Anthropology of Food Week 9

"Gastro-Anomie: Global Indigestion?"

Sign-up for Your Presentation Time

Thursday-Friday, 27-28 October 2016
Fall Break

This week we meet the *Soul Food Junkies*. It is "a Film about Food, Family, and Tradition" featured on the PBS *Independent Lens* series.

Visit the [Soul Food Junkies website](http://www.soulfoodjunkies.com) and have look around. . . .

About the Film *Soul Food Junkies*, from the Producers

Filmmaker Byron Hurt grew up eating lots of soul food: grits and scrambled eggs covered with cheese, buttered biscuits smothered with gravy, bacon, collard greens seasoned with
ham hocks, fried pork chops, macaroni and cheese, deep-fried chicken, fried fish, barbecue chicken and ribs, candied yams coated with cinnamon and brown sugar, and other delicious but fatty foods right out of the black southern tradition.

Both of his parents are from Milledgeville, Georgia, a small southern town. It’s a place where soul food is beloved by black and white folks alike. Soul food is a long held culinary tradition passed down from generation to generation, and is a source of pride for many black people. Some soul food, depending on how it is prepared, can be good for you. But when it is cooked with lots of fat, sugar, and salt — which is often the case — it can lead to obesity and other health issues.

Hurt can speak from personal experience. From his earliest memories, his father was overweight, his mom the soul food chef. As an adult, growing concern about his father’s health prompted Hurt to confront him about his eating habits, but to no avail. Eventually, his father made small changes to his diet and began to exercise more, but the changes came too late in his life. In 2004, doctors diagnosed him with terminal pancreatic cancer, a virulent disease that disproportionately affects black people. Statistically, black Americans are more likely to die of the disease than whites; figures for 2001 to 2005 from the National Cancer Institute show that blacks had a 32 percent higher death rate. One of the risk factors for developing pancreatic cancer is a high fat, meat-based diet. Hurt’s father died in 2007 at the young age of 63. This is sadly a common story in the lives of many African American families in the U.S. — losing loved ones too soon from a nutrition-related illness.

In *Soul Food Junkies*, Hurt sets out on a historical and culinary journey to learn more about the soul food tradition and its relevance to black cultural identity. Through candid interviews with soul food cooks, historians, and scholars, as well as with doctors, family members, and everyday people, the film puts this culinary tradition under the microscope to examine both its positive and negative consequences. Hurt also explores the socioeconomic conditions in predominantly black neighborhoods, where it can be difficult to find healthy options, and meets some pioneers in the emerging food justice movement who are challenging the food industry, encouraging communities to “go back to the land” by creating sustainable and eco-friendly gardens, advocating for healthier options in local supermarkets, supporting local farmers' markets, avoiding highly processed fast foods, and cooking healthier versions of traditional soul food.

Speaking of *Race (and Gender, and Class)*, be sure to have a look at the . . .

Forum: Michael W. Twitty’s Open Letter to Paula Deen from Afroculinaria (Due by the end of Week 9—Saturday, 29 October 2016)

Twitty’s letter is a well-written—now quite famous—piece.
This week we’ll continue to have a look at globalized industrial food; in *Eating Culture* we’ll have a look at Food Sovereignty and Food Security, and a peek at Localizing Global and Globalized Commodities.

This week you can pick from a *smörgåsbord* of ideas on what Gillian Crowther calls “Gastro-Anomie”—obesity, as well as Food Sovereignty, Food Security/Insecurity, Cuisines, and other side topics.

At the Nobel “Making Food Good” Conference at Gustavus two of the speakers talked about obesity in America at the very beginning of their presentations—Marian Nestle (no relation to the company) reviewed the now-common information that Americans (and people in the industrial world in general) have been growing obese over the last couple of decades to the point where over 70% of the adults are now clinically overweight or obese, while Jeffrey M. Friedman, talking on “. . . the biologic base of obesity” began his talk stating that the figures were misleading *[no pun intended]*, and, even if they weren’t, genes basically control body weight.

But as Robert H. Lustig, M.D., points out, “*We even have an epidemic of obese six-month-olds!*” (*Fat Chance: Beating the Odds Against Sugar, Processed Food, Obesity, and Disease.* Hudson Street, 2012, 4). The human gene pool hasn’t substantially changed in the last few decades, *so the cause cannot be genetics*, or even primarily a laps of individual self-control.

And it’s not just in the United States. In England they had to buy some new ambulances because some of the guests will not fit into the current ambulances. And if one doesn’t fit in the ambulance and is off to the morgue, the same problem awaits. In 2013 one chap in the morgue wouldn’t fit into the morgue’s cooler and they left him start to decompose on the autopsy table. . . .

*Too big' body left to decompose* -- BBCNews (09 March 2012)

**Ambulance service buys vehicles for obese patients** -- BBCNews (23 January 2012)

**Obese patient needs bigger ambulance** -- BBCNews (03 February 2011)

Last month the National Health Service in Great Britain began to put obese patients at the end of the surgery queues, denying them routine surgery. . . .

**Obese patients and smokers banned from routine surgery in 'most severe ever' rationing in the NHS** -- The Telegraph (02 September 2016)

Not so long ago in my hometown of Winsted, MN, they added a wing to the “leisure home” and purchased *doublewide wheelchairs, and hoists to get the guests in and out of bed and bath*. The medical staff are not able to lift newly-arriving residents.
On a flight I was on not so long ago there was a passenger who physically took up two seats in the business class section. If he gets any larger, he may need help from the flight attendants to “shoehorn” him into the plane through the boarding door. (I don’t think airlines allow passengers to ride in the cargo hold—yet.)

The airplane problem has gotten so bad that airlines are starting to charge obese passengers more to fly . . .

Should obese passengers pay more to fly? -- BBCautos (20 October 2016)

And calls for a “Sugar Tax” continue to mount . . .

W.H.O. Urges Tax on Sugary Drinks to Fight Obesity -- The New York Times (11 October 2016)

Philadelphia to bring in 'soda tax' to fight obesity -- BBCNews (16 June 2016)

Obesity is now a world-wide problem . . . and all that long ago in the United States the American Medical Association declared obesity to be a “disease” . . .

Obesity is a disease in the US. Should it be? -- Kate Dailey, BBCNews (24 June 2013)

Obesity is a 'disease.' Now what? -- NPRNews (21 June 2013)

Earlier this year, April 2016, we reached the “tipping point”, so to speak . . .

More obese people in the world than underweight, says study -- BBCNews (01 April 2016)

Michael Moss’ book that came out in 2013, Salt Sugar Fat was on The New York Times hardcover nonfiction list for several months. Moss is quoted by Martha Rosenberg in the article mentioned above. And it created quite a stir. Here are some commentaries and follow-ups from the release . . .

Michael Moss, Salt Sugar Fat

Michael Moss on 'Salt Sugar Fat,' how we got so addicted -- MPRNews (1 March 2013)

Book pick: 'Salt Sugar Fat' by Michael Moss -- MPRNews (26 February 2013)
And, as Dr. Lustig notes, the problem is fructose, and, of course high-fructose corn products are in tens of thousands of items, literally, in a typical American supermarket.

No wonder Big Food is spending millions of dollars fighting to keep information on “added sugars” off of the food label. (They argue, in effect, that their customers are not smart enough to understand what “added sugars” means.) And the sugar industry has been carrying on a campaign of misinformation and disinformation FOR THE LAST 50 YEARS . . .

So, take your pick: Genes control body weight, or food intake/lack of moving controls body weight, or, the fact that your brain doesn’t respond to fructose to let you know when you have had enough to eat results in chronic overeating, or all of the above.
Meanwhile, The Two Fat Ladies thumb their noses at the lot. We’ll meet the Two Fat Ladies next week. And, as you have seen, Michael Pollan adds his two cents worth in Ch. 6 of The Omnivore’s Dilemma, “The consumer: a republic of fat” (see Week 7 Readings).

Whatever your take on obesity and the “obesity epidemic” in America, which is rapidly spreading to all of the industrialized nations of the world, the startling multiple paradoxes remain: in a world that produces more food than people need or can eat, two-thirds of the world’s citizens are overweight while about 925 million people or so are undernourished while in America about 1000 Anorexics die each year of complication related to excessive weight loss thinking they are fat . . .

We’ll have a look at these issues in Ch. 8 of Eating Culture, “Gastro-Anomie: Global Indigestion?” For the present, to get your thought processes working on the many and complex problems associated with obesity, have a listen to what the Two Fat Ladies and Sherri A. Inness and Michael Pollen and others have to say next week and the week after.

Take the Student Survey:

We greatly appreciate your participation in the course survey. If you didn’t fill the Student Survey out yet, please do that (with the “Activities” for Week 8). In order for it to be most useful, it’s 100% anonymous.

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Rate and Rank the Films / Videos

And also as usual, be sure to check all of the activities for the week on your Moodle HomePage. And do them in a timely manner . . .

Response to the film Soul Food Junkies (Due by the end of Week 9—Saturday, 29 October 2016; Your Name Will Be Logged) Feedback
And Voice Your Opinion

Forum: Michael W. Twitty’s Open Letter to Paula Deen from Afroculinaria (Due by the end of Week 9—Saturday, 29 October 2016)

Forum: Slow Food / Locavorism (Due by the end of Week 9—Saturday, 29 October 2016)

REM: Take the f2016 On-Line Student Survey (if you haven't already done so)

It’s time to . . .

Sign up for your Class Presentation Time
(See Week 9 Activities)

A major part of this course is your research project—not just for the points, but because researching a topic you are interested in and presenting your findings to others, and then writing the results up as a formal paper, is one of the best ways to learn things. (Lectures, as it turns out, research suggests, are one of the worst ways—keeping in mind that one must separate “learning” from the “perception of learning.”) So this week be sure to spend some time working on your Paper and Presentation. (Remember that your Presentation is a “work in progress” report on your paper.)

If I can be of help with your project, please let me know.

(Right now there are enough time slots for everyone to sign up. Do not wait until the last minute, or until after the Presentation Sessions have gone by, and then argue that you cannot give your presentation because there is not a time available.)

(Sign up for one time slot selected from the following days)

The class Presentations WebPage, if you would like to review, is at <http://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/troufs/anthfood/afpresentations.html#title>.

Presentations Session I: Week 11 Day 21 (Sign up here) Thursday, 10 November 2016 Wiki

Presentations Session II: Week 12 Day 22 (Sign up here) Tuesday, 15 November 2016 Wiki
Try sharing your ideas with others in class. Discuss them on-line . . .

2016 **Student Collaboration Space**
for your own personal use

Wiki for Project Collaboration

QUICKMAIL (see sidebar)

The above items will be found at the top of your Moodle folder under "Student Collaboration Space".

Check the results of the class Video Responses from earlier weeks when they close. You can find the results in the Moodle Blocks where they first appeared. This week have a look at . . .
Food Trivia for the week: What does "Häagen-Dazs" mean?

Your Readings and Assignments and Activities listings are available in the Week 9 Block of your Moodle folder.

As usual, if you have any general or specific questions—especially about your Project, or about the assignments, or about the extra credit option(s), or about the Exams—please do not hesitate to stop in after class, or post them on Moodle, or e-mail troufs@d.umn.edu.

Enjoy your break.

Best Regards,

Tim Roufs
<http://www.d.umn.edu/~troufs/>