

**Breaking Bread: Religion and American Foodways**  
**Religious Studies 217**  
**Fall Semester, 2006**  
**MW 10:25-11:40**  
**Blaustein 205**

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*Drink is in itself a good creature of God, and to be received with thankfulness, but the abuse of drink is from Satan, the wine is from God, but the Drunkard is from the Devil.*

*-Increase Mather*

*Coffee is the only thing I like integrated.*

*-Malcolm X*

*Gefilte fish can be the next sushi. You want to know why? Because people are hungry for something authentic. They remember what they used to eat at their bubby and zaidy's house. They miss the past. Even if they never had it, they still miss it.*

*-Tova Mirvis, The Outside World*

*Tasting a piece of bread that someone bought is like looking at that person, but tasting a piece of bread that they made is like looking out of their eyes.*

*-Diana Abu-Jaber, Crescent*

**Introduction:**

This course is a methodological inquiry into American food traditions as elements of personal and communal religious identity. It also is an introduction to the study of religion, examining theories of religion within the context of religious foodways. The course will emphasize the implication of food culture as a category for a religiously pluralistic society such as the United States. Topics to be covered in this course include a variety of religious traditions as they exist in the United States, food in American culture, religious and national identity, and acculturation over time. Shifts in American religious practice and food culture will be examined in light of immigration.

This is not a greatest hits course. A semester is too brief to even attempt to explore all the world's religious practices with any depth or justice. Consequently, this course will explore a limited selection of religious traditions, examining them specifically in the United States, and approaching religious practices as they influence and are influenced by contemporary food culture. We will begin each section with a historical overview of a religious tradition in order to develop a usable vocabulary and then move into a discussion of contemporary practice and identity. Additionally, we will examine American foodways that are not traditionally considered "religious." We will ask such questions as: What does it mean to be religious? What does it mean to be part of a religious community? Are these two questions the same? How is religious identity preserved by food traditions? How is religious identity created by food traditions? Texts will include theory, fiction, memoirs, and film.

The goals of this course are...

1. To understand that there are many ways to approach the study of religion.
2. To gain a basic knowledge of the theory and vocabulary used within the academic conversation of religious studies.
3. To improve your ability to read texts (as well as elements of material culture) carefully and critique them.
4. To cultivate basic literacy in some of the world's religious traditions.
5. To develop an understanding of the ways that ethnic food traditions create and sustain personal and communal religious identity.

### **Required Texts:**

You will be expected to acquire the following books, as well as access readings on electronic reserve (the reserve readings will be designated with an \* in your schedule, and will be available through WebCT):

Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*

Elizabeth Erlich, *Miriam's Kitchen: A Memoir*

Stuart M. Matlins and Arthur J. Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook* (noted on syllabus as HBPS)

Elijah Muhammad, *How to Eat to Live, Book No. 1*

Swami Prabhupada, *The Higher Taste: A Guide to Gourmet Vegetarian Cooking and a Karma-Free Diet*

Daniel Sack, *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture*

### **Attendance:**

You are expected to attend and participate in every class session. If you know you will be unable to attend class due to illness or an emergency, you should make every effort to alert me in advance (or to let me know of the circumstances of your absence as soon as possible) by e-mail. More than three unexcused absences during the semester will result in a lowered overall grade. In addition, three late arrivals will result in an absence. You **must** be on time. Almost every class will start with a student presentation and when you are late, you disrupt your classmates' work.

You are also required to attend one religious service or gathering that involves food (this will be the jumping off point for your term paper). More detail will be forthcoming.

### **Class Presentations:**

These will be discussed in detail in class. You will have considerable freedom in determining your topic (although suggestions will be offered). These presentations should be **no more than 15** minutes long, and we should meet briefly to discuss your approach and sources (at least one of which should be a non-internet source). You are encouraged to use multi-media in these presentations, and should bring in some type of food to present to and share with the class. While you are not required to turn in a handout to the class, you will be required to submit a typed page of sources to me **at the beginning** of your presentation, as well as post a recipe or brief description of the food you are discussing on WebCT.

In addition to my assessment, your presentation will be evaluated by your classmates.

## Grading Process:

### Evaluation Scheme:

One 10- page paper	30%
8 intellectual responses	8%
2-page diet diary	2%
2-page book review on either <i>Miriam's Kitchen</i> or <i>Crescent</i>	5%
In-class Presentation	15%
Participation	15%
Final Exam	25%

## How Does One Earn A Grade?

An **A** requires both initiative and inspiration. This grade is reserved for exceptional work.

A **B** fulfills all requirements well.

A **C** fulfills all requirements satisfactorily.

A **D** is barely adequate fulfillment of requirements.

An **F** is reserved for work that does not remotely meet the requirements. Plagiarism is a good way to earn an **F**.

## Writing Assignments:

*Writing assignments* are due on the due date! Any work submitted after it is due will be penalized an **additional letter grade each day**. Papers more than three days late will not be accepted. Assignments are to be submitted in **paper form or through WebCT (I will not accept emailed papers)** in **12-point** typeface, **double-spaced**, with **one-inch margins**. The first page should include your name, the date, course number and my name. Always **number your pages** and **staple** them together.

You will be graded not only on your ideas, but on how you convey your ideas. **Content counts, but so do structure, grammar and spelling**. If you require help with your papers, one-on-one tutorial assistance is available all semester at the Connecticut College [Writing Center](#). To schedule a tutorial, please call 439-2173 or go to their website.

Please note that this is not a proofreading service; it is a venue for learning the art of writing for an academic audience. Make appointments in advance of your paper's due date. Writing tutors can help you at any stage in the writing process: brainstorming ideas, mapping out an argument, polishing your prose.

*Please Note:* If you have a physical or mental **disability**, either hidden or visible, which may require classroom, test-taking, or other reasonable modifications, please see me as soon as possible. If you have not already done so, please be sure to register with Susan L. Duques, Ph.D., in the Office of Student Disability Services, at Extension 5428

## Participation Requirements:

*Participation* For any class to function, participation is extremely important. Your participation will be evaluated on the frequency and quality of your comments, as well as responses to your classmates' comments. Ways of participating include:

- responding thoughtfully to questions or comments posed by the instructor or by a classmate;

- posing a question or comment that occurs to you while working through the readings;
- generating your own insightful questions that probe deeper into the subject material.

Your participation should reflect the following:

- Did you do the requisite reading(s)?
- Did you think about this issue?
- Have you listened to and considered earlier discussion?
- Are your answers relevant? insightful? appropriate?

Our class meetings are meant as a place for you to exchange information, share ideas, share opinions, form opinions, and help each other throughout the semester.

Expectations: The three “R’s” that will make this class successful

- **Reading:** Everyone is expected to keep up with the readings. Each week, our discussion will focus on the readings assigned for that week, so you will need to complete the assignment before class. My lectures are **not** summaries of the readings, you **will** need to both read and come to class.
- **Reflection:** You need not only to read the necessary pages each week but also to spend some time thinking and reflecting on what you have read. Engage the reading – analyze, evaluate, come up with questions, think about connections with other things you have read, etc. The intellectual responses will help you do this well.
- **Respect:** We all need to have appropriate respect and consideration for each other’s views. We also need to have respect for the material we are studying. Even if you find a particular reading to be disagreeable somehow, try to understand it on its own terms rather than simply dismissing it.

**Email Availability:**

As your instructor, I will occasionally communicate with you via e-mail. I will check my email daily, but it may take me up to two days to respond to messages. Please type your name and course number in the Subject heading.

**Honor Code:**

*Plagiarism:* Any attempt by a student to represent the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism includes each of the following: copying the answers of another student on an examination, copying or substantially restating the work of another person or persons in any oral or written work without citing the appropriate source, and collaboration with someone else in an academic endeavor without acknowledging his or her contribution. All instances of plagiarism will be dealt with according to Connecticut College’s policy on plagiarism, as outlined in the Honor Code. Seriously folks, I’ve had to deal with this problem on several unfortunate occasions. I know how to use the internet. I will catch you. Please don’t put me in that situation.

All work in this course falls under Connecticut College’s Honor Code. If you have any questions about whether your usage of sources is acceptable, please contact me.

**Class Schedule<sup>1</sup> and Readings:**

**Part I.**  
**What we mean when we talk about “religion” and “food”**  
**Or**  
**You are what you eat**

*Tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you what you are.*

-Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher

**September 4            Introduction**

**September 6            How do we talk about religion?**

Colleen McDannell, “Interpreting Things”\*

Amitai Etzioni, “Holidays and Rituals: Neglected Seedbeds of Virtue” *We Are What We Celebrate*\*

Colman Andrews, “Authenticity: It’s the Real Thing”\* [to be read in class]

*How can we take McDannell’s approach to material culture and employ it in the study of holidays? How does Durkheim’s functional approach to ritual (discussed in Etzioni) explain the meaning and utility of holidays?*

**September 11            How do we talk about food?**

Carole M. Counihan, “Food, Culture, and Gender.”\*

Peter Gardella, “Food,” *Domestic Religion*.\*

Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” *Implicit Meanings*\*

*What are Counihan’s four categories of foodways? How can they be applied to various celebrations or meals? How can Andrews’ discussion of “authenticity” be applied to religious studies as well as foodways? Pay particular attention to Douglas’ method here. Think about how you would go about approaching familiar religious traditions with this level of scrutiny.*

**September 13**

Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” *The Interpretation of Cultures*\*

*How does Geertz’ definition aid in the understanding of religion and culture (or religion as culture)?*

**Part II.**  
**Religious Traditions**  
**And**  
**Who’s in the Kitchen**

**Jews**

**September 18            Introduction**

“Jewish” HBPS

Max Apple, “Stranger at the Table” *Free Agents*\*

*What does Apple’s story reveal about boundaries regarding food and relations between people?*

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<sup>1</sup> Note: This schedule is subject to change.

**September 20 Jewish Immigration**

Jenna Joselit, "Kitchen Judaism"\*

Gaye Tuchman and Harry Gene Levine, "New York Jews and Chinese Food: The Social Construction of an Ethnic Pattern"\*

*Both readings deal with early 20<sup>th</sup> century Jews. How do these first and second generation Americans attempt to assert their American-ness through diet?*

**September 25 The Jewish Year**

Ehrlich, *Miriam's Kitchen*

*How much of Ehrlich's story is a conversion narrative? How so?*

**September 27 Becoming Kosher**

Ehrlich, *Miriam's Kitchen*

*How many memoirs are included in this memoir? How much of Ehrlich's kosher journey has to do with the past? The future?*

**October 2 No Class (Fall Break)**

**Catholics**

**October 4 Introduction**

"Roman Catholic" HBPS

Susan Bales, "Research on First Communion" (can also be found at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week638/interview.html>)

*How does Bales ascribe meaning to the ritual of communion for these children?*

**October 9 Italian Immigration**

Film: *Household Saints*

**October 11 Generational Conflict and Consensus**

Film: *Household Saints Continued*

**October 16**

Hasia R. Diner "The Bread is Soft': Italian Foodways, American Abundance"\*

Robert Orsi, "The Days and Nights of the Festa"\*

*According to Diner and Orsi, what is the significance of food in the lives of these early 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian Americans?*

**October 18**

Joan Nathan, "An Italian Christmas Eve in Providence," *An American Folklife Cookbook*\*

*Given our theoretical readings, how would you decipher this meal?*

**Protestants**

**October 23 Introduction**

"Presbyterian", "Lutheran", "Episcopalian and Anglican" HBPS

Martin Marty, "Frontiers of Food" \*

Sack, "Introduction" to *Whitebread Protestants*

*What do Marty and Sack share in their assessments of mainline Protestants?*

**October 25 Coffee Talk**

Sack, "Social Food: Potlucks and Coffee Hours" (Chapter 2 in *Whitebread Protestants*)

*How does the "ordinariness" of coffee function in Protestant gatherings?*

**October 30 The Black Church and Church Food**

"African American Methodist Churches" HBPS

Jualynne E. Dodson and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes. "There's Nothing Like Church Food': Food and the U.S. Afro-Christian Tradition: Re-Membering Community and Feeding the Embodied S/spirit(s)."

*What religious function does the church supper serve in African American Protestant Christianity?*

**Due: Proposal for Term Paper (100 words typed and double-spaced)**

**November 1 Southern Foodstuffs**

"Baptist" HBPS

Wade Clark Roof, "Blood in the Barbecue? Food and Faith in the American South."\*

*How does Roof employ Durkheim's theories in his description of southern barbecue? Do you buy his argument that this ritual is "religious"? Why or why not?*

**Muslims**

**November 6 Introduction**

"Islam" HBPS

Harris, "The Abominable Pig"\*

Film: *30 Days* (excerpts)

*How does Harris' discussion of the pig in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam add to our understanding of foodways? What does it leave out?*

**November 8 A Month of Restraint and Reflection**

"Ramadan: Holy Month of Fasting, Feasting" \*

Alia Yunis, "Consuming Faith"\*

Film: "Ramadan Diary" in *The Meaning of Food*

**Due: Proposed Bibliography**

*What is a surface reading of Ramadan? What would a "thick description" tell us?*

**November 13 Halal and Loving It**

Lockwood and Lockwood, "Continuity and Adaptation in Arab American Foodways"\*

Begin discussing *Crescent*

*How does the adaptation of foodways relate to identity?*

**November 15 Another Cup of Arabic Coffee Before I Go**

Abu-Jaber, *Crescent*

*Consider nostalgia as criteria for the sustaining of foodways.*

**November 20 No Class—AAR in Philadelphia**

**November 22 No Class—Thanksgiving**



**Part III.**  
**Abstinence, Temperance, and Abundance**

**November 27**            **Lust for Food vs. Love for Jesus**  
R. Marie Griffith, "Don't Eat That': The Erotics of Abstinence in American Christianity"\*  
Rebecca Mead, "Slim For Him"\*  
Sack, "Moral Food: Eating as a Christian Should" (Chapter 5 in *Whitebread Protestants*)

*Do a quick web search on Christian diet plans and be prepared to talk about these in class.*

**November 29**            **Women's Bodies and American Cultures of Eating**  
Joanne Woolway Greffel, "Religion and Eating Disorders: Towards Understanding a Neglected Perspective"\*  
Marvalene Hughes, "Soul, Black Women, and Food."\*

*How does religious perspective influence our understanding of the purpose of food?*

**December 4**            **My [many] Cup[s] Runneth Over**  
Sack, "Liturgical Food: Communion Elements and Conflict" (Chapter 1 in *Whitebread Protestants*)  
**Due: Term Paper**

*Why is alcohol such a divisive subject in communion? Think about the historical context? Who comes out the winner in this dispute?*

**December 6**            **Culinary Conversions**  
Elijah Muhammad, *How to Eat to Live* (selections TBA)  
Swami Prabhupada, *The Higher Taste: A Guide to Gourmet Vegetarian Cooking and a Karma-Free Diet* (selections TBA)

*These works both have clear agendas. Is one more persuasive than the other? How is morality framed within these arguments?*

**December 11**  
R. Marie Griffith, "Body Salvation: New Thought, Father Divine, and Material Pleasures"\*  
Sack, "Emergency Food: The Development of Soup Kitchens" (Chapter 3 in *Whitebread Protestants*)

*What are some religious responses to the poor? Are there rules for accepting the charity of others?*

**December 13**            **An American Day of Thanks (to who?)**  
Melanie Wallendorf and Eric J. Arnould. "Consumption Rituals of Thanksgiving Day"\*  
Diana Muir, "Proclaiming Thanksgiving throughout the Land: From Local to National Holiday", *We Are What We Celebrate*\*

*How does the Thanksgiving meal's abundance demonstrate a certain belief about the United States?*

**December 16-20**        **Final Exam Period**