



AMERICA ON THE WORLD STAGE

ALBEMARLE | CHARLOTTESVILLE | GREENE | MADISON | ORANGE

A
TEACHING
AMERICAN
HISTORY
GRANT PROGRAM

PROJECT TITLE: Immigration and Food	
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SCHOLARSHIP & RESEARCH

1. **Primary Investigative Question(s)** – How has immigration influenced American food?
2. **Contextual Essay** –

Immigration has had a long lasting effect on the American diet. As a nation of immigrants, people from countries all over the world have immigrated to America bring their religion, language, and of course, their food. Many foods that are considered to be American today came from other countries and were brought by immigrants. Pizza, stir-fry, spaghetti, sandwiches, tortillas, sushi, and bagels name just a few of these foods. When immigrants arrived in America, they used raw foods available to them to modify recipes from their home countries. In this way, immigration influenced the American diet and made a lasting impression on American culture.

Italians foods have had a huge impact on the American diet. Many people eat Italian foods weekly like pizza, spaghetti, lasagna, ravioli, mozzarella and Parmesan cheese, with the most popular being pizza and pasta. As Italians immigrated to the United States, they set up Little Italy communities all over the country (Diner, 2001, p. 53). Depending on where they were from, Italians brought different culinary traditions with to the United States. Pizza is one of the most popular Italian foods incorporated into the American diet. First introduced in 1905 by an Italian immigrant from Naples, it did not become popular in America until after World War II when pizza became more accessible to the public through pizza shops and restaurants (Ichord, 2006, p. 23). In the 1950's Italian celebrities like Frank Sinatra and Joey DiMaggio popularized pizza (Stradley, 2011). Pizza went through transformations in America. What began as a flat piece of bread with salt and oil later had tomatoes and onions added (Diner, 2001, p. 53). Nowadays, pizza is readily available in any grocery store and many restaurants. In fact, over \$3.3 billion was spent on frozen pizza in 2002, with the amount rising every year since 1997 (Holcomb).

The Chinese have also influenced the American diet. Chinese immigrants began coming to the United States in the 1850's. Despite the prejudice that the Chinese faced in the U.S. with the Chinese Exclusion Act, many chose to put down roots in America. Many Chinese immigrants worked in the Western United States on the railroad or in mines. Many began cooking for the fellow Chinese workers, as well as the American workers as a livelihood (Essman, 2010). Many Chinese Americans chose the food business since, " food and its careful preparation [was] such an important part of the Chinese culture" (Ichord, 2006, p. 48). As a result, many Chinese restaurants were built in America,

with over 41,000 in the United States today. Chinese food is difficult to make at home due to the flash of high heat that is required to seal in flavors. However, stir fry became a popular method of cooking vegetables using a Chinese pan, a wok, because this style of cooking does not require the high heat most Chinese dishes do (Ichord, 2006, p. 49). Today, in addition to Chinese restaurants, the Chinese influence on food has been capitalized and popularized with Chinese foods available in most grocery stores.

English immigrants had a large impact on American food with the introduction of the sandwich. While sandwich-like foods have been documented as early as the first century, the sandwich earned its name and gained popularity in England when John Montague, the fourth Earl of Sandwich requested meet between two slices of bread. Others soon followed Montague's example. Englishwoman Elizabeth Leslie introduced the ham sandwich to the United States in a cookbook in the early 1800's. (Stradley, 2011). Since then, Americans have added many twists to the sandwich like the hamburger, egg sandwich, blt, and peanut butter and jelly (Essman, 2010). Sandwiches are eaten daily by many Americans and have been capitalized on by Subway, which has 24,889 stores in the United States, and many local sandwich shops across the country (Subway, 2011).

America has Polish immigrants to thank for the introduction of the bagel to the American diet. Jewish immigrants from Poland started bakeries in the United States in the early 1900's in New York. According to Gabaccia in her book *We Are What We Eat*, the immigrant neighbors of Eastern Jewish Europeans discovered the bagel and the popularity of the simple roll grew (1998). Gabaccia explains how Harry Lenders, a Jewish immigrant from Poland, opened a simple bagel bakery in 1926 that had only six family employees that eventually grew to a corporation of over 300 employees in the 1970's. Lenders rose to meet the American public's demand for the bagel. He was responsible for the placement of the bagel in grocery stores, making them available to many Americans regardless of their relation to a traditional Jewish bagel bakery (1998). Today Lenders bagels can be found in most grocery stores and bagel franchises like Between Rounds, Einstein's Bagels, Brueggers, and local bagel bakeries can be found in many communities across the United States.

Japanese foods have also influenced the American diet through the introduction of sushi. While Japanese immigrants had been serving and eating sushi in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, most Americans found the thought of eating raw fish unappealing. Eating raw tuna was once a military field test, but is now a lunch treat (Carroll, 2009, p. 454). According to Carroll, the attitude in America toward sushi began to change with the movement of consuming fresh ingredients in combination with sushi starting to be viewed as a diet food (2009, p. 454). Due to these new opinions of sushi, many restaurants were opened in California and New York. Soon, Japanese restaurants began opening in cities all across the country (Carroll, 2009, p. 455). Sushi is now served in the prepared food section of many grocery stores, and offered in the dining plans of many college campuses. It has become a popularly eaten food in America.

Mexican immigrants have had an influence on the American diet, as well. Tortillas date back to the time of the Aztecs and have been popular in Mexico ever since (Stradley, 2011). As Mexicans immigrated to the United States, they also continue to enjoy their traditional foods in their new home. According to Grabaccia, San Antonio's Mexican women prepared tortillas with a metate [grinding stone]" (1998, p. 43). Like bagels and pizza in other parts of the United States, tortillas became popular with Texans, and the food began to spread throughout the Southeast United States. By the 1960's machines could produce a tortilla every two seconds (Stradley, 2011). This machinery made tortillas available on a large scale and available to more of the American public. Today, Americans can buy tortillas in grocery stores. This Mexican staple is used as a replacement of bread in sandwiches, snacks, and is stuffed with just about anything.

It is truly difficult to think of a food that has not been influenced by immigration in some way. Thanks to immigrants from all over the world, the United States of America has developed an extremely diverse population and [culture]. Food could not escape the influence of immigration and has been enhanced. Using food as a means of introducing immigration to students is meaningful and

relevant. It is an easy connection for children to make. Indeed, the melting pot of America has made quite a tasty dish.

3. Annotated Bibliography – Summary of the secondary sources with short annotation (3-5 sentences) that focuses on these resources fit into the historiography of your module and explains the value and utility of the source.

Carroll, W. (2009). *Sushi: Globalization Through Food Culture: Towards a Study of Global Food Networks*. Retrieved February 29, 2012 at <http://hdl.handle.net/10112/3253>.

Carroll discusses the globalization of sushi. He explores how it has evolved in the United States as a distasteful food to a popular meal. He also discusses the impact of the Japanese culture on the attitude towards sushi.

Diner, H. (2001). *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

This historic exploration in food follows Italian, Jewish, and Irish populations through their immigration experience. Diner provides reasons for immigrating to America and discusses how traditional foods were modified to accommodate life in the United States. This book also explores several foods that were created in America, like spaghetti and meatballs, which are often confused to be typical Italian foods.

Essman, E. (2010). Chinese Cuisine in America. Retrieved on February 29, 2012 from <http://www.lifeintheusa.com/food/chinese.htm>.

On this website Essman compiles the histories of many foods eaten in America. He also explores the Chinese, Mexican, and Italian impacts on American cuisine. The website is easy to navigate and provides a plethora of information on various American foods.

Ichord, L. (2006) *Pasta, Fried Rice, and Matzoh Balls*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Millbrook Press.

This student friendly book explores immigrant cooking in America. It features chapters on German, Irish, Swedish, Polish, Chinese, Portuguese, and Japanese immigrants. The author focuses on a few common foods that were introduced by each group. Each section features a traditional recipe. This book is suitable for teachers and students.

Gabbaccia, D. (1998). *We Are What We Eat*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Donna Gabbacia writes an in depth book on several factors that have influenced what is eaten in America today. This book examines the multicultural heritage of food consumption in the United States through immigration, industrialization, and commercialization. This book provides fascinating examples for the reader.

Holcomb, R. *Food Industry Overview: Frozen Pizza*. Oklahoma State University Food Technology Fact Sheet. www.fapc.biz.

This article describes the competition and trends in the frozen pizza industry in the United States. It features several graphs and is a brief, but concise source of information.

Explore Our World. (2011). Retrieved on February 29, 2012 from
<http://www.subway.com/subwayroot/exploreourworld.aspx>.

Subway's webpage that lists franchises all over the world.

Stradley, L. (2011). *History and Legends of Famous Foods*. Retrieved on February 29, 2012 from
<http://whatscookingamerica.net/History/HistoryIndex.htm>.

Stradley describes and explains the history of various foods eaten in America. The website is organized by food type, region, and alphabetically which makes searching foods easy. Food histories are presented in a timeline format which allows for easy reading.