

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF FOOD & NUTRITION: WE ARE HOW WE EAT
Anthropology 330
Spring 2007

Professor Elaine Gerber

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Note: Since this course meets at lunchtime, feel free to bring food!

Course Description

How do people create and manipulate meanings for the foods they consume or for those from which they abstain? How do people use food to maintain social relations and to establish relations with supernatural beings? Biology may dictate that we eat, but culture teaches us what, how, and when. This course explores cross-cultural perspectives on food and food issues, using food as the entering point to understanding local social and cultural institutions, as well as global systems. We examine some of the cultural practices associated with food, such as feasting, fasting, and the flow of food as gifts and commodities and as local forms of knowledge (e.g. orally transmitted recipes, specialty cookbooks, and FoodTV). Offering a perspective on food from a cultural point of view in order to understand its powerful symbolic value, this course also considers the material conditions under which food is or is not consumed (i.e., obesity, malnutrition).

Objectives

At the completion of this course, students will be able to demonstrate through writing and discussion that they have:

- Developed requisite critical thinking skills in analyzing local social and cultural institutions, as well as global systems, as they relate to food.
- Be familiar with traditional anthropological notions of ritual, exchange, and kinship, among other current topics and theories.
- Will have considered practical strategies and solutions to global hunger/malnutrition and the domestic obesity epidemic

Required Readings

Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture by Marvin Harris

Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal by Eric Schlosser

Food & Culture: A Reader by Counihan and Van Esterik, eds.

Other than the two books, readings are located either in the Reader (Reader) or on Blackboard (Bb).

Grading and Course Requirements

30% - First Paper

30% - Second Paper

30% - Final

10% - Class Participation

Students are required to write 3 one-page “reaction papers” during the course of the semester. These can be on any of the readings of your own choosing. They should relate some aspect(s) of your life, society, or culture to the readings. Examples can come from the news media, television, films, the Internet, history, or from your own personal experience or family history. Please include your source, explaining its relation to the readings, and stating how it supports a particular argument or belief. The goal is to get you to think critically and apply new conceptual understandings to your everyday experience. You are expected draw your examples from a variety of sources throughout the semester.

Reaction papers are not graded, but you should bring them to class and be ready to include them in classroom discussion.

Students with Disabilities

Any student who is registered through the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD) is eligible for an accommodation based upon the impact of her/his disability. If you need such accommodations, please contact me privately and provide documentation from OSSD.

University Writing Policy

I expect that you should be able to coherently express yourself. Thus, all submissions should be typed, edited and proofread, in addition to adhering to standards established by the *University Writing Policy*.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty, within the context of the *MSU University Regulations and Disciplinary Procedures* portion of the Undergraduate and Graduate Student Handbook, is defined as “intentionally or knowingly giving or receiving aid on any test, exam, or academic exercise...collusion or purchase [of] term papers, and plagiarism.” A student found culpable for academic dishonesty will be subject to penalties.

The readings are organized according to the following broad themes (in order):

1. Background, Context, & Theory
2. Culture: Symbolism and Functionality
3. Contemporary Implications

Course Schedule

January 17

Introductions

January 22

The History of Food in the Field of Anthropology

January 24

Anthropological Theories through Food

Food, Meaning, and Voice (Ch 1-3) in Reader

January 29

Anthropological Theories through Food (cont)

Food, Meaning, and Voice (Ch 4-6) in Reader

January 31

Power and Globalism: Historical & Evolutionary Perspectives

Section from Jared Diamond book (chapter on domestication of plants?) (Bb)

February 5

Power and Globalism: Historical & Evolutionary Perspectives (cont)

ADD: Introduction (and other?) chapters from SALT. (Bb)

February 7

Potlatch and Food Exchange

Eating Christmas in the Kalahari (Bb)

Film: Disappearing World: Ongka's Big Moka - The Kawelka of Paupa, New Guinea

See also: <http://www.peabody.harvard.edu/potlatch/default.html>

February 12

Giving, Receiving, and Refusing Food

Commensality and Feasting (Ch 8, 10) in Reader

February 14

Giving, Receiving, and Refusing Food (cont)

Commensality and Feasting (Ch 11-13) in Reader

February 19

Giving, Receiving, and Refusing Food (cont)

Mother's Love: Death Without Weeping (Bb)

Selected readings tba (re: Schiavo Case) (Bb)

February 21

The Other White Meat, Ecological / Materialist perspectives

Good To Eat (Harris) Chapters

Film, tba

February 26

The Other White Meat, Ecological / Materialist perspectives (cont)

Chapters

February 28

Eating as Identity, Food as Medicine

Japanese Mothers and *Obentos*: The Lunch Box as State Apparatus (Ch 22) in Reader

Feeding China's Little Emperors (Introduction & Ch 5)-(Bb)

Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia (Ch 4)- (Bb)

McLanguage Meets the Dictionary (Bb)

Eating as Identity, Food as Medicine

Readings tba

(e.g., western cures for Rheumatoid arthritis, autism, & cancer; use of "raw food")

Chinese medicine

Harry Potter – "Drink your chocolate"

March 5

Written On The Body

Food, Body, and Culture (Ch 15, 17) in Reader

March 7

Written On The Body (cont)

Food, Body, and Culture (Ch 18-19) in Reader

SPRING RECESS

March 19

Written On The Body (cont)

American Women and Dieting: Fat Talk (Chapters 1 -3) - (Bb)

Sharp Rise in Eating Disorders in Fiji Follows Arrival of TV - (Bb)

Globalization of Beauty Makes Slimness Trendy - (Bb)

March 21

Active Living Research (ALR), universal design, and the built environment

March 26

Food Security, Food Deserts

Carmen Miranda on My Mind: International Politics of the Banana (Bb) –
Readings re contemporary context: greenmarkets as a solution to food deserts in poor neighborhoods, Community Supported Agriculture, etc (via Bb)
Excerpts from *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (Michael Pollan), via Bb
Industrial Tortillas and Folkloric Pepsi: The Nutritional Consequences of Hybrid Cuisines in Mexico: Jeffrey M. Pilcher (Bb)
Reading “GLOBAL WORLD HUNGER” (from W.H.O.), tba

March 28

NO CLASS

April 2

Food Security, Food Deserts (cont)

Selected readings (ongoing research by Kinne; Webber et al in DSQ)

April 4

Modern American Food Production

Fast Food Nation (Schlosser) ...Chs>>>>

Film?

April 9

Modern American Food Production

Fast Food Nation (Schlosser) ...Chs>>>>

April 11

Film: Beyond Organic: The Vision of Fairview Gardens

<http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/bo.html>

Cappucino Trail (film available at MSU)

April 16

Green Markets, Sustainable Agriculture, and the Slow Food Movement

Excerpts from *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (Michael Pollan), via Bb

April 18

Safe Food

Safe Food: Bacteria, Biotechnology, and Bioterrorism, Part II (Bb)

April 23

Safe Food (cont)

Film: Deconstructing Supper: Is Your Food Safe?

<http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/decon.html>

April 25
Summary & Review Session

April 30
FINAL EXAM (in class)

2nd PAPER DUE
1st PAPER DUE

NOTE: YOUR FINAL EXAM WILL TAKE PLACE IN CLASS ON MONDAY, APRIL 30th

Other films include:

The Greening of Cuba
Cappuccino trai: the global economy in a cup
The Omnivore: satisfying humanity's hunger
The Crooked beak of heaven (Potlatch)

About Writing Assignments

Writing Assignment #1: Observe Someone Eating

DUE: **WEEK 4 – October 13**

Anthropologists rely on several methods to collect their data, including participant-observation. Spend 15 minutes observing someone eating, and take "field" notes. You can choose your own field location and research informant. Write 3-5 pages based on your observations, describing this experience to an outsider. Stronger papers will integrate content from class as well.

Writing Assignment #2: Local Knowledge Project, Film Critique, or Policy Analysis

DUE: **WEEK 8 – November 10**

Option 1: "Local knowledge" (see Geertz 2000) about food comes in many forms (e.g. orally transmitted recipes, specialty cookbooks, FoodTV). Pick one example of local knowledge, and write a 3-5 page cultural analysis, interpreting the material using theory from our readings. What can you learn about the culture from this product?

Option 2: Watch and critique two food films from the list below. Write a 3-5 page cultural analysis, interpreting the material using theory from our readings. What can you learn about the culture(s) – and their food production, eating habits, rituals, etc – from these films?

Approved films: Babette's Feast; Big Night; Eat Drink Man Woman; Chocolat; My Dinner with Andre; Like Water for Chocolate; Look Who's Coming To Dinner; Pulp Fiction; Soul Food; Eating; Tampopo; The Wedding Banquet; Black Gold: Wake Up and Smell the Coffee. Others may be acceptable with instructor's approval.

Option 3: Write a 3-5 page "Executive Summary" outlining your proposal for solutions/suggestions to improve one of the contemporary topics discussed in this course.

As with all the assignments, more detail will be provided in class.