

Unit 16

Food, Demographics, and Culture

Section 1

Unit Materials

Questions To Consider

Question 1.

How were shifting patterns of food production and consumption related to the process of globalization?

Question 2.

What effects did the introduction of new foods have on local and regional environments?

Question 3.

What kinds of social and cultural changes resulted from the introduction of new foods to China, West Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?

Question 4.

How does the production of foods influence social organization?

The Big Picture

How is this topic related to Increasing Integration?

After 1500, global trade led to the dispersal of regional foods around the world. This spread of foods helped integrate global cuisines, as more and more societies came to rely on similar staples — such as potatoes, corn, and sweet potatoes — to supplement their diets.

How related to Proliferating Difference?

The introduction of new foods had profound social, cultural, and economic consequences on most societies. These consequences were not uniform across time and space, however, and could lead to rapid population growth in one place and slavery in another. The results often exacerbated cultural and economic differences between the world's peoples.

Unit Purpose

- Food is a revealing lens through which to study the phenomenon of globalization. Indeed, changing habits of production and consumption reflect the wider cultural, environmental, economic, and social effects of global connections.
- The introduction of new foods to new parts of the world led to profound social, cultural, and demographic change.

- The introduction of some foods — such as sugar and tea — to new places stimulated a worldwide demand. This demand fueled the rise of slavery and opium cultivation, thereby linking consumers and laborers in a global web of interdependence and inequality.

Unit Content Overview

Food has always played a variety of complex roles in human societies. In the earliest societies, the desire to share food was one marker of humanity. As communities became more complex, food became invested with a wide variety of meanings that varied widely depending on the time, the place, and the particular food. For this reason, what was the well-to-do Englishman's exotic delicacy could well be another's taboo. Also for this reason, food conveyed what was unique to specific cultures: As one nineteenth-century French food pontiff rightly claimed, "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are." Yet while the history of food can reveal historical differences between societies, it also reveals a shared human need, and how all societies have mediated this need through the lenses of status, class, and culture.

This unit explores dramatic changes in the ways food was produced and consumed as a result of global connections after 1500. These changes were as obvious in the Caribbean as they were on the opposite side of the world in China. Indeed, both regions represent key places where the introduction of new foods produced extraordinary changes in culture, economy, and demography. After 1500, in fact, the histories of both regions cannot be understood without reference to the wider world.

In the three centuries after 1500, patterns of food production and consumption were the engines that drove global processes. Cultures of consumption could shape population movements, declines, or increases. They could also shape identity and express cultural values. Finally, they nearly always enriched some at the expense of many others. In recent centuries, changes in food production and consumption have only intensified, and have helped to shape the many flavors of our global community.

Unit References

Robert Gardella, *Harvesting Mountains: Fujian and the China Tea Trade, 1757–1937* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

Kenneth Kiple and Kriemheild Ornelas, eds., *The Cambridge World History of Food*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999).

Global Historical Context

- Time Period: 1450–1750
- Connections and encounters among peoples and societies are a constant feature of world history, producing patterns of change and continuity. No culture is or was ever static; cultural change is a major feature of human adaptability to a changing

environment. After about 1500, the pace of cultural change quickened and the impact of globalization on cultural realms seemed more startling as goods, ideas, and peoples moved rapidly around the globe. The period between 1450 and 1750 saw sweeping cultural and intellectual developments, including the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, Neoconfucianism, major exchanges between large empires (like the Mughal and Ottoman), and a new breed of world traveler. Maritime trade and technology brought about the globalization of labor and the creation of an African diaspora — and carried with it a wave of changing cultural patterns with economic, demographic and environmental consequences.

AP Themes

- Examines interactions in economy and politics by demonstrating that interactions between Europeans and peoples around the world went both ways, altering both invader and conquered.
- Explores change and continuity because the introduction of new foodways altered cultural traditions, but were also reworked into existing traditions.
- Discusses technology, demography, and environment by focusing on the ways the introduction of new foods was facilitated by technological developments, and by exploring the ways new foods could bring environmental and demographic opportunity as well as destruction.

Related Units

- Unit 4. Agricultural and Urban Revolutions: What past peoples liked to eat and where they liked to live determined the origins of early communities. This unit examines the earliest farmers and herders in relation to the evolution of cities. It looks at changing evidence and ideas about the “cradle of civilization” in light of the social, technological and cultural complexity of newly discovered cities without citadels in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. It is related to Unit 16 because it explores profound changes that occurred in the human diet as a result of the agricultural revolution.
- Unit 10. Connections Across Water: The Indian Ocean, the Mississippi River, and the routes connecting the Baltic and Black seas provide the settings for a voyage to the past shores of encounters in world history. Rafts, boats, and ships carried death and disease, skills and technologies, and philosophies and religion. This unit examines these conduits of expansion, cultural transmission, and trade before Columbus. It is related to Unit 16 because it explores an earlier era in which connections across water produced important cultural changes in many parts of the world.
- Unit 13. Family and Household: What does the study of families and households tell us about our global past? In this unit examining West Asia, Europe, and China, historians focus on how families and households provide windows into the private experiences of world societies — and explore how these private experiences sometimes become models for ordering the outside world. It is related to Unit 16 because families, like foodways, often provide intimate perspectives on social change in the past. In addition, food preparation was most commonly done within the context of individual families; thus, changes in consumption and production would be felt strongly at the family level.
- Unit 15. Early Global Commodities: This unit follows commodities such as silver and sugar around the globe, examining the dynamic patterns of trade, exchange, and

encounter brought about by the new global economies after 1500. How were earlier commercial patterns altered by European contact? The commodities lead us in some surprisingly new directions. It is related to Unit 16 because it explores some of the other ways global connections altered the world's cultures and economies after 1500.

Section 2

Video-Related Materials

Video Segment 1: Food and the Columbian Exchange: The Atlantic Voyages

In the late fifteenth century, European voyages back and forth across the Atlantic initiated the “Columbian Exchange” — that is, the exchange of foods, diseases, plants, animals, and peoples between the Americas and the “Old World.” Its effects were no less than monumental in terms of economics, the environment, demography, and culture. This video segment explores some of the culinary effects of the Columbian Exchange that were initiated in those very first Atlantic voyages. Although European ships were stocked with a variety of foods as they set out, by the time they arrived in the Americas sailors had been forced to make do with weevil-infested sea biscuits, rats, and seagulls. Once in the “New World,” Europeans found themselves in a culinary world very different from their own. Indigenous plants — chili peppers, cacao, and cassava — as well as animals provided new tastes. Traders transported some plants, such as chilies, around the world, transforming the cuisines of far-distant places in the process. Other plants, such as cassava, transformed the diets of West Africans and were used to inexpensively feed large numbers of slaves. Europeans did more than simply adopt and disperse indigenous American foods, however. They also brought their own plants and animals to the Americas, which had both cultural and environmental effects. Meat from pigs and cattle altered native diets, but they also caused soil erosion and disrupted indigenous farming practices. In addition, the introduction of European crops led to deforestation.

Video Segment 2: Food and the Columbian Exchange: The Caribbean Experience

This segment explores the culinary effects of the Columbian Exchange in one region: the Caribbean. In these islands, one culinary item in particular — sugar — transformed cultures, economies, and diets worldwide. Sugar, a rare and highly prized food item in Europe, was well suited to the tropical climate of the Caribbean. However, sugar production requires a steady supply of labor; by the early sixteenth century, Europeans had begun to obtain that labor through slaves from West Africa. Increased sugar production resulted in a corresponding increase in demand in Europe, which in turn led to even more production and demand. To feed this demand, at least 12 million slaves were forced to cross the Atlantic between 1508 and 1885. One result of the sugar/slave system in the Caribbean was that it became a place where the culinary habits of many different cultures intermingled. The cooking styles of African, European, and indigenous cultures were all reflected in Caribbean cuisine, as was the use of New World plants such as cassava. This process of melding a variety of traditions into new, distinct traditions is often known as “creolization.” At the same time, food in the Caribbean was also used in symbolic and ritualistic ways to signify resistance to the highly stratified and racialised order of Caribbean plantation society.

Video Segment 3: Changing Diets, Population, and Trade: China

This segment explores the profound social and cultural changes that occurred in China as a result of the interconnected phenomena of global trade, shifting dietary patterns, and population growth. Europeans had long desired to increase their trade with China for a variety of luxury goods, but one commodity stood out above all others — tea. By the eighteenth century, tea was the most important part of European commerce with China, partly because European workers learned to combine it with sugar as a way to fuel them through long work days. Europeans found the trade in tea expensive, however, because there were few European goods the Chinese

wanted in return. But by the nineteenth century, Europeans discovered that Chinese merchants would buy illegal opium at favorable rates. And while the opium/tea trade enriched many European merchants, it proved devastating to Chinese culture and to the Chinese state. In the meantime, however, global trade had brought new food crops — especially potatoes, corn, and peanuts — to China from the Americas. The cultivation of these new crops led to a massive population boom between 1500 and 1650. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, foods from the Americas had become integrated into Chinese culture and into the regular diets of most people. Partly as a result of these cross-cultural culinary connections, by 1800 China accounted for more than one-third of the earth’s population.

Perspectives on the Past: Consuming Passions: Local or Global?

Can eating exotic foods upset the balance of nature? Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the famous Enlightenment thinker, believed that it was far better to eat locally grown and in-season foods than to eat exotic foods. The debate between local versus exotic still rages today, as people fear the negative consequences of separating too far the processes of food production and consumption.

Video Details

Who Is Interviewed

- Candice Goucher
- Linda Walton

Primary Source Materials Featured in the Video

- Diego Alvarez Chanca, Spanish traveler
- Lady Maria Nugent, nineteenth-century resident of Jamaica
- Pierre Poivre, French traveler
- Jean Jacques Rousseau, French philosopher

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24:12	26:08	Perspectives on the Past: <i>Consuming Passions: Local or Global?</i>
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