

The Taste of America: How American Cuisine Shapes and Reflects Culture and Identity

By Regan Yates

In this presentation, I would like to explore how American food both influences and has been influenced by cultural diversity, evolving technology, religious practices, and gender norms. The central question I would like to answer through the presentation is "What defines "American food," and how does it shape and reflect cultural identity, religious beliefs, and gender roles?" Food is more than just sustenance, but tells a story of all people and reflects societal views. American food culture has been shaped by generations of immigrants, each bringing their own traditions and flavors, which have since become more mainstream. Also, food marketing strategies play a major role in reinforcing gendered expectations, with certain foods being advertised specifically to be "masculine" or "feminine." To explore these ideas, I will use historical analysis, statistical data, conduct interviews and qualitative research to examine how food shapes American identity.

One may argue that the central flaw of this presentation is that talking about so much food could make people very hungry. However, to avoid "The Hungry Mob" (Bob Marley, Them Belly Full 1975), I intend to include a food tasting component, allowing the audience to sample different foods that represent cultural fusion, generate discussion through interactive questions about what makes 'good american food' by tasting through history to display the inclusion of culture as American cuisine has changed and will continue to change. This should allow for an immersive, entertaining, interesting and delicious experience for both audience and presenter.

Throughout the presentation, I will report my findings using numerous books I discovered from our very own Alma College Library as well as surveys and scholarly articles from different demographics. I will work within food regulations and bring in bite-sized foods for the audience to experience that show of cultural impact. I expect to find that American food is not a single, fixed concept but an ongoing reflection of cultural and societal change. Through this presentation, I hope to challenge conventional ideas about American cuisine and highlight its deeper social significance.