

# 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. Office Hours will be held via Zoom from 2:00 to 3:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. A link will be available in Canvas. (Other times will work, too, as my schedule allows.)

**Email:** [nprender@uwsp.edu](mailto: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/@lportwoodstacer/how-to-email-your-professor-without-being-annoying-af-cf64ac0e4087> )

### Course Materials

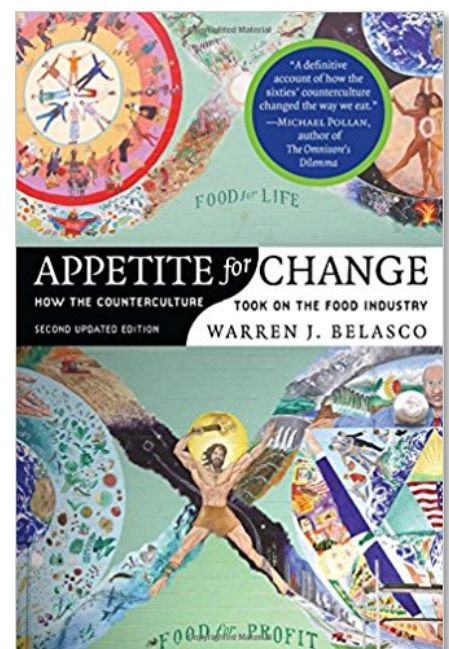
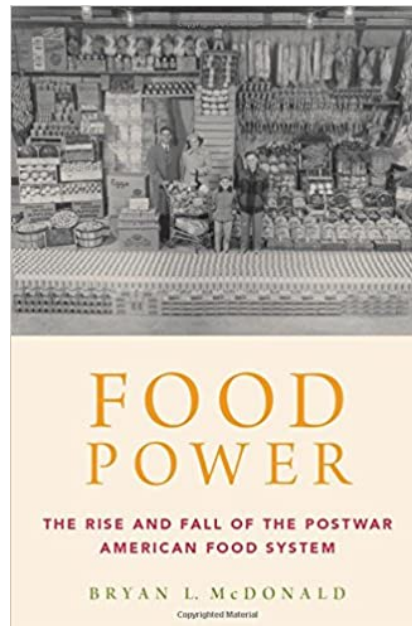
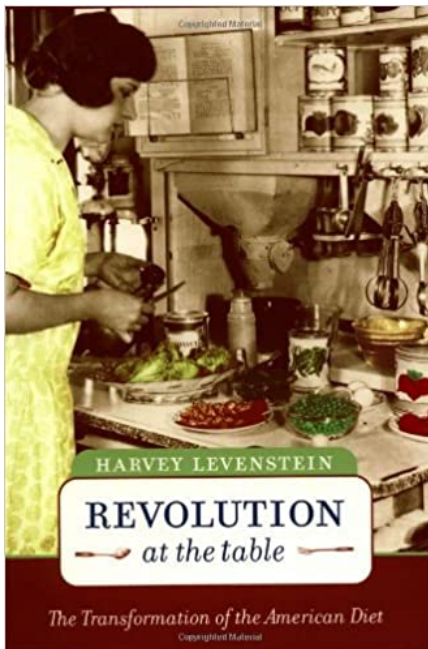
Most of our readings will come from these three books:

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

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

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

**CANVAS** We'll have a small handful of readings available here as well.





**Grading:**

- 20 points for **Unit One Paper**
- 25 points for **Unit Two Paper**
- 25 points for **Unit Three Paper**
- 30 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.





**Lecture and Discussion** Our course is a mixture of lecture and discussion. Mondays and Wednesdays will lean more on lecture, although with plenty of moments for dialogue between professor and student. Lectures will not be recorded, so students must attend.

Most Fridays show “Discussion” on the syllabus. These days will often include in-class readings and analytical exercises that will drive class conversation. Our goal is to apply readings and lectures from earlier in the week to a specific scenario. On a couple occasions, you’ll see “Online Activity.” These days will be similar to Discussion but conducted online asynchronously.

Together, our lectures, readings, and discussions will help students put together their unit paper.

**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. Changes announced via email may be necessary.***

### **Coming Back to Campus**

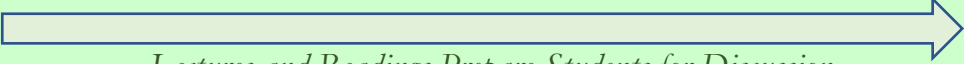
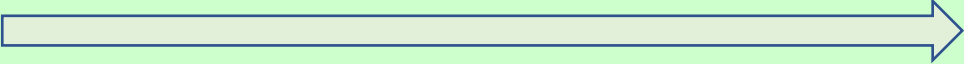
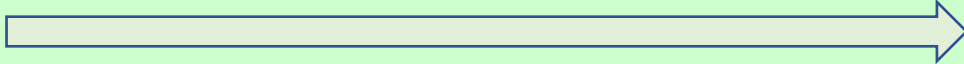
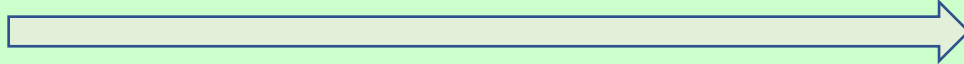
How normal will things be? Aside from the wearing of masks, holding to a seating chart, and having office hours via Zoom, our course will be normal in all respects. We meet in person, read, write papers, and so forth.

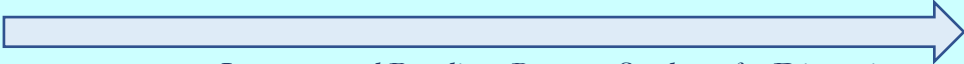
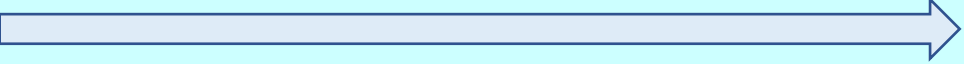
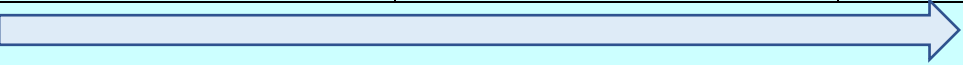


Will there be Zoom meetings? No, not as a regular part of our course meetings. I will use Zoom exclusively for office hours, though.


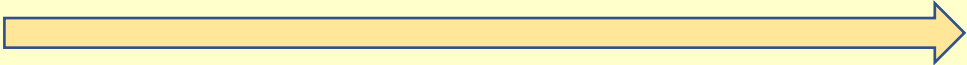


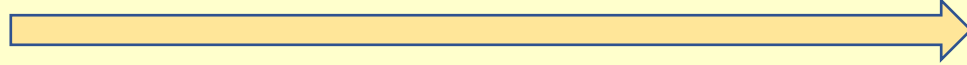
Will we have any online class meetings at all? On occasion, but not through Zoom and not as synchronous events. A few times during the semester, we’ll be better served by doing an online activity instead of meeting in person. Such occasions will be announced in class and via email ahead of time if not already scheduled.

Is everything going to be on Canvas? We’ll use Canvas sparingly. You can track your grades there, get a copy of the syllabus, find paper descriptions, and locate readings listed as “Canvas” on the syllabus schedule...but not much else. Think of Canvas as a filing cabinet, not a meeting room.



Schedule				<i>Please note that I cannot hold class if even one student is unmasked.</i>
Why the History of Food Matters				
Week 1			Friday Sept 3 Introduction	
Unit 1: Eating in Industrial America				
Week 2	Monday September 6  LABOR DAY	Wednesday September 8  American Eating Habits of the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century  Read: Intro, Chapter 1 and 2, <i>Revolution at the Table</i>	Friday September 10  Discussion	Discussion and Online Activities Prepare Students for Papers
 <i>Lectures and Readings Prepare Students for Discussion</i>				
Week 3	Monday September 13  Agriculture in the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century  Read: Chapter 3, <i>Revolution at the Table</i>	Wednesday September 15  Immigrant Cuisine  Read: Chapter 8, <i>Revolution at the Table</i> ; and <i>Hungering for America</i> (on Canvas)	Friday September 17  Online Activity	
				
Week 4	Monday September 20  Nutrition Science and Home Economics  Read: Chapter 5 and 12, <i>Revolution at the Table</i>	Wednesday September 22  Grocery Buying Before the Supermarket  Read: <i>Building a Housewife's Paradise</i> (on Canvas)	Friday September 24  Discussion	
				
Week 5	Monday September 27  World War I and American Foodways  Read: Chapter 11, <i>Revolution at the Table</i>	Wednesday September 29  Agriculture in the Early Twentieth Century  Read: Chapter 14, <i>Revolution at the Table</i> ; and <i>U.S. Farm +Food Subsidies</i> (Canvas)	Friday October 1  Discussion	
 <b>Unit One Paper Due by Midnight, Monday October 4<sup>th</sup></b>				

Unit 2: Food in a Consumer Culture				
Week 6	Monday October 4  World War II  Read: <i>Eating for Victory</i> (Canvas)  <b>Unit One Paper Due Midnight</b>	Wednesday October 6  Postwar Agriculture  Read: Chapter 3, <i>Food Power</i>	Friday October 8  Discussion	<i>Discussion and Online Activities</i> Prepare Students for Papers
 <i>Lectures and Readings Prepare Students for Discussion</i>				
Week 7	Monday October 11  School Lunch  Read: <i>School Lunch Pol.</i> (Canvas)	Wednesday October 13  Supermarket  Read: <i>Supermarket USA</i> (Canvas)	Friday October 15  Discussion	
				
Week 8	Monday October 18  Nutrition and Convenience  Read: Chapter 2, <i>Food Power</i>	Wednesday October 20  Food as Cold War Power  Read: Chapter 4+5, <i>Food Power</i>	Friday October 22  Discussion	
				
Week 9	Monday October 25  The Chain Restaurant  Read: <i>Ten Restaurants That Changed America</i> (on Canvas)	Wednesday October 27  The Fast Food Restaurant  Read: <i>Black McDonald's</i> (Canvas)	Friday October 29  Discussion	
 <b>Unit Two Paper Due Monday, November 1st</b>				
<b>The Food Movement</b>				
Week 10	Monday November 1  Counterculture Challenge  Read: Ch. 3, <i>Appetite for Change</i> <b>Unit Two Paper Due Midnight</b>	Wednesday November 3  Counterculture Food System  Read: <i>Be Receptive to the Good Earth</i> (on Canvas)	Friday November 5  Discussion	<i>Discussion and Online Activities</i> Prepare
				

<i>Lectures and Readings Prepare Students for Discussion</i>				<i>Students for Papers</i>
Week 11	Monday November 8  <b>Food Industry Response</b>  Read: Chapter 5 and 8, <i>Appetite for Change</i>	Wednesday November 10  <b>Gov't Food Policy in 1970s</b>  Read: Chapter 6, <i>Appetite for Change</i>	Friday November 12  <b>Discussion</b>	
				
Week 12	Monday November 15  <b>Media and the Food Movement</b>  Read: Chapter 7, <i>Appetite for Change</i>	Wednesday November 17  <b>Marketing Alternative Food</b>  Read: Chapter 10, <i>Appetite for Change</i>	November 19  <b>Discussion</b>	
				
Week 13	Monday November 22  <b>Thanksgiving</b>	Wednesday November 24  <b>Online Activity</b>	Friday <b>THANKSGIVING BREAK</b>	
				
Week 14	Monday November 29  <b>Food Deserts</b>  Read: <i>Foodless Neighborhood in a Foodie Town</i> (Canvas) and <i>Supermarket Redlining</i> (Canvas)	Wednesday December 1  <b>Food Movement Today</b>  Read: <i>Food Activism, A Critical History</i> (on Canvas)	Friday December 3  <b>Discussion</b>	
				
<b>Unit 3 Paper Due Monday, December 6th</b>				
Week 15	Monday December 6  <b>Final Paper Workshop</b>  <b>Unit Three Paper Due Midnight</b>	Wednesday December 8  <b>Final Paper Workshop</b>	Friday December 10  <b>Final Paper Workshop</b>	



Final Exam Week	<b>Final Paper Due in Canvas by end of Final Exam Period: Monday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 12:15pm</b>	
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**Mask Policy:** <https://www.uwsp.edu/coronavirus/Documents/UWSPChancellorOrder%208.6.2021.pdf> We will follow that policy without exception.

*Please note that I cannot hold class if even one student is unmasked.*

**Vaccines:** I myself am vaccinated. I took the vaccine to protect myself, but more importantly to protect my wife and son. My son is too young to get vaccinated, but my vaccination buffers him against infection. My wife is vulnerable due to medicine she must take to battle Multiple Sclerosis, but again my vaccination provides an important buffer. For me, these were the reasons to get the vaccine.

There are also more uplifting and fun incentives to vaccinate. The university has prizes, including scholarships, laptops, parking passes, and shopping sprees available. See details:

<https://www.uwsp.edu/coronavirus/Pages/ItsWorthAShot.aspx>

The State of Wisconsin is offering \$100 to get vaccinated before Labor Day: <https://www.wpr.org/wisconsin-will-give-you-100-if-you-get-covid-19-vaccine-labor-day>