:

-Write a one-page (double-spaced) précis of the Core Reading.

Week 8 (Oct 23) Modernity of Food: Europe and America

Film: Our Daily Bread

Reading: Core Reading: Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America* (pp, 84-145).

Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (excerpt on Blackboard site)

Assignment: Questions from Groups/ Group meetings

Week 9 ((Oct 30) Human and Political Ecology of Food Commodities

Core Reading: Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire* (Chapters 2-4)

Comparative Reading #2:

Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Comparative reading #3

Hannah Nordhaus, *The Beekeeper's Lament*. New York: Harper, 2010.

Assignment:

-Write a one-page précis on one chapter of Core Reading

Week 10 (Nov 6) Political Ecology of Food and Cooking in the United States

Core Reading: Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Comparative Reading #4:

Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York: Perennial, 2002).

Assignment:

Write a one-page (double-spaced) précis of the Core Reading book

## **SECTION TWO: FOOD AND COOKING AS ECOLOGY**

Week 11 (Nov 13) Regional Cuisine in the American South and Northeast

Core Reading: Frederick Douglass Opie, *Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America* (New York, 2008).

Robert Dirks and Nancy Duran, "African American Dietary Patterns at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," *Journal of Nutrition* (2001): 1882-84. (Blackboard)

Comparative Reading #5:

Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor, *Vibration Cooking: Or the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1992).

Week 12 (Nov 20) Africa: Taytu's Feast

McCann lecture and images on origins of Ethiopian cuisine (and the Simpsons)

Core Reading: McCann, *Stirring the Pot: A History of African Cuisine* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009), pp. 65-77

-Write a one-page (double-spaced) précis of the Core Reading

Organization of groups for final project "Historical Ecology of a Cuisine"

Assignment:

Write a one-page (double-spaced) précis of the Core Reading that contrasts their approaches and conclusions

Week 13 (Nov 27) New England Food Ethnicity

Film: Oyster Revival

Reading:

Cox and Walker, *Chowder: Four Centuries of a New England Meal*

Week 14 (Dec 3) Team Presentations on Ecology of Cuisines

(Groups 1 and 2)

Week 15 (Dec 10) Final exam team presentations (Groups 3 and 4) on Ecology of Cuisines

Descriptions of Iconic Meal/Cuisines (4 themes from group work)

Assignment:

Team Presentations and questions: on Historical Ecology of the Recipe and Ingredients

Final individual paper on Historical Ecology of a Cuisine assignment will be due Monday Dec 16 in my mailbox (History Dept, 226 Bay State Road 3<sup>rd</sup> floor). Early submissions are welcome, but late submissions must have permission of instructor.

**Readings (books available at the Boston University Bookstore (\*) or on reserve):**

Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2001.

Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Harvard University Press, 2001.

Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

James C. McCann, *Stirring the Pot: A History of African Cuisine*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009.

Frederick Douglass Opie, *Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World*. New York: Random House, 2001.

Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation.: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. Boston: Houghtlin Mifflin, 2001.

**Recommended, Comparative and Reference books:**

Carney, Judith and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff, *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

Flanderin, Jean-Louis, *Food: A Culinary History*. New York: Pengui, 1999.

Kipple, Kenneth and Ornelas, Kriemhild Conee. eds. *The Cambridge World History of Food*, vol I., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

McCann, James C. *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with A New World Crop*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Smart-Grosvenor, Vertamae. *Vibration Cooking or The Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl*. New York: Ballentine, 1992.