

HI343: Taste, Culture, and Power: The Global History of Food

Spring 2017, M, W, F, 9:05-9:55, CAS 201

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Office Hours W 10:30 – 1:30

Office Hours M 10:00-11:45am
Th 12:00-1:15pm

Course Description

Across time and across borders, humans have eaten not only for sustenance, but for pleasure, and food has helped shape the creation of societies and religions as well as nations and corporations. Eating together or eating similar cuisine binds families, cultures, and states together, while food taboos and distinctions draw distinctions between strangers. What we eat is not an incidental component of life, but an essential part of how it is structured; every meal we ingest represents a confluence of power, culture, technology, and taste that can be traced back far into the past.

In this course, we will investigate the history of food from prehistory to the present day and beyond, as we consider examples from every corner of the world. Beginning with the science of food and taste, we will consider the origins of agriculture and the role of food in antiquity and religious life. We will explore the spread of crops and food practices across the oceans in the early modern world, and investigate the intimate and uncomfortable relationship between food and the global slave trade.

We will think about hunger, intoxication and stimulation, and the origins of industrial food before considering the birth of national cuisines, and the way in which imperialism changed the eating practices of people around the world. We will look at the foods that immigrants brought with them to the United States and elsewhere, while probing the linkages between race and modern eating practices. We will look at the birth of nutrition as a way of thinking about food, and the scandals of food adulteration that helped shape how we eat today.

As we approach the twentieth century, we will consider the relationship of food, famines, and war, and the new technologies that led many to believe the world was approaching end of hunger. Towards the end of our class, we will unpack some of the problems in our food system today, from the rise of fast food to the “inventions” of anorexia and obesity. At the very end of the course, we will think – as historians – about the future. How will we eat in the future, as the tastes of the rich and the middle classes grow more cosmopolitan, but we contend with the twin specters of global malnutrition and obesity? What will our meals look like two hundred years from now?

Assignments and Evaluation

There will be three classes each week, a mixture of lectures, discussion sections, film screenings, and special activity sessions. The readings listed below are to be done before class: some weeks there is a relatively light workload, and other weeks are more demanding; only rarely will the reading exceed thirty pages per session. Most of our readings are book chapters, articles, or selections from longer works, and will be available on Blackboard Learn.

There will be three exams given in class, and no final exam; make-up exams will only be given on presentation of a note from the dean. In lieu of a research paper, there will be four activities asking you to consider and write or present critically on food in its lived contexts, drawing upon relevant readings and class discussions. These assignments include a “food autobiography” [due February 1], a family recipe exercise [due March 3], a grocery store “scavenger hunt” [due March 29], and a journalistic or ethnographic account of carrying a piece of food with you over the course of a week [due April 10]. These exercises must be uploaded to our class Tumblr, tasteculturepower.tumblr.com, by the date listed, and we will devote those class periods to in-class discussion; as such, no extensions can be given.

Class attendance is expected, as is arriving on time and staying for the entire class. Attendance will be taken via a sign-in sheet each day. Each student is allowed two excused or unexcused absences; further absences will result in a third of a class grade deducted per class missed. Computers and cell phones are not permitted in the classroom, unless the former are required for documented accessibility needs. Students using cell phones will be asked to leave the class. Plagiarism is a serious offense and, if suspected, will be referred to the Dean’s Office to be adjudicated as stipulated in the Boston University code of conduct.

I am available during my office hours, listed above, and urge you to come in for a conversation about substantive class matters; all logistic matters are detailed in this syllabus. I do not use e-mail for class purposes except for the occasional logistic update. Our teaching fellow, Kristen Carey, is available at kmcarey@bu.edu or during her office hours.

Final grades will be based on the following rubric:

- Three fifty-minute exams (term identification and short essay): 45%
- Participation in Friday discussion sessions and pre-discussion activities: 40%
- Participation in class discussions: 15%

A Note to History Majors: This class is intended as a broad introduction to the study of food in global history, and the intent is to survey a number of foundational concepts, ideas, and readings that those researching food in global history have found central to their work. We will not be producing a research paper in this course; however, I have worked with students in the past to produce seminar papers and senior honors theses on food-related subjects, and would be eager to do so with you after the completion of this class, after which you should have a strong knowledge of the key themes animating the study of food in history.

Weekly Schedule

UNIT ONE: FOUNDATIONS

Friday, January 20, 2017 – Introductory Lecture

Monday, January 23, 2017 – Plants, Taste, and Us

- Michael Pollan, “Desire: Sweetness / Plant: The Apple,” in *The Botany of Desire* (New York: Random House, 2002), 1-58.

Wednesday, January 25, 2017 – Humans, Hunters, Gatherers

- J.R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, “Shifting to Food Production, 11,000-3,000 Years Ago,” in *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 25-40.

Friday, January 27, 2017 – Food, Symbols, Meaning

- Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” *Daedalus* 101:1 (Winter 1972), 61-81.
- Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Culinary Triangle,” in Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik eds., *Food and Culture: A Reader* 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2008), 36-43.
- Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, vol. 1: *Swann’s Way: Within a Budding Grove* (New York: Vintage, 1982), excerpt.

Monday, January 30, 2017 – The Colombian Exchange

- Alfred W Crosby, “New World Foods and Old World Demography,” in *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003); 165-207.

Wednesday, February 1, 2017 – Food Autobiographies

- Over the course of several days before you begin writing, brainstorm three things – people, dishes, meals, holidays, events, ingredients, or anything else – that would be at the center of your food autobiography. This exercise is meant to be open-ended, but to get you thinking: what is the first food you remember eating? What is the food that tastes like “home” to you? Did you eat out growing up, and if so, where? When did you start cooking, or do you cook at all? What restaurant was formative to your ideas about food? Where did you do the grocery shopping growing up, and who took primary responsibility for shopping and cooking in your family? Where do you eat now, and when do you eat out? How have your food habits and tastes changed over time?
- When you have finished brainstorming, write a 750-1000-word food autobiography centered around these three things. Aim for eloquent and evocative writing, and explain

the meaning behind your selections. Then, come up with a picture to illustrate each of your three items: a family photo, a photograph or illustration from somewhere else, or your own sketch or drawing.

- Upload your autobiography and your illustrations to our class Tumblr by Tuesday, January 31, at 5:00 PM.

Friday, February 3, 2017 – [Film Screening TBA]

Monday, February 6, 2017 – Sugar and Slaves

- Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 74-150.
- David Singerman, “The Shady History of Big Sugar,” *The New York Times*, September 16, 2016, A17.

Wednesday, February 8, 2017 – Uppers and Downers: Coffee, Alcohol, and Other Drugs

- Tom Standage, “Civilized Beer,” “The Coffeehouse Internet,” in *A History of the World in 6 Glasses* (New York: Walker & Co, 2005), 24–42; 151–174.

Friday, February 10, 2017 – Discussion Section

- We will divide into two groups and discuss all readings and class material since the beginning of the class.

Monday, February 13, 2017 – Hunger and the Moral Economy

- Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), chapters 1, 2, and 3.
- James Vernon, “Hunger as Political Critique,” in *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 41-80.

Wednesday, February 15, 2017 – Industrial Food

- William Cronon, “Annihilating Space: Meat,” in *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 207-259.

Friday, February 17, 2017 – Exam #1

- 50 minutes; will cover material from the first third of the course

Monday, February 20, 2017 – No Class [President's Day]

UNIT TWO: ENCOUNTERS AND EXCHANGES

February 21, 2017 – Making Modern Cuisines

- Brian Cowen, “New Worlds, New Tastes: Food Fashions after the Renaissance,” in Paul Freedman, ed., *Food: The History of Taste* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 197-232.

Wednesday, February 22, 2017 – Food and Empires

- Marcy Norton, “Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics,” *The American Historical Review* (2006) 111:3, 660-691.

Friday, February 24, 2017 – Discussion Section

- We will divide into two groups and discuss all readings and class material since the last discussion section.

Monday, February 27, 2017 – Food and Race

- Maurice M. Manring, “Aunt Jemima Explained: The Old South, the Absent Mistress, and the Slave in a Box,” *Southern Cultures* 2:1 (1995), 19-44.

Wednesday, March 1, 2017 – Migrant Cuisines

- Donna R. Gabaccia, “Immigration, Isolation, and Industry” in *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 36-63.

Friday, March 3, 2017 – Family Recipes / The HI343 Cookbook

- Sometime in the weeks leading up to this class, reach out to a family member by phone or e-mail to obtain a family recipe – ideally, a dish that has strong family associations for you. Write down this recipe as closely as you can – in a standard recipe format, if that seems right, or in more narrative form, if that captures the spirit of the recipe better.
- Film a two-minute introduction to this recipe. What is this food? What associations does it have for you? When was it served in your family? At holidays or other family gatherings? What parts of your family story, if any, can be found in the recipe itself? Did the person telling you the recipe give you any lore, information, or beliefs about the recipe? How might the recipe have changed over time? What changes might you make to the recipe to better suit your own tastes, location, or beliefs about health and diet? Upload the recipe and your video introduction by Wednesday, March 1, at 5:00 P.M., and on Thursday, spend some time watching your classmates’ videos.

Monday, March 13, 2017 – No Class

Wednesday, March 15, 2017 – The Discovery of Nutrition

- Nick Cullather, “The Foreign Policy of the Calorie,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 2 (April 1, 2007): 337–364.

Friday, March 17, 2017 – Discussion Section

- We will divide into two groups and discuss all readings and class material since the last discussion section.

Monday, March 20, 2017 – Food, War, and Famines

- Amartya Sen, “Poverty and Entitlements,” “Concepts of Poverty,” “Starvation and Famines,” and “The Entitlement Approach,” in *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 1-23, 39-51.

Wednesday, March 22, 2017 – Food and Nationalism

- Arjun Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30 (1988): 3–24.

Friday, March 24, 2017 – No Class

Monday, March 27, 2017 – The Green Revolution

- Nick Cullather, “Mexico's Way Out,” in *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 43-71.

Wednesday, March 29, 2017 – Grocery Store Scavenger Hunt

- In the weeks leading up to this class, take a trip by yourself or with a classmate to one of the many specialty / international grocery stores within a mile or so radius of campus. Some options include, but are not limited to
 - Turkuaz Market (Turkish, 16 Brighton Ave, Allston)
 - Elsol Food Market (Mexican, 353 Chelsea St., Boston)
 - Syrian Grocery Importing (Arabic, 270 Shawmut Ave., Boston)
 - Kaba African Market (African, 29 Roxbury St., Roxbury)
 - The Butcherie (Jewish / Kosher, 428 Harvard St., Brookline)
 - Bazaar (Eastern European, 1432 Beacon St., Brookline)
 - Greek International Food Market (Greek, 5204 Washington St., West Roxbury)
 - H-Mart (Asian, 581 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge)
 - Salumeria Italiana (Italian, 151 Richmond St., Boston)
 - Shalimar (South Asian, 571 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA)
 - Super 88 (Asian, 1095 Commonwealth Ave., Boston)

- Arm yourself with a camera (your phone's will do just fine) and a notepad for documenting your hunt. Spend some time browsing the aisles, looking for goods that are unfamiliar to you. Buy one item that costs \$10 or less – an ingredient, piece of fruit or produce, a spice, a sauce, or anything that is not a finished dish. Before you take it home, note where the object is in the market itself. What is it next to? How is it displayed? Is it one of a kind, or are there other items like it? What sort of knowledge does it presume?
- Take some more time with the item back at home before you begin to research it. Open it up, smell it, taste it, and before researching it, take time to write as comprehensive and clear a description of the item as you can. Discard whatever preconceived ideas you have about the item in question, describing it as a “specimen” of sorts.
- When you are done with this description, you can begin researching this item. What is it? Does it have multiple names? What is it used for? Who eats it, and when, and why? Think about some larger questions: what transformations has it undergone in its creation – has it been changed by heat, air, fermentation or other preservation? What is the chain of supply that has brought it to Boston? How might this object differ in its preparation or presentation in the United States than in its “home” country or countries? What meaning might the object have for those who consume it?
- Finally, drawing upon your research, prepare something to eat with your item. It can be very simple, or very complicated, depending on your preferences / kitchen status / etc. Take notes about your preparation – what do you learn as it is cooked or prepared or transformed, and what does the final product smell, taste, feel like?
- Finally, compile your thoughts into an illustrated photo essay, with 4-5 photographs or other illustrations, and around 750-1000 words of writing. Document your journey with this item, from the store to the table. Upload this essay and your illustrations to our class Tumblr by Tuesday, March 28, at 5:00 PM, and later that evening, browse through your classmates' submissions in preparation for Wednesday's discussion.

Friday, March 31, 2017 – Exam #2

- 50 minutes; will cover material from the second third of the course

UNIT THREE: FOOD POLITICS

Monday, April 3, 2017 – Fast Food

- William Finnegan, “Dignity: Fast-Food Workers and a New Form of Labor Activism,” *The New Yorker*, September 15, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/09/15/dignity-4>
- Eric Schlosser, “Why the Fries Taste Good,” *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2012), 111-132.

Wednesday, April 5, 2017 – Eating Animals

- Peter Singer, “Animal Liberation,” *New York Review of Books* 20:5 (April 5, 1973).
- Massachusetts Minimum Size Requirements for Farm Animal Containment, Question 3 (2016), [https://ballotpedia.org/Massachusetts_Minimum_Size_Requirements_for_Farm_Animal_Containment,_Question_3_\(2016\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Massachusetts_Minimum_Size_Requirements_for_Farm_Animal_Containment,_Question_3_(2016))

Friday, April 7, 2017 – Too Fat, Too Thin

- Joan Jacobs Brumberg, “‘Fasting Girls’: Reflections on Writing the History of Anorexia Nervosa,” *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 50, no. 4/5 (January 1, 1985): 93–104.
- Marion Nestle, “From Eat More to Eat Less,” *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health, Revised and Expanded Edition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 31-50.

Monday, April 10, 2017 – Food Biographies

- On Monday, April 3, you will be given a small piece of “food” to carry with you throughout the week. Seriously – carry it with you throughout the week, wherever you go. Snap a picture of it with your cell phone somewhere interesting (or mundane). Take it with you to other classes, to work, to practice, to a party. If I see you on Bay State Road, I’ll ask to see it. Observe what kind of questions you get about this food. Think about its origins or “provenance,” what cultural, political, or economic forces helped to create it, and how it gets from field or factory to the plate or bag or wrapper or bowl. Consider how this food might look to an alien observer.
- Then, as the weekend approaches, draft a short, 500-word descriptive piece about the food and upload it, with a picture of your food in the wild, to our Tumblr by Sunday, April 9, at 5:00 PM. We’ll devote this class to a discussion of our foods and our experiences.

Wednesday, April 12, 2017 – Revolutions and Identity

- Frances Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine, 1971), selections.
- Alison Leitch, “Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity,” *Ethnos* 68:4 (2003), 437-462.

Friday, April 14, 2017 – Film Screening, *Unser Tglich Brot* (dir. Nikolaus Geyrhalter, 2005)

Monday, April 17, 2017 – No Class [Patriots' Day]

Wednesday, April 19, 2017 – Food Justice: Production

- Seth Holmes, “Segregation on the Farm: Ethnic Hierarchies at Work,” in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 45-87.

Friday, April 21, 2017 – Food Justice: Consumption

- Janet Poppendieck, “Food Fights: A Brief History,” in *Free for All: Fixing School Food in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 46-83.

Monday, April 24, 2017 – Discussion Section

- We will divide into two groups and discuss all readings and class material since the last discussion section.

Wednesday, April 26, 2017 – Wrap-Up: The Future of Food

- Warren James Belasco, “The Modernist Future,” in *Meals to Come: A History of the Future of Food* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 166-218
- Rachel Laudan, “A Plea for Culinary Modernism: Why We Should Love New, Fast, Processed Food,” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 1, no. 1 (February 1, 2001): 36–44.

Friday, April 28, 2017 - Exam #3

- 50 minutes; will cover material from the last third of the course