

A GLOBAL HISTORY OF FOOD Fall 2007

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Office Hours MWF 1:00–3:00

Class Meeting: MWF 11:00 – 12:20 Geoscience 101

Brief Description

This course will cover history of the interaction of humans with food resources from the earliest hunting and gathering societies to the present. It will focus on how and why civilizations have been shaped by geography, native flora and fauna and technological/structural developments that have enabled humans to exploit natural resources. It will emphasize the fact that feeding people has always been the primary concern of our species and that more than any other factor finding, growing or trading food products has been the prime catalyst in human history. The scope of this course will be global, covering civilizations of Asia, America, Africa and Europe and how cultures in each of these domesticated unique staples that literally enabled these civilizations to expand and flourish. The course will also cover the marginalized and colonized cultures that were dominated largely to feed or entice the palates of the great. A major theme of the course will be the process of globalization, imperialism and the growth of capitalist enterprise at the cost of indigenous cultures and traditional farming practices and how these processes were shaped by trade in food.

Beyond the larger economic and social issues, the course will also cover the culture of food, why humans made the food choices they have and what their food practices tell us about them and their world outlook. In other words, food practices will be used as a window for viewing culture as a whole, much as one might study painting or literature. Foodways, in fact, reveal much more because not only must all humans eat but they all make conscious choices about food within a cultural milieu. These choices not only reveal who they are and where they fit in socially but often their political, religious, philosophical bent as well. For example, a vegetarian of the 20th century (or from any century) makes food choices that reveal a great deal about the individual, perhaps the dominant food culture which is rejected, and a host of other concerns: animal welfare, a thin physique, religious taboos, etc. By studying what humans have thought and written about food, I hope that human history will become alive and direct in a way that the stories of great kings and epic battles sometimes cannot.

This course requires no prior knowledge of food issues or history and is intended to be an introduction to the topic as it relates to several different cultures throughout history. This course will necessarily be interdisciplinary, connecting in significant ways to research in anthropology and sociology, the history of science and technology, psychology, religious studies and the arts. The structure of the course, although comparative and international, will follow chronologically, so there will also be a firm foundation in history and methods of analysis throughout the course will be predominantly historical in nature.

This course will also examine in detail why different people make different food choices, why they sometimes go to extraordinary lengths to find rare or exotic items while refusing to eat foods that are cheap and plentiful, why individuals from certain social classes will avoid or esteem particular foods and in general how food is the most important factor of self-definition. In other words, food helps define who the individual is, where she fits in society and how the culture, nationality or ethnicity she espouses expresses itself through food and cuisine. Of course, what a

particular food or dish may mean differs dramatically from place to place and time to time, from generation to generation, and even in the mind of one individual depending on the context. So this course will help you not only to see how and why other cultures shape what people eat but how your own choices are ultimately determined by our culture and are often equally bizarre and arbitrary to outsiders.

Lastly, because this is a history course we will look at the way the interaction of cultures, their destruction, transformation, assimilation are all hastened by the human drive to feed and titillate the gullet. For example, the demand for sugar and spices in the late middle ages was not only the impetus for discovering the New World, but it also transformed the economy of both Old and New Worlds, involved massive migrations, the spread of human pathogens, and biological interaction of flora, fauna and humans among several continents. All this literally changed the world – so Europeans could have sugar in their tea.

Course Learning Objectives

1. I expect you to master a significant body of information about food in history. I will focus on ingredients, where they come from and where they go and why. I will expect you to understand how culinary cultures develop in several different cultures over time. I will expect you to have a firm grasp of the history, geography, social structure, religion, technology and agriculture of the cultures we discuss and be able to relate these to eating habits, aversions, manners and a variety of different topics. I will also expect you to be able to relate these historical facts to food culture in the world today.
2. I will help you develop critical thinking skills. First, you should not believe everything you read and being able to assess an argument, point out its strengths and weaknesses and offer constructive criticism is one of the goals of this course. Fortunately popular food history is rife with mistakes, exaggerations and fallacies. So are many of the sources you use in your research paper. Through examples given in lectures I hope you will hone your ability able to discern sound from unsound arguments.
3. I expect you to improve your writing skills in this course. Both your exam essays and paper will be graded in terms of form and content and my comments will offer suggestions for improvement. I will expect you to master proper citation form as used by historians and to use citations responsibly. Development of a thesis and supporting that thesis with concrete examples and proof will also be a part of the writing skills I hope to help you develop.
4. I hope to instill in you the value of thinking about people in the past and around the world objectively. You will find many of the topics we discuss strange and disturbing. I hope that by the end of the course you will not only understand why people eat the way they do, but gain a measure of respect for the diversity of the human species, and maybe even broaden your own tastes.
5. Most importantly, I want you to see the value of thinking about what you eat, understanding the consequences of what you put in your body in terms of aesthetics, health, and sociability. I would also like you to have a greater appreciation for the environmental, social and economic

consequences of your diet and I hope I will be able to give you the power to make informed choices. Remember, eating is the only thing everyone on this planet must do and over which they have a degree of freedom to make conscious choices about.

Assignments

There is no assigned **textbook** for this course. You may wish to purchase Reay Tannahill's *Food in History*, which is available cheap on amazon.com. Consider this supplementary to the lectures and read it at your own pace. Just beware that I (and most food historians) do not agree with all the assertions in it and I will contradict much of what is written therein. It is not ideal, and it is very old, but is the only book that covers the whole topic, short of the massive encyclopedias – which I encourage you to use: **Kiple**, ed., *The Cambridge World History of Food*; **Katz**, ed. Scribner's *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*; **Davidson**, *The Oxford Companion to Food*; *Larousse Gastronomique*; Toussaint-Samat, *History of Food*; **Flandrin and Montanari**, *Food: A Culinary History*; **Smith**, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*. All have extensive bibliographies that will give you an idea of how much has been published lately. You can find these in the reference section (under several different call numbers). A few are on the stacks, so please do not check them out. There is also a series I edit called *Food Culture Around the World*, currently at 14 volumes, which I will put on reserve for your use. There are also other useful titles you may want to purchase: Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Food: A History* and Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Food in World History*. I have used these in the past with mixed results, but I think they are good.

Please note, I will expect you to purchase several specialized books for your research paper.

You will assigned one **7 page paper** which should be based on both primary and secondary sources. You may choose the topic. It can be about the history of one ingredient, the cuisine of a nation or people whom we have not discussed at length in class, or a topic related to food – such as agriculture, trade, nutrition, diets, the food industry, in a particular time and place. For this paper you should use all and any sources you can get your hands on. I will expect you to **purchase books** relevant to your topic. If you check on amazon.com under food history you will see there are several hundred new titles to choose from. But be sure you are buying history, NOT a modern cookbook. Note also that a lot of what you might find on the web is garbage. So ask me first if you're in doubt.

There will be one **midterm and a final**, both in essay format. Each will comprise 1/3 of your grade for this course, as will your paper. You will be expected to know the both the lecture material and readings for the exams.

Attendance in this course is absolutely mandatory. I will call your names at the start of every class, so please be on time or you will not be counted. This will also help me to learn your names. You are allowed 4 absences. If you are ill or can not make it to class for some very pressing reason please e-mail me or inform me upon your return and I will give you a one page assignment to make up the missed class (which I expect you to complete promptly) – and the absence will not be counted. Athletes missing class should complete make-up assignments. After four unexcused absences your grade will drop 4 points with every absence.

Feel free to contact me via e-mail for whatever reason, especially if you have to miss class or have a question about an assignment. It's the easiest way to find me, and I'll respond promptly. And of course my door is always open if you want to come by and chat in the flesh.

I will also plan a few field trips – we can not go anywhere as a whole for logistical reasons, so I'll let you sign up for them as you like. Last year our trip to Diamond Walnuts was amazing, as was a trip to an artisinal cheesemaker and a foie gras slaughterhouse. I have an organic dairy in town in mind for this year, and have already been speaking to someone about visiting a bean harvest.

Lastly, this will be a fun course. But it is up to you to bring your ideas, concerns to the class so that we can make it as entertaining and edifying as possible. You will receive **extra credit** if you bring any relevant food history **news** item to class and share it. I also have a **board** outside my office which will be dedicated to this class. Please post any ideas, food items, news etc. on this board. Also note, I will expect you to disagree with me, and I will often go out of my way to provoke a reaction from you. That's a good thing. That's how one learns in history. Just recognize that it may be a little different than what you're used to. Rest assured that your grade will reflect the quality and creativity of your thoughts, not whether you've ingested and regurgitated what I've fed to you.

A Note on Academic Honesty

Obviously you may not pass off another person's work as your own or cheat in any way on an exam. On your papers, use of any source without proper citation is regarded as intellectual theft, and is most reprehensible thing one can do. For professional historians it is illegal, and in this class will lead to failure for the assignment and in flagrant cases the course, as well as an official report of academic dishonesty that will appear permanently on your record. You know that using another person's words, either a sentence or larger passage without enclosing it in quotes and footnoting it is regarded as plagiarism. You may not be aware that using someone else's ideas, even when stated in your own words, without citation is also plagiarism. Commonly known facts are the intellectual property of no one, and need not be cited. But opinions regarding those facts may belong to someone. For example: Asparagus is grown in Stockton everyone knows. But Scholar X's opinion about the asparagus must be cited. Please also note, that although you may use web sites for your paper, DO NOT cut and paste anything from a web site, and be especially careful with what you find. There is a lot of garbage out there and web sites are generally not geared toward the level of academic discourse that I expect of you. In other words, if you quote extensively a web site designed for high school students, do not expect to do well. The same holds true for encyclopedia entries.

Syllabus

W Aug 29 Introduction to the Course
 F Aug 31 Prehistoric Hunting and Gathering
 M Sept 3 LABOR DAY
 W Sept 5 The Agricultural Revolution – The Fertile Crescent and Sumer
 F & M Sept 7–10 NO CLASS
 W Sept 12 Ancient Egypt
 F Sept 14 Ancient Judea and the Old Testament
 M Sept 17 Ancient Greece
 W Sept 19 Hellenistic Greece and Dietary Theory
 F Sept 21 NO CLASS
 M Sept 24 Rome
 W Sept 26 Early Christianity
 F Sept 28 Ancient India, Hinduism and Ayurveda
 M Oct 1 Ancient China
 W Oct 3 The “Dark Ages” – Barbarians
 F Oct 5 FALL STUDENT BREAK
 M Oct 8 The Islamic World
 W Oct 10 The High Middle Ages 1000–1300
 F Oct 12 NO CLASS
 M Oct 15 Late Middle Ages 1300–1500
 W Oct 17 Renaissance Italy 1400–1550
 F Oct 19 Aztecs
 M Oct 22 **MIDTERM EXAM**
 W Oct 24 1492 and Globalization
 F Oct 26 Bartolomeo Scappi / Spanish Cuisine and the Baroque
 M Oct 29 Early Modern French Cuisine
 W Oct 31 England
 F Nov 2 Age of Mercantilism – Coffee, Tea and Chocolate
 M Nov 5 Native Americans
 W Nov 7 African Foodways
 F Nov 9 Traditional Japan (Edo)
 M Nov 12 Colonial North America
 W Nov 14 Industrial Revolution
 F Nov 16 Food Luddites
 M Nov 19 Restaurants and Gastronomy
 W & F Nov 21–23 THANKSGIVING BREAK
 M Nov 26 Late 19th c. Food Industry
 W Nov 28 Imperialism and Big Business
 F Nov 30 Immigrants
 M Dec 3 20th Century Teens to Thirties **RESEARCH PAPER DUE**
 W Dec 5 Fast Food
 F Dec 7 Slow Food
 M Dec 10 Frankenfoods
 W Dec 12 Extra Day Just in Case
 F Dec 14 Review
 M Dec 17 **Final** 8:00 AM