

History 282: Food in Modern America

GEP Historical Perspectives

Course Meetings: 12:00-12:50 MWF

UWSP – History Department

Dr. Neil Prendergast

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Recently, Americans of all sorts have been arguing—quite passionately—about their food. Is it best to shop for organic food? Are ‘paleo’ foods really better for us? Is gluten bad? A generation ago, similar headlines filled the newspapers: How much fiber should I eat? Do eggs increase cholesterol? Is butter better than margarine? Yet another generation earlier still more questions were common: Are my kids getting enough vitamins? Will grocery store cranberries make me sick? Is the milk safe from strontium?

In short, Americans have long been insecure about their food, at least since they stopped raising it themselves and started buying it from stores. Certainly the questions we ask today could be readily answered by nutritionists and other health care professionals. But all those questions from previous generations suggests something else is going on. There is a *tradition* of anxiety and insecurity. Why?

The answer to that question must be *historical*. “Food in Modern America” will help you see that uncertainty about food is more than individual; it is a product of changes in science, business, government, and culture.

Each of the questions above asks about food, but also underscores larger concerns about modern life. Is there strontium in the milk? That’s a question about whether the government would protect citizens from radioactive fallout during the Cold War. Is the meat safe? That’s a question about whether some of the first large corporations in America—meatpacking companies—could be trusted.

In other words, studying the history of food can help you understand a great deal about the complexity of modern America. We will examine the place of science in society, the role of business in framing consumer choices, the presence of government in American life, and the power of culture to ascribe meaning to the material world.

This way of thinking about food might be brand new for you. As you can see, I think it’s a useful way to expand our thinking—and I’m incredibly excited to share this perspective with you. If you’re entering a wellness or healthcare profession, then this course will certainly help you think about your career ahead. If you’re entering another field—or just interested in food—then this course will still be useful, perhaps by sparking a new interest in the past.

Enduring Understanding:

Culture, science, and business set the frame for an individual’s choices about food.

Learning Outcomes: After taking this course, students will be able to:

- Use primary sources to answer questions about how foodways have changed in American history
- Describe differences among interpretations of American food history
- Analyze how changes in science, culture, and corporations have affected American foodways





Dr. Prendergast's Office Hours: This semester, I will not be seeing students in person. However, I will be available to speak one-on-one via phone on Wednesdays from 5-7pm. Email me to set up a call. Other times will work, too, as my schedule allows.

Email: nprender@uwsp.edu Email is a great way to get a hold of me.

(If you're uncertain about how to write an email to a professor, then this is a great template: <https://medium.com/@portwoodstacer/how-to-email-your-professor-without-being-annoying-af-cf64ae0e4087>)

Course Materials

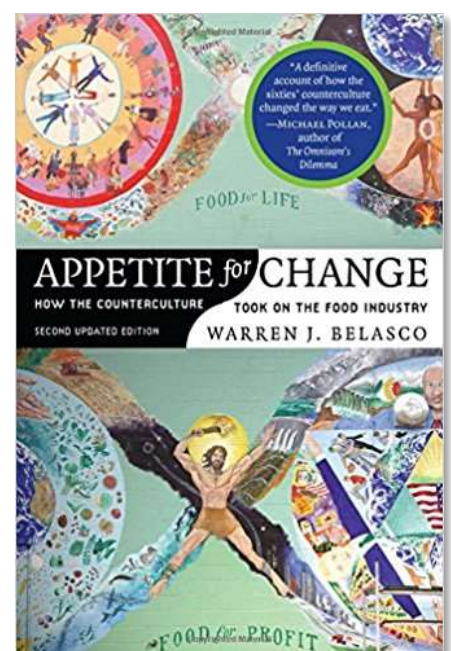
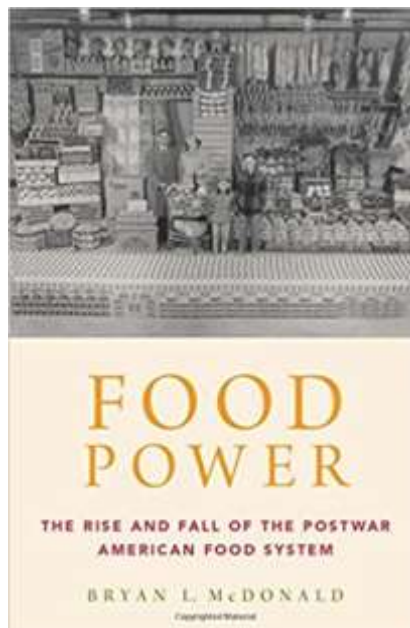
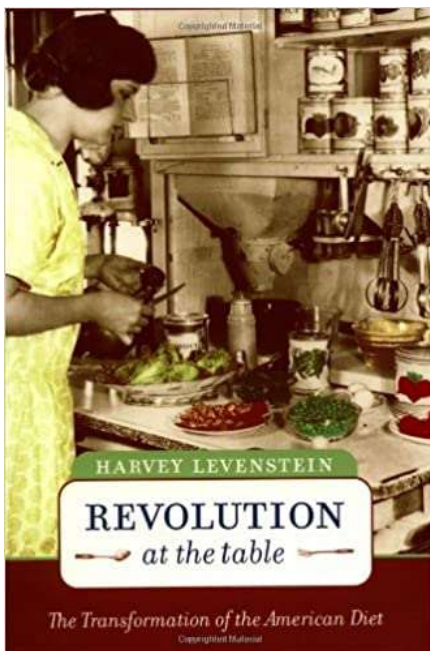
Required Books (Available Online via the University Library):

Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Bryan L. McDonald, *Food Power: The Rise and Fall of the Postwar American Food System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Warren Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry, 2nd Updated Ed.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

Canvas: You will also need access to the university's learning management system, Canvas.





Grading:

- 20 points for **Topic Assignments** (20@1pt each)
- 20 points for **Unit One Paper**
- 20 points for **Unit Two Paper**
- 20 points for **Unit Three Paper**
- 20 points for **Final Paper**
- 100 points total

Letter grades for the semester follow the typical pattern:

A 93-100	B+ 87-89.99	C+ 77-79.99	D+ 67-69.99	F 59.99 and below
A- 90-92.99	B 83-86.99	C 73-76.99	D 60-66.99	
	B- 80-82.99	C- 70-72.99		

Life Happens: I understand that life might make it difficult to complete some assignments, attend class, or simply to do well. I also know that some real learning has to take place in this class. You will have more opportunities in life if you can analyze, think critically and communicate effectively. This class has to be one of your priorities. I do my best to be flexible, but need to adhere to some standards. So, if something comes up, let's talk.



Course Policies: For information on plagiarism, consult <http://www.uwsp.edu/centers/rights>. See Chapter 14, *Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures*, pages 5 -10, for the disciplinary possibilities if you are caught cheating. As an instructor deeply concerned with fairness in the classroom, we pursue each and every case of plagiarism and cheating. Please note that turnitin.com is used for the essay assignments.



Discussion Actively listening to each other, asking thoughtful questions of each other, and offering basic respect are important parts of intellectual exchanges.

To prepare for our Zoom discussions, simply enter the meeting with something you want out of it. Perhaps its clarification on an aspect of the reading. Or maybe you want to hear how others reacted to the content. Still yet, you might want to know how the material connects to other parts of the course.

If you prepare for discussions by asking what you want from them, it will make a habit of mind out of asking yourself “what do I know and what do I need to learn?”

Equity of Educational Access: If you have a learning or physical challenge which requires classroom accommodation, please contact the UWSP Disability Services office with your documentation as early as possible in the semester. They will then notify me, in a confidential memo, of the accommodations that will facilitate your success in the course. Disability Services Office, 103 Student Services Center, Voice: (715) 346-3365, TTY: (715) 346-3362, <http://www.uwsp.edu/special/disability/studentinfo.htm>.

Note: The syllabus is a general plan for the course. Deviations announced via email, or on Canvas may be necessary.

How Online Works in This Course: Our course is “synchronous,” which means we have specific time allotted for learning each week, just as in a face to face course. There will be a lecture on Monday and Wednesday followed by a discussion on Friday—in most weeks (see Schedule for details). That’s a very typical arrangement for a college history course.

In our case, though, the lectures will be recorded and then made available at class time. This pacing of the material will help create a routine. Each lecture is on a topic and these topics each have a small assignment, which will be made available at class time as well, again reinforcing routine.

Our discussions will be via Zoom. We’ll see how these go. I know the platform is not everyone’s favorite. At the very least, it will be a space for us to interact in real time on a regular basis, so I’m glad to have it. In planning our semester, I thought it would be best to preserve this time together as “flex time,” where we can make it what we need it to be. I will not use Zoom discussion to present new information. It will be a place to digest information only. I will take notes of these discussion and make them available on Canvas.

I strongly de-emphasize Canvas in my online teaching. It’s important as a place for students to access lectures and assignments, submit completed assignments, check their grades, receive feedback on work, and find announcements. Beyond those functions, we will not be using Canvas much. My concern is that the more we use it, then the more we think that’s where learning takes place. In fact, learning takes place by listening, reading, taking notes, and writing. Much of that work is done with a book, notebook, and pen. I want to keep your attention there.

Online Course FAQ's

Can I work at my own pace? To some extent, yes. You can access the lectures and work on the assignments anytime between when they are made available and when they are due, typically a 5-7 day range.

Can I work ahead in the semester? No. The course is designed with a particular pace in mind. This pace will help keep students in a routine, and it will also be fair to my own workflow.

Do I have to attend Zoom discussions? No. But if you miss, then I expect you to view the recording.

What if I just don't understand something? Then send me an email right away! The best part of my job is communicating with students. Sometimes students don't even have a specific question, they just "don't get it." I know that can make it hard to email, but just say "Dear Dr. P., I'm not getting this." We can sort it out via email or phone.

How do I find the lectures and assignments? These will be available in Canvas under "Assignments" and listed by Topic Number and Topic Title, corresponding to the Schedule in this syllabus.

Schedule			
Why the History of Food Matters			
Week 1		Wednesday September 2 Recorded Lecture: Introduction	Friday September 4 Reading and Syllabus Discussion on Zoom
Unit 1: Eating in Industrial America			
Week 2	Monday September 7 LABOR DAY	Wednesday September 9 Topic 1: American Eating Habits of the 19th Century Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available Unit 1 Paper Available	Friday September 11 Reading Discussion via Zoom
Week 3	Monday September 14 Topic 2: Agriculture in the 19th Century Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available Topic 1 Assignment Due Midnight	Wednesday September 16 Topic 3: Immigrant Cuisine in Early Twentieth Century Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available	Friday September 18 Reading Discussion via Zoom
Week 4	Monday September 21 Topic 4: Nutrition Science and Home Economics Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available Topic 2 and Topic 3 Assignments Due Midnight	Wednesday September 23 Topic 5: Grocery Buying Before the Supermarket Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available	Friday September 25 Reading Discussion via Zoom
Week 5	Monday September 28	Wednesday September 30	Friday October 2

	<p>Topic 6: World War I and American Foodways</p> <p>Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available</p> <p>Topic 4 and Topic 5 Assignments Due Midnight</p>	<p>Topic 7: Agriculture in the Early Twentieth Century</p> <p>Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available</p>	<p>Reading Discussion via Zoom</p>
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Unit 2: Food in a Consumer Culture

<p>Week 6</p>	<p>Monday October 5</p> <p>Topic 8: World War II</p> <p>Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available</p> <p>Unit 2 Paper Available</p> <p>Topic 6 and Topic 7 Assignments Due Midnight</p> <p>Unit One Paper Due Midnight</p>	<p>Wednesday October 7</p> <p>Topic 9: Postwar Agriculture</p> <p>Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available</p>	<p>Friday October 9</p> <p>Reading Discussion via Zoom</p>
<p>Week 7</p>	<p>Monday October 12</p> <p>Topic 10: School Lunch</p> <p>Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available</p> <p>Topic 8 and Topic 9 Assignments Due Midnight</p>	<p>Wednesday October 14</p> <p>Topic 11: Supermarket</p> <p>Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available</p>	<p>Friday October 16</p> <p>Reading Discussion via Zoom</p>
<p>Week 8</p>	<p>Monday October 19</p> <p>Topic 12: Nutrition and Convenience</p> <p>Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available</p>	<p>Wednesday October 21</p> <p>Topic 13: Food as Cold War Power Part I</p> <p>Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available</p>	<p>Friday October 23</p> <p>Reading Discussion via Zoom</p>

	Topic 10 and Topic 11 Assignments Due Midnight		
Week 9	Monday October 26 Topic 14: Food as Cold War Power Part II Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available Topic 12 and Topic 13 Assignments Due Midnight	Wednesday October 28 Topic 15: The Chain Restaurant Recorded Lecture Available	Friday October 30 Reading Discussion via Zoom

The Food Movement

Week 10	Monday November 2 Topic 16: Food in the Counterculture 1960s Part I Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available Unit 3 Paper Available Topic 14 Assignment Due Midnight No Assignment for Topic 15 Unit Two Paper Due Midnight	Wednesday November 4 Topic 17: Food in the Counterculture 1960s Part II Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available	Friday November 6 Reading Discussion via Zoom
Week 11	Monday November 9 Topic 18: Food Industry Response to Counterculture Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available	Wednesday November 11 Topic 19: Government Food Policy in 1970s Recorded Lecture and Assignment Available	Friday November 13 Reading Discussion via Zoom

	<p>Topic 16 and Topic 17 Assignments Due Midnight</p>		
Week 12	<p>Monday November 16</p> <p>Topic 20: Media and the Food Movement</p> <p>Recorded Lecture Available</p> <p>Topic 18 and Topic 19 Assignments Due Midnight</p>	<p>Wednesday November 18</p> <p>Topic 21: Marketing Alternative Food</p> <p>Recorded Lecture Available</p>	<p>November 20</p> <p>Reading Discussion via Zoom</p>
Week 13	<p>Monday November 23</p> <p>Topic 22: Thanksgiving</p> <p>Recorded Lecture Available</p> <p>Topic 20 and Topic 21 Assignments Due Midnight</p>	<p>Wednesday November 25</p> <p>Reading Discussion via Zoom</p>	<p>Friday THANKSGIVING</p>
Week 14	<p>Monday November 30</p> <p>Topic 23: Food Deserts</p> <p>Recorded Lecture Available</p> <p>No Assignment for Topic 22</p>	<p>Wednesday December 2</p> <p>Topic 24: Food Movement Today</p> <p>Recorded Lecture Available</p>	<p>Friday December 4</p> <p>Reading Discussion via Zoom</p>

Week 15	Monday December 7 Paper Workshop via Zoom No Assignment for Topics 23 and 24 Unit Three Paper Due Midnight	Wednesday December 9 Paper Workshop via Zoom	Friday December 11 Paper Workshop via Zoom
Final Exam Week	Final Paper Due in Canvas by end of Final Exam Period (see AccessPoint for Final Exam Time)		