Eating Ethnic:
Cross-Racial Encounters, Cosmopolitan Whiteness and the Senses, 1964-Present

By

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Abstract

Eating Ethnic: *Eating Ethnic: Cross-Racial Encounters, Cosmopolitan Whiteness and the Senses, 1964-Present* explores links between ethnic food, sensory experience and space to reveal how white Americans have used the act of eating to articulate privileged transnational subjectivities in the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Taking ethnic and cross-racial food consumption by white Americans as my subject, this project analyzes key cultural moments - the 1964 New York World’s Fair, culinary slumming in New York’s urban immigrant enclaves during the early 2000s and the globalized consumerism of travel television during the last decade. Where white American consumers have used the social and symbolic practices surrounding eating to articulate racial difference and an emergent form of privileged cosmopolitan cultural positionality, that I label cosmopolitan whiteness. Particular to the transcultural complexities of a post-Civil Rights, Post-Immigrant reform multicultural America, I critically define this cosmopolitan whiteness as an identity construct that merges neutrality and primacy of whiteness with an orientation towards, a willingness to engage with, and an accrual and active display of non-Euro American foreign cultural knowledges. In doing so, my research not only offers radical interventions into critical racial theory by positing a new articulation of whiteness that is fundamentally predicated on the appropriation of the transnational cultural productions of immigrant groups, but it also offers several crucial interventions in the study of comparative ethnic and racial formations of late twentieth and twenty-first century multiculturalism. Drawing on innovative source material ranging from food ephemera, culinary journalism, food television, oral histories of immigrant foodways and sensory ethnographies of urban ethnic enclaves, my research examines “eating” as a complex act that is at once symbolic, geographic, sensory and bodily. Taking up the “sensory turn” in cultural history, I argue that the complex sensory
economies of eating across cultures, collectively function to give visceral, deep, and sometimes emotional, meaning to late twentieth-century ideas concerning ethnic and national identities. Because one wholly ingests the food being eaten, the white American consumption of ethnic food therefore literally enacts emergent forms of late twentieth century transnationalism, particularly cosmopolitan whiteness, directly onto the body. As such, I merge work done in critical race studies, sensory studies, and mobility theory to make key interventions in the bodily and corporeal histories of transnational American racialization by offering new insight on the ways by which the sensory ingestion of food enacts whiteness and (trans)nation upon both the body and urban space.
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**Introduction**

On September 6, 2106, *Bon Appetit* Magazine published a since-removed video called “Pho Is the New Ramen” and accompanied it with the headline “PSA: How to Eat Pho.”¹ The video featured Tyler Akin, the white American male owner of Stock Restaurant in Philadelphia, a restaurant that describes itself as “Southeast Asian,” giving an instructional video on how to properly season and eat phở, a Vietnamese soup consisting of broth, rice noodles called bánh phở, herbs, and typically beef or chicken. Claiming that there is one proper way to eat the dish, Akin, through detailed descriptions of his eating technique, including how to hold chopsticks, how to twirl the noodles like one would with spaghetti, how to sip the broth and the proper broth to noodle ratio, Akin presents himself as the ultimate authority over all things phở. He even claims to be the authority over the sensory experience of preparing and eating the dish, claiming many times in the video that there is an authentic flavor profile that should not be adulterated. Multiple times he tells the viewers of the video that you cannot adjust the flavor with sauces because the chef has perfected it, yet immediately advises viewers to “squeeze as much lime as they give you.” Claiming visceral pain over seeing restaurant guests season his Phở, he concludes “If the cook, or the chef, or the owner, or whoever, sees you dump your hoisin or your Sriracha in the soup before tasting the broth, it’s like, it hurts.”²

In what was and was ironically labeled #phogate, a large number of Asian and Asian American media outlets and twitter users were quick call attention to the ways with which this video was problematic. Dr. Bich-Ngoc Turner, lecturer of Vietnamese language and literature at

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¹ The original article and video have since been taken down, however you can watch the original video and read the original article here: General, Ryan. Ignorant White Guy Tries To Tell Asians How To ‘Properly’ Eat Pho — Gets it All Wrong.” NextShark. February 7, 2016. https://nextshark.com/tyler-akin-pho-stock-video. Accessed March 20, 2018.
the University of Washington explained, “when you present ethnic food this way by a white man, you offend the Vietnamese community and deprive them of their own right to maintain their identity.”\footnote{Yam, Kimberly. “Why The Outrage Over Bon Appétit’s Pho Article Is Completely Justified.” https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-the-outrage-over-bon-app%C3%A9tit’s-pho-article-is-completely-justified_us_57d84562e4b0aa4b722ce47d} The video says nothing about the long complex history of the dish and its role in Vietnamese and Vietnamese American communities, these group are completely absent. As Andrea Nguyen points out, phở has had an unusually rich history of being a means of protest and a symbol of self-determination for the Vietnamese people, tied to Foreign occupation, civil war, the Vietnam War, reunification, and national rebuilding, none of which is present when the white American man claims authority and mastery over the dish.\footnote{Nguyen, Andrea. “The History of Pho.” Viet World Kitchen. March 29, 2018. https://www.vietworldkitchen.com/blog/2018/03/the-history-of-pho.html. Accessed March 20, 2018.} Comparing the soup to ramen, a dish that many white Americans initially associated with instant prepackaged noodles but now has become incredibly popular upscale food trend for white Americans, \textit{Bon Appetit} magazine makes a strange pan-Asian association, linking the two dishes as if their origins, history and presence in the United States has followed the same trajectory or that their flavors are essentially identical. As Nguyen continues, boldly reclaiming authority over the sensory make-up of the dish, “phở does not include lemongrass. Perhaps \textit{Bon Appetit} got confused with bun bo Hue noodle soup? Sometimes there is a lemongrass and chile sate condiment offered with phở — but that is generally an outlier. Where did they go to eat phở? And, phở and ramen are not mutually exclusive. I make room in my life for both. Asia is huge and I want to enjoy the full breadth and scope of the various cuisines. But Asia is not monolithic. We don’t look and cook the same.”}\footnote{Nguyen, Andrea. “Why the Pho Video Boiled over into Controversy for Bon Appetite.” Viet World Kitchen. September 8, 2016. https://www.vietworldkitchen.com/blog/2016/09/bon-appetit-how-to-properly-eat-pho.html. Accessed March 20, 2018.
After social media went wild, a firestorm that Akin very much fought back against, the video was taken down and Bon Appetit offered an extensive apology.\\(^6\)

While the video’s content erased the complex history of the dish and the communities for which phở carried great cultural and political significance, it spoke volumes about the identities being constructed by the video’s host and producers. By making the claim that Akin contained a deep culinary and cultural knowledge that gave him ownership of this dish, they were showing that his culinary mastery transcended his racial, ethnic or national identity. His culinary proficiency and sensory expertise were not tied to a nation of origin or contained within geographic borders. Rather Akin’s grasp of cuisine is presented as decidedly cross-racial and global, framing Akin as unquestionably cosmopolitan and open to exploring the culinary culture of non-Western groups. In an act of self-formation, Akin shows us that he has the cultural privilege to claim authority over the culinary production of an immigrant group, in a manner evokes a great deal of sociocultural capital.

Akin’s attempted claim of authority over the sensory and technical aspects of immigrant cuisine is not unique. In fact, it is indicative of a larger cultural, culinary and sensory shift that has emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century and has dominated American food culture ever since— the white American desire for, consumption of and attempted mastery of “ethnic food.”\\(^7\) Eating Ethnic: Cross-Racial Encounters, Cosmopolitan Whiteness and the Senses, 1964

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\(^6\) Bon Appetit. “About that Pho Video.”

\(^7\) I define ethnic food here specifically as Non-Anglo and non-white European cuisines, foodstuffs and culinary cultures. I link ethnic food with non-white cultures for two particular and crucially important reasons, first to differentiate ethnic food from white European ethnic foods like Italian and French cuisines which have become ubiquitous with traditional American dining; and second because, as Tanachai Mark Pandoongat points out in his article “Too Hot to Handle: Food Empire and Race in Thai Los Angeles” that “the term ethnic food is in itself a racialized term used to evoke the exotic non-white other, and that some ethnic foods are indeed more ethnic that others; which implies that the process of assimilation of foreign foods into dominant American culinary cultures is never even across racial groups and is thus never void of racial considerations. I also attempt make the term ethnic food distinct from “foreign food” and “international food” because although very similar terms, they have subtle yet crucially different meanings.
to Present, takes these changes in American eating patterns as its subject and explores the links between food, sensory experience and space to reveal how white Americans have used the act of eating “ethnic food,” and the cross-racial encounters that such eating facilitates, to articulate a radically new form of flexible globalized privilege, which I label cosmopolitan whiteness - an identity construct that merges the neutrality and primacy of whiteness with an orientation towards, a willingness to engage with, and an accrual and active display of non-Anglo foreign cultural knowledges. In doing so, this project will contend that the consumption of ethnic food became a means for white Americans to enact racial privilege and process the presence of ethnic and racial populations in the late twentieth century by offering a “safe” way for white Americans to interact with the culture of racialized others, often while only tolerating or even ignoring their larger bodily presence in American society. As such, this project argues that the white consumption of “ethnic food” has become the key method through which progressive white Americans have negotiated the new multicultural sensory diversity of a post-immigration reform urban America, and illustrates the importance of using sensory studies to situate multicultural eating and fluid ethnic foodways within broader historical and racial contexts.

Immigrant groups from Asia, Latin American, and the Middle East - who had previously been restricted from immigrating to the United States until the Immigration Reform of 1965 removed racist national origins quotas - began moving to the United States in previously unprecedented numbers, bringing with them a host of new foods, flavors, sights and sounds, all radically changing the sensory geographies for much of urban America. This project explores specific historical moments where white Americans have utilized the consumption of “ethnic food” and the pursuit of cross racial encounters to negotiate the sensory and racial complexities

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of an increasingly multicultural urban America. Divided into three closely related case studies that focus on key moments that have drastically changed food consumption and highlight the intrinsically global nature of eating in the late twentieth century – international food at the 1964 World’s Fair in Queens; culinary slumming in Brooklyn’s Little Mexico; and the global culinary adventuring of food-travel television – this project argues that the complex sensory exchanges that occur when eating across cultures, collectively function to give visceral, deep, and sometimes emotional, meaning to late twentieth century ideas concerning ethnic, racial and national identities. Drawing on innovative source material ranging from food ephemera, culinary journalism, food television, archival records, sensory ethnographies, and in-depth neighborhood centered oral histories of immigrant populations, my research examines “eating” as a complex act that is at once symbolic, geographic, and bodily. I question how the sensory experiences of eating – taste, smell, sight, touch, sound - mark race and diaspora on both white and non-white bodies while simultaneously racializing the sensory geographies of urban America.

*Eating Ethnic* merges work in food studies with sensory theory to develop a new analytical framework for understanding the significance of food within diverse cities. In doing so, I make several key interventions that are relevant both to the study of food and the study of racialization in the multicultural era. First, I use cross-racial eating to theorize on a fundamental epochal shift in the making of white privilege that has resulted in a new mode of racial privilege that I label *cosmopolitan whiteness*. I contend that through the exoticized and colonial logics embedded in the pursuit and consumption of “ethnic food,” white Americans have actively transformed the racial complexities of a multicultural and neoliberal America into a sites of consumable cultural capital that are used to articulate a new type of privilege predicated on the consumption of global and transnational cultural productions. By examining how this new form
of white privilege can profoundly impact racialized immigrant groups themselves, I ask how does the movement of whites in pursuit of culinary authenticity impact gentrification and a community’s ability to build sensory and diasporic connections within transforming urban spaces.

Second, I examine the sensory and affective connections that eating can cause with both racial identity and urban space, building off Kyla Wazanna Tompkins’s call to examine what “gut feelings” are produced through food. Using food and eating as a lens, I push toward a method by which critical race theorists can understand race as not solely contingent on the visual, rather that complex forms of racialization - especially in our contemporary moment of neoliberalism and globalized exchange - take place across all of the senses: taste, smell, feel, hearing as well as sight. By looking at erotic and sensory pleasures derived from the intentional consumption of food perceived as foreign, I highlight the importance of the non-visual senses to changing definitions of race, privilege and nation in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I contend that the rise of ethnic food consumption of the past fifty years represents a sensory reshuffling within American cities that has changed how we emotionally experience urban life. Finally, I argue that public displays of “joy” surrounding eating (in restaurants, on the street, at festivals) function as a sensory way for ethnic groups to forge bodily resistance to the violence and expurgation that gentrification, cultural appropriation and multiculturalism often entail.

The Rise of “Ethnic” Eating in America

The last fifty years has been a period of significant transformation in American food culture. Sparked in part by the passing of the 1965 Immigration Act and the subsequent influx of immigrant populations from Asia, Latin American and the Caribbean, beginning in the mid-
twentieth century, ethnic food cultures began to grow in popularity and eventually came to radically change mainstream American eating culture. Prior to the 1960s, in both public and domestic dining spaces, white American food culture was dominated by a combination of “traditional” American style cuisine, French haute cuisine, European Continental Cuisine, and the emergence of the fast food and prepared foods industries. While foreign food cultures have to some extent always been a part of the American culinary landscape, particularly European ethnic foods like French and Italian, it wasn’t until the mid 1960s that cuisines from nations such as Mexico, Japan, Thailand, India, and Middle East as well as Soul cuisine began to be common outside of immigrant communities and urban ethnic enclaves.9

In the 1960s and early 1970s, white progressives became among the first white Americans to openly embrace foods from Asia, the Middle East and Latin America and ethnic food became a central part of the radical political movements. By the 1970s immigrant entrepreneurs began to open more restaurants specializing in the cuisine of their diasporic population and ethnic food continued to cement its place in the dominant American foodscape. In the 1970s influential chefs such as Alice Waters, Wolfgang Puck, Alfred Portale, and Mollie Katzen began to openly embrace foreign foods within their restaurants, leading to the emergence of the hybridized styles of Fusion and New American cuisines, which now dominate American fine dining.10 By the late 1970s and early 1980s ethnic foods, such as pita bread sandwiches, 7

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9 This claim is of course dependent on how ethnic or foreign food is defined. For example, Indigenous Communities have since colonization had a profound impact on the way that white settlers ate, however it begs the question as to whether indigenous cuisines are considered “ethnic” or foreign. It is also important to note there that Chinese cuisine also a long history in the U.S. that stems back to the late 19th and early 20th, but this history has been very contentious and very racially charged, which differs distinctly from French and Italian ethnic cuisine.

10 Fusion cuisine is cuisine that combines elements of different culinary traditions. Cuisines of this type are not categorized according to any one particular cuisine style and have played a part in innovations of many contemporary restaurant cuisines since the 1970s. New American cuisine is a term for upscale, contemporary cooking served primarily in restaurants in the United States. Combining flavors from America's melting pot with traditional techniques, New American cuisine includes ethnic twists on traditional American dining. It developed in the 1980s and features significant creative use of in-season produce and sauces. It
burritos, fajitas, tacos, and Thai-style noodles became readily available in the form of mass-marketed convenience foods and for the first time foods that were once primarily consumed by immigrant groups in urban ethnic enclaves became common components of many middle-class white American diets. By the 1980s not only were ethnic foods common in nearly every grocery store, but the United States saw a rapid increase in the number of corporate chain restaurants that specialized in ethnic food, or some hybridized combination thereof. In the late 1990s and early 2000s the hybridized and Americanized versions of ethnic food that became popular in the 1980s and early 1990s began to lose favor in many gourmet and “foodie” circles and what emerged was a pursuit of ethnic culinary “authenticity”, as well as a desire for new, foreign, ethnic foods which has come to dominate the food consumption of progressive, food conscious, and predominantly white Americans for the last two decades. By the late twentieth century ethnic food culminated to a point where it was no longer rare to see white Americans eating curry or falafel, food choices that would have been incredibly rare prior to the 1960s. American food choice became more cosmopolitan and many flavors, dishes, and cuisines from around the globe, that many Americans had previously not heard of, came to be seen as exciting and new, radically altering both public and domestic food culture across the country.

**Literature Review on the Intersection of Food and Race**

While the field of food cultural studies has grown dramatically in the last decade and has emerged as a rich interdisciplinary field of study, much of the work emerging in this discipline still follows older and in many ways outdated models of food scholarship that tend to focus on

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is somewhat related to the French Nouvelle cuisine and often incorporates influences from Latin American, Mediterranean and Asian cuisine.
one of three disciplinary paradigms – single commodity histories\textsuperscript{11}, individual diasporic food histories\textsuperscript{12} or works of (often troublesome) food politics.\textsuperscript{13} As such, this field has paid scant attention to the broad shift towards ethnic food consumption and the transnational cultural transformations that this shift in food choice has fostered. A small, but growing number of scholars are working from beyond these three limiting paradigms by merging poststructural theory with food studies scholarship and are offering more critical interventions on the relationship between food, eating and the construction of race. Among this group of critical food studies scholars are Melanie DuPuis, Mark Pandoogpatt, Camile Bégin, Judith Carney, Psyche Williams-Forson, Doris Witt, Kyla Wazana Tompkins among others, who have shown how and why food and eating culture is entrenched in the construction and maintenance of racial thinking and practice in the United States. More specifically, they have shown that holding onto and appropriating specific food habits can be a subversive cultural and political act that racialized and immigrant groups have used to subvert their marginalized positionality within the larger white heteropatriachal society. For example, scholars such as Psyche Williams-Forson, Doris Witt, Frederick Douglas Opie, Bryant Terry and Breeze Harper\textsuperscript{14} have shown that the preparation and consumption of certain foods and cuisines is central to the development and preservation of black identity, black feminisms and to the emergence of black radical politics.

Furthermore, substantial literature on the nineteenth and twentieth century history of eating and

\textsuperscript{11} Examples include: Mark Kurlasky, \textit{Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World}, Dan Koeppel, \textit{Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World}, Mark Kurlasky, \textit{The Big Oyster: History of the Half Shell}, among numerous others.


“ethnic” food, from scholars of food and race such as Anita Mannur, Wenying Xu, Heather Lee, Hasia Diner, Donna Gabaccia, Williams-Forson and Carole M. Counihan, and others has shown that cuisine is a central part of the cultural life and imagination of diasporic populations. These scholars have developed important theories on the ways by which food can function as a crucial transnational link between the diaspora and its homeland. In exploring migration, cultural hybridity and food in conjunction, these scholars have shown that cuisine plays a central role in the ways with which immigrant groups are racialized, how ethnicity and (trans)national identity are imagined and how notions of belonging are both affirmed and contested through transnational food cultures. These texts have done crucial work in teasing out the ways that racial identity and food culture are inextricably linked, and as such have a strong influence on the project at hand. However, these scholars have focused the bulk of their attention on in-group food cultures, i.e. the construction and critique of racialized positionality through the production and consumption of foods from and within that racialized population – two examples being Williams-Forson’s work on the importance of chicken in the production of black feminism or Witt’s work on soul cuisine and its relation to the articulation of radical black political movements of the mid-century.

What’s more, this model of arguing for the importance of food to diasporic identity has seemingly been replicated several times to make similar arguments about Chinese-American, Italian-American and Mexican-American identity among several others. And while this critique is not levied here to say that food is important to all diasporic communities in the same way, or

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that universal assumptions can be made about the relationships between U.S. society and
different immigrant groups, rather I challenge the replication of this model to say that these texts
often miss some of the complex intricacies of racialization that do occur when food is consumed
both within and beyond a specific diasporic community. These texts often fail to address some of
the complex and messy exchanges that can occur when food is consumed from across racial
groups, in particular they fail to address what is at stake when global cultures become
commodified and enter into mainstream white American consumption patterns. While these
scholars certainly do not ignore representations of food culture from outside of the populations
that their text focuses on, the bulk of their attention has been focused upon specific racialized
communities and not on the exchanges and encounters that occur when food is consumed and
represented from across racial groups. In addition, much of the work written on race and food
has focused on the role of food as a tool to subvert racial subjugation and very little work has
been done that specifically correlates food choice, especially within white American populations,
with racial privilege and whiteness. My work will add to this body of scholarship by arguing that
the foods of racialized groups are not simply used to articulate or challenge a marginalized racial
positionality, but are also a central part in the construction, articulation and perpetuation of racial
privilege, whiteness, and as such are central to the very foundations of the racial hierarchy,
particularly in post-civil rights, post-immigrant reform late twentieth-century America.

Therefore, I agree with Krishnendu Ray when he argues that in order to truly understand
the ways that racialization is performed through food, scholars must take a step back from close
examinations of specific ethnic foodways and avoid the racial affinity that often undertones such
texts, and rather observe the at large process of ethnic succession that has dominated the last fifty
years of American food culture. Several scholars have, like Ray suggests, observed the larger
turn towards ethnic food within mainstream American food culture. Scholars like Donna R. Gabaccia, Harvey Levenstein and Richard Pillsbury have traced the emergence and evolution of ethnic food and examined the changes to American eating culture that came with an influx of foreign foods. However, much of this work, particularly Gabaccia’s, promotes a liberal multiculturalist view of U.S. society and American eating culture, which I find to be highly problematic. The political thrust of this scholarship purports a pluralistic and welcoming narrative of American food history where new immigrant groups bring in new tastes and new eating cultures that simply add to and enrich the diversity American culinary culture. The issues most central to this scholarship are assimilation, acculturation and the ways by which ethnic groups maintain their unique and “authentic” culinary traditions and identities while finding a niche within cultural pluralism that is American food culture. For example, Gabaccia implies that the rise in ethnic food consumption by white consumers proves their openness to other cultures and is proof of the successes of liberal multiculturalism and even hints to the emergence of a post-racial America.

My work writes against this problematic scholarship, which I contend only reinscribes the very process of culinary othering that the work at hand will critique. As Mark Padoongpatt points out, these texts fail to see, that “ethnic food is itself a racialized term used to invoke the ‘exotic’ nonwhite other, and that some ethnic foods are indeed more ‘ethnic’” and more racialized than others and the processes of culinary acculturation or assimilation that Gabaccia explores are not race neutral. Rather, much like Padoongpatt, I contend that the very construction of ethnic food/non-ethnic food is itself a practice of racialization. Therefore, I will challenge these outdated theories of ethnic food that further a problematic multiculturalism and

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rather argue that this shift towards ethnic food must be read within the logic of a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that, borrowing from bell hooks here, commodifies ethnicity and racial difference and views it as “spice” or a “seasoning that livens up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.”17 I will challenge this understanding of the rise in popularity of ethnic food simply as a benign expression of a multicultural society, but rather, as part and parcel of a globalized and racialized logic eating ethnically that renders ethnicity an exploitable and commodified resource for the pleasure of the mainstream white consumer by contending that the eating culture surround ethnic food at large is as much about the construction of whiteness as it is about the questions of assimilation or acculturation of ethnic groups that food scholars like Gabaccia and Levenstein seem so preoccupied by.

There is some scholarship, limited as it may be, that critically looks at the act of cross-racial eating, the desire for ethnic food and processes such as culinary adventuring and culinary tourism. Some emerging scholarship, particularly from disciplines such as cultural geography and philosophy has worked to theorize on cross cultural eating and the specific pursuit of ethnic food as a cultural practice. 18 However, few of these scholars have given significant attention to the past and present race relations that inform this act of food consumption. For example, Lisa Hedkle, whose text *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer*, very much informs this project, has given the most attention to the act of cross-cultural eating and the white consumption of ethnic food. Her work very much succeeds at merging colonial and anticolonial theory with food studies and is significant to the emergence of my theoretical interventions here. However,

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17 bell hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance” from *Black Looks: Race and Representation*

while doing important work in philosophically theorizing on the act of “food adventuring,” Hedkle’s work stops short of drawing the necessary connections between the articulations of whiteness (or race in general) with eating culture. She also fails to see food and eating as implicated in larger cultural processes such as nationalism or migration and pays scant attention to how culinary adventuring and eating are enacted upon the body or are particular to geographic space. And while she touches on race and whiteness, she fails to thoroughly examine the major shifts in eating culture that this project takes to task. In addition, Hedkle’s work relies heavily on personal narrative and does not place cross cultural eating in a historical context, specific urban setting or critique specific cultural actors, like this work is doing.

To date, the only text that draws strong correlations between the construction of whiteness and eating is Kyla Wazana Tompkins’ *Racial Indigestion*, which examines eating culture in the nineteenth century largely through literary sources. And while my work is very much indebted to her contributions, in particular the afore mentioned call for a new sub field of *critical eating studies*, the historical periods of the texts differ and my text seeks to explore whiteness through transnational food encounters, which are largely absent from Tompkins’ text. In fact, much of the scholarship that specifically attempts to correlate race to food in the U.S. context (with some notable exceptions, Sidney Mintz’s and Judith Carney’s work being among the most important) have focused on regional histories.¹⁹ For example Camille Begin’s work on taste and race during the New Deal Era is very much limited to the particulars of specific regions in the American South. My work seeks to bring a transnational perspective to the study of race

¹⁹ In much of the work on diaspora, identity and food, race is an important part of the theoretical interventions, but the process of race making and unmaking are by-products and not central to their theoretical claims. Also, there is a significant amount of work done in material history and commodity scholarship that critically examines how food and race are implicated from a global and transnational perspective. However, as I mentioned, I am trying to move away from some of the limitations of these single commodity histories and the exploration of food solely as a material object.
and food within the U.S. context by exploring cross-racial food encounters that are fundamentally predicated on transnational exchanges and global cultural migrations.

In exploring the rise of ethnic food and cross-racial food encounters, I will examine what Kyla Wazana Tompkins calls *eating culture*: the discourses, representations and social practices that surround the act of eating, ingestion and food consumption. In doing so, this project fits within Tompkins’ framework of *critical eating studies*, pushes past the “unending stream of single commodity histories and ideologically worrisome localist food politics” which drive much food studies scholarship and examines the physical act of consuming food as a social, cultural and bodily practice. By focusing on the cultural discourses of eating and the bodily act of ingestion, this *critical eating studies* framework merges the study of food with theories that address the body and the construction of identity including critical race theory, gender studies, bodily theory and sensory theory. This theoretical turn moves away from the unreflective single-commodity or single ethnic culinary histories that in many respects dominate the cultural study of food. Rather it allows me to examine food and eating using a wider lens and argue that a social practice such as cross ethnic food consumption is a complex racialized social and bodily act, as opposed to taking the more prevalent narrow approach that is often celebratory of a particular ethnic cuisine or assiduously attached to a single food commodity - approaches which seem to only further the object and cultural fetishization that this work is trying to critique. In addition, by employing Tompkins’ critical eating studies framework to explore the relationship between ethnic food consumption and race, this dissertation regards cross racial eating and culinary slumming, a one of the everyday affective means through which racialization is performed. Unlike other racial enactments, when eating, food literally gets ingested and fills the

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21 Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion*. 
body on a physical, sensory and affective level. It fills the body with experiences that other
cultural productions that are not literally ingested. As such this chapter will engage with recent
scholarship in the field of sensory history and bodily theory which has convincingly pointed out
that sensory perceptions are social and cultural constructs, a close examination of which can shed
light on the important “historically conditional, visceral and emotional aspects of racial
construction and racism” in the twentieth century.

**Cosmopolitan Whiteness and the Remaking of Racial Privilege**

Both Howard Winant and Jodi Melamed argue that after World War II, “many challenges
to the old forms of racial hierarchy converged” including the worldwide rejection of fascism and
politicization of racial violence, anticolonial movements, the American Civil Right Movement,
Black Power Movements, Ethnic Rights Movements, Cold War political conflicts and the
expansion of Western style liberal democracy, American Immigration Reform, and global
multiculturalism, all of which to some degree confronted global inequalities and “called into
question white supremacy to an extent unparalleled in modern history.” While these
movements resulted in relatively moderate social and political reforms, in part because such
reforms in the United States were “won through mass mobilization and a tactical alliance with
U.S. national interests,” they did have a profound impact on the ways by which white racial
identity was imagined in the United States. These wide-ranging egalitarian social movements

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23 Obvious examples may include wearing a sari, dressing as an indigenous group for Halloween or middle class suburban whites listening to hip hop and wearing clothes typically associated with black urban life. While these acts are certainly charged cultural acts that have important and often damaging consequences, they differ from food in that the objects of cultural production (dress, music, etc.) are not literally taken into the physical body.


26 Winant, 41.
posed fundamental challenges to white supremacy by calling out the “consciousness of a nation that had just barely begun to deal with the harshest contours of white supremacism”\(^\text{27}\) and heightening “the white consciousness of their skin privilege rendering it not only visible, but also uncomfortable.”\(^\text{28}\) After Civil Rights, the Immigrant Reforms of 1965 and the subsequent rise of multiculturalism, for the first time in the twentieth century, large numbers of white Americans were being forced to reckon with the ways by which white privilege was creating an unequal and unjust social order that privileged them solely on the basis of their skin color. These challenges to white privilege, brought forth largely by communities of color and their allies, caused a fundamental crisis in the formation of white racial identity in the post-Civil Rights era. The privileges associated whiteness, both legal, cultural and spatial were beginning to come to the forefront of the American consciousness and beginning to be challenged, making many whites deeply anxious and socially ambivalent about their place in the future of America.

American whites reacted to this racial anxiety in three key and interrelated ways, each of which had widely different approaches to how this racial break was navigated, yet had relatively similar results, the maintenance of the power and primacy of white racial identity. One was to dive deeper into the traditional modes of white supremacy and racial violence, as evidenced by the rise of white nationalism (a group that largely sees themselves as oppositional to the multiculturalism that resulted from these social movements), the widespread white flight of the 1950s, mass incarceration and police brutality of the 1980s, immigration restrictions of the 1990s and ultimately the election of Donald Trump in 2016. The second reaction was the white ethnic revival and the growth of white ethnic pride, beginning in the 1970s.\(^\text{29}\) In order to claim ethnic

\(^{29}\) Jacobson, *Roots Too*.  

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and racial prominence in the face of Civil Rights and the increasing racial diversity brought forth by Immigration Reform, white Americans utilized the language of Civil Rights and Black Power movements to reaffirm their ethnic identity as a source of pride. White ethnics, eager to dissociate themselves from the newly contested social power of whiteness and the construction of a privileged Anglo-white, culturally positioned themselves as Italians, Slavs, Irish, Hungarians, Jews, and Poles, which allowed them to avoid the critiques of their white identity and white privilege (although there is much overlap between white ethnic pride and white nationalism). Ethnic revival normalized a narrative of white struggle, through immigration, poverty, hard work and sacrifice, and an eventual uplift into a highly educated, suburban, middle class group.

The third way by which white Americans addressed the racial anxieties of the post-War racial break, which this project explores in depth, was to incorporate racial difference into the very logic of how privilege is constructed by actively and openly embracing global cosmopolitanism in a way that monetizes and commodifies racial and ethnic difference. This embrace of ethnic difference, allowed progressive whites to distance themselves from the white nationalists and conservative Anglo-American groups that were facing the brunt of the racial critiques, by claiming a new subject position that was defined by its openness to racial diversity, so long as that diversity was typically encountered through mediated, controlled and market driven interactions. This highly public white American “consumption of difference plays a central role in mediating the putative crisis of the Western self that is evoked when transnational perspectives are foregrounded in the celebration of global diversity. As bell hooks suggests in her oft-cited essay “Eating the Other,” cultural difference is most easily domesticated when it
can be reframed as an enticing opportunity to “spice up” mainstream culture.” By desiring, pursuing and consuming the cultural productions of communities of color, whiteness, which is in many ways under siege by multiculturalism, can be delighted by multiculturalism’s potential abundance. In this way, whites can actively push back against their own racial identity and the negative connotations associated with it, while simultaneously reinforcing a new form of whiteness. While the first two reactions to the challenges brought forth by egalitarian social movements of the twentieth century were adopted by conservative and moderate white Americans, this third reaction was adopted primarily by middle class progressive whites, a group that makes the primary subjects of this project. This group, while relatively flexible and hard to define are characterized by a number of dominant socio-political traits, including their affiliation with the liberal side of the political spectrum; white collar, service based, business sector employment, middle class socioeconomic status; affection for global travel and their propensity to claim a post-racial positionality, while often uncritical of their position at the pinnacle of the racial hierarchy. I label this emergent form of white subject positionality *cosmopolitan whiteness* and argue that it is a new mode of racial and cultural privilege predicated directly on contact with the cultural productions of racialized groups. Eating ethnic food along with other forms of cross-racial consumption are crucial in constructing *cosmopolitan whiteness* - a form of racial and classed privilege emerging in the 1980s and 1990s that middle-class whites articulate through the deployment of a repertoire of socially evocable cultural resources gained from contact with non-white groups and a public claiming of a transcultural “post-racial” positionality.

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31 In this dissertation, because of the fluidity and overlap in the terms, I use progressive and liberal interchangeably.
Cosmopolitan whiteness, a new formation of whiteness is predicated on the accumulation of cultural capital and perceived authority that occurs when whites pursue the cuisine of ethnic groups of color, even when it does not require a mastery of such cuisine, a prolonged engagement with that community, or even any such intentionality on the part of the white subject. Within neoliberal multiculturalism, a direct correlation has been established by progressive whites between one’s global knowledge, geographic mobility and perceived cultural openness and a heightened position of cultural and social capital. Through the exoticized and colonial logics embedded in the pursuit and consumption of “ethnic food,” white Americans have actively transformed the racial complexities of a multicultural and neoliberal America into consumable cultural capital that is used to articulate a new type of privilege predicated on the consumption of global and transnational cultural productions, thus fundamentally challenging the very nature of “ethnic food” as a racialized categorization.

Using the pursuit of, desire for and consumption of ethnic food by white Americans as the central phenomena of my project, it is among my central contentions that the emergence of cosmopolitan whiteness presents a fundamental shift in the articulation of whiteness and white privilege in the post War era. Unlike more antiquated forms of racial privilege that are derived from a hatred of and separation from communities of color (the 2016 Presidential election highlighted the continued existence of such racial privilege), cosmopolitan whiteness requires cultural, physical and sensory engagement with communities of color as a means of accruing global cultural knowledges, which then form the basis of one’s privilege. As detailed in chapter one, in the 1950s and early 1960s, white privilege was primarily exuded by creating physical, cultural and sensory distance from communities of color, as evidenced by the widespread white
flight of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. However, with the rise of new urbanism in the 1980s\(^{32}\) - which led to many young white Americans actually returning to American cities - coupled with a political and cultural turn towards multiculturalism, white privilege shifted away from being defined by one’s ability to create geographic distance from communities of color (i.e. moving to highly segregated suburbs) towards being predicated on one’s ability to have controlled and market-driven encounters that resulted in “happy” experiences and visceral reactions to multiculturalism.\(^{33}\) As we see through culinary slumming in places like Sunset Park, multiculturalism has birthed the context where the presence and subsequent contact with the dispossessed other is required for the very formation of contemporary white privilege. As such, I argue that cosmopolitan whiteness has reshaped the very way by which racial (and classed) privilege operates in these complex transnational contexts and represents a fundamental new construction of racial privilege that is specific to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. No longer are all modes of racial privilege articulated through geographic and cultural separation from immigrant communities of color. Rather, direct yet controlled interactions with immigrant communities of color have become a way for whites to express forms of geographic mobility and an open embrace of multiculturalism.

Cosmopolitanism, coming from a Greek word meaning “citizen of the world” is defined by Ian Woodward and Zach Skrbis as “a set of structurally grounded and locatable resources available to social actors which are variably deployed to deal with emergent agendas and issues,

\(^{32}\) New Urbanism is an urban design movement, which promoted walkable neighborhoods containing a wide range of commercial, housing and employment types. It gained popularity in the early 1980s in the United States and had significant impact on real estate development, urban planning, and municipal land-use strategies. Conversely, it also arose in conjunction with neoliberal urbanism that turned to open, unregulated markets as a means to drive urban change.

related to things like cultural diversity, the global difference and otherness.”34 Building off of this definition, I see cosmopolitanism as a global trans-cultural repertoire that can be employed by individuals as a cultural resource to deal with the shifting, mobile and increasingly global contexts of a post-immigrant reform, neoliberal America. Cosmopolitanism, as a recent manifestation of late capitalism and globalization, both of which are preconditions necessary for its emergence, emphasizes the interconnections and post-national orientation in a range of everyday fields such as culture, objects, materialities and attitudes. The term captures an open attitude towards the foreign and allows those who evoke a cosmopolitan positionality to reject the strong psychological and evolutionary pressure to privilege those nearest to oneself. It functions as an individual state of mind that can be evoked by privileged actors (typically in the West) to avoid seeing geographic and cultural difference as a barrier. Observable through both action and self-identification, cosmopolitanism can function as a tool to work towards the possibility of dialogue that may potentially lead to transformative cross-cultural connections.

Cosmopolitanism is typically understood as the positive face of globalization, a process of international integration brought forth from the interchange of worldviews, products, cultures and the global circulation of people. For most, claiming a position of cosmopolitanness is thought of as a positive move, because it expresses mobility and openness within the contemporary moment of hyper globalization where bodies, objects and cultures are in constant transnational and global circulation. The uneven ability to claim or be assigned cosmopolitanism speaks to the very nature of how privilege has changed as a result of late twentieth century neoliberal multiculturalism. It is not a universally applied repertoire that can be utilized by all groups impacted by global movement. The very nature of who has the ability to claim a

cosmopolitan positionality, and who is afforded the geographic mobility to make a reasonable claim for cosmopolitanism, speaks to its complicated relationship to global power structures and privilege. Most of the actors who see themselves as cosmopolitan “global citizens” are whites of relative economic, cultural and social privilege in the West or Global North. Claiming a position of cosmopolitanism requires access to geographic travel (both of leisure and business), high levels of education and flexibility afforded by relative wealth.

As such, cosmopolitanism must be understood as both accidental and strategic. As Sociologist Victor Roudometof and others have argued, modern day migrants and refugees have had their lives marked by involuntary globalization, or global movement that was unwarranted or forced upon them.\textsuperscript{35} This type of cosmopolitanism does not imply that the subjects do not have agency and some control over their geographic movement. However, it does show that the cosmopolitan identity is not simply created intentionally or by the result of seeking out such positionality. Strategic cosmopolitanism, rather, is a positionality that subjects with relative social, economic and cultural privilege seek out. For the privileged whites that employ strategic cosmopolitanism, racial, ethnic and national difference is viewed as desirable, as they are actively pursuing transnational difference in order to claim this position. As such, those who are seen as different, - immigrant groups, communities of color, etc. – become sites where whites can grow their cosmopolitanism and have it reinforced. Those defined by normative white American culture as “different” or “foreign” remain available in principle for whites who wish to claim cosmopolitanness. As such, cosmopolitanness becomes a strategic positionality that whites are actively claiming to show their openness to other cultures and, in doing create a set of evocable cultural resources that grant them a fluid cultural cache and social privilege, with a

regime of self-value attribution. And because cosmopolitanism requires the presence of and contact with the global other, the desire to create a cosmopolitan worldview is predicated on the existence of groups that will perpetually be “alien,” unassimilable and defined as outside of mainstream American normativity. Without the perpetual presence of an “foreign” or racially alien other, cosmopolitanism cannot constantly be reinforced.

To contextualize the emergence of cosmopolitan whiteness, it is crucial to explain how privilege and conceptualizations of race have evolved since the advent of multiculturalism. Despite the popular rhetoric of a “progress narrative” surrounding race, the notion that race relations are gradually improving and moving towards a post-racial moment when race will no longer be a salient category, race remains a defining and destructive social force, even as overt racism is aberrant and becoming increasingly publicly deplorable. Étienne Balibar argues that a new modality of racism emerged in the 1970’s, in which race is no longer tied to an antiquated notion of biological differences amongst races. He contends instead that the differentiation between racial groups is created through a complex series of naturalized and insurmountable cultural differences that developed over the first half of the twentieth century. In labeling this new racial logic “neo-racism,” Balibar argues that “culture functions as nature” and any biological notion of racial difference is replaced by the notion that there are insurmountable and fixed cultural differences that create racial hierarchies. For Balibar, the incompatibility of lifestyles and traditions and the substitution of terms like immigrant and foreigner for

\[36\] he term alien is used to describe food because it implies the inability to assimilate and perpetually remain outside of white normativity, while “foreign” allows a transition from foreign to native. For more on the distinctions between the labels of “alien” and “foreign” see: Ku, Robert Ji-Song. Dubious Gastronomy: The Cultural Politics of Eating Asian in the USA. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013.


biologically driven racial lexicon created a new form of multicultural “neo-racism” that allowed for racial hierarchies even without the clear notion of distinct biological races (or even racists). Melamed argues that white supremacy gradually became “residual” and was “replaced by a formally antiracist, liberal-capitalist modernity whose driving force was a series of successive office state recognized anitracisms.”39 For Melamed, the post-war changes in racialization did not lessened the power of white privilege but rather normalized and rationalized it because they have innovated new racial procedures that are more covert and exist “beyond the color line” so that “new terms of racial privilege (liberal, multicultural, global citizen) along with new terms of racial stigma (unpatriotic, monocultural, illegal)” can come to dominate racial thinking in the United States.40 In this way, within the contemporary neoliberal multicultural era (2000s to present), the privileges of neoliberalism (mobility, economic wealth, private property, geographic travel, cross-cultural knowledge, socio-cultural capital), which are inherently racially driven, become dematerialized from racial realities and are framed as the “key to a post-racist world of freedom and opportunity.”41 As Melamed explains,

> neoliberal policy has engendered new racial subjects while creating and distinguishing between newly privileged and stigmatized collectivities, yet multiculturalism has coded the wealth, mobility and political power of neoliberalism’s beneficiaries as the just desserts of multicultural global citizens while representing those neoliberalism has dispossessed as handicapped by their own monoculturalism or other historico-cultural deficiencies.42

By severing race from material or biological conditions and shifting the focus to cultural exposure (multicultural v. monocultural), official antiracisms make it possible to seem antiracist while furthering a neoliberal capitalism that is fundamentally reliant on the racialized bodies that

40 Melamed, 2.
41 Melamed, 42.
42 Melamed, 42.
fall outside of neoliberalism’s ideal subject. “In its U.S. form, progressive neoliberalism is an alliance of mainstream currents of new social movements (feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism, and LGBTQ rights), on the one side, and high-end “symbolic” and service-based business sectors (Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood), on the other. In this alliance, progressive forces are effectively joined with the forces of cognitive capitalism, especially financializing. However unwittingly, the former lends their charisma to the latter.”

The result of this was a form of progressive neoliberalism that removed antiracist discourse from material realities, allowing for the emancipatory rhetoric of such progressive social movements to be combined and utilized in conjunction with forms of free market financialization and global movement. The dematerialization of anti-racist discourse also enables the repudiation of social movement efforts (ethnic studies, feminism, women of color feminism, etc.) and legitimizes asymmetrical material realities (poverty, state violence, etc.) all while framing the pursuit of the privileges of neoliberalism as fundamentally antiracist (for example, eating across cultures as a fundamentally antiracist act).

Cosmopolitan whiteness, which is part and parcel of progressive neoliberalism and articulated in large part through culinary slumming, represents a further progression and neoteric modality or “epochal shift” in the ubiquitous makings of white privilege, albeit a shift that does not undermine white privilege’s power as a social force but rather creates new methods in which it operates. I see this epochal shift as a direct result of the changes in racial capitalism brought on by neoliberalism, such as market segmentation, consumer individualization, trade deregularization, global travel, among others and the performance of this racial shift occurs through the everyday bodily act of eating, where white American progressive elites bring the

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sensory experiences of a neoliberal multicultural world directly into one’s body. By placing the location of whiteness and cosmopolitanness on the actual body – through the ingestion of food - we see that the changes brought on by neoliberalism are not simply economic. Rather, through multicultural eating, we see that neoliberalism is also a “world-historical configuration” of all “biological and social life” that plays out on the very bodies that inhabit and move through American’s urban spaces.44 By making privilege fundamentally predicated on one’s ability to figuratively and literally consume the global other, cosmopolitan whiteness “naturalizes the privileges of those who benefit from the present socioeconomic arrangements” of neoliberalism – like the ability to travel globally, the ability to eat out, the ability to have intentional and desired cross-cultural encounters – while making “the dispossessions of those cut off from wealth and institutional power appear fair” and making their lives (even as their lives are often inherently transnational) “ineligible.”45 As such, I do not see cosmopolitan whiteness and the cross-racial eating from which it emerges as simple acts of cultural appropriation. Rather, cross-racial eating, especially culinary slumming, becomes part of an aggregate of acts done by whites to pursue cosmopolitanism and a new globalism that make up the crux of this radical sea change in white privilege.

Scholars such as Henry Giroux, Bradley Jones, Roopali Mukherjee, Raka Shome, Radha Hedge, and Darrel Wanzer, among others, suggest ‘neoliberal multiculturalism’ presents a world in which race and culture are valuable commodities in a cosmopolitan marketplace, as opposed to a time when they were substantive barriers to social and economic justice. Progressive whites have openly embraced the rapid increase in global diversity within American urban centers that has resulted from neoliberal multiculturalism, even encouraging mediated and controlled

44 Melamed, 39.
45 Melamed, 2.
encounters with immigrant groups without risking any deterioration of their racial, social and cultural privilege. As Richard Dyer writes of the paradoxes within contemporary multiculturalism, “postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely opened up space for the voices of the other, challenging the authority of the white West . . . but it may also simultaneously function as a side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them.” 46 Casey Ryan Kelly writes, “the practice (of cross-racial eating) reveals in an exhilarating and open-armed celebration of difference” but also

reveals the ambivalence that is at the heart of contemporary whiteness: an identity that is at once the assumed norm, the generic template for humanity, and yet remains a lack, an absence, a meaningless void. Among many other practices of cultural appropriation, “eating the other” manages this crisis of white ambivalence by giving white Westerners the illusion of experiencing authentic Otherness through a practice that is both intimate and universal. Whites can retain the privilege of being unmarked while experiencing, and ultimately domesticating, the exhilaration of the exotic.47

Whiteness is seen as having a fundamental lack of distinct cultural markers, that has resulted in a nearly universal drive to pursue authentic experiences of culture in order to satiate what is seen as a fundamental void in white cultural identity. Because of the history of white ethnics, like Italian, Jewish and Irish immigrants, claiming a position of normalized undifferentiated whiteness, whiteness became universalized, monolithic, ubiquitous with normality, yet because of its omnipresence it lacked any distinct cultural characteristics. American culture saw a revival of white ethnic cultural identity in the 1970s, marked within literature, film and public celebration that occurred in response to the Civil Rights and ethnic rights movements of the previous decade.48 However, I contend that with this white ethnic revival of liberal multiculturalism, which encouraged whites to see ethnic difference as something that should be

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47 Kelly.
celebrated and desired, when an influx of new immigrants came to the U.S. after the immigration reforms of the 1960s whites felt comfortable embracing and consuming ethnic difference. This embrace of difference that came with white ethnic revival and liberal multiculturalism created for progressive whites a “delightful world of digestible cultural experiences” that “renders the practice of consumption a progressive endorsement of multiculturalism” that stabilizes one's whiteness and poses no risk to one's own cultural identity.49

Cross-racial exchanges, specifically those occurring through food, are typically framed among both scholars and progressive whites as anti-racist, who argue that cross-cultural exposure is the key to ending racial stigmas and stereotypes. Certainly, cultural exchange can lead to potentially radical cross-cultural understandings that can lessen the violence of the racial hierarchy. However, this logic fails to recognize that these types of cultural motilities are only afforded to those that benefit from neoliberalism. This is not to demonize diversity or the experiences of cultural difference. However, difference becomes problematic when knowledge about difference - acquired through acts such as cross-racial eating, becoming an “expert on ethnic food,” learning yoga, listening to “World music,” attending racially diverse street food markets, etc. - is claimed as a way to mark one’s superiority over the immigrant other. As a result, the ability to claim such knowledge, which is very much predicated on the mobility afforded to progressive middle-class whites through neoliberalism, not only places the progressive white in a position of relative authority, but also has created the context where global knowledge and cosmopolitan capital has become the basis for white privilege. As such, those bodies disposed from the privileges of neoliberalism (immigrant othered groups) become consumable subjects necessary for the making of contemporary cosmopolitan privilege. Those who are seen as not containing such cosmopolitan knowledge (of music, art, spirituality, food, etc.)

49 Kelly. “Bizarre Foods”
etc.), whether racialized immigrant groups or working-class whites, are seen as monocultural and outside of the privileges afforded proper, normative and preeminent neoliberal subjects. In the neoliberal multicultural moment where curtailed and controlled sensory contact with racialized others – such as at the restaurants of the 1964 World’s Fair or at an “ethnic” restaurants of Sunset Park - actually became a source of cultural capital for middle-class whites, the gaining of cultural knowledge about food, clothes, music, spirituality, cultural goods from transnational immigrant communities or communities of color became a means to express one’s cosmopolitanism, which emerged as a source of pleasure for neoliberal multiculturalism’s new privileged class. Happiness and joy were also gained from the sensory experiences of cross-racial encounters because of the affective reactions that emerged from such experiences, i.e. yoga brings white subjects calmness, tacos make white subjects happy, vibrant colors of immigrant communities bring white subjects joy.50

This new cosmopolitan positionality also necessitates the production of new forms of stigma that result from the socioeconomic violence of neoliberalism, specifically those that progressive whites rhetorically code as cultural – such as monoculture, backwards, outdated, unsophisticated, country. These forms of subjugation are cast onto communities that do not poses the geographic mobility afforded to neoliberalism’s elite, like the Mexican-American working class of Sunset Park, rendering these subjects culturally immutable and inconsequential in regard to the changing dynamics of globalization (and often rendering them a necessary but inconsequential casualty of gentrification). This represents a fundamental change in the construction of twentieth and twenty-first century racial privilege. Prior to the emergence of neoliberal multiculturalism of the 2000s, privilege was exuded by creating physical, cultural and sensory distance from communities of color, as evidenced by the widespread white flight across

50 Ahmed, Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness.”
many American cities. However, with the rise of new urbanism of the 1980s which led to many young white Americans actually returning to American cities, coupled with a turn towards multiculturalism, white privilege shifted away from being defined by one’s ability to create geographic distance from communities of color (i.e. moving to highly segregated suburbs) and rather towards one that was predicated on these “happy” experiences of multiculturalism. Rather moving to an urban location where one could have mitigated pleasurable sensory experiences with communities of color – such as dining in an “ethnic” restaurant or listening to “ethnic” music - became one of the ways with which urban whites expressed racial privilege. This also represents a fundamental change in the shift in the affective reactions to diversity by urban whites. Once a source of pain and frustration (such as within the racial violence and white flight of the 1960s and 1970s) as Nirmal Puwar argues, within the current racial climate whites see some level of diversity as “good” and the proximity to such levels of diversity can indeed be a source of happiness and pleasure for white subjects. Additionally, this new form of cosmopolitan whiteness, much like “racism without racists” and “color-blind thinking” allows for a disavowal of any connection to a racial hierarchy or privileged/unequally positioned racial status. White subjects, now operating under the guise of cosmopolitan whiteness, do not see themselves as occupying a positionality of white privilege. Rather, because of their constant encounters with communities of color – and in particular their food – they see themselves as multicultural global subjects who are more affiliated with a broad range of immigrant and ethnic cultures than they are with any perception of their own whiteness. This allows for an active denial of the ill effects and very violent reality that result from white privilege in communities of color. The accumulation of cultural capital through cross-cultural experiences of diversity also distinguishes cosmopolitan subjects from the white working class, who are seen as culturally

outdated, backwards and monocultural “by virtue of a presumed inability to appreciate ‘diversity’ and ethnic cultures.” As a result, cosmopolitan whiteness reinforces and normalizes the economic inequities, even among Western whites, of neoliberalism with distinctly cultural rhetoric – that of monocultural, inexperienced and uncultured.

**Race, Eating and the Senses**

A central argument of this project is that eating is central to the sensory production of race in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. Since the emergence of modernity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, individuals and social groups have used the senses to construct and maintain social classes, race and gender identities and ideas of selfhood, belonging and “Otherness.” However, most historical and theoretical scholarship on race, perhaps the fundamental marker of identity and organizer of social stratification in Western modernity, tends to understand race solely as a visual phenomenon. Even while scholars have rejected the notion of race as biologically determined, critical race theorists still understand racial constructions as nearly exclusively produced by sight; i.e. “color” is always seen. While sight and the optical gaze surely are influential on how we process and mark (racial) identity, understanding race as purely a visual construction can have problematic limitations which can reduce our critical engagement with the mechanisms of racial hierarchies in both historical and contemporary contexts.

In theorizing race, as purely an optical construction, scholars have subtly endorsed the Western notion of nonvisual senses as “lower,” crude sensory experiences. Nonvisual sensory experiences like taste and smell, are seen by both scholars and in popular discourse as appealing in ways that are emotional, intimate, imaginative, bodily and visceral, while vision, at least in much conventional historical and cultural studies scholarship, is understood by scholars as

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52 Hage, 33.
appealing to rational, intellectual processes. Plainly, scholars have traditionally recognized nonvisual senses as absent of being processed in the same intellectual capacity as sight and hence not as worthy of rigorous academic attention. While, much of this unconscious academic degradation of nonvisual senses can be seen as a direct result of the means by which historical research is done and the politics of the archival record keeping, the emphasis on the visual never the less limits our understanding of race and of American history et large.\textsuperscript{53}

Some excellent critical work being done by a select group of cultural anthropologists, some recent theoretical interventions made in bodily theory, affect theory and queer theory, work done in sensory history as well as a group of emerging food studies scholars, many whom very much influence this project, reject this notion of nonvisual senses unworthy of academic attention. This disciplinarily diverse group of scholars in the humanities have convincingly pointed out the need to study nonvisual senses as more than mere biological endowments, but rather as cultural constructions that influence our lived everyday experiences and mediate all social relations in visceral, complex and often unspoken ways. As socially shared, culturally, historically and geographically contingent phenomenon, nonvisual sensory experience provides an affective, visceral and bodily dimension to identity constructions that challenge the false Cartesian dualism between the body and mind, culture and nature, intellectual and lived experiences of our everyday lives.

Examples of white Americans marking race through the nonvisual senses abound in American history, ranging from the hearing of Southern Black preaching and auditory styles, late nineteenth and early twentieth century popular white perceptions in of Chinese cuisine as tasting spicy, exotic and South Asians being stereotypes as being olfactory off-putting and visceral

\textsuperscript{53} For example, Indigenous Storytelling or even oral histories are often seen as outside of the accepted cannon of archival materials, in no small part because they require an engagement with of nonvisual markers, in this case most notably auditory ques.
generally disgusting playing a crucial role in nativist anti-immigration campaigns. Another example is the one-drop rule of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which in order to pursue white racial purity, Southern Segregationists argued that anyone with any racial mixing would not classify as white. This rule, confirmed that it was impossible to “see” to always race because one drop of mixed blood would not be visibly detectable. This which resulted in a turn towards non-visual senses, as racist southern whites claimed that Blackness did not always need to be seen and could be smelled, tasted, heard. As Mark M Smith clearly demonstrates of the early twentieth century, that while people of mixed racial identity, as one observer claimed in 1918, might have the “skin coloration of a white man” they still retain and cannot escape the “odor of the negro,” proving that whites have believed since at least the beginning of the twentieth century that blackness was always susceptible to some sort of sensory detection, even when it was not visual.54

Following this “sensory turn” in cultural history, this work sheds light on the “historically conditioned, visceral, emotional aspect of racial construction and racism” in the second half of the twentieth century. Based in large part on the work of Mark Smith, this work examines how food senses, taste in particular, function to give “deep, sometimes emotional, meaning to modern ideas concerning ethnic and national identities.”55 As such, by looking at the colonial gestures embedded within culinary slumming and the search for the “authentic exotic” that emerged in late twentieth century white American eating culture, this dissertation considers the sense of taste as a cultural construction that reflects the changing geography and definitions of race, privilege and nation in the late twentieth century United States. I will argue in this project that taste and

55 Smith, Mark M. How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation and the Senses, 4.
smell are crucial in the way we have come to understand race and the ways by which middle
class white Americans have worked to reinforce class and racial privilege in the late twentieth
century. I examine the complex relationship between taste, smell and touch of certain foods and
the construction of cosmopolitan whiteness in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.
Therefore, a key contribution of my work on eating culture, culinary exchange and racialization
is its ability to emphasize the other senses – particularly taste, smell and touch – which will
undoubtedly add to a fuller understanding of historically conditional, visceral and ephemeral
aspects of the ways race is made and unmade in the late twentieth century.

Eating is a complex affective and bodily act because, unlike other cultural acts, the
cultural production is literally ingested and becomes the physical substance that constitutes our
sensate bodies. Also, unlike any other cultural production (art, literature, film, dress, television,
music, new medias, etc.), food is experienced through the sense of taste. Like all sensory
experiences, taste has an affective component, but is also largely culturally constructed. As
Camille Bégin’s work on New Deal Era sensory economies makes clear, the taste of a food
object or dish is a “cultural and social construct determined by the situation in which the act of
eating takes place. Depending on who eats it, where, when, and with whom, a dish tastes
differently, signifies disparately, and can invoke a variety of cultural representations.”

Indeed, tasting, like all senses, “occurs within a cultural context where eating traditions accustom people
to a specific range of foods and beverages.” The cultural construction of taste by white
Americans have, to varying degrees over the past twenty years, constructed many non-white
cuisines as exotic, novel, spicy, bizarre or otherwise repugnant. This is juxtaposed against the
American taste preference for foods of the European diaspora, which are defined by American

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whites as normal, constructing and universalizing the notion of a normative white American palate. White Americans have utilized a perceived conquering of the taste aversions to ethnic cuisine to assert a progressive openness to and acceptance of the global other. Culinary slummers often utilize this public display of cultural and sensory openness in order to reinforce and reinvent their position of privilege by building a particular form of neoliberal globalized cultural capital; a cultural capital that is predicated on geographic mobility and the ability to have cross cultural gustatory experiences.

However, as eating does not solely operate on the sensory plane of taste, culinary slumming is read as a sensory act that is not limited to taste. Eating, as many sensory studies scholars have pointed out, is a “multi, trans and intersensory” act that plays out across a complex “sensory economy” of scapes of smells, modalities of touch, visual cultures and soundscapes. The act of eating involves all of the senses and as such, culinary slumming will be read as a cultural and bodily act that involves entering the immersive sensory space of an urban ethnic enclave. In addition, by paying specific attention to historical moments where white Americans have traveled within urban space to eat foreign food, in particular the taco tourism of Sunset Park, I unveil the ways by which urban ethnic enclaves have been constructed in historical discourse as sensory alterity and foreign to mainstream U.S. sensory experience. As such, this chapter will explore how the act of cross-racial eating links space and the senses, asking how race becomes enacted upon not only the body, but space as well. By doing so, I contend here that the rise of ethnic food consumption of the past fifty years, and specifically the phenomenon of culinary slumming in the last two decades, represents a globalization of U.S. sensory experience.

58 See the definition of continental cuisine from Chapter 1.
59 I borrow the term “sensory economy” from Camile Bégin’s work on race in the New Deal Era South which she lays out in her article “Partaking of choice poultry cooked a la southern style: Taste and Race in the New Deal Sensory Economy” Radical History Review, Issue 110, Spring 2011. 127.
and that reflects the evolving definition of race, whiteness and ethnicity, both on a bodily and spatial level. Like Jean-Antheleme Brillat-Savarin famously describes of the experience of taste, the “mouth is a laboratory,” and I contend that for progressive whites over the past fifty years, the mouth is the laboratory where multiculturalism and conflicting notions of race come in direct contact with white bodies.  

With the emergence of the popular fallacy of a new “color-blind” society in the late twentieth century, it became popular among middle class urban whites, particularly those in the urban North, to claim that they could no longer “see” race. In addition, with increasing immigration from throughout Latin America and from various regions of Asia, the racial makeup and the visual markers of race became increasingly diverse. As has convincingly been documented by Mark M. Smith of this and other periods of American history, with this increased diversity both in ethnic identity and in the physical markers of race, “seeing” racial identity became not only increasingly difficult to ascertain and what emerged was a high degree of visual instability of race. In addition, progressive whites also increasingly regulated social behavior in relation to race in the social climate of the late twentieth century and the rhetoric of a “post-racial” America. The progressive rhetoric is the claim that one can “no longer see race,” became increasingly common, primarily for fear of negative interpersonal and social outcomes resulting from observable signs of “seeing” race. In light of this, I will argue that in the late twentieth century, for middle class whites nonvisual senses proved to be a viable reinforcement to continue

the process of racialization while maintaining their position at the pinnacle of the racial hierarchy, in this case as accomplished through the racializing aspects of late twentieth century eating culture. As legal scholars of race have made clear, throughout American history skin color alone could not mark one’s racial identity and legal, cultural and scientific measures were often used to position racialized groups within the racial hierarchy. However, by the late twentieth century and the influx of global migration from previously restricted areas, many middle class whites in the late twentieth century began to believe they could detect racial identity using senses in addition to the visual. In this dissertation, I show that by paying close attention to taste (in concert with a host of interrelated senses) we can gain significant insight into the production of cultural identities – particularly those that are made through the intersections of race and place.

By paying specific attention to historical moments where white Americans have traveled to eat foreign food, such as with Anthony Bourdain’s global culinary excursions or whites traveling to Sunset Park, Brooklyn for tacos, I will unveil the ways by which space (both urban ethnic enclaves and foreign nations), has been constructed in historical discourse as sensorially disconnected and foreign to mainstream U.S. sensory experience. As such, this dissertation will explore how eating ethnic links space and sensory experience and through a close examination of these sensory geographies of ethnic food, how race becomes enacted upon not only the body, but space as well. By doing so, I will contend here that the rise of ethnic food consumption of the past fifty years represents a crucial period of sensory reshuffling within American food cultures that has fostered a globalization of U.S. sensory experience and that the culturally constructed sensory act of eating ethnically reflects the evolving definition of race, whiteness and ethnicity, both on a bodily and spatial level in late twentieth century America.

Chapter Summaries
The chapters of this dissertation are divided into three sections. In each of these three case studies – the eating of international food at the 1964 World’s Fair, the white pursuit of authentic immigrant cuisine in the multiethnic urban space of Sunset Park, Brooklyn and the global culinary adventuring of food television - I theorize on the formation of whiteness in a specific cultural moment after the post-War Racial break. In doing so, these sections parallel the three time periods of race-making that Jodi Melamed identifies in *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, beginning with racial liberalism (mid 1940s to mid-1960s); liberal multiculturalism (1960s to 2000s); and neoliberal multiculturalism (late 1990s to the present). I show how food fostered the transition from one period to the next and tracing the various ways by whites used eating ethnic to maintain white supremacy despite the demographic reshuffling of the broader United States that occurred after 1965.\(^\text{64}\)

The first is section, comprised of chapters one and two, examines at the emergence of what I call a racial/spatial/sensory divide in the post-war era, followed by the disruption of that divide by the international foodscape at the 1964 World’s Fair. Chapter one sets the stage for the remainder of the project and examines the state of whiteness prior to 1965. In chapter one, I argue that during the post-War period, an ethnically diverse group of white Americans that only recently fit into the expanded category of American whiteness, were using physical, cultural and sensory distance from communities of color as a means to articulate and claim their racial and classed privilege. Through the uneven distribution of federal resources related to housing, white Americans of all ethnic backgrounds moved out of cities at a rate higher than ever before in American history. This white flight, combined with the cultural construction of cities as hyper racialized, sensorially abundant, dangerous spaces, created a distinct spatial and racial

\(^{64}\) Melamed, Jodi. *Represent and Destroy.*
polarization between the suburbs as spaces occupied by white Americans and cities as spaces occupied by racially othered groups. By relating this well documented history of white flight to the food culture of the mid-century and the homogenization and corporatization of food choice in the American suburbs, I argue that emerged in the late 1950 and early 1960s was not only a racial and spatial divide, but a divide that operated along sensory lines as well. This racial-spatial-sensory divide worked to construct the idea of whiteness as sensorially neutral and allowed ethnic whites to further assert their normative whiteness by conforming to the food consumption and sensory experiences of American suburban life.

In the second chapter I argue that this racial-spatial-sensory divide was radically disrupted by the 1964/1965 World’s Fair in Queens, New York. Here I focus on the consumption of “international food” at the 1964 New York World’s Fair, a key, yet to this date unexplored early point in the globalization of the American palate where millions Americans first sampled cuisines from nations like India, Morocco, Spain and Japan. Because of the unique financial and logistical troubles that the 1964 Fair faced, (largely caused by the mismanagement of Robert Moses) many European nations failed to participate in the Fair, allowing the International Areas to be dominated by nations that, because of racist immigration restrictions, did not yet have a strong cultural presence in mid-century America, such as Thailand, Morocco, Japan and many African countries. This set the stage for an exceptionally global eating culture within the fairgrounds in Queens, New York, one previously unseen by the million Americans who visited the Fair. These various international offerings represented a radical culinary disjuncture, both on symbolic and sensory levels, from the continental cuisine and corporate industrial food options that were incredibly popular in suburban white American households in the post-World War II era. Through a combination of archival and oral history work and the utilization of the
methodologies of sensory history, this chapter not only uncovers the untold history of “international food” at the 1964 Fair, but also argues that millions of Americans eating across cultures for the first time had a profound impact on white American ideas about immigration, multiculturalism and race during this period of American cultural upheaval. I contend that this moment when millions of Americans were temporarily forced to globalize their food consumption was a precursor to the Immigration Reforms of 1965, shifted ideas about America’s transnational composition and positioned eating as one of the key ways with which American whites negotiated the pending multiculturalism of the coming decades. I argue that the international encounters that were occurring at the Fair subverted the racial-spatial-sensory divides created by widespread white flight by throwing white Americans into sensory environments that were simulacrums global diversity. Also, by presenting international diversity in a safe and consumable way, I argue that the 1964 Fair encouraged whites to dissociate with white racist positionalities of the mid-century by accepting international diversity, while still unconsciously permitting discrimination against Black Americans to continue at home. In addition, this chapter addresses an unexplored aspect of World’s Fairs, food and eating and situates it within a broad body of scholarship in cultural studies that explores World’s Fairs as key cultural sites of racialization, modernization, nationalization and the American imperial project.

Staying located in New York, but moving from the 1960s to more recent history, the second section, explores the interplay of food, immigration, whiteness and sensory experience in the Latinx and Pan-Asian immigrant communities of Sunset Park, Brooklyn. My source material here is both familiar and less familiar and includes oral histories of restaurant employees and patrons, demographic data, archival analysis, critical examinations of food journalism and
culinary ephemera, and a prolonged sensory ethnography of the Brooklyn community. Chapter three introduces the methodologies and theoretical arguments of the following two chapters before presenting a multiethnic history of Sunset as it transitioned from a white ethnic enclave to racialized immigrant community, to a contemporary site of renewed interest for progressive whites and the current gentrification and displacement of communities of color – a history that very much reflects a cycle of white flight and urban redevelopment that is occurring in major metropolises across the United States. In tracing this history and in detailing the sensory geographies of Sunset Park, I argue that Sunset Park exudes a sense of “sabrosa, a powerful yet ephemeral set of placemaking practices that inscribe the space with sabor a “specifically Latino social aesthetics” that the Mexican and Latinx communities have employed to create a fluid and transnational home in urban New York.65 In this section I also trace the history of Mexican food in New York, including the white American turn against Tex-Mex cuisine and the “discovery” of “authentic” Mexican cuisine and how that turn toward authenticity caused an influx of progressive whites to travel to Sunset Park for a intersensory, cross-racial dining experiences.

In Chapter four, through a critical analysis of digital and print food media combined with my sensory ethnography of Sunset Park, I explore a phenomenon that I label “culinary slumming” - voyeuristic and exploratory excursions of white pleasure seekers into racialized ethnic urban enclaves in efforts to achieve what they perceive as an authentic, peculiar, and even sometimes dangerous, dining experience. Much like the practice of leisure slumming did during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the practice of “culinary slumming” provides a relatively comfortable means for middle class whites to negotiate the racial complexities of late twentieth and early twentyfirst centuries as well as navigate the spatial and sensory dimensions of urban life. Here I argue that unlike with the racial-spatial-sensory divide of the

65 Pérez and Audant, p 209.
mid-century where whites were using geographic separation to construction their racial privilege, within the context of liberal multiculturalism, progressive whites are instead using mediated and controlled sensory encounters with communities of color to articulate a kind of flexible and evocable cultural privilege, I label cosmopolitan whiteness. Here I argue that the potential for whites to have cross-racial food encounters and the diversity of sensory experience has been framed as a positive attribute of the neighborhood that is causing widespread gentrification and neoliberal urban development that is reworking the sensory geographies of Sunset Park and displacing the immigrant communities that have long called Sunset Park home. The chapter concludes by exploring some of the ways by which immigrant groups have made sensory claims over the urban space through public festivals and parades which take their culinary and sensory culture directly into the streets.

The final chapter will build on chapter four and continue to provide examples of white Americans who travel to eat ethnic, however, by taking food-travel television as my subject I shift my focus from transnational and cross-racial food encounters that occur within the nation-state to those that occur beyond it. The source material for this chapter is the work of two white American male television hosts, Andrew Zimmern and Anthony Bourdain, whose shows follow these white American men as they travel the world in search of what they the most authentic and strange food options that they can find. While there are vast differences in the representations of these two figures publicly, Zimmern being more suburban and normative and Bourdain being more urbane and rebellious, fundamentally both of these shows follow a white man as he travels the world to eat. I argue that these shows are propelled by colonial nostalgia and imperialistic logics that drives the desire of Bourdain and Zimmern to eat across borders. However, because both of these shows are known for the hosts consuming food that American audiences would
find repulsive or viscerally disgusting to the senses, these shows can present American consumers with what they perceive to be the most extreme articulations of sensory experience and ethnic eating, but because it is done through the medium of the television, the largely white American audiences of these shows can earn imagined cosmopolitan cultural capital without leaving the safety of their homes. Finally, I ask how the pleasures of disgust work within the logics of neoliberal multiculturalism, thereby relying on authenticity, exoticism and eroticism to reify racial privilege. The project closes with a conclusion gives a broad overview of the contributions of this work by putting them into conversation with the ways by which communities of color are fighting against the formation of white racial privilege through the appropriation and consumption of their cuisines.
Chapter 1

Whiteness, Immigration and Food: Racial, Spatial and Sensory Divides of the Mid-Century

Literary Review of Critical Whiteness Studies

Because of the deep roots of white supremacy in American settler colonialism, whiteness in many respects has become synonymous with American culture, making it so ubiquitous that it becomes hard to locate and invisible, yet normative. Whiteness functions as the unmarked center from which all others are racialized as non-normative. However, “especially in a world where transnational and multicultural identities are celebrated as the new progressive features of the cosmopolitan marketplace,”66 whiteness is often defined by what it lacks as a cultureless void or blank slate into which other cultural traits can be adopted or co-opted. This implies that the power of whiteness is derived from its ability to be remain empty and unmarked, exempting white bodies from the scrutiny of public visibility. This logic implies that whiteness is dependent for its meaning on the process of negation of what is outside its borders. This also assumes that racialized groups are the people who contain authentic culture while whiteness is neutral and empty of cultural distinction, thus pure and clean of negative cultural traits.

Within this logic, whiteness becomes the unmarked norm, both invisible and hyper-visible, by which other identities are defined. “Whiteness often goes unnoticed for those who benefit from it, but, for those who don’t, whiteness is often blatantly and painfully ubiquitous.”67 The logic here is that whites do not acknowledge or recognize themselves for their access to the structural privileges of whiteness, while for the marginalized groups that face oppression at the


hands of whiteness violence, whiteness is painfully visible. This belief that whiteness is invisible and whites do not acknowledge or earn their privilege is one of the foundational tenants of critical whiteness studies, a claim made prominent by Peggy McIntosh in 1989.\textsuperscript{68} Ruth Frankenberg builds upon McIntosh and defines whiteness as “a location of structural advantage, of race privilege” but also as “a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed.”\textsuperscript{69} Because of this malleability, in many ways whiteness is a paradoxical construct, at once invisible and unmarked yet normative and everywhere; at once “empty” yet the source of great violence and structural privilege.

The goal of much of the writing in critical whiteness studies is to make whiteness visible so that the ways by which whiteness creates structural privilege may be challenged. Much of whiteness studies is founded on the belief that rendering whiteness visible is a crucial and necessary precursor to dismantling it. Indeed, there is a power in naming privilege. Prominent critical race theorists such as Howard Winant,\textsuperscript{70} David Goldberg,\textsuperscript{71} George Yancy,\textsuperscript{72} George Lipsitz\textsuperscript{73} and Charles Mills\textsuperscript{74} have shed light on an epistemology that is centered in Western philosophies and political thought and, in the process, expose the ways that whiteness dominates Western consciousness and Western social institutions. Yancy’s work points to the ways by which the privileges of whiteness are “continual and incessant,” yet “routine and non-self-announcing,” as social, cultural and physical environments in the West are built to accommodate

white bodies. A great deal of the scholarship in critical whiteness studies has also done the work of uncovering whiteness by pointing to the very real privileges that are afforded to white Americans in sectors such as housing, education, criminal justice, employment, civic engagement, desire, among many others. The best works in this vein of social science grounded research also speaks to the ways by which whiteness intersects with class, gender, sexuality and ability, creating variant contexts for white privilege to take form.

Using changing patterns of food consumption as my source material, the central aim of this project is to examine how whiteness has shifted as a racial category and privileged subject position since the Immigration Reforms of 1965. While this project is focused on changes to whiteness of the last fifty years, critical whiteness studies is not a new field of inquiry. Historians and cultural studies scholars who have done work in critical whiteness studies have long analyzed the historical construction of whiteness and how as a racial category it has evolved over time. Important to this vein of the discipline is to examine how European immigrants, Italians, Irish, and Jews in particular, “became white,” often by working through cultural, labor and legal channels to actively claim whiteness. “This scholarship demonstrated the contingent nature of whiteness by studying the fluidity and malleability of who was considered white or not throughout different eras, regions, and along with other social group intersections within the United States and globally.” Whiteness is indeed a fluid category, the boundaries of which has shifted over time. Key to this project is the work of scholars, including Noel Ignatiev, Karen

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78 Applebaum.
79 Applebaum.
Brodkin, David Roediger and Matthew Frye Jacobson who have shown how Jewish, Polish, Italian and Irish immigrants utilized the labor movement, New Deal-era reforms, and a rise in home-buying after WWII to evolve from European immigrants to white American ethnics who were largely subsumed into a fluid definition of American normative whiteness.\textsuperscript{80} This active claiming of whiteness by Western and Southern European immigrants not only expanded the definition of white beyond those of Anglo-European descent, but also allowed “new” European immigrant groups to have access to the structural privileges afforded by whiteness and thus differentiating themselves from immigrants of color and Black Americans. Jacobson for example illuminates whiteness as a continuous categorization by showing us that nineteenth and early twentieth-century European immigrants actively pursued whiteness and white racial identity as a form of civic engagement.\textsuperscript{81} Jacobson shows us whiteness has shifted over the late nineteenth century and in order to maintain the power invested in whiteness and that the categories of ‘American’ and ‘white’ were reconstructed in the face of an increasingly polyglot European immigrant population. In a now seminal work, \textit{The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class}, Roediger uncovers the historical construction of whiteness by showing how whiteness was more than an economic advantage for working-class whites in the post-Civil War era. Rather, Roediger points to the psychological and ideological “wages” that help to forge the identities of the white working class in opposition to racialized others, particularly Blacks.\textsuperscript{82} Collectively, these texts expose how the category of white was contested and access to the benefits of whiteness changed over time in relation to social, political, cultural and demographic shifts. It is important to note that this vein of scholarship within critical

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\textsuperscript{80} Roediger, 2006.
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whiteness studies that critiques how the category has evolved over time forms the foundation of this project as my theorization of cosmopolitan whiteness is a further evolution of whiteness in relation to a post-immigrant reform, post-civil rights America.

Indeed, this vein of historical work in critical whiteness studies has shown us that, as Sara Ahmed argues, “whiteness could be described as an ongoing and unfinished history.”\(^{83}\) However, prior to the recent re-examining of whiteness that came with the Trump election and the critiques of the problematic “all lives matter” mantra, the majority of recent writing that specifically theorized whiteness has been historical in focus, choosing to look at the deep historical roots that have made whiteness a salient and powerful positionality. While critical whiteness studies scholars have defined whiteness as a fluid and expanding category that evolved throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this field has largely failed to fully examine how whiteness is being renegotiated in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Most of the central works in critical whiteness studies are focused on how the category of whiteness and the privilege associated with it developed and shifted prior to the demographic changes that resulted from the 1965 Immigration reforms. Apart from some of Jacobson’s work, namely *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America*, and a small handful of other writing done by critical race theorists that examine the reconstruction of whiteness in the late twentieth century,\(^{84}\) most critical whiteness studies scholarship emerging from historical or cultural studies disciplines stops in the mid-twentieth century.

This gap in the scholarship makes whiteness appear as an antiquated construction. While whiteness is still fundamentally relevant to the lived reality of racial privilege and racial


subjugation, it seems to have lost its academic relevancy or theoretical immediacy. For example in recent scholarship pointing out the whiteness and nationalism of the Trump movement, scholars and popular critics have called out Trump supporters for holding onto sentiment from a bygone era. Critics have defined this racist cultural groundswell and the members of that movement as relics, as if the white nationalists marching in Charlottesville and around the country are simply evoking whiteness as racialized historical nostalgia and employing the antiquated ideologies of an irrelevant, outdated and fading white supremacist past. Many of these recent critics of whiteness fail to observe it as something that is evolving today and drastically changing as a result of the historical context of the last fifty years. Recent critical writing, both in popular and academic publishing is quick to point toward whiteness as a construct that has existed since colonization; however, they often fail to examine how whiteness has shifted since the midcentury. For example, Ta-Nehisi Coates recently rightfully compares to Trump the historical figures of “Virginia slaveholders” or “marauding Klansmen” who hated the idea of a Black President but celebrated a “blameless,” passive and superannuated white working class American. Roediger has recently argued that Trump’s election is the “logical result of long processes” and asks what can the “past of whiteness” tell us about Trump. 85 Important questions undoubtedly, but when solely looking backward at whiteness, such questions often fail to challenge and critique the complexities of whiteness in the contemporary moment. And while many have written regarding the idea of a divided nation in the face of the Trump election - one that represents middle American white nationalism and the other that represents liberal multiculturalism - few have explicitly critiqued the whiteness and privilege inherent in the liberal globalism and multiculturalism of the left and how it reflects a changing construction of

whiteness in the last fifty years. Even recent popular texts that have gained a great deal of national attention, like White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America, Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis and White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide, deal with whiteness as a historical construct, largely do not address how whiteness operates as a continuously fluid identity that is evolving to this day. They historicize and contextualize whiteness and the discontents of working-class white Americans, which is important, yet fail to fully address how whiteness is evolving in a post-immigration reform multicultural American, especially in the context of the urban north.

This void in critical race scholarship on whiteness might be the result of a desire to decenter whiteness as a critical frame of reference as to not “further marginalize the experiences of groups long left out of the historical record.” Indeed, “the field of critical whiteness studies is full of an almost habitual anxiety about what it means to take up the category of ‘whiteness’ as a primary object of knowledge.” Or, as Sara Ahmed argues, “any project that aims to dismantle or challenge the categories that are made invisible through privilege is bound to participate in the object of its critique.” However, it is crucial that the workings of contemporary whiteness be uncovered, especially the whiteness of a progressive white middle class, so that it may not go unchallenged. It is my aim with this work to use an analysis of whiteness and multicultural eating to fill this gap in critical race theory by offering an analysis of whiteness that is crucially contemporary and examines multiculturalism not as peripheral to whiteness, but rather at the epicenter of how new forms of whiteness are articulated in the late twentieth and early twenty-

91 ibid
first centuries. In what follows, I historicize this process, thereby laying the foundation for a nuanced study of whiteness and consumption in contemporary moment.

**Whiteness and Immigration Prior to 1965**

To examine how whiteness changed in a post-immigration reform, post-civil rights America, and ultimately the role that food and eating played in that transformation, it is important to first recognize the state of whiteness in the years leading up to the 1965 Immigration reforms. In the years immediately following World War II, key to American cultural rhetoric was the notion of preserving the sanctity of American nationalism, which coincided directly with preserving the sanctity of American whiteness. As the Cold War intensified fears of foreign countries and racialized others, widespread desire to preserve an American civic nation-state that was free from foreign others also intensified and drove much of American socio-political rhetoric. As the Red Scare and perceived threats from communism ramped up in the 1950s, U.S. nationalism and isolationist policies were intensified, which coincided with fears of racialized foreign others and radical activists fighting for racial equality. This manifested not only in active attempts to destabilize any subversive political movement by the law enforcement arm of the Federal government but also in the cultural desire to create homogenous social and residential spaces in the American suburbs.

Critical race theorists and whiteness scholars have written extensively about post-war suburbanization and the expansion of whiteness and have examined white flight as largely a mid-
century phenomenon. However, widespread racially driven migration out of urban centers and to the suburbs by people of various European ancestries to the suburbs began as early as the 1910s. Lynching and widespread racial violence against Blacks and deteriorating social and economic conditions in the South led to a mass exodus of Black Americans to northern cities like Chicago, New York, Detroit, Pittsburg and New York. This black migration and white racial fears prompted white flight through these urban centers in the first third of the twentieth century. “Over the course of the first three decades after the turn of the century, coinciding with the start of the Great Migration of blacks out of the South, there were more than three white departures out of a northern urban center for every black arrival.”

However, while racial driven migration of white Americans out of Northern urban centers began in the early twentieth century, by the 1950s and 1960s white flight was in full swing. World War II initiated another mass migration of Blacks out of the South into the urban North in the years immediately following the war. Meanwhile, legal exclusion, redlining, racial covenants, blockbusting, urban decay, school desegregation and various government policies all led to widespread white flight in these very same cities. The economic and social privileges afforded to white Americans were further entrenched after World War II and into the 1950s. The

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Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 Benefits (widely known as the G.I. Bill), Federal Social Security benefits, labor union benefits, unemployment insurance and workmen's compensation were all unevenly distributed as the vast majority of their social and economic privileges given to whites Americans. These programs, along with New Deal projects and programs a decade plus earlier, were pulling white Americans out of the global economic downturn of the 1930s and into the economic prosperity of the 1950s. The GI Bill, which essentially functioned as affirmative action for middle-class whites, was perhaps most widely misappropriated in its distribution of financial resources. The GI Bill was indeed among the biggest factors that drove white socioeconomic privilege and, as a result, white flight in the post-war era. The Bill is widely considered a success as it helped over 16 million veterans attend college, receive job training, start businesses and purchase their first homes. However, its benefits were almost exclusively given to white Americans, especially in New York and the surrounding suburbs. At one point during the 1950s, in New York and northern New Jersey, "fewer than 100 of the 67,000 mortgages insured by the G.I. Bill supported home purchases by nonwhites." Throughout the United States, Blacks were denied housing and business loans, excluded from job-training programs, as well as admission to whites-only colleges and universities. The result of such discrepancies was that whiteness was being fortified through federal government subsidies in the late 1940s and 1950s. Essentially serving as a social and economic catapult into the suburban middle class for white Americans, these post-war benefits entrenched and normalized whiteness while in part spatially encoding it and associating it with suburban life.

In the post-war era, whites saw diversity and cross-racial encounters as something from which to establish distance: “Whites fashioned their enthusiasm for homeownership and

97 Katznelson, 140.
suburban life by painting the city as a place undermined by crowded and deteriorating living conditions, by renters and most conspicuously by the presence of Black people.”

Financially, because of federal appraisal system and private practices that labeled communities that white communities as a low financial risk and communities of color or diverse communities as high financial risk, communities of color were “redlined” and most mortgages went to building homes in segregated suburban areas. This financial and racial logic adopted the “principle that an integrated neighborhood is a bad risk, is a financial risk, that an integrated neighborhood is likely to be an unstable neighborhood. Unstable socially, but also, therefore, unstable economically.”

In some cities in the urban North, such as Detroit, New York and Chicago, whites built physical barriers between their communities and communities of color so that their housing value would not decrease and that their community would not receive a negative rating from the Federal Housing Authority. “Between 1934 and 1962 the Federal Government underwrote one hundred and twenty billion dollars in new housing. Less than two percent went to non-whites.” Such racialized financial logic gave whites looking to buy homes financial incentive to geographically distance themselves from communities of color. Living in or adjacent to a Black community or racialized immigrant community could devalue one’s property and reduce the likelihood that purchasing a home was a sound financial decision.

Culturally, diverse communities and communities of color were portrayed as deviant and socially unsound. In films, television and popular media cities were being painted with lurid imagery as the epicenters of violence, deviancy, decadence and above all else, hyper-racial visceral spaces that should be avoided at all costs. For example, film noir portrayed the modern

98 Roediger, 2005.
urban landscape as a space where working-class blacks (garage attendants, Pullman porters, jazz musicians, custodians) intermingled with morally bankrupt white men and promiscuous white women all in a dark, dense and seedy spaces where prescribed social boundaries were fluidly transgressed.\(^1\) In stark contrast, places like Levittown and Westchester were being developed by suburban whites as spaces that were marked by “homogeneity, containment and predictability” and separated those whites from what they perceived to be the dangerous and racialized urban landscapes of the mid-century.\(^2\) In addition, suburbs were constructed as spaces where the lived everyday experience of white Americans, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, could be relatively similar. These northern suburbs, including Levittown, were marked by their sensory homogeneity where white Americans could experience the same sensory experiences as they moved from house to house, shopping center to shopping center or street to street.

As much as any city in the Urban North, in the early 1960s, whiteness and segregation were impacting life in New York. As one article from the New York Times wrote of segregation in New York, “segregation is as much a fact of life in New York as it is in the South.”\(^3\) Cities like New York, portrayed in television and film for their seedy characters and racialized communities, were seen by suburban whites as spaces of sensory excess that defied the sanitized normalcy and sensory consistency of suburban life. As such, planned suburban landscapes like Levittown offered for those leaving New York the promise of upheld racial and social hierarchies, American nationalism and a traditional social order. For urban whites, the 1950s was a period of unrest as the Cold War, Red Scare, Korean War, Civil Rights Movement and the

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\(^1\) Avila, 81.
\(^2\) ibid
Great Migration all in some way challenged the idea of white normativity and global American
supremacy. By moving to racially segregated suburban spaces, middle class whites found ways
to increasingly distance themselves by creating cultural sites - “movies, theme parks, freeways,
ballparks, television, shopping malls” and the 1964 World’s Fair - that where distinctly white
and could reinforce a racial and spatial order that separated whites from communities of color.

It was not just Anglo whites there were quickly leaving northern American cities. In the
early twentieth century Eastern and Southern European immigrants were seen as racially other
from Anglo whites on the basis of biological and cultural factors including “jobs, speech, diet
and other environmental factors.” These immigrant groups were considered, as Roediger
describes them “in-between” peoples, at once legally white and certainly not racialized in the
same way as Black Americans, but also very far from being able to fully claim the category of
normative whiteness. In addition, these new European immigrants faced discrimination in the
labor market and were typically excluded from specialized skilled, positions and limited to
difficult, tough, physical jobs, often competing with Blacks for jobs at the bottom of the labor
market. Civic participation and labor union activity did grant these European immigrants some
access to normative whiteness, but it was not until after World War II when thousands of second
generation European immigrants moved to the suburbs that they could fully claim American
whiteness. For Italian, Jewish, Slavic and Irish immigrants, homeownership in the suburbs,
provided the ability to lift the status of racially “inbetween.” No longer were they living in
distinct ethnic enclaves in close proximity to communities of color in the inner city. Buying a
house in the suburbs represented the ability to claim full participation in both whiteness and
Americanness while simultaneously distancing themselves from the racial and ethnic otherness,

104 Roediger, Working Towards Whiteness, 66.
105 Roediger, Working Towards Whiteness.
and lurid deviance, that had come to define Northern urban centers by the mid-century. In moving to the suburbs, many of the cultural distinctions that once separated European immigrants groups, such as with language and food, were minimized. Rather these groups fit into a more monolithic and homogenous version of normative American whiteness that was part and parcel of mid-century suburban life. As such, white flight not only signified the prescription of existing racial hierarchies into an urban/suburban divide, but it also allowed a myriad of white ethnics to claim full inclusion in American whiteness through participating in the creation of this racial/spatial order through homeownership. This widespread white flight created what Eric Avila calls a “spatial and racial polarization” that “nurtured the development of a more expansive white identity,” including the large number of ethnic whites who immigrated to the United States in the early twentieth century and only recently could claim participation in American whiteness, who were actively “removing themselves from racialized spaces of the inner city vis-à-vis homeownership.”

In the years prior to the 1965 Immigration Act and the 1964 World’s Fair, white Americans expressed their social, cultural and economic privilege by creating physical and spatial separation from communities of color. Even as the civil rights movement gained steam and challenged racial segregation in the 1960s, in both the South and urban North, with this move to into racially segregated suburbs, moderate whites could elude contact with black communities and avoid facing the visceral nature of racial discrimination and the challenges to it brought forth by the Civil Rights movement. Whites could turn a blind eye to the turmoil facing communities of color and black communities across the country by physically separating themselves. “Postwar suburbanization sanctioned the formation of a new racial geography that spatialized a starker contrast between white and black” where black became synonymous with

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106 Avila, 6.
urban and suburbanization became synonymous with white. As we will see with cosmopolitan whiteness and the cross-racial encounters that occur through eating, progressive whites in the later part of the twentieth century are actively expressing their racial and cultural privilege by engaging with communities of color in the limited and contextual encounters that occur through food. This is a radical disjuncture from the 1950s when whites were taking steps to actively distance (and for white ethnics distinguish) themselves from racialized immigrant groups by moving to the suburbs.

The 1965 Immigration Reform and Its Impact

Reflecting the challenges to the existing racial order brought forth by radical racial justice movements, the post-war racial/spatial order of “chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs” would begin change over the next two decades. The mid-1960s were a period of flux, where every kind of split in American life, especially the nation’s vast racial and class divides, became open and visible. As the 1960s progressed, widespread social tensions developed around radical anti-racist activism, Third World liberation movements, Civil Rights movements and human sexuality, women's rights, traditional modes of authority and differing interpretations of the American Dream. Protests against the Vietnam War were escalating, drawing critical attention to U.S. militarization and the role of the U.S. as an imperial power. Race-based social movements, most notably the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, were radically shifting racial political discourse throughout the United States. Simultaneously, despite growing levels of American wealth and consumerism, with suburbanization and the increasing numbers of middle-class suburban single-family homes, economic disparities became increasingly wide and visible.

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107 Avila, 4.
108 Avila, 1.
Growing from the work of small groups of black activists fighting for racial equality in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Civil Rights movement reached a climax in 1963 when an estimated one million activists participated in protests in American cities such as Birmingham, Washington, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago and small towns across the South.\textsuperscript{109} Part of a global anti-colonial, Third World revolt against white Western domination, the American Civil Rights Movement very much acted in synch with movements around the world, including nonviolent resistance pioneered in India. Support for the civil rights movement amongst whites was mixed. Racist whites, especially in the American South, actively opposed the actions of the movement. Meanwhile, liberals, represented by Lyndon Johnson were embracing the more moderate ends of the Civil Rights movement and eventually signed into law the 1964 Civil Rights Act, while failing to support more radical black activists, including Martin Luther King Jr in his later years as he increasingly became more critical of capitalism. Meanwhile law enforcement was doing everything in its power to discredit and destroy radical black power movements and third world liberation movements both within the United States and abroad. By the mid-1960s, the intermingled racial, economic, and political forces that had generated vast urban segregation and poverty, resulted in “racial uprisings” in many cities across the United States. Spurred by white racial violence and police brutality, race rebellions were flaring up around the country in places like Birmingham (1963), Cambridge (1963 and 1967), Harlem (1964), Philadelphia (1964), Rochester (1964), and Newark (1967). Informed by the teachings of Franz Fanon and sparked by these radical uprisings, the Civil Rights Movement radicalized and the movement largely dispelled the nonviolence of a few year earlier in favor of fiery language and militant confrontations. Failing to truly address white

privilege by attributing racial inequality to cultural differences, many whites reacted to the Civil Rights Movement by synthesizing a legacy of centuries of a racial inequality within the egalitarian and democratic norms of the black rights movement. The result was a form of individualistic egalitarianism that worked to preserve racial advantages for whites.

Key to the reshuffling of mainstream American attitudes towards global difference and the racial/spatial divide of the post-war era was the 1965 Immigration Act, which was signed into law during the second summer of the 1964 World’s Fair. As numerous scholars and historians argue, such as Mae Ngai, Erika Lee, Richard Alba and Matt Garcia, no other single piece of legislation in the twentieth century has had more impact on the country’s demographic character quite so thoroughly. The share of the U.S. population born outside the country tripled and became far more diverse as a direct result of this bill. “Seven out of every eight immigrants in 1960 were from Europe; by 2010, nine out of ten were coming from other parts of the world.”

As Mae Ngai succinctly describes the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, widely known as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965:

The Immigration Act of 1965 repealed the system of national origins quotas, replacing it with a new system of quotas that were at once global (applying to all countries) and evenly distributed (20,000 per country). It raised the ceiling on admissions to 300,000 a year and established preferences for family and occupationally based immigration. Its signal achievement was that it ended the policy of admitting immigrants according to a hierarchy of racial desirability and established the principle of formal equality in immigration. It increased the possibilities for migration for peoples from eastern and southern Europe and from Asia. As a result of immigration reform (as well as other developments in the world), patterns of migration to the United States changed tremendously in the

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last decades of the twentieth century. To paraphrase historian David Reimers, after 1965 the third world came to America.\textsuperscript{112}

Prior to 1965, the American borders were largely closed to those outside of Western European nations. To keep the American population largely homogenous, the racist and nationalist 1924 Johnson Reed National Origins and Asian Exclusion Immigration Acts were passed, which limited the annual number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to two percent of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States. Using race and national origin as determining factors, the blatantly racist act controlled the influx of "undesirable" immigration by establishing quotas that barred immigrants of some specific national origins, including much of Africa and Asia, including Japan, China, the Philippines (then under U.S. control), Siam (Thailand), French Indochina (Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia), Singapore (then a British colony), Korea, Indonesia, Burma (Myanmar), among others.

Proponents of the 1965 Immigration Act did not push for the passing of this bill to abolish the racist quota system set up by the 1924 Bill. Rather, the political forces that pushed for the Bill’s passing, largely white ethnic second-generation immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, speaks much more about expanding definitions of whiteness in the mid-century than it does about changing attitudes towards non-white immigrant groups from Asia, Africa and Latin America. By the 1960s, white ethnics in the urban industrial north, namely Italians, Greeks and Polish, Hungarian and Slavic Americans were a major voting block and a major force in both civic and union activity. They saw this quota system as an attack on their civic belonging, which coincided with their attempted ascendance into normative American whiteness. For ethnic whites in the urban North, the logic behind critiquing the 1924 Bill was that if people from their home

nations were not deemed worthy of having access to the United States through immigration, their position as fully American and fully white was being questioned. As such, second generation white ethnics were the primary group actively protesting the 1924 Bill and taking civic action against it, primarily on the grounds that the 1924 Bill favored Western and Northern Europeans over Eastern and Southern Europeans. This Western and Northern European preference was indeed reflected in the immigration under the 1924 Immigration Bill, whose quota system allocated nearly seventy percent of the VISAs offered by the United States to immigrants from Great Britain, Germany and Ireland. For example, the VISA quota for Germany was 51,000 while the quota for Italy was 3,400. However, these racist national origin quotas were not rejected by to open the doors to immigrants of color, but rather to make space for white ethnics who by the mid-century were slowly being embedded in the category of normative American whiteness. This push by Eastern European whites combined with the groundswell of what was becoming an increasingly transnational and global Civil Rights Movement, led to President Kennedy being a strong proponent to ending this quota system. After his assassination in 1963, the bill gained much Congressional support and was signed into legislation by President Johnson at the foot of the Statue of Liberty in 1965.

While the impact of the concurrent Civil Rights movement on the 1964 Immigration Act should not be ignored, President Johnson and many in Congress specifically claimed the 1965 Bill was not designed to increase immigration from Asia or Africa. When President Johnson signed the Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 into law in the aftermath of the

landmark Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, he did not predict a mass shift in American immigration patterns. Rather, he claimed that the bill would have no major impact on the racial or demographic makeup of the American population, specifically from Asia, Africa and Latin America. In fact, relatively strict regional quotas, albeit larger and more universally applied, were placed on immigration under this new Bill. This was because the intent of the 1965 Bill, which at the time was largely unpopular, was not to radically open the American borders to non-white immigrants. Rather, it was to ease immigration for members of families already living in the United States from nations that were operating under a more strict quota system. The Act was clear in creating “several categories of immigrants who would receive preferential treatment, including the family members of naturalized citizens already living in the United States and immigrants working in certain high-skilled occupations,” which have had long-lasting impacts on our contemporary immigration practice in the United States.¹¹⁵

However, the long-term results of the 1965 Bill were radically different. The 1965 reform did not represent an immediate flooding of the United State with foreign immigrants, because all immigration is tied to a continually fluid “‘interplay among immigration policy, foreign policy, and asymmetrical international exchange.”¹¹⁶ By 1970 only 4.6 percent of the population was foreign born. However, in the decades that followed, immigration to the United States from Asian countries, Vietnam and Cambodia, especially from regions that were experiencing major military conflict, quadrupled.¹¹⁷ In addition, The Philippines, Dominican Republic, Cuba, South Korea and India all became major sources of immigrants to the United States in the decades

¹¹⁷ Hoffnung-Garskof, 126.
following this legislation. As Ngai describes the monumental impact of these immigration reforms:

Over the next five decades, 59 million people would make their way to the United States, according to the Pew Research Center’s latest report on immigration, issued on September 28. They would come from China, the Philippines, India, Lebanon, Pakistan, Brazil—from almost every country on the globe—dramatically shifting the country’s racial and ethnic landscape. Today, because of this bill, the foreign-born account for nearly 14 percent of the total population, a proportion we have not seen since the 1910s. What’s more, 88 percent of immigrants now come from non-European countries, the exact inverse of immigrants’ origins in 1960.\(^\text{118}\)

It should be made clear that this Bill did not instantly make the United States universally inclusive and its impacts have been complex on the demographics of post-1965 United States. As the historiography on immigration has shown us, including Ngai’s Seminal Work on the advent of the notion of the “illegal immigrant,” *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, as well as important works by historians such as Catherine Ceniza Choy,\(^\text{119}\) Vicki Ruiz, Vivek Bald,\(^\text{120}\) Madeline Hsu,\(^\text{121}\) Erika Lee,\(^\text{122}\) Natalia Molina,\(^\text{123}\) and others, the bill not only led to increased amounts of inclusion - inclusions which would radically change the demographics of the United States - but it also led to increased levels of exclusion for many ethnic and racial groups. While the 1965 Act abolished the old quota system that unequally distributed immigrant visas based on national origin and explicitly prohibited discrimination based on race, sex, nationality, and place of birth, “it also established a new preference system based on

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professional status and family reunification and set global and per-country ceilings on the annual number of immigrants for every country.”

For example, The 1965 Act placed strict numerical restrictions on immigrants from Western Hemisphere countries, most notably Mexico. “No prior immigration law restricted the immigration of Mexicans or other Latin Americans, in part because business owners relied on their labor. Instead, their immigration was regulated according to the demands of the U.S. labor market. So when the 1965 Act set the number of Mexicans who could immigrate legally at 20,000 per year despite the demands of employers for a much greater number, it guaranteed a spike in undocumented immigration, a subject that had garnered national attention before, especially during the anti-'wetback' hysteria of the mid-1950s, but never with the vitriol that characterized it from the late 1960s onward.”

In addition, the familial and skill-based preferences of the 1965 Act discriminated between particular categories of immigrants, those with family in the United States and those with advanced degrees and highly employable skill sets, which has resulted in uneven treatment for various immigrant populations, especially those who are deemed to be unskilled laborers. Importantly, conservative whites painted communism and homosexuals as the two biggest enemies of the federal government. Under the 1965 Immigration Act, immigration into the country of "sexual deviants" and “psychopathic personalities” which including homosexuals and anyone identifying as LGTBQ, was prohibited.

The bill should not be seen as a “victory for liberal attitudes toward immigration and race” or as a “triumph of a pluralistic conception of Americanism,” because not only was

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125 Cadava.

that not the Bill’s original intent, but it did not have an immediate impact on reducing existing racial hierarchies and its long term impacts are muddied and complex.127

While the 1965 Bill’s impacts may not have been immediately clear, as Stuart Hall points out, the widespread changes in U.S. Immigration policy combined with the racial uprisings and student movements of the 1960s did, at some level, work to “disinter and reconstruct subjugated histories around race, gender and nation,” together brought forth challenges to the idea of a singular unified national culture centered on white normativity.128 The cultural uniformity within the American nation-state, that of Anglo white cultural normativity, faced fundamental challenges from a pending influx of immigrant groups from Latin America and Asia, Third World radical movements, Civil Rights and Black Power groups, feminist, lesbian and gay rights groups, and student activist movements during the 1960s.129 With the increase of immigrants of color from around the globe in the late 1960s and early 1970s, whiteness was at a crossroads where multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism was beginning to seep into popular discourse. These challenges to the notion of a singular American culture, brought forth by progressive whites, communities of color and new immigrant groups began to challenge the notion of lurid and deviant racialized cities and whitewashed homogenous suburban spaces.. Especially amongst progressive liberals and so-called “hippies” who were openly embracing cultural traditions, religions and products from Asia and Latin America, the normative behavior and cultural traits of American whites were more globally fluid than ever before.

129 The expanding definitions of “whiteness” that occurred in the late eighteenth and into the twentieth century, also destabilized the idea of “American” culture as defined solely by Anglo-whiteness.
While such changes did have a profound impact on the cultural plurality of American culture, as Hall, Roderick Ferguson and Lisa Duggan all make clear, American conservative elites managed to coopt this “crisis of national culture,” that had the potential to destabilize normative whiteness, and found ways for global capitalism to feed on the local histories and fragmented identities of an emerging American identity politics.\textsuperscript{130} Market segmentation became common among United States marketing and consumer patterns as racial, ethnic and regionally specific goods and products became common across the American consumer landscape. By the mid-1960s, specific marketing and advertising to racialized populations, perhaps the most notable example of this being ad campaigns for Marlboro Cigarettes and McDonald's being targeted directly at Black Americans by the mid to late 1960s.\textsuperscript{131} In addition to targeting certain racial and ethnic populations, advertising media also targeted younger audiences with more progressive playful and trendy advertising. Whereas advertising previously had treated the counterculture as deviant, undesirable and marginalized, advertisers now attempted to connect with the youth market, attempting to win over a consumer group that was increasingly disaffected and distrustful of corporate messaging. Not only were markets being segmented in advertisements, but individual brands were now given distinct media personalities. As large marketing firms could more readily access emerging research and data on the complexity of American diversity and the specific traits of various consumer groups (dividing consumers by income, race, ethnicity, gender, employment, etc), advertisers could increasingly narrow the target of their advertisements, creating more fragmented and distinct consumer markets that goods and products were designed for and targeted to.

\textsuperscript{130} Ferguson.

As such, the result of this increasing diversity and rebellious countercultural movements was not a widespread reduction in consumerism or a reduction racial and cultural segmentation, but rather the two being merged into a form of ethno-racial micro-marketing of products and services to small market segments based on race, class, gender and ethnicity. As Inderpal Grewal further explains in *Transnational America*, by the 1960s, “as social movements created new identities in the United States, marketing practices were designed to understand these communities and to diversify and differentiate them to sell more and different products.”

According to Lisa Duggan, continual and effective attacks by conservative whites on the “downwardly redistributive social movements of the 1960s, especially the Civil Rights and Black Power movements,” resulted in a new multicultural and non-distributive form of cultural plurality, specifically designed to facilitate the emergence of a new diverse and globalized consumerism while effectively redistributing wealth upward. The result was that a 1960s consumerism and commodity culture emerged that “worked through the very local, vernacular, and subjugated histories and differences that helped to bring the nation-state to crisis in the first place,” but ultimately resulted in the continuation of racial and classed hierarchies, however now with a range of segmented consumer markets predicated on ethnic and cultural difference, individual identities and specific alternative lifestyles. “Diversified consumerism” was pushed onto middle-class white consumers, resulting in an emerging form of liberal multiculturalism defined specifically by the increasingly diverse number of consumer options. By the 1960s, as Eric Lott and others have pointed out, racial fantasies by whites about the non-white other have driven much of the cultural consumption of white Americans and this newly segmented and

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134 Ferguson, 16.
diversified consumerism was no different. As Lawrence Grossberg writes, by the cusp of the World’s Fair in the early 1960s, “it is no longer a matter of capitalism having to work across differences…it is difference which is now in the service of capital.”

It should be noted that large corporations, advertisers and white elites did not just aim to apply multicultural, segmented, individualistic consumerism to racialized or ethnic groups. Indeed, they were also applying the notion of multicultural consumerism to the expanded multi-ethnic groups that were now subsumed under the umbrella of American whiteness. As the first half of the twentieth century ushered in a flexibility and continual slippages in the meaning of whiteness, “within which whiteness connoted not only not only Anglo-American but a more heterogeneous group that ‘passed’ as white,” the new consumer individualism of the 1960s was seemingly unbound from the specifics of a unified Anglo model of whiteness and a specific national uniformity linked to a singular American dream. By the 1960s, multinational corporations were expanding consumerism to embrace these transnational and global products and marketing them to heterogeneous white subjects. As Grewal points out, with the assistance of new technologies, “consumer culture produced transnational identifications and subjects,” for both immigrant groups and progressive whites, whose desires and fantasies crossed national borders, but remained” firmly attached to “national imaginaries.” By the 1960s, Americans were beginning consume (and eat) products representing a newfound globalized plurality without facing any question of their nationalism or national allegiance. Irish Americans, Italian Americans and other white ethnics could now purchase goods and services marketed directly to them, without having their allegiance as an American, in particular as a white American,

135 Lott, Eric.
137 Grewal, 7.
138 Grewal, 11.
challenged. This new diverse consumerism was embraced by many progressive whites, especially in relation to food consumption, giving white subjects a way to feel materially connected with diverse communities, both their own ethnic groups as well as communities of color (the very same groups whose radical social and political movements brought challenges to the idea of a unified national culture) and openly embraced multiculturalism in a consumer sense, without relinquishing any of the privileges afforded by whiteness or inclusion in the category of Americanness.  

This emergent diversified consumerism of the mid-1960s made it not only safe, but actively encouraged white subjects to embrace the cultural productions of communities of color, as long as the cultural differences were clearly defined and incontestable, and that such cross-cultural embraces were primarily accomplished within the limited structures of the consumerism.

By the mid-1960s, the Post-War period of exceptional economic prosperity, the new racial/spatial order and increased consumer choice combined with social upheaval and youth-driven countercultural consumerism to result in a transformative moment in American history. 1960s counterculture reshaped more “mainstream” white American culture by making stylized consumerism, specifically consumer obsolescence, the dominant mode through which individuals articulated their socioeconomic position.  

The youth-driven counterculture movements of the mid-sixties, combined with post-war economic prosperity to encourage the widespread use of conspicuous consumption and aesthetic consumer choices as modes of class distinction for the middle and upper classes. Even as many young Americans became disillusioned by what they perceived to be the shallowness and materialism of contemporary

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139 Mentioning the multinational corporations, especially in the food sector, found ways to benefit from these radical social movements in no ways is an attempt to undermine the radical nature of these movements, especially the movement for ethnic studies, and its long-term impact on American racial politics.

culture, more so than at any previous moment in the twentieth century, in the mid-1960s Americans were turning to consumerism as a means to articulate individualism and claim a privileged social and classed positionality. Corporations were targeting products to segmented groups on the basis of age, race or ethnicity, gender, region, employment, and income, among others factors. One illuminating example is Pepsi’s 1963 Pepsi Generation Advertisements which were aimed specifically at teenagers and featured television ads of young people dancing and singing while drinking Pepsi products. Pepsi’s advertising executives saw young rebellious teenagers not as a group that was outside of mass consumerism, but rather a group that needed to be brought towards consumerism through direct targeted and specialized advertising. In a cyclical logic, the consumers could then claim specific social identity through the consumption of that product and the lifestyle that advertisements were selling along with it. Consumers could use the consumption of specific goods, such as Pepsi which was marketed as youthful, Cadillac’s marketed as luxurious or Harley Davidsons marketed as adventurous, to outwardly exude a certain personal identity and position of relative privilege, hence distinguishing themselves from others around them. As Lizabeth Cohen states "Market segmentation gave capitalists and rebels alike a shared interest in using consumer markets to strengthen -- not break down -- the boundaries between social groups, it contributed to a more fragmented America. The marketplace became more like other fractured places in post-World War II America, most notably residential communities and commercial centers, where an investment in mass consumption ironically also propelled Americans away from the common ground of the mass toward the divided and often unequal” divisions amongst people and across geographic

This is an important distinction from how individual privilege was constructed a decade earlier in the early to mid-1950s when a key means through which one articulated their racial and class privilege was homeownership, mass universalized consumerism and a geographic move out of the urban core. While in the 1960s many Americans were certainly still pursuing a traditional model of the American Dream and moving to the suburbs, it was individualized consumerism, which resulted from increasingly segmented markets and specialized advertising, that consumers were using to distinguish themselves from other social groups.

The result of this corporate and conservative co-option and highly commercial embrace of cultural difference became a driving force in what Étienne Balibar labels *neo-racism*. Balibar defines *neo-racism* as a new form of racism in the “era of decolonization” where the dominant logic driving American racial hierarchies was not the biological differences across races. Rather, what came to drive the differentiation between racial groups was a complex series of cultural differences that over the first half of the twentieth century have become both naturalized and insurmountable. He argues that the insurmountably of these cultural differences does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but ‘only’ the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of lifestyles and traditions. Rather, Balibar and other critical race theorists argue that new categories, most notably “immigration” and “foreigner” are becoming substitutes for the notion of biological races, creating a new form of multicultural “neo-racism” that allows for racism even without the clear notion of distinct biological races (or even racists). This is a crucial turn in the operation of racial logics, in which eating was a central component, because the cultural differences that now defined the racial

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142 Cohen, 331.
order were seen as insurmountable and naturalized, and functioned as a way of locking individuals and groups into a “determination that is immutable and intangible in origin.”\textsuperscript{144} The creation by American corporations of new and fragmented consumer markets played a key role in the naturalization of these cultural differences as clear cultural distinctions between racial groups that were emphasized within the process of consumer market fragmentation.

Food and Eating Culture prior to 1965

The new racial logic emerged in conjunction with the fragmented multicultural and globalized consumerism of the 1960s and was very much influenced by changes in food

\textsuperscript{144} Balibar’s term for the prevalent new modality of racism he calls ‘racism without race’, which emerged in the 1970s. Whereas racism used to be premised on the idea of race as biological heredity, now in the postcolonial era it tends to be focused on ‘cultural differences’.

consumption. Food played a key role in the definition of certain groups as culturally incompatible and perpetually alien (even sometimes strange and unusual) as the foods that racialized groups both produced and consumed, were one of the key components at the forefront of what naturalized the insurmountable cultural differences and “locked” racialized groups outside of normativity and a compatibility with mainstream white culture. White Americans increasingly turned towards consuming across the new fragmented consumer markets to publically construct a position of cosmopolitan sophistication, and there was much to be gained from such multicultural positionality. Especially for liberal whites in urban areas, embracing consumption across racial, national or ethnic market subsets was increasingly seen as positioning oneself as progressive and affiliated with counterculture movements. This includes the Beat Generation and early “hippy” groups such as The Merry Pranksters, The Diggers and the Red Dog Experience that were emerging in Greenwich Village in New York City and in San Francisco and Berkley, California. Starting in the early 1960s, such groups were embracing non-Western cultures as a means to distinguish themselves from normative white suburban America, including wearing non-Western inspired clothing that appropriated Native American, Asian, African and Latin American motifs, the appropriation of Buddhist, Hindu and Sufi spiritual practices including yoga and other various forms of meditation, and Asian and Middle Eastern culinary cultures.146

This use of consumerism to articulate a social position and embrace an emergent multicultural diversity also extended to eating culture as progressive Americans increasingly turned towards individual food choice to articulate class distinction and a global cosmopolitanness. I label this newfound utilization of food choice to articulate individual social position and break free from domestic, familial and ethnic traditions, by Americans across the

social and economic strata, *dietary individualism*. Prior to the 1960s food was a social activity that the vast majority of Americans did in the home or at the workplace. Relatively few Americans were dining out for leisure. It was during this era of post-war consumer prosperity and shifting American domestic norms that eating outside of the home widely became a leisure activity, no longer commonly reserved for the wealthy, but to an extent unprecedented at that point in American history also popular among both the working and middle classes.\(^{147}\) For millions of working and middle-class Americans, eating became a performative act done on a public stage - in restaurants, at bars and cafes, on the street - even at a World’s Fair. The symbolic performative nature of such acts is no more evident than with the lunch counter sit-ins throughout the American Counth during the early Civil Rights movement. The importance of these political actions speak to the performative, symbolic power of eating publically as well as the importance of restaurant culture to the fabric of American leisure and cultural life during the late 1950s and 1960s.

While Americans have always eaten publically, with the unprecedented proliferation of public dining that occurred in the post-war era, for the first time in American history eating culture shifted away from being something that was considered a primarily a domestic practice, to something that was also widely considered a public leisure activity. During the first half of the twentieth century, because of the conservative consumer practices and the food rationing that was associated with the two World Wars and the Great Depression, Americans were dining out in relatively low numbers. Most food was consumed in the home. However, with the economic

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\(^{147}\) This is primarily because, fast food and dinner house chains, relatively scarce at the beginning of the decade, flourished by middle to the end of the 1960s. Casual dining prevailed, both at home and in public, resulting in much more access to eating out for many Americans. As Audrey Russek and others argue, eating outside of the home was primarily reserved for the wealthy in the earlier decades of the twentieth century. Russek, Audrey. “Appetites Without Prejudice: U.S. Foreign Restaurants and the Globalization of American Food Between the Wars.” *Local Foods Meet Global Foodways: Tasting History*. Benjamin N. Lawrance and Carolyn De La Pena eds. New York: Routledge, 2012.
prosperity of the post-war era, increasing demands on the American worker and thousands of women now entering the workforce, more Americans than ever before were choosing to dine outside of the home. By 1950, dining out of the home rose to twenty-five percent of all food spending, the highest amount at any point in American history, and continued to steadily rise for the next two decades. With the proliferation of diner culture, the growth of fast food franchises such as McDonalds, Burger King, Howard Johnson and others, Americans were beginning to see dining out not as something that was done only by the elite or reserved for special occasions, but rather something that could be done as “meal replacement.” In fact, in the 1960s Howard Johnson’s served more meals outside of the home than any country or organization except for the United States Army and by 1970 had over 900 restaurants and over 500 motor coaches across the country. The widespread popularity of these fast-casual dining options made it relatively easy for homemakers to quickly and affordably replace a home cooked meal.

However, eating outside of the home was done for more than just meal replacement. As Pierre Bourdieu theorizes in Distinction, by the 1960s, aesthetic choices and personal taste functioned as a means for individual consumers to create and articulate social class distinctions. Both domestic and public food choices, like any other form of consumer consumption, fit within this model of consumer obsolescence and increasingly became how Americans, especially in urban areas, differentiated themselves along social and cultural strata. While food choice and eating certainly remained a means to maintain social ties and played a key role in the cultural imagination of diasporic populations, including among white ethnics, within

the emerging context of rampant consumerism of the 1960s, food choice also became a central means by which white Americans differentiated themselves along classed, racial, and individual lines. As such, not only were Americans eating outside of the home in the 1960s at a greater rate than ever before, but the culinary choices they were making had a greater impact. Eating in a fast food restaurant was not only a means to replace the meal, but it also became a means to express that one was modern and up to date with the current culinary trends. Eating in an expensive restaurant was seen as a means to express one’s wealth and prestige. Eating in a “foreign” restaurant was slowly becoming a means to express one’s cosmopolitan propensity. In addition, dining out also allowed for consumers in the late 1950s and early 1960s to have more flexibility over their food choices. Rather than simply eating what was prepared by the homemaker for a large extended family as was the case with most meals in the early twentieth century, when dining out in the mid-century individual consumers could order off of a menu and have a great deal of discretion and individual control over the food that they consumed. Eating was becoming less of an activity that was done with a large extended family and more of an activity that was done by the individual. Furthermore, with this proliferation of restaurants, the same market segmentation and conspicuous consumption that was driving consumerism in other consumer sectors such as retail goods and the automotive industry, was extending into the food market. More and more restaurants were targeting specific populations, such as “ethnic” fast food chains like Pizza Hut and Kentucky Fried Chicken, the rise of health food and vegetarian restaurants (such as The Source Family Restaurant in Los Angeles) and the rise of “countercuisine” food was increasingly becoming a means through which individual identity was articulated.\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{151} Counterculture elements, such as a rejection of mass production and industrial agriculture, began to be evident in American food choice during this time. For more on the mass consumerism of the post-war era see Cohen, Lizabeth. \textit{Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America}. New York: Vintage Books, 2003., among others.
The late 1950s and 1960s can also be credited for the rise of food journalism, which further pushed the food choices being made middle class whites by into the public sphere. Food sections in most periodicals and newspapers were originally included as part of women’s magazines or women’s sections of large newspaper. Such food sections primarily were comprised of recipes for the American housewife. However, with the rise of restaurant dining and the growth of culinary options available to middle class consumers, the food writing of major newspapers began to start to receive stand-alone sections by the late 1950s. In the late 1950s many food writers were moving back and forth between writing for advertising and for food publications and food sections in prominent newspapers and originally were primarily a resource for the American homemaker. “In the post-World War II years, newspaper food sections were made thick thanks to grocery store and kitchen product advertisements.”

However, by the early 1960s, hundreds of papers which in the past have paid scant attention to the subject,” began “realizing the reader interest and the advertising revenue possibilities of food and are appointing qualified editors to turn out readable food pages.” By the early 1960s, spearheaded by Craig Claiborne of the New York Times, who in 1959 became the first man to run a dining section at an American newspaper, food and dining sections of American newspapers began to provide more in-depth analysis of the culinary and restaurants trends of the day. Claiborne in particular led the a turn towards restaurant reviews and was quick to highlight restaurants for their service, culinary attributes and aesthetic merit. In addition, Clairborne and other writers that followed in his stead were also quick to point out “ethnic restaurants,” a term

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153 Ray Irwin, “Newspapers Find Food Profitable News Subject,” Editor & Publisher, July 15, 1950.
he is widely credited for coining in 1959. As one New York Times article writes of Claiborne’s prepotency for diverse dining options,

On May 18, 1962, readers of The New York Times woke up to learn that of all the Chinese restaurants in the city, “there is probably none with a finer kitchen” than Tien Tsin, in Harlem. The same article praised four other places to eat, including Gaston, on East 49th Street, which “may qualify as having one of the most inspired French kitchens in town,” and Marchi’s, on East 31st Street, “one of New York’s most unusual North Italian restaurants.”

Claiborne, who eventually became a celebrity in the food world, and other prominent food writers of the day had much cultural power. Their restaurants reviews held much weight and they could give credibility to a new restaurant or culinary trend. Such food writing not only exposed Americans to more diverse public dining options, but it also further placed a prominence on individual food choice as a means to discern one’s social positionality. If one could dine publically in one of the restaurants that a critic like Claiborne was bestowing with high praise, one could prove that they were at the epicenter of taste, class and social capital in the mid-century.

By the mid-sixties, Americans were, for the first time in such a fashion, turning towards food (as a cultural and economic commodity) and eating (as a bodily and physical, but also social and cultural practice) to demonstrate individual culinary capital. Publicly expressing and showcasing one's culinary indulgences, excess, multiplicity and sophistication increasingly became a means through which individuals showcased their own liberal consumer individuality. In a Foucauldian sense, the bodily consumption of food also invested social capital directly into one’s own body. Through eating and the development and expansion of one’s taste preferences,

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154 Freedman, 171.
one could remake the body as a site with which both cultural and social capital were acquired. Adapting Foucault’s concept of biopower to the proliferation of a highly racialized food culture, it becomes clear that by the 1960s large numbers of white middle-class Americans were turning towards food practices and rituals – both the social display and sensory experience of them – as a means to invest individual cultural capital directly into the body.

As food increasingly became a means through which liberal consumers constructed their individualism and cultural capital in the mid-century, the sensory experience of eating increasingly became an important tool through which individual social position was articulated. As Bourdieu highlights, class distinctions, in this particular case the construction of a middle-class cosmopolitan positionality, was largely constructed in the quotidian aesthetics of the everyday, “most marked in the ordinary choices of everyday existence, such as furniture, clothing, or cooking.”¹⁵⁷ For Bourdieu, taste functions as the “practical affirmation of an inevitable difference” used to foster ones cultural capital in efforts to articulate a certain classed positionality. However, with few exceptions where Bourdieu refers to taste as the “faculty of perceiving flavors,” he largely refers to taste in an aesthetic sense.¹⁵⁸ However, it was not simply a set of aesthetic preferences that were being used to claim a position of heightened cultural status or even a clear personal distinction between domestic, familial and ethnic identities, but rather taste understood as “the sensation people feel when they take food or drink into their mouths” and a form of sensory and bodily desire, that became crucial in articulating individuality and class positionality by the 1960s.¹⁵⁹ The emergent dietary individualism of mid-century liberalism does not simply function through social and cultural displays of food choice,

¹⁵⁷ Bourdieu, p 177.
¹⁵⁸ Bourdieu, 190.
articulated when one eats or appropriates food choice in a public manner. Dietary individualism and the use of eating to articulate social status and individual identity also have profoundly affective and sensory components tied to the act of eating as a visceral bodily act.

As eating culture and food choice became much more public in the midcentury, as a result of the expansion of the restaurant industry and the rampant rise of food journalism, these associations between taste and class became much more visible and pronounced, thus making the role of sensory experience in the construction of liberal individualism much more discernable. For example, by the mid-twentieth century, members of well-paid professional classes tended to exhibit a taste preference for “light, delicate foods” and a rejection of “coarse and fatty foods,” which increasingly became associated with working-class identity or immigrant status (lower class European immigrants and immigrants of color were increasingly linked to foods that tasted “heavy” or “unrefined”). In addition, the Progressive Left began preferring foods high in spice and foods, preferring foods noted for their simplicity and association with the peasant classes, especially cuisines originating in the Middle East and East Asia. Such taste preferences not only became a way to mark one’s social status publicly but to enact such status upon one’s body. As we will see of the mid-century and the World’s Fair, the use of sensory experience and taste preferences to articulate liberal individualism went global as Americans increasingly turned to eating across racial and cultural lines to accumulate cultural capital.

Despite the increasing prominence of dietary individualism in the early 1960s, food choices available to white American consumers, except for in a select handful of major metropolitan areas, were relatively limited. As food historians have made clear, in immigrant-dense cities like New York, Boston and Chicago, there were many restaurants in ethnic immigrant communities since the first decades of the twentieth century. This included the

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160 Upton, p 96.
restaurants in New York’s or San Francisco’s Chinatowns,\textsuperscript{161} Polish restaurants in New York or Chicago or Jewish restaurants in New York or the Bay Area. However, in such public dining spaces, “the general public was not the intended consumer.”\textsuperscript{162} Rather, these spaces of public dining were intended to serve a specific immigrant and diasporic population, serving as both spaces of community building and diasporic connection. In the years between the two World Wars, however, there was a slight uptick in the popularity of “foreign themed”\textsuperscript{163} restaurants as a relatively small number of German, Russian, Jewish, Japanese and Syrian themed restaurants throughout the Urban North began marketing their cuisine toward a more general audience. Such restaurants began to drop foreign language from menus, hire multilingual servers and offer dishes that they adapted to be more palatable to the American general consumer, all of which helped to attract middle-class white consumers.\textsuperscript{164} However, as Audrey Russek argues, this small number of foreign-themed restaurants did not necessarily show that white Americans, who made up the vast majority of all restaurant patrons in the 1920s and 1930s, were increasingly cosmopolitan.\textsuperscript{165} Rather, Americans often sought confirmation of their own identity through “gastronomic contrast” in foreign themed restaurants.\textsuperscript{166}

My review of restaurant trade journals reveals that, in the years following World War II, this turn of white American diners towards “foreign-themed” restaurants was actually

\textsuperscript{161} The exception to this may be chop suey houses in New York and San Francisco which were young white progressives saw as affordable places to spend a night out. However as anti-Chinese rhetoric grew in the United States, including the widespread racist trope of Chinese eating rats, these restaurants remained somewhat popular but lost some of their cultural cache. For more on Chop suey houses see: Liu, Haiming. “Chop Suey as Imagined Authentic Chinese Food: The Culinary Identity of Chinese Restaurants in the United States.” The Journal of Transnational American Studies. Volume 1, Issue 1, 2009.

\textsuperscript{162} Diner, 75.

\textsuperscript{163} Foreign themed differs from “foreign” restaurants. “Foreign themed is defined by Audrey Russek as defined as restaurants that offered a simulated proximity of the foods served in dining spaces intended specifically for immigrant diners.

\textsuperscript{164} Russek, 46.

\textsuperscript{165} Russek, 42.

\textsuperscript{166} Russek.
By the 1960s, the social and cultural conservatism of the 1950s was very much still reflected in American food culture. For many middle-class Americans, moving to the new spatial landscape of the American suburb, eating foods traditionally recognized as Euro-American with a tint towards modern efficiency, became a way to express American nationalism and industrial might after the triumph of World War II and in the face of the Red Scare and the Cold War. Eating traditional foods became a way to express nationalistic pride and as a result suburban nationalism had a distinct taste and sensory experience. In addition, during the 1930s, ninety-five percent of all American restaurants were independently owned, which allowed for a large portion to be opened relatively easily by a variety of actors, immigrant and otherwise. However by the 1950s and 1960s many restaurant chain restaurants had emerged, which not only pushed many of these independent restaurants out of business, but also homogenized and corporatized American public dining.

While culinary patterns in the United States have always very much been driven by regional and ethnic differences, as both Anglo-Americans and second and third generation white ethnics flocked to the suburbs in the 1950s some commonalities and larger trends emerged within white American food consumption. My broad examination of period cookbooks, domestic magazines and culinary ephemera reveals that during the late 1950s and early 1960s, for white suburban Americans in both domestic and public settings, eating and food choice was driven by food culturally linked to the European continent (known as continental cuisine) and known for its large and prominent servings of meat and starches. This included casseroles, meatloaf, and

167 Restaurant trade journals include Restaurant Management, Catering World, American Restaurant, among others. 168 Russek, 40. 169 Continental cuisine refers to culinary styles from the European continent, primarily that of France, Italy, Spain and Portugal as well as the cuisine of England. This term very much derives from a Eurocentric conception of American food consumption. In continental cuisine, meat is a prominent and substantial in serving size. Continental cuisines also put substantial emphasis on sauces, condiments, seasonings, or accompaniments, in particular because of the difficulty of seasonings penetrating the larger pieces of meat. Dairy products are common in the cooking
large portions of red meat or pork, roasted or baked dishes and, of course, the suburban American barbeque. ¹⁷⁰ These large portion sizes, especially the large portions of meat, are a clear cultural reaction to the European food shortages that sparked much early twentieth century immigration to the United States, but also the recent government rationing of food during WWII, a period where both restaurants and home cooks were legally mandated to limit portion sizes. ¹⁷¹

Furthermore, the expansion of whiteness to include white ethnics from Western and Southern Europe also expanded quotidian American food choice to include cuisines from nations such as Italy, German, and parts of Eastern Europe. What this expanding umbrella of whiteness did for American food choice was that it became common in the United States to see cuisine from all regions of Europe in both public and private food consumption. While foods such as pizza, ¹⁷² Italian pasta dishes and frankfurters seem to be ubiquitous in American cuisine today, these foods were not common in the United States prior to the mid-twentieth century. However with the move of a large number of white ethnics, Italians, Irish, Polish, Germans, into the suburbs, such foods quickly became popular components of the American culinary landscape. Prior to the mid-century, what was considered a “foreign” restaurant was largely serving European continental cuisine, such as “the German, the Swiss, the French, the Scandinavian smorgasbords” or the “the Italian and Hungarian and Armenian establishments specializing in

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¹⁷⁰ Barbeque, at least how it has come to be understood in popular rhetoric, is direct result of the post-war rise of suburban living. However, Barbecue is culturally derived from African American and Indigenous culinary culture and its popularity in white America seen as a form of culinary appropriation.

¹⁷¹ Diner.

¹⁷² Perhaps most notable to this transformation of the American palate that was symbiotic of the expansion of whiteness was the rapid rise in popularity of pizza. Pizza was first introduced to the United States in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, but it was largely limited to Italian Immigrant communities until the 1940s and 1950s, when it quickly became a national culinary fixture.
the tempting dishes of their forebears.” With the expanding definition of whiteness in the mid-century, these European cuisines that in the 1920s and 1930s Anglo-Americans generally considered “foreign,” by the 1950s were largely subsumed under a broad moniker of Euro-Whiteness. This includes foods such as pasta dishes and pizza adopted from Italian cuisine, both the hamburger and frankfurter or hot dog adopted from German cuisine, bagels adopted from Jewish cuisine and fondue adopted from Swiss cuisine. As a result, by the mid-1960s, foods that were typically considered foreign were now consumed as part of the expanding vision Euro-American whiteness. With the exception of Chinese and Cantonese cuisine and a small number of other ethnic cuisines that were limited in regional scope, there were few popular restaurants serving foods from outside of continental Europe to a widespread and not regionally or ethnically specific consumer base. Popular dishes in the 1950s, merged many of the dishes culinary traditions brought by these new European immigrants and blended them with the staples of Anglo-American cooking, which almost always include large portions of roasted meat, combined with roasted vegetables. The most successful restaurants in cities like New York (which included Delmonico’s, Waldorf-Astoria, Juniors, Roosevelt Grill, and of course the Jewish delicatessen) were all serving either haute cuisine (upscale French cooking, known widely at the time as the pinnacle of fine dining) European continental cuisine or a regional Americanized version of such. My review of popular cookbooks, including Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book (1956), The Joy of Cooking (1953) and Martha Deane's Cooking for Compliments (1953) reveals that popular entrees included Fluffy meat loaf, Baked ham with glaze, Chicken a la king, meat pies, Scalloped chicken supreme, American lasagna, various casseroles, all dishes that originated

176 Taylor, Martha Young. Martha Deane’s Cooking with Confidence. New York: M Barrow and Co. 1953.
in continental Europe. Indeed, by the late 1950s, most of the food that was consumed by white Americans, whether at home or at a restaurant, originated from the culinary traditions of this expansive group of European immigrants which broadly became known as continental cuisine.

The late 1950s and early 1960s also marked the rise of the corporatization of food and mainstream American food choice began to be primarily driven by industrialization, consumerism and convenience. The late 1950s brought us the birth of a number of large food corporations such as Pizza Hut, Trader Joe's, Little Caesars, IHOP, Mister Softee, Dunkin Donuts, Sonic Drive-In, Betty Crocker, Eggo, Hagan Daas, as well as the rapid growth of brands like McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Burger King, Pillsbury, Campbell's, Jell-O, among many others. The *Chicago Tribune*’s Food Editor Ruth Ellen Church wrote in “1955 that the changes in the food industry and available products over the previous decade were ‘revolutionary.'” Church continued, “fully a third of the products and foods we buy now in the supermarket were not even in existence 10 years ago: instant puddings, cake mixes, instant coffee, instant dry milk, detergents, the wide array of frozen and pre-packaged foods.” The corporatizing and mass marketing of industrial food products that occurred during the post-war commercial boom did deliver large quantities of standardized processed foods into American homes. In the 1930s and 1940s, large supermarket chains spread across vast regions of the United States, simultaneously undermining the viability of small-scale grocers and vastly homogenizing the foods available to suburban consumers. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, large grocery chains like A&P, Safeway and Piggly Wiggly built large supermarkets in centrally

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177 Which was to be showcased by the “World of Food” Pavilion at the ’64 Fair, which was never completed for the ’64 Fair.
178 Voss, 12.
located suburban shopping centers, further homogenizing food options available to white consumers, who, because of rapid increases in suburbanization were now even further removed from the urban ethnic enclaves where much of the non-Anglo ethnic eating culture was located.\textsuperscript{180} These large supermarket chains that served large regions of the United States, offered similar products in all of their stores, including a large number of prepackaged foodstuffs.\textsuperscript{181} These corporate prepackaged foods, which were now being sold across the country, were linking consumers of diverse regional, classed and racial backgrounds to a similar eating culture. As such, this consistency of food options available in these large corporate supermarkets further homogenized the daily experience of suburban life for white Americans. Regardless of the suburban shopping center or grocery store where white homemakers would purchase their groceries, the options would be nearly identical.

In addition, as more and more women were entering the workplace, food choice became increasingly driven by convenience and uniformity. This included public dining options such as Howard Johnson, McDonald's and other fast food chains, which allowed American homemakers to purchase quick meals on the go. My broad review of cookbooks and popular women’s magazines like Good Housekeeping, House and Garden, McCall’s and Family Circle confirms that the rise of convenience was also crucial to dining at home. This included the popularity of dishes like casseroles, meatloaf (especially frosted with mashed potatoes) canned soups and frozen vegetables. These dishes at once preserved the norms of European continental cuisine


\textsuperscript{181} The most notable among them being the Swanson TV Dinner, which sold over 10 million units in its first year alone (1954) by fulfilled two Post-War trends, the growing popularity of television and the lure of time saving technological innovation. These prepackaged meals were immensely popular in the 1950s, as for just $.98 per dinner, customers were able to choose among continental cuisine favorites like Salisbury steak, meatloaf, chicken, or turkey, served with potatoes, sweet potatoes or green peas, further disseminating an eating culture widely uninfluenced by cuisine from outside of European lineage. Source: Bellis, Mary. “The History of TV Dinners: In 1954, Gerry Thomas invented both the product and name of Swanson TV Dinner.” About Inventors. http://inventors.about.com/od/inventionsalphabet/a/tv_dinner.htm Accessed February 18, 2014.
with their large portions of meat, combined with a starch (typically potatoes) and minimal vegetables (in this case typically frozen), but also were incredibly convenient and easy to prepare. In addition, by the 1950s, large corporations urged American homemakers to purchase time-saving appliances like self-containing refrigerators, gas ranges and of course the microwave, which standardized much of the food that was being cooked at home. This further homogenized the foods being produced as many prepackaged convenience foodstuffs, like microwave and TV dinners which were highly popular in the suburbs during the mid to late 1950s, could be quickly and easily prepared in the American home. TV dinners were originally marketed to white urban families because they could save the urban housewife time and money, however because of the lack freezer or ice box space, the prepackaged goods were not widely adopted by urban homemakers. It was not until such families moved to the suburbs and purchased large freezers that they began to prefer TV dinners and purchase them in large numbers. These prepackaged goods and scientific technology in the American kitchen had an impact on the taste and smell of life in the suburbs. “Nuances of flavor and texture were irrelevant in the scientific kitchen, and pleasure was sent off to wait in the parlor. To cook without exercising the senses, indeed barely exercising the mind, was going to have a considerable effect on how and what” Americans ate in the mid-century. Suburban life and the food technology and industrial prepackaged consumer goods created a sensory experience of food and of suburban life that was consistent and relatively homogenous for millions of white Americans and differed greatly from the sensory experiences of urban life, as well as the sensory experiences being had by communities of color in urban centers across the American North. Suburbia had a taste, texture and smell and that sensory experience was of prepackaged foods and largely homogeneous. In addition, this sensory and culinary homogeneity that began to

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emerge in the American suburb in the 1950s also would differ greatly from the foods being introduced to millions of white Americans by the Asian, African and Latin American International pavilions at the 1964 Fair.

Other food trends that were popular in the late 1950s and early 1960s amongst white suburban households include the rise of the backyard barbeque and grilling, which must largely be attributed to whites coopting Black and Indigenous cooking techniques. This period, as we will see in later chapters, also marked the beginning of “ethnic foods” entering mainstream white American culinary options. As millions of American GIs returned from tours in Europe and the Pacific, after developing new tastes while abroad. Food corporations were quick to adapt to these new tastes and were happy to supply the ingredients in large grocery store chains. "Americanized" versions of East Asian dishes like sukiyaki, egg foo yung, chow mein and barbecued meats with Polynesian sauces, which GI’s could have likely encountered during their military service in that region, regularly appeared in 1950s and 1960s cookbooks.

It should also be noted that not all whites were so quick to embrace the culinary and sensory homogeneity of the emerging American suburb. Countercultural groups of this era, comprised of mainly white middle-class youths who, by the mid-1960s were challenging the ideologies, rituals, and leadership of normative white American suburban life, were also beginning to challenge the culinary norms of suburban America. While the food in the American suburbs was becoming relatively uniform and overwhelmingly corporate, a group of white progressives such as the San Francisco Diggers, The New Left, “hippies,” those living in communes and in co-op style communities were utilizing food choice as a medium for socio-

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183 This broad label includes a number of groups that rejected mainstream American society during the 1960s and 1970s including the Civil Rights Activists, The New Left, Hippies and Yuppies, Ecological Activists, Feminists, and other members of other subversive political movements. movements
political expression. By choosing wheat bread over mass-produced white bread,\textsuperscript{184} brown rice over potatoes or homegrown over store-bought, these counterculturalists began choosing food not for its efficiency or economics, but were using food choice to denounced the corporate food structure. These counterculture groups emphasized the physical health, ethical production practices or spiritual benefits of their dietary choices. This demonstrates that even as corporate prepackaged food largely defined the food trends of the late 1950s and 1960s, a group of white progressives “saw diet as a way to transform consciousness, to integrate mind and body, to overcome personal alienation, and to take social responsibility” while rejecting the sensory normativity of the American suburb.\textsuperscript{185}

It also should be noted that this very same group of white progressive was also amongst the first whites to openly embrace the cuisine of non-white immigrant groups. While “the concept of a relatively inexpensive place to eat that serves another country’s cuisine was long established before this date,” young progressives were amongst the whites first to break away from the monotony of suburban American cuisine of the 1950s in order to eat across racial and ethnic barriers.\textsuperscript{186} Progressive whites, in many respects feeling left out of the shifting cultural terrain of a new multicultural America and excluded by the Civil Rights and Ethnic Rights movements of the 1960s while simultaneously feeling disconnected from the cultural norms of suburban Middle America, were quick to embrace various immigrants cuisine, as a means to sensorially and physically embrace this new multicultural America.\textsuperscript{187} “Countercuisine,” as it came to be known, combined the health food movements of Southern California from the 1930s,

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macrobiotics (a Japanese culinary philosophy developed by George Ohsawa, which was essentially Japanese working class cuisine\(^{188}\)) and the countercultural ideas about eating as a political act, yet combined these culinary principles with the flavors and foodstuffs emerging from non-Western cultures.\(^{189}\) For these white progressive in the 1960s, these flavors were largely Asian and dishes commonly included foodstuffs such as brown rice, soy, tofu and tempeh. These white counterculturalists were also quick to embrace tabouli, pita, falafel, dolmades, tahini and many other goodies from the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries. This embracing of non-Western cultures was seen by progressives to avoid the industrial processing of American food and reject the sensory homogeneity of suburban America while appropriating various forms of East and South Asian spirituality (including yoga and meditation). However, it should be noted that while progressive and countercultural white were embracing such cuisines by the mid-1960s, as per a review of period cookbooks, restaurant menus and domestic magazines, the vast majority of suburban homes were not openly embracing cuisine from outside of the scope of European continental cuisine.

The narrative detailed here of an increasingly normalized and homogenized American foodscape that defined typical American food in the late 1950s and 1960s refers primarily to white Americans and more specifically those whites moving to the suburban North. However, substantial literature on the history of eating and “ethnic” food, from scholars such as Anita Mannur,\(^{190}\) Heather Lee,\(^{191}\) Hasia Diner,\(^{192}\) Donna Gabaccia,\(^{193}\) Psyche Williams-Forson,\(^{194}\)

Mark Padoongpatt\textsuperscript{195} and Carole M. Counihan\textsuperscript{196} has shown us that cuisine was a central part of the cultural life and imagination of communities of color in the early twentieth century and that amongst and between certain immigrant populations, the culinary diversity was vast. Perhaps most prominent of these food movements emerging from communities of color in the late 1950s was the soul food movements of urban Black communities. Blacks adopted soul as a broad-reaching concept that defined an empowered cultural and racial identity that functioned as an alternative to white mainstream culture. Like soul music, which has its roots in traditional African gospel music and rhythm and blues, soul food has its roots in traditional African foodways and culinary practices. Soul food combined foods from West Africa, such as collard greens, black-eyed peas and sweet potatoes, with foodstuffs commonly used as slave rations such as chicken wings/legs, pork back and pig’s feet. These African and Slave cuisines were then merged with Southern Indigenous American culinary traditions to create the basis of what we now consider soul food.\textsuperscript{197} By the 1950s as Blacks migrated out of the South into the urban North, soul food came with them and black-owned soul food restaurants served as neighborhood meeting places and important spaces of cultural, political and spiritual life for Black communities. The term “soul food” itself came into widespread use as Black Power and Civil

\textsuperscript{196} Counihan, Carole M. \textit{A Tortilla Is Like Life: Food and Culture in the San Luis Valley of Colorado}. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.
Rights movements became strong expressions of black cultural, economic, political and culinary prominence. What’s more, culinary cultures like soul food that were emerging amongst communities of color were far from homogeneous. Cross-racial culinary connections were becoming common across the urban North “because everyone who wasn’t Anglo-Saxon white was forced to live in close proximity in segregated sections of town, African-Americans encountered global immigrants and were early adopters of Chinese (chop suey, pork fried rice), Italian (macaroni, pizza, spaghetti), and Tex-Mex (chili, enchiladas) far before the mainstream public.”

While these cross-racial culinary exchanges were common amongst Blacks, immigrants and other communities of color, they were far less common between communities of color and whites. As the Black/White –Urban/Suburban divide grew more prominent with 1950s white flight, the culinary divide between communities of color and white Americans became even more pronounced. While white suburbanites were co-opting black culinary and cultural traditions with the widespread popularity of the backyard barbeque in the 1950s, restaurant spaces remained incredibly segregated not just in the South, but the urban North as well. Prior to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, across the American South, because of Jim Crow laws, public dining spaces remained segregated. The logic of proponents of Southern racial segregation was that because eating is a visceral, intimate and primal act it must be done in racially segregated spaces. Dining together “denoted fellowship” as one “broke bread with those one cared about, those one deemed as equals” and therefore eating together in public, “could therefore call into question the

entire logic of racial hierarchy under Jim Crow.”200 The racial politics of public dining in the North, particularly New York, were much different. “Given its diverse population, there was certainly opportunity for integration in postwar New York, and especially in Manhattan, where more than one-fifth of the borough’s two million inhabitants was designated as “non-white” in 1950.”201 In addition to this urban diversity, New York was perhaps the most socially progressive city in the country. This would imply that in the post-war era that there was a great deal of intermingling in restaurants in New York. The reality was in fact quite different. While Blacks and other racialized groups were seldom refused service outright or denied entry into Manhattan’s restaurants, they were consistently discriminated against in restaurants across the five boroughs. And while this discrimination was less overt than it was in the South, it was certainly not benign. When entering some of Manhattan’s restaurants, Blacks were often bombarded with violent language, greeted by poor service, seated in less desirable locations and often ignored altogether. Through these discriminatory acts, restaurant owners, employees and patrons were making a clear claim that people of color were not welcome in these spaces and thus the restaurants were coded as white. As Chin Jou’s research details,

Incidents of racial discrimination were reported all over the city in the postwar years—from Brooklyn and the Bronx to Manhattan’s Upper East Side and Greenwich Village. In 1945, for example, an NAACP lawyer sued a luncheonette in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn in 1945. In an episode reminiscent of racially charged exchanges in the Deep South, the suit accused a luncheonette employee of denying service to three African-American dockworkers, threatening the trio with vulgar language and violence: “We don’t serve n— in here. And if you coons don’t get out, I’ll take a knife and split your heads[1].”202

201 Jou, 234.
Of course, this discrimination was not universal across a vast culinary landscape like New York’s. Some restaurants were more open to serving a diverse clientele than others. Popular travel guides like the *Greenbook*\(^{203}\) and *Travelguide* even commonly listed a small handful of restaurants that welcomed Black patrons.\(^{204}\) However, such discrimination was widespread and certainly made people of color feel excluded from the same restaurants that whites felt welcomed in and even frequented (in fact, the vast majority of those that ate in restaurants in the 1950s were white).\(^{205}\) As a result of this discrimination and other socioeconomic factors, it was rare that people of color ate in the same dining spaces as white diners in New York during the post War Era. This is crucial point because it shows us that prior to the 1964 World’s Fair, there were few contexts where white Americans and people of color were eating publically together. Even in a progressive city like New York where much racial comingling occurred in daily life, when it came to eating, the same racist logic driving white flight and creating a racial/spatial divide were also creating a distinct culinary divide. Even in progressive New York City in the 1950s and early 1960s it was unlikely that whites and blacks would be eating ion public in the same spaces, despite the fact that many whites were grilling and having barbeques in their backyards.

**Conclusion**

In summation, this was the complex racial and culinary context of the mid-1960s that the 1964 World’s Fair entered into. The 1950s ended and the 1960s began with a fairly pronounced racial divides across many arenas of American life. As suburban whiteness now included second

\(^{203}\) *Greenbook*, otherwise known as *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, was an annual guidebook for Black road trippers that pointed out places that were friendly to Black customers.

\(^{204}\) Jou, 241.

\(^{205}\) Russek.
generation European ethnics from Southern and Western Europe, most white American suburbanites had very little exposure to food being produced from within communities of color. While black activists were fighting for the rights of black Americans in the face of widespread segregation and structural inequality, large numbers of White Americans, of a range of European ethnic backgrounds, were moving to the suburbs and creating geographic distance from communities of color. This move by whites fleeing to the suburbs was creating a pronounced racial/spatial divide where large urban centers were primarily imagined as spaces of deviance, communities of color and other people on the margins. Conversely, the suburbs were being constructed as spaces of whiteness, where American nationalism, normalcy and homogeneity could be constructed. In these spaces, white Americans were eating in increasingly homogenous and monolithic ways because of the increased corporatization and industrialization of the American food industry. The result was a racial divide that was twofold. On the one hand it was racial/spatial, dividing Americans based on geographic space and residency patterns. On the other hand this divide was sensory. Because there was little cross-racial contact, especially in relation to food, suburban whites and communities of color were largely divided along the basis of food choice and many of the sensory experiences that accompanied eating.

Much of this would soon begin to change and the 1964 World’s Fair would be at the forefront of disrupting these racial divides in pronounced and crucial ways. The 1964 Fair was proposed as a suburban amusement for white Americans that would highlight the predominance and superiority of American industrial and global supremacy. However, this aspect of the Fair became secondary to the diversity and global multiculturalism that was on display across Fairgrounds. It was at the 1964 World’s Fair that millions of white Americans would first be
exposed to the food from a wide range of cultures, Indian, Spanish, Thai, African,\(^ {206} \) that they simply had no previous firsthand exposure to, thus flipping many of the racial/spatial/sensory divides that had developed in the post-war era. In a fairscape that was designed to reflect the American suburb, so that the millions of white visitors would have little exposure to the deviance and racial unrest that came to define urban space of the post-war era, because of the abundance and predominance of international culinary options, white Americans were exposed to more ethnic and racial diversity than fair organizers could have ever imagined. Millions of whites were put face to face with cultures and peoples that were “foreign” to the white normativity of suburban life as the predominant food options at the Fair were from regions like Thailand, India and Africa. And while the Fair intended to showcase for millions of white Americans the might of American industrial prowess, it instead had a distinctly cosmopolitan feel that very much reflected the pending immigration changes and multiculturalism of the coming decades. It was the act of consuming food, this act of putting the cultural production of a racialized group into the body, that would begin to radically challenge the physical, spatial or sensory separations that white flight and the post-war racial/spatial divide created.

More so, the World’s Fair very much reflected the pending demographic changes that would come in the following decades and signifies is a gradual yet fundamental shift in the ways in which race is experienced in the United States. Immigration reforms were passed in 1965 that would eventually radically remake the racial demographics of both American cities and American suburbs. Because of widespread changes in immigration law and an increased cultural and sensory presence of immigrants of color, it became impossible to avoid contact with these racialized immigrant groups as immigrant communities began to develop in both cities and

\(^{206} \) I use Africa here and in future chapters not to make monolithic the vast cultural and culinary differences across this continent, but rather because the pavilion hosted at the 1964 Fair was under the moniker of the “African Pavilion” and individual nations did not have distinct pavilions or restaurants.
suburbs across the urban North. In the New York region alone, large Korean, Indian, Pakistani, Vietnamese, Mexican, Dominican, Ecuadorian, Puerto Rican, Arab, Caribbean American, would eventually develop across Manhattan, but also in the city’s outer boroughs and suburbs in places like Staten Island, Queens, Westchester County and western New Jersey. This radically disrupted the racial/spatial/sensory divide as white Americans who once lived in homogenous and racially monolithic suburbs would begin to have exposure and encounters with the diversity that came with the post-immigrant reform America. No longer could whites simply avoid interactions with communities of color through geographic or sensory separation and as such the mode of reinforcing whiteness through geographic separation would gradually begin to decay. Rather, they would need to find new ways to navigate the racial and ethnic complexities of a post-immigrant reform and post-civil rights era America and it was through these navigations that new forms of whiteness, namely cosmopolitan whiteness, would emerge. Through the consumption of “international,” “foreign” and “ethnic” food, which began at the 1964 Fair and expanded outward, white Americans began having mediated and controlled sensory encounters with communities of color. As I argue across this project, rather than continuing to avoid contact with communities of color by a means of geographic separation, progressive whites would begin to use such culinary encounters to their advantage. Progressive whites in the Urban North did this by claiming the culinary encounters had with communities of color increased their worldliness and allowed them to claim a position of global cosmopolitanness, which became a position of heightened privilege in the emerging multicultural neoliberal America. As such, not only did the 1964 Fair and the increased did the presence of these immigrant communities and the cross-racial experiences that came through food challenge these racial/spatial/sensory divides that developed in the post-war era but they would also begin to fundamentally challenge the
ways by which whiteness was constructed in post-immigrant reform and a post-Civil Rights America. In making the argument for the emergence of cosmopolitan whiteness - a new mode of privilege predicated on controlled interactions with immigrants of color that has come to define the workings of whiteness in the contemporary moment - I will attempt to look forward as much as I do into the past, exploring the ways in which whiteness has changed after 1965 and is still evolving today. In doing so, I fill the gap in the historiography of whiteness that largely stops at the 1965 Immigration Reforms and fails to see whiteness as something that remains fluid in the contemporary moment.
Chapter 2

“New Kind of Fair Food:” Whiteness, Liberal Multiculturalism and Eating at the 1964 World’s Fair

“We are going to take a little trip around the world. Starting in Spain with Gazpacho. Followed by Japan, rumaki. And then we will stop by Duchess County for a leg of lamb, mint jelly accompanied by egg noodles, the way my grandmother made them from Germany. And we have a choice of burgundy from France or a frosty glass of beer from Holland.”

-Betty Draper from Mad Men, at a dinner scene where she is trying to impress her husband’s wealthy business associates. Set in 1962. “A Night to Remember” S02 E08

“My grandmother (who I lived with), cooked the most incredible, made from scratch meals….Of course, she made dishes like goulash and chicken fricassee and stuffed cabbage, but also there was steak, pot roast, roast beef, fried chicken, meatballs and spaghetti, hamburgers, hotdogs or deli food…At the World’s Fair, food was much different. ... I know I had Belgian Waffles many times, but one time my family ate at the Polynesian exhibit. I remember the colorful exotic birds and dancers. It all seemed so foreign to me and so interesting to see another culture. Even though I didn’t eat at the more expensive places, I walked into all of them (Restaurants in the International Pavilion) and just remember smelling all these foods that I was not used to. The choices were endless. The décor of the restaurants, and the scents matched the foods being served... it was a unique and amazing experience.”

-Andrea Gilmore who spent her youth in Flushing Queens and, at the age of 15, was a frequent visitor to the 1964 New York World’s Fair.

Chapter Introduction

The shish kebabs and köfte steaks (kebab variant consisting of lamb meatballs with parsley and mint) of the Moroccan Café sizzled when placed on the smoking grill. The curried meats of the Indian Restaurant billowed a fragrant aroma that could be noticed far beyond the Pavilion’s restaurant doors. The Thai Pavilion’s temple-like restaurant served steaming plates of musaman (curried meat with pickles) and mee krob (sweet and sour noodles with shrimp and
chicken) at what they claimed to be the first authentic Thai restaurant in the United States. The safari-like Tree House Restaurants of the African Pavilion, which were surrounded by Tutsi Dancers and an African zoo, dished up curried beef, baked banana and couscous, which despite its unfamiliar texture, was incredibly popular among American Fairgoers. The Japanese Pavilion smelled of fresh seafood, introducing its American diners to sushi. The Spanish Pavilion, visually lured guests with some classic and contemporary paintings by some of Spain’s most famous artists, while its two opulent restaurants poured its guests sweet, decadent, fruity red sangria - the first time it had been served in the United States. And perhaps most popularly, many stands across the Fair baked countless sweet and warm Bel-gem Waffles that Queens Residents claimed could be smelled miles from Fairgrounds. These are just some of the aspects of the culinary landscape at the 1964 New York World’s Fair, held for two seasons in Flushing, Queens that were largely unfamiliar to white American diners. A mere fifty years ago it was rare, especially for white Americans, to eat foods produced outside or across one’s own cultural, racial or ethnic identity group. Foods that are ubiquitous today like sushi, falafel and pad thai were practically non-existent in the American culinary landscape prior to the mid-sixties. While American eating culture has rapidly globalized over the last fifty years, it was at the 1964 Fair where millions of Americans first sampled cuisines from around the globe, including Moroccan, Belgian, Japanese, and Thai food.

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207 There are some conflicting reports as to what was the first true Thai Restaurant in the United States. Some claim there was a restaurant in Denver five years earlier than the restaurant at the Fair. Regardless, this restaurant was one of the first places that white Americans sampled Thai cuisine. Haddad, Barbara. “Thai Woman in Denver: Food Business Replaces Politics In Lily’s Life” Denver Post, 1963. For more on the history of the Thai American community and the history of Thai food in the United States, see Padoongpatt, Tanachai Mark, “Thais That Bind: US Empire, Food and Community in Los Angeles, 1945-2008” University of Southern California, 2011. DA3478057


210 Compiled from numerous Oral History Interviews conducted by John Burdick from December 2013-March 2014.
The 1964 Fair entered the American cultural landscape during a period of sociocultural rupture where every kind of division in American life was fracturing. Opening in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, the escalation of the Vietnam War and only a mere five months after the assassination of President Kennedy, the domestic revelry, suburban aesthetics, American nostalgia and contrived global harmony that defined aura of the Fair stood in contrast to the racial and cultural upheaval that was occurring all around the country. At a time when most social spaces where still highly segregated and white flight was rampant in cities across the American North, the 1964 Fair was a largely suburban white playground where white American mothers and fathers would take their children to visit dazzling commercial amusements, gaze at the giant iridescent Unisphere, see a life-size replica of Michelangelo’s Pieta, visit amusements built by Walt Disney and eat food from around the world. Located in one of the most diverse cities in the country, New York, the Fair was largely a destination for white suburban families with disposable income. The Fair offered its audiences a highly commercialized, futuristic, American-centric globally interconnected worldview and was an incredibly popular travel destination for millions of suburban white Americans and their families. These families visited the Fair, a whitewashed, safe and highly corporate amusement space with the goal of soaking in the Fairs harmonious techno-corporate worldview, to avoid the political strife that was defining national rhetoric of the day. However, despite best attempts by principal organizer Robert Moses to create an apolitical family-friendly destination, the racial politics of the era spilled onto Fairgrounds as Civil Rights groups and communities of color saw the Fair and its large audiences

211 There is no detailed demographic data on exactly who visited the Fair, therefore it is difficult to determine the exact racial breakdown of the Fairgoers. In fact, because of mismanagement on the behalf of Robert Moses and his staff, many local politicians complained about the Fair’s inconsistent record keeping and balance sheets. However, based on general attendance figures, oral histories, photographs, anecdotal accounts, traffic and parking figures, the design of the fair, its intended audience and overall aesthetic, one can make an educated estimate that the majority of fairgoers were white and suburban.
as a perfect political platform to protest the nation’s racial inequality, even while the Fair’s racially homogenous white audience was largely out of touch with the political turmoil of the mid-sixties.212

Today, just over fifty years after its inauguration, the 1964 World’s Fair is principally remembered as a largely failed attempt to showcase mid-20th-century American cultural and technological advancements on a global stage. What far fewer remember is that for two seasons, Flushing, Queens became a site of never before seen global culinary diversity where Fair visitors tentatively embraced foods from outside of white American culinary normativity with great skepticism and confusion, wonder and curiosity.213 It was here that Americans from across the country were “discovering just what sushi meant at the Japanese Pavilion, filling up at the Thai Pavilion buffet, trying tandoori under a temple-inspired ceiling at the Indian Pavilion, and sampling their first sips of Sangria at the Spanish pavilion.”214 When some types of non-European ethnic foods were already, even if newly, present regionally across the United States, they were primarily limited to urban ethnic enclaves. It was the 1964 Fair that brought these cuisines into the mainstream, introducing them to large numbers of suburban middle-class households, thus having a profound impact on eating culture and the globalization of American consumer choice and the global imaginary more broadly.215 This chapter focuses on the 1964

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215 Most notable of the non-European American cuisines that were emerging in urban ethnic enclave in the mid-sixties were Japanese and Indian. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, many second and third generation white ethnics remained in urban centers in often ethnically segregated neighborhoods. In these communities, many the eating culture was still very much driven by ethnic identity as families consumed a great deal of specialty food items, as restaurants and small grocers served cuisine representing that immigrant population. Relevant examples include New York’s Little Italy, Buffalo’s Polish East Side, Boston’s Italian North End and Irish South Boston.
World’s Fair as a key yet unexplored moment in American culinary history and the globalization of the American sensory consumption. Withing I examine a rich archive of culinary ephemera, journalism, cookbooks and Fair records, alongside an extensive oral history of fairgoers, employees and organizers. Specifically, I look at the act of “cross-racial eating” or “eating the global other” at the Fair where Americans began to desire and consume foods from outside of their own ethnic background. Rather than simply writing a history of midcentury food consumption, this chapter uses this significant moment in American eating culture to examine changing attitudes about race, ethnicity and cultural inclusion in the mid-twentieth century.

I use this chapter to explore this early and significant moment in ethnic eating to provide clues as to how the practice of desiring and pursuing ethnic food rose in popularity in the years directly following the Fair, marked by the rise of “dietary individualism” and the internationalization of American eating culture following the 1965 Immigration Reforms. The eating culture of the 1964/1965 World’s Fair, built upon growing consumer segmentation and pending immigration reforms, to spur a new kind of American consumerism in which consuming across ones ethnic and racial identity served to express an emergent form of cosmopolitan cultural privilege. I argue that the eating culture of the 1964 Fair altered ideas about the global other and perceptions of ethnic difference, especially in relation to mid-sixties immigration reform and racial upheaval. My central conceit is that the spectacle and sensory experience of “other” foods at the 1964/1965 World’s Fair were central in the transformation of American whiteness and laid the foundation for the emergence of cosmopolitan whiteness in the following decades. I contend that the increasing prominence of middle-class white Americans’ consumption of international food was utilized to articulate distinction along racial, classed and

However, with the rapid suburbanization/white flight of the 1950s and 1960s, many of these white ethnic communities dispersed or eroded and no longer exist.
cultural lines, especially as ethnic and racial difference increasingly became desired sites of cultural and sensory consumption. The international area at the 1964 Fair is an important precursor to liberal multiculturalism which highlights the ways by which whites would navigate and utilize diversity to reinforce their privileged positionality. I content that by presenting foreign food, and by extension foreign cultures, in a museum-like exhibition, the Fair essentialized and reduced complex cultures into monolithic self-contained units. Rather than seeing diversity or foreignness as something that should be feared, the culinary spaces of the Fair made global diversity recognizable, safe, easily accessible and consumable for white suburban Americans. White Americans were able to maintain their cultural and racial privilege because the Fair presented diversity in a manner that made it both tolerable and consumable while prepared white Americans for the pending demographic changes that came following 1965 Immigration Act.

As such, this chapter maintains that Fair food and the transnational food encounters within the Fairgrounds catalyzed a shift in the American global imaginary where cross-ethnic consumption became a central facet of an emergent cosmopolitan white cultural identity, which I label *cosmopolitan whiteness*. I bring to bear the relationship between the globalization of eating culture in the United States and the emergence of liberal multiculturalism, specifically within the context of an evolving mid-century racial discourse. In doing so, I not only examine the role of “foreign food” at this Fair in the production of cosmopolitan whiteness, but also historicize the racialized history of “culinary capital” as a form of social distinction that emerged as an

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216 In *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, Jodi Melamed details how the mid-1960s was a crucial period of transformation in American racial capitalism, a period that signaled the shift from race liberalism (which spanned from the 1940s to mid-1960s and was defined by an emphasis on “equal opportunity” legislation, such as the dismantling of legalized segregation and the establishment of anti-discrimination laws) to liberal multiculturalism, which spanned from the mid-1960s to the early 2000s when it was replaced by neoliberal multiculturalism. Melamed, Jodi. *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
important method for accessing and circulating social and cultural power and the role of eating ethnically to the white American food culture of the mid-century. This chapter contends that out of the cultural, political and social forces that drove the 1964 Fair emerged a prominent early example of “eating the other,” a practice that bound race, whiteness and national identity directly to the eating culture and sensory geography produced within Fairgrounds.217

The cross racial culinary exchanges that occurred at the 1964 Fair predate many of the culinary encounters that large numbers of suburban whites would often not have for multiple decades. The 1964 Fair, in introducing millions of Americans to cuisine from countries like Thailand and Spain which eventually would become popular across the United States, served as an important (and to this date not yet critically analyzed) precursor to demographic and culinary changes that were still decades away for much of white America. I contend that because of the political and cultural context of the emergent liberal multiculturalism of the mid-sixties, the unique financial and logistical troubles that created an exceptionally global eating culture within Fairgrounds, and the Fair’s specific spectator/exhibitor sensory economies, the 1964 Fair became a key catalyst in the mass popularization of ethnic food among white eaters and a key turning point in the eventual globalization of the wider American palate.218

The rapid globalization of American eating that occurred over the last 50 years represents a fundamental change in American food culture and consumer culture more broadly and it is also symbolic of fundamental shifts in American ideas about race, the state, consumption and cultural

218 The 1939 World’s Fair, also located in Queens, a select number of International food options, including Japanese, Swiss, British and Middle Eastern culinary options. However, much of the “international food” at the 1939 Fair was Eurocentric. In addition, unlike the 1964 World’s Fair, the 1939 Fair featured multiple “Food Buildings” that featured foods common to American markets at the time as well as technological advancements in food preparation and production. Also unlike the 1964 Fair, the 1939 Fair featured 40 restaurants that served “American” food, including burgers, hamburgers, sodas, etc. Source: Morabito, Greg. A Food Tour of the 1939 World’s Fair. Eater. NY.Eater.com retrieved January 24, 2014. http://ny.eater.com/archives/2012/06/worlds_fair.php
globalization. Key to these changes was the 1965 Immigration Reform Bill, which eventually radically reshuffled the ethnic and racial demographics of the United States. The impact of this Bill should not be downplayed. However, the demographic changes that came from the 1965 Immigration Act were relatively slow. By 1970 less than five percent of the American country would be foreign-born. The widespread demographic changes took several decades to occur and today nearly fifteen percent of the United States population is foreign-born. However, the 1964 Fair exposed Americans to cultures from nations and regions of the world that, because of racist immigration restrictions, had little to no presence in the United States. It would not be for several decades that the cultures millions of white Americans were exposed to at the 1964 Fair became common and part of the greater global culinary and cultural imaginary across the United States. This is an important distinction because the 1964 Fair adjusts the periodization that widely marks the 1965 Immigration Reforms as the start of liberal multiculturalism and the notion of members of racialized immigrant groups maintaining their distinctive collective identities and practices in the face of a dominant normative culture. I argue that while the 1965 Immigration Reforms are crucial to the growth of liberal multiculturalism, the central tenets of multiculturalism were being developed and utilized by at the 1964 Fair by white Americans, which predated the 1965 Immigration Reforms and the demographic changes that would result from those reforms decades later. The consumption and spectatorship of international cultures, products and foods that occurred at the Fair, which predated a presence of immigrant groups like South Asians, Southeast Asians Latin Americans and Caribbeans in America, opened white Americans to the ideas of multiculturalism, expanded their worldview and compelled them to begin to negotiate ways by which diversity could be embraced without fundamentally challenging the place of whiteness at the pinnacle of the American racial hierarchy.
As such, the complex cultural, symbolic and sensory discourses at work when American whites ate across racial and ethnic boundaries, specifically at the 1964 Fair, serve as an important site to examine the transition from the racial liberalism of the 1940s to mid-1960s to the liberal multiculturalism of the 1960s to 1990s. The racial liberalism era, primarily the post-war years, was defined by the belief that changes to federal and state legislation, such as the dismantling of legal segregation, were important steps toward ending racial discrimination. The logic of this era is credited with aiding the rise of the Civil Rights Movement. The era of liberal multiculturalism however, the period from the 1960s through the 1990s, was defined by the notion of a society with multiple interacting social groups where individual openness, diversity, and freedom were the key features driving social interaction and major factors driving consumer behavior. Free individual actors open to diversity and moving across and between distinct social groups, be it to eat or for other social functions, is a central tenant of liberal multiculturalism. As is the case with cosmopolitan whiteness, this freedom to move across cultures, in particular for the act of eating, is indeed one of the key means by which individual privilege is articulated in the era of liberal multiculturalism. The 1964 World’s Fair is a key catalyst that drove the transition between these eras of racial logic. The introduction of millions of white Americans to globalized diversity through the succinct and digestible exhibitions and restaurants of the Fair, symbolized the (often superficially problematic) embrace of consumable diversity that came with the liberal multicultural era of the next three decades.

Despite eating culture’s capacity to incorporate diverse and often contradictory meanings within its fold, the cultural acts I explore in the following chapters privilege a way of seeing food and the people and cultures from which it derives. For white Americans in the second half of the

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219 This periodization of racial discourses is borrowed from Jodi Melamed in Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism.
twentieth century, this way of seeing presented the food of new immigrant groups as exoticized consumable materials. While there was certainly potential for these sites of cross-racial and transnational cultural exchange to be transformative in anti-racist ways, they also were utilized by whites to build one’s cultural cache and further privilege one's position of cultural and racial superiority. By asking how white Americans have used globalized consumption to articulate a specific globalized cultural cache, I challenge narratives of racial progress, especially during the Civil Rights era and the vast transformation racial discourse during the midcentury. Rather, I assert that eating culture, along with other forms of cross racial consumption, fostered a shift in how whiteness and privilege are articulated. In making this argument, this work contributes to the critical study of whiteness and its varied significance to diverse peoples, especially within the context of late twentieth century popular culture. And while whiteness studies has faced criticism in the last decade for further giving preference to the examination of white actors over communities of color and for solely studying whiteness as a historical articulation, white racial identity is no less a powerful social category and clearly white normativity remains pervasive even within the context of mid-twentieth century liberal multiculturalism.²²⁰ Therefore, I contend that not only is studying whiteness crucial to understanding the means by which racial hierarchies operate within the United States, but studying it in the second half of the twentieth century allows us to see whiteness as a fundamental part of contemporary consumption patterns as well as current neoliberal multicultural political economies.

It is an important particularity that this chapter explores cross-racial eating in the context of a World’s Fair, a space that in many ways is defined by entertainment, international cultural exchange, and a very particular spectator/exhibit relationship. Doing so will not only allow me to address a largely unexplored aspect of World’s Fairs - the eating culture housed within - but will allow me to situate my research within a broad body of scholarship that explores World’s Fairs as key cultural sites of racialization, modernization, nationalization and the American imperial project. The 1964 World’s Fair functioned not as a harbinger of a vibrant mass culture and rejection of Victorian sensibilities like Fairs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but rather as a failed attempt to cling to the social and racial orders of the early twentieth century in an increasingly volatile cultural moment. Despite the radical challenges to the existing racial order brought forth by Third World Liberation, Ethnic Studies, Black Power and the Civil Rights Movement, the 1964 Fair worked to stabilize the existing racial hierarchies. However by linking them directly to individualized international consumption, it instigated a radical change in the very nature of white privilege and parameters with which racial positionalities are articulated. The 1964 Fair came at a particular moment in the advancement of American consumer culture that not only emphasized leisure, gratification and sensual experiences but also increasingly turned towards forms of transnational consumption to satisfy American consumer impulses. As such, this chapter explores the means by which the Fair’s numerous international exhibits worked to actively construct culinary culture as a fundamental part of national identity and nationalism within the transnational consumer space of the World’s Fair, but also more broadly within the trade liberalization of the Post-War global economy.

Finally, this chapter brings to bear the cultural politics of authenticity and national identity as negotiated through the complex sensuous geographies of the Fair’s international eating culture. While many scholars have written about the role of food in the construction of cultural and social capital, few have explored the role of visceral bodily experience in the construction of social distinction. This chapter fills this void within both food studies and the scholarship on multiculturalism and privilege, by placing focus on eating and the senses, demonstrating how white bodies have particular sensual experiences of racialized economies. Thus utilizing sensory, bodily and affect theory, my goal here is to highlight how taste, as a historically defined category of perception, became instrumental in the everyday visceral making of race and class, both within and beyond Fairgrounds. To do this, I draw upon my oral history of Fair guests, staff and organizers in order to examine the Fair’s sensuous geographies and the sensory experience of being on Fairgrounds. I will primarily focus on taste and examine how the logic of Orientalism, exoticism and multiculturalism are enacted in visceral and bodily ways when white diners ingest food in the Fair’s international pavilion. However, I will also place taste in conversation with olfactory, auditory and visual senses to detail the complex sensory economies of the Fairgrounds and its role in racialization and the emergence of multiculturalism during the mid-century. In doing so, I merge Bourdieu’s theories of social

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222 Oral Histories conducted by John M Burdick in January/February 2014.
223 Sensuous Geographies is a term developed by Paul Rodaway to examine how sensate bodies have immediate sensuous experiences of the material environments and an integral part of our cultural understanding of geographical spaces. Source: Rodaway, Paul. Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place. New York: Routledge, 2011.
224 I borrow this term “sensory economy” from Camille Begin. She defines sensory economies as a larger sensory world that is defines by visual cultures, soundscapes, landscapes of smell, and modalities of touch in concert with one another. This term fully takes into account the “multi, trans and intersensory” character of the modern world and places them in the contexts of historical and social constrictions of all sensory experience. Source: Begin, Camille. “‘Partaking of choice poultry cooked a la southern style:’ Taste Race in the New Deal Sensory Economy.” Radical History Review. Issue 110, Spring 2011. p 127-153.
distinction\textsuperscript{225} with both sensory theory and the Foucauldian concept of biopower\textsuperscript{226} to examine the ways by which the body and its sensory experiences of eating across cultural and ethnic boundaries, in this moment of mid-century racial transformation, became a means through which a new form of globalized cosmopolitan privilege is enacted and performed.

**Multiculturalism and the Racial Politics of the 1964 World’s Fair**

Prior to its construction, organizers labeled the 1964 World’s Fair, located in Corona Park, Flushing, Queens, the biggest, most beautiful, and most spectacular event of the mid-century. Robert Moses, known for his elaborate and often underfunded public projects is widely credited with negatively reshaping New York’s urban space in a manner that resulted in an urban landscape that favored automobiles over dense walkable neighborhoods, eroded public transportation, destabilized working-class neighborhoods and resulted in urban divestment and neglect in favor of suburban growth (design features that you can see in represented in the large parking lots and white middle-class suburban aesthetics of the Fair). Moses, whose reputation was already fading by the 1960s, expected the 1964 Fair to be his crowning achievement, not only be the largest World’s Fair to date but “the single greatest event in human history.”\textsuperscript{227} This seemingly grandiose claim does not seem so absurd when contextualized within the history of World’s Fairs. The Fair was set to have a nearly half-billion-dollar budget (nearly four billion when calculated for 2016 inflation) and were expecting over one hundred million visitors during the Fair’s two year run, April to October in 1964 and 1965, which would have nearly doubled the

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\textsuperscript{227} Samuel, Xii
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number of guests at the 1939 Fair, the most recent to be held in New York. This would not only constitute the highest attendance total in Fair history but would also quite possibly be the highest total attendance for any peaceful event in human history. Sitting on over a square-mile site, and themed somewhat haplessly “Peace through Understanding” and “Man's Achievements on a Shrinking Globe in an Expanding Universe” the aim of Fair officials was to showcase large international and state pavilions alongside two decades of American post-war ingenuity and corporate culture. The Fair was to contain multiple “Areas” each with their own theme and intent. This included a large international plaza, which featured sizeable pavilions from the nations represented at the Fair, several American federal and State exhibits alongside many corporate exhibits that collectively attempted to showcase the technological advancements of the burgeoning Space Age. Highlights of the corporate exhibits included a “Futurama” show at the General Motors Pavilion, which showcased technological visions of the future, concept cars in the General Motors Pavilion, the introduction of the Ford Mustang at the Ford Pavilion, a nine-screen film by Charles and Ray Eames on the advances of computer science in the IBM Pavilion, technological advancements in domestic life showcased at the Westinghouse Pavilion and a General Electric sponsored “Progressland” pavilion that featured a Disney-produced audio-animatronics presentation of the progress of electricity in domestic life.

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229 This claim, while seemingly farfetched, is fairly easy to support. Barring major military conflicts, it is difficult to find a single event that would draw close to 100 Million spectators. In addition, in The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic and Madness at the Fair that Changed the World, Erik Larson claims that the 1867 Paris World’s Fair “had draw more people than any event in human history” (60) and the organizers of the 1964 New York Fair were expecting millions more than had attended the 1867 Fair. Even while the 1964 Fair’s attendance did not live up to expectations, the Fair still had a much larger attendance than the 1867 Fair and any World’s Fair to date.
Both the political left, namely President Kennedy, and the conservative right, most notably the Fair’s President Robert Moses, had much to gain from a successful Fair. In the increasingly tense political and cultural moment of the Cold War and Civil Rights Movement, the World’s Fair represented a chance to showcase American technological advancement on a global stage by securing faith in the strength of corporate America. The Fair

231 Kennedy gave the Fair’s groundbreaking keynote address at the beginning of construction, however he was assassinated prior to the Fair opening.
offered the promise of furthering American exceptionalism on a global stage and espousing an anti-communist consumer vision to a broad global audience. The Fair was certainly a product of an increasingly global economy that resulted from the trade liberation of the Post-War era, which was emphasized by the fact that many of the major national pavilions were not organized by States, but rather large trade organizations or corporations from the respective nations. Even the corporate pavilions that dominated the Fairgrounds, especially the Futurama exhibit at the General Motors pavilion, promised to lay the foundation for America as a racially/ethnically diverse, global, technological, consumer utopia. Additionally, amid the turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement, the Fair attempted to depict an image of America as a racially harmonious global melting pot, with images of immigration and ethnic diversity throughout the state and federal exhibits. The early phases of American multiculturalism were prevalent all over Fairgrounds, including in the Fair’s theme of “Peace Through Understanding’ and exhibits named “Progressland” and “A Shrinking Globe” which rhetorically positioned the U.S. as a space of cultural harmony and hollowly attempted to echo the language of Civil Rights leadership.

Robert Moses blocked the construction of any midway or amusement areas, refusing to allow the Fair to become what he considered a “honky-tonk” sideshow, preferring instead to frame the Fair as a space of cultural sophistication and technological triumph. He did not want to have the Fair to appear like that of a carnival or public amusement that included freak show exhibits and performances. Rather he wanted the Fair to have a modern feel. Many for the

232 It should be noted that this was mostly white ethnic diversity. Images of European immigrant influence on American culture we common among the state sponsored pavilions.
Fair’s pavilions featured mid-century modern design mixed with elements of futuristic architecture such as modern cars, jet aircraft and the space age. This is a direct departure from architecture of earlier Fairs both before and after the turn of the twentieth century, such as Chicago’s World's Fair: A Century of Progress International Exposition in 1933 or the New York World’s Fair in 1939, which both featured large midway amusements that were not only among these Fairs’ most popular attractions but were highly racialized exhibits that served to legitimize the global American empire.234 Midway exhibits, like the Norman Bel Geddes's nude Crystal Gazing Palace that had proved so popular at the 1939 Fair, were not present at the ’64 Fair, which did hinder Fair attendance.235 While the Fair did have a number of “rides” they either reflected the globalism of the Fair, such as the highly popular “It’s a Small World” Pepsi/UNICEF exhibit and boat ride that featured multiple animated scenes that stereotyped cultures from around the world, or the Fair’s corporatism, such as General Electric’s The Carousel of Progress or the “World’s Largest Tire” which doubled as the Fair’s Ferris wheel. While these rides were popular, they differed from the rides and amusements that one would find at a previous Fair because of their corporate, global themes, which reflected both the aesthetic of the 1964 Fair and the tone of America in the 1960s.

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235 Norman Bel Geddes was an industrial and theatrical designer working in the early twentieth century, who primarily focused on aeronautical design and designed the General Motors Pavilion for the 1939 Fair. He also designed much of the 1939 Fair’s Amusement Area, also known as the Midway, the Fairway, and, perhaps ironically, the Great White Way.
Image 3
The China and India animatronics in the Pepsi/UNICEF “It’s a Small World Exhibit”\textsuperscript{236}

Image 4
The “World’s Largest Tire:” US Royal Tires Ferris Wheel\textsuperscript{237}

\textsuperscript{236} Luske, Hamilton. \textit{Disney Goes to the World’s Fair}. 1964.

The critical reception of the Fair was also highly unfavorable. Cultural and architectural critics blasted the Fair for its lack of a clear theme and its laissez-faire approach towards corporate involvement. Critiquing the seemingly disjointed and highly corporate nature, Architectural critic Vincent J. Scully wrote in *Life Magazine*, the Fair “had nothing creative in its layout,” pointing out the corporate and sterile feel of the Fair, claiming that it “uses the same zombie ground plan that was dead from the 1939 World’s Fair.”238 The 1964 Fair, which had momentous financial struggles and left several buildings unfinished, “attracted far more attention for its financial woes and conceptual failures than for anything it had to offer to its visitors.”239

As much as the Fair espoused rhetoric of the space age and a promising future, critics argued that the corporate nature of the Fair did not fit with the youthful exuberant rebellion of the mid-1960s, one critic even calling the Fair “an old Fair in a distinctly new time.”240

In the years just prior to the 1964 Fair, both Seattle and Montreal held international expositions, significantly detracting from the international presence at the New York Fair. As a result of the Seattle Fair, the Bureau of International Expositions (BEI) specifically chose not to sponsor the New York Fair, claiming that a host nation could only sponsor one Fair every decade. 241 This lack of sponsorship by the international governing body that oversaw all World’s Fair, resulted in all 40 of its member nations (which included Canada, Australia, most major European nations and the Soviet Union) refusing to officially participate in the New York Fair.242 As a result, the New York Fair’s organizers were forced to turn towards business and trade organizations within many nations to sponsor national exhibits, significantly shifting the

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242 Lawrence, xx. Some of the nations represented by the Bureau of International Expositions did exhibit at the Fair, however the Pavilions were organized by large trade organizations and did not have official state sponsorship.
aura of the Fair away from one of a global celebration of culture to one focused on national branding, marketing and the emergence of a newly globalized consumerism. This lack of a European, Canadian and Australian presence significantly damaged Fair attendance and its international reception. The failure of the Bureau of International Expositions to sponsor the Fair did, however, result in significantly more space for smaller nations that were not affiliated with the BIE. Nations with smaller economies, including Japan, Sweden, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan, were eager to have the chance to exhibit in New York City, the clear global economic center during the mid-twentieth century. Many of these nations decided to build large national pavilions for the ’64 Fair, including Thailand, India and Africa, whose pavilions were some of the most popular attractions at the Fair, but still lacked some of the appeal for the largely white Fairgoing public that European amusements may have offered. The result of this was significantly less public interest in the Fair, specifically because of its decidedly corporate atmosphere and public perception of being unnecessary and out of touch with the revolutionary spirit of the mid-sixties.243 The result was that the legacy of the 1964 Fair has largely been tarnished, remembered primarily it for its “financial losses, European no-shows, heavy commercial orientation, and above all, the looming, rather sinister presence of its president, Robert Moses.”

The’64 Fair was not alone in its underwhelming attendance and significantly diminished public reception. Leisure spaces, such as public parks, restaurants and amusement parks were racialized and contested spaces where the nuances of race were negotiated. As Victoria Walcott and other historians of amusement have pointed out, early to mid-twentieth century Blacks saw the relationship between “fun and freedom,” and viewed leisure space as playing an important

role in the Black freedom struggle,\textsuperscript{244} integrating such popular amusement spaces as a means to claim collective political, recreational and spatial agency.\textsuperscript{245} However, popular spaces of American leisure just prior to the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act were highly segregated (the Civil rights Act, because of loopholes in the laws and the advent of “private clubs” could only in part desegregate such spaces\textsuperscript{246}) and largely reflected the social conservatism of the post-War era. Whites fleeing to the suburbs in large numbers saw cities as spaces of racialized violence and social unrest that should be avoided. The amusement spaces inside such cities were at the epicenter of that unrest. As more Blacks moved to Northern cities, the race riots that occurred across the urban North reinforced the notion that the “very presence of Blacks created disorder and devalued spaces of leisure they favored.”\textsuperscript{247} Many whites saw these urban amusement spaces as being filled with “undesirables” and their racist anxieties led to the common perception of amusement spaces as overrun by violence, unrest and overall racial tension.\textsuperscript{248} Black urbanites celebrating or displaying emotion in urban public has historically been criminalized by whites who saw Black urban life as a threat to white normativity and white civility. As urban amusements such as Coney Island and Chicago’s Riverview Park saw an “growing influx of Negro visitors” they were increasingly associated with vandalism and muggings, even when there were no reports of violence or disorder. This certainly hindered

\textsuperscript{244} Walcott.  
\textsuperscript{246} Walcott.  
\textsuperscript{247} Walcott, 195.  
\textsuperscript{248} Walcott, 211.
attendance and kept large numbers of whites away from such spaces of public amusement. Furthermore, because amusement parks were typically common public spaces for young urbanites, the young blacks who frequented them were labeled as the source of urban crime, reducing the desire of whites to visit such spaces. This was the case with public amusement in the mid-century and any space where Blacks celebrated in public was avoided by suburban whites who were generally seeking white civility and homogenous public social spaces. While the 1964 Fairs is commonly remembered as the event that effectively put an end to all major World’s Fairs and expositions, racist fears of “young black hoodlums” (along with the privatization of American amusement and advances in technology) also very much played into the decreased the social prominence of urban amusement spaces and the eventual downfall of World’s Fairs.

The 1964 Fair did not carry the same discursive association as did urban amusement spaces of the early twentieth century, which were commonly understood as cultural mixing grounds where racial, class and sexual norms could be transgressed. The 1964 Fair was not to be a space of decadence, racial tension or deviant social behavior. Rather, Mosses, Disney and the other lead designers of the 1964 Fair organized the Fair to be a family friendly space that mimicked the social norms of suburban life. Attempting to avoid the political upheaval that would result in the Civil Rights Act signed into effect during the first summer of the Fair, organizers imagined the Fair as a means to bridge the social conservatism of the post-war era

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249 Samuel, 2007, xiv
250 Samuel, 2007, xiv
with the increasingly global consumer culture of the mid-sixties, bringing together two decades of American cultural change in one singular event. Strongly influenced by in theme and design by Walt Disney, Robert Moses saw the Fair as a means to transmit the conservative rhetoric of the post-war era, what he considered “uplifting social values,” by building a sanitized and largely corporate entertainment space, countering the ethnic and class heterogeneity and sexual ambiguity that characterized Coney Island.²⁵² Wanting to preempt this backlash and any reduced attendance by suburban whites, Fair organizers expected that by creating a family-friendly space that was geared towards white middle-class suburban families that any fears over racial tension would not impact Fair attendance. In addition, organizers expected the appeal of a global atmosphere and technological showcases to transcend the racial fears that associated urban amusement spaces with blackness. Fair organizers were largely wrong.²⁵³,²⁵⁴ Even while most accounts note that the Fair’s attendees were largely white and racially homogeneous, largely a result of cost and limited public transportation to the Fair (the majority of people of color at the Fair being employees or performers at the exhibits and pavilions), racial tensions and nearby race rebellions in Harlem and Brooklyn hindered attendance at the 1964 Fair.

The cultural plurality of the early 1960s had clear influences on the Fairscape. Specifically, the organizers of the Fair embraced the nascent multiculturalism of the period by creating the perfect environment for Fairgoers to partake in new forms of multicultural and international consumption in a very market-mediated fashion. Put more simply, Fairgoers went to the Fair with the intent of experiencing other cultures. However, the diversity was not to be experienced or consumed was not by intermingling with a class or racially heterogeneous Fairgoing public as interacting with urban Blacks was deterring suburban whites from visiting

²⁵² Avila, 119.
²⁵⁴ Avila, p. 5.
amusement spaces across the urban North. Rather the American amusement parks and World’s Fairs of the early twentieth century reflected the class and ethnic diversity of a modern industrial urban space. This appealed to European immigrant populations because of their familiarity with European street festivals and by offering an escape from the traditional and Victorian moral limitations of ethnic enclaves. The 1964 Fair however did not reflect such urban racial and sexual diversity.\textsuperscript{255} According to most accounts by Fair visitors, the majority of those that attended the ’64 Fair were racially white. While this reflected an expanded definition of whiteness of the mid-century, which by this period encompassed most European ethnics, the whiteness of the Fair was clearly symptomatic of a growing black-white/urban-suburban divide and the midcentury transitions towards a decentralized urban region. Location (in the pseudo-suburban location of Flushing), cost, parking and availability of public transportation limited access to the Fair for urban blacks.\textsuperscript{256} The result was that the Fairgoing public reflected the racial and class homogeneity of American suburban life.

The ’64 Fair was in many respects predicated on a landscape that was at once removed from the concentrations of urban poverty (located in Queens, removed from the concentrations of poverty in Brooklyn and Harlem) and increasingly associated with nuclear family, suburban, white identity.\textsuperscript{257} Fair organizers, heavily influenced by the park design of Walt Disney, specifically worked to remove white suburban Fairgoers from the urban blackness, urban uprising and the racial tensions of the 1960s. Borrowing specific design and public relations techniques from Disneyland, such as the afore mentioned removal of midway amusements, accessibility via interstate highway systems, “the validation of patriarchy and the nuclear family

\textsuperscript{255} Avila, 111.
\textsuperscript{256} One of the few means by which urban poor/working class had access to the ’64 Fair was by taking school organized trips, which were feasible because the Fair offered discount rates to educational organizations.
\textsuperscript{257} It should be noted that the Fair was also very automotive friendly. With large parking lots and intricate series of highways, Fairgoers could easily assess the Fair, while having little exposure to the urban core of New York.
and a thematic emphasis on racial and cultural divisions,” the 1964 World’s Fair set itself up as the spatial antithesis to amusement parks like New York’s Coney Island and Chicago’s Riverview Park.\textsuperscript{258, 259} This differed greatly from amusement parks like Coney Island and Chicago’s Riverside Park which, which were located in complex and racially diverse urban centers, and thus attempted to attract a diverse range of visitors. These were known to be spaces of racial, sexual and class heterogeneity. What diversity was to be witnessed at the ’64 Fair was largely international, housed in the national exhibits and on display as a consumable spectacle for the primarily white Fairgoing audience. Fair organizers worked to market the Fair as a space of racial harmony where white suburbanites could experience and interact with international cultures, but only in a way that was safe and commercially mediated.

As a result, the 1964 Fair created a clear context where the Fairgoer, the spectator, was white and suburban, while the exhibitors, the spectacle of the Fair hosted in thirty-six International Pavilions, were largely racialized international others who were either organizers or employees in the International Area. Just as blackness has historically been defined against shifting definitions of whiteness and vice versa, the Fair presented a context where white visitors could be defined against racially foreign immigrant others and lower-level laborers who were largely people of color. Employment was highly segregated with menial labor being assigned to people of color and more prestigious customer focused positions being reserved for whites. Joyce Purnick reflects on the racial dynamics of her time working at the Coca-Cola Pavilion,

To me, the real show at the Coke pavilion had nothing to do with a carbonated drink and everything to do with America in the mid-sixties, because there was a strict caste system to the job assignments. It was overwhelmingly young black men and women who worked at the outdoor counters, dispensing and selling

\textsuperscript{258} Walk Disney was involved in the overall design of the Fair as well as the lead designer on many of the Fair exhibits and pavilions.

Coke and Tab in the summer heat. I never saw a black person working as a host or hostess inside the air-conditioned pavilion, responsible for keeping order (like movie ushers of old). And then there were what we locals called the “Georgia Peaches.” They were young women imported from Atlanta—Coca-Cola’s home city—who worked in the V.I.P. lounge upstairs, treating esteemed visitors to snacks and drinks, and escorting them on private tours through the pavilion. To summarize: African-Americans on the periphery, sweating it out selling soda pop. Whites inside, cool and sheltered.²⁶⁰

The 1964 Fair created the context within the nascent multiculturalism of the mid-sixties, where a new expansive whiteness and being ethnically foreign were juxtaposed, positioning foreign cultural productions as consumable sites where whiteness could be reflected.²⁶¹ As James Farmer of the Congress for Racial Equality proclaimed in 1964 while leading a march on Fairgrounds protesting segregation in the South, “there is a distinct contrast between the glitter and fantasy world being shown at the World’s Fair and the real world of poverty, brutality, hatred and vengeance which Negros face” in the mid-sixties.²⁶² Many Blacks and Civil Rights activist groups even protested the Fair’s racially biased hiring practices, some even boycotting the Fair during its first season. As NAACP leader Mrs. Lillian Walker Smith passionately argued in an editorial entitled “White Man’s Fair”:

If I were black, colored or a Negro. I would boycott the 1964 World's Fair. That is, I would not go until the Congress has passed the civil rights legislation which they are spending so much time over. Instead of attending, I would mail my admission fare to the NAACP, CORE, Southern Christian Leadership Movement of the National Urban League. To stay away from the Fair would be a great demonstration of unity. An effective "Stay-out" would eliminate seeing men, women and children being beaten and dragged around like cattle. It would also eliminate seeing our sympathizers receive this same inhuman treatment and having warm, live blood from theirs and our own bodies make ugly puddles in our city streets. Discrimination and hatred know no boundary or state lines and what has been done at the World's Fair reminds me of them in the South. On the Fair's opening day (and since then at formal exhibition openings), Negroes were excluded as guest speakers. Our Negro leaders and others were instead, being


carted treatment many have and are still receiving away to jails because they
dared to ask for rights so long denied them.263

With the racial tensions and Civil Rights urgency of the mid-sixties, both the synthetic nostalgia
and incongruous visions of a corporate utopian future did not widely resonate with urban blacks.
For many, the Fair was a whitewashed fantasyland out of touch with the pressing racial concerns
that defined the era.

Simultaneously and somewhat misguidedly, however, Fair organizers saw the Fair in a
much different light, as genuinely embracing the nascent multiculturalism of the mid-sixties,
pushing white American visitors to tentatively interact with cultures from around the globe,
largely unfamiliar to most Americans. However, unlike Disneyland which opened a decade
earlier in suburban California and gained popularity by selling a distinctly uncospolitan and
racially homogeneous vision of small-town American life, the Fair organizers wanted to sell the
’64 Fair as a culturally diverse global gathering, where white visitors would not simply
experience manufactured nostalgic visions of an innocent and virtuous rural American culture,
but also technological visions of an increasingly interconnected (yet American centered) global
economy.264 While this attempted marriage of white American suburbanization with an emerging
multiculturalism, was in many respects unsuccessful and marred by the racial and cultural
tensions of the midcentury, the Fair proved to be an important testing ground where white
Americans could tentatively and safely experience unfamiliar global cultures – both on a cultural
and sensory level - without fear of physical or social repercussion. While the political and
cultural environment surrounding the Fair was steeped in tension and violence, marked by
rampant racial violence perpetrated against communities of color and the assassination of

264 Albeit a global economy with white American cultural norms and the American corporate economy at the center. 
Source: Avila, 118.
President Kennedy just prior to the Fair’s opening in 1963, the Fair operated as a space where white Americans could cross global cultural and racial boundaries without risking either physical violence or loss of social status. The racial and global encounters that happened in the Fair space were innocuous, driven by the spectator/spectated relationship and housed within the confines of the Fairgrounds. While the Fair may have been overshadowed by the momentous political events of the day, it served as a tentative testing ground where, despite the tensions, white Americans could securely and cautiously experience foreign diversity, albeit in a very mediated and manufactured cultural and sensory landscape. By doing so, the Fair could offer the security and predictability craved by white Americans in the wake of the precarious post-war global order and the Cold War; and simultaneously placate a nascent desire for cultural exchange that emerged in the mid-sixties. In many respects, growing the suburban/urban, black/white divide created a context where white Fairgoers actively sought out cross-racial interactions. As suburbanization increasingly moved whites to increasingly homogenous suburban spaces, the cross-racial and cross-ethnic interactions that were so common among the previous generation of European immigrants who had a history of complicated racial positionality and lived in diverse urban environments. Despite what many cultural critics claim, then, the “Fair did not fail to leave a lasting mark on American culture,” the Fair proved to be a key testing ground where emergent ideas about multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism could take shape for white Fairgoers.265

Eating at the Fair: The Fair’s “Alien” Eating Culture and Unfamiliar Sensory Geography

For most Fairgoers, visiting the Fair was a daylong event. Because of the Fair’s grand design, expansive layout and number of large exhibits, the typical visitor did not simply visit the

Fair on a whim and spend a few short hours on Fairgrounds. Visitors averaged around seven hours per Fair visit. Fair attendance also spiked in the evening, in the after-work dinner hour. Commentary surrounding the Fair actively encouraged visitors to attend in the evening in order to take in the Fair’s light displays, thus enjoying the whole of the Fair’s visual spectacle. Esquire described the Fair as “undoubtedly more exciting by night than by day.” “The Fair at night had a magical feel to it,” reflected Andrea Gilmore, Flushing Native and Frequent Fair Visitor. “It was dark, but there were so many beautiful lights, that just illuminated everything.” As a result of the relatively long Fair visits and the likelihood of visiting during evening mealtime, most Fairgoers ate at least once, if not twice, while on Fairgrounds. The most popular meal was dinner. Fairgoers ate substantial meals, not just snacks while on Fairgrounds.

However, eating was not simply something necessitated by the long visits or being on Fairgrounds during mealtime. Rather the diversity of food choices on Fairgrounds was among the primary draws for Fairgoers. Several newspaper articles, promotional materials and advertisements featured food as one of the key reasons to visit the Fair, especially in the face of such harsh criticism of some of the other facets of the Fair. As Esquire pointed out, “the restaurants of the Fair probably have more attention given to them, favorably and unfavorably than any other attractions.” Other advertisers capitalized on the vibrant and rapidly globalizing food scene at the Fair, such as A&P Supermarket that ran many full-page ads claiming they sold the “World’s Fare,” “over 6000 items” from the “four corners of the world” representing over

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“fifty countries.” For many critics, commentators and visitors, eating at one of the Fair’s large elaborate restaurants or drinking in one of the Fair’s expansive pubs or beer gardens were seen as one of the few ways to find reprieve from the rampant consumerism, long lines and seemingly unstructured layout that hampered a Fair visit. And as a result, the food scene at the Fair was vibrant and popular. Restaurants had long lines, every restaurant and snack bar “appeared to be operating at peak capacity” and the “restaurant business in Flushing Meadows boomed beyond anyone’s expectations.” Indeed, for Fair visitors, eating was among the primary and most popular reasons for visiting the Fair.

At least in popular rhetoric, the food sensation of the Fair was the Belgian Waffle, which could be purchased at numerous snack bars and food carts around the Fair. However, the food options at the Fair went far beyond the Belgian waffle and represented an degree of global culinary diversity previously never experienced by the white American eater, even at prior World’s Fairs. On opening day in 1963, the Fair had 112 eating and dining places that could serve over 24,000 diners at any given time, including over forty-nine full service restaurants that offered full-course meals, served alcohol and stayed open until at least midnight, as well as at least eighteen large snack bars that had larger seating areas of over 50 diners. Of these 110 restaurants, snack bars, food carts, cafes, and bars, 61 of them, well over half, were located in the International Area and primarily served cuisine that was claimed to have origins in the nation

272 Maurice Vermersch first introduced the Belgian Waffle to the United States eater at the 21st Century Exposition in Seattle in 1962. Originally known in the U.S as the “Bel-Gem” Waffle because of a typographical error, the Belgian Waffle gained popularity at the 1964 New York Fair and in New York as a street food and dessert.
273 Taylor, 1939.
274 Official Guide to the New York World’s Fair 1964/1965. New York, Time/Life Books 1964. These large snack bars had seating areas of fifty or more; there were many small refreshment stands and cafes that offered food options.
hosting that respective pavilion. The international area alone could serve 9241 diners at any
given time, which was more than any other area at the Fair. Of the restaurants and snack bars
that were not in the International Area, twenty-five were Brass Rail restaurants, which served a
single fixed meal every day except on Fridays, when there was a sea-food alternate, but also
commonly featured cuisine from one of the nation’s exhibiting at the Fair.

While it seems obvious that such an internationally themed event would feature foods
and eating cultures from the wide gamut of nations exhibiting at the Fair, several specific
contexts led to the 1964 Fair having a significantly higher percentage of International dining
options compared to those available at previous Fairs or in the surrounding New York area.
Among the primary reasons was the lack of American corporate food options, resulting from the
failure to complete the large “World of Food Pavilion.” Despite its slightly misleading title, the
“World of Food Pavilion” was intended to house dozens of American corporate food vendors
(from companies like Pepsi, Hershey’s, Whirlpool, Morton Salt, and Miller Brewing, among
many others) and was intended to be the primary location for Fairgoers to eat American
corporate food or snack foods. Dating back to at least the 1939 New York Fair, all World’s Fairs
contained at least one major exhibit that was sponsored by or focused on major food
corporations. However, when Lionel Levy, President of the 1964 World’s Fair World of Food
Pavilion failed to secure sufficient funding, the project was scrapped. Almost immediately after

The Federal and State Area had 18 restaurants that served 6095, the Industrial Area had 15 restaurants that served
3567, the Lake Amusement Area had 11 restaurants that served 3420 and the Transportation and Travel Area had 11
restaurants that served 2560.
276 Many of the Brass Rails also served what one might consider traditional “Fair Food,” including hot dogs,
hamburgers, fried foods and ice cream cones.
277 This included the “Food Building” at the 1939 World’s Fair, which featured exhibits from Kraft Foods, Beech
groundbreaking, what little construction had been completed was demolished. More than thirty major food manufacturers and distributors were set to house their exhibits and restaurants in this massive five-story, 50,000 square foot building, but when organizers of the building mismanaged its finances and failed to complete the structure, corporations like Pepsi, Hersey’s, Reese Candy and Hickory Farms were left scrambling for a presence at the Fair. Many of them either ended up not having any presence at the Fair or having one that was significantly diminished. Outside of companies that built their own pavilions like Coca-Cola and Chunky Candy, many major food corporations (many of which were powerful players in the trade liberalization of the global post-war economy) found themselves wholly absent from the Fair, notable examples including Miller Brewing Company, Lipton and Wise Chips. The result was that foods that most fairgoers expected to find at such an event, especially American snack or fast food, were actually very difficult to find outside of a handful of generic versions at some concession stands. Foods that one would expect to be prevalent at such a Fair, candy bars, ice cream or French fries, were in fact few and far between. As Bill Cotter, photographer, author and New York Native who visited the Fair many times as a teenager expressed, “Looking back, you realize there was no national fast food presence at the Fair. “Instead of hamburgers, hot dogs, and snow cones offered at the concession stands”, he says “the more interesting places


280 A notable example of a food corporation that has a diminished presence was Hershey. They planned to have a major presence in the World of Food Pavilion where visitors would receive a free candy bar. However, their eventual placement in the Better Living Center hindered their place in the landscape of the Fair because visitors had to walk along a one-way path when traveling through this pavilion essentially making it take hours to receive that free candy bar.

281 Barber, 2012.

were the international pavilions, particularly ones that had a budget-priced accessibility to them.”

The failure to complete this large World of Food Pavilion represents a disjunction in the corporate-dominated landscape and the affective and sensory economies offered by the Fairscape. Fairgoers were essentially forced to eat outside of the corporate monotony that was quickly beginning to dominate white suburban food choice in the post-war era. However, an analysis of what was intended to be included in the pavilion speaks a great deal to the racial logic driving the Fair organization and American food culture of the mid-century more broadly. The pavilion was envisioned to include a “Miracle Kitchen,” which featured Post-War technological advancements such as automated push-button appliances intended to minimize domestic labor for white American suburban women. The sizeable pavilion was also set to house “American” cooking lessons and a major collection of “American” cookbooks and recipes, both with connections to Federal and State agencies and local food festivals like several Apple Festivals or Shrimp Festivals across the country or “Dutch Days” Festivals in Pennsylvania. Not only would this recipe collection have presented a white normative and Eurocentric image of American eating culture that was very much constructed by state agencies and regional organizations, but such images would also have been presented with museum-like authority. What would have been on display in this space would not have been culturally neutral. In collecting, preserving, researching and displaying objects related to American culinary culture, the pavilion would have made decisions based on interpretation, potential learning and perceived audiences. These decisions would have given credence to certain facets of American cuisine over others. Much like cookbooks, which have a long and complex history of granting authenticity

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Barber. 2012.

and authority over particular cuisines (even when not written by the people from the region where such cuisine may have originated), the pronunciations made by these food exhibitions would have had much influence and authority in regards to defining American food, especially because of their formalized style and governmental recognition. Stories at the World of Food Pavilion about American regional foods constructed the U.S. as a nation with a complex eating culture and diverse food preparation and consumption patterns. While at the same time, the national cuisines of other nations were consolidated into monolithic and ahistorical singularities, condensing eating cultures that were surely diverse in these various nations into unified replicas that aimed to encompass the whole of the nation’s eating culture. The “international” foods to be served and presented in the International Area would then serve as a distinct contrast to the eating culture and recipes presented within this exhibit, drawing clear lines between which eating culture (and the sensory experiences of such culture) was seen as American (i.e. white) and which was alien and perpetually outside of white American food/sensory normativity (and for the most part racially othered).

Among the largest area in the World of Food Pavilion was set to be the “Americana” Area where corporations were planning exhibits that linked the importance of particular foodstuffs with broad themes of American nationalism, history and cultural identity. This space was intended to include several exhibits, including one sponsored by American Sugar Refining Co. telling the “story of sugar as a quick-energy food, historically important to American life for both “fun and good taste,” the Miller Brewing Co. tracing the history of beer since early American small town life and a replica of a small New England fishing Village with a "foods afloat" section in which the sea's products will be displayed along with a model
Touted as “a taste of America,” these exhibits collectively planned to trace contemporary corporate food culture to its historical origins through rustic, sentimental and celebratory visions of early colonial America. The Americana area in the Pavilion had no plans to include any presence from African Americans, Indigenous people or other communities of color that have influenced all facets of American food culture, especially those that are traditionally understood as of American origin. Rather, the eating culture housed at the “Americana” exhibit was to reflect a whitewashed, corporate and nostalgic vision of American food culture as solely influenced by and predicated on the achievements and products of American corporations, which were to be presented as organically emerging out of a white small-town American “folk” culture. Using what noted film critic Richard Schickel calls “the politics of nostalgia”—a longing for social order, social homogeneity, religious faith and a return to “traditional” value systems—this exhibit was set to present both an idealized and whitewashed vision of small-town life that worked in opposition to both the global nature of the Fair and the social upheaval and budding multiculturalism of American youth culture. Such an exhibit would have reified a racialized and whitewashed vision of American eating culture in the 1960s as historically tied to white suburban normativity. By defining American eating, or in this case culinary “Americana,” as primarily a result of Euro-American influence, the intended exhibit would present a vision of American-ness that was exclusively white, setting up the international

cuisine at the Fair as both culturally foreign - perpetually outside of this historically white normative American culture - but also foreign on a sensory level and alien to what aesthetically constitutes the American palate and American taste normativity. Showcasing “American cuisine” as primarily influenced by a whitewashed vision of corporate food culture, this pavilion would have done much to define sensory normativity, especially those of taste and smell, as foundationally tied to Euro-American cultural norms, but also increasingly dictated by corporate and industrial food producers. While it is clearly difficult to fully interpret the potential impacts on American eating culture of a pavilion that was never fully completed, it is clear that this pavilion was intended by organizers to serve a very particular purpose, which would have had great definitional power over “American” food and “American” sensory experience in the mid-century. Failure to complete this project created an opening in the food and sensory culture of the 1964 Fair that would provide the space for globally diverse non-corporate food options to shape the culinary and sensory geographies of the Fair.

Into the dining void at the Fair, created by the lack of corporate food options, stepped the numerous restaurants housed inside the Fair’s national pavilions of the International Area. This encouraged visitors to try International foods. Without few options for more traditionally accepted fast food or corporate food options, Fairgoers were essentially forced to eat at the international pavilions, the vast majority of which housed a combination of casual and fine dining establishments serving foods that represented the national cuisine of each pavilions host nation. However, the international restaurants at the ’64 Fair did not simply provide a sampling of European “continental” cuisine that had a strong influence on American food culture in the previous decades and with which many Americans would be familiar. For fairgoers, eating

at a restaurant serving Italian or British cuisine would not have been an exceptional cultural or sensory event. European ethnic food had a deep-rooted history in the United States and was a prominent part of mid-century eating culture because of the large waves of European immigration in the early twentieth century. Most of the suburban or white ethnic Fairgoers would have been largely familiar with European ethnic and Chinese cuisines, which was one of the few popular cuisines emerging from a community of color. Eating at the restaurants within European national pavilions would not have represented for the Fairgoing public a major break in normative eating culture. This was because, although they were relatively fluid and evolving in relation to European immigration over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, European continental cuisine had largely dominated American eating culture and taste normativity for some time.

However, because of a dispute between Moses and the Bureau of International Expositions, many of the more established European countries, at least formally, avoided a presence at the ’64 Fair. The Bureau of International Expositions, the governing body of official World’s Fairs, refused to sponsor the ’64 Fair, claiming that under their organizational bylaws any nation may only host one Fair per decade (Century 21 Exposition or the also known as the Seattle World’s Fair was held in 1962). While the Fair still contained thirty-six international pavilions, nations such as Canada, Australia, France, the United Kingdom, and many other European nations whose cuisine would have been familiar to the white diner, did not formally

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290 There are a vast number of texts that detail the history of European Ethnic food in the United States, however the most relevant in relation to immigration and foodways and perhaps most theoretically innovative to emerge out of the last decade food history and food studies scholarship is Hasia Diner’s *Hungering for America*. Diner, Hasia R. *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
participate in the Fair. The result was that large prominent exhibit spaces that would have been occupied by European nations such as France, England and Germany ended up occupied by non-European nations such as India, Japan, Thailand and Iraq. The result was that the Fair presented to the fairgoer a multicultural vision of the World as Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan (then called the Republic of China), Indonesia, Polynesia, the Phillippines and Samoa all built pavilions, many of which were newly independent nations, some even recently overthowing former European colonizers. While white Fairgoers would have largely been familiar, both culturally and sensorially, with the cuisine served by restaurants in European national pavilions, the cuisine offered in the pavilions hosted by Asian, Middle Eastern and African nations, which came to dominate the culinary landscape of the Fair, were vastly new sensory and cultural experiences. This created a radically unfamiliar foodscape and sensory geography in the Fair’s international area, one that fairgoers – especially those coming from the highly segregated surrounding suburbs – would have been largely unfamiliar with. While Fairgoers would certainly expect the food in the international area to be on some level globally different to the American palate and normative American food choice, the European national pavilions would have at least served food that many white Americans of European descent would have some exposure to and familiarity with. Because of the lack of participation by European nations, instead of avenues lined with large five-star restaurants serving continental cuisine and European gourmet stables, an ad hoc street food–style bazaar took shape featuring many smaller restaurants and snack bars hosted by these smaller nations which were not yet a large part of American eating culture.

291 While State sponsored exhibits from larger European nations were not present, many trade associations and business organizations sponsored national pavilions in efforts to boost trade and tourism in their countries, especially in this particular moment of post-war trade liberalization.

understanding in the mid-sixties. The result was that the most prominent dining options offered at the Fair, in pavilions hosted by the India, Thailand, Mexico, Jordan, and Pakistan were cuisines that until that point, most of the Fair’s over seventy million visitors had little to no exposure to.

Major media outlets and Fair organizers alike featured the food and eating cultures unfamiliar to white diners was an active part of the Fair’s marketing. In the media blitz leading up to the Fair, diners were actively encouraged to eat untried food and avoid “American style

293 Barber. 2012.
food,” as evidence from the claims made by a multi-page review in Life Magazine, which clearly labels the Fair’s foodscape as a space of culinary, cultural and international exchange. “There are a few principles to follow here: for a start, bypass American style food, that’s why you left home, isn’t it,” encouraging fairgoers not only to consume outside of their cultural and sensory comfort zone, but also to actively participate in a form of highly curated yet accelerated culinary tourism.295 As one New York Times article wrote, “the exotic international snacks” such as “Swedish smorgasbord, Indian curry, and Japanese sukiyaki” among others are among the only true “highlights” of the Fair. According to this article, the only way to fully experience the multicultural offerings off the Fair was to embrace these new culinary options and in order to “fully experience the World Fair, you must try new foods.”296 The Fair’s own Official Guide even featured a five-page spread detailing each restaurant and highlighting popular “exotic” dishes at each International Pavilions. Promotional materials for the Swiss Pavilion bragged about its Swiss food and wines that were never before available in the United States; advertisements for the Spanish Pavilion’s Toledo and Grenada restaurants claimed to serve the finest food at the Fair, featuring excellent and luxurious regional Spanish dishes and the first bar in the United States to offer sangria: the Official Guide boasted about a restaurant in the Indian Pavilion with Temple-like ceilings, Tandoori chicken and “puffy bread,” which a later version of this guide labeled as paratha; while the Thai Pavilion gloated about its “treasures from an exotic land” including the musaman (curried meat with pickles) and mee krob (sweet and sour noodles with shrimp and chicken) served at what they claimed to be the first authentic Thai restaurant in

the United States. Even Seventeen Magazine featured a section entitled “A Hungry Teen-Ager’s guide to the Fair” which highlighted the African, Japanese, Polynesian and Indonesian restaurants as well as many of the restaurants in the International Area as great for both “treats and dates” or for “gourmet specialties” and special occasions that the most cosmopolitan or rebellious teens would happily enjoy.

The result of such marketing was that the primarily white suburban Fairgoing public was actively encouraged to eat across cultural lines. The global culinary and sensory offerings became a key draw of the Fair for many of the white suburban Fairgoers. Unlike other contemporary contexts where continental and haute cuisine were clearly considered the pinnacle of fine dining and the most commonly desired aspects of American eating culture, at the Fair the white American suburban public was actively pushed to forego their expected culinary and sensory preferences in favor of new cultural and sensory experiences. Not only was trying new foods, considered foreign to the white American palate, constructed as part of the thrill of the World Fair (which speaks a great deal to the nascent “foodie culture” that food journalists like Craig Claiborne and Gael Greene were instrumental in creating), but it was an expected part of any Fair visit. The depth of culinary diversity and wide array of eating, which The New York Times referred to as the Fair’s “edible landscape,” became a primary drive for visiting the Fair, as well as a central part of the expected Fair going experience, especially the visceral experiences


299 While the number of those widely interested in trends in food culture, especially with the rise of dietary individualism (which I detail earlier in the chapter) was growing in the mid-sixties, the term “foodie” was not introduced until 1980 and is widely credited to New York Magazine restaurant critic Gael Greene. Source: Greene, Gael. “What’s Nouvelle? La Cuisine Bourgeoisie” New York Magazine. June 2, 1980, col. 3. p 33.
of the Fair’s complex sensory environment. This is one of the first times in American culinary history that large numbers of middle-class white Americans were actively choosing to consume culinary productions of immigrant groups and communities of color in large numbers. This not only is a key catalyst in the global diversification of American signifies a tremendous moment in the growth of mid-century liberal multiculturalism.

Such cross cultural and global exchanges, even ones as driven by the spectator/spectated binary as those at the Fair, were relatively exceptional within the cultural context of the mid-twentieth century. Unlike the late nineteenth century when Victorian social reformers actively visited immigrant households in attempts to impose strict moral reform, or during the early twentieth century when white middle class urban “slummers” crossed racial and sexual boundaries for entertainment purposes, within the context of an increasingly segregated urban/suburban divide of the 1960s such cross-cultural and cross-racial contact was relatively rare for the white middle class. Not only was it rare to engage with people from globally diverse backgrounds, consuming cuisine understood as outside of normative American eating culture was exceptionally rare. Both residential and leisure space largely homogenous. For example, as Eric Avila points out, Disney “renounced the contradictions and uncertainties of modern urban society. The very heterogeneity and dissonance that defined cosmopolitan urban culture inspired Disney to create a counterculture of order, regimentation, and homogeneity.”

Therefore, such cross-cultural experiences as those had at the Fair were an exceptional moment in midcentury cultural life, an era where racial fears, affordable housing, and the desire to leave

301 The major exception to this is the culinary slumming of the early twentieth century where many young white urban professionals were traveling to Chinatowns in cities like New York and San Francisco to for nightlife and the heightened sensory experiences that came with consuming “exotic” Chinese food.
303 Avila, 119.
decaying cities were all factors that prompted many white Americans to flee to a racially homogenous suburbia. For the most part, the global imaginary of white Americans was relatively limited to nations with which America was engaged in Cold War political or military conflict. White Americans were largely not being exposed to people or cultural global cultures from nations like Thailand, Jordan, Pakistan or the Philippines, who all had a prominent national presence at the 1964 Fair, but because of racist immigration restrictions, did not have a large physical or cultural presence in the United States.

However, for the primarily white suburban Fairgoers, tediously negotiating the balance between an increasingly segregated urban/suburban landscape and slowly emerging forms of globally pluralistic consumerism, eating familiar Euro-American foods in such a space geared toward international exchange would have gone against the Fair’s theme and the experience of a Fair visit. For the largely suburban Fairgoing public, eating internationally at the Fair offered a means to temporarily engage with racial, cultural and global diversity - that both ethnic studies and counter-culture movements were radically bringing to the forefront of the public imaginary - in a manner that was at once safe, entertaining and driven by the logic of consumer interaction. Such cross-cultural exchanges did not require relinquishing any of the perceived safeties of white suburban living. The white Fairgoers could eat in the Indian Pavilion and pay to temporarily engage with the sensory experiences offered by eating Indian cuisine and watching Indian dance.

304 As I mentioned in earlier portions of this chapter, Black Rights, Ethnic Studies and Third World Liberation movements, that in some regards were later co-opted into forms of “global consumerism” were pushing the cultural productions from immigrant groups and communities of color into the public consciousness of white Americans, even as whites increasingly moved to the suburbs away from these racialized groups, rapidly increasing both suburbanization and segregation.
performances, while neither requiring prolonged engagement with Indian immigrant communities or travel to the Indian subcontinent itself.\textsuperscript{305}

This early form of culinary adventuring, albeit mediated through the logic of the amusement and exhibit space, was not simply a two-season aberration in normative, Eurocentric American eating culture. Rather, the eating at the Fair served as a crucial antecedent and stimulus for the pending globalization of American eating culture, that was not only going to reflect but shape multiculturalism, race relations and constructions of cosmopolitanism in the coming decade. The pavilions and restaurants of the International Area offered suburban whites contextual, limited, segmented, versions of complex regional and national culinary cuisines. This is in part because the international encounters that suburban whites were having at the Fair were among their only exposure to the food and cultures of nations such as Thailand and India. Because of immigration restrictions and the racial/spatial divide of the 1950s and early 1960s, few whites would have encountered a substantial Indian, African or Thai community. Representations of foreign cultures, outside of offensive stereotypical films or television shows, were not commonplace. Simply put, these nations were not a deep part of the American global imaginary. Because the white Fairgoing audience was so unfamiliar with the food being offered, they did not see the nuance, variation, or complex culinary history implicit within the food they were being offered in the international restaurants. Rather the Fairgoing public saw the cuisine being served, and by extension the regional or national culture, as an essentialized, self-contained, uniform, distinct whole.\textsuperscript{306} The cuisine served at the Japanese, Thai, African or Indian

\textsuperscript{305} As we will see in later chapters, global travel predicated on food tourism, to places nations like India, became a key way with which progressive whites actively attempted to gain cosmopolitan status and a globalized cultural capital.

Pavilions was an exotic simulacrum of an entire nation’s culinary culture, that was presented in safety of the Fair.

What such representations did was to take vast and complex cultures and essentialize them into small, consumable, self-contained wholes that were easily digested by suburban whites. For example, the African Pavilion intentioned to represent twenty-six African nations, housed under the continental title. Of course across such a vast geographic area with immeasurable cultural variation, the culinary complexity would be immense. However at the Fair the cuisines of “Africa” were presented in a monolithic way in a single restaurant. Foods from across continent, representing an estimated over 300 million people, were represented in one dining establishment in a way that, while new to white American consumers, was not nuanced or dynamic. Many of the dishes on the African Pavilion Restaurant’s menu were even named after countries, such as Congo or Mozambique, further essentializing culinary variation and exchange by representing the cuisine of an entire nation in a single dish.

This global eating at the Fair set the context for American whites to process the demographic changes of the coming decades by minimizing complex cultures into consumable fragments. Under the logic of liberal multiculturalism, a logic which the international area of the Fair very much represented, group cultural identity was minimized to an essentailized fragment so that it may be marketable and consumable by white Americans. In relation to food, The Japanese came to be represented by sushi, Thai by pad thai, Spanish by tapas and India by tandoori or curry. This essentialization made it easy for whites to negotiate diversity because group identity was not seen as vastly complex, but rather it was a consumable tidbit that whites could easily take in without fear of minimizing their privilege or the centrality of whiteness to American identity. As such, diversity did not need to be something that was feared, because
multicultural eating gave whites the ability to process it in a way that was at worst harmless and at best personally enjoyable. Whites could see diversity as something they could visit, experience and consume, without having to truly incorporate that diversity into their lived daily lives. By presenting diverse and wide-ranging cultures into exhibitions and restaurants, the Fair exuded the notion that it was giving due recognition to different international groups (the very groups which that be immigrating to the U.S. in record numbers in the coming decades), without presenting them in a way that would challenge the predominance of whiteness or the privileged positionality of the white Fairgoer.

The International Pavilions of the 1964 Fair thus become an early examples of what Charles Taylor, Nancy Fraser and others have called the politics of recognition.307 The International Area of the Fair could grant recognition to a foreign nation and their culture by having their culture showcased at the Fair. This recognition alone is a powerful political act, especially in relation to the widespread immigration restriction and racial segregation that was occurring across the country. By including the cuisines and cultures from countries in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean at the Fair, these nations were recognized in an important and powerful way. Without recognizing a social group’s culture, they are further excluded from the American global imaginary, pushed to the margins and considered irrelevant. This politics of recognition challenges status inequality and the remedy it seeks is cultural and symbolic change, which is important. However, recognition alone does not offer any challenges to legal, political or economic inequality and exploitation and in fact can reinforce, rather than transforming, structures of cultural inequality because vast social groups become defined by their essentialized

and stereotyped representations.\textsuperscript{308} The essentialized, segmented and consumable cultural “recognition” that occurred in the International Area of the Fair made diversity something that could be present, tolerated and even at times consumed, without forcing any real accommodation by suburban whites. While widespread demographic changes were pending, and many whites in the North acknowledged that to be true, the politics of recognition on display at the Fair made diversity something that whites could negotiate, acknowledge, and even consume without accommodation or a reduction of their social and cultural predominance.

\textbf{Intersensoriality of the Fair}

For all Fair guests, entering Fairgrounds meant entering a sensuous geography radically different than those surrounding the Fair. The sensory disjuncture was clear the minute visitors entered any of the Fair’s eight gates and heard the chatter of the crowds waiting in long lines, the smell of the Belgium waffles\textsuperscript{309} and, of course, the sight of the Unisphere, undoubtedly the Fair’s most enduring visual image.\textsuperscript{310} Each area, pavilion and exhibit at the Fair offered a vastly different sensory experience, different visual experiences, smellscapes and auditory markers, making the Fair a varied, nuanced, and highly complex sensory and affective space.\textsuperscript{311} Located just to the Northeast of the Unisphere was the expansive International Area, which contained nearly 40 national pavilions and featured the Fair’s most complex and diverse sensory

\textsuperscript{310} Unisphere, a 12-story likeness of the globe, was intended to represent global interdependence and the Fair’s theme of Peace through Understanding. It was dedicated to "Man's Achievements on a Shrinking Globe in an Expanding Universe".
\textsuperscript{311} Journalists, scholars and the general public criticized the lack of a clear visual aesthetic, claiming the Fair lacked a central identity or unified aesthetic.
environment. Nearly every national pavilion featured music and dance performances, art displays, visual nationalistic symbolism and at least one large restaurant.\textsuperscript{312} Referred to by the Fair’s Official Guide as a “global market” the various exhibits of the International Area created a plethora of smellscapes, visual markers, auditory markers and gustatory stimuli emanating from national pavilions, each of which played a central role in defining that nation’s larger sensory perception within the consciousness of the white American Fairgoing public.\textsuperscript{313} Often to market a certain travel experience to American tourists, each national pavilion consciously worked to create an imagined simulacrum centered on a constructed idea of the host nation’s dominant national or regional sensory economy. For example, the Thai Pavilion with its large elaborate red and gold Buddhist shrine, ornate pavilion houses and expansive eight-course Thai buffet, constructed an environment of sensory brightness, excess and overt decadence. The African Pavilion’s sensory experience was defined by the “hard, driving shouting”\textsuperscript{314} of a large Nigerian dance-and-drum troupe and bright imagery of the “high-jumping Watusi warriors,” representing auditory markers of the African diaspora in a distinctly American cultural space.\textsuperscript{315} While the Swiss Pavilion, with its series of “master clocks and watches” and an alpine themed restaurant, “Le Chalet,” serving chocolates and wines never before served in the United States, constructed a sensory space that reflected modern minimalism and emulated the visceral experiences of being in the Swiss Alps.

Eating at the Fair, more so than any other aspect of a Fair visit, provided the white suburban Fairgoers access to multiple cross-racial and cross-cultural sensory experiences, which

\textsuperscript{312} As stated earlier, the International Area alone contained 61 that could serve 9241 diners at any given time, which was more than any other area at the Fair.


operated in accordance with the new turn of these middle-class whites towards diversified and fragmented consumerism. Although the International Pavilions, as exhibit spaces, presented a mediated simulacrum of the eating culture and sensory experience of what white fairgoers considered “alien” cultural productions, the diverse eating culture at the 1964 Fair served as a symbolic vehicle for white diners to accumulate cultural capital through cross-cultural sensory experience. The food scene at the World’s Fair became a space for the white eater to encounter what Martin Manalansan calls sense “out of place,” sensory experiences that do not fit within the perception of a white normative American sensory experience.316 Borrowing from Nirmal Puwar’s concept of “bodies out of place,”317 senses out of place are sensory stimuli (like odors, tastes, visual imagery, etc) that do not fit within the sensory geography of the surrounding environment with to which white Americans are accustomed.318 In increasingly segregated urban/suburban environments, including Flushing Queens in the early 1960s,319 white residents were primarily accustomed to the sensory markers of the middle class to working class, Euro-American life. This included the senses produced when preparing and consuming continental cuisine, which while nuanced (ranging from numerous parts of Europe) was widely known for its frequent use of mildly seasoned starches and large portions of grilled or baked meat and fish.320 The range of tastes and cuisines available to most urban and suburban households during the early 1960s was relatively conservative and, as previously mentioned, very much reflected Euro-American food preferences.

318 Manalansan refers to Indian and other Asian Americans in New York City and the sensory perception of them in regards to the sensory geographies of New York.
319 Today Flushing, Queens is a highly diverse residential neighborhood, including large populations of Asian, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, European, and Black descent.
320 European and Continental foods, the odors that such foods produced, a particular visual aesthetic of the white working class neighborhood, etc.
The sensory economy of the International Pavilion vastly contrasted white normative sensory experience. The visual aesthetics of the vibrant Thai Pavilion, the soundscapes produced by the African Pavilion or sweet and spicy curries of the Indian Pavilion all represented sensory experiences, that according to the logic of white sensory normativity, were “out of place” in a major American city in the mid-century. Despite this fact, the typical white Fairgoer did not avoid cross-cultural and cross-racial sensory experiences. In fact, it was quite the to the contrary. As an oral history of Fair guests has shown, one of the primary reasons for visiting the Fair was to take part in the international exchanges that were taking place, be they cultural or sensory. As a result, Fairgoers often went to the Fair, not to simply eat continental cuisine or American fast food, but rather with the specific intention of eating (and consuming on a sensory level) foods that would otherwise be “out of place.” White eaters did not turn from these cuisines and this international eating culture, but rather actively sought them out. What the Fair provided was a space where these international culinary and sensory exchanges were expected, encouraged and seemingly enjoyable for white Fairgoers. This represents a truly significant moment in the history of American eating culture. For the first time millions of white Americans were eating food produced by foreign peoples of color who were being excluded from the United States by racist and nativist immigration restrictions.

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321 Compiled from numerous Oral History Interviews conducted by John Burdick from December 2013-March 2014.
322 The only notable examples where Americans were eating food produced by foreign people of color in large numbers prior to the 1964 was “Chinese cuisine” in both California and New York as well as “Mexican Cuisine” in the Southwest.
This drive of white progressives to have cross-cultural and cross-racial sensory experiences seemingly runs counter to the increasing segregation and urban/suburban divides that defined New York City in the mid-century. Eating and experiencing new culinary cultures can be enjoyable and offer pleasurable sensory stimuli and affective responses and, especially in the safe and mediated space the Fair, there was also much to be gained by the white eaters. However, white eaters were not simply eating these foreign foods, which in large part were completely unfamiliar, because they found them pleasurable. The cultural and sensory exchange

was much more complex and nuanced. Because of the context of a changing cultural landscape and shift towards multicultural consumption, there was much to gain for white eaters by experiencing these “foreign foods” on a sensory level. The eating culture at the Fair offered white suburban Americans a means to forge liberal multicultural and cosmopolitan subjecthood through sensory experience, namely the taste, smell, and visual aesthetics of the Fair’s international foodscape. This foodscape, rich in international offerings from non-European nations, offered a level of global sensory diversity yet to be experienced by white Americans at any point during the twentieth century. Reflecting the budding multiculturalism of the mid-sixties, especially within the urban North, many Fairgoers imaged the Fair space as a sort of microcosm with which mid-century ideas about transnationalism, global diversity and the other could be experienced in a safe space or “testing ground” where the other could be consumed from a mediated distance through the particulars of the spectator relationship. As one Fairgoer explained years later in an interview, Mary Ann Gentile, Frequent Fair Visitor and Flushing Queens Resident,

It was really overwhelming. To be in one space where there was so many cultures side by side. So much to take in. It was much more segregated. It was fascinating to be able to see so many different people’s cultures on display, especially because I didn’t see them growing up. You didn’t see very much diversity among the visitors of the Fair (it was mostly white and seemingly middle class), but you did get to see many peoples on display at the International Pavilion.³²⁴

For white Fairgoers, the International Area functioned as a sort of multicultural microcosm, a single space that could represent the whole of the multicultural diversity and sensory transformations that would come with the liberalization of immigration restrictions in 1965. White Americans utilized this space, and the sensory experiences achieved within them, to expand their cultural capital and have mediated yet nuanced cross-racial sensory encounters.

White Fairgoers could then call on these sensory experiences in contexts outside of the Fair to express their position of progressive liberalism, but also to exude a sense of affinity with racialized groups, a tactic that would be especially useful in this period of racial turbulence.

**Eating International**

Twenty-eight different national pavilions featured at least one restaurant. This included a restaurant in the United Arab Republic’s Pavilion that featured a motif of “Egypt in ancient times and a cuisine that stresses unusual Egyptian delicacies;” a Jordanian restaurant that served “Jordanian specialties as homas (an appetizer of mashed chick peas mixed with spices and oil, eaten cold), shaурmāh (spiced and barbecued lamb), Arab and Turkish pastries, coffee and wine;” a Mexican restaurant named The Focolare that served “Mexican and international haute cuisine in an elegant atmosphere, including a cocktail lounge featuring south-of-the-border drinks and strolling musicians” a restaurant in the Polynesian Pavilion that featured drinks and fish, chicken and pork dishes are served in a Polynesian style longhouse; and an Indian Pavilion serving Indian dishes that were “soaked in spices” yet, according to Life Magazine, tasted much safer and “tamer than it looks.”

In a Fair that was criticized for being expensive, confusing and lacking dynamic qualities, the International dining scene was both inexpensive, especially in comparison to the fine dining haute restaurants, and almost exhaustingly vibrant. As a review in Life Magazine makes clear, the foods at the International Restaurants were significantly cheaper than foods at the “American” restaurants of the Fair. The review continues with a cautionary warning:

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325 Graves, 1964.
beware of exotic atmospheres for their own sake. Sometimes glamor comes at the expense of the food. For instance, the Caribbean pavilion has a steel band, and the Japanese restaurant has a full-scale floor show. The entertainment in both pavilions is fine, but the food is dull. In some other international pavilions, one native son could love the food.  

Many suburban white Fairgoers had never tried many of the cuisines offered in these restaurants, like falafel in the American-Israeli Pavilion or beef satay in the Malaysian Pavilion’s restaurant, and there was certainly a level of apprehension towards venturing into the culinary unknown. But because of the relatively low cost and a Fair motif that emphasized international cultural exchange, many Fairgoers were animated to dine in the international restaurants.  

Rather than speaking in detail regarding the whole of the culinary options available in the International Area, I will pay particular attention to two pavilions that were among the more popular, but also represented some of the more radical sensory and culinary disjunctures for the white American diner. I will offer a more detailed examination of the Thai and African Pavilions. Examining the cuisine at these pavilions and the reaction to them from white American Fairgoers. In doing so I will pay particular attention to the sensory experiences in these restaurants, especially taste. These restaurants were the first in the United States to serve dishes like pad thai and couscous, respectively, that would later become very common and popular. In examining their introduction to the American eater, I explore the changing nature of taste and I show the shifting and transient nature of taste preferences, especially during the budding multiculturalism of the mid-century. Not only does the hesitant acceptance of these cuisines and new tastes by white American eaters show the early globalization of American taste preferences, it also shows the temporal and fluid nature of taste and all sensory experience more generally.

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328 Graves, 1964.
329 Compiled from numerous Oral History Interviews conducted by John Burdick from December 2013-March 2014.
It is also important to note that the whole of the Pavilion space, not solely the restaurant, contributed to a visceral sensory disjuncture that adds to the white diner’s assumed exoticism and authenticity of the eating experience. Because both pavilions were staged as officially sanctioned exhibits that presented food as part of a collection of artifacts and cultural productions that were deemed by the hosting state to be of historical, cultural or commercial significance, white diners commonly understood the food served in the restaurants as authentic national cuisine, framed within a cultural geography that resembles a museum space. By collecting, preserving, displaying and interpreting certain cultural objects, museums have long played an important role in determining what has social, cultural and historical value. When choosing to eat in a particular international restaurant, diners walked past halls of artifacts, shrines, markets, exhibits and performances that granted importance to certain cultural components over others. By presenting cultural objects in glass display cases with formal plaques or panels, the space had the affect of a authoritative, official, informational space which added a level of credence to what was on display. This set up the meal to be consumed in these spaces as clearly culturally foreign but also as purely authentic with almost museum-like authority. The Fair visitors commonly viewed the restaurants as if they were museums or exhibits that presented a pure, unaltered and authentic cross-section of the dominant cuisine of the home country.\textsuperscript{330} For Fairgoers, the food seemed authentic because the pavilion’s exhibition-style set-up gave the space the aura of authority and credibility. This played into the sense of cosmopolitanness for the white diners, because they were not simply eating food in a foreign restaurant, but they were eating food that was the most authentic representation of that particular nation’s eating culture and sensory economy.

\textsuperscript{330} The same can be said for the Museums of the Epcot Center at Disney World. This claim is based on my Oral History of Fair visitors and their food experiences.
In addition, like the corporations that drove much of the Fair’s landscape, the nations hosting these pavilions were very much participating in the Fair for commercial purposes. Each national pavilion operated with the intention of promoting current or future cultural assets, travel destinations and commercial interests to an audience of global consumers. Especially as the global tourism market expanded in the 1960s, and as jet travel began to be more popular, many nations (especially those pavilions sponsored by trade organizations), organized the pavilion in the hopes of constructing an appealing national brand that would entice visitors to consider their nation when making vacation plans. As such, pavilion organizers were very conscious of how these spaces were constructed and worked to create a national “brand” that could be sold to a global marketplace, a brand with which cuisine was very much at the center. The result was that these international restaurants attempted to serve their “national dishes” to create a unified image of each nation’s food culture (obviously, just as in the United States, all nations have various regional cuisines and dishes and the idea of a dominant national cuisine is a fallacy). Pavilion organizers worked to create a centralized and monolithic sensory experience within the pavilion that could be marketed as part of a coherent and consistent national brand. The idea of a dominant national cuisine that was desirable to white Americans was a significant part of that national brand. This furthered the essentialization that took place on the part of the white diners, and in a complex way allowed them to make assumptions and generalizations about each nation’s “authentic” cultural and sensory makeup, often through the consumption of a single dish. As such, the Fair’s eating culture in many respects served as a microcosm for the impending changes to American eating culture, which would quickly turn towards international

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331 Because it was such a growth industry during this period, international travel also must be understood as one of the ways that white Americans began to exude their cultural cosmopolitanism and global positionality during the midcentury. Much scholarship has been written on this topic including the large body of scholarship on cultural tourism.
influences and the rapid rise of fusion cuisine and the popularity of ethnic food in the years directly following the Fair.

The African Pavilion

Perhaps the most sweeping sensory and culinary disjuncture for the white American diner was the African Pavilion, which for white diners, represented one of the clearest examples of culinary adventuring and anthropological eating on Fairgrounds.332 The African Pavilion, located adjacent to the Unisphere and nearly in the direct center of the entire Fair, consisted of twenty-six round “huts” made of straw, wood and plastic all sitting on a large platform erected on stilts above a water display. These huts were intended to represent the twenty-six nations of sub-Saharan Africa, many of who had recently declared independence from European colonial control and admittedly saw a presence at the Fair as a means to secure a place in the global economy.333 Upon paying the small admission price and entering the Pavilion, visitors were immediately met with a vastly unfamiliar sensory geography. The pavilion presented a radical sensory disjuncture from suburban American life, that included a visual landscape made up of exhibits filled with bright pieces of national and Indigenous African art, several large caged African animals including gorillas, lions, leopards, giraffes, monkeys, baby elephants, huts filled with wild birds (which were directly inside the Pavilion gates) and several performances by

332 Anthropological eating is the idea of eating a cuisine with one of the purposes being to study, gain knowledge of and attempt to understand and experience a different culture, especially when across ethnic or racial lines.
Watusi dancers, the unfamiliar soundscapes of numerous African languages being spoken, the sound of African drumming, and of course the gustatory disjuncture presented by the cuisine at the Pavilion’s large restaurant.

The restaurant, named the “Tree Houses of the African Pavilion,” closely resembled two open-air balconies with covered dining areas that could seat up to 250 guests at any given time. Pavilion organizers served a cross-section of dishes intended to offer a sampling of African cuisine but made appealing to the American palate. Dishes were “Americanized” by removing some spices, altering the texture or adding larger portions of meat or seafood to the dishes, which was perhaps a necessary move on behalf of the Pavilion’s organizers to appeal to a clientele consisting of largely white suburban diners. Despite attempts by restaurant management in the

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334 Watusi dancers (also known as Tutsi) – Ethnic group from the Eastern Africa (Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo) – Victims of mass slaughter in 1994 at the hands of the Hutu during the Rawandan civil war.
African Pavilion to “Americanize” the food, which might appear as a move away from the perceived “authenticity” or “exoticness” of the food served within the “Tree House” restaurant, the dishes offered were still vastly unfamiliar to white American diners and the normative American palate. Fairgoers still largely saw the cuisine of the Tree House Restaurant through an Orientalist lens, as strange, exotic, mystical and authentic. As Life Magazine wrote, this food would truly only “appeal to the adventurous.” Dishes on the menu including cold soups, groundnut soup, curried meats like beef and lamb, chicken moamba “served in peanut sauce and accompanied by spinach, hard-cooked eggs and yams,” and African baked lobster tail. Many dishes were even named after nations or geographic locations in African including Congo - which consisted of peanuts, yams, spinach, chopped avocado, shredded coconut - pilli-pilli and baked banana, Curry Beef of Kenya and the Fruits of Africa salad. The most popular dish at the pavilion, also the one that received the most attention and praise, was couscous, which food critic Craig Claiborne described as “a delectable cereal, steamed semolina with admirable texture that in many minds is superior to rice when served in a savory sauce.” This was one of the first times that couscous was served widely to white American diners who very much favored European continental cuisine and typically consumed starches like potatoes, pasta and bread. Couscous was not only outside of typical food choice, but also outside of the American culinary consciousness, and typical flavor and texture palate. The soft grainy texture of couscous, a staple food of West Africa, was unfamiliar to the American eater, many finding it to be difficult to understand, both visually and texturally, seeing the semolina dish as somewhere between pasta

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338 Compiled from numerous Oral History Interviews conducted by John Burdick from December 2013-March 2014. and a broad review of reviews of the Fair’s restaurants.
Introducing the dish to the American palate was difficult and required much explanation on the part of restaurant staff, describing it as “a North African casserole of meat and cracked wheat” before the dish became one of the more popular at the International Area. However, the vast popularity of this dish at the Africa Pavilion proved not only that diners were eating outside of their comfort zone while on Fairgrounds, but also that they were explicitly seeking dishes foreign to U.S. mainstream taste experience.

The Tree House Restaurant was one of the more popular and financially successful restaurants of its size on Fairgrounds. Although restaurant critics and guests criticized the pavilion for its slow service, many, including Claiborne, praised the restaurant for the quality of its food and reasonable prices. Complete dinners ranged from $4.50-$5.75, which was significantly cheaper than full dinners in some of the Fair’s more elaborate restaurants serving continental cuisine. Even while much of the food was unfamiliar to white diners, because of the Fair’s theme that encouraged international exchange and the reasonable prices white diners were willing to try food that otherwise would be considered far too exotic and strange to eat outside of the Fair setting.

However, the appeal of potentially sampling “exotic” cuisine was certainly not the only attraction at the African Pavilion. The popularity of the African Restaurant was also in no small part because of the entertainment offered. As Life Magazine wrote, “To combine a good time, far and away the best bet is the African Restaurant.” Life Magazine continues, “On the one-side Watusi natives, brandishing spears stomp and shout their way through a ritual dance-but a distance, which permits conversation at the table. On the other side, lions prowl, elephants,

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343 Graves, 1964.
camels and baboon skulk in a fenced enclosure, and from time to time a giraffe drifts over to
give your dinner a wistful and disconcertingly close inspection.” As Phyllis Canter of Rye Brock,
NY vividly recalls of the Pavilion’s multisensory dining and entertainment area, “We were
invited to a party at the African exhibit. When we sat down to dinner on the second floor,
giraffes poked their heads through the windows and we were told we could feed them the
bananas that were on the table. We never expected such fun. You could hear our squeals all over
the fair.”

Many of the cultural, sensory and culinary experiences that white diners were having in
this safari-themed restaurant were perceived as unique. With the exception of travel literature or
television, few suburban white Americans were familiar with the cultural productions of Africa.

344 DeSantis, Alicia, Jon Huang, Matt McCann, Jacky Myint, Dagny Salas, R. Smith, Daniel Victor, Amy Zerb.
Recalling a Vision of the Future: Fairgoers share memories of family outings and moments of inspiration at the 1964
April 20, 2014.
Accessed, May 2014.
Even more so, few white Americans were familiar with the sensory and affective reactions accompanied by encounters with African performances and African cuisine. The combination of outdoor seating, Watusi dancers, “zoo-like” animal exhibits, and Indigenous African décor, represented a complex “safari-like” atmosphere that blended culinary adventuring with the exoticism of tourism, the authenticity of anthropology and the logic of a consumer marketplace.

While the market-driven interactions in the restaurant space surely benefited the proprietors of the restaurant, the power dynamic was clearly much more complex. White diners entered into this restaurant with the clear goal of purchasing a meal, but also to scrutinize the whole spectacle of the dining experience. Not only did this combination of elements create a vastly foreign sensory geography for white Fairgoers, but also while in this space white Fairgoers learned an anthropological gaze, with both the food and the surrounding performances becoming artifacts of constructed authenticity for the white diners to consume. The Watusi dance and drumming performances especially were a large part of the sensory experience of eating in the African Restaurant. Performing during nearly every dining service, their boisterous performers certainly attracted much of the auditory and visual attention of the diner. The dancers themselves certainly had the potential of making economic, political, and cultural gains from performing at the 1964 Fair, including access to a large public forum as well as publically making a challenge to their exclusion from global modernity.346 Certainly, on some level both the dancers and the organizers of the Pavilion achieved this, making both financial and cultural gains from their presence at the Fair. However, the Watusi dancers, by participating in the manufacturing of an authentic African indigeneity and African sensory experience in an amusement space, became a site of a white anthropological gaze and added to the authenticity of

the dining experience predicated on an imperialist nostalgia that craved an authentic, vanishing yet, somehow consumable pre-modern global other. In addition, the dancers and animals in the Pavilion, which for the white diner discursively blurred together as both wild and dangerous, represented a level of perceived vulnerability during the dining experience. For white Fairgoers, this added a level of excitement to the eating at the African restaurant. The white diners literally experienced an affective reaction of fear while eating – fear of the unknown and untamed “darkness” of the African continent. As one Fairgoer Andrea Gilmore explained, “the dancers would perform alongside the table. Animals were everywhere. Even coming right up to your table and poking their head around your food. At first it was intimidating and slightly scary. But after a while you got used to it and it felt more and more comfortable. We went back over and over again to eat there (The African Pavilion).”

This anthropological gaze, which was certainly compromised and negotiated because of its location within the Fair, was not just the lens through which the diners viewed the dancers and artifacts, but most certainly applied to the cuisine as well. White Fairgoers consumed dishes like couscous and curry beef with tourist-like curiosity and an orientalist lens. As Fairgoer Andrea Gilmore explains, “Even though we didn’t have much money, we ate some pretty adventurous foods…I remember as a teenage girl that I had no interest in trying the strange foods in the African Pavilion, but you had to. You didn’t come to the Fair to avoid this stuff. You were there to be adventurous and I was certainly curious about the new dishes that the African restaurant was serving.” Visiting the Fair as a teenage girl, her experience of the African Pavilion was a combination of fear and excitement. It is doubtful that Sub-Saharan Africa would have been a large part of her global imaginary in the mid 1960s and the language she uses to describe this

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event certainly shows that a fear of the unknown would have influenced her perception of the Fair. Her rhetorical use of dancer and animal in a similar context speaks to the American view of Africans as an animalistic and uncivilized people. However, Gilmore expressed that the longer she engaged with the more comfortable she felt. This speaks to how whites were engaging with diversity, moving from a place of anxiety regarding the foreign racialized other, to a place of comfort once the culinary counter occurs. Gilmore also speaks of pressure to try foreign foods while on Fairgrounds. This not only shows just how crucial international exchange was to the Fair experience for white Fairgoers, but also how encountering multiculturalism was moving into the general consciousness of young Americans in the 1960s. Certainly her recollection of them is certainly influenced by collective memory of the Fair including its portrayal in popular culture and the recent upswing in nostalgia for the 1964 Fair (much of which came with the celebration of the Fair’s Fiftieth Anniversary). In addition, as a longtime white American resident of Flushing Queens, resident Gilmore has certainly witness the demographic and multicultural changes in her community and would to some degree be projecting them onto her recollection of the past.349

However, more so than watching the dancers or hearing the animals, eating offered a more intimate level of anthropological engagement. When eating food that diners viewed as an exotic foreign object, which requires a level of perceived bravery to consume, the object of the anthropological gaze is literally consumed into the body. The objects of curiosity and fear are literally put into the body as the dangerous, foreign and exotic African subcontinent can enter into the physical body of the white diner. In consuming African cuisine, white diners found a way to physically engage with what they saw as a pre-modern and vanishing African people

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essentially playing native through food-- while at the same time doing so through a safe and market-mediated interaction. Food changes the anthropological gaze because one makes bodily or ingests the sites with which one is gazing. Eating the cuisine of Africa allowed the white diners to engage with and imagine the life of the African dancers and the people of the African continent, but from a safe distance. One did not have to visit Africa or even speak with the “dangerous” and “exotic” African dancers in order to experience a bit of sub-Saharan Africa. Rather, for the first time in the United States on a large scale, by consuming the food in the Tree House Restaurant, white diners experienced “Africa” in a sensory and visceral way. The animals and performers clearly posed no to risk to the diners because of the physical barriers in the Pavilion, the only risk to the white diner was that the food would potentially be unappealing to normative white American taste. The act of eating was what required the white diners to conquer any affective responses of fear or hesitance. However, in the international context of the Fair, eating foreign was a worthwhile and calculated risk. The risk of consuming food considered noxious to the white palate was far outweighed by the potential pleasures of eating the food and the pleasured derived from sensory and cultural newness or adventurousness. More importantly the potential gain in cultural capital that could be gained by eating in an environment perceived to be so “exotic” “foreign” and even somewhat “dangerous”. Americans found a way to engage with African subjects in a way that was bodily and deeply intimate (as eating always is), playing into a perception of affinity with communities of color that was so desired by white progressive in the mid-century, while not relinquishing any position of privilege or risk any loss of social status. By placing the black bodies of the African dance performers, in a similar context and location as the “Animal Kingdom” the Pavilion frames the African bodies as savage, authentic and wild. Much like the gorillas, lions, leopards, giraffes, monkeys, and elephants that fill cages
around the pavilion, the black bodies are viewed as a savage and potentially dangerous part of Africa’s “heart of darkness.” The restaurant, placement at the center of a “safari-like zoo” framed the food itself as wild and exotic. While the organizers of the African Pavilion and the Treehouse Restaurants were certainly conscious of pavilion design decisions, and made clear choices for both cultural and financial reasons, the food and its unfamiliar tastes, smells and textures became a source of commodified savagery for the white diners to consume. Eating the food, gave the white diners a means to consume the African continent and, figuratively, the black bodies that inhabited it, in a way that was familiar and mediated through the logic of consumerism and the Fair’s grand globalized spectacle.350

The Thai Pavilion

The Thailand Pavilion blended the rapidly growing commercialization of the developing Thai nation with a highly constructed and symbolic vision of an exotic yet triumphant nationalistic history.351 The Pavilion featured a replica of an elaborate eighteenth-century Buddhist temple with a beautiful, ornate, tiered roof typical of Thai shrines. The Pavilion’s main structure was an exact replica of the Mondop of Saraburi, a Buddhist shrine north of Bangkok where a sacred footprint of Buddha is preserved.352 The ornate pavilion, like the Chinese and Austrian Pavilions, was crafted by artisans in Thailand and then delicately assembled on Fairgrounds.353 Unlike many other pavilions in the International Area, the Thai Pavilion did not include any major shows or dance performances. However, because of the 18th Century

350 For more on the figurative and literary consumption of black bodies see Kyla Tompkins: Racial Indigestion.  
351 Samuel, 104. Thailand is the only nation in Southeast Asia never to have been colonized.  
Buddhist shrine with its gilded, tiered and spired roof rising nearly 80 feet, there were typically long lines waiting to get into the Pavilion. Many Fair visitors considered the Thai exhibit to be the most beautiful and most detailed at the Fair. It was certainly among the most photographed.

Surely the Thai government understood the economic and geopolitical justifications for the inclusion of the Pavilion at the Fair. Thailand’s economy was rapidly growing, its tourism industry was the most prominent in Southeast Asia and the United States was becoming a key ally and commercial partner. The Pavilion, which was widely well received and celebrated by both the press and Fairgoers alike for its intricate structures and attention to detail, played an important role in locating Thai culture in the collective consciousness of the general American public, especially in the American northeast where there was not a large Thai population for several decades following the Fair. The Pavilion’s organizers operated consciously and specifically to utilize ornamentation, artifacts and of course food to build cultural and economic bonds between the United States and Thailand, which would increase tourist interest and trade

relations between the two nations. The Pavilion was to some extent even criticized for its overt marketing and clear attempts at merchandising, and the press described the Pavilion as both beautiful and saturated with nationalist marketing and tacky gift shop trinkets.\textsuperscript{355} The ornate Pavilion was designed around a large gift shop that sold cookbooks, jewelry, and teak elephant carvings among other things and forced visitors to engage with the commercial and cultural productions of Thai nationalism prior to exiting the Pavilion. While the elegant surrounding structures and large Temple lured guests with their beauty, its restaurant and gift shop attempted to capture their attention financially. While the general public saw the restaurant and gift shop as marketing gimmicks and tourist excesses, they were largely successful as the Pavilion, in part, contributed to the signing of the 1966 U.S.-Thai Treaty of Amity, which facilitated U.S. and Thai companies' economic access to one another's commercial markets and labor supply.

The Pavilion’s restaurant proved to be one of the most popular at the Fair and worked to spread Thai food to an American audience, certainly contributing to the increasing presence of Thai culture in America’s emerging multicultural landscape and new cosmopolitan global imaginary. As Mark Padoongpatt has argued, Thai food played an important role in the viability and visibility of Thai culture within the United States.\textsuperscript{356} As Padoongpatt highlights, Thais and Thai-Americans (a population that was very small in the 1960s) sought to play on Americans’ liberal multiculturalism and desire for the exotic in efforts to spread Thai culture globally by bringing “Thai cuisine to the world.”\textsuperscript{357} While the earliest known Thai restaurant in the United States was in Denver in 1959, most of early Thai markets and restaurants were in the American

\textsuperscript{355} Samuel, 105.
\textsuperscript{356} Padoongpatt, Tanachai Mark. \textit{Thais That Bind}. 191.
\textsuperscript{357} Padoongpatt. \textit{Thais That Bind}, p. 33.
Southwest (specifically Los Angeles) during the late 1960s. As Padoongpatt has detailed in his critical history of Thai-American foodways, many of these first Thai restaurants were temporary, “small make-shift shops intended to serve a Thai student clientele that planned to return to Thailand upon completing their studies” at American Universities. These early restaurants even had trouble finding Thai ingredients such as curries and kafir lime leaves and were often forced to manipulate Chinese ingredients to simulate Thai flavors. It wasn’t until the late 1970s that there was a major Thai culinary and restaurant scene in North America; Keo’s that opened in Honolulu in 1977 is among the first.

While the restaurant in the Thailand Pavilion at the 1964 Fair may not have been the first Thai restaurant in the United States as it claimed in its advertisements, it was certainly one of the first examples of Thai cuisine being served to large numbers of white Americans, especially on the East Coast. This is significant because not only were large numbers of white American’s exposed to cuisines and flavor combinations decades before this now widely popular cuisine was available throughout the United States, but the Thai government utilized this space as a means to establish a “taste” for Thai food in the broader American public. The Thai organizers of the Pavilion saw “taste” and “flavor” as a way to spread Thai culture to white Americans and firmly implant Thai goods and culture into the American consumer economy. In fact, in keeping with the notion of Thai government’s attempts to expand the reach of Thai culture globally by |

358 It is in fact hard to trace the origins of Thai food in the United States because of the many synonyms used to describe the Thai population, including Thai, Thailand, Siam, Siamese, and Bangkok as well as the lack of clear definitive record of such restaurants because of their usually temporary and make-shift nature. However, the first known references to a Thai restaurant in the United States were in the Denver Post in the early 1960s. Source: “Thai-USA Restaurants. Asian American Cuisine.” Food Timeline. Accessed March 20, 2014. http://www.foodtimeline.org/foodasian.html#thairestaurants
spreading Thai cuisine globally, the restaurant even marketed and sold to American fairgoers a Thai cookbook that featured many of the dishes served in the restaurant.

In part because of the influence of the World Bank, in the early 1960s Thailand emerged as the first country in Southeast Asia to develop a mass tourism industry and began to attract relatively large numbers of Western tourists. The new tourism to the region, coupled with an increasing Cold War American military presence in Thailand, led to an American desire to consume and devour of everything Thai, including consumer goods, women (the sex trade and number of “War-brides” grew rapidly during this period, in part because Thai women were seen as both docile and hypersexualized) and of course Thai cuisine and flavors. By the mid1960s, large numbers of American visitors to Thailand could consume both Thai women and “authentic” Thai food at elaborate and expensive classical Thai dinner and dance shows. During this time, many new ornate restaurants that replicated the late Chakri dynasty opened in Thailand, partially to serve the American military stationed in there during the 1960s Cold War. Visitors to these restaurants would enjoy traditional Thai cuisine while “relaxing on royal silk cushions, and using bronze cutlery and benching (elaborate polychrome pottery).”

Much like with “tiki-themed” restaurants that were popping up throughout the American West when World War II military men craved pseudo-Polynesian food and culture, tourists, military men and visitors to Thailand returned to the United States open to the excitement about the idea of continuing to consume Thai food here in the United States. The Thai restaurant at the 1964 World’s Fair tried to build on this, replicating the elaborate Thai restaurants, offering both indoor and outdoor seating areas and ornately decorated, bright and vibrant dining areas.

The restaurant featured a lavish eight-course buffet serving a wide assortment of hors-d'oeuvres, rices and entrees adapted by chefs to please the American palate, often toning down

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the level of spice or certain flavor combinations. The organization of the menu and flavor combinations, certainly worked to facilitate the cultural exchanges between these two nations and encourage American tourism to the economically developing Thailand.\textsuperscript{362} The Thai restaurant’s buffet offered guests a “proper Thai meal” consisting “of a soup, a curry dish with condiments, a dip with accompanying fish and vegetables”\textsuperscript{363} and included flavors like coriander roots, peppercorns, and garlic (which are often ground together), lemongrass, \textit{nam pla} (fish sauce), and \textit{kapi} (shrimp paste), but with the flavors and range of tastes tuned down in order to not frighten or upset the delicate American taste palate.\textsuperscript{364} These dishes and flavors, like much other Thai food, were prepared to reflect a “harmony of tastes and textures within both individual dishes and the entire meal” but did so in such a way that American’s could easily process and understand them.\textsuperscript{365} Common ingredients and flavors in Thai food, that typically come from garlic, galangal, coriander, cilantro, lemongrass, shallots, pepper, kaffir lime leaves, shrimp paste, fish sauce, and chilies, were present in the dishes prepared for the Pavilion’s buffet, even though many of these ingredients were very difficult to obtain in the United States in the mid-sixties. Fairgoers commented on the smells emanating from the Thai pavilion calling them rich, spicy, vibrant and totally new. The tastes and smells of the Thai restaurant were described much in the same way, as spicy, vibrant, exciting, potentially frightening, yet new.\textsuperscript{366} While these flavors were largely new to the white American Fairgoing public and were immediately met with curious excitement and enthusiasm, with the restaurant proving to be

\textsuperscript{362} Many restaurants in Thailand had already began adopting American staple meals like hot dogs and hamburgers in order to appease the large number of tourists and American military men in Thailand and were very familiar with American consumption and taste preferences.


\textsuperscript{365} Good, 2003.

\textsuperscript{366} Oral Histories conducted by John M Burdick in January/February 2014.
among the most popular at the Fair. However, unlike food at some of the other pavilions, like the Indian restaurant which was described by Life Magazine as offering a menu that was “absolutely unpronounceable” and serving food “soaked in spices” yet tasting far safer and “tamer than it looks,” the food served in the Thai Pavilion was generally well received by Fairgoers and openly embraced. Fairgoers were open to the combinations of Thai flavors, and perhaps because of the visual appeal of the Pavilion space, embraced Thai cuisine openly. Thai food quickly spread beyond the Fairgrounds and in the years immediately following the Fair many Thai cookbooks were published in the United States, including Marie Wilson’s *Siamese Cookery*, which argued to its white readership that Thai food should be praised and be considered a “happy addition to your household.” The flavors and tastes of the Thai Pavilion were not limited to the Fairgrounds and it quickly became popular across the country.

Not only does the popularity of the Thai Pavilion’s restaurant speak to the influence of American cultural and military imperialism on domestic racial politics and food culture, but the quickness of Americans to embrace international flavors, like Thai flavor combinations, speaks to the depth of the turn towards liberal multicultural consumption in the mid-sixties. However, as the Thai Government and Thai business interests worked to market Thai cuisine globally as a way to spread Thai culture, Thai food became a packageable and consumable superficial representation of Thai culture. The widespread marketing of Thai food culture, which the Fair’s restaurant was a very large part of, worked to construct an image of Thai culture as exotic, fiery, vibrant and flavorful, but also monolithic and safe. To borrow a term from Sara Ahmed, as food became the “happy object” - things that when coming into contact with the body can cause the affect of joy or happiness - that symbolized the positive impacts of American multiculturalism in

the decades following the Fair, the Thai community and Asian Americans more broadly continued to face racial violence, cultural stereotyping and physical exclusion.\textsuperscript{369} Surely this widespread marketing of Thai culture and Thai food, which was a central project of the Thai Pavilion, worked to build the visibility of Thailand in the American global imaginary and the viability of Thailand as an American tourist destination. However, by making Thai culture a consumer object, that could be a source of immediate and incremental sensory pleasure, Americans began to see Thai culture (and the women of Thailand) as a commodity for American consumption. Organizers of the Thai Pavilion worked specifically to construct Thai sensory difference as a source of pleasure for white Fairgoers, with well-intended financial, political and cultural intent. However this inadvertently framed Thai sensory difference as a form of fetish that insulated a form of less overt racism, contingent on the “visibility” of distinct sensory and cultural differences. Thai cuisine was gaining popularity in the United States as Americans in the decades to come began to develop a palate for Thai flavor combinations. However, the growth of Thai food did not in large part end the tangible and very pronounced discrimination, segregation and cultural exclusion that was faced by Thai communities as they began to immigrate to the United States in the years immediately following the Fair.

\textbf{Conclusion}

White Americans always understood food as a “happy object” of multiculturalism and separate from the racial violence and dominant racial hierarchy that exists throughout American history.\textsuperscript{370} What we saw during the liberal multiculturalism of the mid-sixties, in no small part a result of the international food scene at the 1964 Fair, was that the collective failure of


\textsuperscript{370} Ahmed, 123.
progressive whites to interact with diverse and global groups was emerging as a source of both communal and individual unhappiness. Progressive whites, especially in the urban North, saw radical challenges being made to the existing racial structures and wanted to find safe and accessible ways to embrace these cultural changes. Failure to do so resulted in progressive whites feeling lost and not keeping up with the changing racial politics of the contemporary moment. As a result, along with direct manipulation of these social movements by corporate elites, American citizens were shifting their consumption patterns to represent these social and cultural transformations, and Americans were purchasing and embracing goods and cultures from around the world. As a result, liberal multiculturalism became entangled with U.S. consumption patterns in the mid-sixties. Prior to the social upheavals and turbulent social changes of the 1960s, many white Americans in the North and South alike found solace in the geographic, cultural and sensory segregation from communities of color. As liberal multiculturalism emerged in the mid-1960s and the Civil Rights and Black Power movements brought radical challenges to structural racism, progressive white Americans in the (sub)urban North began to see their lack of diverse cultural encounters as a source of collective uneasiness. For white Americans, eating internationally represented more than just a preference for new flavors. White Americans began to see interacting on both a cultural and sensory level with global communities of color to redirect their collective uneasiness and found a measured form of joy and pride in these forms of cross-cultural encounters.

The 1964 World's Fair capitalized on this and openly embraced and promoted the emerging American cosmopolitanism, especially in its food scene and multinational sensory geography. The World's Fair was a perfect testing ground for these sorts of encounters. As Sara Ahmed argues the “shift from unhappy diversity to happy diversity” always “demands
interaction” and that progressive whites utilized these cross-racial interactions that occurred on Fairgrounds to express their new cosmopolitanism. At the World’s Fair and in the urban North more broadly, the embrace of multiculturalism became “attributed as a positive value through the alignment of a story of individual happiness with the collective social good” of equality. The sensory and cultural interactions that took place at the 1964 Fair certainly made white Americans more accepting of foreign cultures, especially people of color. This undoubtedly had an impact on the passing of the 1965 Immigration Act; which removed the racist national quota system that restricted immigration from India, Africa, East Asia, and the Middle East; from many of the very nations that sponsored Pavilions at the 1964 Fair. However, in a highly symbolic space like the World’s Fair, these sensory and cultural interactions surrounding food were increasingly regulated and conditional, with the power dynamics of these regulated encounters continually shifting between whites and foreign groups, yet still replicating the power of whiteness. The food served at the International pavilions offered white Americans an entry into many foreign cultures – often making foreign peoples of color visible to the U.S. citizen. However, the packed and highly contextual interactions centered on food made the food a single commodified cultural object that could be consumed while issues regarding immigration rights, racial violence, poverty, labor rights and segregation raged throughout much of the country. While much is gained for the organizers of the International Pavilions and their respective restaurants, such as financial gains, introductions to new foreign markets and increased tourist interest, white Fairgoers gained a great deal of cultural capital and sensory pleasure from their culinary adventures at the Fair.

This was certainly the case at the Fair, but there is also a great deal lost in these exchanges. The affective and risqué sensory pleasures derived from eating, be it couscous in the

371 Ahmed, p. 123.
African Pavilion or curried meats in the Indian Pavilion, encouraged white diners to forget histories of violence, oppression, colonization and racial tension that were often correlated to these racialized and foreign communities. As Lisa Lowe argues, this collective forgetting, that sensory pleasure exacerbates the concentration of capital within a homogeneous elite class and separates it from an increasingly racialized, immigrant and heterogeneous working class.”

As Lowe continues, “multiculturalism registers the pressures that increasing numbers of immigrant, racial and ethnic bring to cultural spheres; these pressures are expressed only partially and inadequately” as either cultural, aesthetic or sensory representation. “The production of multiculturalism instead diffuses the demands of material differentiation through the hominization, aestheticization and incorporation of signifiers or ethnic difference.”

Multiculturalism, even sensory multiculturalism, levels important differences along and within different racial and ethnic groups according to the “discourse of pluralism, which asserts that American culture is a democratic terrain to which every constituency and group has equal access and representation, while simultaneously masking the existence of exclusion by recuperating conflict and otherness through the promise of inclusion.”

**From Fair Food to Street Food: The Emergence of Liberal Multiculturalism and Cosmopolitan Whiteness**

The 1964/1965 World’s Fair helped set the stage for the emergence of cosmopolitan whiteness in the coming decades. The Fair introduced millions of suburban Americans to global cultures and expanded the global culinary imaginary of suburban white Americans in a safe, controlled, consumer driven environment. The restaurants of the Fair made it easy, safe and fun

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373 Lowe, p. 86.
for white Americans to cross ethnic, racial and national bounds and encounter cultures that most suburban Americans simply had never come in contact with. In making encounters with foreign cultures so consumable and acceptable, the internationalism of the 1964 Fair helped usher in the transition from racial liberalism, a racial logic in which legal structures were challenged to grant rights to communities of color by linking antiracism to the expansion of the United States in the global economy, to liberal multiculturalism, a racial logic in which members of minoritized ethnic and racial groups we able maintain their distinctive collective identities and whites were encouraged to embrace an emergent American cultural pluralism. The global diversity of the 1964 Fair, and the racialized market segmentation that followed, began to give rise to a racial system in which different ethnic and racial bodies were inscribed with social and cultural value or valuelessness within the capitalist system. Liberal multiculturalism and the racial system that emerged because of the valuation and recognition of different social groups did not fundamentally reduce the power of white supremacy, but rather create a system in which “repertoires of interpretation, representation, evaluation and description” of global diversity that were coded into the very fabric of white supremacy’s operations. As Lowe argues,

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multiculturalism is central to the maintenance of a consensus that permits the present hegemony, a hegemony that relies on a premature reconciliation of contradiction and persistent distractions away from the historically established incommensurability of the economic, political, and cultural spheres… In this sense, the production of multiculturalism at once "forgets" history and, in this forgetting, exacerbates a contradiction between the concentration of capital within a dominant class group and the unattended conditions of a working class increasingly made up of heterogeneous immigrant, racial, and ethnic groups.374
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374 Lowe, 86.

The cultural pluralism of liberal multiculturalism, showcased at in its early stages at 1964 Fair, did not fundamentally challenge white supremacy for two crucial reasons. One, because of how corporate American coopted this pluralism through market segmentation. And two, because
of the ways in which whites found the ability to negotiate this multiculturalism through appropriation and the utilization of cross-racial encounters, which eventually would emerge as a means for whites to boost their own global elitism. Rather, this emergent liberal multiculturalism that the Fair helped usher in, hid white privilege in new racialized rhetoric, including language of reform, colorblindness, postracial and diversity to explain away the vast inequalities of a highly racialized cultural and economic system.\textsuperscript{375} Within the liberal multiculturalism brought forth by the Fair, new forms of racial privilege slowly began to emerge, including liberal, multicultural, global citizen and cosmopolitan where whites were encouraged to encounter diversity as a means to express their progressive ideologies and flexible globalism. Along these new forms of privilege came “new forms of racial stigmatization” including “unpatriotic, monocultural, illegal,” which positioned subjects as the antithesis of worldly and thus at the bottom of the global social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{376} With this racial shift to liberal multiculturalism, being able to encounter a vast array of ethnic and racial diversity, in part through the ability to move geographically movement, became a key means through which individuals could express their cosmopolitan privilege. The inability to experience such global cultural diversity meant one was a throwaway of globalization and exiting in a state of monocultureness that was outside of the bounds of what was deemed culturally and socially valuable. The 1964 Fair was crucial in this transition because it gave white Americans a means to test these new cosmopolitan identities in the safe environment of the Fair, where cross-ethnic, cross-racial and global encounters, especially through food, would pose no risk to the white privilege that was reinforced a decade earlier through white flight, suburbanization and the racial/spatial divine of the Urban North.

\textsuperscript{375} Melamed, 9.
\textsuperscript{376} Melamed, 2.
While the Fair offered a fledgling example of liberal multiculturalism at its most early stages, the next two chapters moves forward thirty years and presents a distinct example of liberal multiculturalism fully formed. The next two chapters move out of the safety and sterilized environment of the fairgrounds and explores the dynamics of liberal multiculturalism and whiteness in a complex, fluid, multi-ethnic urban landscape. Rather than the slow and cautious embrace of liberal multiculturalism in the 1960s, we see the full vehement embrace of liberal multiculturalism by progressive whites by the late 1990 and early 2000s. Rather than traveling to a safe amusement space to experience diversity and have cross-ethnic global encounters, we see an example of whites seeking out such experiences in a complex urban and public setting, that of Sunset Park, Mexico. By the 1990s and early 2000s, no longer could whites simply adopt a pluralist worldview by visiting the Fair or by buying corporate versions of ethnic food, rather to be truly progressive, cosmopolitan and global, whites are required to seek out what they imagined to be authentic culinary and cultural experiences by travel across urban space, breaking the racial/spatial divide and enter into a wholly foreign sensory geography. While my primarily exploration of Sunset Park takes place in the late 1990s through the present, this neighborhoods was deeply impacted throughout the second half of the twentieth century by white flight, waves of immigration made possible by the 1965 Immigration reforms and is now facing another transition at the hands of progressive whites who are seeing the neighborhood as the perfect places to eat ethnically and express their cosmopolitan elitism. In particular, the encounters with the Mexican community had a very particular social and cultural value for the whites that entered that community to eat. In jumping forward to the cross-racial eating in Sunset Park, we see an example of liberal and neoliberal multiculturalism fully realized and we see the articulation of this new form of cosmopolitan whiteness, not in its fledgling stages like it was at the 1964 Fair,
but rather in full swing in the complex multi-ethnic and rapidly changing urban space of Sunset Park, Brooklyn.
Chapter 3

The Making of a Multi-Ethnic Foodscape: Sunset Park, Mexican Cuisine and an Urban Sensory Geography

Introduction

“Foreigners have always fed Americans and Americans have eaten it up.”

-Krishnendu Ray

Sunset Park came into the collective culinary consciousness of the city’s white foodie elite shortly after a burst of food journalism in the early 2000s highlighted Sunset Park as New York’s premier location for authentic Mexican cuisine. Shortly after, Sunset Park’s Mexican neighborhood became the destination of choice for large numbers of progressive, young, urban in search of the most “exotic,” “authentic” and therefore “best” Mexican cuisine New York has to offer. Since the early 2000s large groups of New York’s progressive whites have begun taking “taco tours” of Sunset Park, traveling from taquería to taquería in the Mexican immigrant community surrounding Fifth Avenue, known as Brooklyn’s “Little Mexico”. The urban mobility of progressive middle-class whites, specifically their ability to cross spatial and racial divides for the purpose of consuming “ethnic food,” has become fundamental to the articulation of whiteness and privilege within the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Now, progressive whites are increasingly turning to encounters with communities of color, enacted through travel and eating, as a means to express progressive middle-class subjectivity and an enlightened position of global cosmopolitanism. Through a critical reading of “foodie”


378 Cosmopolitanism, broadly defined as an openness to and willingness to engage with cultural Others.
literature, an oral history of Mexican restaurant employees and ethnographic research in Sunset Park, I consider the impact of these culinary excursions on Sunset Park, both on this new formation of cosmopolitan whiteness and on the Mexican community of Sunset Park. I ask key questions about how food and race intersect in ways that are at once cultural, biological and spatial; specifically, in what ways has the desire of whites to pursue ethnic food reshaping the multiethnic dimensions of urban America? I do this by dividing the next section of the dissertation into two interrelated chapters. Chapter three will examine the multiethnic history of Sunset Park, the complex immigrant and ethnic makeup of this diverse community and the history of Mexican food in relation to Sunset Park. Chapter four will examine the urban history of food, eating, migration and the production of “whiteness” in relation to culinary slumming in Sunset Park.

Acknowledging that no urban space is static, but rather is constantly being transformed by a series of mobile actors, Sunset Park provides an ideal context for studying early twenty-first century formations of white urban cosmopolitanism, immigrant transnationalism and the symbiotic relationships that exist between the two. First, the racial transformations of Sunset Park throughout the twentieth century - from a white ethnic enclave to racialized immigrant enclave, to a contemporary site of renewed interest for progressive whites – very much reflects a cycle of white flight and urban redevelopment that is occurring in major metropolises across the United States. The unique racial mix of Latinos, Asians, Blacks and whites that currently occupy Sunset Park show how racial identities are being remade in such urban spaces that are undergoing transition.

Second, as I have argued, progressive whites have utilized eating to articulate their cosmopolitan identity. Because eating is central to what has initially attracted progressive whites
to Sunset Park in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, eating in Sunset Park’s restaurants becomes one of the key ways by which whites are engaging with immigrant communities. As such, the complex culinary landscapes within the Mexican American immigrant community of Sunset Park becomes the perfect local to examine how eating is woven into the physical, racial and sensory fabric of an ever-fluid urban place.

Third, because when examining the contemporary influx of progressive whites and the resulting displacement of immigrants of color, Sunset Park functions as an ideal site to examine how conflicts over food, authenticity and sensory geography can alter both racial identity and urban space. The production of cosmopolitan whiteness is very much predicated on encounters with racialized immigrant groups, which often results in the subsequent displacement of those groups and the gentrification of their communities. The neighborhood of Sunset Park serves both as the central locale of this chapter but also as a “laboratory” in which to examine how urban food mobility reshapes the sensory, affective and gustatory experiences of urban space. It should be noted that while Sunset Park is truly a diverse neighborhood that contains various large East Asian communities, Latin American communities - in particular from Puerto Rico, and a growing South Asian population - the vast majority of the focus here is on Sunset Park’s Mexican community. This is not to downplay the inherent cultural complexity or to underestimate how much such immigrant groups interact with each other in fluid urban spaces. As Robyn Longhurst and Lynda Johnson explain, “When migrants arrive at a new place their bodies are disciplined in new ways and open to new possibilities, including through food and eating. This involves complex interactions not just with the “host” community, but also with
communities of other migrants.”\textsuperscript{379} I emphasize these communities in this examination to allow a deep analysis of the impact of cross-racial eating on a particular community that is currently facing the forceful wrath of gentrification sparked, in part, by culinary interloping.

I turn to three main types of source materials that are both innovative and seldom explored in cultural studies but that will allow me to address both the complex history of Sunset Park and the role of food within it: oral histories conducted with people associated with Sunset Park’s culinary community (customers, restaurant owners, chefs, cooks, front of house staff); critical analyses of numerous types of culinary journalism, food blogging and culinary ephemera (newspapers, restaurant reviews, blogs, periodicals, restaurant menus, social media, online reviews) related to whites eating in Sunset Park; and a sensory ethnography of Sunset Park (restaurants, taco trucks, bodegas but also streets, parks and other public urban spaces). Together, these diverse sources suggest that eating in Sunset Park is not an isolated practice, but rather part of a larger process of urban and racial transformation in Brooklyn. I use a substantial oral history of restaurant employees, restaurant owners and Sunset Park diners to examine the food scene in Sunset Park and the complex changes that are brought on by large numbers of white diners entering into dining establishments that typically serve a Mexican and Mexican American community. The oral histories that I collected of Sunset Park’s culinary scene, which I examine alongside the Brooklyn Historical Society’s Sunset Park Oral History Project’s own collection, provide evidence of the food history and immigrant experience of the last 50 years in Sunset Park.

Food journalism, in turn, provides insight into how whites collectively understand their experiences while eating in an immigrant community. By taking culinary blogging and food

journalism seriously as primary source documents, through close readings, critical analyses and recapitulation of their arguments, I can examine how such culinary encounters and sensory experiences are articulated in personal, social and public spheres and truly understand how whites are presenting these culinary experiences to the larger world. Food blogs are especially important in my analysis because they show how the racial implications of culinary slumming become at once replicable, rhetorical, performative and public.

I combine these approaches with a prolonged period of ethnographic research, utilizing the technique of sensory ethnography, in Sunset Park. Sensory ethnography is a type of direct and engaged observation of lived daily life that is not only reflexive and informed by the researcher’s own positionality but allows the sensory experiences of the place to be embodied, and incorporates an observational approach that encompasses all of the senses (including smell and taste) in concert. Sensory ethnography is informed by an understanding of the interconnected and fluid nature of all sensory experience and avoids a prefacing of sight in all cultural observation. This sensory ethnography of Sunset Park not only involved engagement with the community, but also the lived sensory experiences of place, including tasting the food, smelling the olfactory stimuli and listening to the sounds of the street. I employ the methods of sensory ethnography, that of moving from participant observation to multisensory participation, by spending a great deal of personal time in Sunset Park, which includes embodied activities such as walking through and eating in Sunset Park, and speaking with and living beside Sunset Park’s residents for a period in 2014 and then subsequent visits for academic and personal reasons. This prolonged engagement with Sunset Park has allowed me a “serendipitous sensory learning” of space or what Sarah Pink calls, becoming a “sensory apprentice” which is the daily and subtle

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381 Pink, 2009.
learning through the ubiquitous sensory experience of space. In employing this approach, my close embodied engagement with the community allows me to go beyond mere visual observations and to theorize on the ways that the sensual geography of Sunset Park is experienced by sensate bodies either living in or traveling through the community. This is especially important because eating and travel are both sensory experiences that require all senses to work in concert and function as interwoven. Finally, by doing sensory ethnography in juxtaposition with oral histories and food blogs, I explore how bodily experience and oral/written rhetoric inform one another and are never produced in complete isolation.

In researching the eating practices in Sunset Park, this chapter employs a critical eating studies framework and focuses on the multifaceted implications of the bodily ingestion of food. Using “critical eating studies” as a methodological framework, I build off the call by Sharon P. Holland, Marcia Ochoa and Kyla Wazana Tompkins to develop a method of inquiry in food studies that puts questions of “racial, biological and historical into tight relation with one another” and explore the ways by which the sensory experiences of eating – taste, smell, sight, touch, sound in concert - mark diaspora, race and transnationality on mobile urban bodies. In doing so, I concentrate on how an influx of middle-class progressive whites into Sunset Park causes a shift in sensory and affective experiences of place and allows for a reification and modification of the operation of white privilege while simultaneously altering the transnational lives and the community affinity of Sunset Park’s immigrant populations. The immigrant urbanization and economic globalization of Sunset Park since the 1990s has created a

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382 Pink, 2009.
transnational neighborhood with distinct affective and sensory responses, which has fostered a settled sense of place for Mexican immigrants, despite the community’s economic and racial stratification. The relatively more transitory group of white taco tourists, driven by a sense of neoliberal mobility, disrupt the Mexican sensory affinity toward Sunset Park by altering the sense of sensory familiarity that Mexican immigrants feel towards this place. Regardless of the intentionality of the culinary slumming - voyeuristic and exploratory excursions by whites into informal dining spaces of racialized ethnic urban communities in efforts to achieve what is perceived as an authentic, peculiar, exotic and even sometimes dangerous, eating experience - their very presence as a middle class, white, urban, progressive unsettles the sensory and affective – the embodied - associations that the immigrant community feels towards this space.

As such, this section (chapters three and four) addresses the impact of the culinary slumming of progressive whites into Sunset Park from two interrelated analytical points that both examine how eating in Sunset Park became a site of contestation over a racialized urban identity. First, I examine the cultural, racial and sensory implications of white Americans traveling from across New York to Sunset Park for the purpose of eating Mexican cuisine. The opening two chapters map the rising popularity of “eating ethnically” in the second half of the twentieth century and in so doing break down the problematic nature of this construction of ethnic or foreign eating. This chapter moves forward chronologically and asks what new identity formations, and in particular what new forms of racial privilege, emerge through these everyday yet relatively new forms of culinary encounter. Using culinary slumming into Sunset Park as a case study, I ask how these cross-cultural exchanges impact race and cultural privilege in the United States, especially when such cross-racial eating is increasingly subject to discourses of
authenticity, exoticization, and neoliberal articulations of the global other. In doing so, I also ask the following questions: Why does this cross-racial eating occur? What draws whites toward the Mexican cuisine in Sunset Park? What does this say about contemporary multiculturalism? And, most importantly, what does eating mean in relation to contemporary constructions of whiteness? 

This chapter focuses on progressive, middle class, urban, young whites for several reasons. First, this group is often at the vanguard of both culinary slumming and gentrification, processes which are very much in correlation with one another. Second, these groups of young progressive whites, millennials in particular, are among the first to embrace a neoliberal brand of identity politics, by claiming a “post-racial” positionality that is largely predicated on cross-cultural consumerism and the fundamental belief that a more open consumer market can bring more social equality (while actually resulting in the “weakening of unions, the decline of real wages, the increasing precarity of work,” and widespread poverty, especially amongst communities of color). This group of progressive whites is defining their very identities primarily through their open embrace of the cultural productions of communities of color (music, spirituality, clothing, food). As such, it is of importance to explore how this group is utilizing a new articulation of whiteness that requires the presence of communities of color for its very formation and is predicated on neoliberal actors – whites of economic, social and geographic

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387 Unlike most explorations of cross-cultural food tourism that try and theorize it after it occurs but rarely trace the origins of the act. Also, such explorations typically stop short of making a claim regarding the association between whiteness and the pursuit of culinary authenticity.
388 Fraser, 2017.
389 This analysis of progressive cosmopolitan whiteness is especially important in the President Trump era. As crucial as it is to understand the Trump election as fundamentally tied to more traditional forms of white supremacy (as punctuated by the growth of the “alt-right”), Trump’s election must also be seen the politically conservative rejection of progressive neoliberalism, defined by Nancy Fraser as “an alliance of new social movements (feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism and LGBTQ rights), on the one side, and high-end “symbolic” and service-based business sectors (Wall Street, Silicon Valley and Hollywood), on the other.”
privilege - having temporary sensory encounters with communities of color. “The Mexican Other, real or imaginary, has played a significant role in the fashioning of white identity and U.S. expansion since at least the early nineteenth century” and like the work of Lee Bebout, this project examines how Anglo-American renderings of the Mexican Other construct whiteness, here specifically a kind of globalized neoliberal whiteness. Also, by exploring whiteness through the cultural representation of Mexican Americans, the examination of whiteness is pushed beyond a common reliance within whiteness studies on an examination of whiteness strictly through a black/white binary.

By centering on the bodily and sensory dimensions of these culinary excursions into Sunset Park, I argue that urban whites have utilized eating ethnic food as a bodily means to digest the racial complexity of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the multifarious visceral dimensions of a multicultural urban life, thus remaking the dining experience into a highly racialized exchange. Eating has become a sensory means through which white Americans are articulating cosmopolitan whiteness while simultaneously negotiating the sensory complexities and new racial opacities of neoliberal multiculturalism. I label this globalized form of white subjectivity, “cosmopolitan whiteness” and argue that it is an epochal shift in the very formation of contemporary progressive white privilege that began in the 1960s but was fully articulated in the late 1990s. I define cosmopolitan whiteness as a form of racial and classed privilege, emerging during the neoliberal multiculturalism period (2000s-present), that middle-class whites articulate through the deployment of a repertoire of socially evocable cultural resources gained through sensory and affective contact with non-white groups, and replicated through a public claiming of a transcultural “post-racial” positionality in public channels (like social settings and digital media). As opposed to articulating white privilege through a
geographic separation and sensory distinction from communities of color, which during decades of white flight was typically how whites articulated their racial privilege, I argue that in being predicated on conditional, highly contextual, ephemeral, sensory encounters with communities of color (i.e. eating in a restaurant) cosmopolitan whiteness is a fundamental shift in the construction of white privilege that has reshaped the way in which privilege operates in complex transnational multiracial contexts.

Second, by locating this examination in an urban enclave undergoing a rapid transition, this chapter examines the implications that lie beyond the touristic pleasures associated with cross-cultural eating. Of course, these food-centered cross-racial encounters are not unidirectional and monolithic. The large numbers of white New Yorkers traveling to eat Mexican cuisine have also had profound impacts on the established, though due to of their immigrant and racialized status perpetually precarious, Mexican community in Sunset Park. This relatively recent influx of whites has impacted many dimensions of immigrant life in Sunset Park, including gentrification and the viability of Sunset Park as a Mexican community, the community’s ability to build a space of transnational diasporic belonging within urban New York, and the long-term economic stability of these immigrant entrepreneurs and restaurant owners. As such, this project puts these two communities in tension with one another as I examine the impacts of these cross-racial encounters on both the progressive whites and on communities with which they are traveling to dine: the Mexican Community in Sunset Park. In doing so, I examine how both the progressive white and Mexican communities define themselves through food, although in paradoxical ways – whites as mobile, using ethnic eating to express a progressive, global and cosmopolitan positionality and the Mexican community as settled, using eating to establish a sense of domestic belonging and diasporic imaginary within a fluid
multiethnic urban space. I argue that the influx of progressive whites into Sunset Park is creating a nuanced, tempestuous and at times codependent relationship between progressive whites and the immigrant groups that have come to define Sunset Park’s culinary landscape.

While other research often does not consider the impact that racialized food consumption and culinary tourism has on Mexican immigrants communities, I consider the impact of this influx of white eaters on the maintenance of an evident sensorially defined Mexican/Mexican American diasporic community and the creation of Sunset Park as a safe space within greater New York where Mexican immigrants can feel at “home.” The relationship between ‘home’ and ‘food’ is an essential one and the production and consumption of food is one of the key ways in which immigrant groups replicate the sensory and affective feelings of “home” while in the United States. As such, I address the impact of this influx of white eaters on the lives of Mexican immigrants, in particular the sensory experiences of diaspora within Sunset Park and the relationship between culinary slumming, eating and gentrification. In doing so, I argue that Sunset Park is facing a sensory remaking that impacts the Mexican community’s positive affective feelings of being “home” and examine the everyday, creative and radical ways that the Mexican community is able to maintain community affinity despite the pending neighborhood transformations.

I take seriously the role of mobility (as well as immobility), as it relates to food, asking several key questions regarding the relationship between food and the looming gentrification of Sunset Park. What is the role of urban food mobility (bodies on the move in search of eating) on

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390 This is often an unfortunate consequence of many of the critical examinations of the white pursuit of ethnic authenticity. In order to understand the complex implications of culinary tourism on whiteness, scholars such as Josee Johnston and Shyon Baumann have often failed to fully address how such acts impact the community with which the “foodies” are entering. Johnston, Josee and Shyon Baumann. Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape. New York: Routledge, 2009.

gentrification in a place like Sunset Park, which The New York Times recently referred to as being on the “verge of being trendy” and is currently undergoing a rapid transformation from immigrant community towards an expensive, “hipster” neighborhood full of late night dance parties, expensive cafes, upscale flea markets, artisanal food events and skyrocketing rent prices.

By examining the process of eating or “devouring” as my site of critical analysis, I merge the study of urban foodways with work done in affect and bodily theory in order to ask several key questions about the sensory terrain in which gentrification takes place: What is the relationship between sensate bodies and the devouring logic of gentrification? Why does a proximity to multicultural sensory diversity elicit positive affective responses for white liberal subjects and how do such affects speak to new forms of multicultural privilege? How do these sensory changes impact the lives of Sunset Park’s immigrant communities (or, to quote Holland, Ochoa, and Tompkins, “what gut feelings are produced by” forms of “colonial evisceration” and how do those feelings linger – how does a taste remain in one’s mouth – during contemporary gentrification? How does immigrants’ loss of sensory familiarity result in a shift in the affective reactions to an urban space? Does this loss change Sunset Park from being a site of positive affective reactions - happiness, joy, love, longing, belonging - to a site of negative affective reactions - those of pain, trauma, misery, and loss - for the immigrant bodies that have driven Sunset Park’s social, cultural and sensory life for over two decades? How does food create a liminal space between that of the warmth of home and the chaos of an unfamiliar outside world for Mexican migrants? Finally, how can public displays of joy, especially those focused on

392 Hughes, C.J. “Sunset Park, Brooklyn: Not Quite Trendy.” New York Times. January 20, 2016. http://nyti.ms/1Ub4NJk. Accessed Feb 1st, 2016. This speaks a great deal to the publications ability to create trends, both in the food world and beyond. If the NYT labels a neighborhood “trendy” there is a direct correlation to an increase of rent and real estate prices in that neighborhood. This was the case with the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Crown Heights and BedStuy [spell this out?] in recent years.

393 Holland, Ochoa and Tompkins.
eating (in restaurants, on the street, at festivals) be an affective way for ethnic groups to forge bodily forms of resistance to the violence and expurgation that gentrification entails? In all, these sensory experiences of eating in Sunset Park map the context of a hemispheric transnational modernity and neoliberal multiculturalism as they play out across urban spaces and bodies that interact with food.

It should also be noted the examinations of Mexican cuisine in this chapter make a historical intervention into mainstream food writing. While there have been several texts that explore the spread and subsequent importance of Mexican cuisine in the United States, including the important work of Jeffery Pilcher and Gustavo Arellano, these texts mainly focus on the growth of Mexican and “Tex-Mex” in the American Southwest, but do not specifically examine the growing popularity and prominence of Mexican cuisine in the American Northeast. This chapter, in examining culinary slumming and identity in Sunset Park, fills that void.

**Literature Review of Cross-Racial and Cross-Ethnic Eating**

While this chapter is very much grounded in the specifics of place and is focused on the history, future and changing culinary landscape of Sunset Park, it should be noted that I use the term “culinary slumming” to make a specific intervention into contemporary food studies scholarship. Most food studies scholarship over the last decade interprets these changes in American eating culture as being part and parcel of the dominant narrative of cultural pluralism - a story of immigrant groups bringing new tastes and new cuisines that enrich the benign plurality of American culinary culture. Donna R. Gabaccia, Harvey Levenstein, and Richard Pillsbury, have written formative texts in food studies. They have traced the emergence and evolution of

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American ethnic food at large and examined the changes to American eating culture that came with an influx of foreign foods. Much of this work, particularly Gabaccia’s, promotes a liberal multiculturalist view of U.S. society and American eating culture, which I find to be highly problematic. The political thrust of this scholarship purports a pluralistic and welcoming narrative of American food history where new immigrant groups bring in new tastes and new eating cultures that simply add to and enrich the diversity of American culinary culture. The issues most central to this scholarship are assimilation, acculturation and the ways by which ethnic groups maintain their unique and “authentic” culinary traditions and identities while finding a niche within the cultural pluralism that is American food culture. For example, Gabaccia implies that the rise in ethnic food consumption by white consumers proves their openness to other cultures and is proof of the successes of liberal multiculturalism and even hints to the emergence of a post-racial America.

Numerous other scholars have offered examinations that have focused, in part, on the positive consequences of our global multi-ethnic palate which include the acceptance of ethnic minorities into mainstream society, the creation of economic enclaves for immigrants who establish and work in ethnic restaurants, and the function of ethnic restaurants as social sites for immigrant cultural solidarity, ethnic bonding or diasporic nostalgia. Writing in response to bell hooks, Ian Cook for example, offers a nuanced and valuable reading of these acts, arguing that cross cultural eating can “act as a critical intervention challenging or subverting racial domination” because not only can they create new cross racial and cross cultural understandings, but also because such acts can provide economic and cultural opportunities for members of

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395 Donna R. Gabaccia, We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans, Harvey Levenstein, Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet, Richard Pillsbury, No Foreign Food: The American Diet in Time and Place.

396 Gabaccia. We Are What We Eat.
“diverse ethnic/racial groups whose histories and experiences were once seen as worthy only of
disdain to be looked upon with awe” and that food can offer communities of color and immigrant
groups the “promise of recognition and reconciliation.” 397 Lucy Long argues that culinary
tourism “offers a deeper, more integrated level of experiencing an Other” because it brings two
cultures together in bodily and sensory ways through the use of “the senses of taste, smell, touch
and vision.” Uma Narayan, in some respects, shares Long’s belief. “Gustatory relish for the food
of ‘Others,’” says Narayan, that “may help contribute to an appreciation of their presence in [a]
national community” outside their native country. Amy Bentley has argued that Mexican food in
the Southwest helps transform the “exotic” to “familiar” and the “inedible to edible,” which she
argues can be an important transformation in race relations and immigration policies with
Mexico “given that not too long ago Texas Anglos considered Mexican food unfit for human
consumption.” 398 Sylvia Ferrero sees ethnic restaurants as having a “dual-life,” as both sites that
can transcend ethnic differences amongst multiracial subjects and as spaces that can foster ethnic
cultural resistance despite the cultural hijacking of their culture. 399 Such scholarship shows that
the relationship between eating across cultures and ethnic resistance, belonging and racialization
is highly complex, highlighting the ways that some forms of cross-racial eating can and do
produce important and potentially new understandings of immigrant groups and radical
transracial solidarities.

Some forms of cross-racial eating can and do produce important and potentially new
understandings of immigrant groups and radical transracial political solidarities (especially when

397 Cook, 821.
398 Bentley, Amy. “From Culinary Other to Mainstream America: Meanings and Uses of Southwestern Cuisine.” in
Long, Lucy. Culinary Tourism.
399 Ferraro, Sylvia. “Comida Sin Par. Consumption of Mexican Food in Los Angeles. Foodscape in Transnational
it is done with best attempts not to fetishize or commercialize it), as one of the clearest ways to change racial stigmas is through positive and personal intergroup contact, leading to a replacement of feelings of fear and anxiety with those of empathy, connection and respect. Indeed, eating food produced by others, as Carolyn Korsmeyer argues, “requires that objects become part of oneself. Its exercise requires risk and trust.” However, as Cook points out, such encounters are complex and nuanced, never being fully exploitative or fully banal. Many scholars, such as Lisa Hedkle, Sonia Ryang, Ian Cook, Lucy Long, Ghassan Hage, Krishnendu Ray, and Uma Narayan among others, have written about the consumption of ethnic food by white Americans with a more nuanced and critical lens, collectively pointing to how these forms of cross-cultural eating are impacted by race. As Cook asserts, this vein of food studies scholarship that examines examples of “eating the other” is overflowing, and collectively can point to how cross-racial eating can be a form of cultural appropriation. Lisa Hedkle, for example, argues that progressive whites use food as a means to break away from a disposed and disconnected notion of “culture-less” white America. Ray argues that cross-racial eating is often done (and also theorized) with little concern for the immigrant groups and their agency. hooks explores how pleasures are derived from desiring contact (be it food or sex) with a racialized other.

While such scholarship does begin to situate cross-ethnic eating within a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, they do not fundamentally tie such acts to the very making of such hierarchy. They often frame the appropriation and exploitative nature of cross-racial eating as symptomatic of the existing racial hierarchy. I find that, taken individually, these examinations are important first steps that lack a critical analysis of how acts such as culinary slumming resonate with and reshape privilege under neoliberalism. To date, scholarship has not found a means to link these cross-cultural acts as tied to an epochal shift in the makings of contemporary white privilege that has stabilized whiteness despite challenges to it from multiculturalism. This scholarship explores cultural appropriation, ideas about authenticity, among other important topics, but it fail to have the foresight to link these actions to a new form of whiteness that is different from modes of white privilege that have existed prior to the contemporary era of neoliberal multiculturalism. My scholarship makes this crucial intervention, introducing the concept of cosmopolitan whiteness, to argue that cross-cultural eating (along with other cross-cultural acts such as yoga, Asian spirituality and medicine, dress, music, etc.) has become fundamental in the shape of white privilege in late twentieth and early twenty-first century America. When cross-racial and cross-ethnic food encounters are sought out by progressive whites for the benefits of one’s cultural capital, require travel (or at least evoke pleasures/desires similar to those of touristic travel), and are clearly operating within the dichotomy of other or foreign/native, they must be seen as implicated in maintenance of the racial hierarchy and as such, are inherently baleful on the part of the progressive white.

**Historicizing Mexican Migration to Sunset Park: The Growth of Brooklyn’s “Little Mexico”**
Sunset Park is a densely populated neighborhood in Southwest Brooklyn with large working poor, Pan-Latino and Pan-Asian communities, and more recently growing Arab American and Muslim populations. Although it is surrounded by the primarily white neighborhoods of Park Slope to the North (39th Street), Bay Ridge to the South (65th Street), Borough Park to the East (9th Ave) and the New York Bay to the West, Sunset Park is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in New York. This, however, was not always the case. Sunset Park has transitioned from a mid-century European immigrant industrial hub to an Asian and Puerto Rican/Mexican immigrant community with large informal economic sectors. These neighborhood transitions tell the story of immigrant-based urban renewal, global migration and a neighborhood in perpetual flux. Recent late twentieth-century immigration from Asia and Latin American have defined the neighborhood by multiple immigrant urban spatial formations and have turned this once white working class industrial sector into a complex transnational and

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globally connected multiethnic neighborhood that serves as an important marker of the immigration, globalization and the racial landscape of greater New York.

Most of the land that is now known as Sunset Park was territory bought from the Canarsee Indians in 1640 and subsequently subdivided by the Dutch and English. By the mid-twentieth century, Sunset Park was a thriving industrial hub. Third Avenue to the Waterfront contained the Bush Terminal (now Industrial City), a large shipping, warehousing, and manufacturing complex that was the first of its kind in New York and the largest multi-tenant industrial park in the United States. Bush Terminal employed thousands of European descended laborers, most of which resided in the immediate neighboring vicinity of Sunset Park. Attracted by the industrial manufacturing and shipping industries, a large number of European immigrants

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moved to Sunset Park in the first half of the twentieth century and developed multiple close-knit European communities in and around Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Avenues in Sunset Park. From the early to mid-twentieth century Sunset Park was composed largely of Irish, Finnish, Polish, Italian, Scandinavian and Norwegian immigrants, many of whom moved to Sunset Park for employment in these thriving shipping and manufacturing industries. In addition, a large portion of recent arriving European immigrants was displaced from the densely populated tenements of lower Manhattan. In opposition to the tenements housing most European immigrants throughout Manhattan, European descended residents in Sunset Park lived largely in one and two story family townhouses. This is significant because it allowed the neighborhood to have a smaller and more “neighborhood like” feel for its immigrant residents, which attracted many families that previously grew up in rural communities in Eastern and Western Europe and later Mexico, Puerto Rico and East Asia.

Image 12
Demographic Makeup of Sunset Park by Decade

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During the first half of the twentieth century, Sunset Park resident’s were actively negotiating their sense of identity, fluctuating between a diasporic and transnational immigrant identity tied to Europe culture, and a distinct sense of American belonging tied to consumer prosperity, whiteness and American cultural norms. As the Works Progress Administration wrote of Sunset Park in 1939, describing the dense close-knit European and Finnish communities that drove cultural and gastronomic life in Sunset Park:

*The SUNSET PARK NEIGHBORHOOD, south of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-sixth Street, is inhabited by a large number of Scandinavians and Finns. Local enterprises including small businesses of every type are bound together in the nationally known Finnish Co-operative Association...Within the locality are several Finnish steam baths; the restaurants feature Finnish dishes: keittokirja (cabbage soup), liha pullia (meatballs), silli perunat (herring and potatoes); the homeland’s culture is kept alive by Finnish societies; and folk dances are held occasionally at which the women wear the gay peasant costumes of their native land. The bluff of Sunset Park, Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, affords a thrilling view of the harbor.*

While cultural life and food culture in Sunset Park in the first half of the twentieth century was defined by European aesthetics, Sunset Park’s European residents were quickly working to assimilate into American normative whiteness and the affiliated privileged. Longtime Sunset Park resident and second generation Italian-American Tony Giordano, whose parents moved to Sunset Park during its industrial boom in the early part of the twentieth century explains that for his family moving to Sunset Park was not simply to be close to his father’s place of employment or finding an Italian American community with which to reside. Rather, for Giordano and his family, the decision to move out of the dense tenements of Lower Manhattan and move to Sunset Park was a cultural choice that simultaneously allowed his family to express a sense of financial

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407 Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration. *New York city guide: a comprehensive guide to the five boroughs of the metropolis: Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Richmond.* New York, NY, Random House, 1939. a
accomplishment and acculturation into mainstream American normativity. As he expressed to the Brooklyn Historical Society, moving to Sunset Park was kind of a leapfrog kind of thing that many of the Italians did at that time. They would become acculturated, get used to this new country in the old neighborhood. And then once there was steady employment and a little bit of money they’d move up to what they considered to be a better neighborhood, which was a more mixed neighborhood. And so my mother’s parents came to Sunset Park as part of that leap, even though it at the time was a Scandinavian neighborhood…my parents were in America at a time when you wanted to be as American as possible. It was important not to talk like an Italian, not to walk like an Italian, not to cook like an Italian. There was a lot of emphasis on being American… my mother even toyed with the idea of changing the family name… to be a more American kind of family…There was this whole thing about being American and living up to what Americans were supposed to be, which was at that point a very white society…Moving to Sunset Park, into a bigger apartment, for my parents that meant they made it as Americans.408

Although Sunset Park contained multiple close-knit European-American communities, as the Giordano quote explains, moving into this industrial hub away from the European resided tenements of the Lower East Side and purchasing a relatively large single or double family home, was a move towards claiming a sense of American normativity. For the immigrants who moved to Sunset Park, it was very much an attempt to establish themselves as American and not what James Barrett and David Roediger have called, “inbetween peoples,” working poor white ethnics who in part because of their cultural roots in Europe and in part because of their position of economic disadvantage were not yet fully considered white and were thus in-between European and American white identities.409 As Giordano’s move to Sunset Park exemplified and Barrett and Roediger illuminate, for these white working poor ethnics, “becoming white and

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409 For Barrett and Rodegier the process of obtaining American whiteness for these “inbetween peoples” was largely occurring in the early twentieth century, however some of the residual work of acculturation and obtaining American normative whiteness in an ongoing process and was certainly still occurring in the mid twentieth century New York.
becoming American were connected at every turn.”410 For many of the white ethnics that moved to Sunset Park, the move not only signified the ability to maintain an “American standard of living” but also was proof that (in large part because of this new economic stability) they had broken free of the in-between status and had fully obtained American whiteness. This was something that was very much aspired to by many first and second-generation European immigrants who faced urban poverty upon their arrival to New York, with a move to Sunset Park representing a break in that cycle of poverty. Sunset Park symbolically became a hub where European immigrants, by geographically distancing themselves from the European ethnic centers of Manhattan, could make a claim of acculturation into dominant modes of white normative Americanness and fully cast off the status of “in-between.”

During World War II, Sunset Park continued to see population growth and economic development in large part because of the presence of the Bush Terminal, built in the 1890s and at its peak one of the one of the largest integrated cargo and manufacturing sites in the world, which offered tens of thousands of well paying, stable manufacturing and shipping jobs to neighborhood European residents.411 The Bush Terminal was the center of New York’s industrial production and saw a strong increase in the production and manufacturing industries, in large part because of the American War efforts, industries in which Finnish, Norwegian and Italian gained strong footholds (in part because of racist immigration laws and racially driven hiring practices). By the mid-1930s and 1940s, Sunset Park was a center of shipping and manufacturing where European immigrants could quickly and easily secure well-paying jobs and find affordable, attractive, modest housing.

Despite the economic boom in Sunset Park brought on by wartime related manufacturing, almost immediately after World War II ended, industrial production in Sunset Park dramatically decreased. Advances in technology, the emergence of the truck-based shipping industry, and a declining competitive edge for manufacturing in the Northeast, led to the rapid decline of Sunset Park as an industrial hub and a cycle of displacement and deconstruction began. As David Ment and Mary Donovan bluntly state, “once the war ended, the activity (at the Sunset Park industrial parks) ceased almost immediately and hundreds of jobs were lost.”

In addition to the widespread decline of industrial production brought on by the conclusion of World War II, Robert Moses led infrastructure projects of the 1940s, namely the Gowanus Expressway and the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel created physical barriers that divided the neighborhood, leading to widespread residential displacement. The Gowanus Expressway, for example, located in the northern half of the neighborhood and widened in the 1950s from four to six lanes, not only divided Sunset Park but also spatially disconnected it from areas of Brooklyn that lie to the north. The Verrazano Bridge, completed in 1964, forced the removal of numerous industrial buildings along the waterfront and allowed for ease of access to Staten Island and New Jersey, encouraging residents to leave the now densely populated Sunset Park. As industrial decline continued in the 1960s, white flight became rampant and large numbers of the European descended Americans left their largely modest but attractive row houses (leaving many of them vacant), moving to Staten Island, Long Island and New Jersey. These more suburban areas in Staten Island and New Jersey offered more physical space (larger homes, bigger yards, less

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414 Like the 1964 World’s Fair, the subject of Chapter 1, the Gowanus Expressway is another example of Robert Mosses’s impact on the New York landscape. This expressway had disastrous impacts on many Brooklyn neighborhoods, including Sunset Park.
expensive real estate). For the European descended residents residing in Sunset Park, moving to a more suburban area in Staten Island and New Jersey was also a reaction to racialized fears of a more integrated and racially diverse Sunset Park, but also symbolized (prior to the white ethnic revival of the 1970s and 1980s) a further embrace of American whiteness and a rejection of the “in-between” status that defined the European immigrant experience when first arriving to the New York area. This was combined with the 1964 closing of the Brooklyn Naval Yard, which in many respects signaled the end of the industrial era of Brooklyn’s waterfront and ushered in an erosion of the European immigrant working-class community and the beginning of two decades of dwindling population and steep decreases in overall real estate values for Sunset Park. The result was that by the fiscal crises of the late 1960s and 1970s, as a result of industrial decline and widespread white flight, Sunset Park was marred by widespread urban decline, divestment and abandonment.

415 The Bush Terminals, which were renamed Industrial City, saw a steady decline from the end of World War II through the early 2000s. In 2009 the industrial park began to see a rebirth in large part because of a multimillion-dollar investment by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. Now Industrial City is a large-scale industrial incubator and art space. The closure of the Brooklyn Naval Yard was announced in November of 1964 and currently the space is being renovated as a large-scale industrial park.

By the 1970s, Sunset Park was widely seen as a “dying neighborhood and another sad victim of urban blight.” After nearly two decades of steady decline, Sunset Park saw dramatic changes in the late 1980s and 1990s when new groups of immigrants, this time from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, other Latin American countries, China and East Asia began moving to Sunset Park in large numbers. As a result of white racialized fears and deindustrialization, by the 1970s white New Yorkers no longer saw Sunset Park as a desirable neighborhood. As a result, Sunset Park was not densely populated in the 1970s, prior to Latino and Asian immigration. Rather, white flight and deindustrialization left large parts of Sunset Park vacant and open to new residents. Several factors made Sunset Park attractive for these immigrant groups, including the affordability of relatively attractive housing (much of which was left vacant during the white flight of the 1960s and 1970s), large amounts of green space (including Sunset Park and Greenwood Cemetery) and systemic urban displacement from traditional ethnic areas in Manhattan and Northern Brooklyn. However, these transformations in Sunset Park were neither organic nor innocuous. Corporate demands for cheaper labor and free trade agreements that eased the flow of capital and labor across borders and promoted enhanced periods of undocumented immigration. Upon their arrival in New York, these immigrants were often left scrambling for affordable housing, which because of the white flight and an eroded industrial and shipping sectors was widely available in Sunset Park. The housing stock in the

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neighborhood was largely discarded and left vacant because of two decades of whites leaving the neighborhood. “Rather than a natural process of ethnic succession, the racial transformation of Sunset Park was the outcome of the interrelated dynamics of economic decline, federal housing policies that favored white homeownership and encouraged divestment in transitioning neighborhoods, and urban renewal activities that destroyed neighborhoods in the service of highway construction and suburbanization,” writes Tarry Hum. The result was that after these two decades of decline and underdevelopment, Sunset Park saw a radical racial transformation, from largely white European descendants to Asian and Latino immigrants, in the matter of a decade.

Despite a hostile reception from white residents and active employment discrimination in Sunset Park’s industrial centers, in the 1960s and 1970s Puerto Ricans were the first community among this more recent wave of immigration to settle in Sunset Park. In fact, “in the 1950s, there were 1,820 Puerto Ricans living in Sunset Park; by 1970, this number had grown to nearly 24,000.” This was certainly a product of the attractiveness of Sunset Park as a residential destination, with its large single-family houses, large amounts of green space, accessibility via public transportation and sweeping views of Manhattan. However, the influx of Puerto Ricans into Sunset Park was also a direct result of “residential displacement due to massive” neoliberal and corporate real estate driven “urban renewal projects in the Puerto Rican neighborhoods of East Harlem and Lower East Side.” Widespread corporate and public investment in these areas of Manhattan raised rents, which in turn displaced many low-income and working-class Puerto Ricans residents who were relatively new to New York. For many of these displaced residents,

420 Hum, 53.
Sunset Park became an attractive and viable alternative. However, unlike the European descended residents of Sunset Park who occupied relatively comfortable positions because of well paying industrial jobs, these new Puerto Rican and Mexican migrants to Sunset Park found work in low paying manufacturing (garment and plastic industries) and service sectors.\footnote{Hum, 53.}

In the 1980s and 1990s, Mexican, Puerto Rican and Asian immigrants to Sunset Park were symbolically utilizing living in Sunset Park as a means to navigate seemingly contradictory forces of acculturation, American belonging, diasporic connection and transnational identity. According to Edmundo Quinones, Puerto Rican immigrant and longtime Sunset Park resident, despite “feeling like a ghetto in the best and worse sense of the word” and not always offering the most desirable employment opportunities, Sunset Park was imagined amongst the Puerto Rican community living in the densely populated neighborhoods of lower Manhattan as a great place to raise a family. As Quinones explains, it offered a “small town community feeling” similar to the small towns in Puerto Rico that was much more appealing to young families than living in the densely crowded Manhattan enclaves. Quinones continued, “Puerto Ricans in New York were very family orientated” and “when you compared Sunset Park to the large apartment houses in Manhattan” Sunset Park felt like a “suburb.” The suburban affect that Sunset Park exuded for immigrant families allowed a sense of acculturation towards normative American whiteness. However in addition to being seen by Puerto Rican families as a small step towards the white American middle class, much like Giordano explained of Italian American relocation to Sunset Park, Quinones and others expressed that a move to Sunset Park had transnational symbolism, for the Puerto Rican immigrant community the move also expressed symbolic association to rural, small-town life in Puerto Rico. “Most houses in Sunset Park have only one or two rentals, so that was really a way to go for young families, especially compared to the large
apartment buildings in Manhattan.”422 For these young Puerto Rican families in the 1970s and 1980s a move to Sunset Park, despite Sunset Park clearly being viewed as an urban ghetto, meant that a family had “made it,” in the same way as did a move to the suburbs for white Americans who where fully abandoning these urban cores in favor of suburban communities.

As a result, nearly seventy percent of the new immigrants to Sunset Park over the last two decades have been Hispanic, the largest groups amongst those being Puerto Rican and Mexican immigrants.423 A combination of the rapid influx of new immigrants - Puerto Ricans and Mexicans - into Sunset Park and the widespread white flight of European descended residents, facilitated the wholesale racial remaking of Sunset Park from a close-knit white working class European community to one that was largely Latino in a relatively short period of time. 424 After Sunset Park became a largely Puerto Rican/Latino neighborhood in the late 1970s and 1980s, what followed was an influx of Mexican and Asian immigrants who, like the Puerto Rican immigrants before them, saw Sunset Park as a relatively affordable and accessible urban space where they could build transnational communities in a space that was otherwise, because of racialized housing policies, deindustrialization and neoliberal urban renewal strategies, and economically restrictive real-estate prices, largely unreachable.

Widespread Mexican movement to Sunset Park occurred after Puerto Rican immigrants had established a vibrant community in Sunset Park. While Mexican immigration to the United States has occurred in large numbers since the early twentieth century, with most Mexican

423 I borrow this term “new immigrants” from Robert Courtney Smith’s Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants. For Smith, the term new immigrants apply to those that entered the United States starting in the 1990s, but also specifically speaks to a new group of immigrants that come from countries traditionally excluded by U.S. immigration restrictions, most notably in both Smith’s work and this chapter are Mexican immigrants.
424 I borrow this term “new immigrants” from Robert Courtney Smith’s Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants. For Smith, the term new immigrants apply to those that entered the United States starting in the 1990s, but also specifically speaks to a new group of immigrants that come from countries traditionally excluded by U.S. immigration restrictions, most notably in both Smith’s work and this chapter are Mexican immigrants.
immigrants settling in the Southwest, it was not until the Bracero Programs of the 1940s through the 1960s that a noteworthy number of Mexican immigrants came to the Northeast. This migration to the Northeast was perhaps because of the sheer number of Mexican migrants coming into the United States through the Bracero Program, nearly 450,000 annually. Most Mexican laborers from the Bracero program stayed in California and Oregon, however some made their way out of the Southwest to find employment outside the agricultural sector and avoid the racial violence targeted against Mexicans and Mexican Americans. By the 1980s, Mexican migration to New York City became a regular occurrence. This was in large part because of three main factors; the Mexican economic crisis of the 1980s, the increase of Mexican men as a preferred labor source in urban industry and service (including restaurant service) in New York, and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 that gave legal status to three million immigrants who had been living in the United States prior to 1982. It was during this period of migration that an increasing number of Mexican migrants began to choose urban, industrialized employment opportunities in the Midwest and Northeast over agricultural work in the Southwest, with large numbers choosing to move to Sunset Park, Brooklyn. “In 2000 the Mexican-origin population in New York City, including both immigrants and native-born Mexican Americans, was 275,000 to 300,000…this figure marks a remarkable increase from 40,000 Mexicans in 1980 and 100,000 in 1990.”

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425 The Bracero Program (named for the Spanish term bracero, meaning "manual laborer" or "one who works using his arms") was a series of laws and diplomatic agreements, initiated in 1942 that led to an increase of Mexican migrant and farm laborers entering the United States. It was signed into law when the United States signed the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement with Mexico.


that typically drew a large number of working-age men from Mexico, during the 1990s large numbers of families, including women and children were migrating to the United States and nearly half of all Mexicans in New York were between the ages of twelve and twenty-four.\textsuperscript{429}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Image 14}
Racial Demographics Along Fifth Avenue in Sunset Park, 2010\textsuperscript{430}
\end{center}

Already occupied by a large number of Puerto Rican immigrants, who made up twenty two percent of the neighborhood’s population in 2000 (and nearly fifty percent of the neighborhood’s Latino/a Community, the largest of any such group), “the Mexican immigrant experience” in Sunset Park, “has been that of newcomers in a neighborhood understood to be Puerto Rican.”\textsuperscript{431} Despite a nuanced, symbiotic and at times tense relationship between Mexican (the vast majority of which were from Puebla) and Puerto Rican communities, Mexican immigrants were drawn to the neighborhoods because of the racial and immigrant solidarity and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{429}Smith, 19.
\textsuperscript{431}Smith, 30.
\end{footnotesize}
shared community that often occurs between various Latino/a groups, the presence of a high percentage of Spanish speaking residents, the affordability of real-estate and the distinctly Latino sensory urban aesthetic.\(^{432}\) In part because of the inroads already made by Puerto Rican immigrants into the Sunset Park community and economy, in the mid-1990s Mexican immigrants were able to quickly establish many small businesses and restaurants that gave them a strong and immediate presence in the cultural and sensory landscape of Sunset Park. As a result, Sunset Park quickly became one of the primary East Coast destinations for Mexican immigrants, especially those from Puebla, Mexico.\(^{433}\) By the late 1990s and early 2000s, Mexican immigrants (and a large population of Chinese immigrants) would begin to transform Sunset Park by purchasing residential property, opening community and religious organizations, establishing numerous small businesses, and, of course opening many supermarkets and restaurants that served the foods desired by the Mexican diaspora who now, though precariously, called Sunset Park home. The result was that over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, the affect and sensory experience of Sunset Park would drastically shift from a sensory geography driven by that of the European diaspora – marked by Finish and Scandinavian language and cuisines (such as lamb and cabbage, beef stew, fish pudding, lutefisk and sytlelabb\(^{434}\)) - to one driven by Spanish, Mexican cuisine and iconography blended with Mandarin/Chinese languages and Chinese cuisine.

\(^{432}\) For example, both the Mexican and Mexican American communities and the Puerto Rican communities have been subject to state sponsored surveillance and police violence in sunset Park over the past two decades. Through community organizations like El Grito de Sunset Park and the Sunset Park Business Improvement District, the Mexican and Puerto Rican communities have shown solidarity in their stance and work against police violence.

\(^{433}\) The state of Puebla is located in East-Central Mexico and is bordered by the states of Veracruz to the north and east, Hidalgo, México, Tlaxcala and Morelos to the west, and Guerrero and Oaxaca to the south.

Today, the neighborhood directly centered on Fifth Avenue from Thirty-Ninth to Sixty-Fourth Streets is one of the largest concentrations of Mexican immigrants in the United States outside of the Southwest. These more recent immigrants reenergized the neighborhood, rehabilitated property values and developed a thriving economy of independently owned businesses, noted by the abundance of Latino/a and Mexican restaurants and businesses along Fifth Avenue and the numerous Asian and Chinese restaurants along Eighth Ave. Although immigrant groups from Latin America and Asia helped revitalize the economy of Sunset Park, it was a revitalization that was plagued by race and classed divisions. As Tarry Hum details, with the exception of a number of immigrant entrepreneurs including a number that opened successful restaurants, most of the employment for the Pan-Asian and Pan-Latin immigrants in Sunset Park is heavily concentrated in marginal retail, service and downgraded manufacturing sectors. In addition, immigrant labor in Sunset Park is largely concentrated in an unregulated and informal economy, including a large network of makeshift retail and small-scale manufacturing, which does not provide much stable employment to immigrants even while it is central to Sunset Park’s economic growth. This informal economy dominates street life in Sunset Park as transient makeshift shops, street vendors, hucksters, and food carts clutter Fifth Avenue with a bright miscellany of goods and foods for sale. These informal economies heighten the sense of precariousness in Sunset Park as many of the places of business lack any permanence from month to month, resulting in the number and type of informal retail, restaurants and manufacturing along Fifth Avenue to fluctuate greatly depending on the time of the year. Collectively the informal economy creates a sensory space that feels distinctly transnational as these street vendors and makeshift shops exude an energy similar to a Mexican and Latin American street market creating both clear sensory divergence from street life in the rest of
urban New York and a diasporic connection to home for the Pan-Latin residents of Sunset Park. Individually however, shops and restaurants close quickly and without much notice, which points to the instability of immigrant settlement, especially for undocumented immigrants, whose very presence in Sunset Park and ability to claim the space as a “home” is tenuous. However, Sunset Park’s street vendors, many of which are first-generation immigrants to the United States, are not marginal to the market economy and economic growth in the community. Rather, they are key contributors to Sunset Park’s economic, cultural and sensory life. In fact, if you factor in this informal economy, Sunset Park ranked second only to Flushing, Queens as the greatest growth in business establishments between 1994 and 2004 in all of New York City.\textsuperscript{435}

Fifth Avenue runs through the heart of a section of Sunset Park known as Brooklyn's "Little Mexico." This avenue (along with Eight Avenue in Brooklyn’s Chinatown) is Sunset Park’s main commercial district and very much reflects the transnational identities of the Mexican community that resides there. While this highly commercialized twenty-six blocks that run the length of Fifth Avenue in Sunset Park contains several national and international retailers - banks, McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts, etc. - most of the businesses along Fifth Avenue are locally owned by Mexican entrepreneurs, the majority of them being informal retail, services, but most prominently restaurants and other spaces of public dining. Upon getting off the N or R train at the 45\textsuperscript{th} Street stop and walking one avenue East toward Fifth Avenue, those entering Sunset Park are immediately met with a complex multisensory environment. Having been inhabited by a Spanish speaking community since the Second World War, Fifth Avenue in Sunset Park hums with Spanish language, colors of Latino nationalism and a vivacious street environment. As complex cultural, economic and social factors have allowed commercial property in Sunset Park to remain relatively accessible to immigrant entrepreneurs, the cultural life along Fifth Avenue

\textsuperscript{435} Hum.
emanates an affect that very much echoes that of a Latin American street market in terms of the commercial density, transitory informality and communal collaboration. Fifth Avenue is saturated with taquerías, panaderías, delis, markets, bodegas, restaurants, food carts, and food trucks that offer a variety of Mexican dishes, specialty foods and imported products, many of which originated in the Puebla region of Mexico. In fact, according to the Sunset Park Business Improvement District, as of July 2014, the Sunset Park contains seventy-two restaurants, taquerías, delis and take-outs, thirty-seven of which are considered to be serving “Spanish Food” (which in their categorization is a stand in for Latinx, broadly including Mexican, Puerto Rican, Peruvian, Dominican as well as Spanish cuisines).\footnote{Sunset Park Business Listings. Sunset Park Business Improvement District. https://www.sunsetparkbid.org/copy-of-businesses. Accessed July 12, 2014.} Eating in these formal and informal public-dining establishments dominates social activity on Fifth Avenue and it is almost impossible to walk down the street without being struck by the wide plethora of dining options available.

Building a Mexican and Mexican American foodscape as well as a cultural community in Sunset Park was no small feat and required a great deal of personal and collective resilience amongst the Mexican community. Even as large numbers of Mexican immigrants came to the United States in the 1970s and then eventually into Sunset Park two decades later, there were very few Mexican culinary options available. For example, it was incredibly difficult anywhere in New York in the 1970s and early 1980s to find quality tortilla. As Juanita Bravo, who came to New York in 1970 to work in a textile factory, claimed, “a Mexican could not find so much as a decent tortilla in this town. ‘We ate bread,’ she said, making it sound like a prison diet.”\footnote{Newman, Andy. First Mexicans, Then the Food. The New York Times. June 22, 2001. http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20010622friday.html Accessed July 5, 2017.} Throughout Brooklyn, in the 1970s and early 1980s, there were very few Mexican groceries and Mexican immigrants often adapted their palates by eating the food of other Latin American
migrants. "We ate what the Puerto Ricans ate: rice, beans, sometimes meat," Bravo continued, “we did what we could."\(^{438}\) Recognizing a market opportunity in the 1970s and early 1980s immigrants, initially Puerto Ricans with financial and human capital, purchased or leased commercial storefronts throughout Sunset Park, largely on 4\(^{th}\), 5\(^{th}\) and 8\(^{th}\) Avenues. These immigrant entrepreneurs quickly established a host of new businesses and restaurants that catered directly to the immigrant communities rapidly moving to the once largely abandoned neighborhood. This resulted in a large number of small-scale retailers and small restaurants emerging along Sunset Park’s main thoroughfares that served food and sold goods desired by the immigrant communities. These establishments were largely informal and transient, exuding an ad-hoc aesthetic to their layout, many often opening and closing quickly, with single restaurants or storefront having multiple changing owners over a short period of time. However, rapidly attracting a large number of Puerto Rican customers, this first batch of new immigrant establishments quickly and conspicuously changed the cultural and sensory landscape of the urban space. Spanish quickly became the dominant language spoken and, as many residents mentioned, in the 1980s sofrito could be smelled as you strolled the streets.\(^{439}\) After Puerto Rican migrants audaciously made inroads into Brooklyn’s commercial and retail market in the 1970s, by the 1990s Mexican entrepreneurs saw a similar opportunity to establish a vibrant food scene that was supported by the growing Mexican population immigrating from Puebla for work in both service and small-scale manufacturing industries. Mexican American entrepreneurs began leasing and purchasing storefronts, especially along 5\(^{th}\) Ave and began offering food specifically geared towards the Puebla community now calling Sunset Park Home. First, utilizing and adapting foodstuffs that were ordered for Puerto Rican restaurants and later encouraging

\(^{438}\) Newman.  
\(^{439}\) Sofrito is a sauce used as a base in Spanish, Puerto Rican, Portuguese and Latin American cooking that typically consists of garlic, onion, paprika, and tomatoes cooked in olive oil.
distributors to sell specialty items directly requested by Mexican chefs, this crop of restaurants opening in the 1990s was able to offer food desired by the large transnational Mexican community. Slowly red, white and green awnings began replacing the majority of yellow and red facades that were typical of the classic New York bodega. While the Don Paco Lopez Panaderías had opened in the 1960s as the first Mexican bakeries in the city, it was not until the 1990s that Mexican entrepreneurs began opening restaurants like Tacos Matamoros or food trucks like Tacos El Branco. Food options for the Mexican community, once largely absent from Brooklyn’s foodscape, became prevalent and the community built a thriving self-sustaining food community with dozens of restaurants, food trucks, food counters and groceries scattered along 5th Avenue. Largely female cooks and male restaurant owners showcased bold flavors, served items such as tacos, cemita, chalupas, poblanos, and mole in quick informal settings to a largely working-class clientele. For the Mexican community that was now calling Sunset Park home, this was a tremendous service and, despite widespread poverty led to a great deal of positive sensory and affective associations to 5th Avenue and the eateries that now lined it. The Mexican entrepreneurs who started this vibrant food community did so both out of necessity (the community did not have access to the foods they desired) as well as out financial incentive; today nineteen percent of the residents living along Fifth Avenue in Sunset Park work in food preparation and serving related occupations, amongst the highest of any area in New York. Indeed these restaurants became an economic catalyst for the growth of this community. However, it should be clearly noted that the initial impetus for opening such restaurants was to serve a growing Mexican community; white consumers were an afterthought at best.

440 Cemitas are sandwiches served on an egg roll that has been covered in sesame seeds.
Food and the entrepreneurial drive to open food establishments serving dishes familiar to the Mexican community became a key means to claim communal belonging in an otherwise foreign and largely neglected urban corridor and as such must be read as more than simply economic, but also as a radical socio-cultural act. Not only did these ethnic markets and restaurants offer financial incentives and employment to the Mexican community, by serving the Mexican community they became important locations where transnational and ethnic identity were reaffirmed in a broader urban environment that otherwise regulates and diminishes it. The restaurants could function as a space where Mexican food could be enjoyed, Spanish was spoken nearly exclusively and a Mexican nationalist and Mexican-American transnational identities could be articulated. While there is certainly a great deal of poverty in Sunset Park and inequality in Brooklyn more broadly, through the growth of a clear food economy Mexican Americans in Sunset Park were able to establish a self-segregated economy that offered internal community support and upward social mobility. For example, restaurant owners, many of whom I spoke to directly, mentioned that they could hire employees regardless of their immigration status because it was a way to support the community. As one restaurant owner states, referencing the two men working in the kitchen: “I don’t ask if my guys have any working papers. It doesn’t matter to me. They are like my family.” The Mexican community in Sunset Park, through the exchange of capital related to the selling of food, was able to support itself without a great deal of outside intervention, and as such the food scene in Sunset Park became a means for the economic, social, political and cultural development of the community.

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443 Interview conducted as part of an ethnography performed in July of 2012 with translation assistance from translator Dulce Gross. These insider details were only admitted to me after a personal relationship was established with various members of the restaurant staff. This was done in part through my own employment in the restaurant/bar industry.
It should be noted that historically, Mexican Americans have claimed a varied racial ancestry, including mestizo, Indigenous, African and Spanish lineages and as such transnational connections between the United States and Mexico/Puebla and Sunset Park are not monolithic. The ability or desire to maintain a transnational life differ widely from individual to individual and family to family based on a multitude of factors such as class status, whether one is a first generation or second generation immigrant, individual age and whether one came of age in the United States or Mexico, one’s ability to travel to Mexico to visit friends and family, the length of time someone has spent in the United States, personal preferences, familial relationships, amongst a host of other complex and nuanced factors. Not only can these factors influence familial and individual attachments to transnationalism and the longevity of one’s connection with Mexico while residing in the United States, but they also can influence the sense of transnational diasporic identity that a neighborhood collectively projects. Despite changes in contexts, at the individual, local, national, and transnational level, this community has for nearly three decades maintained a close cultural and sensory affinity to Pueblan culture. By living in the United States, first and second-generation Mexican migrants in Sunset Park feel a connection, though precarious because of contemporary political context, to urban New York. Simultaneously, they remained connected to Puebla by keeping close connections to family, (for many) moving back and forth between Mexico and New York, and expressing a heightened level of free-trade driven geographic mobility but also by creating distinct sensorially defined Mexican and Mexican American urban socio-cultural spaces within Sunset Park. Because of its Mexican and Latino urban markers, highly active political Mexican-American political organizations, a host of businesses and restaurants started by entrepreneurs from Puebla and high levels of Spanish speaking residents, the sensory geography of Sunset Park encourages Mexican

444 Bebout, 14.
Americans and Mexican immigrants to claim a space that is distinctly Mexican within New York’s complex urban landscape. This cultural affinity to Puebla includes the wide variety of available foods that are common in Puebla (including Chalupas, Mole poblano, esquites and Rajas poblano, regional specialties that are common at many of Sunset Park’s eateries) and an active street culture comprised largely of small-scale informal food carts and shops that very much emanate an energy similar to the markets of Puebla’s zócalos.

Mexican “migrants and their children in New York and Puebla are affected by political and economic events and forces that are both local and global” which to varying degrees have led the migrants in New York to live largely transnational lives. The opening of free trade in the 1990s and the increasingly global reach of American consumerism have increased the flow of immigration from Mexico during this period. Mexican migrants to the United States, including those from Puebla living in Sunset Park, have frequently been excluded from American citizenship because of their often-undocumented status and have often fallen outside the parameters of Mexican national culture because of their geographic movement to the United States. Despite the contemporary rhetoric in the United States regarding border walls, the increased demand for cheap Mexican labor caused by free trade agreements, political push toward Mexican deportation and the impetus for migrants to flee because of political turmoil and drug cartel-related violence in Puebla, most Mexican immigrants in Sunset Park are live “transnational lives,” at once unable to be incorporated fully into the either the imagined national community of the United States, New York or Mexico. As a result, Mexican migrants in New York imaginatively craft close cultural connection with both regions, informed by the sense of displacement and belonging, as Mexican expressive culture and the practices sustaining migrant

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445 Smith, 4.
social movements move fluidly between nation states, which Alicia Schmidt Camacho labels a “migrant imaginary.”

The Turn Against Tex-Mex: White Americans “Discover” “Authentic” Mexican Food

Despite the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement and the increasing militarization of the U.S./Mexican border, relatively consistent Mexican migration in the late twentieth century led to Mexican enclaves in major cities across the northern U.S., including Sunset Park. This caused drastic changes in the cultural significance of Mexican cuisine throughout the United States. As Mexican immigrants moved throughout the United States in the 1990s, settling in places outside of the Southwest like New York, Chicago, North Carolina and Central Florida, Mexican entrepreneurs opened numerous restaurants serving various formations of regional Mexican cuisine in major urban areas throughout the United States. Not only did this spread Mexican cuisine to parts of the United States that had previously had little exposure to it, but these newer Mexican communities also brought with them foodstuffs common throughout working-class Mexican cuisine, like peppers, various types of queso, beans, crema, avocado, limes and corn tortilla, all of which began to permeate grocery stores and food markets where they had not previously been sold. This was done both by creating a demand for such products that were then sold in other grocery stores, but also through immigrant entrepreneurs opening their own grocery stores and selling such products. In addition, with the large working-class Mexican labor force that was moving into Northern and Midwestern cities came an increasing number of Mexican owned restaurants that sold Mexican working class culinary staples. The result was that more

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447 As scholars like Mark Padoongpatt and others have shown, immigrant groups also often adapt ingredients from similar cuisines that can substitute in for ingredients that are not yet readily available in an urban location, for example substituting mozzarella for certain types of Mexican queso or sour cream for Mexican crema.
Mexican culinary options, most notably working class culinary staples like tacos and tortas, began to be popular across the country, especially in major metropolitan areas like Chicago and New York.448

Prior to this, much of the Mexican cuisine that was popular in the United States from the 1950s to 1980s was not foods traditionally eaten throughout Mexico. Rather, it was Tex-Mex, a combination of Mexican and American cuisines first widely introduced by Tejano “chili queens” in San Antonio’s open-air markets and city centers. In informal tables and stalls, “chili queens,” Mexican-American women served dishes like chili, tamales and coffee to businessmen, soldiers, cowboys and families before they were banned from these city centers. Almost immediately after these women began selling Tex-Mex to whites in San Antonio the cuisine spread quickly throughout the American Southwest.449 Known for dishes like fajitas, nachos, refried beans, cheese enchiladas, chili con carne, and chili con queso, which often contained large amounts of melted cheese, Tex-Mex quickly became popular throughout the Southwest. In addition, Tex-Mex is known for its heavy use of cumin (relative to traditional Mexican cooking), which can be traced back to the 1500s, when the Spanish brought workers of Moroccan descent from the Canary Islands to their settlements in the San Antonio region. As a result, Moroccan cooking, with its heavy use of cumin, became part of the hybridized culinary legacy of Tex-Mex.450 Tex-Mex quickly became popular for white Americans as chains like Taco Bell (1962), Chili’s (1975), Chevys Fresh Mex (1981), Chuys (1982) and On the Border (1982) were rapidly spreading throughout the country. Although many view Tex-Mex as a regional Southwest

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448 Working-class Mexicans cuisine relies heavily on corn tortillas, simply prepared meats along with beans, chili peppers, and tomatoes. Recently because of globalization, an influx of American snack food and sodas has become common amongst the working class throughout Mexico.


cuisine worthy of its own culinary admiration, amongst many Mexican and Mexican Americans, Tex-Mex is seen as a cuisine that resulted from colonization and Americanization. As a result the cuisine is largely unpopular amongst Mexican immigrants.\textsuperscript{451} Popular Mexican American cultural critic and author of \textit{Taco U.S.A.: How Mexican Food Conquered America} Gustavo Arellano explains, “with the Mexican elite, they have just hated the fact that Americans love Mexican food and despite the fact that when Americans cook Mexican food they cook Tex-Mex. It's a deep psychic wound. Not only did the \textit{gabachos} steal half of our territory, now they're stealing our food.”\textsuperscript{452} This deep psychic wound that Arellano mentions surrounding Tex-Mex cuisine certainly correlates the rhetoric, cultural and affect/sensory experience of eating Tex-Mex food with the physical and psychological violence of colonization and border politics. As Tex-Mex spread throughout the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, anti-Mexican rhetoric and violence against Mexicans/Mexican Americans continued to be commonplace, surely only deepening the psychic wound caused by the popularity of this “Americanized” cuisine.\textsuperscript{453}

Despite its rapid rise in popularity, especially in fast food restaurants like Taco Bell and fast casual dining like Chi Chis, amongst progressive whites the affinity for Tex-Mex was relatively short-lived. As Jordana Rothman writes in \textit{Conde Naste Traveler}, “Many Americans don’t even know to distinguish between our version of Mexican food—cheesy, saucy Tex-Mex; fat Mission-style burritos; crispy-shelled ground beef tacos—and the food most Mexicans actually eat. But that's beginning to change.”\textsuperscript{454}

\textsuperscript{451} Shilcutt, Katherine. “Gustavo Shilcutt: Has the Tide Turned Against Tex-Mex Food?” \textit{Houston Press}. November 5, 2012.
\textsuperscript{452} Shilcutt.
\textsuperscript{453} Perhaps the most malicious case of such violence against Mexican Immigrants in the 1970s occurred in the most vicious cases occurred at the U.S.–Mexico border west of Douglas, Arizona on August 18, 1976, when three farmworkers were violently attacked while crossing a ranch.
Diana Kennedy, a white British-American chef often called the “Julia Child of Mexican Cuisine,” was amongst the first considered to bring “traditional Mexican” cuisine to white American homes. She made a clear distinction between the two cuisines in what is now considered an important book by many American chefs on Mexican cuisine, The Cuisines of Mexico. This text, written by Kennedy - the self described “ethno-gastronomer,” – along with Rick Bayless, is widely considered central in introducing Americans to Mexican cuisines beyond Tex-Mex.455 Kennedy had a great deal of cultural cache in the 1970s, frequently cooking on television, giving demonstrations in many large American retail stores, and selling a large number of her popular cookbooks.456 By the late 1990s and early 2000s, while Tex-Mex remained popular across the United States, it began to lose favor amongst urban progressive white Americans who were quick to embrace identity politics and the culinary productions of America’s new ethnic “diversity” of the 1990s. Many factors led to the decreasing popularity of Tex-Mex cuisine amongst progressive whites.457 Perhaps spearheaded by Oklahoma native and renowned chef Rick Bayless and the publication of Authentic Mexican: Regional Cooking from the Heart of Mexico458 in 1987 (a cookbook that New York Times food critic Craig Claiborne called “the greatest contribution to the Mexican table imaginable”459) cosmopolitan whites began to dismiss Tex-Mex for lacking the flavor and spice variety that represented the “true complexity” of Mexican tastes, although few of these whites were true “experts” on Mexican

456 Danovich.
457 This is signified by the closing of numerous chain Tex-Mex establishments, including the closing of all 65 Chi-Chi’s Restaurants in 2004. This closing was both because of dwindling sales but also a severe hepatitis outbreak at one of its Pennsylvania establishments. Prior to it’s closing, the Minnesota based restaurant was a large part of the spread of “Tex-Mex” and Mexican flavors to American suburban households in the 1970 and 1980s.
458 Bayless is said to have lived in Mexico studying food for over six years prior to opening Frontera Grill and the publication of his cookbook, Authentic Mexican: Regional Cooking from the Heart of Mexico. New York: William and Morrow Cookbooks, 1987.
cuisine. As Bayless claims in the Introduction to his cookbook, Mexican-American food seems to have suffered unmercifully, to become a near laughable caricature created by groups of financially savvy businessmen-cum-restaurateurs who saw profit in rice and beans and margaritas,” before going on to explain to a largely white audience the superior flavors of regional Mexican cuisine over a “generalized” Mexican-American Tex-Mex style of food preparation.\textsuperscript{460} While Mexican and Mexican American chefs have acknowledged Tex-Mex as a mix of American and Mexican culinary approaches for some time, it was in the late 1990s that progressive whites, hungry to consume all things authentically multicultural, started associating Tex-Mex with bland suburban white culture. For a young generation of newly cosmopolitan progressives, suburban corporate chain Tex-Mex style cuisine became associated with a kind of insular, monocultural and unsophisticated worldview that was that antithesis of all things globally progressive and modern in the 1980s and 1990s.

Progressive whites, feeling left out of the shifting cultural terrain of a new multicultural America and excluded by the ethnic rights movements of the 1970s and 1980s while simultaneously feeling disconnected from the cultural norms of suburban Middle America, were quick to embrace various immigrants’ cuisines, as a means to sensorially and physically embrace this new multicultural America.\textsuperscript{461} Seeing an embrace of more authentic Mexican cuisine as a means to bring the newly multicultural landscape into their homes and their bodies and as a way to reject the brazen notions of an American nationalism tied directly to whiteness and by association suburbanized fast-food Tex-Mex, progressive whites were quick to adopt the simple

\begin{footnotes}
\item Bayless, 4, 1987.
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and often inexpensive working-class Mexican cuisine being prepared by immigrant restaurateurs, or at least the simulacra of it being put forth by Bayless and other white foodie elites.\textsuperscript{462}

Because of cultural hybridity working class Mexican cuisine was valorized over Tex-Mex by the culinary elite for several reasons. Tex-Mex is associated with the American colonization of Mexico and the labor of Mexican American Tejanos living in Southwest Texas. Tex-Mex was originally associated with San Antonio and the Mexican American laborer communities in that region of Texas. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, Tex-Mex was also associated with Texas as a whole, which for many progressive whites in Northern cities had come to represent conservative American values, Country music and the Bush Presidencies. In addition, because of the rapid corporate rise of Tex-Mex, the cuisine became associated with suburban American fast food dining. Meanwhile, Mexican cuisine was valorized by such white chefs because it was considered to be the antithesis of everything that Tex-Mex represented, a fake hybridized fast food. The very specific type of working class Mexican cuisine that was beginning to be served in upscale white owned establishments is considered authentic and is based on a pseudo-nostalgic vision of a Mexico untouched by colonization and globalization. Unlike Tex-Mex, the new, more “authentic” dishes, served by both white and Mexican chefs alike, featured unadulterated Mexican staple ingredients like tomatoes, avocados, Mexican oregano, crema, queso, chilies, tortilla and maize prepared rather rapidly and inexpensively in a manner that was similar to the ways by which it was prepared in Mexico. The seemingly rustic and simple foods affiliated with rural and working-class Mexican life (including, most famously, the taco, common in working-class barrios of Mexico City at the end of the nineteenth century) began to be served in both gourmet and popular dining establishments throughout the United

\textsuperscript{462} Hannerz, Ulf. The Two Faces of Cosmopolitanism: Culture and Politics. Barcelona: Documentos CIDOB, 2006. Hannerz claims that one cannot simultaneously be cosmopolitan or truly multicultural and nationalistic, and thus progressive whites saw the embrace of cosmopolitanism as a way to reject nationalism.
States.\(^{463}\) As food blogger Rick Paulas explains of the backlash against Tex-Mex, “the term has become a dirty word that culinary aficionados do their best to avoid. ‘Tex-Mex is an abomination! they'll say. ‘It's inauthentic and only the choice of the ill-informed and willfully ignorant masses!’”\(^{464}\) As Arellano explains in a 2012 interview with the Houston Press, “In some ways, people feel cheated. They feel that Tex-Mex masqueraded as Mexican food for all these years… Outside of Texas, the tide has turned against Tex-Mex despite its deep roots in our country.”\(^{465}\)

Image 15
Rick Bayless in a Yoga Pose, 2007\(^{466}\)

\(^{463}\) “The most popular versions then were *barbacoa* (pit-roasted beef or lamb), *carnitas* (fried pork), *tripitas* (tripe and assorted organ meats), and *tacos de minero* (miner’s tacos), which were filled simply with steamed potatoes and salsa and are now called *tacos sudados* (sweaty tacos).” Source: Pilcher, *Planet Taco*, 2012.


This shift in popularity away from an Americanized version of an ethnic cuisine (in this case Tex-Mex) towards cuisine commonly understood to be more “authentic” or “traditional” (working class Mexican “street” food) is a fairly common process for immigrant food when entering into the US culinary marketplace. As prominent food scholar Krishnendu Ray argues, when first introduced to white American consumers by both immigrant and non-immigrant food producers, ethnic foods are often translated, Americanized or “bastardized” by adding sweetness, fat and often color, to make the flavors more boldly satiating and appealing to the white American palate. Typically after a generation, as the ethnic group further integrates into the American culinary landscape, these foods are redefined and a “new wave” of ethnic restaurants attempts to return the cuisine to more traditional recipes. However, as scholars of Mexican food, Jeffery Pilcher and others have pointed out, the increasing numbers of Mexican immigrants and

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more common prevalence of Mexican food in the United States did not necessarily raise the cultural status of Mexican Cuisine, even as more cuisine perceived to be “authentic” becomes available. In what Ray calls a “hierarchy of taste,” ethnic cuisine actually “gains (cultural) status in inverse proportion to the number of actual immigrants in the country,” arguing that a large number of a certain immigrant groups within the United States actually causes a backlash against their racial identity, culture and by proxy cuisine, a backlash that excludes cuisine from being understood as having elite sensory or cultural regard. Ray argues that the sheer number of immigrants leads to a decrease in the exclusivity of a specific cuisine and as it becomes more common its status as a cultural production that requires skill, knowledge and expertise is significantly diminished within popular rhetoric. As more Mexicans entered the United States and large Mexican populations were seen in areas outside of the Southwest, both amongst common perception and amongst the foodie elite, Mexican food spread quickly around the country. In New York alone, from 2000 to 2011, the percentage of New York’s restaurants that served Mexican cuisine grew from two percent of all restaurants to seven percent of all restaurants in the city. However as Mexican food became more popular, its cultural status did not elevate accordingly. Rather, with its popularly came the popular image, especially amongst whites, as cheap, quick and while enjoyable and gratifying—food for the poor Mexican day laborer or the drunk college student—food defined by its quickly satisfying nature, but not by the expertise of the chef, the intricate labor involved in its production or for its level of culinary

471 Mexican cuisine for example can be compared with Japanese Cuisine. A relatively low number of Japanese immigrants and higher levels of wealth (compared to Mexican immigrants) came to the United States following internment during WWII and the changes in Immigration law in 1965. This allowed Japanese cuisine to occupy a relatively high status within culinary culture while Mexican/Mexican American cuisine was seen as inexpensive “low status” food.
complexity. In fact, according to check averages calculated based on Zagat Surveys, Mexican cuisine ranked 8th out of 11 for average check cost in New York City restaurants, with only Korean, Vietnamese and Thai being less expensive (French, Japanese and American were the three highest). To fit within progressive ideas about cosmopolitanism, white Americans often define the dining spaces that produce Mexican cuisine, (such as taquerias, taco trucks, food carts, bodegas and small food counters) similarly, even at times labeling them as dirty, run down, cramped and aesthetically unappealing. This attitude of ethnic restaurants reflects the commonly held perceptions among American whites of immigrant bodies as sources of labor or “toil” but not of aesthetic value or of “high” taste.

Image 17

474 Ray, The Ethnic Restaurateur, 84.
475 A full description of Krishnendu Ray’s distinction between high status (French and Japanese) and low status (Mexican and Chinese) ethnic cuisines is in the introduction but also can be found in the lecture “Taste, Toil and Ethnicity” given at the University of Vermont in 2009. It can be found here: https://vimeo.com/7687605
The famously kitschy exterior of the now-defunct Caliente Cab Co, including its famous yellow cab and overflowing margarita sign in the mind 1990s. This popular New York Tex-Mex Restaurant fell victim to the collective backlash against Tex-Mex cuisine and has been pushed out by a wide number of more “authentic” Mexican restaurants that focused on Mexican working class staples.\textsuperscript{476}

![Image 18](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caliente_Cab_Co_27_7th_Av_So_jeh.jpg)

The posh exterior of Anejo in Hell’s Kitchen. Such chic décor and elevated working class culinary options have replaced the expected kitsch of Tex-Mex restaurants.\textsuperscript{477}

The view of Mexican cuisine amongst white Americans both in New York and around the country certainly has followed this familiar trajectory from Americanization to authenticity as Tex-Mex was replaced in the American culinary landscape by more traditional Mexican fare. This new white American obsession with “authentic” Mexican cuisine that began to develop (at least in the Midwest and Northeast) in the late 1980s was perhaps no better signified than with the opening of Rick Bayless’ widely popular Chicago Restaurant Frontera Grill in 1987. Both Bayless’ cookbooks and Frontera Grill are noted inspirations for a later generation of white American chefs who serve working-class Mexican cuisine to largely middle and upper-class white consumers. Inspired by Bayless, chefs such as Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger


(Border Grill) and more recently Alex Stupak (Empellón Taquería), René Redzepi (Noma), Danny Bowien (Mission Chinese/Mission Cantina) and April Bloomfield (The Spotted Pig) have each traveled Mexico and used Mexican cuisine prominently in their highly successful American fine dining establishments. This group of chefs are certainly not credited for bringing Mexican cuisine to the United States, but are credited with “elevating it” – breaking it away from the stigma associated with Mexican food as being a “low status” or in Ray’s terms a “toil” based culinary addition to American food scene. Although the first Mexican-American restaurant to be presented with a Michelin Star, a distinction that is given to what is widely considered the best restaurants in the world, was Chiapas born Cosme Aguilar of Long Island City’s Casa Enrique, in the gourmet world of foodie elites, it took a group of progressive white chefs and restaurant owners to bring the complex flavors of the Mexican working class to a white middle and upper middle class American consumers while simultaneously driving the interest in all things archetypically associated with Mexican culinary authenticity. For example, Alex Stupak has been featured on shows like CBS This Morning as the new face of Mexican Cuisine, widely credited for elevating Mexican cuisine from widely being considered working class to something that could be served in a fine dining establishment. René Redzepi of the famed Nordic themed

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479 While the Michelin Star is widely considered the highest honor that can be given to a restaurant, the ways by which these awards are distributed speak of the inherent cultural, racial and class discrimination in the restaurant industry. The vast majority of the restaurants that are awarded Michelin Stars and therefore considered the best in the world, are located in Europe, with a particular high concentration in France.


restaurant has recently opened Noma Mexico which was an elite high-end pop up restaurant in Mexico City, also criticized but credited with bring Mexican cuisine into the stratosphere of the culinary elite. Because of the intersections of race and class that drive much of the food world, it essentially required a group of wealthy white chefs to give culinary validity and prominence to Mexican cuisine within the gourmet world. This not only speaks to the well-documented racial hierarchies inherent in the culinary community, but also begs the question of who has the power to claim authority over cultural knowledge, and showcases the power of whiteness to usurp and claim ownership over cultural and culinary knowledge.

After being introduced to the elite culinary world by a series of white chefs (and a number of Asian chefs who through their wealth have a complicated access to whiteness), upscale/expensive Mexican cuisine had become a trend in the culinary world, both in New York and around the country, as these white chefs “studied this intricate and endlessly complex cuisine with an anthropologist’s intensity”482 blending what were considered “authentic” Mexican flavors with modern culinary innovations.483 Food writers were quick to label these restaurants the “new frontier” in Mexican cuisine, stating that these largely white American chefs were “standing up for Mexican cuisine” by serving “dreamlike” variations of Mexican street cuisine, that, according to the New York Times, “only a select few had the ability to serve.”484 Popular taquerías – like Manhattan’s Tacombi, La Esquina, Dos Caminos, Añejo Restaurant and Empellón Taquería, Brooklyn’s Roco’s Tacos, Chavela’s and Gran Electrica, Chicago’s Tortas Frontera, San Francisco’s Tropisueño (not all owned by white chefs) and numerous other upscale establishments across the country owned by large corporations or white restaurateurs – rejected

484 Wells. 2012.
what progressive white foodies deemed inauthentic Americanized Tex-Mex in favor of a combination of culinary choices and décor that created an elevated and abstracted simulacrum of rural working class Mexican culture. This was done in such urban upscale expensive taquerias and restaurants not only by including Mexican working class culinary staples on the menu, but also by including a sort of rural/industrial/working class chic that moves away from both the tacky kitsch style of Tex-Mex restaurants and the upscale poshness of haute restaurants. Design elements – such as a rusty Volkswagen Beetle converted into a grill (a key design element of Tacombi), a construction bucket for a sink in the bathrooms (also in Tacombi), rustic distressed tables, mismatched colored distressed chairs, chipped paint on the walls, fifties diner style checkered floors, and dented and faded relics of Mexican nationalism such as signs and flags – to create a working class Mexican chic that appealed directly to food conscious middle and upper class white Americans’ desire for ethnicity, authenticity and exoticism. Yet by elevating these design elements still appealed to their desire for stylish and upmarket dining spaces. What is contradictory and complex about the aesthetics of these Mexican “fine” dining establishments is that even as they present themselves as paying homage to working-class culture, they simultaneously do not lack an aesthetic aura of luxuriousness and feel posh even while incorporating dilapidated decorative elements. Therefore, such spaces are allowed to navigate a delicate balance where they are upscale, but the inclusion of working class aesthetics allows the diners to assume the cuisine is an accurate or at least reliable representation of authentic Mexican working class cuisine. In addition, even while such design elements are not simply to placate the desire for simulated exoticism by progressive whites, (and are, rather, the

485 One of Tacombi’s Owners, Oscar Hernandez is from Jalisco, Mexico, however its ownership team is also comprised of white Americans and the restaurant certainly plays up its Mexican working class/Mexican beach aesthetic.

486 Based on an extensive oral history of restaurant owners, employees, customers done from 2012-2015.
result of an amalgamation of factors including the decisions of restaurant owner and staff), these
design elements construct a nostalgic and idealized vision of Mexican culture and an aesthetic
turn towards a rustic or pastoral idealism that works to unconsciously endorse the Mexican
economic hardships that resulted from American neoliberal economy. The irony of wealthy
millennials eating in an environment that attempts to simulate poverty that is a direct result of
United States’ economic policies is often lost on restaurant patrons in upscale establishments
such as La Esquina and Tacombi. And as a result, even while serving dishes that are very much
popular in less expensive taquerias and taco carts across New York and Sunset Park (such as
barbacoa or al pastor tacos with simple ingredients, corn tortilla and pickled vegetable toppings),
because of the combination of upscale décor and an appropriated working-class aesthetic, these
restaurants can feel chic, charge premium prices, and allow privileged white patrons to feel as
though they are having a genuine, authentic dining experience.
Images 19, 20 and 21
Tacombi at Fonda, Nolita, New York

The simulated rustic working class exterior of La Esquina, located in the upper-class neighborhood of Nolita, Manhattan.

The posh downstairs interior of La Esquina and its bar with over 200 premium tequilas.

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New York’s progressive whites did not limit their search for culinary authenticity to Manhattan’s new upscale eateries. Rather, as progressive whites increasingly utilized travel and eating as a means to boost their cultural capital and express cosmopolitanism, the foodie turn away from Tex-Mex led progressive whites into the outer boroughs in search of what they perceived to be the most authentic Mexican cuisine New York has to offer.  

If there’s one cuisine I could happily munch into eternity, it’s Mexican street food. I have been happy about the crop of upmarket taco restaurants sprouting around my home state the past few years, with their artisanal-tequila cocktail menus and chichi ingredients (crunchy kale, slow-roasted pork belly, spice-glazed duck breast). But for every upscale taquería eatery I’ve visited, it seems as if I’ve driven past a smaller, less glossy Mexican restaurant, set amid discount stores in a strip-mall shopping plaza, or peeking from between the entrances to glitzier restaurants. These spots, some with hand-lettered signs in their windows, got me wondering: What sorts of pleasures might they offer beyond my beloved tacos? Plenty, as a tour of small, under-the-radar Mexican restaurants recently proved.

Sarah Gold’s article in the New York Times, excerpted above, suggests that those living in the greater New York region have extended their search for authenticity beyond the upscale taquerías of Manhattan and have turned towards the less formalized working class taquerías and take-out of working-class Mexican enclaves.

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492 Gold’s article is specifically focused on the working class Mexican restaurant scene in New Haven.
Chapter 4
The Gentrification of Sunset Park: Urban Change, Cosmopolitan Whiteness and an “Epochal Shift” in White Privilege

“Yes, I am Puerto Rican… but you don’t see me as a human being. You see me as rice and bean first.”
-Rosie Perez

Image 24
Miss Niss (Melissa) and A-Tooch (Angela) of the Blog Foodies at Work

One January afternoon in the West Village of Manhattan, a group of young, white, middle class, urban professionals decide to meet for lunch. Having the day off from work and wanting to “celebrate diversity in honor of Martin Luther King Day,” Angela, founder of the blog, Foodies at Work, and a group of her friends decide to venture into Sunset Park, well over an hour away by mass transit, in order to find the most “authentic,” and therefore “best” Mexican

food that New York has to offer.  

Angela (pictured on the right), a self-described “foodie” writes on her blog that she has a taste preference for all types of “ethnic” foods. Her favorites are Indian and Mexican. As someone who dedicated a great deal of time and energy searching out the “best ethnic food” in New York, in particular Mexican restaurants, it was not out of the question, or even extraordinary, for Angela to recommend the long commute to Sunset Park to enjoy a taco or a torta. Unlike during the 1980s and early 1990s, when Tex-Mex was often white Americans only exposure to Mexican cuisine, Angela knew she wanted something different, something she saw as more authentic and more global, and as a result was eager to travel to Sunset Park to find it. During what she described as a “Mexi-venture,” Angela and her friends took what has been called a "taco tour" - a visit to several different taquerías and panaderías on Fifth Avenue with notable stops including Tacos Matamoros, Tacos el Branco and Ricos Tacos, which cater mainly to the community from Puebla, Mexico that make up the primary residents of the neighborhood. Overcoming any language barriers (most of the residents in this neighborhood primarily speak Spanish), they ordered and ate tacos, Arabes, tortas, tostadas and guava puff pastries, washing everything down with Jarritos, horchata, and “real sugar” cola. Upon their return to the West Village, about a fifty-minute commute via the B, F, D, N or R Trains, Angela declared her food adventure a success: “If you are a huge Mexican fan like me, Sunset Park is a little piece of heaven in an otherwise overpriced city. The food is

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494 This anecdote is taken from the blog *Foodies At Work*, for which Angela is a founder and primary writer. The blog entry on her trip to Sunset Park can be found at [http://www.thefoodiesatwork.com/2011/01/19/a-taco-tour-of-sunset-park-brooklyn/](http://www.thefoodiesatwork.com/2011/01/19/a-taco-tour-of-sunset-park-brooklyn/). Accessed October 2012.
495 Mexican style tortas are sandwiches that can be eaten warm or cold and are filled with various meets, pickled vegetables, avocado and eggs.
496 Arabes are similar to tacos but wrapped in a thicker pita like flatbread. Jarritos is a Mexican sold typically sold in various fruit flavors like Guava, Pineapple and Mango. Horchata is a Mexican beverage made of made of rice, sometimes with vanilla and always with cinnamon.
authentic and plentiful and the people, well they are too.” As the closing comment of A-Tooch’s blog post proclaims, the food in Sunset Park is “authentic and plentiful and the people, well they are too,” she renders the Mexican/Mexican Americans of Sunset Park as subjects that can figuratively be ingested by A-Tooch and her friends. The food and the bodies of Mexicans are mentioned in the same breath, as if they are both consumable and exist, not as complex subjects living complex transnational lives, but solely for her sensory experience/pleasure. Also, by calling them plentiful, she speaks to the notion of a neighborhood that is overflowing with bodies and sensory stimuli, all of which the logic of cosmopolitan whiteness encourages here to find enticing.

In what follows, I undertake a detailed analysis of fourteen blogs (Gothamist, Brokelyn, Brooklyn Based, Serious Eats, Eater NY, Time Out, New York City Food Guy, The Infatuation, Eating in Translation, Grub Street, Feast New York, Foodies at Work, Tasting Table, Restaurant Girl), two user generated review sites (Yelp and Google Reviews), and numerous food and

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498 “A Taco Tour of Sunset Park.” theFoodiesatWork.com -
dining sections of major newspapers and periodicals (New York Times, Village Voice, New Yorker, New York Post, Wall Street Journal), to argue that, over a five year period from 2008 to 2013, Sunset Park, with its large Mexican/Mexican American population and rich variety of Mexican culinary options, became a primary destination for mobile white New Yorkers in search of Mexican cuisine. As several blogs and major newspapers have called Sunset Park a must for the lover of authentic Mexican food, progressive whites quickly began to perceive it as a “hot spot” for “authentic” Mexican cuisine. As Food Writer Sara Zorn writes in Brooklyn Magazine, “Sunset Park is, essentially, Brooklyn’s own little Mexico, meaning you’d be hard-pressed to find a truly inauthentic terrible taco.” Outings like “taco tours” of Sunset Park became relatively commonplace and within the last decade as relatively large numbers of white, urban, professional, primarily young progressives have turned towards Fifth Avenue in Sunset Park as their destination of choice for Mexican cuisine.

Food media played a key role in the designation of Sunset Park as a space of culinary otherness. The desire of progressive whites to consider and travel to Sunset Park is made possible by a collective discursive construction, by in large part in the food blogosphere, of Sunset Park as a destination where the most authentic and exotic Mexican cuisine can be uncovered for white audiences. Much of the food writing on dining in Sunset Park has discursively framed the geographic distance and time required for travel to Sunset Park as a voyage into the unknown, dangerous and foreign spaces of Mexican Sunset Park. Food blogs and contemporary culinary journalism describes traveling to Sunset Park as a tour, voyage, get-away,

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escape, excursion, and expedition in the food blogosphere, rhetoric that is very much similar to that employed within imperialist travel literature. Numerous blogs call for “Taco Tours” of Sunset Park, including Brokelyn’s “12 Taco Tour of Sunset Park,” Serious Eats’ “Sunset Park Taco Crawl,” and even a series of guided tours of Sunset Park’s Mexican restaurants that can be through various touring companies. These taco tours evoke anthropological and imperialist language, claiming that the cosmopolitan eater could dedicate several hours traveling Sunset Park, crisscrossing the neighborhood and subsequently eating at several taquerías and food carts.

As the blog *Eat the World: New York City* describes itself as, at the intersection of New York City and the World, this is your travel guide and cultural map to explore the planet right here at home.” An article from the New York Times from late 2007 even called a culinary visit to Sunset Park a “pilgrimage for the taco enthusiast,” a must for any lover of Mexican food. As documented in the food blog The Infatuation, these searches by whites celebrated the hunt for the “few-and-far-between,” resulting in pursuits necessitated several short visits to the neighborhood that extended over several years:

*Our search for the perfect taco is well documented here at the Infatuation. We have lamented about the lack of reliable options, and Garcia that have hit the mark. For whatever reason, New York just doesn’t churn out reliable taco spots like it does so many other ethnic eats.*

*But just because dependable options are hard to find doesn’t mean we have stopped searching. I, in particular, happen to commit much of my free time to the endeavor. And as with many long searches before it, this one has led us to a sweet, salty reward. A diamond in Sunset Park's rough, Tacos El Bronco is home to one of, if not The Best tacos in town.*

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In such online writing, dining in Sunset Park is conceptualized as a playful escape from the banality of daily life in New York, where eating ethnically stands in for transnational travel. In her blog, *Foodies At Work*, Angela clearly framed her “taco tour” as a frivolous and extravagant trip where she and her friends overindulged their appetites by moving from one taquería to the next, overeating and taking in as many cultural and sensory experiences as possible. For white culinary slummers like Angela, Sunset Park is not perceived as a complex community with its own issues, concerns, tensions and dynamics, but rather an urban playground where white urbanites can play out transgressive fantasies as mediated through complex cultural and sensory experiences. Much like the practice of leisure slumming did during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the practice of “culinary slumming” provides a relatively comfortable means for middle-class whites to negotiate the racial complexities of late twentieth and early twenty-first century urban America and has emerged as a central feature in the construction of an emergent multicultural “post-racial” white subject positionality. Sunset Park offers for white urbanites a perceived safe space where one can have cross-racial cultural experiences with the immigrant Other without fear of social reprimands to one's social status. Instead, slumming actually increases one's perceived social status by fostering a sense of culinary adventurousness and by increasing one's cultural capital and cosmopolitan knowledge that can later be then put up for display on social media networks and add to one’s social and cultural cache.

I label this pursuit of and desire for immigrant cuisine “culinary slumming,” voyeuristic and exploratory excursions by whites into informal dining spaces of racialized ethnic urban communities in efforts to achieve what is perceived as an authentic, peculiar, exotic and even sometimes dangerous, eating experience. Progressive whites are able to travel through urban space and partake in what is considered an authentic cultural experience that involves interacting
with a racialized immigrant population on both an interpersonal and sensory level. In Angela’s particular case for example, her and her dining partners returned to their predominantly white neighborhood of the West Village confident that they had daringly entered into the unknown of Mexican Sunset Park, had eaten “real” Mexican food, prepared and served by “real” Mexicans in a “real” cultural environment. Their desire for food in Sunset Park specifically emerges from its perceived lack of hybridity or cultural blending that otherwise characterizes all American food, New American cuisine in particular. For culinary slummers, traveling to Sunset Park is less about food as a material substance, less about the meat, queso, corn and avocado as commodities or as sustenance, and more about the consumption of difference and an avoidance of the hybridized/Americanized cuisine of the Tex-Mex and New American options in Manhattan. Surely, white diners can find tacos and tortas in Manhattan and they do not need to travel for nearly an hour and a half on the Coney Island Bound R Train just for lunch. What is appealing for the culinary inclined progressive white is that food in Sunset Park is different and represents a radical disjuncture from and rejection of normative white American food choice, which is generally perceived as dull, boring and bland within late twentieth century “foodie” discourse. Within the American culinary discourse, non-Anglo food is constructed as exotic and offers eaters a “spicy”, “dangerous”, “wild”, “strange” alternative to normative Anglo-American cuisine, especially in regards to the Asian Immigrant eateries in Sunset Park.

For white, food-conscious consumers of ethnic food, it is the assumption that these encounters with the cuisines and cultures of the racialized foreign Other will provide a greater, more intense, pleasure than would be achieved through food consumption within ones racial group because of their spicy or exotic traits. This desire to eat outside of ones normative food choices is predicated on the construction and availability of a population and culture that is
perceived as different and foreign. This white desire for “foreign” food, thus, renders the producers of those foods, in this case Mexican immigrants, as perpetually “foreign” and outside of what is understood as part of American cultural identity. Here progressive whites, desiring culinary authenticity, can claim a position of authority over an essentialized and ahistorical vision of Mexican cuisine, and by extrapolation Mexican culture, as unchanged and unaltered by the unending cultural exchanges of globalization and immigration. For the white urban eater this act of culinary slumming displays a symbolic openness to other cultures that discursively serves as a moment of transformation into proper multicultural liberal positionality. Cross-racial food encounters and the subsequent performative rearticulation of such acts in food blogs, on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as well as in various social settings, are utilized by white culinary slummers to “make themselves over and transition from a world of inexperience to an experienced world of globalized knowledge”. While surely the immigrant populations have much agency in this cultural exchange, deciding what food to serve white people, using different ingredients, making hybrid dishes to increase profit and controlling all aspects of the restaurant space challenge the subject position of the white diner while in the restaurant, by publically rearticulating their sensory and racial encounters, culinary slummers work to reaffirm the existing cultural hierarchy by rendering the racialized other an edible and consumable source of cultural capital. Through the appropriation and use of the cultures of racialized immigrant populations to publicly articulate one’s position of globalized familiarity and expertise (on blogs, food writing, twitter, etc.), slummers articulate a view of the immigrant cultures within Sunset Park as a source of commodified pleasure where the white urbanite can build upon their own cultural cache, prove one’s proper liberal positionality and hence support and reinforce their own position of relative cultural privilege.
I use the term “slumming” rather than the more prevalent terms like “culinary tourism” and “culinary adventuring” for specific reasons. First and most importantly, culinary slumming highlights the ways by which the food conscious middle-class white Americans use cross-racial eating to reinforce a particular sense of social, class, racial superiority over the immigrant populations who inhabit urban neighborhoods with which they are traveling to dine. A close read of food literature and online media reveals that for middle-class whites, a primary impetus to travel to these communities is because of a perceived sense of entering into a community that is deemed rough, unrefined, unassuming, sullied and unimpacted by the fast-paced, hyper-competitive and extremely expensive New York food scene. I also use the word slumming to evoke an important historical legacy. Dating back to the 1880s, progressive whites traveled into working class, immigrant, Asian and black enclaves – such as Coney Island, Harlem, Greenwich Village, Chicago's South Side and Levee districts – in order to pursue nightlife, sexual encounters and various forms of sensory pleasure. Such encounters, much like the culinary multiculturalism of today, were predicated on having transgressive cross-racial exchanges with communities of color. In addition, the use of the term “slumming” is also to draw correlations to the ways by which gustatory and olfactory stimuli are viewed as “lower” and cruder sensory experiences in the postmodern Western perception. The experiences to be had in such ethnic restaurants, the taquerías of Sunset Park, appeal on these low/crude sensory planes, but because of the racialized status of the producers of the food, not to a pure and more refined

510 See Heap, Chad. Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. And Mumford, Kevin. Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. While a great deal of cultural history and critical race theory has highlighted these acts as racially and sexually charged, the racial implications similar contemporary acts have yet to be critiqued as also being tied to a clear racial hierarchy.
sense of aesthetic taste. Although this is in no way a reflection of the actual quality of food or décor within these dining establishments, the word slumming is aptly used to describe the perceptions and implications of this act by progressive whites; they assume they are going into a working class and othered neighborhood, which implies a potential risk of contact with a “dirty” alien racialized subject, that should only be risked for the potential rewards of the authentic and hopefully gaustoryily pleasurable eating experience.\textsuperscript{511} Even when progressive whites who participate in slumming do not consciously perceive the bodies of racialized others as foreign, the act of travel, specifically for inexpensive, often informal, fast-paced, culinary experiences with a certain racial and social positionality, implies a charged cultural act that the word slumming attempts to illumonate.\textsuperscript{512}

The culinary slummers themselves are most commonly middle-class urban whites who accentuate their affinity for multicultural contact and take pride in their geographic mobility afforded to them because of their middle-class positionality within the contemporary moment of multicultural neoliberalism.\textsuperscript{513} The new cosmopolitanism, global mobility and cultural privilege exuded by these progressive whites are a direct result of both late twentieth-century neoliberal policy and a (often corporate sponsored) public embrace of multiculturalism. These young, professional urban dwellers are not only amenable to changing their palate and eating the cuisines of immigrant groups, but along with global travel, adventure tourism, partaking in

\textsuperscript{511} Health Inspection Grades of all New York restaurants can be found here: http://a816-restaurantinspection.nyc.gov/RestaurantInspection/SearchBrowse.do Accessed November 9th, 2015.

\textsuperscript{512} The racial and social implications of such acts would be much different if done by other groups of color, such as the large Chinese population of Sunset Park (centered around 7th Ave) that dines in the Mexican Restaurants (centered around 5th Ave), and vice versa. The racial implications of such acts, in part because of the history of whiteness and the cross racial activist and solidarity work done in Sunset Park, implies a much different racial schema.

\textsuperscript{513} In this chapter however, I do not specifically examine the cross-racial eating performed by communities of color (such as the Chinese population of Sunset Park dining in the Mexican establishments). This is because it is a much different cultural act, that can speak to important cross racial solidarities and new multi-racial identities that have emerged as a result of global migration, but also does not operate within the same racial hierarchies that drive whiteness and these new forms of cosmopolitan privilege.
global cultural and spiritual practices (like Yoga, Color Runs, and various forms of Eastern Spirituality) have also openly embraced global diversity and their position of flexible privilege within it. They possess the disposable income and leisure time because their class position allows them to dedicate a relatively large amount of resources to the pursuit of culinary experience.

Critical reading of food blogs reveals that for culinary tourists eating Mexican food on Fifth Avenue in Sunset Park is not thought of as a problematic, an exploitative or even a charged cultural act. Rather, cross-racial eating is constructed as a way to process the racial complexities of New York by publicly affirming cultural plurality; participating in cross-racial eating is seen as a progressive act that confirms one’s tolerance towards, openness to and acceptance of other cultures, especially cultures of people of color and non-native born immigrants. The process of cultural exchange at work here is much more complex and hierarchical. Much like hooks’ arguments concerning cross-racial sexual desire, I contend that culinary slumming displays a symbolic openness to other cultures that discursively serves as a moment of transformation for the white urban eater. In rejecting the Mexican food of Manhattan, culinary slummers perceive that they have left behind the innocent naivety of normative food consumption and by eating the “authentic”, “exotic” and “dangerous” foods in ethnic enclaves slummers symbolically attempt to demonstrate that they are culturally and globally enlightened. Eating ethnic food then becomes a way for culinary slummers to make themselves over and transition from a world of inexperience to a world of globalized knowledge. While these urban whites lack a nuanced understanding of the neighborhood and community dynamics of Sunset Park, they also often lack a complete understanding of the dishes served in the eateries. In interviews with restaurant workers, many restaurant employees long Fifth Avenue spoke of how white diners simply did not fully understand the food that was being served to them or that they did not venture away

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514 bell hooks. “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. 
from a small number of dishes, like burritos, tacos and chips and salsa, that white diners were familiar with. As one bartender/server in a small taquería shared with me, “when I give them the customer their food, they often seem displeased and express a look of confusion on their faces, even though they usually enjoy it anyway” which expressed a culinary distance or cultural misunderstanding between the Mexican American staff and the white American customer. These mistranslations, culturally or linguistically, express the naivety with which the culinary slummers often enter these dining spaces, a naivety that can cause both innocuous but also vehement disconnects between the culinary slummers and the Mexican immigrant community in Sunset Park. Without fully understanding the cultural significance of the food and dining spaces, culinary slummers not only do not know the procedure with which follow in the dining spaces but also do not fully process the cultural and affective violence that their presence can have in these communities.

When such progressive white diners traveled to Sunset Park, they unearthed a culinary landscape and sensory geography that progressive whites in other New York neighborhoods were unaware of. As they walk down Fifth or Eight Avenues, progressive whites exude a sense of confidence and superiority in imagining that they are the ones able to introduce such “new” ethnic cultural productions to their progressive white community. For the culinary slummer, the presumption is that such acts and the subsequent public display of them place themselves at the forefront of multicultural inclusiveness and progressive cosmopolitanism. Despite the history and contemporary context that clearly marks Sunset Park as an immigrant enclave, culinary slummers are “space invaders” that feel as though could travel to Sunset Park with little fear that

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515 Interview conducted as part of an ethnography performed in July of 2012 with translation assistance from translator Dulce Gross.
they were not welcome in this urban enclave or unauthorized to be there. Ta-Nehisi Coates writes of the occupying nature of whiteness, pointing to the confident strut of progressive whites down New York sidewalks. Similarly, culinary slummers, feel comfortable to inhabit the physical, cultural and social space of Sunset Park, despite its clear display of Mexican aesthetics. Any fear of repercussion, awkwardness or discomfort, would be displaced by the gains to one’s cultural cosmopolitanism that could be achieved from culinary slumming in Sunset Park.

For example, Dave Cook of the blog *Eating in Translation* writes of his experience eating in Sunset Park’s Isabella Mexican Cuisine (which he tellingly misnames in his blog as Isabella’s Family Restaurant) located between 44th and 45th Streets on 4th Avenue in Sunset Park.

The two ladies working at the very back of the dimly lit, otherwise empty dining room appeared surprised when I walked in for an atol de granillo. Not surprised by my order, I gathered, but surprised by the very fact that I’d stepped inside, though I couldn’t figure why. (The restaurant was open for the day; the weather, on a late morning in January, was relatively balmy.) One lady ducked into the glassed-in kiosk at the front of the restaurant; she soon emerged with a small cup of the atol ($1), and I was on my way. I didn’t get far, however, before another customer appeared. She disdained the door, made a beeline for the window, and put her finger to something just above the sliding partition in the center: a bell, or maybe a buzzer. Regular customers know the drill; some of us newcomers need a little time to catch on.

As this passage details, Cook did not follow the procedures of the restaurant (such as ordering from the window rather than entering the restaurant and walking to the back) that typical customers already understood. However, at least in how he describes the experience later, he felt very little in terms of discomfort or alienation when entering the space. His presence shocks, if not alarms, the two restaurant employees who may have been surprised by the presence of a white man in a restaurant space that was otherwise typically inhabited by people of color. For

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Cook, his whiteness and gender privilege allowed him to invade the restaurant space and feel no uneasiness, despite the restaurant being culturally and sensorially marked for the Mexican/Mexican American community and very much outside of the realm of normative whiteness. He was able to boldly walk into the restaurant, make a quick and power-laden commercial exchange and leave the restaurant with no danger to his cultural, racial or gendered privilege. By following up this experience by writing about the culinary exchanges and encounters that occur after leaving Sunset Park, food bloggers and culinary slummers such as Cook can claim a position of authority over the cuisine that is in effect earned by their geographic movement and self-assured immersion into the Latino/a dining spaces of Southwest Brooklyn.

Image 26
Exterior of Isabela’s Mexican Cuisine located at 4412 4th Avenue, 2014.  

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A collective reading of restaurant reviews of Fifth Avenue dining establishments like Tacos Matamoros, Tacos El Bronco, Rico's Tacos and Taquería La Paz, demonstrates that the larger claim put forth concerning dining in Sunset Park is that despite several barriers - the most common three being the geographic distance and travel time (it can take well over an hour to reach Sunset Park from parts of Manhattan, Queens or Brooklyn), the language barrier between the English speaking patrons and the Spanish speaking restaurant staff, and the perception that restaurants in Sunset Park are dirty and potentially unsanitary – the Mexican cuisine in Sunset Park is seen as significantly more authentic and therefore superior to Mexican cuisine found anywhere else in the city. In fact, in restaurant reviews, and the subsequent plethora of blog entries that highlight Fifth Avenue, these barriers - distance, language and restaurant condition - are constructed as part of the appeal of eating in Sunset Park. A critical examination of the discourse surrounding these three barriers turned appeals reveals further evidence that culinary slumming is predicated on the consumption of the difference and that the rhetoric surrounding

these three barriers participates in the construction of white/non-white, native/foreign and normative/exotic cultural binaries as mediated through eating.

A clear language barrier exists between the predominantly English speaking culinary slummers and the predominantly Spanish speaking restaurant staff and Mexican clientele, which often results in the inability for the white culinary slummer to read the menu in its entirety or ask the restaurant staff questions. This often results in restaurant staff preparing food that was not precisely what the diner was intending to order and the diner being served an item that was not exactly what they wanted. As Alicia, a bartender at a small taquería kindly admitted:

I try my best to understand what the customer is ordering, but sometimes I cannot understand them. And when I give them the customer their food, they often seem displeased and express a look of confusion on their faces, even though they usually enjoy it anyway. But because we do not understand each other, no one says anything. I am doing my best, but I know I sometimes bring people food they did not intend to order. Most times, however, they do seem to like it.520

While this language difference could be considered a barrier, the rhetoric put forth by the food writing again finds a way to frame it as part of the appeal found in consuming difference in Sunset Park. The potential of receiving something that one didn't initially want to eat adds to the sense of bravery and adventure that is exhibited by the slummers. It also offers the opportunity for them to eat a food or dish that they previously had not encountered, which in the logic of cosmopolitan whiteness, only build their cultural capital. Entering into a restaurant where little or no English is spoken plays into the construction of the dining establishment as different and particularly authentic. For slummers, the best Mexican food is prepared and served by those individuals who are perceived as culturally closest to Mexico and furthest from American cultural identity. Language functions as a clear a marker of that Mexican identity.

520 Interview conducted as part of an ethnography performed in July of 2012 with translation assistance from translator Dulce Gross.
Food writing and blogs present it as an obvious conclusion; of course, the most authentic Mexican food will be found in a restaurant where the staff speaks Spanish.

One clear example of progressive whites overcoming this geographic and language barriers is from the blog *Untapped Cities* (a title which implies these cities are waiting to be “tapped” by middle-class whites). An article entitled “Eating the Brooklyn Horseshoe: A Food Tour Along the Borough’s Most Immigrant-Dense Neighborhoods,” encourages its readers to take a single-day food tour of what they call the “Brooklyn Horseshoe.” The “Brooklyn Horseshoe” is a horseshoe-shaped route that follows along the B, Q, N, D and R trains into Brooklyn’s most immigrant-dense neighborhoods of Brighten Beach, Coney Island, Bensonhurst and Sunset Park.521 These “immigrant-dense neighborhoods,” with large Asian, Latino, Caribbean and Eastern European communities, because of the competitive real estate market, also happen to be among the furthest geographically from Manhattan and thus most isolated from the cities center of finance and commerce. Samantha Lee and Alyssa Pagano, the authors of “Eating the Brooklyn Horseshoe,” encourage its readers to revel in the fact that these restaurants and eateries are geographically disconnected from Manhattan, seeing the distance not as a burden, but rather an enjoyable part of this “international culinary adventure.” The large number of foreign-born residents along this route, with several noted stops in Sunset Park, note the various languages spoken and the “almost 950,000 immigrants” does not make the trip more difficult, but rather become part of the experience of such a food journey as the “diverse populations engender culinary offerings that are just as varied – and make a great summer day’s

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worth of eating.” The informal, extemporaneous and casual nature of their dining experiences, which is primarily expressed in the blog through high resolution photos of various dishes in plastic, aluminum or Styrofoam containers with plastic cutlery, ordered from counters and street windows, seen eaten outside, is not a deterrent but rather encouraging part of the “food adventure.” The distance, language and ad-hoc nature of immigrant eateries, things that for less progressive and less cosmopolitan inclined eaters may see as reasons to avoid embarking on such a food journey, are actually framed as some of the highlights of the trip because it heightens the perception that such experiences are authentic and truly cross-cultural, thus allowing the progressive whites embarking on such trips to bluster their multicultural global positionality.

Another prime example how race, urban space, street food and sensory experience converge in Sunset Park is with the rhetoric surrounding Luis Garcia, otherwise known as the “The Esquites Man,” and how he is represented in the food blogosphere. For numerous years, Mr. Garcia has rolled out a red shopping cart to the corner of Fifth Avenue and 53rd Street in Sunset Park. From this cart, Garcia serves Esquites, a corn dish made of butter-sautéed corn kernels topped with mayonnaise, epazote (a dried Mexican herb), cotija cheese, cayenne pepper, a lime and fresh lime juice. He serves large scoops of the corn dish from a Gatorade cooler placed in a red Lowes shopping cart into Styrofoam cups for two dollars each. Despite the tiny one-man operation, Garcia has received extensive attention in the food blogosphere and culinary world, including reviews in *Time Out New York, Urban Spoon* and *Zamato*. The New York Magazine also did an extensive profile on Garcia and even named him as the tenth best food cart

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522 Lee, Samantha and Pagano, Alyssa.
523 There is no proof that Garcia actually named his operation this, as his street cart has no signs and his operation is not listed publicly online or in business publications. Rather, it is likely that The New York Magazine assigned this name to him.
in New York City.”524 This attention certainly has helped Garcia in some financial respects, as he began to grow lines of people waiting for their cup of esquites. However, this increased media attention does raise some questions. Why would a high culture publication like the New York Magazine – that targets an upper middle-class white readership by often running features on upscale retail, the elite Manhattan art scene, the bourgeois New York social scene and the city’s fine dining restaurants – publish a feature on a man that serves a corn dish out of an orange cooler placed inside of a rickety red Lowes shopping cart?

This is precisely because Garcia’s small-scale operation is exactly the kind of adventurous, surreptitious, seemingly authentic dining experience that culinary slummers fawn over. As a number of Mexican American Sunset Park residents have expressed, Garcia is part of

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their close-knit transnational community. Eating Garcia’s food presents a small treat, a means by which to indulge in one of the small gustatory decadences of life in Puebla, Mexico. Regardless of whether the esquites is served out of a shopping cart or in a local taquería, for the Mexican immigrant community this dish symbolizes an affect and sensory connection to home in an otherwise corporate urban space.  

However, for the Progressive whites who began to frequent Garcia’s cart (at least in large part because of the attention it received in the food blogosphere), eating corn out of the Styrofoam cup served by Garcia offers the perfect combination of fatty decadence (the corn is roasted and smothered in butter and cheese), sensory stimuli, assumed authenticity, the perception of potential danger/dirtiness, and a sense of discovery. Finding the food cart represents a sense of adventure, as his location has varied from day to day and his hours are far from consistent and one must get over what numerous blogs have described as dirty or filthy food serving conditions. As Ben Kopelan writes in The Infatuation, Garcia represents one of the “diamonds in the rough” and “celebrated few and far betweens” that culinary slummers so cherish.

The food blog Eating in Translation, even questioned why Garcia has received such coverage in the middle-class food world. “Would you eat food from this man?” Pointing to the informality of Garcia’s operation, the suspected filth of the food being served, and what the blogger sees as the absurdity of the New York Magazine Coverage, the blogger answers his questions with a firm “no.” However as one customer of Garcia explained in a brief interview after finishing his cup of corn, expressing that he perceived Garcia as both dirty and elusive, but certainly worth the effort and risk: “I’ve had the corn here are few times. It’s great. Its super creamy and smothered in butter and cheese, what’s not to like. I was a little sketched out the first

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526 Even the use of a Lowes Hardware shopping cart and a Gatorade water cooler speaks to the cooption of corporate products, immigrant entrepreneurial spirit and immigrant resilience.
527 Kopelan.
time I tried it and worried about what it might do to my stomach. I mean, he literally serves it out of that big cooler. But if you can find him, it's so worth it. I keep an eye out for him every time I am over here (Fifth Ave in Sunset Park) for work.”

By publishing a piece on Garcia, the New York Magazine can express several things to its readership. For one, that it is not a pretentious publication that ignores the vibrant diversity of New York and proves that it is not completely out of touch with the working class masses. However, more importantly, in writing about Garcia the New York Magazine and other food blogs can draw the attention of an increasingly adventurous food conscious readership who, as the logic of culinary slumming suggests, are constantly searching for more obscure, more adventurous, more off the beaten path and more diverse dining experiences. “The Esquites Man” is exactly the kind of culinary adventure that young white urban professionals seek out and thus by publishing such an article, these food publications can cater to and encourage their readership.

As a result of the large influx of whites to Sunset Park, the restaurants and taquerias of Fifth Avenue, such as Tacos El Branco, Tacos Matamoros, Ricos Tacos and Taquería El Mezcal Corp, which have traditionally served the Mexican and Latino community, have recently begun serving large groups of whites that have begun traveling to Sunset Park from across the city. While large numbers of Latino/a residents still frequent these dining establishments and they very much still convey to varying degrees a sense of “sabor,” the influx of middle-class whites represents a fundamental change in the makeup of the customer base as well as the aesthetic and affective experiences of these restaurants. Recognizing this change in restaurant patronage and its potential impacts on familial affects for the Mexican and Latino/a

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528 Based on an oral history of restaurant owners, employees, customers done from 2012-2015 with translation help from Dulce Gross.
communities, Alicia, the bartender at the Fifth Avenue taquería further explained in the summer of 2012,

In the past, we only served food to Mexicans. But now, many of our customers are not Mexican and not from this neighborhood. Some days, so many white people will come to the restaurant that it does not feel like it is a Mexican restaurant at all. It feels like it is a restaurant for everyone else.  

As Alicia continued, she had previously only spoken Spanish while serving and preparing food. The menus at the restaurant where she was employed had previously only been written in Spanish. However as a result of this large influx of white, non-Spanish speaking Americans, the menus have added both Spanish and English translations, Alicia began speaking much more English with her customers and the recipes, taste and aesthetics of some of the food items have been altered to appease this new set of white customers. This change in restaurant patronage in Sunset Park is indicative of a larger cultural and culinary shift that has emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century and has dominated American food culture ever since – the middle class white American desire, pursuit and attempted of “ethnic food” - particularly the food of racialized immigrant populations in urban ethnic enclaves. Throughout cities across the United States, large numbers of progressive urban whites are traveling around their respective cities to immigrant and ethnic enclaves (like Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo, D.C.’s Little Ethiopia, Manhattan’s Chinatown or Curry Hill, or Brooklyn’s Sunset Park) to eat across racial and ethnic boundaries in order to achieve what they perceive to be a new, exotic and authentic dining experience.

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529 Interview conducted as part of an ethnography performed in July of 2012 with translation assistance from translator Dulce Gross.
530 Because of her immigration status, her name has been changed and specific location of her place of employment has been excluded. While she was happy to informally share her experiences with me and my translator, she did not wish to have her identity revealed because she was not a legal permanent resident.
531 While these adaptations can certainly “water down” traditional dishes, it also should be noted that the influx of white diners has allowed some chefs to experiment with flavors that were not traditionally part of these nationally defined culinary staples, resulting in a host of new “fusion” dishes.
The Sensory Landscape of a Transnational Community and its Culinary Interlopers

Immigrant and ethnic urban enclaves, like Sunset Park, are the paradigmatic image of sensory alterity within the modern global city. Popular discourse labels ethnic enclaves like Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo, D.C.’s Little Ethiopia, Manhattan’s Chinatown or Curry Hill, or Brooklyn’s Sunset Park as odious, gastronomically stimulating and visually vibrant sites of sensory overload. Despite the fact that sensory stimuli abound in all urban areas (especially in a city like New York), the perceived sensory excess of immigrant enclaves is typically juxtaposed

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532 Burdick, John. Pig Mural at Ricos Tacos. Taken August 2014.
against the image of white urban modernity and its sensory neutrality – Manhattan’s financial
district for example as a space of global finance and technology, but at least in popular
understanding, free of smells, tastes or distinguishing sensory markers (of course, in reality, this
urban space represents just as complex of a sensory economy as any in the United States).
Modern cities, especially those spaces inhabited primarily by middle-class whites like lower
Manhattan, are seen as highly rational, clean and free of distinct senses. Meanwhile, New York’s
popular rhetoric often stereotypes the outer boroughs, the Bronx, Queens and the outer reaches of
Brooklyn, as sites of racial and ethnic excess, spaces known for being hyper-sensuous with a
cacophony of foreign or immigrant sounds, sites, smells and tastes. For much of the twentieth
century, Anglo-whites saw the othered immigrant bodies that inhabited these spaces as “the
natural carrier and source of undesirable sensory experiences” 534 – i.e. immigrant bodies as
odious, dirty, and disease-ridden. The boroughs or enclaves with which they inhabited, Sunset
Park, for example, was seen as the source and site of these unpleasant odious, visually
overwhelming and gastronomically repulsive sensory experiences. Until very recently, Sunset
Park was seen as geographically, culturally and sensuously disconnected from the New York
inhabited by urban white elites. Prior to the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, middle
and upper-class whites often avoided contact with these othered neighborhoods and the
racialized bodies that inhabited them as a means to avoid unpleasant cross-racial sensory
encounters.

However, these urban spaces represent something much different for the immigrant
communities that inhabit them. Fifth Avenue’s restaurants, combined with a host of other
establishments such as groceries, florists, dry cleaners, doctors, barbers, salons, meat markets,
boutiques that offer Mexican and Latino/a goods and services, clearly mark the neighborhood’s

534 Manalansan. “Immigrant Lives and the Politics of Olfaction in the Global City”
sensory geography as being predominantly for and by a Latino/a immigrant community. The sensory experiences of Sunset Park, specifically its auditory (language and music), its sights (nationalist iconography on building facades) and its gustatory (eating in Mexican restaurants), all operating in concert are those that define the neighborhood as a Latino social space. Little English is spoken on Fifth Avenue and the auditory landscape is marked with both Spanish dialogue and various forms of both traditional and popular Mexican and Latino music. As of January 2017, Fifth Avenue in Sunset Park alone had at least 28 restaurants with Spanish in the title of the restaurant, a primarily Spanish speaking staff and serving primarily Mexican or Latin American cuisine. The vast majority of the building facades represent Mexican nationalistic iconography, including the Mexican flag, red, white and green paint and the Mexican Coat of Arms (including the golden eagle, snake and cactus which signify the Legend of Tenochtitlan and the founding of Mexico City) which creates a visual landscape that is clearly marks Sunset Park as inhabiting the liminal cultural space between Mexico and America. Tacos 2004 Viva Mexico Restaurant located at 3913 Fifth Avenue, which is primarily a bar for working-class Mexican laborers, has a front door painted white while the adjacent front windows are painted green and red and an overhead awning that combines these three colors. The use of these colors clearly symbolizes Mexican nationalistic pride and the Mexican flag. It also visibly marks the space as serving Mexican food and catering to a Mexican/Mexican American clientele.
This complex combination of groceries, delis, taquerías and food carts, emit various aromas and sell flavorful foods, marking the space as both olfactory and gustatory associated with Mexican nationalist culture. What’s more, the cultural and social activity of the street, including parades, holidays and public celebrations, is predominantly Mexican and clearly marks Fifth Avenue sensorally as a specifically Mexican and Latino/a social space. Because of the combination of these various sensory perceptions, Sunset Park radiates what Ramona Lee Pérez

and Babette Audant call a sabor, “an excessive flavor… an aesthetic principle that implies a
multisensory saturation and satiation” in a distinctive Latino sensory and social aesthetic.\textsuperscript{536} Fifth Avenue in Sunset Park, with its combination of Puerto Rican and Mexican/Mexican American sensory experiences and affective connotations, exudes a sense of “sabrosa, a powerful yet ephemeral set of placemaking practices that inscribe the space with sabor a “specifically Latino social aesthetic.”\textsuperscript{537} Fifth Avenue truly is a street saturated with pan-Latino and Mexican restaurants and less formal dining establishments, a strip truly defined by food and eating. “The simultaneous presence of so many food businesses with complementary menus and visual styles anchors the specificity of place and contributes to the production of a Latino public space by combining different groups and their culinary cultures into a sort of pan-Latino American mosaic.”\textsuperscript{538}

For the Mexican and Mexican American community that reside in Sunset Park, the aesthetics of these businesses, the smells of the foods, the sight of the flags, the scent street carts and the sound of Mexican music, create a sense of sensory familiarity that exudes a communal belonging that transcends national boundaries. In Sunset Park, Latino immigrants have created a truly transnational community that they have built based on shared sensory experiences and a collective sense of displacement and dispossession from both their national homeland. Mexican and Latino/a Immigrants feelings towards Sunset Park not only allow for the maintenance of Mexican cultural identity within an otherwise diverse New York but also create an urban sensescape that can feel like “home” (smell, sound, taste, look “Mexican”). Like all diasporic groups, this sense of home exists in the smells, sights and sounds that elicit a connection to an


\textsuperscript{537} Pérez and Audant, p 209.

\textsuperscript{538} Pérez and Audant, p 210.
imagined national homeland, regardless of how tangible that connection may actually be, for this population Mexican Americans that connection is with Puebla, Mexico. Food and eating – especially the sensory experiences of eating – can reconstruct and locate a sense of “home,” (impermanent as it may be) whether it is the domestic space of our childhood or an idea of a diasporic postcolonial home within an otherwise fluid urban space. The presence of a neighborhood that is defined by a distinctly Mexican social aesthetic – elicits within the Mexican community of Sunset Park the affective of happiness, brought forth by the sense of belonging, connectivity and exclusivity caused by the sensory familiarity and visceral connections to place that the Mexican and Mexican American Community feel towards Sunset Park.

An Example of a Mexican Grocer

Image 31

An Example of a Mexican Grocery Store and its utilization of both Spanish and English languages, both American and Mexican Iconography and Nationalist symbolism, giving off a distinctly transnational aesthetic. Located at 4011 Fifth Avenue, 2010

However because of global movement, the complex nature of immigration law and urban dislocation in New York caused by the aggressive real estate market, the affect of belonging and sense of being “home” for are not fixed for Latino and Mexican migrants. Rather, the affects and sensory perceptions that drive communal belonging are relatively ambulatory. The legal insecurity of immigration status and the seemingly inevitable and pending urban displacement make any sense of feeling “at home” contain transient undercurrents, undercurrents often made visible by the informal and impermanent nature of the restaurants, food carts and shops that line Fifth Avenue. This does not, however, delegitimize the claims made by immigrant populations that Sunset Park is their home and that deep community roots are laid there. Mexicans and Mexican Americans have lived and loved in the streets of Sunset Park for nearly three decades and, as many residents have made clear in my interviews, feel the violent affects that come with gentrification, urban displacement and the loss of sensory familiarity. Rather, the transitory nature of a “home” in Brooklyn for Mexican migrants, can critique the popular narrative that migration is unidirectional, a narrative that is very much tied to the global corporate dispersion of the “American Dream.” In this popular narrative, migrants come to the United States, their life is immediately improved and they, therefore, will never return to their nation of origin (or even as a second or third generation migrant that they should have any connection to that place). Of course, residents in Sunset Park do visit and even return to Mexico. They occupy an identity that is at once Mexican and American. By intentionally and unintentionally creating a transitory sense of community the Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in Sunset Park have, in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s words, created a community that “carries a sense of home” that is mobile and not fixed but allows them to feel connected with place even while outside of their diasporic homeland.540 This is one reason why the deliberate premeditated urban mobility of progressive

540 Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “Podcast #75: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Zadie Smith on Race, Writing, and
whites is so jarring for the Mexican Immigrant community. For Mexican Immigrants relatively new to Sunset Park, because their sense of home is comparatively insecure and their geographic mobility has been in large part out of forced necessity, not for leisure purposes like it is for a generation of millennial white Americans (although New York’s real estate market is so competitive it is now even pushing middle-class whites far into the outer boroughs), their connection to space and to the creation of a transnational community has significant importance.

For progressive whites, the act of traveling to Sunset Park is not simply about experiencing food deemed as authentic, but also about entering into a sensory landscape that is viewed as distinctly different from those in other New York neighborhoods while expressing their progressive niche in a diverse urban landscape. While there are certain similarities across an urban area, as all neighborhoods have complex sensory geographies and social markers of affect that make neighborhoods distinct the restaurants, bakeries, taquerías, grocery stores, snack counters, street vendors, bodegas, food trucks and delis that are prevalent on Fifth Avenue together construct a powerful and complex sensory environment marked by tastes, smells, sights, sounds that clearly differentiate Sunset Park from much of Manhattan and inscribe this urban space as specifically Mexican or Mexican American i.e. having *sabor*. Tastes mark ethnic identity as outsider, but also as sense of belonging, the pointed heat of a chili peppers, the robust roasted flavor and firm chewiness of a corn tortilla, the mild freshness of a poblano pepper, the tartness of a squeezed lime, the smooth coolness of fresh crema, the subtle sweetness of mole, the buttery softness of ripe avocados and the soft saltiness of queso Oaxaca all mark the tastes found throughout the taquerias and delis of Sunset Park as a space of inclusion for the Puebla community. The dozens of dining establishments that dominate 5th Avenue, not only serve dishes

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https://www.nypl.org/blog/2015/08/25/podcast-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-zadie-smith

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familiar throughout Puebla, Mexico but also emit air fragrant of those dishes that interweaves with the aroma of the city – car exhaust, garbage and human odors – creating a complex taste and olfactory geography. Spanish, of course, is the primary language spoken and Fifth Avenue’s soundscape saturates one’s ears in both Spanish conversation and music. Exterior and interior spaces of eateries alike layer, green, white and red colors with nationalistic imagery that includes flags, coats of arms, murals, and other visual markers of Mexican popular culture. For the Mexican community, the sensory geography of Fifth Avenue offers familiarity as well as ethnic and nationalist pride – making a clear claim for these urban spaces as trans or multi-national as these dining establishments become a clear part of this immigrant community’s home-building practice - functioning as Mexican sanctuaries within an otherwise American and densely commercialized urban landscape.

Because eating is a complex undertaking that is at once cultural and bodily, eating brings to bear the implications of these charged acts directly onto the body of progressive white urbanites. More specifically, when culinary slumming progressive urban whites negotiate a fraught tension between the sensory and affective perceptions of disgust and desire associated with eating in spaces of “low status” ethnic dining. The very logic of culinary slumming is predicated on the progressive whites rhetorically constructing immigrant-dining spaces as crowded, dirty, run-down and socially unorganized. For the slummer, this elicits a clear sensory and affective reaction of disgust. When culinary slumming in Sunset Park, they, on the one hand, envision and construct spaces of ethnic dining and the immigrant bodies that inhabit them as the sensory alterity to white normative sensory experience—as alien and dirty—causing an imagined repulsion that very much perpetuates a nativist-racializing project that remains central to the logic of colonization and racial exclusion. However, this construction of repulsion then works in
consonance with a desire for exoticized ethnic food and the eroticized visceral experiences that are achieved when consuming and eating across races and ethnicities in such spaces of public dining. For culinary slummers, there is a perceived thrill in having a cross-racial culinary experience and consuming food that is perceived as distinctly sensorially different.

New York food blogs present public dining spaces in Sunset Park as dirty, unkempt, unsanitary and therefore dangerous. This perceived sense of danger is juxtaposed against a sense of confidence to enter into and occupy these restaurant spaces that is exuded by progressive whites. In addition, in many contexts, racialized bodies and the enclaves they inhabit are juxtaposed against a common perception of white sensory neutrality and considered the harbinger of sensory grotesqueness. The food blogosphere posits a perception of a lack of cleanliness of the dining establishments of 5th Avenue (which in no way reflects the actual

condition of the restaurants), which works to construct culinary slumming as an act of risk-taking and masculine bravery, where one dares to eat the dirty and unsanitary foods of the racialized other. A blogger at *Eat The World NYC* brags about the eating quesadillas and esquites in the back area of an AK Laundromat in a “bodega with grill service” named Pancho’s Bagels To Go. The blogger writes of the shops messy elusiveness; claiming the space was informal, haphazard and disheveled, “what actually drew enough attention to warrant a stop was the handwritten sign behind her for *quesadillas.*” As the blogger continues, there was “no seating except for a few stools for laundry customers” and while you are trying to eat the place fills up with the scent of dirty clothes and laundry detergent, “the Laundromat has a boisterous atmosphere and people are dragging their giant bags of clothes in and out constantly,” however the eating experience is “quite enjoyable regardless.” Another blogger wrote on Chowhound.com when describing the Tacos Cachanilla, a small taquería at 58th and 5th Ave, “zero English skills, the décor was a definite negative, and the place was filthy,” however, he continues “who cares. This is my kind of place. I’ve had some wonderful stuff there. If you are brave enough to get past the filth, you’ll have some amazing food.” This logic of culinary slumming, predicated on the racialized construction of dining spaces as crowded, dirty, run-down and socially unorganized, for the slummer elicits a very clear visceral reaction of disgust. Thus, on the one hand, culinary slummers envision and construct spaces of ethnic dining and the immigrant bodies that inhabit them as alien and dirty, causing an imagined repulsion that very much perpetuates a nativist-racializing project that remains central to the logic of colonization.

This construction of repulsion then works in consonance with a desire for exoticized ethnic food and the eroticized visceral experiences that the white diner believes can be achieved.

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within. While the taquerías and eateries on Fifth Avenue are certainly not fine dining establishments, and these eateries are casual dining establishments that serve and reflect the primarily working-class community that resides in Sunset Park, the rhetoric that constructs them as unsanitary and dirty is in no way a reflection of the number of health code violations that occur in Sunset Park. In fact, New York Health Inspection Records indicate no higher rates of Code violation in Sunset Park than in other areas of New York. The construction of Fifth Avenue restaurants as dirty is part and parcel of a nativist racializing project that throughout US history has understood immigrant bodies as unclean and disease-ridden, a discourse which is very much at work in the logic that propels culinary slumming. For the culinary slummer, this perceived uncleanliness, like the barriers of distance and language, is not a deterrent but part of the appeal of cross-racial eating and culinary slumming as transgressive and rebellious acts. Thus culinary slumming must be read as a particular performative act that expresses the white consumer’s sense of adventure, adaptability and openness to experiencing other cultures and willingness and bravery to engage with the perceived filthiness of immigrant groups. By negotiating this tension between disgust and desire and the colonizing logic that undergirds both, culinary slumming functions to enact privilege and perpetuate white normativity in ways that are both discursive and bodily.

As Manalansan points out, the presence of immigrant tastes, sounds and smells, raise questions amongst progressive whites about immigrant “placing,” where whites express and legitimize superior cosmopolitan knowledge by “placing” the origin, foreignness and strangeness of the immigrant other. Of course, immigrant and non-immigrant Others can locate themselves within an urban enclave or as part of a diasporic community through food. This is the case within many Sunset Park restaurants such as Tacos Matamoros (Mexican) or La Brasa Peruana.
(Peruvian/Chinese) where the chefs not only cater to the influx of new customers and Sunset Park residents, but also serve “different menus” (one for regulars/staff/members of the diasporic community and one for new customers/whites) that often feature different recipes and hence different sensory experiences that cater directly to the immigrant community within the area. Many restaurants in Sunset Park actually cater to the tastes of the new customers, even altering recipes and flavor profiles of dishes, while still serving foods with a taste profile that maintains a sense of sensory and gustatory familiarity for the members of the Mexican and Mexican American community. This was made clear by Alicia, a bartender at a small taquería and tequila bar in Sunset Park who clearly and without hesitation stated:

> We often sit the white customers in the front of the restaurant and seat the regular customers in the back. We know them and can serve them food that tastes the way we like it to taste. For the new customers, the white customers, we seat them in the front so others can see them and think the restaurant has good food… Our cooks also know that we have to serve them food that is much less spicy because they do not like the same tastes as the customers from Puebla.\(^{543}\)

As one white male keenly noticed when eating at Tacos Matamoros of how the presence of white diners impacts the items on the menu and the means by which they are being served, “I found it interesting and perhaps telling of the early gentrification of Sunset Park that the woman who took my order made sure I was okay that my vegetarian taco had cheese.”\(^{544}\)

> For white progressive urbanites, many of whom are not native New Yorkers but rather transplants to the city themselves, entering into Sunset Park, means entering into a vastly different foreign sensuous geography, where the sites, smells, sounds and of course

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\(^{543}\) Interview conducted as part of an ethnography performed in July of 2012 with translation assistance from translator Dulce Gross.

\(^{544}\) Berger, 2016.
tastes are imagined as new, exciting, foreign and exotic. For cosmopolitan whites, travel to Sunset Park opens the possibility of new cultural and sensory experiences that one couldn’t readily access in the relatively racially homogenous neighborhoods like Park Slope, the Upper East Side, or Midtown, from which these diners are traveling. The combination of taste with visual markers, olfactory stimuli, and auditory markers, are framed in food writing as entering into a new and exciting sensory geography that one must travel to in order experience – making a trip to Sunset Park for tacos not just about having lunch, but about taking on an excursion – framing the geographic distance required to travel to Sunset Park, not as a barrier, but rather as an appealing part of traveling into such a divergent sensory space. In fact, terminology like tour, voyage, getaway, escape, excursion, and expedition are commonly used to describe traveling to Sunset Park in the food blogosphere, make the long travel time to this neighborhood part of this experience’s ephemeral and transcendent nature while using rhetoric that very much echoes imperialist travel literature.

Upon entering Sunset Park, culinary tourists are first met with a bright visual environment that clearly sets the neighborhood apart from any other in Manhattan or Brooklyn. Many of the storefronts are marked by a dazzling mélange of red, white and green nationalist iconography and in both design and naming practices (many restaurants are named after regions in Mexico) are visually marked as distinctly Mexican or Chinese. Some notable examples of this visual culture include a large Mexican flag painted on the side of the very popular Tacos El Bronco Taco Truck, a large red, white and green awning that dominates the façade of Tacos Cachinilla and perhaps most famously a large red and green mural of a humanized and sombrero-wearing pig joyfully stewing himself which is located on the front of Rico’s Taco’s.
Both exterior and interior spaces of eateries on Fifth Avenue layer patriotic imagery that includes flags, coats of arms, murals, and other visual markers of Mexican popular culture. Those on Seventh similarly represent Chinese nationalist pride and a deep sense of diasporic identity. For the immigrant communities who can interpret the complex nationalistic symbolism, the visual culture offers familiarity, ethnic and nationalist pride that makes a clear claim for these social spaces as trans or multi-national. The visual culture entices culinary travelers and gentrifiers with a colorful visual aesthetic that suggests the possibility for exotic, foreign and transnational food encounters and presents spaces where clearly multicultural forms of sensory contact can be had. In addition, bright colored photos, which visually display the cuisine being offered within, also mark the facades of these public-dining establishments and attempt to attract clientele, both culinary slummers and compatriots. These large visual menus offer for the unfamiliar eater a visual language that allows them to overcome the Spanish to English or Chinese to English language barrier that often exists between the residents of this community and the culinary interlopers. As such, the act of culinary adventuring must be read as a complex bodily act that operates on several sensory levels, the taste of the cuisine being one of many that define the cross-racial experiences being had by white culinary adventurers.

Standardized posters, menus and other culinary ephemera are common in many of the restaurants in Sunset Park. They show images of Mexican and Latino cuisines, such as generic photos of tacos, tortas or burritos. Such images are typical of bodega walls, deli counters, restaurant menus, the sides of food trucks are an important part of the sensory landscape of Sunset Park. While such images are not common in upscale dining establishments throughout Brooklyn or Manhattan, including the aforementioned Manhattan Mexican restaurants La Esquina or Tacombi because fine dining establishments rarely have photos on their menus, they
are incredibly common up and down Fifth Avenue in Sunset Park. These visual markers certainly express a nationalistic Mexican aesthetic by combining images of food with typical Mexican iconography, making a claim for the restaurant space as a space at once diasporic and not specifically tied to any particular national or linguistic context. By visually representing menu items, they allow for economic transactions despite any language barriers and open the cuisine up to any visitors who may not initially understand the written text on the menu. Immigrant entrepreneurs have a simple reason for including such images in the restaurant or on the menu, they allow customers in these spaces to order without needing to be able to understand the written description of the item. These images of food also create a sensory landscape that transcends the verbal/written. They open the space for transnational sensory encounters surrounding food as they make the food legible to anyone. As such, both white culinary tourists and other immigrant communities (the second largest community in Sunset Park is its Chinese community) can understand the foods, order them and have a multinational sensory encounter. Because the images are mass-produced, sold to restaurant owners through restaurant supply distributors and sign manufacturers, these images also standardize the food as those producing the food often work to create food that resembles the images at least in appearance. Not only are they prevalent and seen on most establishments that sell food, but also because they bring food from something that is typically experienced through taste and smell into the realm of the visual, even before the actual food has been observed by the eater. In an act of synesthesia, these signs also merge the sensory experience of taste to the visual as the signs evoke emotional and affective experiences of eating. Their omnipresence creates a multisensory landscape of Sunset Park that merges the visual landscape with the sensory experiences of smell and taste.
Menu: Tacos El Branco
4323 4th Avenue, Sunset Park

Menu: Tacombi at Fonda
267 Elizabeth Street, Manhattan

Menu: Tacos Matamoros: 4508 5th Ave, Sunset Park, 2016

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The Pursuit of Authenticity

One key concern surrounding the process of culinary slumming, both in Sunset Park and around the country is the construction of authenticity. For the past decade, the unwavering pursuit of authenticity – be it in a place like Sunset Park in search of food or in other forms of white cultural consumerism such as in music, fashion or dance - has become crucial to the construction of a progressive cultural positionality for middle-class whites. Scholars, such as Arjun Appadurai, Lisa Hedkle, Martin Manalansan, Merideth Abarca, and Ian Cook have debunked the everyday non-critical use of authenticity (through phrases such as “this food so authentic,” “this is an authentic Indian sari,” “no its not a replica, its totally authentic”), showing us that authenticity is an indefinable and elusive construct that is at once always “site-specific, contextual and contingent.” Such work has importantly shown us that authenticity is a fallacy and pointed out the facile and problematic dichotomy between inauthentic/authentic cuisine.

Because labeling a cuisine authentic requires that it must be unadulterated by cultural change, historical temporality or geographic movement, all other variations (which are inevitable with global migration and the passages of time) of said cuisine are deemed to be inauthentic. As such, when progressive whites place authenticity at the pinnacle of a hierarchy of cultural worth, any object deemed inauthentic is rhetorically constructed as having lesser cultural value. However, despite the every day and glib non-academic popular debates over which food product can be deemed authentic or inauthentic, this false dichotomy and who has the power to drive such conversations says a great deal about the workings of privilege within cosmopolitan whiteness. There is a great power in naming, and in the fat that food consumers often have as

much control over labeling something as “authentic” as do food producers. For example, it was Angela from *Foodies at Work* that called the Mexican cuisine in Sunset Park authentic, not the restaurant owners or waitstaff. This displays a rhetorical and symbolic power. There is a distinct authority that can be derived from this ability to label a dish or flavor authentic, the ability to claim expert status over the cuisine of a community of color while not having a deep connection to or place in that community. The pursuit of “authenticity” by whites places excessive burdens on immigrant groups because the duality of authenticity/inauthentic constructs immigrants as “strangers being slowly integrated into the preexisting ‘native’ culture.”

One prime example of how expertise over authenticity is problematically claimed by a white culinary slummer is from the blog NYC Food Guy. “Authentic and affordable Mexican food is alive and well and it lives not in Manhattan but in Sunset Park, Brooklyn,” writes blogger, TV host and self-described food expert, Lawrence Weibman, also known writing under

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the moniker the “NYC Food Guy.” In a blog post that details a food tour of Sunset Park, Weibman specifically writes of a “pambazo” sandwich (a variety of a torta) from the now-closed Tacos Xochimilco (4501 5th Ave, now occupied by another locally owned taquería), which he describes as follows:

“We arrived at Tacos Xochimilco quite full but in a true testament to our mission and the power of preparation, I had to investigate an intriguing sandwich called a “pambazo.” I had only seen this pop up once or twice while researching the food tour and I was intrigued. Chaos between two pieces of bread finds order upon reaching your taste buds, new flavors and textures abound with every bite. It’s the everlasting gobstopper of Mexican sandwiches.”

Not only does Weibman speak of the research he performed before his food tour as if it was an excursion into uncharted and foreign geographic and cultural spaces, but also points to a fundamental paradox within the logic of the white American claim over immigrant cultural authenticity. Calling the sandwich both wholly authentic yet “revolutionary” and full of “new flavors and textures,” Weibman’s post proves that without insider knowledge of the cuisine, there is very little knowledge of what foods, flavors, textures and sensory experiences of eating are more regionally specific, hybridized through cultural contact or simply new to the white diner. Because authenticity implies that something conforms to an ahistorical pre-settler colonialism original, for Weibman to call the sandwich both new and authentic is contradictory and shows his fundamental inability to truly determine what authentic is while simultaneously pointing to the illusiveness of the very concept of authenticity.

While progressive white culinary slummers make assertions about what is authentic in Sunset Park, what is assumed to be authentic, because of context and geographic distance, far removed from the regional cuisines produced Mexico. Certainly Mexican-American chefs often

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551 Weibman, Lawrence. “NYC Food Guy’s 200th Post: Revolutionary Sandwich & Authentic Tacos on Sunset Park, Brooklyn Mexican Food Tour.”
552 Weibman. “NYC Food Guy’s 200th Post.”
negotiate the tension between preparing food in a manner that is familiar to Mexican/Mexican American community, but also foods that are pleasing to a relatively new customer base. While the chefs and restaurant owners in Sunset Park have been able to maintain a great deal of continuity and serve food that the Mexican/Mexican-American community sees as representative of the cuisine that could be served in Puebla, recipes and flavor profiles are always evolving and altering based on specific national, urban and geographic contexts. For example, numerous chefs in Sunset Park made it clear in interviews that they have reduced some of the spiciness of their dishes in order to make that flavor profile more appealing to a white consumer base, thus changing the gustatory experience of the food from that which would occur in Mexico.\textsuperscript{553} Also, health code regulations limit the means by which certain food is produced and inherently alter them from older or more traditional food preparation methods. For example health code regulations do not permit the use of traditional mole pots in many New York City kitchens so mole can be prepared, but not in the same manner that they may be prepared in various parts of Mexico. Food preparation styles and cuisines are always evolving as they move geographically. As Lucy Long notes, all food is multivocal and polysemic and major modifications to traditional foods are always caused by the mobility of globalization.\textsuperscript{554}

The progressive white American search for authenticity is tinted with colonialist attitudes, manifesting themselves in the appropriation of ethnic other’s cultural and personal knowledge.\textsuperscript{555} By claiming expertise and attempting to “make the exotic familiar” whites position themselves as spokespersons for a culinary culture that is not their own.\textsuperscript{556} Non-academic writers at College Humor, NPR, The Root, and other blogs, have ironically labeled the

trend of white people “discovering” “authentic” cultural phenomena that have existed for years if not decades outside of white mainstream, “Columbusing”. This phenomenon, a process that Arjun Appadurai has labeled “cultural hijacking,” speaks to the white appropriation of the cultural productions and cultural trends of ethnic groups and communities of color (other such examples include dance, music, dress, amongst numerous others). This is exactly the act that the swarms of white progressives are engaging in when they travel to Sunset Park to eat and make a cultural claim over the authenticity over certain food productions associated with immigrant life in New York. However, “Columbusing” does not simply speak to the appropriation of such cultural acts or products, but rather to the process by which progressive whites “discover” the act or product, claiming it as something new and original that they have discovered. The cuisine being produced in the restaurants in Sunset Park is part of a long line of cultural productions that white Americans have claimed to have discovered and appropriated in order to increase one’s own cultural capital (along with other recently appropriated cultural phenomena such as twerking, soul food, Desi-inspired color runs, henna tattoos, yoga, among seemingly countless others). This search for authenticity and culinary newness is stained with colonialist attitudes that come to be manifested when white Americans appropriate ethnic others culinary, cultural and personal knowledges through eating. The claim of authenticity by a cultural insider, such as the chefs in Sunset Park, can be a claim to maintain cultural traditions in the face of outside hegemonic pressure to assimilate with or be dispossessed by white

mainstream American culture. Cooking involves intellectual knowledge, skillful manual processes and personal as well as collective histories, all of which the act of hijacking takes away.

**Gentrification Sure Tastes Good: Multiculturalism and The Communal Attempt to Maintain Sensory Familiarity**

![Image 37](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Image 37

Anti-gentrification sticker on a parking meter along Fifth Avenue in Sunset Park, 2017

Blogger Dave Rosado affectionately and astutely paints a complex image of Sunset Park as a neighborhood with a convoluted past that is facing a rapid different future. Writing for Brokelyn.com in an article entitled “6 places I hope survive Sunset Park’s gentrification:” he writes, “affectionately known at one point as Gunset Park by those who grew up there (like me), and slapped by those who lived in neighboring sections of Brooklyn with the derogatory moniker Gunset Park, it’s is still a place where you can get some of New York’s best bahn mi and tacos, and where you can enjoy an amazing view of Manhattan from the highest

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point in Brooklyn.” The term Gunset Park, which is derived from a street gang in Sunset Park in the mid-1990s of the same name and a heightened level of gun-related crimes in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, points to the collective perception of Sunset Park as a hyper-violent racialized enclave. During this period the late 1970s and 1980s, Sunset Park did have a heightened level of gang activity according to police reports, including notable street gangs such as Turban Saints, Dirty Ones, La Familia, Bloody Leopards, Crazy Homicides and Filthy Mad Dogs. Despite this affiliation, Rosado, a longtime resident of Sunset Park moves past that perception and elicits some positive affects associated with his childhood, while remaining astutely aware that because of neoliberal development, this historical legacy of a dense racialized enclave will not stop the wrecking balls of gentrification.

For Rosado, food is central to Sunset Park’s history and very much part of what might be lost in Sunset Park’s changing future. He rhetorically pleads to his readers save a handful longtime neighborhood establishments “before they’re bulldozed to make room for luxury housing.” Here Rosado is using food and the affects of nostalgia (at once joy, warmth, longing and sadness) or what one might call nostalgic gastronomy to push back against the pending changes to Sunset Park, hoping that the neighborhood he has long called home will not simply become “yet another place people write stupid hacky lazy hipster-related jokes about.” The six places he petitions to be saved are all food establishments, including Melody Lanes (and its restaurant), the pub Irish Haven (made famous because scenes from the film The Departed were filmed inside), Ba Xuyen (Bahn mi shop on 8th Avenue), Johnny’s Pizza (5th Avenue Pizza shop)

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564 Rosado.
and International Restaurant (a 5th Avenue Latino and Caribbean Restaurant). Each of these establishments has long been part of a vibrant immigrant community in Sunset Park for over 20 years and played a direct role in shaping the communities sensory geography and cultural aesthetic. Rosado pleads for them to be saved even as the neighborhood is facing inevitable change. He specifically highlights local favorite Tacos Matamoros (4508 5th Ave), “I beg of you, on my hands on knees, save this place” and “do not confuse this wonderful, heavenly taco joint with Tacos Matamoros II over on 58th Street. I can’t stress this enough. You go for the original every. Single. Damn. Time.” He uses the quality of the food and the communal importance of the restaurant to justify the preservation of Tacos Matamoros while white millennials are rapidly moving to 5th and 8th Avenues. “If you’d like to survey whether this place is worthy of existing in the upcoming “Funset” Park (a term he sardonically uses to highlight the new image of Sunset Park as a whitewashed hipster playground), have al pastor or carnitas tacos ($1.50 each for a small). Go ahead and have a margarita to wash it down. You won’t need any more convincing.”

Comparing Sunset Park to the predominantly white post-gentrified neighborhoods of Murray Hill (known for its post-college millennial party scene) and Park Slope (known for brownstones and wealthy families), Rosado continues, “Sunset Park is, for now, still known as an affordable place that’s just barely resisted the fast-moving gentrification of Murray Hill East, Park Slope and countless other neighborhoods. Now though? It’s on the fast track.” He concludes by depicting the eventual demise of the communal neighborhood he grew up in and clearly states that Sunset Park is in its “twilight days.” With these looming changes, the sense of community, the familiar smells of tacos and roasting corn and the sounds of a vibrant pan-Latino

565 Rosado.
566 Rosado.
neighborhood may be lost. As Rosado cautions, the “transformation to Sunset Park 2.0 will be complete and nobody will be able to afford to live there anymore… In lieu of measured debate about the possibilities of more jobs for the locals (whose ability to remain local, to be fair, I am concerned about), let’s recommence freaking out instead. When’s the J. Crew coming?”

Today Sunset Park is the site of a fierce battle over gentrification, immigrant life and the accessibility of urban space in New York, a battle that for longtime residents and culinary slummers alike food is very much at the forefront. Currently, Sunset Park is undergoing a drastic transition from ethnic immigrant community to one of the new “hotspots” for Brooklyn’s white middle-class cultural elite. With the influx of progressive whites to eat ethnic food in Sunset Park’s immigrant eateries, came increased attention to the neighborhood by both public and private interests. This mixture of private (corporations, private real estate developers) and public (the city of New York, public zoning boards and development corporations) investors are transforming Sunset Park (in a similar way by which much of the rest of New York was transformed) by subscribing to post-Fordist neoliberal urbanism, “the belief that an open, competitive and unregulated market, liberated from state interference and the actions of social collectives represents the optimal mechanism for socioeconomic” urban development. Mayors Michael Bloomberg and Bill De Blasio, The New York City Council and the New York City Economic Development Corporation, have begun to view Sunset Park as a new area of urban growth, turning to corporate development, specifically along the Sunset Park waterfront to remake the area in the name of ending so-called economic blight. Of course, this labeling of Sunset Park as an underdeveloped or underutilized neighborhood is a misnomer because Sunset

[567] Rosado.

Park has one of the most vibrant small business communities in all of greater New York, a direct result of the labor and entrepreneurship of Latino and Asian immigrant business owners, entrepreneurs and restaurateurs.

Image 38
Young White Woman Stands Outside of the Sign for Brooklyn Flea and Smorgasburg in Industrial City in Sunset Park, 2015

Image 39
Primarily white Visitors Gather at Smorgusburg and the Brooklyn Flea located at Industrial City in Sunset Park, 2015

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570 Lynch. “Photos: Smorgasburg and Brooklyn Flea Invade Industry City.”
Both public and private interests have combined to promote several major commercial developments that are set to drastically change Sunset Park. The first and largest is Industrial City, a large technological start-up incubator and retail space that opened in 2014 after “Belvedere Capital, Jamestown and Angelo, Gordon & Company invested more than $125 million toward a $1 billion plan” to redevelop the former industrial manufacturing and shipping hub. Industrial City is a large tech and art hub located along the Sunset Park waterfront, which is attracting numerous art galleries, tech start-ups and small-scale production facilities, primarily driven by middle class, progressive, white millennials. In recent years, Industrial City has become a destination for Brooklyn’s progressive middle-class elites to shop, offering retail locations such as Design Within Reach, upscale gourmet chocolatiers, Brooklyn Brine (a small scale artisanal pickle manufacturer), exclusive wine shops, the Goldman Sachs affiliated Smorgasburg (a large food-fair compromised of “small batch” food producers and food trucks).

571 Lynch. “Photos: Smorgasburg and Brooklyn Flea Invade Industry City.”
and Brooklyn Flea’s curated flea market. Industrial City couples these offering with art galleries and an open space for large late night parties, including Mr. Saturday Night a series of large dance parties, which has recently come under fire for its blatant lack of diversity.\textsuperscript{572}

Smorgasburg, a combination food hall and food truck public market, one of the primary tenets in Sunset Park’s Industrial City and financially affiliated with Goldman Sacs, who is also a major real estate developer in Sunset Park, uses food and the draw of middle-class whites that follow the large food-fairs as a portable tool of gentrification as the presence of and proximity to the food-fair drastically increases rent prices in proximate neighborhoods. These mobile hipster attractions like Mr. Saturday Night, Smorgusburg, The Brooklyn Flea and similar attractions, have become portable drivers of gentrification. Because they require a great deal of space and are often loud and disruptive to a community, as neighborhoods develop they are forced to move, jumping to more “new” neighborhoods less accessible to progressive whites in search of more industrial space to hold their large disruptive events. As, Eamon Harkin, one half of the duo behind the daytime dance parties Mr. Saturday Night (along with Justin Carter) has stated with great pride in his role in changing Sunset Park, “Industry City has gone from old factories with some tenants, to a hub where culture is happening, and it’s starting to become a destination,” says Harkin. “I think we’ve had a role to play in that… Justin and I both really enjoy the learning curve we’ve been on with respect to real estate and the general landscape in Brooklyn.”\textsuperscript{573}

Residential realtors have reported skyrocketing demand for housing in the rowhouses adjacent to the perimeter of Industrial City where such events are taking place.\textsuperscript{574} “Developers now view


food halls and dance parties as anchors, as the kind of attraction that can hold down a luxury rental tower or attract corporate office tenants. The ultimate amenity.”

Also along Sunset Park’s waterfront are two other renovated former industrial spaces the Brooklyn Army Terminal, a massive 95 acre former military storage facility that now serves as the home for internet retailers and art galleries and the Liberty View Industrial Plaza, a self described state-of-the-art industrial and manufacturing innovation center that recently signed a lease with Amazon.com and is at the beginning stages of housing a mini-shopping mall (anchored by a flagship Bed, Bath and Beyond home goods retail outlet). Moreover, spurred by the need to grant access to these new tech incubators and white millennial attractions along Sunset Park’s Waterfront, Mayor De Blasio has proposed the Brooklyn-Queens Connector (also known as the BQX), a modern streetcar that, as currently proposed will connect Sunset Park to

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various stops along the Brooklyn and Queens Waterfronts (Brooklyn Heights, Dumbo, Long Island City and Astoria). While such a project could have transportation benefits for borough residents, Latino and Asian residents in Sunset Park have denounced the project calling it a “Gentrification Express.” \(^{577}\) Sunset Park residents have protested widely and strongly against the streetcar, citing its 2.5 Billion dollar cost and questioning whom it will serve. At various protests, they have claimed that the train will only make Sunset Park more attractive for middle-class whites as a potential playground or even residency while not serving as a transportation option for Sunset Park residents who typically do not work in the high price neighborhoods along the Brooklyn and Queens waterfronts. As tenant organizer, Marcela Mitaynes told the Village Voice of the BQX, "we really feel like this is funded by developers who are in the process of developing luxury housing as a result of this connector. This has nothing to do with us, adding that the city’s failure to conduct BQX planning meetings in different languages was "insulting." \(^{578}\) Combined these developments will not only redevelop Sunset Park’s once thriving but more recently largely vacant industrial waterfront, but such developments will also attest to the widespread use of post-Fordist neoliberal development strategies, noted by the open embrace of the free market as a means for economic growth and a growth in the number of specialized white collar jobs as opposed to manufacturing jobs. Developments like Industrial City and the Brooklyn Queens Connector, driven by the fundamental belief that the open market, private property, and industrial and entrepreneurial growth are the most viable means of building strong healthy communities (which is also tied to the fundamental belief that Sunset Park isn’t already a


\(^{578}\) Robbins.
healthy community), are fundamentally reshaping Sunset Park, often to the detriment of the very low-income communities of color that have long called this neighborhood home.579

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<th>BROOKLYN</th>
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<th>RETAIL FLAVOR</th>
<th>DEMOGRAPHICS</th>
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Image 42
Marketing and Retail Report from Cushman & Wakefield, who labeled Sunset Park “Edgy Cool” and as one of the top 15 “Coolest Neighborhoods” in North America, 2016580

Image 43
HotSpot Rentals Ranking of Sunset Park, The Fifth “Hottest” Neighborhood in America, 2017581

579 Hum, 35.
As a result of these new developments are combining with the marketed attractiveness of immigrant cuisine whites are moving to Sunset Park in large numbers. HotSpot Rentals, Lonely Planet and Cnn Money have all recently named Sunset Park as one of the hottest neighborhoods in America, citing the views of Manhattan, the walkability of the neighborhood and most importantly the “vibrant diversity” as the key reasons why the neighborhood is so “hot.” With an 84 percent hotteness rating, Hotspot Rentals Ranks Sunset Park as the Fifth Hottest Neighborhood in the Country, behind only The Mission and Jackson Square in San Francisco, Capitol Hill in Seattle and Bushwick in Brooklyn.\textsuperscript{582} Not only has this increased attention attracted more whites the neighborhood, but the presence of more and more middle-class residents has rapidly decreased the affordability of the neighborhood. The average household income in New York is just over 50,000 dollars and for years in Sunset Park the average household income was just below that city wide average at 45,000. Over a quarter of all residents are considered rent burdened, spending over fifty percent of their income on rent and often living in overcrowded apartments.\textsuperscript{583} However, for the white millennials moving to Sunset Park, the average household income is over 82,000 dollars annually, shifting drastically the financial make-up of the community.\textsuperscript{584} In addition, Sunset Park population is now 26.9 percent millennial, in part because of the large influx of young whites that are moving the neighborhood. These progressive whites are purchasing houses and renting luxury apartments in a neighborhood that whites once dominated, but then fled as people of color started to integrate the community. This new class of white millennial progressives has openly embraced Sunset Park as a hip cultural hub and not simply an immigrant ethnic enclave. Sunset Park home sale prices have

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{582} “Hottest Neighborhoods in America.” 2018.
\end{itemize}
increased seventy-three percent since 2010, that is compared to forty percent across the city. Median rents have gone up thirty one percent since 2010 while only eight percent across the rest of the city. Over seventy percent of people in the neighborhood rent, making members of the community highly vulnerable displacement related market shifts in rent prices. With the large working-class immigrant communities, these rapid increases in cost of living have very real impacts and are displacing large numbers of members of this community that have long called Sunset Park home.

As the “Brooklyn brand” (hyper white, hyper-hip, bearded, pseudo-DIY/artisanal aesthetic) spreads to encompass all corners or the borough and beyond, the aesthetics of whiteness are coming to a neighborhood once abandoned by New York’s white middle class. The New York Times has even caught wind of Sunset Park as a new party destination for progressive whites, labeling Industrial City “the SoHo of Sunset Park.” The New York Times continues, seeing Sunset Park as a new oasis for young white partygoers, asking “So why is proletarian Sunset Park, so long ignored by the city’s glamorous throngs, now blipping on the night-life radar? Along with the push of development into the far reaches of Brooklyn, the area’s new appeal is tied to its relative solitude, its novelty as a destination for partying and the convenience of ride-sharing apps…2016 is all about traveling a bit of an extra distance to party.” And as Cushman and Wakefield write of the emerging consumer and retail market that is Sunset Park, “the renaissance occurring on these Cool Streets, like Sunset Park has been

585 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/04/style/the-brooklyn-brand-goes-global.html?_r=0

driven by an explosion of new restaurants and retail concepts that connect with the seemingly elusive Millennial consumer like no other.”

With Smorgusburg and the food halls in Industrial City, both of which attract large numbers of whites for its expensive trendy food options wide variety of “ethnic” street food, we see a direct correlation between food, changing neighborhood sensory geographies and the financial violence of neoliberal urbanism and the resulting gentrification. Smorgusburg, while only typically open Saturday and Sunday, can drastically remake the food landscape of the neighborhood, thus changing the gustatory and olfactory experiences of a neighborhood. Restaurants adjacent to Smorgusburg complain about how the proximity to the food hall and many food trucks directly detracts from business. As one bartender at bar/café adjacent to a Smorgusburg location clearly pronounced, “We are dead on Saturdays and Sundays now. With Smorgusburg across the street, why would you go to a restaurant? It rolls in once a week with 50 food trucks, sets up shop across the street and just kills our business. But it’s a huge destination. There is no stopping it.”

The Brooklyn Flea and Mr. Saturday night also shift the sensory geography of Sunset Park. Mr. Saturday night blasts loud music during Saturday and Sunday afternoon, pushing the auditory landscape away from one that once preference Latino and Asian music towards one that blares contemporary hipster and pop tunes to surrounding blocks. The Brooklyn Flea, with its vintage clothing and kitsch trinkets, has also pushed the neighborhood away from one that favored the material artifacts of Mexican American identity (even as their representation was constantly changing because of geographic movement), to one that clearly promoted a whitewashed universal consumer hipster/Brooklyn aesthetic that is now being replicated from neighborhood to neighborhood across the borough.

588 Cushman and Wakefield, 3.
589 Interview conducted as part of an ethnography performed in July of 2014 with translation assistance from translator Dulce Gross.
The construction that inherently must accompany the droves of new residential and retail establishments that are popping up, a direct result of Industrial City, Smorgusburg and the like, are also changing the auditory dynamics of Sunset Park. Once known as a neighborhood filled with loud Latino music on the streets and the vocal sounds of friends, families and a community inhabiting the public sphere, much of Sunset Park is now overrun by the sound of construction on the streets. Between the traffic, music, “trucks, jackhammers, lovers’ quarrels: This city offers an infinite variety of sonic assaults.” However, it has become more and more common for those other auditory markers of urban life to be overrun by the abrasive and repetitive sounds of construction. As Brooklyn resident Lindsay Leif argues of the new plethora of sounds like hammering, jackhammering and sawing, “Construction makes (this community) unlivable. It’s a one-way street and the only entrance is blocked every day by trucks.” Previously the largest source of noise complaints to 311 (New York’s all-purpose information phone line) had been made regarding sounds of religious worship (Sabbath sirens, mosque prayer bells, etc.), noise

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592 Newman.
that both reflect the diversity of New York, but also the various ways that different communities find common ground in an urban space. However, throughout New York as a whole, the largest source of complaints to 311 is now regarding construction, a sure sign that the livability and sensor geographies of much of New York, especially developing neighborhoods like Sunset Park, is rapidly changing.\footnote{593 Newman.}

However, it is not merely large-scale economic developments that drew attraction of progressive middle-class whites, which are now for the first time in several decades seeing Sunset Park as a worthy cultural destination and a viable neighborhood of residence. The proximity to ethnic diversity, underscored by the presence of what whites viewed as the best ethnic food in Brooklyn, encouraged progressive whites to view Sunset Park as a viable place to live. Within the devouring logic of contemporary gentrification, the notion of a vibrant multicultural sensuous geography is not seen as a deterrent for moving through urban space for the white cosmopolitan urbanite. Rather, for the white cosmopolitan subject who, as Sara Ahmed argues, sees a proximity to multicultural diversity as both imperative to proper modern liberal subjecthood and a source of happiness sees a neighborhood like Sunset Park and its vibrant sensory and ethnic diversity as an appealing.\footnote{594 Ahmed. Multiculturalism.} For the white gentrifier, being adjacent to perceived ethnic sensory stimuli, in a neighborhood like Sunset Park, allows an increase in cultural capital, but more importantly marks a break from the unworldly blandness that otherwise defines the sensory experiences of white (sub)urban life. Within such logic, bodies of color are not an afterthought of gentrification; but rather their presence is a necessary component in the gentrification process. It is precisely the proximity to such bodies, and the sensory encounters that this creates, that are a source of pleasure for cosmopolitan whites. As such, eating tacos in
Sunset Park becomes a moment of joy for white urbanites. Not only did the urban white get to build upon cultural capital, but also the pleasurable experience of eating delicious, perceptibly authentic food, creates an affect of happiness that encourages and justifies the gentrification happening around them. Normally, joy and happiness are perceived as positive and such cultural exchanges could potentially be a source of radical cross-racial solidarity. However, as has been the case in Sunset Park and is typically the case with rapid urban gentrification, these positive affects create a fondness to the neighborhood that allows the colonization of it by urban whites, however, such colonization typically shows little regard for the very community where the positive affect is derived. As such, multiculturalism actually serves as a driver for gentrification drawing cosmopolitan white subjects in, luring them with the possibility of potentially enthralling affective responses.

Sunset Park in the late 2000s contained the precise level of multicultural diversity to make the neighborhood appealing for white urban gentrifiers. However, for the white urban progressive, there is a fine line between which a neighborhood can transition from containing a specific amount of diversity that makes the space appealing to containing too much diversity that makes the neighborhood unappealing for white progressives (factors that determine where this distinction lie depend on the context of the city, rent prices in the area and other complex factors). A neighborhood that is too racially homogeneous, even if containing all of the other factors that encourage gentrification (such as lots of restaurants and ethnic food, low-cost housing, proximity to “hip” or already gentrified areas), is often not very likely to be quickly gentrified. As Harvard researchers Robert Sampson and Jacquelyn Hwang have recently documented neighborhoods that contained forty percent or more of the same racial group were not at risk of gentrification. Their research found that neighborhoods that were more racially
heterogeneous were much more likely to undergo transformations caused by a rapid influx of middle class whites.595 This is potentially because neighborhoods with a large population of the same racial or ethnic make-up may have close communities ties that are able to fight off the potentially devastating impacts of gentrification, but this also speaks to white urbanites’ desire for and pleasure derived from diverse multicultural neighborhoods, a pleasure that is not derived when the community is decadently racially or ethnically homogeneous. Having cross-sensory encounters with multiculturalism, especially through eating, encourages whites to enter into these spaces they see as racialized others. This desire of white subjects for cross-ethnic and global sensory encounters is paradoxical, as their increased presence in these neighborhoods often pushes out immigrant communities and thus much of the sensory complexity that initially made these areas appealing.

In a “catch 22” of gentrification, the presence of a large number of middle-class whites to a neighborhood actually shifts the makeup of the neighborhood in a way that displaces – both economically, but also sensorially and affectively - the very multiculturalism that initially drew whites to that area. Gentrification rapidly alters the sensory terrain of a neighborhood and the sensory experiences of a community by those that have a great deal of sensory and affective familiarity with the space (often replacing any distinct characteristics with a now ubiquitous global brand of “Brooklyn hipness”). These sensory encounters, and the happiness derived from them – happy experiences of multiculturalism – also encourage the use of the cultural productions of others to become a central facet of new conceptions of contemporary whiteness. Not only does the culinary slummer take a photo of the food and share it publicly through social media, but the sensory experience of the food – its taste, its colors, its smell – all build towards a

feeling that such cross-cultural encounters lead to the global cultural consumerism that is part and parcel of both neoliberal multiculturalism and the new articulation of cosmopolitan whiteness. As such, gentrification must be read not simply as an unfortunate byproduct of racial capitalism, but the as a fundamental result of the globalized consumerism and desire for cross-racial sensory encounters that are at the heart of cosmopolitan whiteness. For white diners, diversity becomes an object of experience, predicated on a total sensory immersion into spaces imagined as outside of white sensory normativity. As Hage points out, this deeply Anglo-centric perspective, which “positions Anglo subjects in the role of appreciators enriched by”, the ethnic producers of these foods, which are “constructed as ethnic objects with no raison d'être other than to enrich the Anglo-subject.”

White subjects, now operating under the guise of cosmopolitan whiteness, do not see themselves as occupying a positionality of white privilege. Rather, because of the constant encounters with communities of color – and in particular their food – they see themselves as multicultural global subjects who are more affiliated with a broad range of immigrant and ethnic cultures than they are with any perception of their own whiteness.

One prime example of the how multicultural eating can elicit an affect of joy, which then may factor into one’s real estate decisions is from a recent New York Times article that labeled Sunset Park one of “New York’s Next Hot Neighborhoods.” Citing a slew of new restaurants and cafes in Sunset Park that offer a standardized aesthetic of Brooklyn whiteness (post-industrial chic design elements, farm to table food offerings, small-batch producers, trendy cocktails and new American cuisine), The New York Times writes, “Sunset Park has been attracting buyers priced out of prime Brooklyn neighborhoods like Park Slope and Fort Greene. Most of the newcomers, brokers say, have gravitated toward the prewar co-ops and brownstone blocks around the hillside park in the northeastern quadrant, where coffee shops and cafes like Parkette

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596 Hage, 33.
Brooklyn (a hip café which replaced Plaza Los Ramos Grocery Store and is tucked into a strip of Mexican restaurants on Fifth Avenue) and Parlay (a small hip eatery located in a densely Chinese section of Eighth Avenue) are popping up. Attract by such new hip eateries were Brad Cooke and his wife, Margaret, who both worked in development and architecture and in 2015 bought a two-family fixer-upper in Sunset Park West for about $700,000 (they have since relocated to Tampa). As Cooke explains of his attraction to Sunset Park, “We realized it was an awesome under-the-radar neighborhood,” said Mr. Cooke, 30, noting the proximity to subway lines, the waterfront and most importantly the good cheap ethnic food. “I think it’s in transition now.” As the times continues, “Since then the couple, who moved from Park Slope, have spruced up and rented out the ground-floor unit for $1,900 a month and have moved into the upper level with plans to live there for several years. Already their bet on this slice of Sunset Park is starting to pay off. Two of their friends have bought townhouses on the block and are fixing them up.”

Sunset Park, for both the immigrant residents and white progressives interloping to eat, elicits deep affective responses to space. As this chapter has detailed, the neighborhood is so defined by its sensory markers, entering into it surely evokes both conscious and unconscious reactions. These reactions are not solely the product of the physical geographic make up of Sunset Park’s 4th through 8th Avenues. Rather, the affective and sensory responses that a space elicits are fluid and constantly shifting depending on the way communities, in this case the Latino and Asian Immigrant communities that make up the bulk of Sunset Park’s residents, define a space. Sara Ahmed argues that feelings are stuck to certain neighborhoods, but do not reside in the neighborhood itself. Rather, they are the product of circulating bodies, signs, objects and sensory experiences that circulate through any given space. Just as the movement of bodies

597 Higgins.
through a space changes the affective economies and sensory geographies of that space (i.e. the presence of large numbers of urban whites is actually pushing out the very ethnic restaurants that made the neighborhood initially appealing), bodies do not simply move through space, but are constituted by them. The movement of bodies through Sunset Park, be it to eat in a restaurant because of changing trends in the “foodie” scene or otherwise, has a direct relationship to the way a neighborhood is perceived and the emotional and affective relationships that individuals, bodies and communities have to that neighborhood. The presence of large numbers of urban whites in Sunset Park has caused outrage and anger by many of the long-term residents of the neighborhood. Whites, as Coates and others have pointed out, can enter a social space that has been affectively or sensorially defined by an immigrant community of color often without feeling a sense of displacement or any affective discomfort. George Yancy argues that “white bodies move in and out of” urban space “with ease, paying no particular attention to their numbers or looking for bodies that resemble their own. They are at home.”

If whiteness allows white bodies to move with comfort, to inhabit that space as home, those bodies then take up more space – feel happy spreading out to embrace the surrounding sensory multiculturalism - because of their relative level of comfort. White subjects do not see themselves as guests, temporary visitors in someone else’s home, rather because of their privilege, their home is always with them. White bodies, when moving into and gentrifying these neighborhoods can sink deep into them and “extend their shape” to occupy them.

In Sunset Park, the role of affects, in particular joy and misery, are crucial to the delineation of individual subjects and the shaping of the neighborhood. The presence of others is

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not initially viewed as a threat to the happiness of the white cosmopolitan subjects, but rather the very source of it. The sensory experiences of the neighborhood, the rich warm smells emanating from taquerías and panaderías, the flavors from Cantonese and Yunnan restaurants, vibrant visual images of nationalistic pride, are sources of happiness for urban whites as joy is gained by proximity to “diverse” communities. It is the emotional feeling of happiness – caused by these sensory contacts with diversity - that works to compel white subjects towards such neighborhoods. Conversely, it is the emotional feeling of misery – caused by displacement – that works to bind the residents of color together. For immigrant groups, these spaces contain an emotional map that elicits a sense of familiarity, joy and happiness that is at risk with the rapid and violent nature of the gentrification of Sunset Park. When entering Sunset Park, white subjects often do not fully understand that their very presence can cause feelings of misery and hostility within the community of color with which they are entering. As radical anti-gentrification activist and lifelong Brooklyn resident Will Giron recently wrote:

Gentrification has gotten to the point where every time I see a group of young white millennials in the hood my heart starts racing and a sense of anxiety starts falling over me. This actually happened not too long ago when I was in Jackson Heights and it always happens whenever I return to Bushwick or Sunset Park. As one of my friends who grew up not far from me told me yesterday, "sometimes I can't even go home."600

As gentrification brings radical sensory and aesthetic transformations to Sunset Park, white progressives see immigrant bodies as resistant to such transformation and thus mark them with “ugly feelings” like frustration and disgust. For members of the immigrant communities, these sensory remakings cause spaces typically experienced as sources of communal joy to be transformed into sites of loss, trauma and anguish as their sense of communal home is collectively eroded by the presence of these large number of interloping whites. Thus, in eating,

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white cosmopolitan liberals literally consume these urban spaces, often financially and culturally pushing out the very restaurants and eateries that first made the neighborhood appealing on a gastronomic level. The large number of urban whites moving into Sunset Park has shifted rent prices and affordability pushing out the community spaces and foodscapes that once made this enclave so familiar and communal for immigrant groups. The presence of urban whites thus is changing the sensory familiarity that communities of color once had with the urban space of Sunset Park.

Despite the best efforts of the Sunset Park Tenants Association, Occupy Sunset Park, El Grito De Sunset Park, The Sunset Park Business Association and other multi-racial alliances and organizations, many in the community fear that they are the next urban residents to face Brooklyn’s whitewashing. Longtime residents of the neighborhood are reckoning the painful eventuality that gentrification is inevitable and that the neighborhood is set to face profound transformations. Despite this, immigrant groups have been fighting back against the sensory “Columbusing” of their neighborhood in very public ways. Public protests, radical political action and cultural organizations in Sunset Park are effective in both keeping a distinct urban culture alive and also in actively resisting the violent communal destruction that comes with swift gentrification. A recent example of such protest against gentrification is a series of flags attached to the fence enclosing the large park also named Sunset Park with the word “Displacement” written on them and crossed out. These flags typically are paired with the flags of various Latin American nations such as Honduras, Venezuela, Guatemala, Mexico, among others. This display was constructed by the organization Residentes De Sunset Park. Similar

601 The “small batch empire” of the Brooklyn Flea and Smorgasburg have been seen as an agents of gentrification across several Brooklyn neighborhoods, from Dumbo, to Crown Heights and now into Sunset Park.
flags have been posted on construction site, the very visceral sign that gentrification is underway, across the neighborhood as an aesthetic, visual and highly public protest against neoliberal urbanism and in favor of the maintenance of Sunset Park as a Latino immigrant transnational community.

Image 45
Anti-Gentrification and Latin American National Flags along 5th Avenue in Sunset Park, 2017

In addition, street festivals like the Puerto Rican Pride Parade, organized by El Grito de Sunset Park, permeate Fifth Avenue with loud music, public dancing and a great deal of street food. While deemed by white law enforcement as “illegal” and “inappropriate”, these public celebrations serve as radical affective acts where immigrant groups can publically reject ideas about white celebration and white public civility. While New York City law enforcement is aggressively trying to “civilize” Sunset Park through “broken window policing” and the consistent harassment of street vendors and unlicensed retailers, public celebrations continue and immigrant groups are radically claiming the streets of Sunset Park as spaces where they are to

603 Residentes de Sunset Park.
live, love and celebrate. These aggressive police tactics were perhaps made most public in 2014 when a street vendor Jonathan Daza and his two sisters were arrested and beaten at the Puerto Rican Pride Parade for refusing to take down his food stand fast enough to comply with police demands. The immigrant communities in Sunset Park have since rallied around Daza and against such violent police tactics and are actively resisting this intrusion into their communities. Police violence against community members and corporate investment in Sunset Park are working symbiotically (perhaps the increased police aggression in recent years is a direct result of the new corporate and real estate interest in Sunset Park) in attempts to bring a whitewashed notion of sensory neutrality to Sunset Park, thus making the neighborhood more appealing for upper middle class white residents who, in large part because of the neighborhood’s ethnic diversity, now see the community as a viable real estate investment. Regardless, these public street fairs, food festivals and visual displays of resistance return sabor and a Mexican and Latino/aesthetic to the center of Sunset Park’s sensory geography, even if only temporarily. In the face of violent gentrification and police aggression, food and the maintenance of sabor emerges as a liberatory way to challenge power in Sunset Park. Such public street festivals, including those put on by the Sunset Park Business Improvement District, can be seen as acts of radial joy, where public celebration around food becomes a way to maintain and reclaim the neighborhood as not only having a distinct sensory feel – of sabor – but also as returning to it the affect of happiness and joy for the immigrant communities who call the space home. These parades and festivals, and the nostalgic gastronomy of their foodscapes, are a means to celebrate the community and their transnational identifies, often in spite of the changing the real estate

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604 Broken windows policing is a policing tactic that believes that if small scale crimes such as vandalism and public drinking are cracked down on with excessive force, that this will create a environment of order and lawless where larger scale crimes are less common. Such tactics, while supported by law enforcement in New York and beyond, have been widely viewed as racially motivated and there has been substantial pushback against them by local activists and anti-police brutality and prison abolitionists.
market. The ability of the Mexican community in Sunset Park to construct and exert a transnational identity is done in part because of their ability to negotiate and subvert the food colonialism of the white progressives. This is not to say however that the Mexican community, through their tacos trucks and food counters, is attempting to create an idealized vision of Puebla or an imagined ahistorical “real” Mexico. Rather, we see that Mexican and Mexican American communities in Sunset Park are using food and public celebration in new ways, such as at street fairs by serving traditional Mexican culinary staples alongside, transcultural cuisines like arepas and American fair food like hot dogs or mixing mariachi or Taíno music with contemporary pop and hip-hop. Through such public celebrations, these communities are actively embracing the hybridization and fluidity of food cultures and thus pushing towards what Elspeth Probyn calls new alimentary assemblages, ways by which immigrant bodies create new forms of connecting with place and with each other through their relationships to food and eating.

Conclusion

By highlighting the sensory geography of Sunset Park, I emphasized the importance of sensory experience, in late twentieth-century racial thinking and practice, particularly in the construction of cosmopolitan whiteness. Culinary slumming is predicated not only on entering into a different ethnically and racially composed urban space in search of food and the cultural encounters that that geographic movement produces, but this phenomenon also centers on the middle-class white urbanite’s desire for sensory experiences divergent and atypical of those

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605 Arepas are a Latin American street food staple consisting of flattened corn dough grilled into a shape similar to a pancake and filled with various ingredients such as roasted meet or cheese. They are served at most street festivals across New York.

assumed to be achieved in within their racially segregated urban space. By examining the ways that white urbanites navigate eating ethnically and the complex sensory geographies of public dining in Sunset Park, I have shed some light on the ways by which racial privilege functions that are as much sensate as they are discursive and, through socially geographically contingent sensory experience, can become both embodied and spatially located without becoming fixed or static. Regardless of the Sunset Park’s current transformations, the pending gentrification and the struggles by the community to resist it, Sunset Park remains primarily a working-class Latino/a and Chinese immigrant community that houses nearly one hundred and fifty thousand residents, approximately two-thirds of which are of Hispanic descent.607 This influx of progressive whites into a Mexican community impacts that communities ability to build a sense of “home” and connection to place within an such focusing on the Mexican immigrant community’s use of eating to build a sensory connection to diaspora within a multiethnic urban space.

In closing, it is important to understanding how immigrant food is used to construct a new form of progressive cosmopolitan white privilege is increasingly important in the current political climate. With the Presidential election of Donald Trump, there has been a great deal of debate and political turmoil between nationalist American interests and those that take a more global view on their socio-cultural place in the modern world. Food has become a target for nationalists in recent years, claiming that ethnic food is a sign of an erosion of national culture. Nationalists, both in the United States and throughout Europe, have asserted that maintaining traditional foods stereotypically associated with national identity, such as pasta in Italy or hamburgers in the United States (especially in contexts that are overtly patriotic in nature, such as at American barbecues or state fairs), believing that including immigrant food cultures erode

nationalist identity. While Trump supporters and American nationalists have clearly claimed racist positions, especially their aggressive opposition to the immigration of people of color, the growth of the Trump movement must also be seen as a backlash to a new kind of globalized privilege that was being aggressively displayed by cosmopolitan whites. American nationalists are not only seeing themselves as different from progressive elites in America’s large urban centers, a clear political bifurcation exists between the types of white progressives who are constructing their privilege through global mobility and cross-racial eating and those who are seeing their antiquated modes of racial privilege being eroded by those inhabiting this new subjection that is cosmopolitan whiteness. While both groups are occupying racial and classed privilege, they are doing so in distinct ways, and cross-racial eating sheds much light on how such worldviews diverge. Therefore, even as aggressive acts of racial violence are increasingly common across the country, it is important that we understand the subtle ways that new forms of white privilege are constructed, and study cross-racial eating in a city like New York can make important assertions about the new workings of neoliberal multicultural privilege.
Chapter 5

“That Sounds Disgusting, I can’t Wait to Try it”: Sensory Disgust, Food Media and Global Culinary Tourism

Sensory disgust - a reaction to the sight of rotting carcasses, the smell of bodily excretions, or the taste and textural feel of curdled milk - may at first glance appear to be a simple, visceral reaction that deters us from ingesting or coming into contact with potentially toxic substances. In the last decade, however, the intentional consumption of such perceived repulsiveness, namely through the Western consumption of exoticized and eroticized “ethnic” food has gained a cultural cache, serving to mark the eater’s cosmopolitan privilege while simultaneously labeling the culture that produces such cuisine as “bizarre” and racially other. Nowhere has the pursuit of disgust become more visible than through televised culinary adventuring, what I call “food-travel television”, a series of popular television shows that highlight disgust as a central characteristic of their affective appeal. This chapter explores these popular television and video productions, primarily Chef Andrew Zimmern’s popular *Bizarre Foods* (2007-Present) and noted chef/writer Anthony Bourdain’s multiple television programs including *A Cook’s Tour* (2002-2003), *No Reservations* (2005-2012), *The Layover* (2011-2013) and *Parts Unknown* (2013-Present) to examine the imperial and neoliberal logics of adventurous globalized eating as they play out across fraught tensions in the sensory allures of disgust, namely by examining disgust as a source of pleasure or fun for white Americans. Like previous chapters, this chapter examines the colonialist attitudes embedded in white Americans’ relationship with and pursuit of foreign foods, and critiques how logics of authenticity and exoticism work to reify racial privilege within the cultural politics of late twentieth century and twenty first century multiculturalism. However, whereas the previous chapters examined how
progressive whites sought out the cuisines of racialized groups after they entered the United States, this chapter looks outward, shifting the focus from transnational and cross-racial food encounters that occur within the nation-state to those that occur beyond it. Indeed, food-travel television is the key channel through which Americans “think about the relationship between food, geography, travel and global cultural difference.”608 As such, I take the global culinary slumming of travel television as my subject and critically examine how a racialized colonial gaze functions within popular television programs like No Reservations and Bizarre Foods to reify white American privilege on a global stage.

I examine recurring patterns in these shows, paying careful attention to narrative voice, described sensory experiences, visual markers and cinematic approaches to explore how these programs play into a larger discourses surrounding eating, neoliberal multiculturalism, cosmopolitan whiteness and the growth of neocolonialism. Borrowing from Casey Ryan Kelly, I will examine consumption “as a market metaphor, bodily function and audience viewing practice” to ask key questions about how the act of eating foreign food on television is experienced by the viewers at home.609 Therefore, rather than examining these programs solely as visual texts, I examine these shows as multisensory texts where the sensory experiences of eating – gustatory, olfactory, auditory, palatable - are experienced by the host and translated through the televised medium to the American viewer. As such, I continue using sensory studies to examine how taste and other bodily reactions to ingestion enact race, in particular the emergent form of cosmopolitan whiteness, upon the sensate bodies of the hosts and the viewers at home. I investigate how discourses surrounding taste have constructed non-white cuisines as bizarre, exotic, spicy, repugnant and most importantly disgusting to the white American palate.

609 Kelly, 24.
and how these taste aversions are in turn transferred discursively onto the bodies of racialized groups. I also explore how this bodily repulsion generally works in consonance with a desire for exoticized ethnic food and examine why such exploratory eating across racial and ethnic boundaries often results in erotic visceral experiences that compel diners to return. I ask how and why has the act of consuming disgust become a source of fun for white Americans.

Food media of all types, once primarily focused on the technical aspects of food production such as home cooking and work in professional kitchens, now function as a primary means through which Americans learn about foodways and the cultural aspects of food. As Kathleen LeBesco and Peter Naccarato illuminate “food representations have historically been understood as mere banners of cultural sensibilities; instead we contend that these representations actively produce cultural sensibilities and the possibility of transgression.”

Using Bourdain and Zimmern as notable and influential examples, I address the means by which food-travel television is constructing the sensibility of cosmopolitan whiteness. In particular, the first half of this chapter focuses on the ways by which white Americans have utilized a perceived conquering of these taste aversions to assert a white Western masculine bravery that builds a sense of superiority and difference from global others, while simultaneously positing a privileged, “cultured” cosmopolitan positionality that dialectically relies on the global other for its very formation. Thus, I argue global culinary adventuring like Bourdain’s and Zimmern’s must be read as a particular sensory performance utilized by the white culinary slummer to articulate cosmopolitan cultural capital. Culinary slummers like Zimmern accomplish this by utilizing the consumption of foreign food, in a foreign geographic location, to express a sense of adventure, adaptability and openness to other cultures as well as willingness and bravery to

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engage with the perceived filthiness of racialized foreign others. Specifically, eating for
disgust remakes whiteness under the logics of “diversity” and “newness” produced within a new
form of multiculturalism that emerged in the late twentieth century and early twenty first
century: neoliberal multiculturalism. By examining the colonialist attitudes embedded in white
Americans’ relationship with and pursuit of “bizarre foods,” I ask how the pleasures of disgust
work within the logics of neoliberal multiculturalism, thereby relying on authenticity, exoticism
and eroticism to reify racial privilege, but also present it in a new way that is predicated on
cosmopolitanism and the conquering of the global other. It is this sensory proximity to foreign
bodies of color, a proximity that is at once geographic and predicated on ingestion and a
proximity to the gut, albeit limited and highly contextual, that function as a tool for white
Americans to express this new form of cosmopolitan globalized privilege. As such, I conclude by
asking in what ways does the act of ingestion – the literal consuming of racialized foods deemed
to be disgusting – becoming a form of sexualized pleasure that encourages white Americans to
eat across geographic borders.

By looking at the erotic and sensory pleasures derived from the intentional consumption
of food perceived as disgusting, this chapter highlights the importance of the non-visual senses to
changing definitions of race, privilege and nation in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
In examining disgust, I claim that taste and smell are crucial to the ways by which middle class
white Americans have worked to reinforce class and racial privilege. This is especially important
in light of the increasingly popular rhetoric of our supposed era of post-racial colorblindness

611 The term alien is used to describe food because it implies the inability to assimilate and perpetually remain
outside of white normativity, while “foreign” allows a transition from foreign to native. For more on the distinctions
between the labels of “alien” and “foreign” see Robert Ji-Song Ku’s Dubious Gastronomy: The Cultural Politics of
Eating Asian in the USA.
612 This term “neoliberal multiculturalism” is borrowed from Jodi Melamed’s Represent and Destroy and is defined
as a form of multiculturalism emerging in the late 1990s that is predicated on the transnational realities of neoliberal
economic policy, such as increased leisure travel, the forced migration of refugee groups, the opening of borders for
free trade, etc., all of which have led to increasingly culturally diverse global cities.
where many white Westerners claim to no longer see race. Taken at face value, if one cannot see race, how do we then smell it, taste it or feel it? In theorizing race as purely an optical construction, scholars have subtly endorsed the Western notion of non-visual senses as “lower” crude sensory experiences not worthy of critical attention. Nonvisual sensory experiences like taste and smell are seen both by scholars and in popular discourse as appealing in ways that are emotional, intimate, imaginative, bodily and visceral, while vision - at least in much conventional historical and cultural studies scholarship - is understood by scholars as appealing to rational, intellectual processes. Plainly, scholars have traditionally recognized non-visual senses as not being processed in the same intellectual capacity as sight and hence not as worthy of rigorous academic attention. The visual is always a site of critical analysis; as scholars we are quick to critically interrogate visual imagery but do not pay as much attention to the role of the other senses, especially in contemporary racialization. In examining the construction and role of disgust in contemporary foodie culture, I ask key questions about the role of the non-visual in the construction of race. How do we imagine different races as having smells, tastes, and textures? How do we use the non-visual senses as a tool of inclusion or exclusion? And what role does our desire for sensory experiences, namely disgust, link racialization, the body and our affective experience into one act: the of eating? Using food and eating as a lens, my hope is to push towards a way by which critical race theorists could understand race as not solely contingent on the visual, but rather that complex forms of racialization - especially in our moment of neoliberalism and globalized exchange - take place across all of the senses: taste, smell, feel, hearing and sight in concert. Finally, I examine the gendered and sexual implications of this performance of global culinary slumming. I argue that by crossing the disgust barrier, Bourdain and Zimmern achieve a public display of masculine bravery that at once reinforces their imperial
prowess and constructs their positionality of global cosmopolitanism. The erotics of eating for
disgust, in particular in close proximity to bodies of color, creates a form of sexual fetishization
where the conquering of such fleshy “disgust’ becomes a form of highly racialized erotic
pleasure.

Defining Disgust and the “Paradox of Aversion”

Taste is a relatively conservative sense. Compared to other sensory experiences like sight
(a wide range of sensory stimuli and colors), smell (a wide range of olfactory stimuli), we
collectively limit what tastes are acceptable to the palate. This is in part a survival mechanism.
“Communities raise individuals with relatively fixed and stable understandings of what is edible
and of what constitutes food.”613 Because food “crosses the boundary between the outside world
and the interior self and can not only nourish but potentially poison the eater,”614 humans are
relatively picky about what they choose to eat. Despite this conservatism, Americans have over
the past fifty years rapidly expanded what is part of the broader American palate. This
“oscillation between these two poles, that of neophobia (prudence, fear of the unknown,
resistance to innovation) and neophilia (tendency toward exploration, need for change, for
novelty and for variety)” is what Claude Fischler calls the omnivore’s paradox.615 Fischler argues
that this paradox can cause great anxiety for eaters as we are constantly torn between the safety
and comfort of the familiar and the intrigue of the unknown. As shows like Zimmern’s and
Bourdain’s highlight, there are periods of history when American eaters have been more inclined
to go beyond what is familiar to the palate and seek out new and foreign tastes.

614 Janes, 238.
In many ways disgust may serve as a gatekeeper to determine what is allowed to be put into the body. It can serve as a protective response against the risk of eating something that is inedible or potentially harmful. Disgust may seem at first to be among the simpler human affective responses: a visceral reaction that deters us from ingesting or coming into contact with potentially noxious substances. A biological survival mechanism, blocking our bodies from the threat of physical contamination. When tasting or smelling something we perceive to be disgusting we gag or recoil, drawing back and physically rejecting the object of our disgust. Certainly, disgust can protect the body from things that may cause us physical harm, however disgust is not simply a “gut feeling.” Like all sensory and affective reactions, disgust is a social and cultural construction contingent on discourses of acceptability, morality and taste, rather than solely an automated physical response. “Perception is informed not only by the personal meaning a particular sensation has for us, but also by the social values it carries.” As, such the performance of disgust has historically served as an important site of boundary making that polices social and sensory norms, and contributed in the making and unmaking of borders and systems of order including national order, systems of belonging, order of the body, hierarchies of taste and palatability, and the very ordering of what is organisms are acceptable for human consumption – all of which are tied to long histories of imperialism and the contemporary politics of neoliberalism.

Throughout American history, Americans have utilized disgust as a tool of cultural, sensory and physical exclusion. Disgust properties – sliminess, bad smell, stickiness, decay, noxiousness, foulness, and perversity have been repeatedly associated with racialized, immigrant, and queer communities. Notable examples that cultural scholars have drawn attention

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to are Chinese immigrants in the 19th and 20th Centuries as disease-ridden, Indian and other Asian immigrants of the twentieth and twenty-first Centuries as odious, homosexuals as morally perverse, the contemporary media discourse of West Africans as carriers of HIV or Ebola, among seemingly countless other examples of disgust properties being discursively placed on the bodies of immigrant, queer and communities of color. Within the logic of white heteronormativity this perceived revulsion and the potential of physical harm to the white body has functioned as a way to physically exclude marginalized groups and uphold the pure sanctity of the white American body politic. Popular discourse has collectively constructed the West as being a source of sensory neutrality while immigrant groups are seen as hyper-sensualized—smelly, colorful, vibrant, repugnant, odious—and repeatedly the source of (both desirable and undesirable) sensory diversity.

In each of these contexts disgust is used to reject or push away. Disgust is used as a form of repellent, discursively encouraging whites to avoid physical contact with groups considered racially othered or morally apprehensible. But what about moments where encounters with disgust are actually seen as enjoyable or beneficial to the maintenance of white normative subjectivity? As Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant and Carolyn Korsmeyer all have argued, disgust is a deeply ambivalent and highly contextual sensory reaction that can exert a paradoxical magnetism that compels one to come in contact with objects and bodies that in the dominant discourse would typically be labeled disgusting. As William Ian Miller writes: “Even as the disgusting repels, it rarely does so without also capturing our attention. It imposes itself upon us."

We find it hard not to sneak a second look or, less voluntarily, we find our eyes doing “double-takes” at the very things that disgust us.”619

Contemporary foodie culture, global tourism and the fairly new phenomenon of eating for disgust operate as a key examples of what Carolyn Korsmeyer calls disgust’s “paradox of aversion” - disgust as exuding a powerful double magnetism that simultaneously encourages a rejection of and encourages contact with substances that are imagined as potentially harmful or foul.620 In the last decade, the intentional consumption of such perceived repulsiveness, namely through exoticized “ethnic” food, has gained a sort of cultural cache, serving to mark the eater’s cosmopolitan privilege and imperialist masculine bravery while simultaneously labeling the culture where the foods emerged as “bizarre” and racially other. Disgust is a driving force in a popular phenomenon in the West, culinary slumming, which I define as voyeuristic and exploratory excursions of white pleasure seekers into foreign dining spaces, in efforts to achieve what is perceived as an authentic, exotic and even often disgusting, eating experience. Zimmern and Bourdain travel primarily through Asia and Africa (until the recent release of Zimmern’s Bizarre Foods America) eating, among other things, insects, rats, bats, snakes, toads, and various glands and organs (otherwise known as sweetbreads) - all foods that are outside of normative American cuisine - and use these encounters with exotic disgust to mark their privileged global geographic mobility. These shows, and the intentional consumption of food that normative American eaters typically consider “disgusting,” offer a perfect space to question how these moments of cross-racial/ethnic consumption function as a source of commodified, temporal and

620 Korsmeyer. 58.
visceral pleasure for the white diner.621 “The reaction of disgust is less often a response to taste as it is to the idea of what we are actually eating (or smelling, touching, seeing or hearing).”622

Food-Travel Television: Domestic Audiences with Cosmopolitan Appetites

Since the mid 1960s Americans have had an appetite for ethnic cuisine. This desire for foreign foods, which in part began in its current incarnation at the 1964 World’s Fair, then moved into urban spaces across the United States, and has now gone global with the proliferation of contemporary food media. This white American desire for ethnic and foreign foods – often foods produced by communities of color - is perhaps made no more visible than with food-travel television. Food-travel television is a genre of television programming that combines the format of travel television – that of taking viewers to unfamiliar locations to expose them to new geographic spaces and tourist destinations– with food television – which often is geared towards introducing viewers to new cuisines, recipes or culinary techniques. Food-travel television combines the stylistic elements of these two genres into a single format where a (typically white) host travels around the globe to new geographic locations often for the sole purpose of eating foods that are “new” or foreign to the American viewer. These shows are exploratory and often even voyeuristic in nature as the hosts take viewers inside restaurants, busy street markets or the kitchens of home cooks, all in search of new, foreign and distinct methods of food production and consumption.

Over the past two decades food-travel television has become incredibly popular genre of television programming in the United States, especially amongst young, middle class, progressive white audiences. In the past few years alone, there have been several highly popular

621 These forms of cross racial food consumption correlate to a long history in the United States of an attraction to all things disgusting being a form of racial enactment: including lynching and lynching photography, freak shows, horror films, etc.
622 Janes, 242.
shows, each involving a celebrity-chef host traveling to all parts of the world with the aim of presenting to a largely white middle class audience unique, “authentic,” and ethnic culinary experiences. Among these shows are the highly popular *Parts Unknown* hosted by Anthony Bourdain (previous iterations of this show include *A Cook’s Tour, No Reservations and The Layover*, all with a very similar format), *Bizarre Foods* hosted by Andrew Zimmern, *Diners, Drive Ins and Dives* hosted by Guy Fieri, *$40 a Day* hosted by Rachel Ray (2003-2006) as well as lesser known shows such as, *Food Paradise, Have Fork Will Travel, Tripping Out* and *The Try Guys*. New versions of these shows are constantly being released even today. For example, on January 12, 2018 Netflix released a show entitled *Somebody Feed Phil*, a show highly derivative of Bourdain and Zimmern’s shows, that follows the Jewish American Phil Rosenthal (creator of the popular sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond*) as he awkwardly, patronizingly and naively travels to Bangkok, Saigon, Tel Aviv, Lisbon, New Orleans and Mexico City. *Somebody Feed Phil* even concludes each episode with a conversational recap of the episode between Rosenthal and his parents, who are representative of the imagined American audience, as they gasp in awe of the new, exotic and adventurous exchanges that Rosenthal just had. As the trailer for this show pronounces, “I Just find a new place, see what everybody is eating, and sometimes miracles can happen.”

There are essentially two types of food-travel television. One is blander, and simply shows a host in a foreign country dining out. Such programs include shows *Rachel Ray’s 40 Dollars a Day* or *Rachel’s Vacation*, which feature celebrity domestic talk show host Rachel Ray dining on a budget in a certain vacation destination, or a very traditional travel show like *Rick Steve’s Europe* or *Globe Trekker*, which while certainly refer to food and showcase certain

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restaurants, are generally more concerned with the overall travel experiences. A second type of food-travel programming is one where the host travels to wide ranging geographic locations with the aim of consuming something that is constructed as foreign to the American palate. Such shows are much more provocative in tone and vastly more popular. Eating food constructed to be strange, exotic and disgusting has become a trope common on a wide number of American television shows. For example, programs like the global travel game show The Amazing Race, where eating foreign food is often a challenge that contestants must successfully complete to move forward in the competition, or on numerous cooking competition shows where non-American ingredients are presented to contestants in order to baffle and disgust them, frequently evoke the exotic food trope. Examples from The Amazing Race include eating live octopus in South Korea on Season Four, cow lips in Madagascar and camel meat in Morocco, both on Season 10. In each of these instances from The Amazing Race, the dishes were rhetorically framed as local delicacies when the challenge is presented, yet the American contestants struggle consuming the food, often gagging and vomiting along the way. Other examples include The Try Guys, a popular video series produced by the media company Buzzfeed that features several men completing various hyperbolic activities for the first time, which often involves eating food they deem to be strange or exotic. Episodes of this show include “The Try Guys Try Korean Cooking” or “The Try Guys Try Danish Food” among many others where they eat some of the more stereotypical or outlandish foods from a particular nation. There is even an incredibly popular interview show, entitled Hot Ones, where celebrities eat a series of increasingly spicy chicken wings while being interviewed about their work and personal life. The trope of Americans eating things deemed to be dangerous, foreign, exotic or disgusting, is very common across many media platforms.
Despite the plethora of such examples from contemporary media, the programs that essentially created this media trope are Anthony Bourdain’s *No Reservations* and *Parts Unknown* and Andrew Zimmern’s *Bizarre Foods*. While these shows are widely different, especially in regard to the way by which the cultures of the host nation are presented and contextualized, *Bizarre Foods, No Reservations* and *Parts Unknown* (along with *A Cooks Tour*, and *The Layover*) are shows that follow white American men traveling around the world eating the culinary productions of various peoples of color in remote locations. *No Reservations*, which for nine seasons followed the hyper witty, verbose, urbane and sharped tongued former New York chef and food icon Bourdain, as he explored over 60 countries, traveled more than 716,000 miles (which is the equivalent of circumnavigating the globe over 28 times) and tasted the delicacies in hundreds of cities, villages and towns around the globe. This show was a hyper popular mainstay of the Travel Channel’s lineup and has spurred a mini-genre of food-travel shows, with several similar programs appearing on a wide variety of networks and streaming services. *Parts Unknown* is Bourdain’s reincarnation of a similar template, however this time produced by the outlet CNN. *Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern* is a serial, one hour, travel documentary program where Zimmern travels across the globe to explain and eat dishes from around the world that many Americans might consider strange or disgusting. *Bizarre Foods* is a similar program to *No Reservations* but, as the title would suggest, is more predicated on Zimmern finding foods that are most oppositional to American norms and acceptable culinary behavior; what an American audience would imagine as some of the most “bizarre” foods in the world. Through a series of connections with local “experts,” including food manufacturers, chefs, travel guides, restaurateurs and translators, Zimmern and Bourdain are able to visit spaces that a typical

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American tourist may not reach such as obscure street markets, rural villages and off the beaten path restaurants. For both Zimmern and Bourdain, and by proxy their viewers, no region of the globe is off limits as they actively seek out cuisines and culinary experiences that are outside of Western norms of sensory experience and hygiene.

Bourdain and Zimmern rarely eat in more popular contemporary restaurants in large major metropolises, rather choosing off the beaten path urban markets, small scale restaurants and food carts in places such as May Yon in Northern Thailand or the war zones of Turkish Kurdistan, often spaces that middle class American viewers have relatively little cultural or physical exposure too. As a result, Bourdain’s and Zimmer’s shows are often among the only easily accessible visual and culinary representations for millennial American audiences of vast regions of the globe. In providing this access, food-travel television allows the middle class white gaze to be pointed geographically outward and live cosmopolitanism through proxy, imagining a world of global flavors and culinary vibrancy through the representations presented on such shows. While hosting No Reservations, Anthony Bourdain filmed in nations in many regions around the world, however his most frequented destinations for filming were in Asia, accounting for 27 percent of all episodes during the nine seasons (compared to 24 percent in North American, 21 percent in Europe, 13 percent in Latin America and 6 percent in Africa). In Bourdain’s programs, it is far less common for him to travel to North America or Europe than it is to travel to a nation or geographic region that is inhabited by large numbers of people of color such as Asia, Africa or Latin America.

For over a decade food-travel shows have sought out culinary options in remote locations in nations such as Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Morocco, India, Indonesia and China, presenting to middle class white millennial audiences a filmed simulacrum of culinary slumming
on a global scale. The global culinary adventuring of Zimmern and Bourdain apply the same principles that are at work in the culinary slumming in Sunset Park, namely the desire for the experience of eating ethnic cuisine, and multiply such desires by the unbound geographic mobility that middle class, progressive, white Americans have in the era of neoliberalism. The culinary slummers that travel to Sunset Park, eat Mexican or Chinese food and later blog about it are operating on a relatively small scale in comparison to the global unbound adventuring of Bourdain and Zimmern. Their global adventuring shows that the progressive white seeking out new cultural and culinary experiences is unimpeached by geographic limitations, the traumatic reality of the border crossings, or transgressing race, class, gendered or national barriers. Rather, these hosts, and by proxy the American viewers, are exuding a sense of cosmopolitan nationlessness and can confidently invade any space regardless of the barriers they may face. By traveling to what the American audience takes as the far reaches of the earth, Bourdain and Zimmern help stabilize whiteness as a global norm that is embracing global diversity to fill the void and perpetual lack that plagues the transient unbound identity of progressive American whites in the neoliberal era.

The networks that host the bulk of these food travel shows, *The Food Network, The Travel Channel, The Cooking Channel, Netflix* and *CNN*, have a largely young, middle-class, white viewership and use these shows to sell American millennials a complex lifestyle of adventure, consumerism, global mobility, multiculturalism and sensory indulgence. The Food Network (owned by the Scipps Network Interactive, which also owns HGTV, The Cooking Channel, the Travel Channel, among others) which ran 35 episodes of Anthony Bourdain’s food-travel program *A Cook’s Tour*, for example, attracts a highly educated, wealthy, white, professional viewership. The “average” Food Network viewer is a college educated white
American, between the age of 18 and 49, who owns their own home, is in managerial office related employment and has an average household income of just over US$80,000 annually.\(^\text{625}\) Culinary travel shows account for approximately 20% of the Travel Channel's programming schedule, which includes offerings such as *Man vs. Food*, Bourdain’s *No Reservations* (*Part’s Unknown* airs on CNN) and Zimmern’s *Bizarre Foods*.\(^\text{626}\) The Travel Channel has similar demographics to The Food Network; white, middle class, suburban Americans make up the bulk of this networks viewers. The Travel Channel’s viewership is largely managerial and highly educated, the majority of whom own their own home and have an average income of over US$65,000.\(^\text{627}\) “*Bizarre Foods* is credited by channel spokespeople with boosting the network’s ratings by 35 percent in its first two years (up 46 percent with its 18–49 audience).”\(^\text{628}\) CNN, which largely offers news programming but also hosts Bourdain’s *Parts Unknown*, “reached a greater millennial audience,” over 46 million Americans, “than any other news and information competitor,” proving that its mix of news and travel programming reaches a large millennial market.\(^\text{629}\) The result of this is that food-travel shows have become the centerpiece of programming on a host of networks (CNN, The Food Network, The Travel Channel, The Cooking Channel, among others) that largely cater to a middle class, highly educated, white audience. Simply put, middle class white Americans are eating food-travel shows up.

These shows are not only widely popular, but are encouraging a new form of leisure travel that is based on the idea of traveling specifically to eat and engage in foreign culinary


\(^\text{628}\) Kelly, 30.

experiences, known as culinary tourism. Food-travel television has played a key role in encouraging culinary tourism, which is now a 150 billion dollar a year industry. Food travel shows like No Reservations, Parts Unknown and Bizarre Foods are shows that are widely “believed to have helped inspire a new generation of traveler, one who is drawn to destinations as much by the palate as by the eyes and ears.” These shows are at once creating a consumer base and capitalizing on the white American desire for global mobility in the contemporary era of global neoliberalism. As CBS News Travel Editor Peter Greenberg describes, “We've evolved from culinary tourism, where travelers merely watched experts in demonstration kitchens, to full-on participatory travel, where travelers get up close and personal with chefs, the products and the process itself. It's travel that embraces a more genuine, authentic experience,” evoking the idea that culinary tourism encourages a new form of travel that is predicated on the desire for “authentic experiences.” To borrow from David Harvey, these shows are selling the ideology of a “global village” to a “new liberal managerial class” that is encouraged to see the world as something easily accessed and consumable.

The appeal of these shows is that the host, Bourdain or Zimmern (accompanied by a small production team, which for Bourdain for example includes at least six producers, location scouts and additional on camera talent) are put in new foreign environments and are tasked with using their American ruggedness, multicultural awareness, imperialistic spirit and hyper masculine bravery to adapt to the new cultural and culinary situations they find themselves in. By traveling to locations such as Phuket, Thailand where Zimmern ate fried grasshoppers,

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intestine soups, stretched squid, wasp larvae, stir-fried stingray, red weaver ants, and forest lizard, or rural Namibia where Bourdain consumed an ostrich egg omelet cooked in ash and a freshly killed uncleaned warthog, such shows offer for the white cosmopolitan viewer the existence of geographic locations and culinary experiences still unaltered by the reach of global mass consumerism or neoliberal development. For the cosmopolitan Western subject, this provides evidence that, despite the seemingly all encompassing reach of neoliberalism and Western capitalism, geographic locations still exist where their progressive adventurist cosmopolitanism can be built. Instead of presenting a world afflicted with famine, poverty and other plagues brought forth by the violence of Western colonialism and neoliberal free trade, these food-travel shows present a world of pastoral landscapes, romanticized traditions, exotic and disgusting culinary practices and exhilarating sensory experiences to be had by the cosmopolitan and mobile white Westerner. As Helene Shugart observed of the role of food-travel media in an homogenous and bland food media landscape, “in a consumer landscape increasingly characterized by artifice, replication, transience and superficiality, the quest for novelty and uniqueness is endowed with greater and greater market value; to this end, cultural differences offer the opportunities for appropriation and commodification” by the hyper mobile white Western elite.635 The pursuit of exotic and unique experiences by Bourdain, Zimmern and the like allows white American audiences to experience food with a presumption of authenticity, yet in the context that is made into a spectacle of vicarious travel, consumption and sensory experience.

Both shows, largely marketed to a progressive white millennial audience, are derived from the fundamental premise of constantly seeking out a new geographic and culinary frontier.

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A central component of these shows is to showcase the hyper-mobility of the white Western male subject within neoliberalism. For these hosts, no nation or space is outside of the scope of their reach. No border crossing is too challenging and no war-torn region is too dangerous. For example, Bourdain travels to the eastern regions of the Congo, despite the fact that this region is incredibly violent because of various warring factions.\(^{636}\) Bourdain and Zimmern are capable of voluntary geographic movement and cross borders fluidly with little hesitation (the preparations and planning are hidden from the viewer). For example, in the pilot episode of Zimmern’s *Bizarre Foods: Asia* he films in Japan, Thailand, and Malaysia, however the border crossings or airline travel between these nations is hidden from the eyes of the at home viewer. The labor of travel is often invisible in food-travel television, making it appear seamless and easy, which of course hides the reality that travel and border crossings can be incredibly traumatic experiences for millions of marginalized groups around the world. This voluntary, exploratory, leisure driven mobility is a key feature of privilege in the era of neoliberalism, because technology and the ease of air travel is now open to an increasingly larger number of middle income Westerners.\(^{637}\) While such mobility has certainly increased with neoliberalism, attempts to control and restrict mobility – such as with immigration restrictions, travel bans and border walls - are just as characteristic of modernity and neoliberalism. The global movement of Bourdain and Zimmern are certainly not subject to those restrictions. The fluid movement of Zimmern and Bourdain across nations at once critiques the importance of nation states and domestic connections, pointing toward “the complex interrelation between travel and dwelling, home and not-home” for these seemingly

stateless travelers. However, because of their position as privileged Western men, often entering into postcolonial communities of color around the world representative of former colonial power, their presence does not challenge racial hierarchies or colonial forms of knowledge. Their privileged positionality as wealthy white celebrities, and the authority granted to them by the CNN or Travel Channel platforms, in many ways reproduces these colonial forms of social ordering. Furthermore, while Bourdain and Zimmern travel fluidly across borders, each episode of their shows is named after a specific nation and centered around the travels through a specific nation-state. To a certain degree this implies that while their positionality is fluid and travels across nations, the cultures and culinary traditions of the nations they are visiting are self-contained wholes and are not, like all cultures, the result of fluidity, movement and hybridization.

Of course, the cultural representations on such shows are not innocuous. Food-travel television, through its unending, unfettered and far reaching pursuit of culinary difference is actively reinforcing distinctions between American and global culinary cultures. In clearly orientalist ways, these shows are creating “food-place-identities that divide the world into categories of exotic and mundane; the former signifying the mysterious identity of the foreign Other and the latter the normal and comforting rituals of everyday America.” The shows are fundamentally set up as a us-against-them juxtaposition where American culinary cultures are defined as normal, clean and acceptable versus various foreign others that whose culinary cultures are defined as dirty, exotic and inappropriate. The open embrace of diversity on such shows is done so in a manner that places the West, in particular the United States, in a perpetual

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640 Kelly, 4.
state of exceptionalism. Western norms of cleanliness, taste, palate, food preparation, utensil use are placed at the unquestioned pinnacle of the global cultural hierarchy and juxtaposed against cuisines framed as odd, disgusting and unsanitary. Such cuisines, typically prepared on food-travel television by people of color, are consumed by the white male hosts in chaotic urban markets found only after long journeys through rugged pastoral terrain that is presented as untouched by the modernizing reach of globalization or neoliberalism. To a lesser extent Bourdain and to a greater extent Zimmern, in seeking out the “most extreme forms of deviance from the experience of the audience, these programs engage the Other at the moment in which it might seem most repellent, primitive and backwards.”

The popularity of such “exotic” culinary adventurism on television reflects the white anxiety surrounding the emerging multicultural and cosmopolitan ethos of contemporary neoliberal globalization. Like the culinary tourism at the 1964 World’s Fair, or in Sunset Park, Brooklyn at the turn of the twenty-first century, the culinary adventuring becomes a means through which these two white television hosts, and by proxy their audiences, can openly embrace global multiculturalism in a means that is safe and does not challenge their position at the pinnacle of the global racial hierarchy. However, through food-travel television the scope is amplified as the hosts take culinary slumming trips not simply within the nation-state, but to any region on earth. No space or place is off limits to the likes of Bourdain and Zimmern. Eating in such places not only allows the hosts, and again by proxy their shows’ viewers, to claim culinary authority over communities of color, but also allows these white cosmopolitan subjects to assert their neoliberal cosmopolitan privilege through such travel, culinary experiences and subsequent reproducing of those experiences for larger audiences. Mediating the globalized neoliberal tension between the open embrace of diversity and multiculturalism and the singular importance

641 Kelly, 31.
of Western culture and its values, such shows are grounded in the creation of a fundamental
distinction between a Western self and a non-Western other. Food-travel shows, which almost
unilaterally frame the culture and culinary techniques of the host nation as bizarre, strange,
exotic and even silly, reinforce the fundamental normality and supremacy of Western modernity
(never mind the fact that over one billion people on earth are food insecure and eating items that
may seem atypical can often be necessitated by food scarcity, which is also a result of the
inequalities of global neoliberalism). By very definition the use of the term ‘bizarre’ implies that
there is an American norm against which the “bizarre” is juxtaposed. As such, food-travel shows
contribute to a larger process of stabilizing a world order that is secure for white privilege, free
from racism, a global color line and the ills of colonialism, yet exotic and exciting enough that
white westerners can still embrace cosmopolitanism and a drive toward global cultural
exploration. Indeed, global culinary tourism serves to continue the “expansion of the cultural
logics and economic practices of neoliberalism.”

Both shows are filmed through a single camera’s highly selective interruptive lens,
utilizing heavy use of authoritative voice over narration and hyper close-up shots of food being
consumed. In visiting the various countries and geographic regions in search of culinary oddities,
both Bourdain and Zimmern employ a commanding tone that gives authoritative weight to the
narration on the shows. Not only does this shift the authority to an American white man and
away from a member of the community that is producing the food being consumed (although
Bourdain is relatively open to sharing the spotlight with a local culinary guide, Zimmern
somewhat less so), but it does so in a way that makes the communities of color where the
episodes of these shows are located into a commodified form of entertainment. Kelly has called

this merging of authoritative pseudo-anthropological tone with the whimsical and often jovial nature that the shows, often awkwardly, also incorporate as “ethnotainment.”

643 “Ethnotainment entails close examinations of the cultural rituals and everyday lives of others to impart both sincerity and objectivity, to communicate to audiences that this is how life exists without the presence of cameras, narration and hosts.”

644 This is of course not the way in which these shows are produced and the reality is that a team of producers, translators, camera operators, editors and many others carefully plan and mediate each frame to create a simulacrum of the lives of those who live on the margins of neoliberalism or Western modernity. Rather, the construction of these such simulacrums is a careful process that creates images of global others, namely as peaceful, docile and pleasant barbarians, who happily welcome the white Westerners and are eager to share their food with them. This also hides a history of colonialism and imperialism by white Westerners that has led to the very contexts of marginalization (Bourdain is unafraid, contextually, of the locations he visits in relation to colonialism; he cannot escape his positionality as a wealthy white American man accompanied by a production team). This construction also relays to the viewer that the white host is living a life of almost excessive cosmopolitanism and geographic mobility with an unprecedented and highly desirable proximity to foreign bodies of color, a proximity that is at once geographic, intimate as the host is invited to domestic spaces, and gustatory as the proximity also occurs through food and is operating on the level of the gut. All the while, the hosts are evoking the rhetoric of travel narratives and a long history in the Western cannon of imperialist travel literature, “televised culinary adventure (functions) as a neocolonial discourse that adapts and refashions assumptions that once structured ideological adherence to Western colonization, namely the superiority of Western

643 Kelly. 12.
644 Kelly. 12.
values and the imperative to extend its civilizing mission to the non-western world.” These shows are less invested in the practices of cooking – culinary techniques, recipes, food production – and are more interested in using food as a means to produce very particular kinds of knowledge about culture, places and peoples around the world. These food-travel shows mark a diversion from a more traditional form of food programming that is based on teaching the audience how to cook a dish, typically set in a well-manicured suburban domestic space. These shows do not focus on the American domestic sphere but rather on global travel, and are typically hosted by men, whereas most at domestic based cooking shows set in American kitchens are hosted by women. These shows mark global travel as hyper masculine, as Bourdain and Zimmern ruggedly move through destinations that they present to their audience as “off the beaten path,” more obscure and hence unattached to Western convenience.

Bizarre Foods: A suburban American Eats Frogs Hearts in Japan and Winged Ants in Uganda

Zimmern’s appetite for foods that Americans would label exotic and that elicit the sensory reaction of disgust is unmatched on American television. Typically dressed in khakis and a polo shirt (his dress is a bit more refined in the more recent episodes of the show), Zimmern represents the suburban middle-American man, clumsily and naively traveling across the globe and eating foods intended to produce a visceral, shocking reaction from the primarily white American viewers of his show. He presents himself as warm, relatable and friendly; for white American men, Zimmern’s affect feels familiar and comfortable. Zimmern exudes sensory familiarity. His persona is that of a man who would be grilling hot dogs in an American suburban backyard, wearing a polo shirt and khaki shorts, with spatula in hand. He could be your neighbor,

645 Kelly, 11.
brother or your uncle. Based on this persona, viewers make assumptions about the sort of sensory experiences that Zimmern would typically have, those of the white American suburban man, which lie at the center of American sensory neutrality.

He juxtaposes this affect, however, against the supposedly dangerous and perceivably disgusting food that he consumes. This contradiction, between a suburban man and the world’s most extreme foods is the central conflict that drives the show, a conflict that is largely played out in sensory terms. The show flips that white sensory normativity on its head, continually placing Zimmern in situations that contradict the sensory experiences of the American man: eating ants in Uganda, grubs in Peru, whale blubber in Alaska, rectum sausage in Kazakhstan or frogs’ hearts in Japan. While the affect is that of white suburban normativity and the sensory experiences that it connotes pervades Zimmern’s image, he also takes pride in being an example of cosmopolitan whiteness to its most extreme end, pushing the limits of what white American men are physically able to consume, all the while bringing the white American viewers along with him. And while these divergent sensory experiences are intended to represent the opposite of those being had in American homes, Zimmern presents them in a manner that is safe, friendly and acceptable for white American consumers. Because Zimmern serves as a proxy, audiences watching Zimmern’s show get to consume the other without fear of having to have these sensory experiences themselves; part of the joy is watching someone else have them, but also without the threat of the actual body of the racialized other. As Kelly writes, in “Bizarre Foods, consumption is the test of tolerance. In other words, Zimmern’s ability to consume exotic ingredients is a testament to his good nature, his respect for other cultures, and his liberal sensibilities. For the
audience, their ability to bear with him throughout his journey validates their status as cosmopolitan citizens, without all the risks.”

In the pilot episode of the Travel Channel’s highly successful global culinary travel series *Bizarre Foods*, Andrew Zimmern, noted chef, television personality and Minnesota native, travels to Asia - specifically Japan, Thailand, and Malaysia - in search of the most “exotic edibles” he can find. Along the way Zimmern dines at small bars, upscale restaurants and street markets eating a wide array of foods that, while often commonplace in the regions where Zimmern is traveling, are seen as peculiar, disgusting, dangerous and even fantastical to his audience of white American diners. In the pilot episode alone Zimmern consumes rooster testicles, turtle blood, fruit bats, durian - a fruit known for its strong smell - and, most famously, a still-beating frog’s heart. After a fairly lengthy introduction where Zimmern affirms a form of culinary multiculturalism by asserting that sharing food is the “best way to experience another culture,” the pilot episode opens in the crowded streets of Tokyo. A monologue that describes Tokyo in orientalist terms as a strange “land of contrasts…where dining out is a way of life,” is followed by Zimmern making his way to “Piss Alley,” in Japanese *shonben yokocho*, a small dense strip whose dark overcrowded bars offer tourists and locals a highly curated and pseudo-nostalgic look at working-class dining in post-war Japan, with the restaurants playing into this constructed space. “Piss Alley” offers Japanese dishes that many food critics typically imagine

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646 Kelly, 39.
648 Known as “Piss Alley,” or *shonben yokocho* in Japanese, because of the large number of criminals who, in previous decades would frequent neighborhood’s bars, would urinate directly into the street due to the lack of toilet facilities. Local authorities attempted to rebrand the strip as Memory Lane, *omoiced yokocho*, after a fire destroyed many of the buildings in 1999 and they were rebuilt, this time with proper toilet facilities. Despite many of the establishments being only about a decade and a half old, both locals and tourists alike describe the strip as dirty, crapped and sleazy; older businessmen who often become intoxicated and are sexually aggressive frequent most of the establishments. This strip is carefully curated however as the strip brands itself as having a run-down, old-timey
as poverty foods of the post-war era, such as *yakitori* (chicken skewers), *motsu-nabe* (offal stew) and *hormone-yaki* (grilled organ meats). In fact, many of the items on the menus of these small bars are made from offal, the entrails and internal organs of an animal used as food.

Zimmern then walks through the crowded alley, describing it in very visceral language along with camera work that makes the street look dark, dense and grimy, constructing an urban space defined almost solely as musky, dark and by the visceral response of disgust. The episode progresses with Zimmern heading to a dark cramped Getomono Bar named Asadachi, which roughly translates to “morning erection,” named after the supposed sexual benefits men experience after consuming the dishes served. Among the menu items are grilled salamander, soft-shelled turtle, snake liquor, and fresh still beating frog’s heart, which are the “strangest” and “most bizarre” foods that Zimmern claims to have ever encountered. This scene, which features very limited engagement with the chef and restaurant staff (the former is almost absent with the exception of one brief appearance, perhaps because of the language barrier), primarily consists of close-ups of Zimmern’s food, various images of his mouth chewing, detailed narration of his sensory experiences – mostly of the texture once in his mouth, mushy, warm, chewy, tough - and audible sounds of his enjoyment. Combined, these sensory displays work to give the viewer a simulacrum of the sensory experiences that Zimmern is having, although mediated and made safe through the television. The scene is clearly focused on Zimmern’s eating experiences, the actual act of chewing and swallowing, as we hear sounds of him grunting, moaning and chewing, marking each bite with audible sensory reaction, a combination of disgust and pleasure, enjoyment and rejection as he swallows each item on camera. As the Japanese chef hands Zimmern dish after dish, he consumes each with a combination of unbridled curiosity and

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appeal. Many travel guides describe the neighborhood as similar to a theme restaurant, only if the theme were post-war poverty.

649 Zimmern, “Bizarre Foods of Asia.”
exuberant delight, showing the viewer that not only does he enjoy the food, but that no sensory experience is beyond the limits of his cultural or sensory tolerance.

The Getomon Bar is presented in an orientalist mystical light, with the narrator claiming that it offers foods that not only challenge the limits of sensory pleasure but also promise to affect consumers’ bodily physicality, including the possible improvement to male virility. As Zimmern quickly chews a still beating frog’s heart and slurps down a shot of lizard sake, in a pseudo (homo)erotic manner, he proudly announces “there is nothing like a pig’s testicle in the morning.” Zimmern takes pride in consuming food that he clearly assumes most of his primarily white Western audience would find simply repulsing, and with a confident sense of conquest, places a photo of himself on the bar’s “Wall of Fame.”

Image 46
The crowded streets of Japan’s “Piss Alley,” 2012

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650 Zimmern, “Bizarre Foods of Asia.”
Zimmern accepting raw frog, including the beating heart, in Japan’s Piss Alley.  

Zimmern explaining the preparation methods and sensory experience, including audible and exaggerated chewing and savoring sounds. The bottom right also includes the frequent explanatory notes that are common on Bizarre Foods.  

A reading of the pilot episode of Bizarre Foods reveals some obvious discourses and power dynamics at work. Avoiding the more popular tourist destinations, Zimmern instead chooses “Piss Alley” because it is off the beaten path – playing into the increasing preference

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652 Zimmern, “Bizarre Foods of Asia.”
653 Zimmern, “Bizarre Foods of Asia.”
among Western tourists to forgo travel as a form of recreation in favor of searching for new
cultural and sensory experiences – the increasingly popular notion within the West that the aim
of travel is to see something new, not to simply relax. For Western whites with the disposable
income to travel, finding “new” sensory experiences in “new” geographic locations is becoming
increasingly difficult within the discourse on contemporary global travel and the increased
mobility of such middle and upper-class Westerners. In the West, whites essentially compete
with one another to visit (and of course document the visit on social media) a location
unbeknownst to their peers and unaltered by Western influence. This is of course aided by travel
technology, such as advances in air travel, which has made few geographic locations off limits to
those who can afford the trip. However, in dining spaces often far beyond the realm of even the
most adventurous Western tourists, Zimmern performs his privileged global mobility in a very
visceral and public way. Food plays an important role both in the performance of his mobility
and in the desire for sensory newness because food can be eaten and prepared in seemingly
endless combinations and can inject newness into even the most predictable trajectories of tourist
travel.

The format and tropes that were established in the pilot episode of Bizarre foods continue
throughout the twelve-plus seasons that the show has been on the air. The entire premise of the
show is for Zimmern to find foods that are considered most strange or disgusting to the
American viewer. In each episode, Zimmern is put in contact with a local guide, usually a
restaurant owner, food manufacturer or translator, who shows Zimmern some of the most
outlandish foods that they can find. Episodes feature visits to rural villages, street markets, small
restaurants, upscale restaurants and domestic spaces where Zimmern is introduced to a wide

654 Chandra, Sarika. Dislocalism: The Crisis of Globalization and the Remobilizing of Americanism. Columbus:
Ohio State University Press, 2011, p 178.
variety of foods all intended to shock and repulse the white American viewer. Each show contains a map that details exactly where Zimmern is located as well as text factoids that explain what is happening on screen and give the viewer fragments of context for the food that Zimmern is consuming. These features, along with Zimmern’s authoritative matter of fact style, give the show an anthropological lens, with Zimmern as expert guide that shows the at home viewer some of the world’s most “bizarre” foods. This anthropological gaze differs from the worldview of a tourist, or what John Urry calls the “tourist gaze.” While the tourist gaze is different from the quotidian worldview, because it is specifically seeking something different and new, the anthological gaze exuded by the likes of Zimmern and Bourdain seeks not only to experience newness but also to fully contextualize and categorize non-Western groups within the knowledge systems and sensory experiences of the West. In consuming each food item, he attempts to make cross cultural and cross sensory comparisons to food items in the West, placing the food items within a framework that the white American viewer will understand. For example, in Uganda he describes dried and smoked lung fish in the following way: “This is very dry in texture, meaty. If you shut your eyes and someone puts it in your mouth, you would think it was dried beef. It is very similar, the texture. But I can still taste the mud from the swamp. I taste it from the fish.” Here we see Zimmern giving the American viewers a frame of reference for his sensory experience, comparing the texture to that of beef, but also distinguishing it as disgusting and as other, claiming it still tastes like the mud that the fish swims in.

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655 This anthropological lens that is presented by Zimmern operates in a similar manner to the museum style approach taken by the African Pavilion at the 1964 Fair, and in both cases white Americans are viewing African nations as if they are bizarre pre-modern societies that require measured observation. Both the Fair and Bizarre foods allow white Americans to observe Africa from a position of safety, one at home while watching television and one in the sanitized Fairscape, neither having to ever truly having to engage with the African people in a deeper or more meaningful way.

Bizarre Foods operates under the fundamental assumption that the white American viewer is the established norm and that the foods and cultures that Zimmern encounters differ from that norm in most absolute terms. He goes to great lengths with the show to establish a strange and foreign other that is constructed against the norm of the invisible white American viewer, who Zimmern often speaks to directly in his narration (however rarely contextualizing the historical contexts or history of colonialism/imperialism in the places he visits). For example, in Season Three, Episode 12, which aired December 8, 2008, Zimmern travels to Uganda.657 Rather than spending the bulk of the episode in one of Uganda’s dense industrialized urban centers, such as the capital city of Kampala, Zimmern films the show in the rural village of Lwanika, about a four-hour drive from the nation’s capital. The episode opens with visual images of Zimmern outside straw mud huts, accompanied by narration that sets Uganda up as a primitive and exotic wonderland that is filled with natural biodiversity and a kind yet unsophisticated people. Zimmern employs imperial nostalgia for a premodern and preindustrial world, Zimmern describes the people of the village as charming and warm and shows a clear affinity for a world that the very colonialism that Zimmern represents is destroying. Standing in front of a mud hut, Zimmern states:

For the Traveler that delights in surprises, Uganda is the place for you… Half of the world’s population of Gorillas thrive here as well as other popular African wildlife. The natural beautify of this country that has been dubbed the Switzerland of Africa, is matched only by the high spirits of the people…Despite years of terror and bloodshed (this may be Zimmern’s only obtuse reference to British colonialism), the Ugandan people still have a reputation for being amongst the most resilient and friendliest people on the planet. As a developing country, their cuisine is derived out of necessary, more so than any other influence. In fact, it could be said that in this country, if its nutritious, if it’s good for you, you gotta eat it.658

In one brief narrative, Zimmern denies that there is any sensory and culinary complexity to the Ugandan food culture, telling his viewers that the food to be consumed is not prepared by skilled chefs that have a deep knowledge or culinary traditional, but rather are primitive foragers who simply eat what they can find.

In this episode, he eats African lung fish, an eel-like fish that burrows itself in mud. Clad in a blue polo shirt and bright khaki shorts, Zimmern buffoonishly accompanies his local guide digging through the mud in search for this fish. On this hunting trip he falls several times. Each fall is met with Zimmern’s self-deprecating humor, even claiming they had to get a rope to prevent the “mud from sucking him in.” As he is walking through the mud in search of the fish, he is very descriptive of the sensory experiences he is having, and describes a “strong funky smell thanks to the decomposing plant matter.” He brags about being the first mazungo (slang term for white person) to hunt for lung fish because of how dangerous it is, an affirmation both of his masculine bravery and the pure exoticness of the food he is set to consume. Several times during this hunt Zimmern turns to the camera and literally dares the people at home to try what he is doing, calling them out in a literal sense. After hunting for the fish and preparing it in the village, Zimmern returns to the village where they trap and prepare winged African white ants, which they catch by drumming on the ground for three to four hours. “If you found this on your property, you’d call pest control. But in Uganda it’s a drum circle and buffet line,” Zimmern jokes in between verbal expressions of shock at how clever the Ugandan method for collecting the ants is. In this episode Zimmern also eats grilled goat stomach lining and intestines at a roadside stand (which he describes as one of the five worst things he has ever eaten), rat, grasshoppers, squirrel, and crocodile.

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Zimmern often laments about the proximity of the people to their food, claiming at one point in the Uganda episode that “Everything is essentially caught or raised within a mile of where I am sitting, not a wrapper in site.” By constructing the people in his show as literally “closer” to their food and not subject to the mechanization and modernization of industrial food production like those in the West, he ensures that the people of his show are not presented as modern equals to the white American viewer, as pre-modern, strange, primitive and backwards. As nearly a billion people on earth are food insecure, in larger part because of the violence of imperialism and neoliberalism, food choices in the non-Western world are often made out of necessity. Being closer to their food sources also assumes that the people of Uganda in this case, but in other episodes other African, Latin American and Asian people, as willing to eat food that is less hygienic and less clean that food in the West, marking the West as the standard of hygienic normalcy and these foreign communities of color as lagging behind. Constructing these peoples and their food practices as outlandish, peculiar and grotesque reaffirms the cultural and sensory normalcy of white American culinary practices. Whereas Western culture has evolved and moved past such culinary practices, the people of Uganda are living in a premodern world, a world that is at once being destroyed by colonialism and industrialization yet longed for through the imperialist nostalgia of the cosmopolitan white traveler. When Zimmern does visit Europe or other Western countries, the foods that he labels strange or “bizarre” are described as such not because of how primitive they are, but rather because of their complexity; choosing often to feature molecular gastronomy or complex hybridized cuisine on such episodes. This presents European cuisines as technologically and culturally advanced, whereas the cuisines of a nation like Uganda are primitive and backward in their bizarreness. In other episodes of the show Zimmern consumes penis ceviche, Sheep's head, tongue and eye, bird embryos, sea snails, coral

worms, horse rectum, and tarantulas and has even been offered human meat during a ritual circumcision of a five year old boy in Madagascar, all in communities of color outside of the Western world.\textsuperscript{663}

The sensory experience of each food item eaten by Zimmern is described in minute detail. He goes to great lengths to relay the sensory experiences he is having in these various geographic locations to the viewer at home. While in Uganda, he describes the dried lung fish as having the texture of dried beef and the toasted winged ants as tasting like a toasted almond, each time making a comparison to a sensory experience with which the American viewer would be familiar. Zimmern is constantly using descriptive rhetoric, such as pungent, crisp, beady, soggy, dry, sticky, tough, among others to relay the sensory experience to the American viewer, which because of the medium on their end can otherwise only be visual and auditory. He also uses sensory experiences to distinguish the people of Uganda from the viewers at home, especially when in relation to boundaries and limits of edibility for the white American viewer who Zimmern embodies. For example, in the Ugandan episode Zimmern attempts to eat grilled intestines on the side of the road while in Kampala. He fails to eat more than one bite, claiming that the food is not properly cleaned and is beyond what even his tolerant stomach can handle. However, his local guide (who is rarely given an on-camera voice) is happy to finish the food for him as the camera pans to the guide who is in delight when eating the grilled meat. Zimmern describes this meat as too earthy, too rustic and too pungent to be eaten. He even jokes that the intestine is so dirty that he can taste what the goat had for dinner the night before.\textsuperscript{664} However by making such claims about a food that is quickly and enjoyably eaten by the black Ugandan man standing next to him, and by hundreds of others also at this roadside stand, he is projecting this

\textsuperscript{663} The Late Show with Steven Colbert, “Andrew Zimmern Gets Stephen To Eat Brains.” June 22, 2016.
\textsuperscript{664} Zimmern, “Bizarre Foods: Uganda.”
pungent and repulsive smell directly onto the people of Uganda, giving them a particular taste, smell and texture for the white viewer. Here taste and palate are being used to draw a clear line between who is normative: Zimmern and by proxy the American viewers; and who is unacceptably disgusting: the guide who readily eats food Zimmern describes as too repugnant for Westerners to consume. Despite his inability to eat the intestine in this case, Zimmern typically embraces foods from all over the world with little to no hesitation.

Zimmern’s eating in both Uganda and Japan, as well as on other episodes of his show, recall Charles Darwin’s writing on disgust in Tierra del Fuego: “In Tierra del Fuego a native touched his finger to some cold preserved meat which I was eating at our bivouac, and plainly showed utter disgust at its softness; whilst I felt utter disgust at my food being touched by a naked savage, though his hands did not appear to be dirty.” Zimmern presents his disgust in a very sensory way, describing with detail what makes the various food objects that he consumes off-putting. However, the ways by which it is presented to the viewer, in a straw hut with Ugandan men and women eating with their hands, is in a manner that makes it as much about the food being consumed as it is about the race and pre-modern “savage” state of the people that are preparing it. As Zimmern sits at a bar with confident smugness, eating pig testicles, a beating frog’s heart and a glass of lizard sake, he makes it clear that the foods he is consuming are at the forefront of the culinary peculiar and shocking. Even in our increasingly globalized world of neoliberal consumption, Zimmern makes it clear that for an American audience these foods are truly “new.” He purposely avoids more popular Japanese dishes such as sushi, udon, ramen and fried rice, which are not only mainstays of the Japanese culinary world, but have been popular in the United States since the 1960s (history of Japanese food in the US reveals much about the racial discourse surrounding Japan-American presence in the US and the socio-political

relationship between the two nations), instead choosing to make a spectacle – a sort of culinary
freak show - out of his eating and his ability to cross the disgust barrier.

Zimmern’s embrace of non-Western sensory experiences becomes a way to exude a sort of sensory tolerance that plays into his cosmopolitan positionality and is pushing the sensory experiences of globalization, cosmopolitanism and neoliberal multiculturalism to be increasingly unbounded and diverse. In this way, sensory formations are temporal and are changing with the increasing multiculturalism that whites are coming into contact with. Whereas the sensory experience of whiteness in the 1950s was that of industrial and corporate suburban Americans, the sensory experience of Zimmern’s brand of neoliberal multicultural eating is infinite and not restricted to particular smells, palate feels, tastes or textures. Examples such as these that abound on Zimmern’s show. The non-visual senses become a tool of exclusion as to what is edible and sensorially enjoyable to the white body is different that of for the racialized bodies in African, Latin American or Asia. Throughout the entirety of his show, Zimmern is using sensory experience to mark race and disgust as a way to mark what is outside of sensory normativity, that of American whiteness. His prepotency for diverse tastes and smells becomes the defining sensory characteristic marking his cosmopolitan whiteness, while grotesque, pungent and off-putting sensory experiences mark the perpetual status as other for the racialized groups he encounters. By rendering the sensory experiences of these communities as abnormal, the sensory experiences of American whiteness become reified as normative and thus places whiteness at the center of sensory neutrality. Zimmern mediates white identity in the era of multiculturalism by eating foods considered inedible, by constructing then assimilating the exotic into the abundance of white identity. By consuming racial otherness, even if it disgusts, he contributes to a narrative of Western exceptionalism in which tolerance and cultural appreciation signal the transcendence
of global power inequalities and validate the superiority of Western democratic values. The other must be authentically foreign when considered against the normalcy and blank slate of white identity. In doing so through eating, Bizarre Foods gives us a clear example of how race is constructed through the non-visual senses – here through the taste, smell and sound of eating - and how the boundaries of self and other are being drawn through the intimate act of ingesting foreign foods.

No Reservations and Parts Unknown: “Chances are you haven’t been to this place. Chances are this is a place you’ve never seen.”

In Season Three Episode Seven of Parts Unknown, Anthony Bourdain and his companion white American chef Andy Ricker (also owner of Pok Pok, a chain of restaurants serving Thai food in the United States), sit down at a small rural restaurant named Him Tang in the town of May Yon in the Chiang Mai Province of Northern Thailand. This restaurant is seemingly chosen for its remoteness, pastoral location and eccentric menu and is largely outdoors with wooden tables and an overall airy feel. After a few hearty swings of a fermented spirit and beer, the two American chefs reflect on the remoteness of the restaurant and the particularities of the menu. “How do you find this place man, we are in the middle of nowhere,” Bourdain bluntly asks his fellow diner, “and what did you order?” Ricker then quickly lists off a lengthy and visceral list of parts of the pig and the style in which they are prepared, roasted pig

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667 An anonymous group of activists of color in Portland, Oregon recently published a list of restaurants owned by white cis gender men that they called at the “center of culinary white supremacy.” Ricker’s Pok Pok was among the restaurants listed. The list also offered alternative restaurants that served similar cuisine, but that was owned by a person of color or a person who identifies as among the ethnic group from where that cuisine is derived. The list has since been removed. Casino, Khier. “Activists Publicly Expose White-Owned Restaurants Guilty of Cultural Appropriation All Over Portland.” NextShark: The Voice of Global Asians. https://nextshark.com/kooks-burritos-heroes-publically-expose-white-owned-restaurants-guilty-of-cultural-appropriation-all-over-portland/ Accessed March 30, 2018.
tail, Northern Thai pork sausage, pigs’ brain and raw pig blood soup. Between each item ordered, the camera zooms in closely on the preparation of these foods – pigs brains being mushed together in the chef’s hands, pig blood being poured into a large pot, pig sausage being dropped on the grill – which when combined with Bourdain’s auditory moaning and carping gives the viewer a highly visceral and instinctive sense of the foods about to be consumed by the two white Westerners. Upon clarifying that the soup to be consumed shortly indeed contains raw blood and partially digested juices from when a cow eats grass (which Ricker calls “shit juice”), Bourdain cringes and belabors the fact that he must eat something so repulsive to the Western palate, describing each food in rich detail, from its unappealing mushy and custardy mouth texture to its pungent gamey smell and fragrant musky taste. The scene is rich with sound, as you can hear the food sizzling, blood pouring, brain mashing and hosts chewing and moaning. After a brief moment of the female restaurant chef’s voiceover in Thai, when she declares that she has made this soup for seventeen years because it is a labor of love, the two indulge in the pork centered meal. After a few highly textured scenes of the two roughly eating the food which includes the auditory markers of slurping and crunching, the two turn to each other and to CNN’s largely white American middle-class viewership to proclaim the food as delicious. “I’m not lying, the food is delicious” whipping a drop of blood from his lip and evoking an imperial trope of the savage cannibal other, “even if it makes you look like a vampire.” Bourdain overcomes his initial fear and repulsion, embracing the allure of disgust to thoroughly enjoy the meal. He has conquered the what his show has framed as the exotic, disgusting and absurd Oriental other. After finishing the meal, the two share a testament to their white masculine bravery as Ricker relays a story of how a family of seven recently died eating this meal because of the “parasites” that the soup has the potential to contain. Bourdain jokingly shrugs off the risk factors and

absurdly states, “This is delicious. I’d eat this out of (New Jersey Governor’s) Chris Christy’s jock strap on a hot summer day”. 670

Image 49
Pigs brain being prepared for Bourdain and Ricker. Bourdain describes his repulsion to it with detailed sensory descriptions, including a “custardy” texture and “gamey” taste. 671

Image 50
Bourdain and Ricker being served blood soup and brain in Northern Thailand. “You’re not kidding, it’s like a horror movie,” proclaims Bourdain. 672

Bourdain’s various shows, *A Cook’s Tour*, *No Reservations* and *Parts Unknown*, are indeed complex cultural works that are in many respects difficult to read. Certainly, as this scene showcases, he expresses a similar logic and visceral markers of disgust that Zimmern has built a career upon. Eating pig’s brain and pork blood soup - a soup that could indeed be dangerous to one’s health - much like Zimmern uses the sensory experiences of disgust to racialize the non-Western other and label them as exotic, strange, outside of dominant and normative lived experience. Like Zimmern, Bourdain pushes audience familiarity with global culinary experiences by traveling to countries that are largely unfamiliar to the American global imaginary and eating foods that, at least the presumption is, white American viewers are largely unfamiliar with. Like Zimmern, Bourdain conveys sensory experience through the televised medium to his viewer through various stylistic choices, including close up shots of food being prepared and consumed such as the Thai chef’s hands mixing the brain and seasoning; detailed verbal descriptions of smells, tastes and textures including Bourdain using words such as “pungent”, “mushy” “earthy” and “funky” to describe the food he is eating in Thailand, or audible sounds of him swallowing and chewing the food. As with Zimmern’s work, this disgust trope is present in much of Bourdain’s work, and he has become renowned for traveling and eating food that is most contradictory to the sensory experiences of food that are common in American homes. He is even credited for popularizing “sweetbreads,” the culinary term for throat, pancreas, heart, stomach or other glands, in the United States.673

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673 Bourdain has discussed sweetbreads both on his show and in public, despite the often visceral reaction that he gets from many of his customers. However his public approval of sweetbreads, his celebrity and an increasing recognition that these foods are consumed around the world have made sweetbreads increasingly popular in the United States. Bourdain has published recipes for sweetbreads in the New York Times, including a sweetbread risotto. Bourdain, Anthony. ” Sweetbreads With Morels And Fava Bean Risotto.” https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/5425-sweetbreads-with-morels-and-fava-bean-risotto. Accessed March 30, 2018.
However, Bourdain’s shows and his public persona differ from Zimmern in several key ways. At once, Bourdain represents the archetype of the contemporary urban intellectual (an archetype he helped create), well-travelled, hyper witty, urbane, verbose. The tall, thin man clad in a pair of rugged jeans and weathered black leather jacket, open about his propensity for drugs and alcohol, carries himself with a sort of grandiose bravado that represents American masculinity and the archetype of the American rebel. He occupies space, he has a confident moxie, he over-eats, over-drinks and he is not afraid to get his hands dirty. Whereas the khaki wearing Minnesota native Zimmern represents the suburban white man, Bourdain actively rejects the consumerism and white normativity of the American suburb. Rather, Bourdain represents the hip urbane intellectual who, although having worked for decades as a working-class line cook and chef in busy New York restaurants, exudes a stylish affect that progressive white middle class Americans idealize and often fantasize about emulating. Bourdain’s rejection of American white normativity is what makes him so cosmopolitan and global, and also what makes him so cherished and popular amongst liberal progressives.

Bourdain’s twenty plus years as a chef in some of New York’s busier restaurants, allows him to claim an authenticity and class flexibility that few other popular chefs can claim. At once he can occupy the subjectivity of the working-class man, the “run of the mill” line cook that has worked in kitchens in establishments ranging from diners to high end French bistros. This grants Bourdain an authority over professional restaurant work that few other television personalities can claim and (along with his heavy drinking and drug use) makes him incredibly relatable to other service industry professionals. He often dines with other chefs, line cooks, street food cooks, farmers, and day laborers on his show. He takes pride in showing the daily lives of
working class people in the countries that he visits, though this view is always filtered through the gaze of a white American television host.

Conversely, Bourdain’s rhetoric is also hyper literary and intellectual. He is consistently making references to prominent progressive scholars, intellectuals, musicians and political figures, dining with Sean Penn in Haiti, Bill Murray in upstate New York, and President Barack Obama in Vietnam, among many others. He also evokes references to renowned white male literary figures within the context in which they are known for having written, such as Joseph Conrad in the Congo\footnote{Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown. “Congo.”} and William S. Burrows and Paul Bowles in Morocco\footnote{Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown. “Morocco (Tangier).” Season 1, Episode 5. CNN. May 12, 2013.} during the first season of Parts Unknown, along with dozens of others over the multiple years of his various shows: Graham Greene, George Orwell, Joan Didion, Francis Copola, Hunter S. Thompson and Charles Portis, again all white Westerners. His love for literary anti-heroes who broke from their privilege and lived a life on the margins - perhaps no more well exemplified than with his adoration of William S Burrows and his period of heroin addiction in Tangier\footnote{Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown. “Morocco (Tangier).”} - allows Bourdain to exude a sort of folk hero working class persona that he feels gives him credibility with marginalized communities around the world, despite his status as a wealthy white Western celebrity. He uses both academic and popular historical research to contextualize the spaces he is visiting, using academic tone and jargon to contextualize a nation or region of the world within a larger global historical context. This makes Bourdain appealing to educated, liberal professionals because he does not directly speak down to his audience but rather rhetorically bombards them with verbose and at times ostentatious literary and academic references.

The financial resources required to be on the road for over 200 days a year aside, Bourdain’s geographic fluidity have made him the ideal white cosmopolitan actor. He has found
a means to optimize the privileges associated with neoliberal mobility. The show often features scenes of him strutting down a dimly lit street in a war-torn post-colonial nation at night, with the gleeful confidence to occupy that space despite the history of colonialism and with no fear for his own personal safety (which surely the team of producers and camera crew preserve). While Bourdain frequently identifies as a New Yorker, he rarely identifies as American and presents himself as a sort of nationless wanderer, a man of the world so untied to national identity that he is free to travel without attachment or hindrance (he does have an ex-wife and child in New York). In this respect, he is the epitome of white cosmopolitan subject, seeing his identity defined more by his desire for constant mobility than it is for a sense of home. This of course differs from the movement of non-privileged subjects, such as migrants, refugees and the geographically disposed, many of which are the nameless faces of his show, and travel through many of the nations he visits not by choice or with the relative ease with which Bourdain does, but rather by force, their movement the result of a violent dispossession of their land and community.

The most common approach to the non-Western spaces and cultures that Bourdain features on his various shows is what Casey Ryan Kelly, Mary Mostafanezhad, Karen O’Reilly and other anthropologists have called “going native.” Going native is the process by which one adopts the cultures, habits, norms and lifestyles of the people in the nations and regions that he is visiting and claims authority over them, with or without that community’s consent. The key way by which Bourdain adopts the cultures and habits of the non-Western spaces he is visiting is, of course, through eating. I call this sort of quotidian and commonplace culinary adoption that Bourdain engages in “eating native,” which is the process by which one

677 Kelly, 113.
678 Mostafanezhad, Volunteer Tourism.
engages in the everyday eating practices of a non-Western culture. In Bourdain’s visits to nations like Argentina, Columbia, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Borneo, Madagascar and Laos, we never see Bourdain eating in corporate standardized restaurants, despite their increasing prominence across the developing world. In fact, he constantly derides this kind of dining experience, equating it with the sensory experiences of normative Americans. In addition, we rarely see him eating in fine dining establishments in these developing nations, despite the fact that many of these nations have deep, rich and diverse culinary cultures. Rather, his food adventures take him to street markets, informal eateries, food carts, pubs and the backrooms of large kitchens. The purest form of authenticity is key to Bourdain and he encourages his viewers to go native and build their global cosmopolitan knowledge through native eating experiences and avoid the typical tourist experiences of global travel.\textsuperscript{680} Tourists are encouraged to eat like a local.

This kind of culinary consciousness raising and global culinary awareness is how Bourdain eats native and fully embraces the normative culinary and everyday sensory experiences of working class communities. What is important about “eating native” is that eating is a deeply intimate bodily exchange during which one engages in the same sensory experiences of the non-Western group and ingests the cultural productions of that group directly into the body. By eating in such spaces, he is smelling, tasting and touching, in a highly intimate and visceral way, the same things that locals are. In this way, Bourdain attempts to disavow his affiliation with Western sensory experience – for example he constantly decries homogenization and the McDonaldization of American culinary tastes – and fully encompasses himself in the sensory experience of the non-Western racialized others. He can break away from normative sensory experience, namely those associated with suburban whiteness, by making the sensory

\textsuperscript{680} Kelly, 129.
experiences of racialized foreign groups his own. This is a key feature of cosmopolitan whiteness, whereby what cosmopolitan whites see as the insufficiency of white American sensory experience can be filled by the sensory excess of foreign groups. For cosmopolitan whites, their American identity gives them a sensory blank-slate that must be filled with foreign, global sensory experiences. By fully indoctrinating himself into these non-Western cultures in a means that is not superficial or insignificant, Bourdain can get “pretty much as far you could possibly be from the blandness of much American food” and find culinary experiences that fill the sensory void that is at the heart of post-suburbanization whiteness.681

For Bourdain, it appears that he sees eating for disgust as part of this process of eating native. Eating foods deemed disgusting by an American audience not only allows Bourdain to reinforce his American white masculine bravery, it also allows him to show that he has gone fully native. Eating pigs blood soup, something a chef has prepared for seventeen years for members of her community, is Bourdian’s way of adopting the cultural and culinary practices of northern Thailand. It is his way of rejecting the cultural and sensory norms of the Western world and showing that he has fully embraced the non-normative, non-Western other. While Bourdian’s desire to eat for disgust is not nearly as problematic as Zimern’s is on Bizarre Foods, eating food that such shows construct as disgusting is also common on Bourdain’s show. Bourdain uses his open embrace of even foreign culinary cultures, most commonly working-class street food, to present himself as having gone fully native. This is indeed the central logic of much of Bourdian’s show. If he acts like one of the locals, gets intoxicated with the locals, eats like one of the locals and has the same sensory experiences as the locals, he will be accepted by the locals, and therefore avoid the criticisms that shows like Zimmern’s have faced, those of

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cultural appropriation, cultural imperialism, white privilege and an overall American cultural naivety.

This is in part why Bourdain’s relationship with colonialism, imperialism and cultural appropriation are so complex. Going native allows Bourdain to avoid any significant criticism. “Going native exempts the traveler from the critiques of cultural commodification and globalization while the naïve tourist”\textsuperscript{682} remains duped by the façade and political economy of the multicultural spectacle. As Mary Mostafanezhad writes, ‘going native’ has similarly become a strategy of Westerners in the third World – including anthropologists – to attempt to overcome their post-colonial guilt.\textsuperscript{683} However, his attempts to go fully native, and his attempts to acknowledge Western imperialism, U.S. militarism and the legacies of colonialism, do not reduce the symbolism and his power as a wealthy white American man consuming the cultures of the non-Western other for his own, and for his viewers’, enjoyment.

One of the key features of much food-travel television, including \textit{Bizarre Foods}, is that such media representations celebrate global diversity and the cosmopolitan identity of the host, the show does little to point out the power inequalities at play in the cultural and culinary exchanges taking place. While Zimmern’s anthropological gaze is at the forefront of this process of eating native, Bourdain is much more reflective. Bourdain is aware of what his presence means to the communities around the world that he is visiting. He is keenly aware of his positionality as a white Western man as he travels into non-Western spaces and he actively embraces the nuanced culinary culture of the working-class everyday life. He attempts to use food as a means to break down those power dynamics, inherent as they may be. He sees eating not as an anthropological act, but rather as a transgressive act, where cross-cultural connections

\textsuperscript{682} Which in many ways represented by represented by Zimmern, who does not “go native” in the same regard but is rather driven by spectacle and not an embrace of the lived everyday.

\textsuperscript{683} Kelly, 114.
can be made. “Just by virtue of showing up, just to see how people eat and drink, people reveal themselves to you in a way they wouldn’t to a hard news reporter. People let their guard down at the table,” stated Bourdain when discussing Parts Unknown. He truly does believe that by eating with others and across racial groups, cultural barriers can be broken down, and ideology that cosmopolitan whites adopt across the county. Of course there is some truth to this.

Historically food has been one of the central ways with which people across cultures have connected and build relationships. Bourdain, because of the privilege and power that comes with traveling with a film crew, can “eat native” by having unprecedented access to community’s inner domestic spaces. However, the relationship shifts when the connection surrounding food is done for television and a broad American audience. These connections, while certainly have the potential to be transgressive and honest, often feel staged and become less sincere because they are being filmed during the culinary experience, and are thus in many ways performative.

In eating native, Bourdain employs an imperialist sensory nostalgia, craving strange and bizarre culinary experiences that have not been impacted by modernization, globalization or cultural exchange. Throughout his shows we see Bourdain, chasing pre-modern cultures or groups unimpacted by the global flows of globalization, employing a deep romanticized desire for a pure, traditional and authentic sensory experiences. In eating something that is defined as outside of modernization, i.e. “the ways it has always been done,” he implies this sensory experience of eating the food is outside of the sensory parameters of the global neoliberal world and thus more authentic and desirable. The paradox in this is that Bourdain’s presence as an agent of cultural imperialism and in potentially opening these sites up to future tourism by other progressive mobile whites, leads to an increased potential of these idealized, romanticized, pre-

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modern and exotic sensory experiences to erode. As the literature in critical tourism studies shows us, the presence of increased numbers of white westerners typically comes great cultural change hybridization, cultural imperialism and modernization. With tourists comes American convenience, large hotels, infrastructure changes and corporate American restaurants. Therefore, Bourdain’s very presence increases the likelihood that this sort of purely non-Western sensory experience that Bourdain is chasing - eating at dhabas (roadside restaurants) in Punjab, India, listening to Afro-Brazilian music in Bahia, Brazil or sampling Cơm hến (clams with rice topped with clam broth & pork rinds), and Bánh bột lọc (cassava flour cakes topped with pan-fried shrimp, pork belly & green onions) from street-side vendors in Huế in Central Vietnam – are more likely to be hybridized, change or erode.

Further complicating his relationship to privilege, the narration on his show prove that he is keenly aware of the colonial and post-colonial histories of the places he is visiting. Both No Reservation and Parts Unknown use a combination of rhetoric and visual cues to present to viewer that Bourdain is not the average white American man who is entering into these spaces clueless to the culture, history and social hierarchies at work in these communities. For example, each episode of Parts Unknown opens with a historical description of the place that is relatively nuanced and aware and an overview of the current social and political climates of the places he is visiting. This narration contextualization is always in Bourdain’s voice, which presents him to the viewer as the authority over that cultural knowledge. Despite this, his shows do often include long conversations with local activists, political figures, musicians, artists and chefs in these shows. For example, in a particularly respectful and nuanced opening narration on “Parts

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Unknown: Columbia,” Bourdain challenges the dominant American vision of Columbia as a hyper-violent country overrun by the drug trade.

Colombia. Ordinarily and, for all too many years, when this country makes the news or appears in a film or television drama, it's not for its looks, which are, I should say right up front, spectacular. It's not for its people who are, everyone I've ever met, anyway, warm, proud, generous and fun. Or for its food, which is truly great. I'm no stranger to this place. Generally speaking, it's a particularly vibrant mix of Spanish, European, Afro-Caribbean, and indigenous people. These are deep waters, my friends, that no news story or episode of "Miami Vice" has ever come close to navigating. It is and always has been a fiercely, fiercely proud country, and its people yearn to see international coverage of something other than cocaine and violence, but that isn't a legacy that's easy to ignore... Until recently most of the news coming out of this part of Colombia was not good. It was a front line in the war on drugs, for lack of a better term, and Colombia's long struggle with the FARC, a Marxist guerrilla force financed by drug trafficking, kidnapping and covert assistance from Venezuela. Fifty years of a very dirty war. The stakes not about drugs per se, but about the ability of ordinary Colombians to live without fear.  

After this rather nuanced narration, Bourdain on to have a roundtable dialogue with Julio Cesar Gonzalez, mayor of Miraflores and Pablo Mora, Professor at Medellin University about the impact of the American “War on Drugs” and daily life in rural Colombia. Here we see that not only is Bourdain fairly knowledgeable about Columbian culture and hypercritical of American militaristic anti-drug interventions, but also that he is willing to share his on-screen time and subvert his own authority by giving the work of knowledge production over to local experts from within that particular community. Other such examples include a conversation with female entrepreneurs and writers in Senegal about the changing religions and gender dynamics of the rapidly modernizing country, which grants these Senegalese women much authority, agency and voice. Such conversations allow Bourdain to use food as an entry into a broader conversation about place, cultural hybridity and identity in these complex post-colonial spaces. Also by

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687 Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown. “Columbia.”
highlighting the restaurant culture of Senegal, showing the cities burgeoning music scene and framing the nation as a rapidly developing economy in an otherwise still developing region, we see that even as Bourdain occupies a working-class persona, his prepotency is for Western style capitalism and absolute faith in the consumer marketplace, even if it will eventually destroy the kind of dense, affordable, gritty and urban culinary and sensory experiences that Bourdain so cherishes. For Bourdain, Western style development is a presumed good, even if he at times acknowledges the harmful aspects of neoliberal globalization and the potential sensory Americanization and hominization of non-Western countries.

These types of scenes and narration, which are long and detailed, often taking place even before Bourdain is seen eating any food, in many ways represent Bourdain at his best. Critical of social hierarchies, aware of his own imperialism and part of the urban proletariat. In taking seriously the relationship between his own identity and the legacies of colonization, Bourdain constantly questions the limitations of his American and Western worldview and in many ways, gives us the blueprint for a “new ethics of global citizenship.” However, the show is much more complex than this and his positionality as a white man, especially one that claims knowledge over these non-white, non-western cultures is in many ways problematic. A perfect example of Bourdain’s complex and problematic relationship with imperialism and colonization is in Parts Unknown: The Congo. This episode opens with images of Bourdain and a United Nations convoy attempting to cross the Congo River on a ferry, but the ferry has broken down, which shows the viewer the burdens of transnational travel especially in developing nations (Travel is rarely featured in Bizarre Foods). In this episode, Bourdain and a documentary filmmaker rent a boat and very challengingly travel up the Congo River to an abandoned

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689 Kelly, 117.
690 Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown. “Congo.”
Belgium colonial research facility. Bourdain’s narration tells the tale of a complex colonial legacy, a tyrannical dictator - King Leopold of Belgium - and a nation that was deeply hurt by European genocide and a long period of exploitative rule. In his narration, he also details the warring factions, military groups and refugee camps that are sprinkled throughout Western Congo. This is a nuanced and detailed exploration of the lasting impacts of violent colonial occupation on the Central African nation, all of which are framed in between scenes of Bourdain struggling to secure food in the food insecure nation (including a scene where him and his film crew kill and precariously cook chickens on the boat in the middle of the night while traveling up the river).  

However, a counter-narrative runs through this episode; that of Bourdain’s extraordinary obsession with the Congo. Bourdain talks of his idea of the Congo of a fantasyland, a place that has eluded him despite his globe trekking. This form of “exoticism is escapist. It looks far beyond one’s social and material world. It is, however, less about reality that about ideals and fantasies. Indeed the exotic is constructed as a distant, picturesque other that evokes feelings, emotions and ideals in the self that be been considered lost in the civilizing process.” Like hooks describes of white American sexual encounters and fantasies in Eating the Other, the Congo has become Bourdain’s obsession because it is one of the few places on earth that he has been truly unable to explore. Conquering the sensory experience of this space drives at Bourdain’s core because his access to it has been limited, thus putting a limit on his unfettered and seemingly unending cosmopolitan global mobility. This limitation of his mobility seems to nag at Bourdain to the point that visiting the Congo and attempting to eat native in this place has

691 Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown. “Congo.”  
become an obsession. His deep desire to conquer the Congo River shows his deep unfettered attachment to the belief that as a white Western cosmopolitan subject there is no physical space, geographic region or sensory experience that should be off limits.

In this episode where he travels up the Congo River, he weaves in references to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* alluding to the major themes of the book, such as the hierocracy of imperialism, the madness that has resulted from colonization, and absurd evil of European rule, while failing to point out the racism and in the text. Unlike other episodes, much of the Congo episode is filmed either under the cover of fog or at night, which is a direct allusion to the *Heart of Darkness*, symbolizing the naïve darkness of the awareness of the American viewer as well as the dark forbidden racialized African nation. The scenes are framed to make the nations seem dark and unapproachable, a nation and a community that should be feared and where only the bravest of white Western subject should attempt to enter. Bourdain spends most of this episode on a boat with a white crew traveling down the Congo River and very few Congolese people have any voice on this show (like many episodes his guide is a white westerner living in the region). Here is at once fully engaged in the African sensory experience, shown by an overexalted focus on sweating and constantly chasing away insects in the dark. However he is at a safe distance as the water of the river keep him physically separated from the racialized subjects that the viewer is lead to believe are watching the ship from the shore as it travels up the river. Also, by presenting the Congo as an unconquerable nation of violence, plagued by heat and moisture, he is using visceral sensory imagery –the boat in the dark, the live chickens being slaughtered, the constant complaining of hunger, the dark and foggy scenes, images of sweat and toil - to render the Congo a nation of darkness, danger, heat and scarcity. This of course juxtaposes Congo against the sensory neutrality and safety of the white Western viewer and, like
much of the other episodes of both Bourdain’s and Zimmern’s shows works to racialize the non-Western group by creating a sense of normative and abnormal, self and other, all of which operate along a racial hierarchy. Bourdain sees this nation as a fantasyland where he can have native sensory experiences, such as sweating while traveling up the river, and eating sparse food at night, while not facing any of the realities of violence, post-colonial devastation and political insecurity because of his positionality as a wealthy white westerner. Such counter narratives and motifs that are present in much of Bourdain’s programming and show that even while he is largely aware of the colonial and imperial histories of the places he visits, he is still participating in the same privilege making at the heart of cosmopolitan whiteness. Because of his position as a white Western male, his obsessive desire to have cross-racial and cross-border sensory exchanges are constructing his cosmopolitan whiteness in a very particular way, central to the ways by which he constructs his identify and his global cultural privilege.

What is key is that for both Bourdain and for the viewer at home, all of these cross racial culinary encounters are done without fear of any challenge to ones personal safety or position and the pinnacle of the American social/racial hierarchy. There is nothing to lose by traveling into non-Western cultures, but rather such acts can only boost ones cultural and sensory capital because of increased knowledge of the non-western other. These white hosts, followed virtually by the white American audiences, carry a sort of arrogant bravery as they travel across the globe, often seeking out spaces that are particularly dangerous, unsafe or are undergoing military violence or political turmoil. Examples of this are Bourdain traveling to Libya during its Civil War and to the Gaza Strip. This does at times lead to tense situations for the crews, which is then relayed on the television show itself, such as Bourdain and his crew filming in war zone of Iraqi Kurdistan in 2011. However, the white hosts always travel through such geographic spaces
confidently and leave unscathed. A commonly framed shot on the show is that of Bourdain walking through the middle of a dense urban street at night, often drunk or pondering some arcane metaphysical question, yet unafraid of any potential risks to his physical body. He can easily and safely (in part because of the presence of a film crew, which is typically unseen by the viewer at home) invade the space of the non-Western other. While the presence of a danger external to the food itself makes the show even more adventurous and compelling for the viewer because these locations play into the notion that no geographic space, whether it be rural sub-Saharan Africa or a Middle Eastern Desert, there is no space unreachable and inaccessible to the white American cosmopolitan male. And because the producers work tirelessly to ensure that these celebrity hosts face no true danger, their global movement is seen as unfettered by the violence of any current geopolitical turmoil. And because the geographic travel is purely optional – the hosts are not refugees or laborers, forced to relocate through military interventions, political strife or from the presence of violent military factions, the hosts have the ability to tour leisurely and leave as they see fit, exuding the epitome of privilege in the neoliberal world, that of unconstrained mobility. This implies for the cosmopolitan viewer watching at home, that for the white American progressive male the world is consumable and accessible, regardless of larger contextual issues. The only physical harm that the host relay to the viewer are the real and imagined digestive issues that occasionally result from the foods the hosts consume, which underlines the perception of the strangeness and foreignness of such cuisines.
Recent Airbnb advertising campaign encouraging travelers to follow Bourdain’s lead and “Eat like a Local.” Airbnb, a popular website that rents informal lodging and is largely credited with gentrifying communities around the world.\(^{694}\)

Another key distinction that Bourdai consistently makes that should be noted here is that he constantly describes himself as a traveler and not a tourist. Not only does the term traveler evoke the legacy of imperial travel and imperial travel literature,\(^{695}\) but also suggests that because travel is harder than tourism – because it requires visiting places that are void of American conveniences, such as Northern Thailand or the Congo River – it is more rewarding and adds more to the cultural capital of the white Westerner. A large portion of Bourdain’s narrations are dedicated to how much he has transformed because of his experiences as a

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\(^{694}\) Airbnb Advertisement. Circulated via Email on April 9, 2018. Tagline for Advertisement reads: “Family Recipes, Street Food Staples and shared meals – if you want to learn about local culture there is no better way than through its cuisine. Indulge your appetite for adventure on these tasty experiences led by local home cooks, chefs and food writers.”

traveler, here we see travel become a form of consciousness raising. He takes joy from being in uncomfortable situations because they build his cultural capital and thus further his cosmopolitan privilege. As Kelly points out, there are problems with Bourdian’s distinction between tourist and traveler that are problematic. It divides the world into that which white westerners deem authentic – Northern Thailand, Democratic Republic of Congo, Columbia, Libya, Vietnam, Tanzania – because they are more pastoral, more underdeveloped and more primitive and a world that Westerns view as inauthentic, places like the American suburbs because they are filled with mass consumer culture. This not only ignores the notion of cultural hybridity, framing the cultures as one or the other, but it also assumes that these inauthentic cultures exists to be sites of cosmopolitan discovery for middle class white Westerners. Unlike travelers who supposedly exemplify “rugged Western individualism, a masculine spirit of perseverance, strength and self-reliance,” tourists are scapegoats of American naivety and idiocracy, making them easily criticizable targets when discussing cultural imperialism or the foils of the travel industry. Travelers, because they are seeking out authentic experiences can see themselves as outside of this critique, because, like Bourdain, they assume their presence has no negative impact on the spaces they are visiting, that they are not attached to legacies of imperialism, colonialism and neoliberalism or that they are not, both a product of their gender, race and classed privilege with allow them to travel the world without fear of their own personal safety.

**The Conquest of the Disgusting**

As Sara Ahmed argues, a proximity to certain symbolic social objects can offer the promise of happiness. This is certainly the case with food, a social object that is often

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696 Kelly, 130.
697 Kelly, 130.
associated with being “good.” Food is typically seen as a source of nourishment, a form of celebration or a tool for community building, and most appropriately here, a form of sensual pleasure for the eater. Eaters take joy in consuming “good food” be it on a social or sensory level. For the culinary tourists, like Zimmern or Bourdain, a certain level of happiness is derived simply from the proximity to foods that are typically defined as outside of the normative white pallet. Crossing into new sensory geographies, caused by the very proximity to these food objects, brings joy to the culinary tourist, be that joy found in the accumulation of cultural capital or in the sensory pleasures derived from consuming “new” foods.

Even in light of the recognition of multiculturalism as a collectively failed project that has not resulted in any higher levels of racial integration nor can provide the right answer to the complex nature of today’s race relations, eating across cultures or racial groups is upheld as one of the true sights of “happy multiculturalism.” Eating is held up as one of the few cultural sites where a social object can turn bad racial feelings into good ones.699 Crossing into a new sensory geography can be a productive and potentially radical way to intimately experience, in visceral and affective ways, cultures that are typically constructed as outside of the very salient category of white American normativity. There can be great transformative potential in these encounters in offering the possibility of new sensory experiences that at times can lead to enhanced cultural understanding. Indeed, eating can create new identities, not simply confirm old ones.700

Many scholars have supported this understanding of foreign food and have argued that food, even food we initially imagine as disgusting, is indeed the best way to experience other cultures either at home or abroad. For example, Donna R. Gabaccia, Harvey Levenstein and

699 This clear lack of racial harmony, which symbolizes the collective failure of multiculturalism as a social or political project, is perhaps no more evident than in the recent increase of visibility of state-sponsored violence against communities of color and the #blacklivesmatter protest movement.

Richard Pillsbury have traced the emergence and evolution of ethnic food and examined the changes to American eating culture that came about with increasing encounters with foreign foods. However, much of this work, particularly Gabaccia’s, promotes a liberal multiculturalist view of U.S. society and American eating culture, which I find to be problematic. The political thrust of this scholarship purports a pluralistic and welcoming narrative of American food history where new immigrant groups bring in new tastes and new eating cultures that add to and enrich the benign diversity American culinary culture. At the same time, Americans traveling outward engage with these cultures and food becomes a key vehicle for intercultural exchange and for the benign expansion of the collective American global imaginary. Gabaccia, for example, implies that the rise in ethnic food consumption by white consumers proves their openness to other cultures and is proof of the successes of liberal multiculturalism and even hints to the emergence of a post-racial America.

As we can see from a careful reading of Bourdain’s and Zimmern’s global culinary adventuring and its public portrayal on television, the racial and cultural implications of these exchanges are not quite as innocuous as many early food studies scholars imagined. While there certainly are some transgressive potentialities and positive affective responses caused when eating outside of one’s cultural comfort zone and these cultural exchanges do open the door to the potential of a more accepting worldview, my work agrees with the likes of Lisa Heldke and Mark Padoongpatt who argues that the American construction of alien or ethnic food is in and of itself a racial act used to evoke images of the exotic, nonwhite other. As Padoongpatt argues,

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some foods are indeed more ‘ethnic’ and more racialized than others and the processes of culinary acculturation or assimilation that Gabaccia explores are not race-neutral. The eating culture surrounding alien food is as much about the construction of whiteness as it is about the questions of assimilation or acculturation of ethnic groups that food scholars like Gabaccia and Levenstein seem preoccupied with. Therefore, this shift towards ethnic food must be read within the logic of a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that, borrowing from bell hooks, commodifies ethnicity and racial difference and views it as “spice” or a “seasoning that liven[s] up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.” I challenge this understanding of the rise in popularity of ethnic food simply as a benign expression of a multicultural society. Rather the consumption of alien food functions as a key component of neoliberal multiculturalism and a globalized racial logic that renders ethnicity an exploitable and commodified resource for the pleasure of the mainstream white consumer.

Simply reading these global culinary adventures as, at worst sites of cultural exchange and at best sites of radical and anti-racist transformation, does not fully encapsulate the charged racial power dynamics at work. In the context of the very limited, superficial and primarily market-driven interactions that are typical of culinary tourists like Bourdain, for the white bourgeois subject, these sensory encounters function more often as a means to display a form of pseudo-imperial neoliberal masculine bravery. This imperialist masculinity is fundamentally predicated on the consumption of foodstuff, labeled not only “foreign” but also grotesque, disgusting and even potentially dangerous. Here for the white Western culinary adventurer, traveling and eating becomes a means of remaking oneself and entering into a position of global cosmopolitanism. In eating, the body becomes both the tool and vehicle for adventure, be it

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sensory or cultural.\textsuperscript{705} This intentional eating for disgust, therefore, must be read a sensory and bodily form of what Sara Ahmed terms “stranger fetishism”\textsuperscript{706} Ahmed shows us that when dominant groups (in this case white Westerners) construct foreign cultural groups as strangers, they do not do so simply because these groups are unknown or have failed to be identified. Rather, it is precisely because these groups that fit outside of white normativity have already been identified clearly as alien. In such a way, Ahmed argues that the “stranger” or “alien” becomes an abstracted, universalized figure that is removed from distinction and cultural specificity and becomes a fetishized object easily consumable by the white bourgeois subject.\textsuperscript{707} This fetishization functions at various times to include or exclude the alien groups, but always in a way that in turn works to use the fetishized bodies of strangers to define and redefine what becomes normative in the West.

\textbf{The Sensory Erotics of Disgust}

This begs the question, however, if these foods are to be perceived as disgusting and unpleasant on a sensory level to the normative American eater, what compels culinary adventurers like Zimmern to cross the sensory barrier that disgust creates and, by eating, come into direct contact with the very objects of disgust. As Ahmed and others have made clear, disgust requires contact. Here Zimmern is a “the body out of place” who is intentionally choosing to come into contact with the very objects of his disgust.\textsuperscript{708} But why would he make such a choice? What is to be gained? For example, why would Zimmern continue to eat a roasted chicken heart in a small Japanese eatery even after he exclaimed: “I would rather be tied to an

\begin{itemize}
\item Probyn, 18.
\item Ahmed, \textit{Stranger Encounters} 12.
\item Ahmed, \textit{Stranger Encounters}. 39.
\end{itemize}
anthill and covered in honey rather than having to eat any more of this.” I contend that for Zimmern and white culinary slummers like him, that the sensory violence of disgust is accompanied by the pleasures of the result of overcoming the barriers created by that very disgust. The reason for risking potential sensory discomfort, and even the perceived potential for physical harm, is done so because of what is gained by the physical encounter with disgust. By crossing the disgust barrier, Zimmern gains a public display of masculine bravery, imperial prowess and global cosmopolitanism. As Zimmern travels the world, eating what he perceives to be the most unusual, and disgusting foods, he claims a sense of pride from his ability to conquer any visceral disgust and takes pleasure in his bodily ingestion of the “exotic.” Global culinary adventuring like Zimmern’s, therefore, must be read as a particular sensory performance that the white culinary slummer utilizes to articulate one’s cultural capital by expressing a sense of adventure, adaptability and openness to experiencing other cultures as well as willingness and bravery to engage with the perceived filthiness of racialized foreign others. We see Zimmern overcome disgust and eating foods with little or no hesitation that, while common across many other regions where he travels, in this case, Japan, would make most Americans shudder at the mere thought physical contact. In doing so, Zimmern displays sensory masculinity, proving that he can conquer the exotic Asian Orient – coopting and appropriating the culinary productions of Asian bodies in the process. To Zimmern and his audience, this food is repugnant, but he is going to eat it anyway – simultaneously taking a personal pleasure in his ability to conquer the disgusting other, while the at-home viewer finds pleasure watching Zimmern squirm as he crosses the disgust barrier. For the viewer, it is fun to watch Zimmern react to the disgusting food, as long as the viewer remains in their space of domestic sensory safeness.

Bourdain’s and Zimmern’s narration is crucial as after consuming each food they details their immediate sensory reaction to the viewer describing it in terms of flavor profile, texture, smell, etc. This gives the viewer, who is clearly distanced from an immediate sensory experience of these foods, a sense of proximity by intimately detailing just how divergent, bizarre and perhaps most importantly new his eating encounters are. Neither Bourdain nor Zimmern specifically uses the word disgusting in their shows and rather chooses to express his disgust through his visible reactions: for example it is common to see Zimmern wipe sweat from his brow, cringe, gag and use linguistic hyperbole to describe just how viscerally repulsive and sensorially objectionable much of this food is. In a move that clearly shows how self-aware he is of the foods sensory experience and his sensate reactions to it, Zimmern defines himself as a “texture guy” and employs terms such as sticky, slimy, mushy, etc. to describe the food. The texture is important for Zimmern because the taste/smell of the food is obviously not perceived by the viewer, but is often accompanied by either soft of brittle textures that are not common experiences of the American palate. In the West, food generally has a relatively consistent mouth fell (part of the product of food processing in the United States), and the textures that Zimmern encounters fall outside of American sensory normativity.

While this reading of these is crucial, and important to acknowledge how these histories and positionalities are at work here, I push past this fairly surface level analysis of these cross-racial encounters surrounding disgust. It’s obvious as we see Zimmern or Bourdain’s gleefully walk through the crowded streets of Japan or Congo that they are out of place and it is important to acknowledge exactly what their position in such an environment means. However, what is more interesting about these sensory interactions is exploring exactly what compels the

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710 The ways by which we label disgust is a powerful performance in and of itself.
bourgeois subject, in moments of travel, to desire physical and sensory encounters with disgust when in familiar or domestic setting they would avoid such disgust or even mere discomfort at all costs.

I contend that one of the things that make disgust appealing in this context of global travel is that, much like sex, it allows the self and constructions of normative self-preservation to be temporarily disrupted. Berlant suggests that much like sex, “eating is a technique for pulling the world in and pushing it away according to one’s own terms and sense of pacing.”\textsuperscript{712} And while disgust creates a border between the outside and self it is also a contact zone that causes a break in normative sensory experience and the normative sanctified white body. Any sensory experience of disgust requires a close proximity, direct contact with that with which is perceived as disgusting. It involves consuming and bringing that which is othered and outside of sensory normativity, directly into the contact with one’s own body, crossing the mouth, entering the nose, touching the skin, entering the stomach, altering the self, in some way eating disgust requires this kind of deep bodily contact. In eating, Zimmern and Bourdain have the ability to control what aspects of the other, alien populations, he incorporates into the self by holding a great deal of power over his sensory consumptions.\textsuperscript{713} They choose what he takes into his mouth, as his consumptions of disgusting food are almost always conscious and intentional. Like sexual encounters, which as Berlant argues, temporarily negate ideas of normative composure, for bourgeois Americans, travel into racialized enclaves also negates much of the physical and sensory composure that is maintained within the domestic safety of United States. In these moments of foreign travel in places like Tokyo’s Piss Alley, culinary slummers expect to have hyper-sensory, gritty, visceral, messy encounters with racialized subjects and as such willingly


\textsuperscript{713} Not to undermine the agency or role of the chefs and producers of the food.
expect the pure sanctity of the white American body to be in a space and state of temporary disruption. When eating in such spaces, especially foods that are so viscerally and sensorially foreign – taste strange, offer new textures, unfamiliar smells – this destabilizes normal white bourgeois composure. Zimmern is not eating in an haute restaurant in midtown Manhattan, he is in the crowded streets of Tokyo, and as a middle-class Westerner expects a disruption of his sensory normalcy.

When this lack of composure is combined with the alluring quality of encountering disgust – the paradox of aversion – we see the consumption of disgust as offering a form of forbidden sensory desire - that operates much the same as (homo)erotic desires for racialized and hypersexualized subjects - a desire that white eaters attempt to conquer as they travel with increased geographic mobility. There is an exotic and erotic allure to conquering these forbidden desires, only achieved when eating food that is truly considered exotic and bizarre within the normative eating culture. In such a way, disgust creates a form of sexual fetishization where the objects of the disgust (rats, insects, frogs, etc.) and the producers of the disgust are seen as simultaneous sites of disgust and foreign erotic/exotic pleasure. As such, I contend that for white bourgeois, cosmopolitan American tourists, the desire to cross-sensory borders operate in many respects that parallel erotic desires. Within the context of border crossing, objects and bodies of disgust – much like sites of sexual attraction – become desirable within the particulars of the context, in this case that of global travel. Like sexual desire, culinary adventuring makes things typically disgusting, alien foods, smells, tastes, etc. seem appealing. Bodily fluids or sexual organs were taken out of context are repelling, but in the context of sexual desire, these objects become sites of intimacy and desire. When placed within the context of experiencing momentary discomposure, both sex and the consumption of disgust permits deep physical connection with
objects and bodies that we typically keep as outside of the self. In the first episode, Zimmern’s continued consumption of foods that have supposed male sexual benefits in a Getonomo Bar named “Morning erection,” certainly speaks to the queer and homoerotic desire laden in this sort of cross-cultural food consumption. The mouth operates as the space where this desire for disgust, homoerotic disgust, is manifested as “disgusting food” enters the white body destabilizing normalcy and disrupting expected and quotidian sensory experiences for the white American subject. As such, eating disgust plays upon Kyla Tompkins conception of queer alimentary, and presents a sensory space with which non-normative desire – in this case desire for racialized disgust - can be performed.714

Conclusion: Biting Back

In early February 2018, Tunde Way, a Nigerian American chef, opened a food stall in New Orleans named Saartj. The restaurant, named after Saartjie (Sarah) Baartman, a black South African woman taken from her home by white colonialists and paraded through Europe under the trope of the venus hottentot, a hypersexualized freak attraction portrayed for her comparably wider hips and larger buttocks. The restaurant, which serves Nigerian food, charges patrons of color twelve dollars for per dish. However, when a white customer walks up the food stall, they are first asked to pay thirty dollars for the same dish. Although white customers are then given the option of paying the twelve-dollar price, the aim of the restaurant is to confront racial privilege and “engage people on the topic of racial income and wealth disparities.” In doing so, Saartj combines eating as a tool of diasporic community building with critical anti-racist discourse. As the mission statement for the restaurant proclaims:

we are a space for important and erstwhile marginalized perspectives. We cook and discuss what ought to be acknowledged. finger snaps...we serve nigerian food in its continental and diasporic incarnations. the nigerian food we serve is not a prop, rather we use it to dislocate diners from their prejudiced references-- their need to understand what is different by relying on what they already know. our food rejects gimmicks and pandering to popular palates because the unfamiliar is okay and it needn’t be synonymous with the threatening other.

*actually we will pander a bit sheeiiiiit we’ve still got to sell our food!

Such a mission statement shows that the owners of the restaurant are hyper aware of the complicated racial, sensory and cultural politics that surround eating publically and the commercial motives that drive the restaurant industry. For Chef Way and the employees of Saartj, eating is a deliberate act that has much power to inform and build critical knowledge of

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716 The name, which evokes this racialized and sexualized trope, clearly reflects the intersections between “eating the other” and cross-racial sexual desire.
717 Godoy.
social inequality. This restaurant is highlighting the complicated nature of when white Americans eat across racial lines. Similar such radical culinary acts are challenging the white cultural appropriation across the contemporary American food scene. Notable examples include Breeze Harper’s *Sistah Vegan Project*, a critical anti-racist feminist vegan food movement that is challenging the whiteness of alternative food practice; Julia Turshen’s *Feed the Resistance* cookbook and her Equity at the Table project, an “easy-to-navigate database for food industry professionals featuring only women/gender non-conforming folks and focusing primarily on POC and the LGBT community;” a group of activists of color in Portland who called out cultural appropriation and the racial wealth gap in the food industry by creating a list of “restaurants or food carts selling non-European international cuisine owned solely by white people who were not born or raised in the country or region from which the restaurant’s cuisine originates” and calls out “egregious examples of religious or cultural appropriation in decor or branding;” and the work of restaurateurs like Eddie Huang and David Chang, who are confronting standardized notions of what is and is not considered American cuisine.

These uses of food to challenge white privilege and racial marginalization are not just happening in the public sphere. Along with these publicized acts are the more quotidian culinary practices of home cooks and restaurant chefs that are also actively resisting the erosion and co-option of their cuisines by cooking at home and in public for loved ones, family, friends, customers and their larger communities. Within and beyond communities of color, home cooks, restaurateurs, chefs, restaurant employees, cookbook authors, activists, and media personalities.

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across the country are pushing back against the inherent whiteness of the “foodie” world and showing that the cuisines of communities of color are not simply passive cultural productions waiting to be consumed by whites looking to increase their global cultural cache and cosmopolitanism. Unlike white progressive who can pursue authenticity and exoticism above all else, because of the deep history of food being used as a tool for racialization, these chefs, home cooks and activists of color are fighting back against the idea that their foods are less palatable and less sensorially appealing then the foods produced by whites. In doing so they are reclaiming the idea that their food culture is simply there for the taking, something that whites can appropriate and claim authority over as they see fit. To reference Kyla Wazana Tompkins, these acts of culinary resistance are showing that communities of color do not simply exist to be eaten.\(^2\)

The intent of this project was not to argue that anytime white Americans eat across racial lines is inherently a racist act. My aim is not to label all whites who eat across racial borders - such as those at the 1964 Fair, culinary slummers in Brooklyn or global televisions host like Zimmern and Bourdain - as racists, colonizers, imperialists, or obtuse to the racial politics of contemporary America. In fact, many of those that are most willing to transgress racial boundaries for communal connection, including those connections that happen through the sharing of a meal and the sensory experiences that such an act includes, are often amongst the first to take a stance as an anti-racist ally and create critical cross cultural and cross racial connections that can fundamentally challenge the workings of the American racial hierarchy.

The culinary exchange and culinary hybridity occurring through what Mark Padoongpatt calls

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\(^2\) Defined by Roberto A. Ferdman as a “a person who is very, very, very interested in food” and a “gustatory pleasure seeker with the time and money to invest in obscure cooking methods, niche coffee roasting techniques, and not-to-be-missed meals might have earned the distinction too.” Ferdman, Roberto A. “Stop calling yourself a ‘foodie.’” *The Washington Post*. March 1, 2016.

\(^2\) Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion.*
“culinary contact zones” has long been a part of how flavors are combined, people interact and cultures intermingle.\textsuperscript{725} Focusing on whether these individual actions are “racist” ignores the structural underpinnings of the American racial hierarchy, imperial logic and neocolonialism that has “made culinary appropriation possible.”\textsuperscript{726}

Rather, my intent here was to highlight the ways by which the intersections between eating, sensory experience, place and privilege are complex. The central goal of this text was to show how changing patterns of food consumption serve as a dynamic analytic tool to make sense of key transitions in the everyday life of Americans in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries, of which eating culture and sensory experience are a register for. In focusing on eating culture rather than food as commodity, this project shows how white Americans use sensory experience as a tool to negotiate the multicultural dimensions of urban life in the post-immigrant reform era and, in doing so argues that other senses beyond sight have played a critical role in the formation multicultural racial privilege. This project rethinks the ways by which communities of color are collectively integrated into larger urban, national and global communities through food and through their sensory claims for urban space and how progressive white Americans have found ways to negotiate their presence in a means that furthers their position at the pinnacle of the racial hierarchy despite being demographically outnumbered. In exploring specific spaces and places where Americans have traveled to eat – be it the 1964 Fair in Queens, the multi-ethnic enclave of Sunset Park or the global culinary adventuring of Zimmern and Bourdain - I have also explored the complex relationship between sensory geographies, race and eating, both in (sub)urban New York and around the world.

\textsuperscript{726} Padoongpatt, \textit{Flavors of Empire}, 188.
In exploring whiteness in the era of multiculturalism through the emergent positionality of cosmopolitan whiteness, this book fills a gap in critical whiteness studies by presenting a formation of racial privilege that is fundamentally predicated on encounters with multicultural diversity. This differs from much of the previous work in critical whiteness studies which has traditionally theorized whiteness through various forms of cultural erasure and spatial distance from communities of color. I argue here is that when white Americans actively pursue cross-racial encounters and publicly reenact those encounters through displays of authority, that they are reinforcing the global color-line through the formation of a new kind of racial privilege that is predicated on the contextual interaction with and subsequent attempted mastery of non-Anglo foreign cultural and sensory knowledge.

A logical question to conclude this project with would be can progressive whites eat ethnic without engaging in the kinds of cultural appropriation and racial marginalization that are discussed throughout this project? Because cross racial eating and the white pursuit of ethnic food entrenched in deep histories of race, colonialism, imperialism and neoliberalism, simply asking progressive whites to be more socially and culturally aware when they eat is will not suffice to challenge the intersections of eating and food. As Padoongpatt makes clear,

This is why, as Uma Narayan has argued, demanding white progressive foodies to be more aware of whiteness and colonialism as they cook and devour the cuisine of others is not enough. There is no amount of concerned reflection, she contends, that will “undo the fact that mainstream [white] eaters would remain privileged consumers, benefiting from the structural inequalities and unpleasant material realities that often form the contexts in which ‘ethnic food’ is produced and consumed.” The relationship between white culinary appropriators and the groups they extract from are deeply embedded in historically constituted relationships of power that will only change in meaningful ways with large-scale, systemic changes in these relations of power.

The white consumption of “foreign” food at the 1964 Fair, the influx of food conscious whites into Sunset Park or the presence of Bourdain and Zimmern in developing countries, whether
these white Americans are conscious of it or not, is fundamentally changing the communities of color they come into contact with. As long as whites are claiming that contact with communities of color, especially through food both increases their cultural capital and makes the geographic spaces themselves more desirable, such as when Trulia (an online real estate listing site) released an article that ranked the desirability of commercial in various cities based on how (culturally and racially) diverse the dining options, such culinary adventuring and cross-racial food encounters will continue to perpetuate the “structural inequities and legacies of U.S. colonialism and neocolonialism that created the conditions for the availability of ethnic cuisines” in the first place. As this project asks, we must push towards deeper understandings of the complex racial dynamics at work every time food is shared across cultures and how the larger power dynamics inherent in those exchanges can be dismantled.

In writing this project over the past several years, white friends, colleagues and other academics have often asked if my perspective was that white Americans should stop engaging with the various food cultures that immigrants have brought to the United States. While I encourage those that ask such questions to push for boarder structural change that would prevent the very institutional and cultural inequalities that allow for cultural appropriation to continue, this answer often does not suffice. They often want a simpler answer that concerns whether or not they should be able to eat a dish produced by a chef of color or served at a particular restaurant in a community of color that they have come to enjoy. I often defer to what is perhaps the best advice on how white Americans should eat across cultures, which comes from Shing Yin Khor’s, a Malaysian comic in

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728 Padoongpatt, Flavors of Empire, 189.
Bitch Magazine from February, 2014 which describes when she explained to her white friend how to engage with a noodle dish and her food culture at large:

Just Eat it dude. My authenticity is not yours. It does not belong to the three other countries I have lived in either. A country cannot be summed up by a curry. Stop thinking and just slurp the noodles into your mouth. I don’t need you to tell me about your spiritual awakening or your surprise about how modernized our cities are, or how charmed you are that English is widely spoken. I don’t need you to shake your head in despair because we’re losing our traditions because of encroaching globalization. Eat, but don’t ask for your gold star for your gastronomical bravery. Eat, but don’t pretend that the food lends you some cultural insight into our “exotic” ways. Eat, but recognize that we’ve been eating too, and what is our sustenance is not your adventure story. Just – eat.  

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