CHAPTER 24

FOOD, RACE, AND ETHNICITY

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A Chinese sage noted more than two thousand years ago that food and sex were the most basic human desires. Since Freud, our understanding of human sexuality has advanced greatly. By comparison, the importance of food remains underappreciated. Food is the most basic need of the human body, and what we eat and how we eat bespeaks our relationship with the natural environment. But its importance extends beyond physical necessity to reflect the multitude of relationships that we form with others as individuals, communities, and nations. Individuals and societies have embedded political, socioeconomic, and cultural meaning in food. Our notions about what is edible and desirable and what is not convey deeply rooted ideas about ourselves and powerful ideologies about our relations with others. The old saying, “we are what we eat,” has inspired an often-unspoken corollary that those who eat differently are not like us. Thus, food has played an important role as a marker of identity throughout history.

Although humans have always separated “us” from “them,” the ways they do so have changed over time. In the modern era, notions of difference have been cloaked in the seemingly scientific language of race and ethnicity. Nineteenth-century authors varied in the categories they used—some defined at least three separate races in Europe alone—but their taxonomies shared a common belief that racial characteristics were inherited at birth and could not be changed. In the twentieth century, as the scientific basis for racial distinction was revealed to be fraudulent, scholars increasingly used the notion of ethnicity to indicate group differences that derived from more mutable cultural patterns such as food and language. In popular usage in the United States and Britain, there has been a tendency to use the word race in discussions of black-white relations, while ethnicity is reserved for

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relationships among non-black groups. Yet the boundaries between these two categories easily become blurred through a process of “racialization,” which emerges from the perception of difference, both physical and cultural, of a particular group from the mainstream. Chinese Americans, for instance, were long regarded as an inferior race with both distinct physical features and despicable cultural characteristics. Such fluidity in the use of these two words helps explain why in popular culture, all non-mainstream cuisines, including those of African Americans, are called “ethnic” food.

The racialization of foodways derived from a number of sources, not only the association of particular groups with foodstuffs, but also the forced production of foods by slaves and servants for the consumption and enjoyment of others. In social contexts, where racial differences entailed discrepancy in power, food and food systems have facilitated and symbolized the political oppression and economic exploitation of racial and ethnic minorities. At the same time, however, minorities have used food as a symbol of resistance and even as an effective weapon against their oppressors.

Modern racialization is paralleled by other connections between food, identity, and power that have recurred throughout human history. The dichotomy of “pure” and “polluted,” noted by Mary Douglas, establishes both the centrality and the socially constructed nature of our ideas about the edibility of food. The Jews, for instance, have used dietary restrictions to define themselves as the chosen people. Moreover, the cultural differences articulated through food are often hierarchical, reflecting discrepancies in power. In his study of myth in the indigenous communities in South America, Claude Lévi-Strauss has explored “the raw” and “the cooked” as binary categories to characterize the difference between nature and culture in a stratified way, with nature representing the emotional and instinctive, while culture was associated with the rational and intellectual. In China, for example, during the Qing Dynasty (1646–1911), the native people of Taiwan were classified into “raw” and “cooked” depending on their degree of acculturation. Modern national consciousness is also articulated in terms of food, creating emotional bonds between insiders and excluding those considered unfit for the nation. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney has described how rice became an icon of the national identity of the Japanese, who regard “rice as our food” and “rice paddies as our land.”

As socially constructed categories, race and ethnicity vary from one society to another. This essay focuses on the United States, where a particularly complicated set of racial and ethnic patterns emerged historically from the mixing of diverse European settlers and non-white peoples. Food provides special insights into the complexities of race and ethnicity in American history. Politically, mainstream society has persistently targeted the culinary traditions of racialized groups in an effort to transform or exclude them. In so doing, food became a powerful metaphor and tool of those seeking to define and redefine the racial character of the nation. The racial and ethnic hierarchies that evolved in this process also mirrored the socioeconomic inequalities in food consumption and production patterns. Such inequalities reveal the intersections of race and ethnicity with class and gender.
This essay seeks to provide a historical narrative of the connections between food, race, and ethnicity based on both primary research and secondary sources. The colonial roots of American regional cooking emerged as status-conscious early modern settlers sought to recreate European societies in the New World. The demands of subsistence in a frontier society made them dependent on Native American and African foods, but they nevertheless transformed these goods to make them fit within European categories of health and status. In the nineteenth century, the so-called “old stock” descendants of earlier settlers sought to exclude or assimilate new immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Latin America. These efforts often took the form of “food fights,” struggles for national identity between that pitted Anglo, industrial foods against the supposed unhealthy and unsanitary foods of newcomers. Earlier patterns of exclusion and inequality continued into the twentieth century, even as assimilated versions of ethnic foods gained widespread popularity. Eventually, corporate versions were challenged in the marketplace by the foods of new migrants, particularly after the passage of immigration reform in 1965. Despite recurring patterns of exclusion and assimilation, the emerging scholarship on food, race, and ethnicity has not yet become a settled field of inquiry. This essay will seek to provide an introduction to basic concepts, important studies, and ongoing debates.

THE CULTURAL AND GASTRONOMICAL ROOTS OF MAINSTREAM AMERICA

In encounters with non-Anglo cultures, early settlers were determined to maintain their own supremacy and to remain loyal to Anglo cultural roots, particularly their traditional foods. The decimation of American Indian populations through warfare and disease opened abundant land for raising crops and livestock. Moreover, African slaves provided a skilled agricultural labor force that was acclimated to the intense summer conditions of the southern colonies. With these advantages, settlers gained wide access to those British dietary staples of beef, beer, and bread by the mid-eighteenth century. The gentry and merchants could even import luxury goods such as Madeira, cookbooks, tableware, and tea. Nevertheless, culinary blending had already begun to take place, mixing European with Native and African foods. To preserve their own sense of purity, the colonists began a longstanding tradition of repressing the historical memory of non-European cultural contributions.

The uneasy culinary relationship between European colonists and American Indians revolved around maize. In the harsh first winters, colonists at both Jamestown and Plymouth depended for survival on corn produced by local Indians. Yet Trudy Eden, in her book *The Early American Table* (2008), explains the great lengths that early settlers went to avoid eating it, a reluctance based on the belief that ingesting into Indian to their cult manner, rat...
that ingesting American foods would literally transform their European bodies into Indian bodies. Instead, the settlers sought to transform maize, adopting it to their cultural norms. They planted the seeds in neat rows in the proper English manner, rather than intercropped with beans and squash according to Indian practices. Moreover, they prepared it European-style by feeding it to livestock, cooking it as cornbread or johnnycake, and distilling it into whiskey. Still, the most common method of consumption, indeed, the staple food in British North America, hominy, utilized native alkaline processing technologies to maximize the plant's nutritional value. Rather than acknowledge this debt, settlers condemned the Indians as uncivilized, in part because of different gender roles; women cultivated the soil while men went off to hunt, a frivolous, aristocratic pursuit in British eyes. Nevertheless, colonists profited from Native hunting skills by exchanging valuable pelts for distilled spirits, thereby contributing to a new stereotype of the “drunken Indian.”

African slaves also had a profound and historically overlooked role in the creation and development of British foods, both in the American colonies and in the metropolis. Sidney Mintz, in his seminal work *Sweetness and Power* (1985), tells how the emergence of sugar as a coveted commodity and an increasingly present food was a racialized process: its production by African slaves for European consumers. Judith Carney has described the role of African slaves in the creation of another important colonial staple, rice. Noting important continuities between West African and Carolina rice agriculture, she concluded that British colonial planters relied on their slaves for the knowledge, as well as the labor, to construct elaborate networks of levies and floodgates for growing rice in the wetlands around Charleston. The skilled work of African women was equally indispensable for milling the rice with mortar and pestle, a backbreaking chore that also required considerable dexterity. Together with coauthor Richard Rosomoff, Carney has recently offered a broad survey of the impact of African foods, farming, and cooking methods on the Americas. While pointing to the ways that slave ship provisioning and slave subsistence production facilitated the survival of African skills under the yoke of slavery, the authors also seek to recover the historical memory of this African connection from hegemonic accounts that attribute agricultural innovation exclusively to European planters.

The silencing of African American cooks, as well as the historiographical controversy surrounding Carney’s “black rice thesis,” is due in part to the dehumanizing consequences of plantation slavery. Yet many scholars have noted the ability of slaves to utilize “weapons of the weak” such as self-provisioning and theft to preserve agency within the oppressive system. Particularly in the decades prior to abolition, planters came to depend for subsistence on slave market vendors, giving them a measure of power and, in the words of Mintz, a “taste of freedom.”

Diverse European settlers also contributed to cultural diversity within British North America, yet they too were largely assimilated into a hegemonic colonial cuisine. Germans, Dutch, and Swedes introduced to the Middle Colonies a range of dishes, including sausage, sauerkraut, waffles, and scrapple. In the South,
meanwhile, as Marcie Cohen Ferris has explained in her delightful book *Matzoh Ball Gumbo* (2005), Jewish residents of early Charleston and Savannah negotiated regional and religious identities at the table, adapting the prescriptions of kashrut to the demands of Southern hospitality. James McWilliams concludes: "One of the most exceptional characteristics of colonial British America, in fact, was its ability to absorb non-English immigrants while simultaneously allowing them to selectively preserve and adopt culinary practices to a very British society."!

Even after declaring political independence from Britain, the English-speaking colonists maintained their allegiance to Anglo foodways and their suspicion of foreign items. Regional cooking traditions became increasingly prominent in the culinary literature that emerged in the early republic. Works such as Amelia Simmons's *American Cookery* (1796), Lucy Emerson's *The New England Cookery* (1808), and Mary Randolph's *The Virginia Housewife* (1828) largely obliterated the role of Native Americans and the native roots of New World foods that remained the centerpiece of mainstream America. Thus, corn became known as a southern food, and tomatoes became Italian. Harvey Levenstein describes this process as a form of "British-American culinary conservatism," while quoting a British-American television personality as saying: "A Briton telling an American about cooking is like the blind leading the one-eyed."!

In a still-unrivaled social history, *Revolution at the Table* (1988), Levenstein offers ample evidence that the persistence of bland, white American foodways was rooted in efforts to preserve a sense of racial purity. Such efforts, however, would confront challenges in the years that followed from a succession of new migrants.

**EXCLUSION AND ASSIMILATION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

During "the century of immigration," from the 1820s to the 1920s, millions of newcomers arrived in the United States, predominantly from Europe. The historical memory of a "nation of immigrants" conjures a welcoming attitude: "Give me your tired, your poor..." in the hopeful words of Emma Lazarus, enshrined at the base of the Statue of Liberty. In fact, the "huddled masses" were precisely the ones that white leaders feared as a threat to the nation's racial purity. Historian Erika Lee has observed that this period marks the rise of the United States as a "gatekeeper" nation, excluding first the Chinese, then progressively more groups, culminating with the highly restrictive immigration quota laws of the 1920s.

The labor demands of industrialization made complete restriction impossible in the decades around the turn of the century, but reformers insisted on assimilating those immigrants who were admitted into proper notions of civilization, starting with their cooking habits. The bland British diet promoted by home economists, however,
had little appeal to new immigrants, who transplanted their traditional cuisines and ultimately enriched the national culture.

The Irish immigrants who fled the Great Famine illustrate the racialization of foreigners in mid-nineteenth-century America. As colonial subjects since the sixteenth century, the Irish had long been considered inferior by the British, and newspaper illustrations often depicted them as equivalent to blacks. Their Catholic religion also set the Irish apart from the largely Protestant Anglo elite. Nevertheless, their labor was in great demand, particularly as domestic servants for middle-class households. The abundant ridicule and criticism of the Irish servant girl in cartoons and cookbooks magnified the prevalence of both the Irish servant girl as a racialized occupation and of anti-Irish prejudice. For example, *The American Woman's Home* (1869), coauthored by the domestic educators and abolitionist campaigners Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, contained obvious Anglo biases toward the Irish servant girl, whom they referred to as “a creature of immense bone and muscle, but of heavy, unawakened brain.”

Here, the prejudice also has a class basis in references to the peasantry. Hasia Diner, in her masterful study of immigrant foodways, offers further evidence of Anglo Americans’ distrust: “Rhetorical associations between Irish servant women and culinary disasters abounded in private writing and journalism.”

The case of Chinese food also offers valuable insights into the racialization of minority groups and their foods, as well as the deep cultural roots of racism and prejudice. Already in the early nineteenth century, China represented the largest potential market for American manufactured goods and the largest field for Christian evangelical missionaries. Through these early encounters, Americans developed a lasting image of Chinese as an exotic, backward people with deplorable foodways. S. Wells Williams, who arrived as a missionary printer in 1833, captured Western perceptions: “the articles of food which the Chinese eat, and the mode and ceremonies attending their feasts, have aided much in giving them the old character they bear abroad.” He continued: “Travelers have so often spoken of birds' nest soup, canine hams, and grimalkin fricassee, rats, snakes, worms, and other culinary novelties, served up in equally strange ways, that their readers get the idea that these articles form as large a proportion of the food as their description does of the narrative.”

As Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States, beginning with the California Gold Rush of 1849, their food habits became the target of derision both by elite Anglo restrictionists and by labor leaders who feared competition from so-called “coolie” workers. Eager to maintain its racial character as an Anglo nation, journalists projected Chinese food as a threat to the bodily health of the nation. A satirical article from 1854 reported: “A California paper gives the following as a bill of fare at a Chinese restaurant in that city: 'Cat Cutlet, 25 cents; Griddled Rats, 6 cents; Dog Soup, 12 cents; Roast Dog, 18 cents; Dog Pie, 6 cents.'” The notion that Chinese food contained rat meat became a popular urban legend, and its reverberations can still be heard today. Union leaders meanwhile feared that competition from Chinese subsisting on rice would drive down the wages of white
workers, making it impossible for them to afford a proper diet of meat. In 1902, the American Federation of Labor published an influential pamphlet entitled: Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion: Meat vs. Rice: American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism: Which Shall Survive? For white Americans, meat represented material abundance, power, and masculinity, while rice was associated with scarcity, weakness, and femininity. Thus, foods were not only racialized but also gendered. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 responded to these fears by forbidding Chinese workers from entering the country and reaffirming the racist principle that Chinese immigrants could not become naturalized citizens.

Domestic cookery became an important battlefield in a turn-of-the-century food fight to define the American nation. In Revolution at the Table, Harvey Levenstein has told this story based on the works of Progressive-era food reformers and home economists, who sought to educate immigrant women to prepare healthy, economical, and most importantly American foods. A pot roast and boiled vegetables fit their cultural notions of a proper meal; a bowl of spaghetti with tomato sauce and grated cheese did not. For Levenstein, this dietary revolution followed a declensionist narrative of corruption through industrialization and assimilation. Hasia Diner examines the same historical moment in her book Hungering for America (2001), but from the perspective of European immigrants. Through a careful reading of immigrant memoirs, she challenges simplistic accounts of Americanization, noting that generational conflicts and social mobility within ethnic communities were more important sources of change than the campaigns of food reformers. She explains that foods contributed to dualistic identities, maintaining ethnic traditions in some situations while adopting national affiliations in others. Ultimately, she provides a classic immigrant tale of Old World hunger overcome by moving to America.

Levenstein makes an important point that with the rise of the food processing industry at the end of the nineteenth century, pure food became associated with neatly packaged, canned, and branded items marketed by national firms. Yet not all industrial foods were created equal, as Donna Gabaccia has shown in a prosopographic study of the ethnic origins of food entrepreneurs. The industries targeted by muckraking journalists such as Upton Sinclair were largely run by immigrant businessmen, most notably, meatpacking, with prominent Scots, Irish, and Jewish leaders. Progressive-era outrage also focused on alcohol, produced by German brewers in the Midwest and Italian and Central European vintners in California, and destined for predominantly urban, immigrant consumers. By contrast, market sectors dominated by Anglo firms such as milling and baking became emblems of national development. Thus, Progressivism and Prohibition reflected, in part, a xenophobic attempt to protect the nation from undesirable outsiders.

The racialization of industrial foods involved exclusion and subjugation on the one hand, and the creation of idealized white domestic models on the other. Betty Crocker, invented in 1921 by the Washburn-Crosby Company, which seven years later merged with other mills to create the world’s largest flour company, served to communicate with consumers and to advertise General Mills products. An
unmistakably Anglo presence on the radio and in print, she did her job effectively, and in 1945, Fortune magazine ranked her as the second most popular woman after Eleanor Roosevelt, calling her "America's First Lady of Food."20 In comparison to this caretaker of family and racial identity, African American women were portrayed as paid cooks and housekeepers. Before creating Betty Crocker, Washburn-Crosby had used advertising images of a "mystic Mammy."21 The best known of such figures was of course Aunt Jemima, also created by Midwestern flour millers to sell pancake mix in the late nineteenth century. Based on a minstrelsy act, perhaps performed originally by a white man in blackface and drag, the advertisements appropriated the iconography of slavery for modern capitalism. Doris Witt explains: "Aunt Jemima pancake mix not only contributed to the widespread naturalization of black women's culinary abilities, in effect, denying that their cooking as slaves and domestic servants was a form of expropriated labor, but they also enabled the product's purchasers to disavow knowledge of the labor... of an emergent class of factory food workers, many of them immigrant women."22

African American foodways were subject to ridicule in an attempt to maintain white supremacy following the abolition of slavery. Psyche Williams-Forson has examined the pervasive and denigrating image of the black as a chicken thief, a petty crime which nevertheless conveyed the supposed illicit desire of blacks to possess all the white man's property, including white women. Black men were even anthropomorphized into chickens through the figure of "Zip Coon," a dandy who preened like a cock in fancy but shabby clothes, and served to mock blacks with aspirations. Yet despite the pervasive racism, Williams-Forson shows how cooking and serving chickens could provide a source of power and income for blacks.23 In a similar fashion, Itai Vardi has analyzed the widespread practice of eating contests—watermelons were a particular favorite—staged by white promoters to assert control over black bodies and thereby shape racial perceptions. Yet beyond this constructionist framework of race relations, Vardi like Williams-Forson employs bell hooks' concept of the "oppositional gaze" to explore how blacks reversed these power relations. Mickey Baker, who took part as a youth in one such eating contest in 1930s Kentucky, felt disgusted by the grotesque behavior of the white audience: "crackers, watching the watermelon gobbling and seed-spitting up on stage. They were farting with pleasure. Literally falling in the aisles of the theater."24

Other minority groups were subject to expropriation and demonization in their food habits. Michael Wise has discussed the process of food colonialism on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana, where government agents sought to restructure patterns of subsistence to instill capitalist patterns of wage labor. The shift from hunting wild buffalo to herding domesticated cattle and the construction of a reservation slaughterhouse sought to cleanse the Blackfeet diet of its predatory past. This colonial project had a gendered component as well in the establishment of a butcher shop which de-legitimated the traditionally female labor of preparing meat and replaced indigenous recipes such as "dupuyer," a form of buffalo bacon, with dishes more acceptable to European sensibilities.25 Health reformers in San
Antonio, Texas, waged a similar campaign against Mexican street vendors known as “chili queens.” Unlike the Blackfeet, the chili vendors provided the city with a valuable tourist attraction, which allowed them to maintain their business despite police harassment. Eventually their foods were appropriated in the form of chili powder and canned tamales by businessmen outside the ethnic community, and by the 1940s, health officials had closed their open-air restaurants.26

Notwithstanding the ongoing harassment of ethnic food production, the white American elite arguably failed in their hegemonic goal of maintaining the supremacy of Anglo foods in the nineteenth century. Donna Gabaccia, in her book We Are What We Eat (1998), has shown the extent to which migrants have shaped American eating habits. Although the WASP upper class cringed at the thought of Chinese, Italian, Jewish, or Mexican food, ethnic dishes gradually entered the mainstream from the bottom up as marginalized white groups including Bohemians and workers recognized the value of tasty and affordable foods.27 What began with working-class cosmopolitanism eventually became a hallmark of middle-class American dining,28 even though racialized inequality persisted throughout the twentieth century.

**ETHNIC SUCCESSION AND “FOOD DESERTS” IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

American race relations in the twentieth century have been marked by historic civil rights movements and by persistent segregation and inequality in access to food. Ethnic food gained wider acceptance in the middle decades of the century, at precisely the moment when the number of foreign born in the United States fell as a consequence of 1920s restrictions and the Great Depression, which prompted the informal exclusion of Latin American migrants, who had been exempt from the 1920s restrictive quotas. As the children of white migrants moved out of ethnic enclaves into mainstream communities, they began to assimilate in their dietary patterns as well, although often maintaining symbolic ties to the homeland through special celebratory meals. By the third generation, many white ethnics felt a desire to reclaim their identity. A resurgence of newcomers after the 1965 immigration reform provided ample opportunities to sample diverse ethnic cuisines, but middle-class consumers often turned instead to suburban grocery stores and theme restaurants. Racialized minorities remained largely excluded from the mainstream, and their segregated urban and rural neighborhoods were particularly poorly supplied with healthy food options. Fast food chains and government commodity support programs became important sources of food, leading to some of the highest levels of food-related disease in the country. Thus, race-based inequality has remained a constant fact in the realm of food consumption.
The United States government persisted in efforts to promote Anglo foodways among the wider population. During World War II, National Research Council's Committee on Food Habits generated numerous studies of American food habits with an eye toward assimilating outsiders and promoting these foodways globally in the postwar era. The committee's executive secretary, the renowned cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead, identified the nature of mainstream food in the following manner: "Being American is a matter of abstention from foreign ways, foreign food, foreign idea, foreign accents, foreign vices. So whisky drinking becomes identified with the Irish and, by coincidence, with Catholics, beer drinking with Germans, and marijuana with black musicians." The military also sanctioned and institutionalized a racialized division of labor in food production. In 1932, the U.S. Navy began to recruit African Americans, but only to serve as messmen. Filipinos have been cast in similarly subordinate roles. In 1970, according to Yen Espiritu, "of the 16,669 Filipinos in the U.S. Navy, 80 percent were in the steward rating."

The domestic consumption of ethnic foods remained an important definer of family and community identity for many, but these patterns changed considerably from one generation to the next. An important study of Italian-American foodways in Philadelphia by Judith Goode, Janet Theophano, and Karen Curtis found that ethnic and American foods were consumed in differing formats: one-pot meals with gravy tended to follow a modified Italian pattern while platters of segregated meat and vegetables featured American items. These meals were served in alternation according to regular weekly routines. Religious feasts and fasts also served as occasions for preserving Italian traditions. Nevertheless, younger generations often showed great reluctance to consume particular items such as organ meats and smelt that were considered inedible by mainstream Americans. The authors observed that families could be highly idiosyncratic in the manner of cooking, rapidly transforming Italian village cooking styles, and challenging the idea that an ethnic community was unified around particular flavor principles. Iconic dishes can still remain as symbols of ethnicity, however, even when they have gone out of fashion in the home country. For example, the descendants of Norwegian immigrants in Minnesota still make a distinctive thin potato pancake called lefse, and when they served it to a visiting diplomat's wife, they were nonplussed to learn that the dish was considered a museum piece in contemporary Norway.

Scholars have also sought to determine the patterns followed by ethnic restaurants. Geographer Wilbur Zelinsky developed a valuable methodology for mapping ethnic restaurants using telephone books. He found, not surprisingly, that the three most popular cuisines, Chinese, Italian, and Mexican, made up fully 70 percent of the total in the United States. Comparing these numbers with population data, he concluded that entrepreneurial cooks were more important than ethnic dining communities, most notably in the case of Chinese restaurants, which had achieved a near universal presence in North America despite quite modest populations in most regions. Donna Gabaccia has pointed to the importance of migratory gender ratios in determining the presence of ethnic restaurants. The
groups that became the leading source of restaurants in the twentieth century, the three mentioned before plus Greeks, were all characterized by predominantly male migrants, for whom inexpensive commercial foods provided a substitute for domestic cooking. By contrast, more gender-balanced migrations, such as Poles, Germans, Jews, and Irish opened fewer restaurants, and their culinary impact came more from groceries and delis.\textsuperscript{25}

Patterns of ethnic succession, whereby new migrant groups take over low-status service niches formerly filled by earlier immigrants, have also shaped the restaurant industry. Krishnendu Ray has discerned two separate processes at work in determining the status of ethnic restaurants in the United States and the ethnic origins of workers in the industry. Challenging notions that particular groups were inclined toward restaurant work, he argued instead for a theory based on social forces exerted by mainstream society. In particular, he concluded that restaurants gained status in inverse proportion to the number of actual immigrants in the country. Thus, the relative scarcity and wealth of Japanese compared to Chinese migrants helped sushi to gain more favor than dim sum in contemporary America. At the same time, the presence of low-skilled jobs in professional kitchen attracted recent labor migrants, positions now filled largely by new arrivals from Latin America.\textsuperscript{26} Meanwhile, Haiming Liu and Lianlian Lin have observed another pattern of ethnic succession, not between different ethnic groups, but rather in the transformation of a particular group’s foodways with new migrations from the home country. Nineteenth-century Chinese migrants came predominantly from the Guangzhou region of southern China, better known to Americans as Canton. After 1965, as new migrants arrived from Sichuan, Shanghai, and Beijing, their regional specialties replaced the older assimilated version of Cantonese, at least among discerning consumers in Chinatowns.\textsuperscript{37}

The invention of “soul food” illustrates another interesting pattern of culinary tourism within and beyond the African American community. The Great Migration of southern sharecroppers to northern industrial jobs began at the turn of the century and reached a high point around World War II. When they arrived in northern communities, existing urban black professionals in Harlem and Hyde Park looked down at first on the catfish, collards, and chitterlings eaten by rustic newcomers. Nevertheless, the nostalgia felt by migrants, combined with the continued segregation suffered in the north, made home-style cafés and cafeterias into havens of commensality in Harlem and Chicago. As the Black Power movement gained strength in the 1960s, middle-class African Americans suddenly embraced the authenticity of soul food as a largely imagined slave diet in order to avoid criticism for assimilation. Often overlooked in considerations of soul food is the immigrant presence, which was first highlighted by Frederick Douglas Opie. In a recent history, Opie noted not only the influence of Caribbean cooking as early as the 1920s and 1930s, but also the growing importance of ethnic succession, as Harlem soul food restaurants have been taken over by recent immigrants, most famously, the Red Rooster opened by Ethiopian-Swedish celebrity chef Marcus Samuelsson.\textsuperscript{38}
One common thread running through the presentation and consumption of ethnic food in America has been a desire for authenticity, which has been met in a number of different ways. Shun Lu and Gary Alan Fine have examined the delicate balance that Chinese restaurateurs face in marketing their dishes as authentic outside the ethnic community. As cultural entrepreneurs, they offer "novel culinary traditions [that] must be situated so as to seem simultaneously exotic and familiar: distinguishable from mainstream cuisine (and thus desirable) yet able to be assimilated as edible creations." Warren Belasco has demonstrated how this balance between exoticism and familiarity was mastered by corporate food processors and restaurant chains, whose ersatz versions of authenticity largely succeeded in coopting the ethnic revival and the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s. For example, General Mills gave Betty Crocker a makeover, transforming her into a multiracial, multiethnic figure calculated to appeal, in the words of Marilyn Halter, to "a rainbow coalition of consumers." Marie Sarita Gaytán’s recent study of Mexican restaurants has emphasized the importance of inauthenticity, as well as authenticity, in the narratives and performances of ethnicity. She offers a valuable typology distinguishing between authenticity that is commemorative of the ethnic community or Americanized to appeal to mainstream consumers, and inauthenticity that is embraced by ethnics seeking a hybrid identity or by corporations to cleanse a cuisine of its foreignness.

Contemporary neoliberal policies, paradoxically intended to subsidize large agribusiness while limiting government support for minority populations, have extended the racialization of foodways and undermined the nutritional health of historically excluded groups. The proliferation of fast food restaurants, purveying goods made cheap by commodity supports, have spread through urban centers in the last few decades, even as full-service restaurants and supermarkets have fled to the suburbs, transforming these impoverished slums into "food desert," areas where it is difficult to obtain fresh, healthy foods. At the same time, as Charlotte Biltekoff explains elsewhere in this volume, experts have sought to moralize the discourse on healthy eating and to pass off onto consumers blame for the poor "choices" they are supposedly making. The complexity of this issue can be seen in recent local government initiatives, such as the vote taken on July 29, 2008, by the Los Angeles City to ban for one year new fast food restaurants in poor, minority neighborhoods in South Los Angeles. Compared to the more affluent, Anglo Westside of the city, these neighborhoods have a far greater concentration of fast food places and a much higher rate of obesity. Nevertheless, the one-year moratorium, which was to be voted as a permanent policy by the city council in December 2010, generated criticism as a form of "paternalism" and a restriction on consumer choice. But no one denies the prevalence of poor nutritional health and obesity among racial minorities. Meanwhile, anthropologist Gary Paul Nabham, commenting on the high prevalence of diabetes among American Indians subsisting on commodity surpluses assistance programs, has called for a return to a traditional indigenous diet. Perhaps the one thing can be safely concluded from the contradictory discourse coming from all sides of the political spectrum is that...
racialization and inequality remain intractable elements of American foodways in the twenty-first century.

IN SHORT

Racial inequality has remained a constant in the history of American foodways through the labor relations that produce it, the access to healthy diets, and the status accorded to particular foods. Nevertheless, there have been clear historical changes in the forms of racial oppression, as well as in the ways that minority groups have resisted it. Colonial patterns of bland British cooking began to be replaced in the nineteenth century by equally nondescript industrial, mass-produced food. By the twentieth century, corporate advertising had begun to see profits from marketing to minorities. Yet counter-hegemonic trends were also in place from early on. Certainly by the great proletarian migrations of the nineteenth century, a critical mass of workers had begun to challenge the supremacy of Anglo models and to eat across the boundaries of race and ethnicity. Although the process of ethnic succession led to the incorporation of many groups into the mainstream middle class, the continued influx of new immigrants offered alternatives to the bland offerings of corporate foods. As the diverse scholarship cited in this essay shows, food has great potential for helping us understand the processes of racial formation and transformation in America.

NOTES

3. Trudy Eden, The Early American Table: Food and Society in the New World (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 22, 58–77. Similar fears of culinary and racial blending among Spanish conquistadors were described by Rebecca Earle, “If You Eat Their Food...: Diets and Bodies in Early Colonial Spanish America,” American Historical Review 115, no. 3 (June 2010): 688–713.


11. McWilliams, A Revolution in Eating, 181.


17. Gleason's Pictorial Drawing—Room Companion 6, no. 3 (January 21, 1854): 47.


23. Williams-Forson, Building Houses out of Chicken Legs, 26–37, 50–70.


35. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 80–81.


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