V14.XXXX: Culture Through Food

Spring 04, T & TH, 11-12:15. 25 Waverly Pl, rm 612

Prof. Thomas Abercrombie
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Course Description:
Like shelter, food is crucial to human life. It is not surprising therefore, that it has also been a central topic in anthropology. Whatever their diverse theoretical approaches, for cultural anthropology food is never "just food". Its significance can never be purely nutritional. Food is intimately tied up with social relations, including those of power, of inclusion and exclusion, as well as ideas about classification, the human body and human health. This course surveys a range of anthropological approaches to the study of food focusing on topics such as: Food, meaning and voice; food as symbol, feasts and famine, food an the self; food and the political economy; cannibalism and food taboos; food and the body; food and the politics of globalization. Our ethnographic focus will be broad, and the range of readings eclectic. The course will include clips from feature and documentary film. Students will be asked to complete a number of short ethnographic and writing assignments throughout the semester utilizing the resources of New York City, as well as web and library research.

Course Requirements:
All students will be graded on the following work, for a total of 100 points:
*20% Reaction papers (10 at 2 pts each): Students are expected to respond to course readings for one session per week, posting their responses to the class discussion board by 5pm on the days before classes (Monday and Wednesday). Write in a direct, concise, telegraphic manner, a synopsis of the arguments of class readings, pointing out strengths and weaknesses, relation to the issues of the course and to other readings, and raising questions for discussion. Write no more than a few screens-full (between 250 and 500 words); shorter and more concise is better. You may feel free to react, as well, to other students postings, as long as your comments are courteous and responsible (no critiques). Postings must be signed, not anonymous. There are 14 weeks in the semester, and you are responsible for at least 10 on-time postings of ordinary reaction papers.
*10% Discussion kick-off (two, at 5pts each, signed up in advance): In addition to your 10 weekly reaction papers, each student must write a more elaborated (but still under 500
word) reaction, ending with a series of questions or comments, and present these questions at the beginning of class (on two occasions) to kick-off the discussion. Two students will kick off each class. You may divide your labors and collaborate. Oral presentation should be very brief (5 minutes), raising your discussion points.

*5% Food preparation/discussion: Once during the semester, each student will prepare and serve a food item related to course themes, very briefly introducing it (5 minutes max). We will generally do this on Tuesdays, with two students responsible per class. You may collaborate with each other if you wish. A full meal is not expected but there should be enough for a taste for all, and the preparation/foodstuff should be good to think.

*30% Ethnographic exercises (two, at 15% each): These will involve interviewing, observation, and/or participant observation on topics to be assigned. The written result of each exercise should be about 3 pages long (typed, double-spaced), turned in with your raw notes. One exercise will be due on March 2, the second one due on April 13. Assignments will be posted on Blackboard.

*35% Final research paper/take-home exam: Write a research paper on a topic of your choosing, related to class themes, and approved (by mid-semester) by the instructor. If you wish, you may incorporate material from your ethnographic exercise, or write about something else entirely. Your TAs, both food specialists, will be helpful in focusing your research project. The final paper should be 10 pages (double-spaced, one inch margins) in length, plus bibliography, and should follow professional standards of citation and footnoting. Alternatively, you may choose to write a take-home exam (distributed on the last day of class, due, like the research paper, on the final exam date of Thursday, May 6th, at 10 am, in Prof. Abercrombie's mailbox at 25 Waverly Place)

To do well in this class, students must keep up with readings and attend all lectures. The content of films, plates, and class presentations constitute an integral part of the course and will be included in take-home final paper topics. There are no make-ups. Students discovered to plagiarize papers (copy other people's writing or closely paraphrase without citing the source), or cheat on exams, will receive an F and be recommended for disciplinary action.

Books Available at NYU Bookstore:
** = required, we will read most or all of the book
* = recommended, we will read part of the book
All readings will be available on course reserve in Bobst Library. Apart from required books, other required readings will be available as PDF files or web links on blackboard. Videos with a call number can be viewed at the Avery Fisher Collection, 2nd Floor of Bobst Library.

*Conklin BA. Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society.
University of Texas, 2001.
**Counihan, Carole M. The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power. Routledge, 1999.**
**Kurlansky, Mark. Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World. Penguin USA, Reprint ed, 2003.**
**Mintz, Sidney W. Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History. Viking Press; Reprint ed, 1995.**
*Pilcher, Jeffrey M. Que Vivan Los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity. U. New Mexico, 1998.*
**Sutton, David E. Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory. Berg, 2001.**

Class Schedule:

Jan. 20: Introduction.
Read: Counihan, ch. 1
Sahlins excerpt from Culture and Practical Reason.

I. Edible/Inedible: The Original Divide:

Jan. 22: Myth and the origins of cooking and mortality
Read: Hesiod on Prometheus (from Theogony, lines 453-616
http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Hesiod/theogony.html
Jean-Pierre Vernant, Myth and Society in Ancient Greece

Jan. 27: Cannibalism to Sacrifice:
Read: Columbus letter
Montaigne, On Cannibals (see link in Assignments section)
Herodotus, The Histories, Bk 4 (pp. 216-225, 235, 239-240, 249-251)
Sahlins, M. Culture as Protein and Profit, NYRB 25 (18):45-53

Jan. 29: Sacrifice to Cannibalism
Kick: Jasmine Greene
Read: Valeri: "Theories of sacrifice." In Kingship & Sacrifice, pp. 62-83.
Conklin, Consuming Grief, chs. 1 & 5.
Bible, King James Version, Leviticus 9
View: Delicatessen, call # VCA 9970;
II. Food and Religion: Symbolism, Boundary Marking, and Commensality

Feb. 3: Pigs and Semites:  
Kick: Erica Fretwell, Seth Thomases. Food: none  
Bible, King James Version, Leviticus 11

Feb. 5: Cannibal Christians and Commensal Communities:  
Kick: Grace Garrison. Food: none  
Read: Bynum, ch. 2, Fast and Feast .  

Feb. 10: Imitating, Feeding, and Eating Christ  
Kick: Kate Bradley, Kristin Skrabut. Food: none  
Read: Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, chs. 4, 6

Feb. 12: Heretical Meals:  
Kick: Jesse Lichstein, Katherine Stout. Food: none  
Bynum, chs. 8, 9  
View: Jamon, Jamon - call # VCA 7447

III. Manipulating Meanings and Social Categories: Ritual Inversion, Embodiment, and Defilement

Feb. 17: Carnivals and Pogroms: Jews, Matzoh, Sausages:  
Kick: Michelle Moore, Tracy Boulian. Food: Seth Thomases  
Francois Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel Book 1, IV, XI, XIII; Book 2, XXVIII to XXXI
Bahktin, Rabelais and His World, ch. 5 "The Grotesque Image of the Body and Its Sources"
View: Babette's Feast, call # VCA 5242

Feb. 19: Cod and Contrition: Empire of Fish
Read: Kurlansky, Cod.
Kick: Patricia Cabal, Alicia Kurl. Food: Michael Strickland

IV. Colonialism and World Systems

Feb. 24: Sugar and the World System
Kick: Patricia Cabal, Kristin Skrabut. Food: Michelle Moore
Read: Mintz, Sweetness and Power, chs. 1, 2
View: either H-2 Worker, call#VCA 2230; or Black Harvest, Call # VCA 8576 (for those who have seen First Contact).

Feb. 26: Tea, Bread, Jam, and the Industrial Laborforce: Working class meals
Read: Mintz, Sweetness and Power, chs. 3-5

Mar. 2: (Mardi Gras): African Rice
Kick: Kate Bradley, Olivia Liddell. Food: none
Read: Carney, Black Rice, intro through ch. 3 (pp1-106)

V. Food and cuisine of the Americas: creolization, American commodities, & social categories

Mar. 4: Africanizing the American Plate
Kick: Megan Hicks, Katerine Stout. Food: Olivia Liddell
Read: Carney, Black Rice, chs. 7-conclusion (pp107-177)

Mar. 9: American Cuisines I: Maize, Potatoes, Capsicum, Chunu and Charki
Kick: Amy Alaniz, Ronnie Yoked. Food: Wade Maynard
Pilcher, Que Vivan, ch. 1
Mar. 11: American Cuisines II: Chocolate, Poison, Markets, and Scullery Maids
Kick: Jessie Lichstein, Aliza Pescovitz. Food: Aliza Pescovitz
Read: Coe, The True History of Chocolate, ch's. 1,3,5, and
Wolf, Europe and the People Without History, Introduction and selections from ch.11
"The Movement of Commodities."

Mar. 16, Mar. 18 (Spring Break)

Mar. 23: Creole Cuisines and Social Differentiation:
Kick: Alicia Kurl, Olivia Liddell. Food: Jasmine Greene
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. All except ch 2.

Mar. 25: Food, Class, Race: Unmixing the Meltingpot in Kitchen and Market:
Kick: Wade Maynard, Grace Garrison. Food: Amy Alaniz
Read: Chambers, Sarah. From Subjects to Citizens, ch. 3
Weismantel, Cholas and Pishtacos, ch. 3

Mar. 30: Creole Cuisines: Food, Hygiene, and Nation
Kick: Erica Frettwell, Amy Alaniz. Food: Erica Fretwell
Read: Pilcher, Que Vivan los Tamales, chs. 2-end

VI. Distinction, Identity, Power

Apr. 1: Food as Social Distinction: Educating Palates in Cafes and Restaurants
Kick: Michael Strickland, Kim Wong. Food: Ronnie Yoked
Read: Bourdieu, Distinction, Intro and selections of ch 1 and 3; (also: optional reading on
habitus, from Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice, ch.2)
View: A TV cooking show of your choice (option: an old Julia Child show would be
ideal); and (optional - April fool - The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, call # VCA
776)

Apr. 6: Craft, Terroir, and Regional Identity
Kick: Seth Thomases. food: Mayke Prezkop
Read: Terrio, Susan. Crafting the Culture and History of French Chocolate, chs. 2, 7, 10,
Rec: Reed-Danahay, Deborah. "Champagne and Chocolate: 'Taste' and inversion in a

Apr. 8: Civilizing Processes Around the Table:
Kick: Kim Wong, Tracy Boulian. Food: none
View: Vatel, call # dvd 1590

VII. Family and gender at mealtime

Apr. 13: Food and Family: Consubstantiation.
Kick: Michelle Moore, Mayke Prezkop. Food: Kristin Skrabut, Katherine Stout
Read: Counihan, chs. 2, 3, 9
View: Big Night, call # vca 7865;
(optional film: Eat, drink, man, woman # vca 9045)

Apr. 15: Reasons to eat ? or not to eat (Food, love, and nurturing; Fat and thin.).
Kick: Aliza Pescovitz, Christina Santangelo. Food: Jesse Lichstein
Counihan, ch. 10, and either 5 or 6

VIII. Food and heritage

Apr. 20: Food and memory, food and the senses.
Kick: Mayke Prezkop, Christina Santangelo. Food: Kim Wong
Read: Sutton, Remembrance of Repasts, chs. Intro-3
View: Like Water For Chocolate, call # DVD 1180

Apr. 22: Food as National/Regional Heritage: Inventing Food Traditions.
Kick: Ronnie Yoked. Food: Christina Santangelo
Read: Sutton, Remembrance of Repasts, chs. 4-end

IX. Globalization and food habits

Apr. 27: Slow food/Fast food (food, ideology, and local identity).
Kick: Amy Alaniz, Jasmine Greene. Food: Katherine Stout
Read: Eric Schlosser, "Introduction" in Fast Food Nation, pp1-10 and ch 9, "What's in the Meat", pp193-224,
browse www.slowfoods.com, see the Slow Food Manifesto

Kick: Megan Hicks. Food: Grace Garrison
Read: Allison James, "Cooking the Books: Global or Local Identities in Contemporary British Food Cultures"

View: Harvest of Fear, call # VCA 10651
(Rec: chapter 2 "McDonald's in Hong Kong: Consumerism, Dietary Change, and the Rise of Children's Culture" by Watson in Golden Arches East and
ch 5 "McDonald's in Japan: Changing Manners and Etiquette" by Ohnuki-Tierney in Golden Arches East.)