The Social Production of Food

Food is more than a means of sustenance; it mediates social relations, transmits cultural values, and underlies a great deal of economic activity. This course examines the social context shaping the literal and symbolic production of food. From the perspective of the symbolic dimension, we will consider the production of cultural meanings attached to food, its preparation, and rituals of eating. When thinking about the literal dimension, we will consider the institutional and industrial creation of food and meals, with a particular focus on their status as commodities in contemporary society. This agenda entails an examination of the social arrangements governing who makes decisions about, and who does the actual work of, food production and preparation, as well as studying the settings in which these processes occur. It also includes a consideration of how these different issues are related to gender and social class, and to the domestic and political spheres. In the first few weeks, we will focus on the variable meanings that food takes on, and the role that food plays in the formation of group identities and solidarity. Next, we consider the industrialization of the food supply and corresponding efforts to find alternatives. Finally, we consider the social agencies, from cookbooks and television cooking shows, to religious authorities, nutritional experts, government bodies, private enterprise, and educational institutions, which try, sometimes unsuccessfully, to shape tastes and habits in the realm of food. While we will read works from a number of perspectives, the primary emphasis of the course will be on how sociologists have addressed these issues.

Learning Goals

Students who complete this course will:

1. Explore how systems of food provision and consumption are related to social, cultural, and political factors
2. Gain an understanding of sociological perspectives on food and eating
3. Assess contemporary debates related to food production
4. Apply academic concepts and theories to concrete food products and processes

Requirements

Students are expected to keep up with the readings, attend class regularly, and actively participate in discussions. In addition, you will complete one short paper covering readings and other course material, a group project (with individual write-ups) tracing the origins of a manufactured food product, and a take-home final that relates course material to primary sources, such as menus or cookbooks.

I expect courtesy in the classroom. That means arriving to class on time, staying put once you are there, turning cell phones off before class begins, no texting, and no side conversations. Please
recognize how distracting these latter behaviors are for your classmates and your instructor. If you bring food or drink to class, remember to clean up after yourself.

My policy on laptops is that they should be used only for class-related purposes. Other uses are highly distracting for you, for me, and for those sitting around you. If I notice you reading email, checking Facebook, watching a broadcast or anything else not related to class, I will call you on it. If these behaviors become a persistent problem, then laptops will be prohibited in class.

**Evaluation**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First paper (4-5 pages)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food origin assignment</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take-home final</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</tbody>
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Students are expected to uphold standards of academic integrity. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use references and, where appropriate, quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, or ideas not your own -- whether they are found in written materials or on the Internet, and whether they are created by a published author, another student, or your parent. Violations of University policies on academic integrity may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. Students with questions about standards of academic integrity are advised to consult Section 4 of Rights and Responsibilities from the Brandeis Student Handbook and/or speak to me. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, you must ask for clarification.

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, you should contact me, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Academic Services at 736-3470 (brodgers@brandeis.edu). Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

The following books are available for purchase from the university bookstore:


The Poppendieck book is also on reserve at the main library. I have requested that the library purchase the McMillan book, and it should be on reserve by the assignment date.

The readings for weeks 1-4 are on the Latte site for this class. Look at the section titled "Readings."

All other readings are contained in a custom course packet. Information on how to purchase this will be announced in class.
There is also an area on Latte with links to organizations and other resources related to issues we will be discussing in class. This may be useful for those who would like to pursue these issues further, either during the course or sometime in the future. I may be adding to this site as the course progresses, so you may want to check it periodically.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1**

**Introduction**

Jan 14

**Meanings of Food and Eating**

**Weeks 1-2**

Jan 16-23

**What Is Fit to Eat: Tastes and Taboos**


**Week 3**

Jan 28-30

**Identity: Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism**


Social Conditions of Cooking and Eating


Industrializing the Food Supply

Why Cook? Processed and Packaged Food


short paper due Wednesday, February 13th

The Development of Agribusiness and Factory Farming


Labor: The Work of Food from Field to Finished Product

Globalization of the Food Supply


Distribution: Getting Food to Market


New Frontiers: Biotechnology


Curbing Illicit Appetites: Forms of Social Control

Instruction: Cookbooks and Cooking Shows

Janet Theophano, "Home Cooking: Boston Baked Beans and Sizzling Rice Soup as Recipes for Pride and Prejudice." In Sherrie A. Inness, ed., Kitchen Culture in


food origins paper due Monday, April 8th

**Claims to Authority**


**Is This Cook Wanted in the Kitchen? Government Regulation**


Feed the Children: School Food


Take-home final due Friday, May 3rd (seniors)
    Wednesday, May 8th (all others)