

AAS 3749 - Food and Meaning in Africa and the Diaspora

Professor L. Shutt

Session I – Summer 2018

M-F, 1:00 – 3:15 – 044 New Cabell Hall

This course investigates the traditions and symbolics of food and eating in Africa and throughout the African Diaspora -- wherever people of African descent have migrated, settled, or have been forced to move. We will examine historical processes which have led to the development of certain foodways and explore the ways that these traditions play out on the ground today. We will begin by examining some examples of culinary tradition in different African spaces both in the past and present. We'll be moving on to see how cooking traditions changed and morphed as people moved across oceans and land. We'll investigate Caribbean, American (United States), and other Diasporic traditions, examining the ways people of African descent influenced cooking, eating and meaning in the new cultural worlds they entered and how the local traditions in these new spaces had an influence on these cooks' culinary experiences.

Food is much more than a biological need for human beings. Human beings are meaning-makers, inseparable from the cultural frameworks in which they find themselves enmeshed. What people eat, the way they eat, and whether or not certain kinds of people prepare or provide food for others is every bit as much symbolic as it is rooted in biological survival. In all cultures, people create self-identity, claim ethnic and national affiliation and affirm our maleness and femaleness with the foods we consume, purchase, prepare, select, or order from a menu. Concentrating on African spaces and cultural traditions as well as on traditions in other places in the world where people of African descent live, we will be exploring food and eating in this course in relationship to such topics as taboo, sexuality, bodies, ritual, kinship, beauty, and temperance and excess. This course will help students to investigate the way the foods people eat—or don't eat—hold meaning for people within a variety of cultural contexts.

Class Fees

* I have decided not to assign a book this semester because we will be eating together as a class on a number of occasions, either in the classroom or in a restaurant in town (Aromas Café, Pearl Island Café, Mel's). I ask that you each contribute \$40.00, which I will collect in advance of our class meals. This does not cover the entire cost, but the cost will be subsidized through a number of possible sources. If you have any difficulties with this arrangement, please come see me. You do not need to pay it all at once if that is difficult for you. Be sure to get a receipt from me!

Course Requirements

- * I ask that you not use laptop computers in class and that cell phones be turned OFF before the beginning of class. You WILL have a break in the middle of each class session (unless you collectively choose to power through and leave early instead).
- * There will be an easy quiz on your readings at the beginning of each class session. You will use your own paper for this: a full sheet of notebook paper with no fringe. As long as you have done the reading/assignment (you need to do more than skim the readings!), you should be able to earn a 100% on every quiz. Quizzes take place at the start of each class – NO make-ups. Your submitted quiz also serves to indicate that you attended class. If you are late to class and do not take the quiz, it is your responsibility to hand in a piece of paper that says something like, “I missed the quiz but I was in class today!” Otherwise, you will be marked absent. Your lowest quiz score will be converted to a 100% at the end of the session.
- * For each day an assignment is late, you will be penalized a full letter grade (for example, an A- becomes a B- if your assignment is one day late.)
- * This course is a seminar; therefore, an important part of our work together is the discussion in which we will engage at each class meeting. For this reason, you will automatically earn a grade of F for the course if you miss more than three class sessions regardless of your reason for missing class. Absences will result in a decreased participation grade. There are no excused absences.
- * All written assignments should be turned in as Word documents to Dropbox on Collab. The food label assignment can be turned in as a hard copy, though I would prefer a scanned image uploaded to Dropbox.

Grading and Assessment

- ☑ Reading quizzes– 25%
- ☑ Participation (semester-long) & Presentation/possibly leading discussion – 25%
- ☑ Short Assignments, collectively – 25%
- ☑ Final Paper – 25%

Course Schedule

☑ Assignments are listed under the heading of the day they are DUE

☑ Most readings can be found on our Collab web page.

WEEK ONE:

May 21 – Introduction to class

* IN-CLASS FILM: Restless Waters [UGANDA]

May 22

READ: Food and Eating: An Anthropological Perspective, by Robin Fox

READ: Introduction: Consuming Culture

WRITE: a recipe that holds some significance in your life. Write a minimum of 800 words about the recipe's significance and be prepared to talk about it with the class. Please submit it electronically by the start of class. You may want to bring a paper copy to class for you to draw on during discussion, though you are not required to do so.

May 23

READ: "Stirring the Pot through the end of Chapter One" [MULTIPLE]

READ: "Staples, Starches and the Heat of Atlantic Circulation" [MULTIPLE]

* IN-CLASS FILM: Mountains of Faith [ETHIOPIA]

May 24

READ: "Stirring a National Dish: Ethiopian Cuisine, 1500-2000" and "Taitu's Feast: Cuisine and Nature in the New Flower, Ethiopia: 1887" [ETHIOPIA]

WRITE: Feast assignment (details on Collab)

May 25

READ: "Slaughterers, Chefs, Writers and Consumers: Men's Contributions to African Culinary Culture," by Igor Cusack [VARIED]

READ: "The Thinness of Bulls: Food, Sexuality and Masculinity in Samburu, Northern Kenya," by Jon Holtzman [KENYA]

* POSSIBLE IN-CLASS FILM: Love in the Sahel [MALI, other Sahel locations]

WEEK TWO:

May 28 - NO CLASS (Memorial Day)

May 29

READ: excerpts from *Feeding Desire* [NIGER]

READ: “Women Fight Fattening Tradition in Mauritania,” by Mohamed Yahya Abdel Wedoud [MAURITANIA]

IN CLASS TODAY: short clip from NatGeo series “Taboo” and other short clips from documentaries on force-fattening [MAURITANIA]

May 30

READ: excerpts from *Feeding Desire* [NIGER]

IN CLASS TODAY: concept maps

May 31

READ: “French Beans for the Masses” [BURKINA FASO]

READ: West African Food Labels Article

CREATE: Your own food label – bring it to class to share

June 1

READ: selections from The Settler’s Cookbook, by Yazmin Alibhai-Brown

IN-CLASS FILM: clip from *Mississippi Masala*

BRING: a description of your intended paper topic, in as much detail as possible (at least 450 words). Following your description, please indicate three possible sources for your bibliography

WEEK THREE:

June 4

INFORMAL MOROCCAN MEAL at Aromas Café in Fontaine Research Park

RESEARCH: information on Moroccan food staples and traditions and write a 1200-word (minimum) essay on what you discover. You should include a bibliography. Come prepared to share this information with the class. [MOROCCO]

IN-CLASS FILM: “Desert Odyssey” [NIGER, other Tuareg territory in the Sahara]

June 5

READ: pp. 163-179 in *Stirring the Pot* [DIASPORA]

READ: “Real Belizean Food: Building Local Identity in the Transnational Caribbean,” by Richard Wilk [BELIZE] READ: “The Bittersweet Culinary History of the English West Indies,” by James E. McWilliams [BAHAMAS, BARBADOS, BRITISH GUIANA, BRITISH HONDURAS, JAMAICA, TOBAGO, WINDWARD & LEEWARD ISLANDS, etc.]

IN-CLASS FILM: *The Price of Sugar* documentary [HAITI, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC]

June 6

READ: “The Sweetness of Fat: Health, Procreation, and Sociability in Rural Jamaica,” by Elisa J. Sobo

IN-CLASS TODAY: How do we imagine bodies work? What are some body metaphors and how do we use them?

June 7

We will share a Caribbean meal at Pearl Island Café in the historic Jefferson School downtown. We will also make our way upstairs for a visit to the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center

READ: “Stolen Bodies, Edible Memories: The Influence and Function of West African Foodways in the Early British Atlantic,” by Kelley Deetz

June 8

READ: “More Than Just the Big Piece of Chicken: The Power of Race, Class and Food in American Consciousness,” by Psyche Williams-Forsen [USA]

TO WATCH IN CLASS: “Everyone Hates the Pilot,” and selection from Chris Rock’s “Bigger and Blacker” [USA]

WEEK FOUR:

June 11

READ: “Eating Jim Crow” and “The Chitlin Circuit,” by Frederick Douglass Opie [USA]

WRITE: Compile a 1500-word essay on “what is soul food?” This assignment must be based upon interviews with at least three people and at least two written sources (not informal websites! Can include ONE reading from this class as an academic source). Be prepared to discuss your findings with the class. Submit this to me electronically by the beginning of class. At the end of this paper (in the same Word document), you should include at least one recipe for something that one of your interviewees (or you) consider to be “soul food,” preferably provided by an interviewee. Your interviewee should share with you why this recipe qualifies as soul food; you can use these comments in your paper. You will need to turn these in electronically by the beginning of class.

June 12

READ: “Food Rebels: African American Critics and Opponents of Soul Food,” by Frederick Douglass Opie [USA]

READ: Selection from Sista Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health and Society [USA]

IN-CLASS FILM: Soul Food Junkies, by Byron Hurt [USA]

June 13

READ: TBD Reading on African American foodways

June 14

CLASS AT MEL’S CAFÉ TODAY

We will meet at Mel’s at 1:15 p.m.

June 15

WRITING DAY - NO OFFICIAL CLASS MEETING – I will be available for consultation about papers in my office during our class time if you would like. Papers due to me via Dropbox on JUNE 16 by noon.

***** PAPERS DUE VIA DROPBOX on JUNE 16 by NOON!**