

ANTHROPOLOGY OF FOOD

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Course Description

Eating is a natural behavior, akin to sleeping and locomotion, that we hold in common with other living organisms. Eating provides the energy for life, growth, and reproduction. Food, however, is anything but natural for humans. We alter it immensely in ways that distinguish us from all other species. Even the simplest human foods—apples, for instance—are the products of human alteration of wild plant species. Furthermore, we are often not content with the apple in its natural, just-picked-from-the-tree form. We peel it and cut it with utensils into bite-sized pieces, or we package it so that others can buy it ready-to-go at the supermarket. We render it into a sauce, harden it for cider, stuff it into a roasting bird, or bake it into cakes. What other species does that? Only humans develop elaborate systems of food preparation, and only humans have complex biocultural systems that revolve around the procurement, production, preparation, sharing, and eating of food. The study of food and culture is a powerful lens for examining human biological and behavioral diversity. The great French gourmand Brillat-Savarin is often quoted for his insight: “Tell me what you eat and I’ll tell you who you are.”

The Anthropology of Food examines the ways that anthropologists think about food in the past, in the present, and across cultures. We examine the archaeological record for early diets and the incredible changes that occurred with food production. Selected topics are the special relationship of humans to food, the evolution of the human diet and recent dietary changes, diet and disease, and the role of food in the construction of individual, class, social and national identities.

Lecture Schedule and Readings

1. Unique Relationship of Humans to Food

Lee, R.B 1969. Eating Christmas in the Kalahari. *Natural History* (December).

Wrangham, R, and Conklin-Brittain, N. 2003. Cooking as a biological trait. *Comparative Biochemistry and Physiology Part A* 136: 35–46

Visser, M. 1991. *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners*. Toronto: Harper Collins. Chapter 3; Chapter 5

Media What Syrian Cuisine Can Teach Us About Humanity | Antonio Tahhan | TEDxMidAtlantic

2. Evolution of the Human Diet and Perspectives on Food Production

Eaton SB and Konner M. 2000. Paleolithic Nutrition. In: Goodman AH, Dufour DL, Pelto GH, editors. *Nutritional Anthropology*. Mountain View: Mayfield, pp. 62-71.

Schepartz LA. 1989. Modeling subsistence pattern change. In *People and Culture in Change*, I Hershkowitz (ed.). Oxford: BAR Inter. Series 508(i):199-217.

Media: Food for the Ancestors

3. Food and Health

Brink PJ. 1995. Fertility and fat: The Annang fattening room. In: de Garine I, Pollack NJ editors. *Social Aspects of Obesity*. Luxembourg: Gordon and Breach, pp. 71-85.

Johns T. 2000. Well rounded diet. In: Goodman AH, Dufour DL, Pelto GH, editors. *Nutritional Anthropology*. Mountain View: Mayfield. p. 122-126.

Sherman, P.W. and Flaxman, S.M. 2001. Protecting ourselves from food. *American Scientist* 89: 142-151.

Nabhan GP. 1998. Food, health, and Native-American farming and gathering. In: Scapp R and Seitz B, editors. *Eating Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Media: TBA

4. Food as a Cultural Construction: Taboos, Sharing and Feasting

Sobo, EJ. The Sweetness of Fat. Health, Procreation and Sociability in Rural Jamaica.

Harris, M. 2000. India's sacred cow. In: Goodman AH, Dufour DL, Pelto GH, editors. *Nutritional Anthropology*. Mountain View: Mayfield, pp. 113-118.

Greeley, A. 2009. Finding Pad Thai. *Gastronomica*, Feb 2009.

Media: Anatomy of a spring roll

5. Food, Social Status and Individual Power

Schepartz, LA et al. 2017. Mycenaean hierarchy and gender roles: Diet and health inequalities in Late Bronze Age Pylos, Greece. In *Bones of Complexity*, H Klaus, A Harvey and MN Cohen (eds). University Press of Florida. Pp.141-172.

Updating this section: Other readings TBA

6. The Future of Food: Migration and Globalization

Himmelgreen, D. et al. 2007. "I Don't Make the Soups Anymore": Pre- to Post-Migration Dietary and Lifestyle Changes Among Latinos Living in West-Central Florida. *Ecology of Food and Nutrition*, 46:5, 427 – 444.

Yunxiang Yan. 2006. McDonald's in Beijing: The localization of Americana. In: Watson JL, editor. *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*. p. 39-77.

Cohen JH et al. 2009. Chapulines and Food Choices in Rural Oaxaca. *Gastronomica* Vol. 9, No. 1, Pages 61–65

Jones, N. 2023. Lab-grown meat: the science of turning cells into steaks and nuggets. *Nature* 619, 22-24 (2023) doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-023-02095-6>

Recommended book: Hogan, L. 2008. *People of the Whale*. NY: WW Norton.