

HSTY 391

Food in History

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Fall 2009, T/Th 10:00-11:15, Clark Hall 205

Food is life. Nothing is more basic than food to all of us, not only to our bodies, but also to our cultures, our social interactions, and our very identities. This has been true throughout history. Food is inextricably interconnected with the development of agriculture and other technologies, with the rise and fall of empires, with increasing understanding of diet and nutrition, with laws and regulations, with the arts, with economic development and consumer culture, and with national, religious, and ethnic identities. By selective examination of representative episodes pertaining to each of these topics, this course explores the history of food, from the agricultural revolution of the neolithic era to the consumer revolution of the last generation. In this way, we seek to understand more fully food, history, and food in history.

The Pantry:

Required readings are assigned from the following paperback books:

Reay Tannahill, *Food in History* (FH)

C. Counihan and P. van Esterik, eds., *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 2nd edition (FCR)

Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (GGS)

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (Norton Critical Edition) (TJ)

Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (TOD)

I have prepared an extensive “**All-You-Can-Read Bibliography**” of books on the history of food; I will send out copies as e-mail attachments.

In addition to the readings and lectures, **films** related to the subject of food history will be on reserve at Kelvin Smith Library, and one will be shown during class; there will be a class visit to the **Department of Special Collections, Kelvin Smith Library**; and there will be regular classroom **discussions**. Students are expected to attend all class meetings, to keep up with the readings, and to participate fully in discussions. More on all this below.

The Bill of Fare

Required, recommended, and discussion readings are listed for each class period, and are to be done before the period. Those readings not labeled FH, FCR, GGS, TJ, or TOD will be provided on Blackboard in PDF.

Aug. 25

The appetizer

What is food history?

Introduction to the course

Aug. 27

Hunters and gatherers, the raw and the cooked

The potato theory of hominid evolution

The invention of cooking

Read: FH, pp. 3-41; read and discuss: FCR, chapter 6, and TOD, pp. 1-11, 298-303.

- Sept. 1 **The agricultural revolution**
 The beer theory of the rise of agriculture
 Notable successes (and failures) of domestication
 Read: GGS, pp. 85-191.
- Sept. 3 **The civilizations of the ancient Mediterranean**
 The birth of culinary arts in Egypt and Mesopotamia
 Ancient Greek and Roman cuisine
 Read: FH, pp. 43-91; read and discuss: FCR chapter 24, and Laudan, "Plea for Culinary Modernism."
- Sept. 8 **Deciphering a meal**
 Food as cultural construction
 Read and discuss: FCR chapters 3 and 4.
- Sept. 10 **"Babette's Feast"** (Sweden/Denmark/France, 1988)
 This film will be screened in **Mather House rm. 100, from 10:00 to 11:45 today**
 Read: Gopnik, "What's Cooking?"; Laudan, "Birth of the Modern Diet"
- Sept. 15 **The early middle ages**
 Before Y1K
 Read: FH, pp. 92-151; read and discuss: Kurlansky, *Cod*; discuss "Babette's Feast"
- Sept. 17 **The late middle ages**
 Why spices? Culinary history meets cultural and intellectual history
 Read: FH, pp. 153-95; read and discuss: Peterson, *Acquired Taste*
 Recommended: FCR 10
- Sept. 22 **Religious meanings of food: taboos and the sacred**
 The abominable pig and the sacred cow
 Is food "good to think" or is it good to eat (or both)?
 Read and discuss: FCR 5; TOD, pp. 304-33; and two short photocopied articles
- Sept. 24 **Sugar and spice and things *not* so nice**
 1492 and all that: The Columbian exchange
 Read: FH, pp. 199-223
First assignment due today!
- Sept. 29 **The formation of national cuisines and the origin of table manners**
 Read: FH, pp. 230-67; FCR 18; read & discuss: Trollope, "Domestic Manners"
- Oct. 1 **Class visit to Special Collections, Kelvin Smith Library**
 Meet in the Special Collections department (2nd floor).
- Oct. 6 **Sweetness and power**
 Sugar, British imperialism, and the shaping of domestic consumption
 Read and discuss: FCR 8

- Oct. 8 **Intoxicating beverages**
The social history of beer, wine, and distilled alcohol
- Oct. 13 **Stimulants**
Coffee, tea, and chocolate: The “drug foods”
The caffeine theory of the rise of the West
Read: FH, pp. 267-79; read and discuss: Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise*
Begin reading *The Jungle* (finish by Oct. 27)
- Oct. 15 **The industrialization of food**
Preservation and processing
Read: FH, pp. 281-331; TOD, pp. 15-56
Second assignment due today!
- Oct. 20 **Fall Break (no class)**
- Oct. 22 **The problem of adulteration and the rise of legislation**
Read: TJ, pp. 445-80
- Oct. 27 **Agricultural science and agricultural production**
Read: FCR 28; TOD, pp. 57-99
Discuss: *The Jungle*
- Oct. 29 **Victorian food and Victorian culture in Britain and the United States**
Class, gender, national identity
From the corner store to the supermarket
Read and discuss: FCR 9, 11, and 12
- Nov. 3 **Buckeyes, Corncrackers, and Suckers: Food in the Old Northwest**
- Nov. 5 **The development of nutritional knowledge**
Read: FH, pp. 224-28, 332-36
Third assignment due today!
- Nov. 10 **The modern science of nutrition**
Epidemiology and epistemology
Read: Pollan, *In Defense of Food*, pp. 1-15, 40-81
- Nov. 12 **Food technology, food additives, and regulation**
Pollan, *In Defense of Food*, pp. 147-61
- Nov. 17 **Growing food in the contemporary world**
The growth of pesticides and other adjuncts
The “green revolution” and genetically modified crops
Read: FH 336-46; TOD, pp. 185-202, 212-25
- Nov. 19 **The world food economy: modernization and development**
Read: FH, pp. 347-71; TOD, pp. 100-19, 134-40, 158-84

Nov. 24 **The world food economy: success and failure**
Read and discuss: FCR 29, 32

Nov. 26 **Thanksgiving Day (no class)**

Dec. 1 **GMOs and the future of food crops**
Read and discuss: FCR 34.
Fourth assignment due today!

Dec. 3 No class today

Dessert:

Dec. 15 **Final examination, 12:30-3:30**

Writing Assignments and “Buffet” Grading Structure

There will be no examinations during the course of the semester, though there will be a final exam in the exam period afterwards; there will also be no quizzes, “pop” or otherwise (unless carbonation is involved). Half of the final course grade will be based on a total of four papers. **Two of the papers will be approximately five pages (1500 words) each, and each will count for 10% of the final grade. The other two will be approximately ten pages (3000 words) each, and each of these will count for 15% of the final grade.**

In these papers, the grade will be assessed on such usual factors as the clarity of the presentation, sophistication of the analysis, organization, use of sources, relevance to the course, and sensible incorporation of course material. Clear, correct, and coherent writing is an intrinsic part of all humanistic (as well as scientific) investigation, and will also constitute a grading element. Plagiarism, whether from printed or digital sources, is a serious violation of ethical conduct, and will not be tolerated; ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an excuse. For a quick review, visit www.plagiarism.org.

Each of your papers must fall into one of the following categories:

- 1. Critical analysis of a food-related art object (a painting, a sculpture, or a culinary implement) found at the Cleveland Museum of Art.** It is of course necessary to describe the art and the artist, but the real emphasis of your paper should be to place the depiction or object in its historical context, using course materials. What does this art reveal about food history and culture? What other interesting aspects of the history of food are relevant to this subject? In other words, you will be using the object to open your discussion of some aspect of food history.
- 2. Critical analysis of a food-related film or films, chosen from the list supplied in my bibliography.** The same considerations apply here. The important point is not just to focus on the film itself, but to make this a properly contextualizing historical discussion, a study that uses

aspects of the film that relate directly to this course, and that reveal interesting aspects of food history and/or culture which you have chosen to highlight.

3. Critical analysis of a historical thesis regarding food. Some possible examples: examine Jared Diamond's geographic determinism, Marvin Harris's cultural materialism, Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, Wolfgang Schivelbusch's "coffee theory" of the Protestant ethic, Upton Sinclair's connections between the meat industry and the rise of American socialism, or Rachel Laudan's attack on the "fresh, local, slow-food" movement. Critique (or defend) the thesis, using evidence from course materials or other sources which you can locate. There are dozens of possibilities; use your imagination and follow your predilections.

4. Critical analysis of a public policy controversy related to food. Genetically modified food is one obvious example, but there are many more possibilities, several of which will be dealt with during the course. This can have to do with nutritional science, food safety, agriculture, the politics of food, or issues that have large cultural components, such as eating disorders or diet fads.

5. Family culinary history. Discuss aspects of your family's culinary habits, as a function of historical and socio-cultural forces that have shaped traditions in your household. Although this will inevitably be a personal exercise, you **must incorporate material from the course, or other sources which you can find**, into your discussion (with proper source citation, as always). In addition to the obvious "ethnic roots" approach to this assignment, there are many other possibilities. What traditions, habits, or practices characterize the household? How do you think these practices may have been shaped by social, cultural, economic, or historical forces? What connections can you make to what you are learning in the course? You can even interpret "family" broadly, if that is appropriate to your circumstances.

6. Historical cookery. Choose a historical recipe. Prepare (or purchase) the dish, then bring it to class for tasting. (I will provide sources for historical recipes, and tasting forks.) Finally, write a paper that describes your experiences and places this food in its proper historical setting, using course materials. You will be graded on the paper, not at all on your culinary artistry. This option can be done as a collaborative exercise with another student.

7. Investigation of an ethnic cuisine by visiting local restaurants and markets. Then write your paper, describing your investigation of this cuisine and placing it in a proper cultural-historical context. This cuisine may not be of the same ethnicity as your "Family Culinary History" (if you choose that option as well). The paper must not read like a restaurant review. Instead, you should use your experience as an entrée to a historical and cultural investigation of that cuisine, and you should incorporate course materials as much as possible. The paper must be focused on food history and culture, not just what you have seen and eaten.

8. Historical study of one of the rare books displayed and viewed by the class in the Department of Special Collections, on October 1. The paper should not be exclusively focused on the one book alone; rather, you should investigate a wider subject represented by the book.

Again, to be very clear: in almost all cases across all categories, the best papers will use the ostensible subject simply as a *stepping-off point* for a wider and deeper discussion of some aspect of food history and culture. All papers must incorporate course materials, including lectures and discussions. Of course, you may use additional sources if necessary or advisable. Web sources are permissible, but are to be used only with great care. Proper source citation is always necessary. And advice from your instructor is always available.

Further table manners:

You may choose order and category, as long as one paper handed in on September 24, another on October 15, a third on November 5, and the last one on December 1. These dates are marked in bold on the course calendar above. You may submit papers early, if you choose.

There will be a **final examination**, given at the time preset by the registrar for this class period, namely Tuesday, December 15, from 12:30 to 3:30, in the regular classroom (Clark 205). This exam will be essay style, and will stress broad concepts and themes related to the course material, rather than recall of specific historical details such as names and dates. Students must, however, be able to support their arguments convincingly, with evidence drawn from the course. **The final exam will count as 20% of the final course grade.**

Classroom commensalism and companionship:¹

Discussion will comprise the remaining 30% of the final grade. The syllabus lists which class periods will explicitly involve discussion exercises (these comprise more than half of all the class periods). In a course with no midterm exams or quizzes, classroom participation is even more important than is normally the case, which is why the discussion grade in this course is a fairly large percentage. If you feel shy in a discussion atmosphere, remember that asking a question is often even more stimulating than offering an opinion. **Barring illness or other calamities, students are expected to attend all classes, to read the assignments carefully, and to participate fully in discussions. Such behavior is an expected courtesy not just to your instructor, but also to all of your classmates.**

All grades will be assigned as letter grades (e.g., A- or C+) rather than as numbers on a 100-point scale. The final course grade will be assigned by averaging these letter grades, in accordance with the weighting as given here. The registrar does not permit +/- grades as final course grades.

The instructor pledges to begin and end class periods on time; he will accordingly greatly appreciate the punctual arrival of students. Please turn off and stow all personal electronics; class times are devoted to the material of the day, and to participants in the course.

Finally, remember that I am always available for consultation with students on any aspect of the course. My office is Room 204 Mather House, phone 368-2614, e-mail ajr@case.edu. Office hours are 2:00 to 4:30 Wednesdays. I am also glad to make appointments for students outside of office hours.

Bon Appétit!

¹ “Commensalism” comes from the Latin “commensalis,” meaning companionship at meals, or eating together as a social act (literally, it means sharing a table). “Companion” comes from Latin “companio,” meaning bread-fellow or messmate. The English word “food” is distantly related to the Latin word “panis,” bread. Also related to “food” and “panis” are such words as feed, fresser, pasta, pastry, pasture, pastor, pabulum, and pantry (all through the Indo-European “pat-,” to eat). Get ready for a lot of unsuspected food language.