

**BAS 325**  
**Food: Culture and Society**  
**Spring 2007**  
**Syllabus**

**Time/Room:** W 6:00-8:45pm Blodgett Oak Room

**Instructors:** Ryan Carey, Maryann Tebben  
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**Office hours:** Ryan: T 2:00-3:00pm, TH 1:00-3:00pm and by appointment  
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Food plays an integral role in our daily lives, from the nutrition and calories that sustain our bodies, to the representations and cultures of food that engage our minds. A closer look at food reveals the complex ways in which it is intertwined in our past and present societies. To untangle those relationships, we will examine the impact of food in culture and as culture, in a national and international social context, and as a new interdisciplinary subject of analysis. Hamburgers in America, pot-au-feu in France, polenta in Italy, fu-fu in Ghana, and coffee in Venezuela conjure up different biological, cultural, and social processes that we often take for granted, from the development of imperial domination on coffee plantations, to union-busting labor practices at McDonalds; from the rise of ethnic cookbooks to the insinuation of the market and biotechnology in the global south through golden rice. The course will examine food from a number of different perspectives: biology--the genetically modified nature of modern cuisine; history--the links between foodways, social relations, and cultural change; geography--food as representative and constitutive of empire and globalization; politics-- consumption and distribution of food, famine and uneven development; literature--iconic representations of food in written works and film; and anthropology--food as cultural identity, taboo, and mythology.

This course fulfills the requirements for a B.A. Seminar in that it will undertake an analysis of a necessarily interdisciplinary topic. Academic approaches to food bring together scholars from radically different disciplines, such as the sciences, social sciences, the arts, and humanities. Because food is both material and cultural, this course will encourage students to take both of these facets into consideration. The course will require students to engage in a significant final research project of their own design that must be similarly interdisciplinary in scope.

**Major texts:**

Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, eds., Food and Culture: a Reader  
Michael Pollan, The Omnivore's Dilemma : a Natural History of Four Meals. New York : Penguin Press, 2006.

Irma S. Rombauer. Joy of Cooking 1931 Facsimile Edition: A Facsimile of the First Edition 1931. New York: Scribner; Facsimile edition, 1998. ISBN: 0684833581

Doris Witt. Black Hunger: Soul Food And America. University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Sydney Mintz, Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History (Penguin, 1990).

Vandana Shiva, Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply (South End Press, 2000)

Film: Big Night. Rysher Entertainment, 1996.

John Steinbeck. The Grapes of Wrath. Penguin, 2006. (originally published 1939).

Emile Zola. The Fat and the Thin. [Le Ventre de Paris. 1873] Trans. Ernest Vizetelly. Project Gutenberg.

**Supplemental texts (excerpts; on electronic reserve):**

Rachel Laudan, "A Plea for Culinary Modernism: Why we should love new, fast, processed food" Gastronomica 1(1) 2001; Massimo Montanari and Jean-Louis Flandrin, Food: A Culinary History; Richard Pells, Not Like Us; Bill Buford, Heat; Marcy Norton, "Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics," AHR, 111, no. 3 (June 2006); Rafia Zafar, "The Proof of the Pudding: Of Haggis, Hasty Pudding, and Transatlantic Influence" Early American Literature 1996 31(2): 133-149; Susan J. Leonardi, "Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster a la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie," PMLA 104, 3 (May 1989): 340-347; Cher Holt-Fortin, "A Loaf of Bread, a Jug of Wine, and Thou Beside Me in the Kitchen," Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture, Fall 2002, Volume 1, Issue 2; Roland Barthes, Mythologies; Anne Murcott, "Family Meals – A Thing of the Past?" in Pat Caplan, ed., Food, Health and Identity; Douglas Sackman, "Putting gender on the table: food and the family life of nature" in Virginia Scharff, ed., Seeing Nature Through Gender; Julia Child, The French Chef [television series]; Warren Belasco, Appetite for Change; Eric Schlosser, Fast Food Nation; the Dark Side of the All-American Meal; William Boyd, "Making Meat: Science, Technology, and American Poultry Production." Technology & Culture 42:4, (October 2001); James E. McWilliams. A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America.

## **Course Requirements and Grading**

### **Class Attendance and Participation (25%)**

Your attendance, preparation for class, and active participation are expected and necessary to succeed in this course. You are expected to prepare material for class discussion before class time in order to participate fully. Since this course meets only once per week, you are limited to one unexcused absence during the semester, after which you will receive a written warning. Further absences will result in suspension from the course.

### **Critical Commentaries (20%)**

Each class, students are required to write a one to two page critical analysis and question based on the required reading. These are short statements, from 500 words and up (*no more* than two pages). They should address the arguments and essential themes of the reading while critically analyzing the strengths or weaknesses of the author's argument by way of a question. The goal here is to learn how to read, think, and write about how scholars build an argument. What kind of assumptions do authors make, and how do those assumptions affect their point? Critical commentaries will not receive a letter grade; they will be graded with a plus, a check, or a minus.

### **Discussion Leader/Book Review (20%)**

Each student will be in charge of leading the discussion for one class session and will prepare one written book review of a relevant text from the list of suggested readings (or another approved text).

### **Final project/Practicum (35%)**

The final project has two components: a "practical" cooking component, and a scholarly research paper. Students will prepare a meal for the class that relates to their research paper and the readings for that class. Students must work together to combine their meals/projects in an intellectually and culinarily coherent presentation. The final paper, emanating out of course readings, outside research, and students' own experience in the kitchen, will be 15-20 pages long, must be fully and appropriately documented with a significant research component, but is otherwise open to students' imagination and scholarly interests. Please refer to the list of recommended resources for suggested texts. Topics for final projects must be pre-approved by the end of week 5.

**Recommended reading:**

- Peter Singer and Jim Mason. The Way We Eat. Rodale, 2006.
- Massimo Montanari. Food is Culture. Trans. Albert Sonnenfeld. Columbia UP, 2006.
- Massimo Montanari. The Culture of Food (Famine and Abundance). Trans. Carl Ipsen. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.
- Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. Physiology of Taste. Trans. M.F.K. Fisher. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.
- Harold McGee. On Food and Cooking. New York: Scribner, 1984.
- Alan Davidson. The Oxford Companion to Food. Oxford UP, 1999.
- Kenneth F. Kiple, Kriemhild Conee Ornelas, eds. The Cambridge World History of Food. Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Peter Scholliers, ed. Food, Drink, and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages. Oxford: Berg, 2001
- Fussell, Betty. The Story of Corn: The Myths and History, the Culture and Agriculture, the Art and Science of America's Quintessential Crop. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.
- Visser, Margaret. Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos of an Ordinary Meal. NY: Macmillan, 1986.
- D. Bell and G. Valentine. Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat. Routledge, 1997.
- Frances Moore Lappé, Anna Lappé, Hope's Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet. Tarcher, 2003.
- Pat Caplan, ed. Food, Health and Identity. Routledge, 1997.
- M.F.K. Fisher, The Art of Eating. 5th edition Wiley, 2004.
- Ruth Reichl. Tender at the Bone. Broadway, 1999.
- Stephen Mennell. All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present. Oxford, 1985.
- Richard Wilk, ed. Fast Food / Slow Food. Altamira Press, 2006
- Warren Belasco. Meals to Come: A History of the Future of Food. U of California P, 2006.
- Nicole Meyer and Amanda Smith. Paris in a Basket. Koneman, 2000.
- Jack Goody. Cooking, Cuisine and Class. Cambridge UP, 1982.
- Sidney Mintz. Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom. Beacon, 1997

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**\*\*Asterisked readings are required texts found on electronic reserve.\*\***

## **Week 1**

Introduction to course

\*Laudan, R. "A Plea for Culinary Modernism"

Exercise: Ken Albala, "A Global History of Food": Get started on analysis of a food artifact: a can of COKE. Think about this as much more than a simple slurp of sugary brown liquid. Think of all the people my act involves, and how it impacts peoples' lives all around the globe. Let's see how drinking a Coke is a cultural, social, political, aesthetic, psychological and maybe even spiritual thing. What ingredients? Who made them? Where? Why? How? Consequences? Who regularly consumes this? What is their class, gender, ethnicity, age group? Does drinking it serve some ritual or social function? Is it solitary? Why significant? What values does it represent? Consider convenience, affordability, efficiency, alertness. How about if it were Diet?

## **Week 2**

Pollan, part 1

Food and Globalization Part 1: Culture

\*Fischler, "The 'McDonaldization' of Culture" in Montanari, ed.

\*Pells, "The Europeanization of American Culture"

\*Montanari, "The Paradox of Globalization"

The Triplets of Belleville (film)

## **Week 3**

Food and Globalization Part 2: Science

Shiva, Stolen Harvest

\*Lappé, Hope's Edge, Chapter 6

## **Week 4**

Mintz, Sweetness and Power

Barthes, "Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption" in Counihan, ed.

## **Week 5      \*\*Final project topics approved by end of week\*\***

Foreign Commodities:

\*Norton, "Tasting Empire"

Allison, "Japanese Mothers and Obentos" in Counihan, ed.

Big Night (film)

Corn: \*Buford, Heat, Chapter 14

\*Zafar, "Proof of the Pudding"

\*Yves Péhaut, "The Invasion of Foreign Foods" in Montanari, ed.

## **Winter Break: February 24-March 4**

### **Week 6**

#### Joy of Cooking

\*Leonardi, "Recipes for Reading"

\*Holt-Fortin, "A Loaf of Bread"

Levi-Strauss, "The Culinary Triangle" in Counihan, ed.

\*Barthes, "Ornamental cuisine"

Resource: The Historic American Cookbook Project:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/html/project.html>

### **Week 7**

Pollan, part 2

Mennell, "On the Civilizing of Appetite" in Counihan, ed.

Bordo, "Anorexia Nervosa" in Counihan, ed.

\*Belasco, "Fighting Fat"

### **Week 8**

Devault, "Conflict and Deference" in Counihan, ed.

\*Sackman, "Putting Gender on the Table: Food and the Family Life of Nature," in Scharff, ed.

\*Murcott, "Family Meals – A Thing of the Past?" in Caplan, ed.

Julia Child, The French Chef (TV series)

### **Week 9**

Steinbeck, Grapes of Wrath

Visual art: representations of scarcity

Guest lecture: Gabriel Asfar, Professor of French and Arabic, on hunger

## **Spring Break: March 31-April 8**

### **Week 10**

Doris Witt, Black Hunger: Soul Food And America

### **Week 11**

Meat: \*Schlosser, "Cogs in the Great Machine," "The Most Dangerous Job"

\*Boyd, "Making Meat: Science, Technology, and American Poultry Production"

Harris, "The Abominable Pig" in Counihan, ed.

\*Buford, Heat, Chapter 24

\*Barthes, "Steak-frites"

**Week 12**

Pollan, part 3

Counihan, "Bread as World" in Counihan, ed.

\*Belasco, "Brown vs. White"

Slow Food

\*Belasco, "Slow Food vs. Fast Food", "Vegetable vs. Animal"

**Week 13**

Zola, The Fat and the Thin

\*Barthes "Le vin et le lait"

Coffee: \*McWilliams

**Week 14**

Summary of course

Presentations of final projects and feast