Course description:
Recent food movements — from veganism to anti-cancer diets, from international factory farming to protests against genetically modified food — bring into focus new linkages between what we eat and who we are. Reading anthropological and literary classics as well as recent writing on food and eating, we will explore a cross-cultural range of identities and socialities built through food production, preparation, and consumption. We will pay particular attention to how people use food to develop a sense of themselves as ethical beings. How do people — through what, and how, we do and do not eat — construct moral relationships with our bodies, with other people, with our cultural histories, with animals, with the environment?

Course Requirements:

- short written assignment 1 10% of final grade
- short written assignment 2 15%
- midterm exam 25%
- research paper 40%
- participation 10%

In lieu of a final exam, students will write a 10-page research paper. This paper can be an in-depth study of the foodways or cuisine in a particular society, an investigation of a particular food (its history, preparation, use, mythology, significance, etc.), or research on some other food-related topic of interest to the student. Papers must be guided by some aspect of anthropological theory and analysis. A list of possible topics will be distributed. A thesis statement, outline and initial bibliography will be due roughly a month before the end of the course. Students will present their research findings to the rest of the class.

Required Texts:


Books are available for purchase at Huntley bookstore, and will be on reserve in the library. All other readings are available as a Course Pack on sale at Huntley.
Outline of Readings and Assignments:

Wed. 9/4  Introduction to the course

Mon. 9/9  Why is the study of food central to anthropology?

read: Margaret Mead, The Changing Significance of Food, pp. 11-19 in Food and Culture (FC)

Roland Barthes, Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption, pp. 20-27 in FC

PART 1: HISTORICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO FOOD, EATING AND GASTRONOMY

Wed. 9/11  on the sense of taste

read: Brillat-Savarin (1825) The Physiology of Taste, 13-19; [skim 29-35]; 36-70

MFK Fisher (1943) from The Gastronomical Me, pp. 3-35.


written assignment: food memory
Write a 1-2 page, informal description of a food memory, preferably from your childhood. This could be a memory of tasting or liking/disliking a particular food, or it could be a memory focused on a particular eating event, collective or individual. Pay attention to as many senses as you can invoke to evoke this memory. DUE MONDAY 9/16.

Mon. 9/16  civilizing the appetite: the rise of gastronomy

read: Brillat-Savarin, 132-145; 155-171

Stephen Mennell, On the Civilizing of Appetite, 315-337 in FC

Wed. 9/18  aesthetics and aesthetes: eating and the ethical body

read: Caroline Walker Bynum, Fast, Feast, and Flesh: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women, 138-158 in FC

Brillat-Savarin, 176-183; 205-225


PART 2: ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THINKING FOOD

Mon. 9/23  structuralism: food is good to think

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read: Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Culinary Triangle, 28-35 in FC
Mary Douglas, Deciphering a Meal, 36-54 in FC

Wed. 9/25 functionalism: food is good to eat … in certain circumstances
read: Marvin Harris, The Abominable Pig, 67-79 in FC

E. N. Anderson, Traditional Medical Values of Food, 80-91 in FC

Mon. 9/30 symbolic-social analyses: what people do with food
read: Anna Meigs, Food as a Cultural Construction, 95-106 in FC

Marjorie Devault, Conflict and Deference, 180-199 in FC

Wed. 10/2 food and the making of gender

Anne Allison, Japanese Mothers and Obentos: The Lunch Box as Ideological State Apparatus, 296-314 in FC.

Mon. 10/7 taste and status
read: Brillat-Savarin, 71-73


Wed. 10/9 MIDTERM EXAM ON ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Mon. 10/14 food, culture and memory in Greece
read: David Sutton, Remembrance of Repasts, Introduction + Chapters 1-3.

Wed. 10/16 food, culture and memory
David Sutton, Chapters 4-5 + Conclusion.

Mon. 10/21 FALL BREAK
written assignment: eating nostaligically

Return to the food memory you wrote up at the beginning of class. Now you will do a bit of research to place your memory in wider context. Write a 4-page (double-spaced) essay on the cultural, symbolic, social, structural, or other meanings of this dish. Specify the social group for whom it has meaning, for what kinds of occasions and settings is this dish prepared, who is involved in the preparation, serving, and consumption of this dish, etc.

There are many ways to approach this assignment: 1) If you recalled a specific event, talk to others who were also present and see how they remember the event; analyze the similarities and discrepancies between your recollections; 2) If you remembered a specific dish, try to find the recipe for it. You may find multiple, slightly different recipes for a regional dish (say, gooey butter cake or black eyed peas) – if so, see how many varieties you can collect from friends, family members, and other sources (do not only look in Better Homes and Gardens or some other standard cookbook). If it is a family recipe that has one ‘original’ source (say, a great grandmother), see if others with access to this recipe have come up with modified versions. You might also try to interview at least one other person about his or her memories, feelings, associations with this dish and/or recipe.

DUE FRIDAY 10/25

PART 3: FOOD POLITICS

Wed. 10/23 production, consumption, and power
read: Carole Counihan, Bread as World: Food Habits and Social Relations in Modernizing Sardinia, in FC

[Fri. 10/25 WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE, in my mailbox in Scott Hall]

Mon. 10/28 colonial products and the power of food
read: Sydney Mintz, Sweetness and Power, pp. 3-150


Mon. 11/4 critiques of food development
read: Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, Beyond the Myths of Hunger: What we can do? pp. 402-411 in FC.

view film in class: In My Father’s Garden

Wed. 11/6 GMOs
Mon. 11/11  what’s in the meat?


PAPER PROPOSALS AND INITIAL BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE ON MONDAY 11/11

Wed. 11/13  politics of food distribution: hunger and obesity


Janet Fitchen, Hunger, Malnutrition, and Poverty in the Contemporary US, 384-401 in FC

Mon. 11/18  eating disorders: medical, political or both?

read: Brillat-Savarin, 226-230

Joan Jacobs Brumberg, The Appetite as Voice, 159-179 in FC

Susan Bordo, Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture, 226-250 in FC

handout: news stories on obesity and anorexia in the developing world

Wed. 11/20  NO CLASS HELD
[professor will be at the American Anthropological Association meetings]


Mon. 11/25  food and national identity


Brillat-Savarin, 74-81

Wed. 11/27  globalization of the food industry

read: Jack Goody, Industrial Food: Towards the Development of a World Cuisine. 338-356 in FC

Mon. 12/2 cultural critiques of the global food industry: the Slow Food movement
see www.slowfoodusa.org
Slow Food Manifesto (on-line)

Chapter 1 of Slow Food: Collected Thoughts on Taste, Tradition, and the Honest Pleasures of Food: “The Ark and the Deluge”; also “Unnatural Cooking”

Alice Waters, “Making Food the Educational Priority” at http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/feedingfuture/

David Hawkins, “Managing the Edible Schoolyard” at http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/gardendevelopment/

Wed. 12/4 cultural challenges — or accommodation? — to the global food industry

read: Chapters 4& 5 in Golden Arches East:


Mon. 12/9 PAPER PRESENTATIONS

Wed. 12/11 POTLUCK LUNCH (finishing up presentations if need be)

If possible, bring your “nostalgia food” or a Slow Food Ark suggestion!

FINAL PAPERS DUE FRIDAY 12/13