History of American Food

4397.01 – Dr. Megan Birk

Office hours: CAS 347c Tues. 12:30-2 and by appointment

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Learning Objectives

This class will examine the influences of food throughout the history of the nation. Specifically we will focus on production, consumption, and cultural influences of food. The class will be organized into four sections – each section will be focused on a specific meal eaten by people in the United States during that time period. Because this is a class about food, there will be frank discussions about hunting, butchering, and the consumption of meat. If you are uncomfortable with these topics please do not take this course.

Course Expectations

This class will require weekly reading and discussion participation. The classroom experience will be more enriching for you as a student if you take these aspects of the class seriously. Failure to read and participate will result in failing the class. There are three books for this class that must be purchased or checked out from a library. I will place articles on the Blackboard site for you to read. You are not required to print these articles, but you may find it helps you read and discuss them if you have them copied. All assignments need to be completed on time. There are no makeups and no late submissions for this class. If it’s late, it’s a zero. Plagiarism – If you have any questions about the university policy about plagiarism please ask me. In this course cheating and plagiarism of any kind will be awarded a zero for that assignment. Any copying, borrowing, or cheating will be given a zero. If you use someone else’s words without proper citation you have plagiarized. In addition to a zero students accused of plagiarism will be referred to the Dean of Student’s Office.

Course Assignments

3 book reviews – 25 points each

You will be expected to review each of the three books by summarizing the argument and content. Each review should be 2-3 pages and double spaced in length. No late papers will be accepted, hard copies of the reviews need to be turned in on their due dates at the beginning of the class in which they are due.
In class discussion and participation – 100 points

This is not an attendance grade – although your attendance is considered mandatory because the class only meets once a week. Notes are not available online, if you miss class you have missed 3 hours of class time and will need to come to my office for notes. Come prepared to discuss the reading or the topic for the week. Topics not based on readings will be posted in advance on Blackboard.

Food Preparation – 25 points

For an additional 25 points you will, at any point in the semester, prepare a food using an old recipe or old methods and bring it for the class to try. You do not need to spend lots of money to do this – you could make a loaf of bread, or tortillas using a stone grinder. You could make a soup, or a casserole from a 1950s cookbook. Please do not feel obliged to make a complicated dish – the idea is that you will have a better understanding of antiquated food preparation after the project is complete. Your in class food assignment does NOT need to be the same food as your research project.

Family Meal Paper – 50 points

Instead of a midterm, you will write a short paper (5-8 pages) about a meal that best represents you, or your family. Discuss the cultural significance of the meal and the traditions surrounding it; what is served, how is it served, why is the meal important to you? Give some consideration to where that food came from and how it came to be traditional to your family.

Research project – 100 points

Each student needs to select a food for the research project. This can be any food, for example: corn, sugar, steak, carrots – these are all acceptable choices. You will need to write a 15 page paper about the history of that food, including information about where and how its grown or produced, who produces it, what culture it most closely relates to, and any other pertinent information you believe is important. You should think about the process that takes that food from raw material to finished food. You will present a 5 – 10 minute summary of your findings to your classmates. Internet sources are acceptable, but Wikipedia is not.

***ALL PAPERS MUST BE GRAMMATICALLY CORRECT AND USE PROPER METHODS OF CITATION (foot notes or end notes). CHICAGO STYLE IS PREFERRED.***
Final Exam – 100 points

There one final for the class. The final IS comprehensive. You will be expected to tie together themes from the whole class. This exam is worth 100 points and will consist of essays you will write in a BlueBook (these can be purchased at the bookstore). A study review will be provided.

**Overall Grade Scale:**

450 – 402 - A
401 – 359 – B
358 – 313 – C
312 – 274 - D

**Schedule**

Meal one – Venison and roast pork, Indian corn pudding, squash, apple cider

Week 1/Jan. 21 – Introductions/Native and English foodways
Week 2/Jan. 28 – Colonies, production and preparation
Week 3/Feb. 4 – Technology and Drinks of preference ** Book review due for The Alcoholic Republic
Week 4/Feb. 11 – Reform food and drink

Meal Two – Salted pork, greens, fish, corn pone, coffee

Week 5/Feb. 18 – Specialized production
Week 6/Feb. 25 – Wartime food needs ---- Family Tradition paper due
Week 7/Mar. 4 – Immigrant influences

Meal Three – Meat loaf, peas, jello fruit salad, bisquick rolls, tapioca pudding

Week 8/Mar. 11 – Middle Class reforms ** Book review for The Jungle due
March 18 – NO CLASS SPRING BREAK
Week 9/Mar. 25 – Government control of the food supply
Week 10/April 1 – Women in the kitchen
Week 11/April 8 – NO CLASS

Meal Four – Big Mac, fries, Coke, milkshake, apple pie

Week 12/April 15 – Are we what we eat? ** Book review for Fast Food Nation due

Week 13/April 22 – Where does our food come from? *** Last day to bring in food for food preparation project

Week 14/April 29 – Research papers due and presentations given

Week 14 – No Class – Study Day

Week 15 – Final Exam