

American Eating and Eating American:
A Taste of Postethnicity?

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Introduction

Fifteen years ago, David Hollinger presented a new platform for the discussion and debate of ethnicity in his groundbreaking book: *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*.¹ His work brings to the forefront the question of identity in the ever-changing nature of American society. Although acknowledging the positive outcomes of the multicultural movement, Hollinger argues that multiculturalism has become more about emphasising distinctions and differences. As his title suggests, he does not wish to discard multiculturalism, but to take the next step and move “beyond multiculturalism.” Hollinger presents his proposal to consider ethnicity from a new perspective, “a perspective I [Hollinger] call ‘postethnic.’”² He defines postethnicity as: “favor[ing] voluntary over involuntary affiliations, balanc[ing] an appreciation for communities of descent with determination to make room for new communities.”³ Responding to Hollinger’s invitation, this paper will discuss ethnicity from this suggested postethnic perspective and it will do so by looking at American food and eating habits. It will consider how, and in what ways, an examination of ethnic food in America can provide an insight into ethnic group identity and experience, and furthermore, to what extent this can indicate a move towards a more postethnic society.

There have been limited responses to Hollinger’s proposal of postethnicity. Perhaps it is considered too optimistic or even unrealistic in a society beset with racial tension, discrimination and racial gang violence. Hollinger himself expressed his concern in 1997: “we may never have a postethnic America,” and again in 2008: “the US is still a long way off from

¹ David Hollinger, *Postethnic America. Beyond Multiculturalism* (10th anniversary ed.), (New York: Basic Books, 2005)

² Ibid., 3

³ Ibid.

a postethnic ideal."⁴ This may be so; nonetheless, we may see some emerging steps towards this ideal. This paper will consider the extent food and eating habits in America may reach this definition. There have been many studies linking food and foodways to ethnicity, culture and identity. There has not yet been a study linking American food and foodways to postethnic theory and this paper will attempt to do so. Foodways is a cross-disciplinary approach to analysing what food can tell us about the cultural, social and sometimes anthropological nature of a society. By focusing on American food and eating habits, this paper will trace the changes within American society and consider whether there may be a move towards what Hollinger believes to be postethnic. Do Americans see beyond race and racial boundaries in their food choices? Are these choices available to all ethnic groups to the same extent? Can there be, what I shall call, "postethnic eating"?

In her acclaimed book *We Are What We Eat*, Donna Gabaccia argues American food is "American" because it is multiethnic.⁵ Her book offers a detailed study on America's history of immigrant food, and as one reviewer states, "she boldly redefines all imported immigrant fare as American food."⁶ Gabaccia argues that American cuisine is symbolised by "how we [Americans] eat, not what we eat," that it is Americans' experimental attitude and freedom to create new foods that makes the food they eat "American."⁷ This is the very reason why I believe food may just be the place where we can see a first "taste" of a postethnic America. Individuals have the space to choose which foods to "affiliate" with, whether that be one, two or five foods of different ethnic origin. With a hint of this and a drop of that, one can create

⁴ Hollinger, "National Solidarity at the End of the Twentieth Century: Reflections on the United States and Liberal Nationalism," *The Journal of American History*, 84.2 (September 1997) 559-569.

Hollinger, "Obama, Blackness, and Postethnic America," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54.2 (February 2008)

⁵ Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 225-226

⁶ David Gerard Hogan, review of *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, *Journal of Social History*, 33.4 (1 June 2000)

⁷ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 226

their own unique identity through the food they choose to eat.

Before discussing ethnic identity in America in relation to food and foodways, it is important to define some key theoretical terms and distinctions that will be used throughout this paper.

The term “immigrant” will be used when referring to first generation immigrants as they arrive in America. The term “ethnic” or “ethnic group” will be used when referring to “immigrants” who, through time and adaptation, have become established as an “ethnic group.” For this paper, I will use Werner Sollors’ definitions of “ethnicity” and what constitutes an “ethnic group” in America. Of course these terms are widely debated by scholars, but I believe Sollors’ definitions are most useful for this paper; in particular for the sake of consistency, as Hollinger recognises in his 2005 Postscript that he first witnessed the word “postethnic” in Sollors’ essay, “A Critique of Pure Pluralism.”⁸ Sollors stresses that ethnicity is different from race. He recognises that ethnicity is difficult to define; however, he states what he considers to be an “ethnic group”: “a collectivity within wider society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood.”⁹ This paper will look at three ethnic groups “within the larger society” of America: Mexican Americans, Chinese Americans and Jewish Americans. These three groups fit Sollors’ definition as they have a common ancestry, a shared past, and we will find that through their food they express a “symbolic” meaning as part of their identity.

Studying history, social change and cultural identity through food and foodways is still relatively new. A key figure in championing this field of study is anthropologist Mary Douglas.

⁸ Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, 221.

Werner Sollors, “A Critique of Pure Pluralism,” in *The Reconstructing of American Literary History*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1986)

⁹ Sollors, *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*, (New York: New York UP, 1996), xii

Beginning in the late 1960s and publishing many key works in the 1970s and onwards, Douglas calls for the study of food to be a significant factor in gaining insight into social and cultural construction.¹⁰ Anthropologists, sociologists and food historians alike have continued to study society through examining food, foodways and eating habits. In their volume *Food and Culture*, Carole Counihan and Penny van Esterik argue that, “food is life, and life can be studied and understood through food.”¹¹ Margaret Mead argues that the study of foodways is essential to understanding culture.¹² In her essay “Food as a Cultural Construction” Anna Meigs argues that, “food has a distinctive feature, one that sets it off from the rest of material culture; it is ingested, it is eaten, it goes inside.”¹³ Food is part of everybody’s everyday experience and existence. The way food is incorporated into aspects of people’s lives becomes a distinctive part of individual and collective cultural identity. This paper will focus on such debates surrounding food and identity.

In *Tasting Food*, Sidney Mintz argues that food is not just “a basic biological need,” but that it “becomes something else because we humans transform it symbolically into a system of meaning.”¹⁴ I believe that an examination of immigrant food as it entered America will provide important insight into ethnic identity and the processes of adaptation and acculturation. Meaning is imposed on food for many different reasons and it becomes an integral part of one’s personal and cultural identity; moreover, it also becomes part of collective cultural identity. For many immigrants arriving in the United States their food was a tie to home and a link to familiarity. For others it meant retention of cultural values or religious practices. Thus, it

¹⁰ See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (London: Routledge, 2003 [1966]), and Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” [1974] in *Implicit Meanings: Collected Works by Mary Douglas* by Mary Douglas (London: Routledge, 2003 [1975])

¹¹ Carole Counihan and Penny van Esterik, eds., *Food and Culture: A Reader*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 1

¹² Margaret Mead, “The Problem of Changing Food Habits” in Counihan and van Esterik, eds., *Food and Culture*, 17-27

¹³ Anna Meigs, “Food as a Cultural Construction” in Counihan and van Esterik, eds., *Food and Culture*, 104

¹⁴ Sidney Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions Into Eating, Culture and The Past*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 6

is a highly significant area to study ethnic and immigrant identity, especially when immigrant identity is subject to conditions that may cause it to change, adapt or even threaten its very survival when entering a new environment and culture.

It is also important to note that food and eating habits are always in a constant state of flux and that acceptance and acculturation are two-way processes. Just as immigrants change and adapt to different circumstances, so too does their food. Meigs believes that “food is a particularly apt vehicle for symbolising and expressing ideas about the relationship of self and other.”¹⁵ Therefore, examining immigrant food as it enters America will provide insight how immigrants adapt to their new surroundings and aim to retain their cultural identity.

Furthermore, by considering how immigrant and ethnic food is accepted and received in America, this will provide insight into wider American society. Throughout this paper we will see that there were processes of negotiation on both sides as immigrants attempted to settle into their new environment. This paper will trace the changes from when immigrants entered America, to how ethnic food changed in the 1960s during the multicultural movement, and eventually whether we can have “postethnic eating” in America today.

In their study of American menus from the 1960s - 1990s, Liora Gvion and Naomi Trostler chart the changes in American restaurants and argue that they coincide with social change after the rise of the multicultural movement. They see a change from the “melting pot” idea in the 1960s, a “symbolic ethnicity” in the 1970s, hybridisation in the 1980s, and a move back to more authentic ethnic dishes in the 1990s.¹⁶ Indeed multiculturalism did promote an opportunity to express ethnic identity. Hollinger recognises this and agrees that the

¹⁵ Meigs, “Food as a Cultural Construction,” 105

¹⁶ Liora Gvion and Naomi Trostler, “From Spaghetti and Meatballs through Hawaiian Pizza to Sushi: The Changing Nature of Ethnicity in American Restaurants,” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 41.6 (2008), 950-974

multicultural movement, “promoted a greater appreciation for a variety of cultures.”¹⁷ Gvion and Trostler also recognise this change arguing that a greater appreciation of ethnic food increased as the movement progressed and continued.¹⁸ Gvion and Trostler’s study demonstrates how changes in attitudes towards ethnic foods mirrored similar attitudes and movements within America. So, this paper will question, that if there is a possibility of “postethnic eating,” will this also indicate a move to a postethnic attitude within wider society?

One of Hollinger’s main arguments in favour of postethnicity is that it allows diversity and multiple identities where multiculturalism does not. Hollinger details the failings of what he calls the “Ethno-racial pentagon.”¹⁹ He describes how society increasingly distinguishes ethnic groups into five categories: White (“European American”), African American, Hispanic American, Asian American and Native American.²⁰ However, he argues that these distinctions are limiting as they stifle diversity, do not allow for “intermarriage,” or allow an individual the opportunity to affiliate with the multiple ethnic backgrounds they may descend from.

In a review of *Postethnic America*, John McGreevy notes Hollinger’s belief that “society’s obligation is ... to promote an open arena for individuals to determine their own identity.”²¹ I believe that American food can provide this arena. Already food transcends the narrow boundaries of the “ethno-racial pentagon.” Foods are never considered “white” for example, but rather their distinctive qualities are highlighted and celebrated, they can be “French,” “Italian” or “Italian-influenced.” Food is not limited to these five categories as each ethnic food is allowed its own distinctive description. Food also allows “intermarriage” of other ethnic

¹⁷ Hollinger, “National Solidarity,” 569

¹⁸ Gvion and Trostler, “From Spaghetti and Meatballs,” 957

¹⁹ Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, 19-50

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 8

²¹ John McGreevy, “From Melting Pot to Salad Bowl,” *Commonweal* 122:18 (October 1995)

foods, for example, a “fajita pizza” or a “Thai chicken burrito.”²² Food offers an arena where diversity can reign free.

The three ethnic groups chosen for discussion in this paper are purposely selected from different categories of the “ethno-racial pentagon.” This is to demonstrate the limitations of the “pentagon” and its narrow categorisations. Within the “ethno-racial pentagon,” Jewish Americans are classified as “European American” (or white Americans). However, Jewish food is very distinctive from other “European American” food. Mexican Americans are grouped with “Hispanic Americans,” but as Roberto Suro suggests in *Strangers Among Us*, “‘Hispanic’ has always been a sweeping designation attached to people of diverse cultures.”²³ Mexican food is distinctive from other foods in the “Hispanic” category. The term “Hispanic” is far too broad to encompass such a wide diversity of people. Similarly, the categorisation of “Asian American” covers a group from a huge geographical area that varies greatly in culture and heritage. Chinese food is very different from other foods grouped in the “Asian” category. Categorising citizens in this way serves to diminish cultural differences and distinctiveness. However, here we can see that food transcends the narrow categories of the “ethno-racial pentagon.” Furthermore, individual eaters have the freedom to “affiliate” with many different cuisines as not only Jews eat Jewish food or Mexicans eat Mexican food. Postethnicity allows ethnic groups the freedom to express their distinctive identity and permits individuals to “voluntarily affiliate” with multiple ethnic groups.

In order to discuss food in relation to postethnic theory this paper will take the form of three sections, followed by a conclusion. The first section will offer a comparative study of the three immigrant groups as they entered the United States. It will focus on three time periods and

²² Marie Sarita Gaytán, “From Sombreros to Sincronizadas: Authenticity, Ethnicity, and the Mexican Restaurant Industry,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 37.3 (2008), 330

²³ Robert Suro, *Strangers Among Us*, (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc., 1998), 10

areas specific to the three groups: Chinese entering California c.1849, Mexicans entering the Southwest c.1900 – 1910, and Jewish immigrants entering New York City between 1880 and 1920. It will examine their attempts at retaining their cultural distinctiveness and how “ethnic” and “regional” identities were formed. It will consider how the immigration experience shaped, altered and changed their food. It will also consider the acceptance of immigrant food compared to the wider social acceptance of the immigrants themselves. An examination of the early processes of adaptation and acceptance of immigrant food will allow us to look at the extent immigrants needed to “negotiate” their distinctive qualities through their food. This in turn will have an effect on the extent they can reach the postethnic ideal.

The second section will focus on the multicultural movement of the 1960s and how ethnic group identity was shaped during this time. Immigration to United States was constant throughout the early twentieth century and processes of adaptation and negotiation continued to take place. However, it was only during the 1960s that ethnic groups began to fight for equal recognition and distinction. This section will consider the effect the multicultural movement had on ethnic food in America. During this time, ethnic food became more widely accepted by mainstream society. For the first time, ethnic food made an impact on American food and lifestyle. However, we shall see that how groups impacted on American society in the early days of immigration will have an effect on their position in the 1960s.

The third and final section will discuss Hollinger and postethnic theory in more detail, and then examine the extent to which postethnicity is visible in American food and foodways. Postethnicity would allow affiliation with one or multiple ethnic groups, while at the same time recognising the history and origin of those groups. Hollinger argues for "voluntary affiliation" with multiple ethnic heritages in order to express one's individuality. Gabaccia believes that Americans enjoy experimenting with and sampling multiethnic foods and that "eating habits

like these suggest tolerance and curiosity, and a willingness to digest, and to make part of one's individual identity."²⁴ This paper will consider if American food can go "beyond multiculturalism" by looking at the blending of culinary styles, the attachment to ethnic roots and its cosmopolitanism in its identity as "American."

At a time of social change in America, discussion of ethnic and racial identity is crucial now more than ever. The country has witnessed its first African American President. In his 2008 article "Obama, Blackness, and Postethnicity," Hollinger sees a society that is changing and suggests that Obama's presence, along with his disinclination to "offer himself as the candidate of a particular ethno-racial group," is perhaps an indication that the "prison" of colour-coded classification may be weakening.²⁵ However, we still see many examples of discrimination based on racial or ethnic identity. In April 2010, the state of Arizona passed a law stating that citizens may be asked to present official papers if they "look" as though they may be illegal immigrants. Clearly, this refers to Mexican "looking" citizens in this state. This new law has caused outrage as citizens will be judged by their colour of their skin.²⁶ However, can food be a place where Americans can see beyond skin colour in their food choices? Can there be a move "beyond multiculturalism" through food and can Americans become "postethnic eaters"? Will a "taste" of postethnicity in American food and foodways make the idea of a postethnic society a little easier to digest?

²⁴ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 9

²⁵ Hollinger, "Obama, Blackness"

²⁶ For more information on the discussion of this law, see, "Arizona Immigration Law Sparks National Uproar," *Huffington Post*, April 20, 2010, accessed May 21, 2010, www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/20/arizona-immigration-law-s_n_544864.html, and Ewan MacAskill, "Arizona Immigration Law Encourages Police Abuse, Says Mexican President," *The Guardian*, April 27, 2010, accessed May 5, 2010, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/apr/27/arizona-immigration-law

Section One

Entering America

“Food is an expression of ethnic resilience.”²⁷

Before discussing hybridisation, cultural “blending” and eventually the possibility of “postethnic eating,” it is first important to look at the early establishment of immigrant food in America and how it became “ethnic” and later “regional” food. This examination can provide insight into the early attempts of cultural retention and the processes of negotiation and adaptation. We will find that long before theories of foodways and ethnicity were defined and discussed by scholars, there were early signs of intercultural exchange and acculturation.

Since this paper will primarily focus on three ethnic groups and their foods, it is useful to concentrate on the three geographical areas where each group settled in large numbers. This section will look at Chinese immigrants in California, Mexicans in the Southwest and Jews in New York. Of course, these three groups settled in many other parts of America. However, I believe it is essential to look at a concentrated area, as this will be beneficial for three reasons. Firstly, it will provide insight into the establishment of “roots” and the interaction between an ethnic group and wider society. Secondly, it will allow us to analyse an area where immigrants were becoming most established as an “ethnic group.”²⁸ Thirdly, it will provide the opportunity for a comparative study and allow us to note similarities and differences between the three groups. This comparative approach will continue throughout

²⁷ Haiming Liu and Lianlian Lin, “Food, Culinary Identity, and Transnational Culture: Chinese Restaurant Business in Southern California.” *Journal of Asian American Studies*. 12.2 (June 2009)150

²⁸ I am referring to Sollors’ definition of an “ethnic group” as stated in the Introduction.

this paper.

This section will take the form of three sub-sections. Firstly, it will comment on the reasons why the three groups immigrated to America and note their identity as an “ethnic group.” Secondly, it will discuss cultural retention and the two-way processes of negotiation and adaptation through food. Lastly, it will consider the extent to which the three groups were able to establish a “regional” identity. We will see later in this paper that the ability to establish a regional identity will have an important effect on an ethnic group’s capacity to be accepted by, or as part of, mainstream American cuisine.

Immigration and Adjustment

Before we can comment on the immigrants’ food, it is useful to establish some background information of the three groups. Here we will explore the different factors that brought the immigrants to America and how they were received by wider society. How immigrant food is accepted and incorporated by American eaters often reflects how the immigrants themselves are treated and received. We shall also see that how immigrants and their food are accepted will have an effect on whether these foods can become part of a “regional” identity.

California witnessed a large Chinese immigration from 1849 onwards and there were immediate effects on food in this area. Most Chinese immigrants came to California because of manual labour offered by the Gold Rush and the Transnational Railroad.²⁹ The Chinese population increased dramatically during 1850 and 1880. Leonard Dinnerstein and David

²⁹ Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, rev. ed. (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2008 [1993]) 178 and 181

Reimers estimate that 233,100 Chinese immigrants arrived in America during this period with the majority heading to California.³⁰ With the increase of Chinese immigrants also came the increase of Chinese restaurants and food stores catering to Chinese clientele. It is worth noting that the first Chinese restaurant in America, *Canton Restaurant*, opened in San Francisco, California in 1849 and the number of Chinese restaurants and stores continued to rise.³¹ Food historians Haiming Liu and Lianlian Lin note that by 1856 there were five restaurants, thirty-eight grocery stores and eighty-eight Chinese businesses in San Francisco alone.³² Here we can see an example of food taking hold in the very early days of the immigrants' arrival. One may conclude that this was due to immigrants wishing to retain their cultural identity through their food. However, although this is true to an extent, other factors contributed to the rise in Chinese immigrants taking up restaurant work.

Anthropologist Bernard Wong emphasises that "the Chinese did not come from a nation of... restaurateurs ... Rather, these occupations [were] the result of their adaptation to the economic environment in the US."³³ Most Chinese immigrants came to undertake manual labour, but widespread discrimination and distain prevented them from continuing this form of work. The Exclusion Acts of 1882 and 1924 specifically targeted Chinese immigrants and prohibited further immigration.³⁴ White labour workers resented Chinese immigrants who would work for less pay and Chinese workers were attacked and "driven out."³⁵ Of those who remained in California, many Chinese immigrants turned to alternative business opportunities, including restaurants and laundry houses. Ronald Takaki describes how

³⁰ Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*. 5th Ed. (New York: Colombia UP, 2009[1966]), 31 and Appendix 1

³¹ Liu and Lin, "Food, Culinary Identity," 136

³² Ibid.

³³ Bernard L. Wong, *Chinatown. Economic Adaptation and Ethnic Identity of the Chinese*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 37

³⁴ Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, 7

³⁵ Ibid., 184

“‘ethnic antagonism’ in the mines, factories, and fields forced thousands of Chinese into self-employment – stores, restaurants and especially laundries.”³⁶ However, due to the labour-orientated work that initially drew Chinese to California, the majority of Chinese immigrants were male. Takaki notes that in 1852, of the 11,794 Chinese in California, only seven were female.³⁷ Therefore, Chinese men had to do work which they “distained” and believed “degrading to them as men.”³⁸ This demonstrates how heavily Chinese immigrants had to adapt and negotiate in their new home. Although this negotiation led to an increase in food-orientated businesses, we will see throughout this paper that Chinese will continue to negotiate in order to fit into America. This in turn will affect their food as they “negotiate” their cuisine in order to be accepted by wider American society.

How Chinese immigrants were received in America had a direct effect on their identity as an “ethnic group” and on their food. Despite discrimination and decreasing numbers, an “ethnic group” was established in California of Chinese immigrants who were able to demonstrate a “collectivity within wider society having ... a shared historical past.”³⁹ However, due to the discrimination and exclusion by other Americans, their sense of identity as an “ethnic group” became something that stood out “different” or as an “other” against the white majority, which caused them to take steps to fit in. Chinese food was also often seen as strange and different, and this affected how Chinese immigrants presented their foods to non-Chinese.

Mexican immigrants arriving in America at a similar time were also attracted to America by work prospects, yet their experience differed from the Chinese for many reasons. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a large Mexican immigration to America. The

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 191

³⁸ Ibid., 185

³⁹ Sollors, *Theories*, xii

completion of the International Railroad in 1895 “triggered a mass migration” and aided the ease of journey northwards.⁴⁰ Political unrest and the eventual Mexican Revolution in 1910 forced more Mexicans to migrate seeking asylum and occupational stability.⁴¹ Dinnerstein and Reimers estimate that 684,279 Mexicans arrived in America between 1910 and 1929, compared to only 31,261 between 1890 and 1909.⁴² However, unlike the Chinese arriving from 1849 onwards, Mexican immigrants did not need to negotiate so heavily in their new home as they found cultural familiarity in the Southwest of America.

In order to understand this difference, it is useful to appreciate the history of this area of America. Large parts of what is now the Southwest was once part of Mexico, therefore, many Mexicans already resided in the area before borders were changed. For example, Texas was once part of Mexico but gained its independence in 1836. Texas then later became part of the United States in 1845 with the Annexation of Texas.⁴³ In *Border Visions*, Carlos Véllez-Ibáñez offers a multidisciplinary study of the culture of the Southwest. He believes that due to the history of the area a cultural identity already existed before political boundaries were drawn up.⁴⁴ We must bear this in mind when discussing Mexican “ethnic” food in America. Many Mexican Americans in the Southwest region can perhaps already be considered as an “ethnic group” as we can see a “collectivity” with a “common ancestry” in this area. As this region can be considered to already have a common “ethnicity,” and along with the proximity to their homeland, post-nineteenth century Mexican immigrants had an easier transition. They were able to find cultural familiarity far more easily than Chinese, through the food they ate. The “tortilla,” a “staple” food for Mexicans, actually dates back to the fifteenth century with

⁴⁰ Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, 294

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 293

⁴² Dinnerstein and Reimers, Appendix 1

⁴³ For more information on Texas during this period, see, T.R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and Texans*, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000)

⁴⁴ Carlos Véllez-Ibáñez, *Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest United States*, (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1996), 5

roots in Native and Spanish cultures.⁴⁵ Processes of adaptation had been taking place for centuries as Mexican, Mexican American, Texan and Native cultures mixed. Unlike Chinese who had to transport their ingredients and their knowledge and traditions over many miles, Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest already had rooted culinary traditions that had developed over time.

Similar to Chinese, Jewish immigrants also had to travel great distances to reach American shores, yet, they differed as they did not need to negotiate their food so heavily in their new home. Jews immigrating to America between 1880 and 1920 were escaping pogroms in Russia and parts of Eastern Europe. The majority of Jewish immigrants settled in New York City.⁴⁶ Differing from Mexican and Chinese immigrants, they came from many different countries. However, Jewish immigrants had the unifying factor of their religion and religious requirements of food. The laws of kashrut stipulate which foods are kosher and these laws are important to all sects of Judaism. Jewish historian Jenna Joselit argues that through the religious requirements of food, “eating became an increasingly important way to recapture and revivify a sense of connection.”⁴⁷ Jewish immigrants could interact as an ethnic group and rely on Jewish restaurants and stores to fulfil the laws of kashrut.

Gabaccia observes that with the arrival of Eastern European Jews from the 1880s onwards, the Jewish food industry grew dramatically.⁴⁸ Takaki notes that “as they settled in the Lower East Side, the Jews began to establish organizations and create community.”⁴⁹ Jewish immigrants searched for “the company of friends from *di alte heym*, ‘the old home village,’”

⁴⁵ Alan Davidson, *The Oxford Companion to Food*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 803

⁴⁶ Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, 262-267

⁴⁷ Jenna W. Joselit, *The Wonders of America. Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880-1950*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 171

⁴⁸ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 69

⁴⁹ Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, 269

and public place such as cafes, delicatessens and bathhouses provided these communal “gathering places.”⁵⁰ In the early 1900s, there were 10,000 kosher butchers in America, 9,000 of which were in New York.⁵¹ Delis, which would later become synonymous with New York, were also establishing a firm hold in the New York business industry. Serving kosher foods, delis were an important place for Jews to retain their cultural traditions by obeying the laws of kashrut. As eating kosher and observing the laws of kashrut were non-negotiable, Jewish immigrants did not need to negotiate this fundamental part of their identity.

Negotiation and Adaptation

The wish to retain cultural heritage and identity is something that the three groups had in common during this period of “entering America,” and food offered a way to do so. Food historian Sidney Mintz argues that “foods eaten have histories associated with the pasts of those who eat them.”⁵² Therefore, continuing to eat familiar foods offered a way for new immigrants to hold onto an important part of their identity. Gabaccia suggests that nineteenth and twentieth century immigrants wished for their food to remain familiar.⁵³ Eating foods from their homelands served as a link to an immigrant’s homeland and history. Eating is not just an individual act; it is also collective and communal. As such, immigrants were able to retain their cultural ties and establish an ethnic group identity by buying, cooking and eating with people from the same cultural origin.

However, although immigrant and ethnic groups wished to eat familiar foods, negotiations

⁵⁰ Ibid., 269-270

⁵¹ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 69

⁵² Mintz, *Tasting Food*, 7

⁵³ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 36

and adaptations had to be made in their new environment. Negotiation and adaptation are two-way processes, yet, some ethnic groups had to make more negotiations than others. Examining how immigrant food was received also provides insight into how the immigrants themselves were accepted into America. The three immigrant groups differed in their impact on their new environment as they entered America.

The presence of Chinese immigrants in California had a moderate impact, as there were some changes to the local environment in the late nineteenth century. Due to the lack of available ingredients in California, Chinese immigrants had to import such dietary staples as fish and rice from Asia. The frequency and volume of imports resulted in the introduction of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1880s in order to regulate customs.⁵⁴ As well as importing rice, Chinese also encouraged the production of rice in Hawaii.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, despite these changes, Chinese food had to be altered in order to be accepted, and this early adaptation is a glimpse of how the Chinese had to “tone down” their own food for non-Chinese. Chinese food did receive resistance from local Americans, demonstrating an extension of the racial stereotypes already popular in the 1880s. In her chapter on Chinese food, Sherrie Inness describes how some white upper-class thought of the Chinese people as “uncivilised, unclean, and filthy.”⁵⁶ Gabaccia also suggests that in the 1870s many believed Chinese food to be “too exotic” or even “disgusting.”⁵⁷ However, due to financial necessity, restaurants had to appeal to non-Chinese clientele in order to survive. As early as the Gold Rush, Chinese immigrants in San Francisco adapted their cuisine in order to suit

⁵⁴ Ibid., 66-68

⁵⁵ Ibid., 69

⁵⁶ Sherrie A Inness, “Unnatural, Unclean, and Filthy: Chinese-American Cooking Literature Confronting Racism in the 1950s,” in *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender, and Class at the Dinner Table*, (New York: Macmillan/Palgrave, 2006), 42

⁵⁷ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 103

their fellow miners.⁵⁸ This resulted in the invention of brand new dishes, including the commonly perceived “Chinese” dish, chop suey. In a detailed article exploring the origins of this dish, Haiming Liu maintains that chop suey is an “imagined authentic” Chinese food.⁵⁹ Liu describes how chop suey is a variation of a Chinese dish “chao zasui,” a dish made of stir-fried animal intestines and vegetables. He argues that it never had an official or standard recipe as it was more a means for Chinese cooks to use up all the parts of an animal. However, when Chinese cooks prepared this dish for non-Chinese in America, they used ingredients familiar and acceptable to the locals, such a pork meat. Instead of preparing the dish as in China using any available ingredients, chop suey, as created in America, contained meat, celery, onions, bean sprouts and mushrooms, as these components were “well liked by American customers.”⁶⁰ Here we can see how Chinese cooks had to adapt to their non-Chinese clientele. Furthermore, although created solely for non-Chinese customers, chop suey was presented as an authentic Chinese dish. Although the method of cooking was authentic, the dish itself was created, named and standardised in America. The original Chinese version was seen as too “different” and was not acceptable to American tastes.

Mexican food was also often seen as different, as Gabaccia notes: “In San Antonio, Tejanos [Texans of Mexican descent] and new arrivals from Mexico ... ate food that marked them as different from German immigrants and Anglos.”⁶¹ However, due to large presence of Mexican Americans in the Southwest, their businesses could rely on a mainly Mexican clientele. They did not need to negotiate their foods to suit non-Mexicans, in the way Chinese immigrants had done. Mexicans were even able to continue many of their cultural traditions and

⁵⁸ Ibid., 102

⁵⁹ Haiming Liu, “Chop Suey as Imagined Authentic Chinese Food: The Culinary Identity of Chinese Restaurants in the United States,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, 1.1 (2009)

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 43

practices, for example, dishes were sold by street vendors, as was traditional in Mexico.⁶² “Street food” was, and still is, a very distinctive aspect Mexican culinary heritage.⁶³ New immigrants were able to continue to eat and serve food as they had done in Mexico. Immigrants arriving from Mexico at the turn of the century had an easier transition than Chinese immigrants as they could continue their cultural traditions in their new home.

Jewish immigrants arriving in New York City were also able to continue many of their cultural traditions and did not need to negotiate their food as heavily as the Chinese. Due to religious requirements, Jews sought to eat as they had done in their home countries and did not negotiate to suit non-Jews. Jews arriving between 1880 and 1920 did experience processes of negotiation, but it was mostly within their own ethnic group. As Jews came from many different countries during this period, each brought with them different culinary traditions and dishes. Gabaccia comments that Ukrainian Jews ate more cheese, whereas Hungarian Jews preferred spices such as paprika and peppers.⁶⁴ As such, there were difficulties in establishing what was kosher. This resulted in some Jews becoming apathetic towards kashrut in the early 1900s.⁶⁵ However, Joselit describes how most Jews in America “persisted in their culinary improvisation on traditions.”⁶⁶ This indicates a willingness to adapt to each other in order to continue their religious practices. The laws of kashrut were something all Jews had in common.

The religious practice of eating kosher was non-negotiable to most Jews and as a result, New York businesses had to adapt and change to suit Jewish customs. There were often boycotts

⁶² Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 106

⁶³ Davidson, *The Oxford Companion*, 500

⁶⁴ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 46

⁶⁵ Joselit, *The Wonders of America*, 172

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 175

and protests over the price of kosher meats.⁶⁷ These “kosher riots” were often successful resulting in the lowering of prices.⁶⁸ This indicates that wider society indeed had to adapt to meet Jewish demands. Furthermore, Takaki argues that these strikes stemmed from “ethnic solidarity” and gave Jewish Americans a sense of belonging to their new land.”⁶⁹ Therefore, by not negotiating through their food and forcing their new environment to adapt to them, this served to strengthen Jewish identity as an ethnic group in the New York City region.

Becoming Regional

Due to the strength and size of a particular ethnic group in certain areas of America, their influence and attachment to this area often creates the emergence of a “regional” identity. However, before discussing the three ethnic groups and whether a regional identity could emerge, it is first important to define what a “regional” identity means. Often the terms “ethnic” and “regional” identity are referred to interchangeably, yet, it is important to understand the difference between the two. As defined in the Introduction, an “ethnic” group identity refers to a “collectivity within wider society having ... a shared historical past.”⁷⁰ The word “region” refers to a geographical area but a “regional” identity can be difficult to define. In their volume on ethnic and regional foods in America, Barbara Shortridge and James Shortridge cannot offer an exact definition. However, they describe a “regional” identity as a collection of “characteristics” that have come to serve as “symbols” for a place as a whole.⁷¹ Food historians Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell also offer discussion on what a

⁶⁷ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 69

⁶⁸ Joselit, *The Wonders of America*, 198-9

⁶⁹ Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, 280

⁷⁰ Sollors, *Theories*, xii

⁷¹ Barbara G. Shortridge and James R. Shortridge, “Introduction: Food and American Culture” in *The Taste of American Plate: A Reader on Regional and Ethnic Foods*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 6-7

“regional” identity entails. They quote Howard Wight Marshall who argues that “like dialect and architecture, food traditions ... join culture and geography into regional character.”⁷² A “regional” identity is formed when an ethnic group becomes so established in a particular geographical area, that many of their distinctive ethnic features become characteristic and synonymous with that area or region. The ability to retain cultural ties through food and establish roots in an area is a key factor to forming a “regional” identity.

The geographical region of the Southwest has a distinctive regional identity as there are cultural traditions characteristic to this area. Arguably, a regional identity has existed here for centuries due to the population of Mexicans residing here long before the national boundaries were changed. The Southwest was, and still is, a place where both old Mexican dishes and newer acculturated cuisines can exist at the same time. Foods of Mexican heritage such as tortillas and tamales can exist alongside foods that are unique to the Southwest region. Dishes such as chilli con carne and burritos emerged from this area, out of the “blending” of Mexican, Mexican American and Texan influences. These foods are unique to this area of America and are key contributors to the “regional” identity of the Southwest.

The New York City region has witnessed the emergence of a distinctive regional identity due to the stronghold of the Jewish population. Due to the sheer number of Jews arriving in the city between 1880 and 1920 and their unwillingness to negotiate their religious and cultural identity, allowed them to establish a firm influence in the New York culinary market. In a recent article, Joan Nathan details the history of the bagel in New York. With origins in Poland, the bagel quickly became a popular food with Eastern European Jews, and by 1900,

⁷² Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell, “Introduction” in *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity*, (Knoxville: Tennessee: Univ of Tennessee Press, 2001 [1984]), 5

seventy bakeries existed in New York's Lower East Side.⁷³ Nathan maintains that "immigrants from Eastern Europe, with their craving for the foods of the old country, sparked the New York bagel craze."⁷⁴ Gabaccia notes that in the 1890s, only Eastern European Jews ate bagels but by the 1930s, the bagel had become a New York speciality.⁷⁵ Due directly to the influence of the Jewish ethnic group the bagel was no longer just for Jews, but had become a distinctive New York regional food. Their distinctive foods and practices such as bagels and delicatessens selling kosher meats have become synonymous with New York life.

Of the three ethnic groups, Chinese are the group that differs in this respect. Although there was, and still is, a large Chinese population in California, the establishment of a "regional" identity has not quite emerged in comparison to the Southwest and New York. Three important factors play a role in this result. Firstly, following the 1882 and 1924 Exclusion Acts, although many Chinese did remain in California and established restaurants and other food businesses, many Chinese migrated east towards New York. It also prevented new immigration which would have an effect on the need for businesses serving to a Chinese-only clientele. This resulted in a weakening of their presence in California and prevented establishing a stronghold in this area. Secondly, due to these factors, the Chinese experienced more pressure than the Mexican and Jewish immigrants to adapt their cuisine to suit the wider American palate.⁷⁶ Arguably, this has contributed to a partial loss of their culinary and cultural identity. Thirdly, as Inness believes, discrimination and racism towards the Chinese population continued throughout the remaining nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Perhaps this resistance they faced prevented them having a deep influence on regional California; maybe simply, they were not allowed to establish a

⁷³ Joan Nathan, "A Short History of the Bagel. From ancient Egypt to Lender's," *Slate Magazine*, November 2008, accessed June 4, 2010 www.slate.com/id/2204140/

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 3 and 108

⁷⁶ Inness, "Unnatural, Unclean," 43-44

regional identity. As we shall see throughout this paper, the inability to retain cultural identity and establish a stronghold when entering America at this time will continue to effect Chinese American's position in America.

Conclusion

Throughout this section we have seen how, when entering America, each group negotiated with cultural retention and adaptation. We can note differences in how the immigrants were able to establish themselves and how they were received by wider society. We have seen that Mexicans in the Southwest were able to retain their cultural traditions and establish a distinctive identity, the Chinese were seen as too “different” and had to adapt more to American customers, and the Jews were able to retain their cultural and religious traditions while New York society adapted to them. Their negotiation and adaptation played an important part in the emergence of ethnic group identity and the establishment of a regional identity. These early examples of negotiation and acceptance are important to bear in mind when examining how these three groups expressed their ethnic identity during the second half of the twentieth century when ethnicity came to the forefront of social and political debate. We will see that their actions in their early days as immigrants in America will be an indication of what was to come in the later period.

The next section of this paper will take us to the multicultural movement of the 1960s in America and discuss how ethnic food was affected during this time. Although culinary mixing and adaptations continued to take place on a smaller scale throughout the early twentieth century, it was not until the 1960s that ethnic food entered mainstream American cuisine on a large scale and would have a major impact on American foodways. The multicultural

movement had a dramatic effect on ethnic food. Ethnic groups were able to express their uniqueness for the first time and this expression was also manifested in their food. During this period, ethnic identities became more visible, ethnic food entered the mainstream and became widely accessible.

Section Two

Eating Ethnic: Food and Ethnic Identity During The Multicultural Movement of the 1960s

“For mainstream Americans, accepting a culture is closely connected with eating its foods.”⁷⁷

“ethnic dishes are a major route to the formation of a multicultural era.”⁷⁸

Food historians agree that the reception and perception of ethnic food changed dramatically during the multicultural movement in the 1960s. In her article “A Tasty Melting Pot,” Michelle Andrews comments on how ethnic food entered the mainstream during this period: “New flavors began finding their way into our restaurants.”⁷⁹ Food historian, Joan Nathan, recognises that the “tumultuous decade” of the 1960s would “profoundly chang[e] America’s culinary mores forever.”⁸⁰ However, Nathan does not tell us why these changes came about. This section will attempt to do so by linking historical and social events to the effect on ethnic identity and subsequently on ethnic food in America. For the first time, ethnic groups were able to celebrate their differences and distinctive identities. This celebration and freedom of expression also manifested itself in ethnic food. Before we can discuss the possibility of “postethnic eating” and moving “beyond multiculturalism,” it is first important to look at how ethnic food was affected *during* the multicultural movement.

⁷⁷ Inness, “Unnatural, Unclean,” 41

⁷⁸ Gvion and Trostler, “From Spaghetti and Meatballs,” 952

⁷⁹ Michelle Andrews, “A Tasty Melting Pot,” *US, News and World Report* 139:6 (15 August 2005)

⁸⁰ Joan Nathan, “Red, White and Blueberry,” *US, News and World Report* 139:6 (15 August 2005)

In their detailed book, which focuses entirely on 1960s America, David Farber and Beth Bailey argue that the decade represents “Americans’ turn toward great cultural diversity and experimentation.”⁸¹ One area we can see this social trend is American food and foodways. This section will discuss how American foodways changed and how ethnic foods entered the mainstream during this time. This section will take the form of three sub-sections. The first sub-section will briefly discuss the significant events that had an effect on ethnic group identity in America. The second sub-section will discuss the activity of Mexican Americans, Chinese Americans and Jewish Americans and how their experiences were reflected in their food. Lastly, as the multicultural movement affected all of America, the third sub-section will comment on general trends in wider society regarding ethnic foods.

Multiculturalism in 1960s America

The 1960s were a turbulent time in America, yet the decade produced substantial social change. Highly significant events would have a major impact on how ethnic and minority groups were able to express and represent themselves. The scope of this paper does not permit a detailed discussion of the Civil Rights movement. However, it is essential to recognise that the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 was a definitive moment of the decade and greatly powered the multicultural movement. Farber and Bailey recognise that, “influenced by the civil-rights movement ... minority groups around the country sought political power and cultural recognition.”⁸² The movement, which began among African Americans, spread to other ethnic and minority groups who also felt oppressed by, or seen as

⁸¹ David Farber and Beth Bailey, *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 62-63

⁸² *Ibid.*, 71

inferior to, the white hegemonic majority. In his book, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, Martin N. Marger details changes of ethnic and minority groups within American society. He argues that the 1960s saw the emergence of a “collective consciousness” amongst African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans in particular. He believes that “a new ideology seemed to materialize in which ethnic differences were... tolerated and respected.”⁸³ Farber and Bailey agree, arguing that the 1960s saw “a growing acceptance of cultural pluralism in the US.”⁸⁴ The multicultural movement was a direct result of, and intertwined with, the Civil Rights movement and led to the promotion and celebration of ethnic differences.

Another event that had a significant impact on many ethnic groups’ identities was the passing of the Immigration Act in 1965. The debate surrounding the enactment was greatly influenced by the multicultural movement and discourse surrounding minority equality. Farber and Bailey argue the 1965 Act was “in keeping with the other legislation aimed at ending racial discrimination.”⁸⁵ The Act removed restrictions that previous Exclusion Acts had placed on immigrants from non-European countries.⁸⁶ It therefore had a substantial impact on the Mexican American and Chinese American population, of which will be discussed in further detail throughout this section. Marger believes that the Act “added incentive to the mood of ethnic tolerance... provided by the influx of millions of new immigrants, radically different from the European norm.”⁸⁷ The sheer number of new immigrants gave weight to the multicultural cause and for the first time ethnic groups were able to stand up as different from the white “norm.”

No longer something that should be forced to “melt” away or assimilate, ethnicity in the 1960s

⁸³ Martin N. Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations*. (California: Wadsworth, 1991), 522

⁸⁴ Farber and Bailey, *The Colombia Guide*, 62

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 211

⁸⁶ For more on these Exclusion Acts, see, Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, 184-189 and 287

⁸⁷ Farber and Bailey, *The Colombia Guide*, 211

became something to be celebrated and emphasised as different from the white mainstream. In *Theories of Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors discusses theorists' approaches to the "melting pot" phenomenon. He highlights concerns of many scholars that this phenomenon in fact meant conforming to the Anglo-American norm.⁸⁸ The 1960s saw a movement away from this "melting pot" mentality and instead ethnic groups were able to express their distinctive qualities. In *Beyond Ethnicity*, Sollors states that before the 1960s, ethnicity was a "trait to overcome," yet since the 1960s and the multicultural movement, it became "a very desirable identity feature."⁸⁹ Differences and ethnic identities became far more accepted during this period and this can be seen in many areas of society. Much has been written on ethnic literature and the increase in availability and reception of it during this time. A lot less attention has been paid to the availability and acceptance of ethnic food. This section will analyse the extent to which ethnic food was affected during this era. The 1960s brought great change to the perception and availability of ethnic food. Just as ethnic groups entered mainstream discourse, so too did their food enter mainstream cuisine.

Mexican American, Chinese American and Jewish American Food in the 1960s.

The multicultural movement of the 1960s had varying levels of impact on Mexican American, Chinese American and Jewish American food. We can note differences between the activity of the three groups, their impact on wider society, and ultimately, to what extent their freedom to express their identity affected their food.

The most active and visible of the three ethnic groups during the 1960s were Mexican

⁸⁸ Sollors, *Theories of Ethnicity*, xxviii

⁸⁹ Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 33

Americans. Under leaders such as César Estrada Chávez and Corky Gonzales, Mexican Americans who were born in America (Chicanos), fought for their recognition and rights during what is commonly referred to as the Chicano Movement.⁹⁰ In his essay discussing Chicano history and equality, Ramón Gutiérrez argues that Mexican Americans were heavily influenced by the Black Nationalist movement.⁹¹ They too wished to establish their own identity and history apart from white America. Marger notes that rather than assimilate, Mexican Americans wished to instil “a sense of ethnic pride and awareness.”⁹² George Sanchez discusses how Chicanos focussed their attention on retaining Mexican culture during the 1960s. He maintains that the Chicano Movement fought for the recognition of a distinct people who wished to identify their distinctions in opposition to white America.⁹³ Between 1965 and 1970, César Chávez organised boycotts and strikes demanding that Mexicans and Chicanos and their culture be respected.⁹⁴ Corky Gonzales founded “Crusade for Justice” which fought for civil rights of Chicanos and encouraged pride and preservation of their cultural heritage.⁹⁵ For Mexican Americans, the 1960s were the beginning of a move away from the “Anglo-American conformity.” They wished to stand in opposition to white America and the Chicano Movement asserted a definitive emphasis on cultural difference and a protection of ethnic heritage.

Although fighting for the political and social position of Mexican Americans, the Chicano Movement inadvertently had an effect on Mexican food in America. In his essay, “Greater Mexico,” Joseph Rodriguez remarks that the decade saw “authentic Mexican restaurants...

⁹⁰ Farber and Bailey, *The Colombia Guide*, 188 and 192.

⁹¹ Ramón Gutiérrez, “Community, Patriarchy and Individualism: The Politics of Chicano History and the Dream of Equality,” in *Locating American Studies*, ed. Lisa Maddox, (Maryland: John Hopkins UP, 1999), 354

⁹² Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, 301

⁹³ George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 5

⁹⁴ Farber and Bailey, *The Colombia Guide*, 71

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 193

operate in many US cities.”⁹⁶ Food historian Jeffery Pilcher notes that Mexican restaurants increased and supermarkets began to sell more Mexican ingredients.⁹⁷ In her article discussing authenticity and ethnicity in Mexican restaurants, Marie Sarita Gaytán argues that “consuming particular food [is] tantamount to displaying cultural pride.”⁹⁸ Mexican Americans wished to retain a connection to their heritage and ethnic identity through eating authentic food. Mexican food became widely available and the decade saw an increase in Mexican restaurants and food stores as demand for authentic food increased.

The demand for authentic Mexican cuisine was also greatly impacted by the arrival of Mexican immigrants following the 1965 Immigration Act. 441,824 Mexicans entered the US between 1960 and 1969, with 621,218 more arriving between 1970 and 1979. This is a significant jump compared to the 56,158 that entered between 1940 and 1949.⁹⁹ Like the immigrants before them, when “Entering America,” we can assume post-1965 immigrants also brought with them culinary traditions and a need for a sense of familiarity and ties to home through food. As many post-1965 immigrants joined family members already in America, or communities with Mexican descendants already established, arguably the new immigrants revitalised the community, arriving with a need for the taste of real Mexican food.

Alongside the expressions of cultural heritage through food and the need for authentic Mexican food, the 1960s multicultural movement also saw Mexican food enter the culinary American mainstream. Many Mexican-influenced fast food chains were established during the 1960s and onwards. On one hand, success of fast food and nationwide chains indicates a

⁹⁶ Joseph A. Rodriguez, “Greater Mexico” in *Mexico and the United States*, Volume 1 by Lee Stacy. (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2003), 380

⁹⁷ Jeffery M. Pilcher, “North America from 1492 to the Present,” in *The Cambridge World History of Food* by Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Coneè Orneles, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 1321

⁹⁸ Gaytán, “From Sombreros to *Sincronizadas*,” 317

⁹⁹ Dinnerstein and Reimers, *Ethnic Americans*, Appendix 1

wider acceptance of food associated with Mexicans. Arguably, the presence of the Chicano Movement promoted a wider knowledge and appreciation of Mexican culture. Pilcher believes the social trend increased the acceptance of Mexican and Mexican-influenced food.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, the increase of Mexican-influenced fast food restaurant chains also allows us to question the authenticity of what was presented as “Mexican.” As many chain and fast food restaurants served “Mexican” food to non-Mexicans, it moved further away from “authentic” cuisine.

Beginning in the 1960s and continuing in the 1970s, many Mexican-influenced fast food chains began to appear throughout America and ultimately led to a change in American cuisine. Major fast food chain such as *Taco Bell*, *Taco Bueno* and *Taco John’s* were all founded during the 1960s. All three of founders of these franchises were non-Mexican. Clearly, the founders believed they could sell this ethnic food, which was gaining interest and popularity. Yet, adaptations and alterations were made in order to gain wider appeal. The food produced moved further away from a Mexican cuisine as dishes such as the “burrito” were invented on American soil.¹⁰¹ The restaurants made efforts to assure the American public that their food was not too spicy and they changed their logo from a sombrero to a bell.¹⁰² This suggests that although interested in Mexican-influenced food, customers preferred a “toned down” version of Mexican food and image. Nonetheless, as these fast food chain restaurants did not aim to appeal to Mexicans or Chicanos, but to wider America, the popularity of such restaurants does suggest an increased interest in Mexican-influenced food. Furthermore, in their play on Mexican food, they emphasised hybrid cuisines such as “Tex-Mex” or “Cal-Mex.” These restaurants produced food inspired by the borderland population

¹⁰⁰ Pilcher, “North America from 1492,” 1321

¹⁰¹ Andrew F. Smith, *Encyclopedia of Junk Food and Fast Food*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2006), 184

¹⁰² Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), 234.

and regional cuisine of Texas and California, rather than basing it on food from Mexico itself. This adds another dimension to the question of authenticity, which will be discussed further in this paper.

Mexican food in America after the 1960s takes two distinctive paths. Firstly, we can note an increase in the availability of food and ingredients in supermarkets and an increase in authentic Mexican restaurants appealing to Mexican and Chicano Americans. Due to the increase in immigrants from Mexico and the freedom for Chicano Americans to express the distinctive ethnic identity, the presence of Mexican food became more prevalent in American society. Secondly, due to this acceptance of a Mexican presence in wider society, non-Mexicans capitalised on the growing interest and fast food chains were born. Stephen Thernstrom, et al., suggest that “while hardly the acme of Mexican cuisine, [fast food chains] represent the omnipresent Chicano cultural influence on mainstream American society.”¹⁰³ Arguably, even though the fast food restaurants were distant from authentic Mexican food, they would not have been popular if the Chicano Movement had not promoted a wider appreciation of Mexican culture. Therefore, the Chicano Movement, which was greatly powered by the surrounding multicultural movement, had an effect on American food and foodways in many ways.

We can note some similarities with the Chinese American experience, yet, there are some differences that caused Chinese food to make a lesser impact on wider American cuisine. The multicultural movement in the 1960s also enhanced their sense of ethnic pride and this was reflected to some extent in their food. Chinese Americans also fought for equal recognition during the 1960s with the Asian American Movement. Like the Chicano

¹⁰³ Stephen Thernstrom, Ann Orlov and Oscar Handlin, eds. *Harvard Encyclopaedia of American Ethnic Groups*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1980), 715

Movement, the Asian American Movement was directly influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and multicultural discourse of the decade. Historian William Wei recognises that, “not until the civil rights movement of the 1960s exposed the pervasive problem of racism in U.S society ... was the Asian American movement born.”¹⁰⁴ However, although this movement had some success, it did not have same impact as the Chicano Movement during the same period. Furthermore, the Chinese population in America in 1950s and 1960s had additional discrimination to overcome.

Inness discusses how Chinese Americans battled against increasing racism and negative stereotypes from the 1950s onwards.¹⁰⁵ She believes that Chinese Americans “faced worse persecution than other racial or minority groups.”¹⁰⁶ Following Chairman Mao’s proclamation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese population in America faced a new discrimination against their ethnic group and their food. Having suffered discrimination and exclusion for many years, they now had the added factor of suspicion and hatred due to the perceived threat of Communism, both abroad and at home. Inness notes that a wider fear of Communism affected the reception of Chinese food as, “even eating Chinese food could be suspect” and “eating Chinese food became a potential signifier of one’s Communist leaning.”¹⁰⁷ Unlike the Chicano Movement, which increased wider appreciation of Mexican culture, Chinese Americans faced factors that caused the wider population to create even further distance from them. This attitude was certainly reflected in the perception and the slower acceptance of Chinese food in mainstream America.

Inness suggests that Chinese Americans attempted to fight these suspicions and

¹⁰⁴ William Wei. *The Asian American Movement*. (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993) 1

¹⁰⁵ Inness, “Unnatural, Unclean,” 39-60

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 42

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 46

discrimination through the publication of cookbooks. She argues that cookbooks, not only introduced Americans to Chinese food, but also “served as a bridge between cultures.”¹⁰⁸ Like other ethnic groups during the 1960s and onwards, Chinese Americans also wished to express their own ethnic identity. However, before they could express it, they needed to fight strong negative stereotypes and discriminations. These cookbooks “sought to make Chinese food more acceptable to mainstream American society” by producing recipes “specifically made to appeal to Anglo-American tastes that might not even have originated in China.”¹⁰⁹ This suggests the authors of the cookbooks were trying to promote Chinese food as not “too different” and demonstrate how it could easily be incorporated into the American way of life. However, again, as we saw in the first section of this paper, Chinese cooks had to adapt their foods to suit and appeal to the wider American palate. As they wished to seem less “different,” they were unable to express their ethnic uniqueness and heritage in a way that Mexican Americans had done.

Authentic Chinese food did exist in some areas of America but only from the 1970s onwards. During the 1970s there was a revival of authentic Chinese dishes as Chinese Americans sought to link back to their ethnic roots through their food. Food historians Liu and Lin note that during this decade, “Americanized dishes gradually gave away to genuine Chinese food.”¹¹⁰ The arrival of new immigrants from 1965 was a major factor in the wish to serve authentic Chinese food. 134,977 Chinese immigrants from China and Hong Kong entered America between 1970-1979, compared to 22,617 between 1950 and 1959.¹¹¹ Liu and Lin argue that from the 1970s and onwards Chinese restaurants “target[ed] new immigrants and

¹⁰⁸ Inness, “Unnatural, Unclean,” 39

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 51

¹¹⁰ Liu and Lin, “Food, Culinary Identity,” 139

¹¹¹ Dinnerstein and Reimers, *Ethnic Americans*, Appendix 1

serve[d] genuine Chinese food.”¹¹² Due to the greater numbers of new Chinese immigrants post-1965, many Chinese restaurants could now survive on the business of Chinese clientele, rather than having to serve “toned down” dishes to serve non-Chinese clients. However, the wider acceptance of Chinese food was much slower and smaller in scale compared to Mexican food.

We can note a difference between the reception and acceptance of Chinese American food and Mexican American foods if we compare how their food was presented in fast food form. As discussed above, non-Mexicans capitalised on the wider acceptance and popularity of Mexican foods. Unlike major Mexican-influenced fast food chains that began in the 1960s, Chinese-influenced fast food only first appeared in 1983 when *Panda Express* opened its doors.¹¹³ This restaurant chain only opened its 100th restaurant in 1993, compared to *Taco Bell's* 100th restaurant in 1967.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the *Panda Express* franchise was opened by a Chinese-American, compared to Mexican-influenced restaurants which were opened by non-Mexicans. This indicates two important factors with regard to Chinese food in America. Firstly, that it took a lot longer for Chinese food to gain a wider appeal. Non-Chinese were not able to capitalise on a growing interest in Chinese cuisine, suggesting that such an interest or acceptance was not present at it had been with Mexican food. Secondly, by a Chinese American opening an Americanised Chinese restaurant demonstrates, as we saw in Section One in the late nineteenth century, the negotiations Chinese Americans had to make to allow their food to be accepted. They were responsible for the “toning down” of their own food. Again, they had to adapt to suit their non-Chinese customers, resulting in a loss of their ethnic distinctiveness and identity. Furthermore, foods such as chop suey and chow mein,

¹¹² Liu and Lin, “Food, Culinary Identity,” 142

¹¹³ “About Panda: Panda Story,” accessed May 15, 2010, www.pandaexpress.com/about/story.aspx

¹¹⁴ “History,” accessed May 15, 2010, www.pandaexpress.com/images/swf/historyPRG.swf, and, “Company Information,” accessed May 15, 2010, www.tacobell.com/company/

which had been created for the non-Chinese customer, continued to be marketed as “real” Chinese. This would only add to the distance that the Chinese Americans were from being fully accepted by wider American society.

The Jewish experience differs from the Mexican and Chinese as Jews and Jewish food became more widely accepted by mainstream society much earlier than the 1960s. Unlike Mexican and Chinese who immigrated in vast numbers post-1965, America witnessed an influx of Jewish immigrants over twenty years earlier. World War II and events leading up to it led to thousands of Jews immigrating to America during the 1930s and 1940s. It has not been discussed by Jewish historians or food historians but if we compare how Mexican and Chinese ethnic food was affected by post-1965 immigrants, then we may deduce that Jews immigrating in the 1930s and 1940s would also impact on Jewish food and identity in America. Gabaccia notes how as early the 1930s, Jewish food was becoming part of mainstream America as department stores began selling kosher foods such as matzos, nuts and fats, and with some even offering a Passover section.¹¹⁵ Demand for kosher foods increased as more Jews immigrated to America. In their article discussing the Jewish experience in twentieth century America, Jonathan Sarna and Jonathan Golden note that immigrants arriving during the mid-1940s helped revitalise strict traditions.¹¹⁶ Many Jews that had fled persecution during this period attempted to keep hold of their identity and heritage once arriving in America. World War II had a significant effect on Jewish American identity, and on Jewish food.

As knowledge and realisation of the horrors of Jewish persecution spread throughout

¹¹⁵ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 163

¹¹⁶ Jonathan D. Sarna and Jonathan Golden, “The American Jewish Experience in the Twentieth Century: Antisemitism and Assimilation,” October 2000, accessed August 27, 2010, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/jewishexpb.htm>

America, anti-Semitism declined and this impacted on how Jews were seen and considered in America. Jews became more accepted by, and even as part of, wider society. In her detailed study of Jewish ethnic identity in America, Karen Brodtkin argues that Jewish American identity has been affected by different levels of anti-Semitism through different periods. She believes that following World War II, for the first time Jews were “gaining many institutional privileges of white racial assignment.”¹¹⁷ Due to change in attitude of many Americans following World War II, Jews were gradually accepted into mainstream society and “became white folks.”¹¹⁸ Acceptance was also seen with Jewish food. Some Jewish food such as bagels and pickles entered the culinary mainstream. Nathan comments on how by the 1950s the bagel “became an American alternative” breakfast choice.¹¹⁹ The bagel was now accepted as part of “American” cuisine. Furthermore, Jewish Americans were also allowing themselves to become part of mainstream society and adapted American foods to suit their dietary needs. Joselit notes that as early as the 1930s “Jewish bacon” or “beef frye” was introduced meaning that Jewish Americans could now contribute and align with “the great American breakfast.”¹²⁰ Joselit believes this move was also symbolic as it “held out the very real and tantalising possibility that the observance of kashruth posted no barrier to the participation of the wider world.”¹²¹ As an ethnic group, Jewish Americans were gaining a unique position in America long before the multicultural movement began, in that they were becoming part of wider society while also retaining their religious and ethnic identity and distinctiveness.

This position within American society resulted in Jewish Americans having a very different

¹¹⁷ Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*, 3

¹¹⁸ For more on Jewish ethnic identity during this period, see, Brodtkin, Introduction and Chapter One, “How Did Jews Become White Folks?” 1-24 and 25-52

¹¹⁹ Nathan, “A Short History of the Bagel”

¹²⁰ Joselit, *The Wonders of America*, 193

¹²¹ Ibid.

experience during the multicultural movement of the 1960s compared to Mexican and Chinese Americans. Mexican and Chinese Americans were still seen as “different” by wider society. As we have seen, Mexican Americans wished to promote their differences against mainstream society and Chinese Americans attempted to “tone down” their differences to escape discrimination. However, by the 1960s, Jewish Americans were already generally accepted and more included within mainstream society that they did not have the same need to express their differences as an ethnic group. As such, their activism during this period did not vocalise their own position but instead they wished to draw attention to the plight of African Americans. Jewish immigrants that had arrived during the 1930s and 1940s had witnessed the results of extreme racial discrimination. Jewish Americans actively supported Civil Rights and many “felt obliged to act to create a more just America.”¹²² We must of course recognise that this freedom to fight for another group would not have been possible if Jews had not been first accepted by white America.

At the same time, although more accepted by mainstream society, for many Jewish Americans the 1960s were a time of Orthodoxy and revitalisation. However, much of this revitalisation was the result of one major outside factor. Jewish American identity was directly affected by the 1967 Israel War. Sarna and Golden believe this war was a “turning point” for many Jewish Americans.¹²³ The 1967 war impacted on Jewish Americans as it became a “powerful symbol of Jewishness.”¹²⁴ For the first time since the atrocities of the Holocaust, Jews triumphed victorious and demonstrated their strength. Historian Hasia Diner argues that the “euphoria of the victory” strengthened ethnic group identity in America.¹²⁵ Darna and

¹²² Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States: 1654 to 2000*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004), 266

¹²³ Sarna and Golden, “The American Jewish Experience”

¹²⁴ Diner, *The Jews*, 330

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Golden state that after the war there was a “new interest in tradition religious practices.”¹²⁶ We can therefore consider how this revitalisation of “Jewishness” affected Jewish food in America. Many Orthodox Jews in particular wished to stay in their own community, buying and selling food from their own stores.¹²⁷ Although Diner does not link the war and the revitalisation of “Jewishness” through food, she does detail many examples of Jewish Americans redefining their group identity in the late 1960s and 1970s as many Jews “began to serve only kosher food at banquets and lunches.”¹²⁸ Gabaccia also notes that from the 1970s, Jewish Americans returned to their roots by eating kosher.¹²⁹ The 1967 war enhanced the sense of an international Jewish community. It led many Jewish Americans to return to Orthodox traditions, which were expressed through the food they ate.

Yet, Jewish Americans had a unique position during the 1960s as they could choose when to associate with their ethnic group. Diner argues that Jewish Americans began to embrace Jewish culture at different times, for example, at weddings or Passover.¹³⁰ Here we can see an early example of Jewish Americans exercising the ability to choose when to participate in Jewish traditions and when to participate in wider society. This freedom was also visible in Jewish food. Furthermore, as we have seen, Jewish Americans were able to remain true to the religious traditions while at the same time eating mainstream food. This unique trait of Jewish Americans is important to bear in mind when we discuss the Jewish food and postethnicity in the next section. Jewish Americans could exercise the freedom to choose far earlier than other ethnic groups.

Each group differed in the extent to which their food was affected during the multicultural

¹²⁶ Sarna and Golden, “The American Jewish Experience”

¹²⁷ Diner, *The Jews*, 312

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 316

¹²⁹ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 199

¹³⁰ Diner, *The Jews*, 314

movement. Yet, their experiences were part of a wider acceptance of ethnic and minority food into the American culinary mainstream. As a direct result of the multicultural movement in the 1960s, American food and foodways changed forever.

Trends in Ethnic Food in Wider American Society

The incorporation of ethnic foods into the wider American culinary mainstream during the 1960s took two distinctive paths. On one hand, ethnic groups were able to express their identity through their food, as well as reacting to the increasing need for authentic food as new immigrants arrived. On the other hand, the decade saw an increase in ethnic-influenced restaurants, which inevitably leads to questions of inauthentic ethnic food in the mainstream. This sub-section will examine these changes to food in America during this period.

The multicultural movement had a profound effect on ethnic group identity. Gabaccia discusses how the “ethnic revival,” which began in the 1960s, spread to ethnic food.¹³¹ She argues that the 1960s gave ethnic groups the opportunity to acknowledge their unique histories and celebrate their identity and believes food “became an integral part of this effort.”¹³² Food is closely linked to individual and group identity as it offers a link to one’s roots and heritage. Food is a real expression of cultural tradition. During the multicultural movement ethnic and minority groups sought to rediscover and recognise their heritage. As such, availability of ethnic food increased all over America. Frederick Douglass Opie notes the increase in popularity of African American “soul food” due to the black power movement. He believes this was because “the black movement gave black people a sense of pride about

¹³¹ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 176

¹³² Ibid.

their food.”¹³³ We have already seen how the Chicano Movement also had an effect on Mexican and Chicano American sense of pride and this was celebrated through the food they cooked, sold and ate. How ethnic and minority groups expressed themselves socially and politically was also reflected in their culinary expressions.

Ethnic and minority groups were being acknowledged on a national scale, and so too was their food, yet, as ethnic food entered the mainstream, ethnic ties were being lost.

Gvion and Trostler argue that ethnic movements during the 1960s did produce a curiosity for ethnic foods.¹³⁴ However, from the menus they analysed they discovered that “restaurants modified ethnic dishes and integrated them into their menus” and only foods “that would appeal to [American] taste” were served.¹³⁵ We have already seen examples of food losing its ethnic ties when entering fast food form.

We therefore must question the extent the surrounding multicultural debate actually had on mainstream American food. Although ethnic and ethnic-influenced dishes were incorporated into American menus, the dishes were not always able to retain connection to the ethnic roots. One could argue that ethnic food did not have an impact on American food if it loses its distinctiveness. However, it is important to recognise that this was the first time ethnic or ethnic-influenced dishes had entered mainstream cuisine on a national scale. The surrounding multicultural debate brought awareness and acceptance of ethnic and minority groups. It sparked interest from wider society, and one area Americans could exercise their curiosity was through food. Yet, we must allow for a transitional period. Processes of adaptation always occur when cultures meet. As ethnic dishes entered the culinary

¹³³ Frederick Douglass Opie, *Hog & Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America*, (New York: Colombia UP, 2008), 135

¹³⁴ Gvion and Trostler, “From Spaghetti and Meatballs,” 957

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 955 and 956

mainstream they had to be adapted to appeal to the American palate which was unfamiliar with many of these foods. This provided the opportunity for American diners to taste ethnic or ethnic-influenced foods for the first time. They could try something different but not too different. Restaurants provided a “safe” environment to try a new dish for the first time. For some diners this was their first experience with ethnic food and for many this would produce a curiosity for the real thing. We must recognise the significant change in American foodways as ethnic foods were becoming part of everyday life.

Conclusion

The 1960s was a starting point for ethnic food to become more widely accepted in American society. This acceptance was a direct result of the ongoing multicultural movement in America. This section has considered how the three ethnic groups were affected during this time, as well as how the wider multicultural movement affected American foodways.

By examining three ethnic groups in detail, we have seen how the multicultural movement affected their identity, and ultimately, their expression of this identity through their food.

Mexican Americans made a significant impact on American society during the 1960s due to the effort of the Chicano Movement. Due to the large increase of Mexican immigrants during this time, this only gave weight to the movement and strengthened the need to strive for recognition as an ethnic group. The availability of authentic Mexican food increased during this time as new and old immigrants sought to strengthen ties to their heritage and identity.

Chinese food took longer to be accepted and this was due to the slower acceptance of Chinese immigrants into American society. As discussed in Section One, from their first arrival, Chinese immigrants were greeted with suspect and hatred and as such, they needed

to literally “dilute” or “water down” their foods in order for them to be accepted. This resulted in a loss of ethnic identity as their foods were still promoted as “real” Chinese. This did not change in the 1960s, even as other ethnic and minority groups were emphasizing their differences. Chinese Americans did not have the same freedom to express their ethnic uniqueness as other groups, such as Mexican Americans or African Americans. As such, they did not express their differences through their food and instead attempted to hide or lessen them. It would take longer for Chinese food to make an impact on American food and foodways. Jewish American food differs entirely as it became part of what is considered “American” cuisine far earlier than the 1960s. Jewish Americans were accepted as part of “white” America and were no longer seen as “different.” They had a unique position in that their food could belong to the mainstream and the minority at the same time. These factors are important to keep in mind when we discuss postethnicity in the next section.

The 1960s affected ethnic groups in different ways. Yet, one thing is clear, that the decade marked the beginning of a major change in American food and foodways. Although at first many ethnic dishes were “toned down” or were distant from their heritage and roots when entering the mainstream, we must recognize the significance the multicultural movement had on the incorporation of ethnic dishes into mainstream American food. Just as the 1960s multicultural movement did not cause instant equality for ethnic and minority, the same can be said for ethnic food. Yet, for the first time it started to become the “norm” to eat ethnic and ethnic-influenced foods. The availability of ethnic-influenced foods increased nationwide. The social changes involving ethnic groups during this time are mirrored in American food. The next section will question whether American food can move “beyond multiculturalism.” It will consider how ethnic foods are incorporated into the mainstream has changed, and, whether we can see examples of “postethnic eating” in society today.

Section Three

“Beyond Multiculturalism”: A Taste of Postethnicity?

“A postethnic perspective favors voluntary over involuntary affiliations, balances an appreciation for communities of descent with a determination to make room for new communities.”¹³⁶

In suggesting we should move “beyond multiculturalism” in our debates and discussions of ethnicity, Hollinger by no means wishes to discard the vital work that the multicultural movement did for the promotion and recognition of ethnic groups in America. Rather, he believes we should build upon this, and go further in the advocacy of freedom to express ethnic identity. Hollinger argues that multiculturalism has become too much about expressing differences and that it does not permit the expression of individual ethnic identity.¹³⁷ He argues that postethnicity would allow the freedom to “affiliate” voluntarily with one or more ethnic groups, a step that Hollinger believes would truly allow “cultural diversity.”¹³⁸

In the previous section of this paper, we saw how acceptance and availability of ethnic food was affected during the multicultural movement in the 1960s. For the first time ethnic food entered the mainstream on a large scale and had a major impact on the diversity of food in America. It marked a change in the perception and reception of ethnic food among Americans. Writing in 1995, (with additional postscripts in 2000 and 2005), Hollinger believes

¹³⁶ Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, 3

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-3

that it is time to view and discuss ethnicity in a new way due to the changing nature of American society. By examining American food and foodways today, we can assess how these changes are reflected in the culinary arena. As Hollinger suggests that we should move towards a more postethnic future, can we already see a glimpse of this in American food and eating habits?

This section will consider the extent American food and foodways today can be considered to be postethnic. It will discuss whether American food allows “intermarriage” of different ethnic foods, whether it can “balance” the appreciation of heritage with creating something new, and whether an individual can express their identity through the food they eat. To do so this section will take the form of three sub-sections. In keeping with Hollinger’s argument, it will focus on the 1990s onwards. The first sub-section will establish what postethnicity entails. The second sub-section will explore in more detail how the theory applies to Chinese, Mexican and Jewish food in America. The final sub-section will consider the extent we can see “postethnic eating” in wider American society and how “American” food can be defined.

David Hollinger’s “Postethnic America”

In the introduction to his groundbreaking book, Hollinger states that multiculturalism has “not been ethnic enough.”¹³⁹ At first glance, this seems to be a striking statement to make against a movement that enabled for the first time ethnic groups to challenge mainstream America and express their group identity. However, Hollinger argues that the limitations of multiculturalism are “increasingly apparent.”¹⁴⁰ Hollinger criticises multiculturalism’s

¹³⁹ Ibid., 7

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 1

cosmopolitanism as “rootless” and argues that postethnicity offers a “greater sensitivity to roots.”¹⁴¹ In a move “beyond” multiculturalism, he maintains that cosmopolitanism has the “potential for creating new cultural combinations.”¹⁴² Therefore in applying the cosmopolitan strand of multiculturalism, postethnicity is able to relate these ideals in a specific way and produce an “appreciation for ... ethnic connectedness.”¹⁴³

One area of particular concern for Hollinger is the difficulty for individuals of mixed race to express their individual identity and retain their ethnic roots. He argues that citizens of mixed race struggle to define themselves personally, and also politically and socially, for example, in the decennial census.¹⁴⁴ The census does not provide a “mixed race” category; therefore, children of interracial marriages are forced to choose between their parents’ ethnic background, denying that particular individual the right to express their full heritage. Hollinger argues that multiculturalism is not “helpful” in understanding the boundaries and problem faced by citizens of mixed race.¹⁴⁵ During the 1990s these citizens protested, demanding that their multiple heritages be recognised.¹⁴⁶ Hollinger maintains that we must recognise the increasing factor of interracial marriage and the problematic of mixed race individual identity. Since the overturning of anti-miscegenation laws in the famous 1967 “Loving Vs Virginia” case, interracial marriage has continued to increase.¹⁴⁷ We must recognise the changes in American society today, compared to the 1960s. Recent research by Pew Research Center estimates that “one-in-seven new U.S. marriages is interracial or interethnic.”¹⁴⁸ Hollinger

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 5

¹⁴² Ibid., 4

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 1

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 1-2

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 8-9

¹⁴⁷ For more on the 1967 “Loving Vs Virginia” civil rights case and its impact on interracial marriage, see, “Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1 (1967),” U.S. Supreme Court Center. No. 395, <http://supreme.justia.com/us/388/1/case.html>, and, “After 40 Years, Interracial Marriage Flourishing,” *MSNBC*, 15 April, 2007, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18090277/

¹⁴⁸ For recent figures on interracial marriage in the United States, see,

points out the difficulties children of interracial marriages face when required to describe their ethnicity.¹⁴⁹ He argues that postethnicity would allow an individual the freedom to “affiliate” with one of more of their ethnic heritages. As such, Hollinger believes a move “beyond” multiculturalism towards a postethnic perspective is necessary.

Hollinger devotes an entire chapter to this issue, questioning the problems of “ethno-racial distinctions”, in particular the limitations of narrow categorisation and the question of “intermarriage.”¹⁵⁰ Coining the term “ethno-racial pentagon,” Hollinger defines it as: “the color-coded, five-part demographic structure in which Americans [have] come to routinely classify themselves and each other (black, brown, red, white and yellow).”¹⁵¹ Hollinger recognises that these ethno-racial distinctions came about to track and prevent discrimination and assess needs for affirmative action.¹⁵² However, he argues that “although the pentagon has been taken up by multiculturalism as a convenient basis for organizing the defense of cultural diversity, the lines dividing the five parts of the pentagon are not designed to recognize coherent cultures.”¹⁵³ The “ethno-racial pentagon” is extremely limiting as it results in categorising a diverse and multiethnic population into five groups. Individuals of multiple ethnic heritages can not fit into any category without sacrificing part of their ethnic makeup. Hollinger believes postethnicity would allow an individual the freedom to “voluntarily affiliate” with one of many of their ethnic backgrounds.¹⁵⁴ He believes that identity should not be prescribed but voluntary, and should not be fixed but allow fluidity. He argues that the very word “identity” “implies a fixity” while the word “affiliation” suggests a greater measure of

<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1616/american-marriage-interracial-interethnic> published June 4, 2010, accessed September 2, 2010.

¹⁴⁹ Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, 19-23

¹⁵⁰ Hollinger, “Haley’s Choice and the Ethno-Racial Pentagon,” *Postethnic America*, 19-50

¹⁵¹ Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, 221

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 32-33

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 36

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6

flexibility.¹⁵⁵ He also recognises that ethnicity is fluid and ever changing.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, a postethnic perspective would permit individuals to “affiliate” with different ethnic heritages at different times of their lives. Yet this does not mean that affiliations would become fickle or meaningless. Instead postethnicity would allow an individual the freedom to choose when part of the ethnic heritage was important and meaningful to them.

American food is a key area to explore postethnicity for many reasons. It offers a place where individuals can choose to “affiliate” with different ethnicities through the food they buy, cook and eat. Individuals can choose to express their ethnic heritage or they may choose to mix and blend other ethnic foods to create a unique dish. The food an individual eats is also an expression of their identity. By allowing choice and freedom to mix different foods, American food allows choice and a place to experience and associate with multiple ethnicities and cultures. As we have already seen, it already transcends the narrow categorisation of the “ethno-racial pentagon.” Each ethnic group is permitted the freedom to express their distinctive heritage. Furthermore, “intermarriage” is permitted and celebrated as restaurants are also free to “blend,” “mix” and “stir” different ingredients or styles together, creating new dishes in the process. Restaurants have the freedom to mix and blend different foods as well as to define their own individual identity.

This section will explore the extent to which food in America can be considered postethnic. The next sub-section will discuss the differences between the three ethnic groups in more detail in their ability to reach the postethnic ideal.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 7

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 220

Postethnicity and Chinese American, Mexican American and Jewish American Food

So far in this paper we have noted significant similarities and differences in the way Chinese American, Mexican American and Jewish American food has been received and accepted in wider society, and how this reflects on ethnic group experience. We have seen how each of the three groups dealt with “Entering America” and how they were affected by, or had an effect on, the multicultural movement in the 1960s. It is important to bear all these factors in mind when we assess the extent each group can fulfil Hollinger’s postethnic ideal.

Of the three groups in question, the Chinese Americans have made the most negotiation with their food in becoming part of American or mainstream cuisine. Early Chinese Americans had to “tone down” their own cuisine in an attempt to be accepted. Negotiation and alteration to their food continued even during the multicultural movement. During this period, although Chinese Americans were able to serve authentic Chinese food to Chinese clientele, they were also the ones responsible for heavily altering their food for non-Chinese but while still marketing it as “Chinese.”

Returning to Haiming Liu’s article and his discussion of chop suey, we can examine the ways in which Chinese immigrants negotiate and alter their food in order to become part of American cuisine, which in turn provides opportunity to examine Chinese American food in relation to postethnicity. Liu calls chop suey an “imagined authentic Chinese food.”¹⁵⁷ He describes how “Chinese cooks ... knew its [chop suey’s] authenticity depended on its ethnic roots.”¹⁵⁸ However, as we saw in Section One, the dish was created and marketed as “Chinese” when in fact it had never existed in China. Therefore this dish is far removed its

¹⁵⁷ Liu, “Chop Suey”

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

roots. Examining this from a postethnic perspective, we can see that Chinese American food only reaches the postethnic ideal to a certain extent. We can see an example of a new “community” within American food as chop suey has become a popular dish. We can also see an example of the fluidity and changing nature of ethnicity in that Chinese Americans have altered and adapted to their surroundings. However, it is also apparent that the “balance” between creating something new and retaining their “ethnic connectedness” can not be reached as “imagined Chinese” foods are promoted as real and authentic. Although authentic Chinese food exists amongst the Chinese community, when entering the wider culinary mainstream, it is not able to retain a strong connection to its ethnic roots.

In the conclusion of her article, Inness argues that Chinese food in American is still seen as “different” from wider American society. She notes that people “still react with uneasiness and distrust if asked to eat Chinese food” due to the history of racism towards this ethnic group in the nineteenth century and 1950s America.¹⁵⁹ Arguably wider society is not allowing Chinese Americans to move “beyond multiculturalism” because it is still labelling Chinese as “different.” Non-Chinese may be able to “voluntarily affiliate” with Chinese food and “choose” to eat it, but Chinese food in America seems to be unable to escape its “prescribed identity” as it is continually labelled as “Chinese.”

When considering the extent to which Mexican food can be considered postethnic, we can see some similarities with Chinese food, but we can also note some important differences. Mexican food, whether authentic or not, is often labelled as “Mexican.” Like some Chinese food in America, many foods labelled as “Mexican” were in fact created in America, rather than Mexico. As “chop suey” was created on American soil, so too was the popular dish “chilli.” However, by comparing these two dishes we can see there is an important factor that

¹⁵⁹ Inness, “Unnatural, Unclean,” 60

can shed light on differences between these two ethnic groups, and also the extent their food can fulfil the postethnic ideal.

The difference between chop suey and chilli is that the latter is able to retain more of its “ethnic connectedness.” Gabaccia argues that foods such as chilli, which now “seem ... quintessentially American,” are still able to “retain their ethnic associations.”¹⁶⁰ Therefore, their “ethnic connectedness” has not been lost. Chilli has a longstanding history that goes back over two hundred years stemming from the regional area of Southwest America.¹⁶¹ It is unclear who initially created the dish and it has now become more of a legendary story within the region. However, one thing that is clear is that the inhabitants of this region of America created it for themselves. Within the last two centuries the dish has changed, progressed and been altered. As we saw in Section One, a regional identity was established here due to the history of the residents in the border region. Chilli is a production unique to this region. This is in contrast to the Chinese ethnic group who were unable to establish such a regional identity due to discrimination, exclusion and an almost complete stop in immigration. Unlike the Chinese immigrants who had to “tone down” and create a “version” of their food with chop suey, chilli was created within the Southwest region for the inhabitants who resided there.

Unlike chop suey, which is marketed as “Chinese,” chilli can be known as “Mexican”, “Texan”, “Tex-Mex” or “American.” Restaurants can choose to associate with their Mexican or Texan heritage. *Texas Chili Parlor* in Austin, Texas celebrates its Texan heritage, offering their “legendary chilli.”¹⁶² *Taylor’s Chili Company* emphasises its Mexican heritage serving a

¹⁶⁰ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 227

¹⁶¹ For more information on the chilli tradition in the South West region, see, “The Chili Queens of San Antonio,” *National Public Radio*, October 15, 2004, accessed September 16, 2010, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4107830

¹⁶² “Texas Chili Parlor,” accessed September 12, 2010, www.cactushill.com/TCP/

“traditional Mexican dish” and a “taste of Old Mexico in your own home.”¹⁶³ The *Hard Times Café* promotes itself as an “American chili parlor,” and while recognising its Southwestern roots, considers its cuisine to be a “unique American culinary institution.”¹⁶⁴ Here we can see an example of the freedom to “voluntarily affiliate” with the Mexican or Texan heritage of this food, and here, either “affiliation” would be authentic.

We are seeing more and more examples of Mexican food becoming widely accepted as what is considered “American” cuisine, unlike Chinese food which, whether authentic or not, is still labelled as “Chinese.” Gabaccia comments that many Mexican foods or Mexican influenced foods are now considered “American.” She comments that the “taco” is “the latest ethnic icon en route to status as an American food.”¹⁶⁵ She also argues that “salsa” is now “dethroning ketchup as the king of American condiments.”¹⁶⁶ This is an important difference between Chinese American and Mexican American experience and the extent each can fulfil the postethnic ideal. Chinese food in America is unable to lose its “fixed” or “prescribed” label, even when it has shed some of its distinctive ethnic traits. Mexican food differs as restaurants can choose how to label their cuisine: “Mexican,” “Tex-Mex,” or “American.”

To continue to assess Mexican American food in relation to postethnicity, we can also question how ethnic history and origins are recognised and respected when “intermarriages” with Mexican and other ethnic foods occur. Many restaurants are demonstrating examples of hybrid cuisines as Gaytán discusses. Written in 2008, her article offers an excellent overview and analysis of the position of Mexican restaurants in the present day. Her research analyses menus, notes restaurant decor and includes interviews with customers and restaurant

¹⁶³ “The Taylor's Tradition,” accessed September 12, 2010, www.taylorschili.com/

¹⁶⁴ “Our Story,” accessed September 12, 2010, www.hardtimes.com/ourstory/

¹⁶⁵ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 202

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 219

owners. In one sub-section Gaytán comments on the increasing popularity of “cross-ethnic cooking styles” and “hybrid culinary approach[es].”¹⁶⁷ She provides examples such as “Thai chicken burrito” or “Buffalo chicken sandwich served on a Mexican-style bun.”¹⁶⁸ At first glance, one may question the “balance” between retaining heritage and the creation of something new. However, Gaytán goes on to note that “customers... take notice of their hybrid inauthentic approach.”¹⁶⁹ Here we can see an example of customers utilising their freedom to choose, to “affiliate” or not with an ethnic group through the food they eat. The fact that they acknowledge the inauthentic nature of the restaurants is different from customers who eat chop suey and believe it is “authentic” Chinese. It demonstrates a level of understanding and acknowledgement of what real Mexican culture is. Gaytán also notes that many restaurateurs do “honor Mexican ethnicity” and “honor tradition” by providing information on their menus describing the history of their dishes.¹⁷⁰ This suggests a respect for the ethnic origins as well as a wish for their customers to do the same.

Jewish American food is also able to retain a strong connection to its heritage when “intermarrying” or hybridising with other ethnic foods. Yet, the Jewish American experience differs from the Mexican American as this “balance” is achieved through different means. In Section One we saw how Jewish Americans were able to retain their ethnic ties through food due to the non-negotiable factor of kosher law. In Section Two we saw how they began to adapt their foods to include popular American dishes, while still adhering to the laws of kashrut. There are many examples of “intermarriage” of kosher foods and other ethnic foods today. In his article discussing Jewish American food, Josh Lipowsky notes that there exists “a wide range of kosher restaurants and cuisines available – Japanese, Mexican, and

¹⁶⁷ Gaytán, “From Sombreros to Sincronizadas,” 329

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 329 and 331

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 329

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Italian.”¹⁷¹ Here we can see an “intermarriage” of different ethnicities, yet, the food is able to remain Jewish because “the dietary laws ... make Jewish cooking what it is.”¹⁷² Therefore, Jewish food has a completely unique position in that Jews can eat Japanese, Italian or Korean food, but by keeping with the laws of kashrut, the food is “Jewish.” They are able to balance their affiliation with other ethnic groups whilst firmly retaining a connection with their heritage and tradition.

In his introduction to the book *Insider/Outsider*, David Biale argues that Jewish Americans hold a unique position in American society, as they are able to remain both “majority” and “minority” at the same time.¹⁷³ Jewish Americans have a unique position in that they can choose when and when not to associate with their ethnic group. Jewish Americans can choose to be part of the majority or minority through the food they eat. Just as Jewish Americans can hold dual positions in society, so too can Jewish food. Gabaccia notes that the bagel can “sometimes be Jewish, sometimes be ‘New York,’ and sometimes be American.”¹⁷⁴ Jewish food such as pickles and bagels have entered the mainstream and become part of the “majority” or “American” cuisine, while Jewish delis selling kosher meats have been able to remain a “minority” targeting a primarily Jewish only clientele. Jewish food in America is postethnic because it allows Jews and non-Jews the freedom to associate with their ethnic group. Jewish American food can remain “ethnic,” or “minority” while also being accepted and incorporated as part of American cuisine. The laws of kashrut make this aspect of Jewish food non-negotiable and this offers a distinct difference with many other ethnic groups.

¹⁷¹ Josh Lipowsky, “What’s Jewish about Jewish food?” *Jewish Standard*, November 21, 2008, accessed August 24, 2010, http://jstandard.com/index.php/content/item/whats_jewish_about_jewish_food1/

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ David Biale, “The Dialectic of Jewish Enlightenment,” in *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*, ed. David Biale, Michael Galchinsky and Susan Heschel, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), 5

¹⁷⁴ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 5

As we saw in Section One, all ethnic groups go through processes of adaptation and negotiation but as we have seen, there needs to be a balance. Chinese Americans negotiated too heavily in their food resulting in a distancing from their ethnic heritage and an inability to establish a regional identity. Jewish and Mexican Americans on the other hand, were able to establish a regional hold and reach a balance between adaptation and cultural retention, and ultimately become closer to a postethnic ideal.

Postethnicity and Food in Mainstream Society

As we discussed the general trends of American food in the 1960s, it is also useful to discuss what food historians and researchers believe are the general trends of wider American society today. This will provide further insight into whether American food can be considered to be postethnic. In their analysis of 1,000 restaurant menus, Gvion and Trostler maintain that since the 1990s, restaurants have shown an “active promotion of a multicultural atmosphere.”¹⁷⁵ They believe that the “acceptance of ethnic dishes” has become ingrained into the mainstream.¹⁷⁶ This practice has continued, as Joan Nathan notes in 2005: “Americans cook and snack across an incredibly broad cultural spectrum.”¹⁷⁷ Nathan also notes the willingness to mix, blend and create new foods “isn’t just a big city phenomenon” but that it occurs all over America.¹⁷⁸ American food offers enormous variety of ethnic foods and multiethnic eating has become the norm across America. In Gabaccia’s conclusion, she stresses that it is American’s freedom and willingness to experiment with food and the fact

¹⁷⁵ Gvion and Trostler, “From Spaghetti and Meatballs,” 967

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Nathan, “Red, White and Blueberry”

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

that they are “multi-ethnic eaters,” is what makes American food “American.”¹⁷⁹ She believes that American food and foodways offer “extraordinary diversity” and “multiethnic mixtures.”¹⁸⁰ This suggests Americans see past race and colour in their food choices. They incorporate all kinds of different foods in their daily diet.

American eaters also mix and blend many different ethnic foods together. Gvion and Trostler observe that, “mainstream diners continue integrating ‘multiethnic’ dishes that combine two or more traditions.”¹⁸¹ Intermarriage of foods is common throughout America. For example, *Basta Pasta* in New York is a popular restaurant run by Japanese Americans serving Italian food with a Japanese twist.¹⁸² *Fusion* in New Jersey blends French and Asian ingredients to create something new.¹⁸³ However, in both cases they retain a connection to their ethnic roots as they recognise the background of the dishes they serve. Furthermore, as restaurants continue to offer hybrid and fusion food throughout America, they are unable to be narrowly categorised and therefore demonstrate the limitations of the “ethno-racial pentagon.” However, we must also address the concern that with so much blending, can American food really be considered postethnic?

Writing in 1996, Regina Schrambling also questions whether by mixing and matching food so much, Americans are “losing respect for cultural differences.”¹⁸⁴ This may be true in some cases, for example, when ethnic food enters fast food form. Yet, as Gaytán argues, many Americans have an awareness of when they are eating inauthentic food. Furthermore, many Americans do take into account ethnic and cultural heritage when making their food choices.

¹⁷⁹ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 226

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Gvion and Trostler, “From Spaghetti and Meatballs,” 968

¹⁸² “How the Japanese do Italian,” accessed September 12, 2010, www.bastapastanyc.com

¹⁸³ “Welcome,” accessed September 12, 2010, www.fusiononmain.com

¹⁸⁴ Regina Schrambling, “Whose Food is it Anyway?” *Newsweek*, 127:11 (March 1996): 12

In a detailed research project in 1999, Carole Devine, et al., look at how food choices are made.¹⁸⁵ Although their research is aimed at nutritionists, their findings support the claim that Americans do choose to affiliate with multiple ethnic groups, place meanings on food at different times, and have respect for cultural heritage. Their qualitative research methods involved conducting in-depth interviews “about participants’ ethnic identity, food choices, and influences on food consumption.”¹⁸⁶ The results are very useful for this paper as they provide vital information on how food choices are made and allow us to question whether Americans’ food choices are indeed postethnic.

One of the main areas of focus of the study is identity, which Devine, et al., define as: “the way people conceptualize their own distinguishing characteristics and self-image.”¹⁸⁷ Central to Hollinger’s theory is the argument that individuals should have the freedom to define their own sense of identity. Rather than being forced into a “prescribed identity” and the limiting categories of the ethno-racial pentagon, individuals should be able to associate with multiple ethnic heritages.¹⁸⁸ Devine, et al., conclude that “the influence of ethnic identity on food choice was characterized by multiple ethnic affiliations.”¹⁸⁹ Here we can see that food is a place where individuals are free to identify with two or more of their ethnic heritages.

Another key finding in their research, which also provides reinforcement to the argument of “postethnic eating” in America, is that the individuals interviewed stated that they choose to express their ethnicity at different times through the food they eat. In a recent article for the

¹⁸⁵ Carol M. Devine, Jeffery Sobal, Carole A. Bisogni, and Margaret Connor, “Food Choices in Three Ethnic Groups: Interactions of Ideals, Identities, and Roles,” *Journal of Nutrition Education* 31.2 (March 1999), 86-95

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 86

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 89

¹⁸⁸ Hollinger. *Postethnic America*, 7

¹⁸⁹ Devine, et al., “Food Choices,” 89

New York Times, Hollinger reaffirms that postethnicity “is, of course, a two-way social process. A person might choose to downplay a connection to an ethno-racial connection.”¹⁹⁰ Devine, et al., state: “Identification with particular ethnic groups was dynamic, becoming more or less important in particular situations and at different times over a person's life course.”¹⁹¹ They describe how many individuals “enacted” their ethnicity during “life-course transitions” such as marriage, family celebrations or holidays.¹⁹² They state that, “people sometimes enacted their ethnicity and other times did not.”¹⁹³ The research conducted by Devine, et al., demonstrates that food offers the opportunity and freedom to “voluntarily affiliate” with one or more ethnic heritage when it is personal and meaningful to that individual. This is key to postethnicity. Americans are able to place meaning on the foods they eat when it is personal to them. Many may choose to only rarely, perhaps once a year at a wedding, a religious ceremony, or even on St. Patrick’s Day. The key to a postethnic outlook is choice, and all Americans are able to utilise this freedom through eating American food.

Conclusion

American eating and eating American is becoming increasingly postethnic. Food in America is extremely diverse and offers an enormous variety of different ethnic foods. It allows ethnic foods to blend and mix. It is multiethnic and allows the individual to define their own sense of identity through the food they eat. Some people choose to enact their ethnicity on a daily basis while others choose to express their ethnic heritage on certain occasions. Ultimately, it

¹⁹⁰ Hollinger, “American Enough” in “How We Adopted the Fourth of July” by The Editors of “Room For Debate,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2010, accessed September 18, 2010
http://roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/07/03/how-we-adopted-the-fourth-of-july/?scp=1&sq=postethnic*&st=cse

¹⁹¹ Devine, et al., “Food Choices,” 89

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 91

allows the individual to decide.

Analysis of the three ethnic groups demonstrates that postethnicity is becoming increasingly apparent, even though it is at different levels. As we have seen, the balance between new creations and “ethnic connectedness” is not always apparent, but there are still many examples of restaurants where this takes place. Jewish and Mexican foods are able to retain more of their “ethnic connectedness” compared to Chinese food. However, as figures suggest, immigrants from China and other parts of Asia are one of the most rapidly rising of immigrant groups, in 2006 411,795 immigrants from Asia arrived in the United States, with immigrants from China being by far the largest group with 83,628.¹⁹⁴ Perhaps if the numbers continue to grow and new immigrants demand more authentic food, Chinese food may be able to achieve a better balance between negotiation and retaining ethnic heritage. Gvion and Trostler note that the 1990s saw Chinese restaurants offering “new dishes such as dim sum, as opposed to the ‘chop suey’ craze.”¹⁹⁵ If this trend continues in this area, we might see Chinese Americans becoming closer to the postethnic ideal in years to come. Further research will be needed to assess the current and future position of Chinese food in America.

Noting the general patterns of food in wider, mainstream society also indicates a definite presence of multiethnic food and a tendency for individuals to choose when to apply meaning to the food they eat. Food offers an arena that does not abide by the definitive ethnic groups that multiculturalism promotes. Ethnic foods are fluid and ever-changing and as more and more hybrid and fusion foods are created, they are unable to be labelled in narrow categories. Instead of concentrating on ethnic differences as multiculturalism promotes, American food is moving “beyond” this and towards a more postethnic outlook. It offers a

¹⁹⁴ Dinnerstein and Reimers, *Ethnic Americans*, Appendix 1

¹⁹⁵ Gvion and Trostler, “From Spaghetti and Meatballs,” 968

place for different ethnicities to come together to mix, blend and create something new.

Of course, as Hollinger argues, we cannot disregard the work the multicultural movement did in the promotion and recognition of ethnic groups and their distinctive differences. Arguably, if ethnic food had not been able to grow so much in popularity and acceptance during the 1960s and onwards then Americans would not have the choice and ability to mix and blend so many ethnic foods as they do so today. It is because ethnic food became so widely accepted in the mainstream during the multicultural movement that there is so much choice today.

American foodways offer the room for a wide diversity of all kinds of foods. Ethnic foods can be real and authentic, or inauthentic, or they can be hybridised. American food transcends narrow categorisation; it offers choice and the freedom for an individual to voluntarily “affiliate” with multiple ethnic foods. It allows foods to change and adapt, while, in many cases, retaining an “ethnic connectedness” at the same. For these reasons, American food and foodways are becoming increasingly postethnic. As food is an integral part of ethnic group and national identity, we can now question, that if there is a possibility of “postethnic eating,” what this might mean for American society.

Conclusion

“Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are.”¹⁹⁶

Writing two years after *Postethnic America, Beyond Multiculturalism* was first published, Gary Gerstle criticises Hollinger’s thinking and expresses his doubts about America achieving a postethnic society: “There is much that I admire in *Postethnic America*. A society of the sort he [Hollinger] envisions, in which people are free to choose their identities, is one in which I would like to live - if only we could figure out a way to get there.”¹⁹⁷ I believe that by examining American food and foodways we can see a way of “getting there.” If Americans can recognise that they are already demonstrating a postethnic outlook through their eating habits, this may allow them to move closer to a more postethnic society.

Before we were able to consider postethnicity and American food today, it was first necessary to appreciate the historical background of ethnic food in America. Three different ethnic groups were chosen in order to provide detailed discussion of food and identity. A comparative approach enabled us to see the differences between the groups’ experiences; firstly when entering America, secondly during the multicultural movement when ethnic food became more widely accepted, and finally, in the extent their food can be considered postethnic today. As food in America changed dramatically during the 1960s, it was also useful to note the general trends and changes to food during this time. We saw that for the first time, ethnic food began to take a stronghold in mainstream America as ethnic groups were beginning to be acknowledged and accepted in American society. It was essential to understand all the changes that occurred during this time before we could discuss the

¹⁹⁶ Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, 1825, quoted in: Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 225

¹⁹⁷ Gary Gerstle, “The Power of Nations,” *The Journal of American History* 84.2 (September 1997)

possibility of moving “beyond” multiculturalist thinking.

From the analysis of the three ethnic groups in relation to postethnicity notable conclusions emerged. Each group displayed postethnic qualities, but to different extents. Out of the three ethnic groups discussed, Jewish American food emerged as the most postethnic. Mexican American food is on its way to becoming so as it displayed many postethnic features. Many Mexican foods such as salsa and tacos are increasingly considered as “American” foods while at the same time retaining connection to ethnic roots. Chinese American food stood out as being the furthest away from reaching the postethnic ideal. Their attachment to their ethnic roots was not as clear compared to Jewish and Mexican Americans. Chinese Americans were unable to make an impact on American society early on and this has affected their ability to reach the postethnic ideal. Chinese Americans were discriminated against from the beginning, and the Exclusion Acts of 1882 and 1924 caused immigration to come to an almost complete stop.¹⁹⁸ This would have an effect on their ethnic group identity for two reasons. Firstly, that there would be no new immigrants to revive and stimulate the Chinese community. Secondly, that their sense of identity in America would be one of victim of discrimination, and therefore stem a response of needing to fit in. As we have seen, this affected their food as they adapted their dishes in order to be accepted by wider America. Their treatment during the 1950s and onwards only increased their need to adapt and negotiate resulting in a loss of “ethnic connectedness.” Yet, there are some indications that Chinese food is becoming more connected to its ethnic roots today. As new immigrants bring the demand for authentic dishes and a greater connection to cultural heritage, Chinese Americans may move closer to the postethnic ideal in years to come. Due to rapidly increasing Chinese population, Chinese Americans will undoubtedly impact on wider American society in the future.

¹⁹⁸ Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, 323

The common factor between Jewish and Mexican Americans was the ability to impact on America by establishing a regional identity. This resulted in a stronger connection to ethnic roots, which as Hollinger argues, is vital to postethnicity. Mexican Americans in the Southwest of America have a close connection to their past and heritage as arguably, a regional identity has existed there for centuries, long before the geographical borders of the USA were drawn up. We saw this strong sense of identity give weight to Chicano Movement in the 1960s. Jewish Americans were able to establish a regional identity in the New York City region. Their presence affected and influenced New York way of life. Due to the non-negotiable factor of kashrut, New York society was forced to adapt to them, rather than the other way around.

Although Mexican and Jewish Americans demonstrate a regional stronghold, we can note some two important differences between the two groups. Firstly, the regional identity of the Southwest emerged out of the location, the border area between Mexico and America, and the people who resided there. However, Jewish immigrants came from outside America, yet were still able to establish a distinctive regional identity. This says something of the strength and resilience of Jewish identity. Due to the religious laws and practices, Jews from many different European countries were able to find a shared common identity, serving to strengthen their sense of connection as an ethnic group in America. Secondly, Jewish Americans differ in that they can exercise the freedom to choose when to associate with their ethnic “label” or identity. This is also true with their food. Jewish foods such as bagels and matzos can sometimes be seen as “Jewish” and sometimes as “American.” Similarly, the food Jewish Americans eat can be “American” and “Jewish” at the same time when foods are prepared “kosher style.” Jewish Americans differ in that they are able to “balance” the

connection to their roots, while at the same time creating something new and “intermarrying” with other ethnic groups through food.

As we noted postethnic trends emerging in the three ethnic groups, it was also important to consider the changing nature of food in wider American society. By examining the general trends, we can see more instances of “postethnic eating.” Gabaccia argues that Americans today experience the “pleasant sensation of choice and individual freedom” through the food they eat.¹⁹⁹ She believes that American food is “American” because it is multiethnic.²⁰⁰ For Gabaccia, American food is defined by this multitude of ethnic-influenced cuisines and although she never uses the word “postethnic,” Gabaccia cites Hollinger when discussing how American food offers the individual the opportunity to choose any parts of these multiple influences they wish to do so.²⁰¹ The 1960s saw ethnic food enter the mainstream for the first time but food was often altered and changed. However, this was only the beginning of ethnic food being incorporated into the daily diet. Now, just as Hollinger argues society has changed and needs to be looked at from a different perspective, so too does American food.

Stemming from the changes made in the 1960s, ethnic food is now fully incorporated into the American daily diet. American food today offers a place for ethnic foods to come together and “intermarry” or hybridise. As Devine, et al., and Gaytán demonstrate, in many cases there is also more attention paid to the roots and history of ethnic food. Gvion and Trostler also argue that respect for cultural roots was common from the 1990s, compared to the changing and adapting ethnic foods in the 1960s.²⁰² The study conducted by Devine, et al., shows that Americans today demonstrate their freedom to “voluntarily affiliate” with multiple ethnic heritages through the food they choose to eat. One can express their individual identity by

¹⁹⁹ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 230

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 226

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 231

²⁰² Gvion and Trostler, “From Spaghetti and Meatballs,” 955 and 967

choosing when and when not to place meaning on their food. For these reasons, American food and foodways are becoming increasingly postethnic.

So, if American foodways are becoming more postethnic, what then does this mean for American society? Anthropologist Anna Meigs argues that “through the analysis of food and eating systems one can gain information about how a culture understands some basic categories of its world.”²⁰³ Food historians Counihan and van Esterik believe that “food holds the keys to any culture.”²⁰⁴ If we look at the foodways of one country or nation, then this can reveal how that country sees and accepts different cultures as part of themselves. Therefore, if Americans can see past race and colour, and can accept different cultures and ethnicities as part of their daily eating habits, then this allows us to question the nature of wider American society.

Throughout this paper, we have seen the role of food as an expression of identity and how the way in which food was accepted by wider society reflected on how an ethnic group was accepted. Meigs believes that “to eat a food produced by another person is to experience that person.”²⁰⁵ Therefore, by eating multiple ethnic foods, Americans must be prepared to see past differences of race and colour. It shows acceptance and tolerance of another culture, if one is willing to literally consume and digest it. Counihan maintains that “food, although essential to biological survival, takes on myriad meanings and roles in contributing to the ‘social construction of reality.’”²⁰⁶ So, if Americans’ reality is to freely choose different ethnic foods and “voluntarily affiliate” with multiple ethnicities to create individual meanings, then we can see a postethnic identity being expressed.

²⁰³ Meigs, “Food as a Cultural Construction,” 100

²⁰⁴ Counihan and van Esterik, *Food and Culture*, 2

²⁰⁵ Meigs, “Food as a Cultural Construction,” 102

²⁰⁶ Counihan, “The Social and Cultural Uses of Food,” in *The Cambridge World History of Food* eds. Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Coneè Ornelas, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 1520

Food is a significant factor in the expression of one's identity. However, not enough attention is paid to food and its close connection to ethnic, regional and national identity within academia. When writing this paper I found that discussion is mostly done by food historians. In other fields, much attention is paid to literature, music and visual media, yet little is paid to food. Yet, I believe the study of food should be vital to cultural historians and theorists alike who focus on examining and analysing ethnic and cultural identity. Food as a cultural artefact offers a unique insight into ethnic identity, expression of that identity and processes of adaptation and negotiation. There is much to be learnt from the study of food and foodways. A suggestion for further research would be to concentrate on specific ethnic groups in turn so future comparison can be made. Future research on Chinese Americans will also be required to assess if they can meet the postethnic ideal to a greater extent.

Throughout this paper, I have linked historical events and significant social changes to the impact on ethnic food, and also to the incorporation of ethnic food in wider society. By recognising the distinctive trends of American food, this offers significant insights into American society. American food is multiethnic and Americans eat from this multiethnic culinary spectrum. As Gabaccia argues, the distinguishing characteristic of Americans is "how we eat, not what we eat."²⁰⁷ Americans utilise their freedom to choose when to place meaning on the foods they eat. Americans already demonstrate that they are "postethnic eaters." Of course, it would be naive to suggest that skin colour or ethnicity no longer have an effect on other aspects of Americans' social, economic and political daily lives. Not all Americans are ready, or want to, see past skin colour and there are many examples of discrimination at all levels of society. However, if Americans can recognise that they are already tolerant and accepting, that they already look beyond differences through their food

²⁰⁷ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 225-226

choices, that they already “affiliate” with multiple ethnic groups, then perhaps they could see that the idea of a postethnic society may be a possibility. They already have a “way to get there.” If Americans take a bite out of postethnicity and realise they have a taste for it, then perhaps the prospect of a wider postethnic society may be a lot easier to stomach.

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