Food Movements
A course created by Nicole Brownstein ’11 and Nora Murphy ’12

Looking at a string bean, I can see a cloud floating in it. I can see the rain and the sunshine. I realize that this string bean is a part of the Earth and the sky. When I bite into the string bean, I am aware that this is a string bean that I have put into my mouth. There is nothing else in my mouth - not my sorrow or my fear. When I chew the string bean, I am just chewing a string bean - not my worries or my anger. I chew very carefully, with one hundred percent of myself. I feel a connection to the sky, the Earth, the farmers who grow the food, and the people who cook it. Eating like this, I feel that solidity, freedom, and joy are possible. The meal not only nourishes my body, but also my soul, my consciousness, and my spirit.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

Food. We need it to survive—it is what sustains us and yet many people do not know where it comes from or that it is one of the most politicized commodities in the world. Products like Hamburger Helper and Shake n' Bake were invented as a part of second wave feminism after World War II when women began to assimilate into the work place, yet were still pressured to put a “homemade” meal on the table. It seems strange to think about Hamburger Helper as being this politically charged product, but it is and people need to realize that.

Organic farming was first labeled in the 1970s, but only became popular after the economic recession in the 1980s when farmers could no longer afford chemical fertilizers and pesticides and thus crops became organic by neglect.

When monopolies are mentioned, most people think of the robber barons, but food is one of the most monopolized commodities in the United States. Corporate farms hold monopolies over the meat and soybean industries because of their incredible amount of purchasing power. Monsanto soybeans are found in almost every product in the grocery store and why? Because Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas acted as the lawyer for the soybean conglomerate.

By regulating what we eat, government organizations are given the agency to regulate how we survive. This course will focus on the origins of food and the public policies surrounding what we eat. We will read texts that support regulations and others that are against it because it is important to understand both parties’ perspectives in order to create an effective argument.

--Nicole Brownstein and Nora Murphy
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Focus of the class: Food Movements

1950s: Microwave Craze (onset of second wave feminism)
1970s: Organic Food
1987-Today: Slow Food (as a reaction to capitalism)
Other: fad diets, environmental concerns

Possible texts:

- Excerpts from Everything I Want to do is Illegal by Joel Salatin (owner of Polyface Farms)
- Marx’s ‘Alienation of the Worker’
- Eating Animals by Jonathan Safran Foer
- Excerpts from Silent Spring by Rachel Carson
- Tragedy of the Commons by Garrett Hardin
- Excerpts from Fast Food Nation by Eric Schlosser
- Articles by Michael Pollan and Alice Waters
- Just Food by James E. McWilliams

Possible Guest Speakers:

- James Pitt, owner of Delta Organic Farm
- Nicole Berube, program director of CitySeed Inc
- The Owner of Wheatberry
- Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro
- Professor Thomas Leatherman

Potential Syllabus

Week 1: Intro to course
Topics: Momism, 1950s food policy, beginning of the microwave era
Watch: Good Eats with Alton Brown
Eat: twinkies

Week 2: Fast Food
Topics: Sanitation, health issues, corporate farming
Read: excerpts from Fast Food Nation
Watch: excerpt from Super Size Me
Eat: fries

Week 3: Intro to Organic Food Movement
Topics: What is organic?, USDA regulations, 1970s political atmosphere, environmental risks/benefits
Read: Excerpts from Omnivore's Dilemma and Silent Spring
Eat: organic greens
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Week 4: USDA regulations
Topics: What is free range?, more about what is organic
Read: excerpts from laws/regulations, excerpts from The Revolution Will Not Be Microwaved by Sandor Katz
Eat: Free range eggs?

Week 5: Intro to Slow Food
Topics: What is Slow Food?, Who is Alice Waters?, slow vs fast
Read: Raw Milk Revolution, Marx’s ‘Alienation of the Worker’
Watch: excerpt from King Corn
Eat: maybe we can cook something in class?

Week 6: Slow Food
Topics: Health and environmental benefits, detriments, gender roles in the home
Read: excerpt from Eating Animals, Tragedy of the Commons
Watch: excerpt from Food Inc
Eat: cook again?

Week 7: Local vs Organic
Topics: Nutrition, food desertification
Read: Alice Waters, Barbara Kingsolver
Eat: canned & fresh veg

Week 8: Fad diets
Topics: Why fad diets begin, media/propaganda,
Read: South Beach Diet book, Atkins book
Eat: Slim fast bars/shakes

Homework ideas:
1. Each week, someone could bring in a food that represents that movement that is being discussed in class and give a short presentation about it. Hopefully, they could also bring in samples! (See “Eat” section in syllabus)

2. Volunteer activities, like working on a farm for a day or in a soup kitchen/food pantry

3. Follow a fad diet for a week (if the student does not have any underlying health issues...this might be tricky, but it also has the potential to be very interesting and prompt a great class discussion)