

ANT 267: Food and Culture
Spring 2008 Tu,Th 10:00 — 11:15 am, Chambers 1006

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Lecture Notes, 8 April 2008

New Social Movements

Gary Nabhan, “Rooting Out the Causes of Disease”

- Main point: previous explanations were wrong, in that high rates of diabetes among contemporary hunter-gatherers (and similarly, indigenous people living in extreme conditions like deserts) were caused by maladaptive genetic predisposition; instead, Nabhan wants to argue that changes in diet (consumption of modern processed foods) are the source of extremely high rates of diabetes
- So yes, while there have been physiological adaptations to living in the desert, the source of high rates of diabetes and obesity among the Pima Indians that he studied, and other indigenous groups throughout the world, comes from the increased consumption of what he calls “fast release foods,” replacing “slow release foods”



Fast vs. Slow release foods

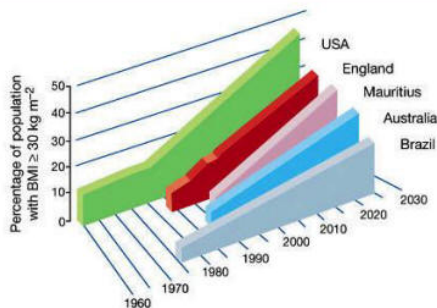
Glycaemic Index	Types of Food	Nutritional Outcomes
High	Refined cereals (Cornflakes, Rice crispies ect...), Sweets, Commercial Honey White & brown bread, Mealimeal, 2- Minute noodles Rice cakes, Snack bread, instant oats, Pastries, Muffins, Cakes, Biscuits	Energy slumps or ‘lows’ High insulin levels Lowered satiety – hungry faster Poor mental performance Cravings for sweet or starchy foods
Low	Sweet potato, Durum Pasta (Cooked aldente), Oat bran & Certain Oats, Kellogg’s hi fiber bran Pearled Barley, Mealies, Soya, All legumes– dried & canned, (peas, baked beans, lentils, pea Dahl...), Seed loaf bread, Pro-vita	Sustained energy Enhanced health & well being also improved immunity Less demand on insulin therefore great for those with diabetes Feelings of satiety – fuller for longer Promotes fat loss Less cravings (Easier to turn down that afternoon chocolate!) Better mental performance

- Nabhan points out that even temporary shifts of diet back to slow release foods for these populations (examples of ten day shift among Pima, one month shift among Australian aborigines) have immediate health benefits
- Another key point here is that healthy consumption practices are **specific** to populations, not universal; prickly pear juice does not have the same health benefit



Fruit on cactus pads.

Obesity, a Global Problem



F. C. Kopelman, *Nature* 404, 636-643 (2000)

to all people. Something to think about is that individuals of European descent (as a population, not as individuals) are less susceptible to “first world diseases” (referred to as Syndrome X maladies by Nabhan) than other populations.

- Relate this to what is being globally circulated in terms of foodstuffs; the exportation of McDonalds and other modern foodstuffs that are heavily processed
- “Today, following dramatic economic shifts that have favored a few cereal

grains and livestock production for export over mixed cropping, the bulk of the world’s population has been left vulnerable to diabetes. One recent reckoning suggests that upwards of 200 million people are now susceptible to diabetes and the other killers associated with Syndrome X. This is not the exception among the diverse peoples of the world; it is a pathology that has become the norm” (Nabhan 2008:377).

Alison Leitch, “Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat”

About the Slow Food Movement:

- Emerged on the political scene in 1986, with protest against the opening of a McDonalds near the Spanish Steps in Rome
- Today, a leading international non-governmental organization that promotes the use of local agriculture and the preservation of local foodways; now centered around “eco-gastronomy”
- Gradually transformed from a local Italian organization that was made up of elite gourmards to a new social movement that contested politics in Italy and in other parts of the world
- Declaring of “endangered” foods; similar to discourse of other new social movements (such as the environmental movement, emigration/migration, etc.



Slow Food Movement video



We believe that everyone has a fundamental right to pleasure and consequently the responsibility to protect the heritage of food, tradition and culture that make this pleasure possible. Our movement is founded upon this concept of eco-gastronomy – a recognition of the strong connections between plate and planet.

Slow Food is **good, clean and fair** food. We believe that the food we eat should taste good; that it should be produced in a clean way that does not harm the environment, animal welfare or our health; and that food producers should receive fair compensation for their work.

We consider ourselves **co-producers**, not consumers, because by being informed about how our food is produced and actively supporting those who produce it, we become a part of and a partner in the production process.

Lardo di Colonatta



- *Lardo*, like Mintz’s sugar and coffee, was a “proletarian hunger killer” (Leitch 2008:385); it w
- A local Milanese staple, with an annual festival, Lardo di colonatta serves as a good lens through which to understand SFM’s three-prong mission:
- 1. Defense of biodiversity
 2. Taste Education
 3. And linking producers/coproducers together within

new patterns/significance of consumption

For discussion:

Why have new social movements become grounded in or expressed through such issues as food? (To put it another way, why has culture become politicized?). This is an issue that is more than symbolic, according to contemporary social scientists.

“For local people *lardo* is deeply reminiscent of a shared past characterized by poverty and food scarcity. In diets distinguished by protein scarcity, *lardo* was an essential calorific food for men who, in the past, labored up to fifteen hours a day cutting and hauling huge blocks of marble. To eat *lardo*, especially in the carnevalesque space of an annual festival, where hundreds of kilos of pork fat are consumed over four hot days in late August, is to remember and celebrate this past as collective history and corporeal memory” (Leitch 2008:386). What is going on here?