Sociology 169F: Cultural Perspectives of Food
Spring 2024

INSTRUCTOR
Jill Bakehorn, Ph.D. (she/they)
jabakehorn@berkeley.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30-4:00pm on Zoom;
Thursdays 10:30am-12:00pm in person
Sign-up: https://calendly.com/bakehorn

CLASS MEETING
Tuesdays and Thursdays 8:00-9:29am
150 Goldman School of Public Policy

Course Description

This course will provide a broad overview of food as culture. Food has more meaning than mere sustenance and we will explore how food can nourish us culturally and socially. Food itself is a social construction; how and what is defined as suitable to eat is socially determined and subject to change. What is acceptable as food in one culture can be taboo in another. Food reflects a culture’s values and is a way one culture asserts its superiority over another. We will begin the course by examining some foundational writings on the cultural implications and explanations of food: How and why do we consume what we do? How is food used to create distinctions?

We will use these foundations to explore how food is imbued with gender, race, class, and even moral meanings and can form the basis for the constitution of identities and social relationships. Food is also connected to political ideologies that inform social movements as well as social inequities. How do we define “good” and “bad” food? How do we assign meaning, including stereotypes, to food? How do “concerns” about food, eating, and bodies lead to the policing of certain folks and cultural practices? Can food be a vehicle for agency and liberation?

What role does food preparation and cooking play in turning food from raw materials into culture? We eat food to nourish our bodies, which can be a source of a great deal of pleasure, but it can also be a source of anxiety. How does our body image impact our relationship to food? What about disease caused, at least partly, by what we consume?

What role do globalization and capitalism have on our food cultures and ways of life?
We will also examine how industrially-produced white bread in the U.S. demonstrates the complex social and political meanings and uses of food, like the construction of purity and germs; the reproduction of gender norms; the marginalization of immigrants; imperial ambitions and dominance; and the class-based meanings and ideologies of food.

Keep in mind this is a sociology course. Sociology is the study of human social activity, organization, and interaction. Sociology is about the search for patterned behavior and social, rather than individual, explanations for this behavior. Sociology is built upon empirical data, not opinions. Sociologists look beyond the taken-for-granted notions of our social environment to examine the many layers of social meaning in the human experience. (If this doesn't sound familiar to you, or if you are unclear about the sociological perspective, please refer to an introductory sociology text for a refresher.)

This course challenges many taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world. Keep in mind that your personal experiences may not match the general sociological insights discussed in the course. This does not negate the insights. Ask yourself why this might be the case. You may not agree with everything we read and discuss, but have an open mind, be ready to have your understanding deepened, and demonstrate an understanding of the sociological perspective.

**Course Goals**

- Examine food as a form of distinction and how this is connected to social inequities
- Analyze how food is infused with ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity, colonialism, and sexuality
- Explore how food can be a vehicle for belonging, identity, resistance, and liberation
- Deconstruct notions of “good” and “bad” foods, food practices, eating, and bodies; in particular examining how food is implicated in anti-Black racism
- Use the history of white bread to highlight and contextualize the themes of the course particularly the politics of food

**Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- Articulate the various cultural dimensions of food
- Explain how food is infused with ideological meaning
- Critically discuss how food is socially, culturally, and politically situated
- Use an intersectional approach
- Write succinct papers that effectively synthesize course materials and apply theory
Required Texts


The books are available as a PDF on bCourses

Course Reader: Individual files are available digitally on bCourses and a bound reader is available from Copy Central.

Assignments

**Food Journal:** You will keep a food journal throughout the semester where you reflect on food and culture in light of the themes of the course. I will assign 3 specific journal entries/themes. Worth 25% of your final grade.

**Essay Exams:** Midterm and final exam. You will be responsible for course readings, lectures, and any media presented in the class. These exams will focus on your ability to apply theories and to synthesize and make connections between various readings.

All work must be original (you cannot recycle work from other courses).

**Weekly Memos:** These assignments are designed to keep you motivated and engaged with the course and to provide opportunities for you to check your comprehension in preparation for the graded assignments. Assignments will be due on Mondays at 11:59pm (exceptions made for Monday holidays-the due date will be Tuesday).

These assignments give you a space to practice the skills you will later be graded on. **Complete 10 of the 12 assignments in order to get full credit** (the lowest two scores will be dropped). **Please note that these submissions are graded for completion, not proficiency. In other words, we are not grading the accuracy of your submissions.**
Grade Breakdown
Food Journal (30%)
Midterm (25%)
Final Exam (30%)
Weekly Memos (15%)

Be sure to carefully consider assignment feedback; it is provided to help you improve on future assignments. For in-text feedback, click on the link “View Feedback.”

Course Format and Policies

Readings
Complete readings prior to class to better prepare you to participate in class discussions and complete assignments. You will get a lot more out of lecture if you come prepared and I am happy to answer any questions you have.

Email
Please put the class number/name in the subject of the email. I endeavor to respond to emails within 24 hours, but this is not always possible; please be patient. Please note that I will respond to emails during normal business hours.

Names and Pronouns
You have the right to be referred to by the name you prefer and with the correct gender pronouns. Because the name listed in University records may not correspond to your preferred name, please inform me of your name (and pronunciation) and your pronouns so that I can ensure you are properly recognized and respected.

You can refer to me as Prof. Bakehorn, Dr. Bakehorn, or Jill. My pronouns are she/they.
Grading Policies

Extensions
Extensions are provided for those with this accommodation from DSP. Please contact me prior to the due date for each assignment to discuss extensions.

Late Work
My priority for this class, and the focus of my assessment of your work, is learning. Due dates are a practical necessity for many reasons, but life sometimes prevents us from meeting all of our obligations on time.

I will accept late work, but you will receive a 3% penalty off of your score for each day the paper is late (up to 7 days past due date). Please note that bCourses rounds up to the next whole number. For example, if you submit an assignment 1.3 days late, the late penalty will round up to 2 days. You do not need to contact me to turn in a paper late.

Assignments will not be accepted without prior approval past the 7 day late period.

TurnItIn
Assignments will be checked by TurnItIn for plagiarism. Keep in mind, this program keeps a database of previously turned in papers as well as searching the internet.

Re-Grades
To request a re-grade of an assignment: first, wait 24 hours after the assignment was returned and second, write up a statement detailing why you believe you deserve a higher grade. This statement should be about the substance of your work, not about effort. Be sure to make specific reference to your work, don’t simply say that you responded to the questions asked. Demonstrate how you did so. Request a re-grade within 7 days of the assignment being returned. My assessment and grade of your work will be used, even if that means you get a lower score than originally given for that work.

**Note that re-grades are likely not possible on final exams due to the tight grading timeline and university grade reporting deadlines.**
Academic Dishonesty

The University defines academic misconduct as “any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community” (UC Berkeley Code of Student Conduct).

Academic dishonesty includes cheating and plagiarism. Cheating is collaboration with other students on papers and exams. Plagiarism includes turning in any work that is not your own as well as improper or missing citations of others’ works. As a student of the University of California, you are bound by the Code of Academic Conduct. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will result in a referral to The Center for Student Conduct.

Plagiarism is most likely to occur because students are unaware of how to cite sources or because they feel desperate. If you get to this point in your writing, contact me ASAP rather than doing something you’ll very likely regret. I am happy to help.

Use of AI

The use of generative AI software or Large Language Models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT falls under the umbrella of academic misconduct as it involves an “action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage” and is not a representation of your own thoughts, critical thinking, and work. Academic integrity is a critical component of being a member of the university community and our ability to evaluate your work. We are evaluating your ability to synthesize and apply sociological concepts, not how well AI does this.

You may not use AI to write, in full or in part, any of the written assignments for this course. You should also not use AI tools to plagiarize. Using AI to generate or modify content to evade plagiarism detection violates academic integrity.

Do not assume the information or analysis you receive via AI is accurate, unbiased, sufficient for the assignment, or meets the standards of the course, even if you only incorporate it partially and after substantial paraphrasing, modification and /or editing. AI-generated content may not provide appropriate or clear attribution to the author(s) of the original sources.
Office Hours

Please see Page 1 or this link for information about my office hours. These office hours are specifically for you. We can discuss readings, assignments, post-college plans, existential dread, how to access resources, letters of recommendation, any issues you are having, what is bringing you joy, whatever.

If you are having any difficulties with the material or assignments for the course or if you are having any personal problems that are affecting your ability to complete assignments on time, please take advantage of office hours—I am here to help!

Remember that office hours are an important resource if for no other reason than getting to know your instructors could help you in the future when you may need letters of recommendation. You do not need to be struggling or have course-specific questions to go to office hours.

Student Support Services

Course Accessibility
This course is intended for all UC Berkeley students, including those with mental, emotional, physical, or cognitive disabilities, illnesses, injuries, impairments, or any other condition that can negatively impact equal access to education. If, at any point in the semester, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, you are welcome (but not required) to contact me by email or during office hours to discuss your specific needs.

I also encourage you to contact the Disabled Students’ Program. If you have a diagnosis, DSP can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan. By making a plan through DSP, you can ensure appropriate accommodations without disclosing your condition or diagnosis to course instructors.

Student Learning Center
“The primary academic support service for students at Berkeley, the SLC helps students transition to Cal; navigate the academic terrain; create networks of resources; and achieve academic, personal and professional goals.”
Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Services
To learn more about these issues, how to support survivors, or how to file a report and receive support services, start here: Survivor Support. Please note that I am not a confidential advocate; I am a mandated reporter. You can speak to a Confidential Care Advocate at the Path to Care Center.

Economic, Food, and Housing Support
If you are in need of economic, food, or housing support, you can find help at the Basic Needs Center. You may be eligible for money to buy groceries via Calfresh or the Food Assistance Program. If you are in need of food immediately, please contact the UC Berkeley Food Pantry. More information on resources can be found here.

Mental Health Resources
All students — regardless of background or identity — may experience a range of issues that can become barriers to learning like strained relationships, anxiety, depression, alcohol and other drug problems, difficulties with concentration, sleep, and eating, and/or lack of motivation. UC Berkeley offers many services like Recalibrate and Student Mental Health that could help.
Course Outline

Complete readings by the day listed below. Course schedule is subject to change.

Week One: Introductions

Tuesday, 1/16  Welcome + Introductions

Thursday, 1/18  Food and Culture


Plagiarism Primer

Weeks Two-Three: Foundational Cultural Themes

Tuesday, 1/23  Theories of Food Consumption


Thursday, 1/25  Food as Distinction


Tuesday, 1/30  Distinguishing Tastes


Thursday, 2/1  Food, Status Anxiety, and Class


Weeks Four-Five: Food, Ideology, and Identity

Tuesday, 2/6  Food Preparation and Reproducing Gender Ideologies


Thursday, 2/8  Resisting Gender/Colonial Ideologies in the Kitchen


**JOURNAL ENTRY 1 DUE FRIDAY, 2/9 AT 11:59PM**
Tuesday, 2/13  Food and Belonging


Thursday, 2/15  Food and Authenticity


Week Six: Moralizing Bodies

Tuesday, 2/20  Hegemonic Masculinity and Diets


Thursday, 2/22  Body Size and Morality

Weeks Seven-Ten: Eating While Black

Tuesday, 2/27  Introducing *Eating While Black*

Psyche A. Williams-Forson: Introduction in *Eating While Black: Food Shaming and Race in America*

Thursday, 2/29  Food and Anti-Black Racism

Psyche A. Williams-Forson: Chapter 1: It’s a Low-Down, Dirty Shame: Food and Anti-Black Racism in *Eating While Black*

**Journal Entry 2 Due Friday, 3/1 at 11:59PM**

Tuesday, 3/5  Food Choice and Dislocation

Psyche A. Williams-Forson: Chapter 2: In Her Mouth Was an Olive Leaf Pluck’d Off: Food Choice in Times of Dislocation in *Eating While Black*

Thursday, 3/7 +  Food Shaming
Tuesday, 3/12

Psyche A. Williams-Forson: Chapter 3: What’s This in My Salad? Food Shaming, the Real Unhealthy Ingredient in *Eating While Black*

**Thursday, 3/14**  Surviving and Thriving + Conclusions

Psyche A. Williams-Forson: Chapter 4: Eating in the Meantime: Expanding African American Studies in a Changing Food World in *Eating While Black*

Psyche A. Williams-Forson: Epilogue: When Racism Rests on Your Plate, Indeed, Worry about Yourself in *Eating While Black*

Tuesday, 3/19  Catch Up/Review

Thursday, 3/21  Work on Midterm—NO CLASS

**Take-Home Midterm Due Friday, 3/22 at 11:59PM**
Week Eleven: Spring Break

Tuesday, 3/26  Spring Break

Thursday, 3/28  Spring Break

Weeks Twelve-Fifteen: White Bread: A Sociopolitical Food

Tuesday, 4/2 +  Bread and Power + Gender and “Dirty Immigrants”
Thursday, 4/4


Aaron Bobrow-Strain: Chapter 1: Untouched by Human Hands: Dreams of Purity and Contagion in White Bread

Tuesday, 4/9  “Spectacle of Modern Progress”

Aaron Bobrow-Strain: Chapter 2: The Invention of Sliced Bread: Dreams of Control and Abundance in White Bread

Thursday, 4/11  Avoiding White Bread

Aaron Bobrow-Strain: Chapter 3: The Staff of Death: Dreams of Health and Discipline in White Bread

Tuesday, 4/16  Enriching White Bread

Aaron Bobrow-Strain: Chapter 4: Vitamin Bread Boot Camp: Dreams of Strength and Defense in White Bread

Thursday, 4/18  White Bread Imperialism

Aaron Bobrow-Strain: Chapter 5: White Bread Imperialism: Dreams of Peace and Security in White Bread

JOURNAL ENTRY 3 DUE FRIDAY, 4/19 AT 11:59PM
Tuesday, 4/23  White Bread and White Trash

Aaron Bobrow-Strain: Chapter 6: How White Bread Became White Trash: Dreams of Resistance and Status in *White Bread*

Thursday, 4/25  Dreams of Good Food

Aaron Bobrow-Strain: Chapter 7: Conclusion: Beyond Good Bread in *White Bread*

**Week Sixteen: Reading, Review, and Recitation**

Monday, April 29-Friday, May 3

**Final Exam: Due Thursday, 5/9 at 10pm**

UC Berkeley sits on the territory of xučyun (Huichin), the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo speaking Ohlone people, the successors of the sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and other familial descendants of the Verona Band. We recognize that every member of the Berkeley community has benefitted, and continues to benefit, from the use and occupation of this land since the institution’s founding in 1868. Consistent with our values of community, inclusion and diversity, we have a responsibility to acknowledge and make visible the university’s relationship to Native peoples. As members of the Berkeley community, it is vitally important that we not only recognize the history of the land on which we stand, but also, we recognize that the Muwekma Ohlone people are alive and flourishing members of the Berkeley and broader Bay Area communities today.

*This acknowledgement was co-created with the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and Native American Student Development*