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Edible Activism: Food and the Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s

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Edible Activism: Food and the Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s



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Food is an essential part of every person's life. Not only does it provide sustenance, but it also holds cultural value. Throughout American history, food has played a significant role in activism because of its ability to form and express identity, build community, demonstrate allegiance with certain beliefs, and reject the status quo. In 1773, American colonists boycotted the controlling British Monarchy and the monopolistic East India Company by throwing tea into the Boston harbor in what later became known as the Boston Tea Party. During the Jacksonian era of the 1830s, radical vegetarians led by the ideologies of Sylvester Graham resisted the preachings of mainstream medical authorities. Suffragettes turned to hunger strikes while in jail in the early 1900s in an effort to publicize their struggle to gain the right to vote. This is only a small fraction of the examples that can be given to demonstrate the uses of food for resistance in United States history.

Food choice is an extremely personal aspect of our lives. It allows for personal expression and communicates to others what type of person one may be. One of the most common ways we utilize food is in the construction of our own personal identities. French gourmand Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, author of *The Physiology of Taste*, once stated: "Tell me what kind of food you eat, and I will tell you what kind of man you are."¹ Essentially, we define "who we are" according to our food choices; what we eat or refrain from eating. The personal nature of people's interactions with their food allows for more intimate communication of culture because it allows individuals to express their beliefs clearly through symbolism. This paper will explore specific uses of food within several activist movements taking place within the United States during the 1960s and 1970s to examine how food can be used as a tool for social change.

Food Symbolism

Food has many symbolic meanings which reveal significant information about American culture as a whole. “Bringing home the bacon,” “apple of my eye,” “crying over spilt milk,” “easy as pie”: the vast number of food idioms that we use every day is a clear testament to the centrality of food in our lives. Common images of food present in American culture can divulge important information about who Americans are. In *Food as Communication/Communication as Food*, a study of food within the field of communication, Janet Cramer et al. explains the efficacy of food in revealing a culture’s belief system:

Food is a crucial ingredient in defining historical identity. It plays a distinctive role in everyday life and is inextricably linked to the economic, social and political circuits of culture. Food and its traditions can be examined as historical texts in order to represent or communicate the narratives that communities tell about themselves. As such, food can be seen as a receptacle of cultural memory, a sign capable of revealing official and hidden transcripts alike. Food comforts as well as nourishes, it provides an embodied experience of the past as well as a physical one. It “is symbolically associated with the most deeply felt human experiences, and thus expresses things that are sometimes difficult to articulate in everyday language.”²

Food is indicative of the values a particular culture holds. Food has historical importance in that it expresses what a specific culture values at a given point in time. Food symbolism is important because it is the mechanism that allows us to understand the meanings behind the actual food itself.

In American culture, bread is the most prominent food image likely most because it has long been the stable carbohydrate of American cuisine. Our discussions surrounding this staple

food allow for a better understanding of our society as a whole. Brown versus white bread has been debated for years and Americans' perceptions of these types of breads continue to change. One article titled "White vs. Brown Bread," written in 1914 and published in *The Washington Post* states: "it seems about time that the relative values of white and unbolted flour were settled, but the doctors can no more agree about it than they can about the therapeutic value of alcohol."³ Throughout this debate the image of brown bread has fluctuated between: cheap, undesired, poor people's food, to natural, wholesome and expensive. While white bread was once expensive, desired, and modern, now it is seen as cheap, tasteless, unhealthy, and unwanted. The fluidity of Americans' views on bread alone represents our changing values as a society.

The Uses of Food in Activism: Identity, Unification, Allegiance, and Expression

Although the importance of food has not been widely studied in the context of activism, many scholars of different backgrounds have noted the significance of food among differing cultures. In particular, scholars have argued that food is an essential medium through which to define identity. Cramer articulates food's importance in society as a whole:

Food is much more than a means of survival. It permeates all other aspects of our lives from the most intimate to the most professional practices. It also is a key factor in how we view ourselves and others, is at the center of social and political issues, and is a mainstay of popular media.⁴

As Cramer states, food is everywhere in our lives and it exposes a great deal about who we are individually and as a society. Whether one chooses to help feed the hungry or support greater subsidies for farmers, food is tied into our beliefs about the world.

Additionally, food has the ability to bring people together. People in every culture bond over cooking, eating, and even the cleaning required after preparing a meal. We bond over foods that we love and those that we detest. Meals allow for conversation and quality time together. Cramer notes that “as well as constituting our own identities, we use food as a means of identifying with others. Food connects people, both physically and symbolically, when we sit down to dine together.”⁵ Not only does food define group identity, but it also creates it. Humans are naturally omnivorous, but cultures are picky. Cuisines consist of a core set of foods and seasonings as well as specific preparation techniques that serve to narrow down food choice as well as create a unified culture.⁶

Because food has the power to build identity, whether it is individual identity or communal, and because of its personal nature, it is useful as a tool for political expression. In *Edible Action: Food Activism and Alternative Economics*, both an anthropological and economic look at current food activism, author Sally Miller acknowledges food as an effective tool for social change: “Food is an idiom that, like language full of puns, is useful for talking about certain things because it is so hospitable to the multiplication of meaning. Food is also a catalyst for social change—as both inspiration and ally.”⁷ Very few scholars have published works recognizing food’s ability to bring about social change despite the frequency food has been used throughout American history in activist movements that discussed either food production, preparation, consumption, or distribution.

Case Studies: Food in Activist Movements of the 1960s and 1970s

The late 1960s and early 1970s was a time of great social change in American history and provides relevant case studies for this research on the efficacy of food as a political tool.

Countercultural groups of this era, comprised of mainly white middle-class youths¹ who opposed the confining structures, ideologies, rituals, and leadership of the wider, or “straight,” society provide the most pertinent examples of food activism.^{2,8} The New Left, arising from the Civil Rights Movement, fears of nuclear war, and earlier American socialist movements, created a similar group of students and intellectuals who resisted dominant policies and cultural mores and also provides some examples of food use in acts of resistance.⁹

During the 1960s and 1970s, activist movements supporting a wide range of causes sought to make radical changes to American society. Among members of these movements it was a widely held belief that one had to embody the changes they wished to make in their everyday lives. Food was one effective way of communicating identity and allegiance to certain sets of beliefs or movements that were embraced at the time. The “personal is political” is an idea that was embraced by many activists and, as historian Warren Belasco points out in *Appetite for Change*, what could be more personal than food?¹⁰ The idea of food as a medium for political expression, or the demonstration of one’s political and societal beliefs, is present within the Ecology Movement, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and the Back-to-the-Land/Countercultural movement. All these groups used food to further their movements in some way. I chose to examine these three movements because they all used food to make change but in very different ways. The youth counterculture addressed food production and consumption to make a statement, Civil Rights and Black Power advocates discussed food preparation and distribution

¹ Aside from those participating in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements who were mostly lower- and middle-class African Americans.

² I use the term “counterculture” to refer to the broad category of subcultures that rejected mainstream American society during the 1960s and 1970s including the Civil Rights, Ecology, Feminist, and other movements. However, in the first chapter, I also refer to the term in speaking about the subculture of young hippies, co-op founders, and communards. The term is often applied specifically to this group as they became the face of all of the countercultural groups of the era.

to bring about change, and environmentalists tackled issues surrounding food production and consumption. Like the scholars mentioned above have now recognized, activists within these movements believed that choices in food had broader political implications than was typically acknowledged. Food was used in different ways among counterculturalists but some common themes that tie the movements together include the idea of food as a community builder, the adoption of certain diets as a rejection of the status quo, and most importantly food choice as a means for political expression. Food was an important medium through which members of activist movements expressed their beliefs whether it was to demonstrate their ideals or to show discontent with American society.

Belasco's *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry, 1966-88* is the first work to discuss the role of food in activism and acknowledge food as a medium for social change. The book is essentially the only historical text to deal with 1960s and 1970s activism and food. It is a historical look, as well as a cultural commentary, on the way in which countercultural groups acted in opposition of the mainstream American food system. This work provides both a historical background for this project, as well as more detailed information pertinent to chapter one which deals with the commune and co-ops movements established by American youth during this time period. While Belasco's aim in his research is to examine how the counterculture and the food industry interacted with one another in the second half of the twentieth-century, I hope to highlight how the same counterculturalists actually used food in different ways to bring about change in American society.

For the members of the counterculture, food was an essential medium through which to articulate one's beliefs. In his book, Belasco insightfully states that "food is a metaphor for what we like most or least about society...indeed, throughout American history, food fights have often

accompanied grass roots political struggles”¹¹ Belasco argues that members of the counterculture, among other activist groups, used food as a form of political expression. Counterculturalists recognized that the food one eats is an important part of identity and that food could be used to demonstrate their ideals or show discontent with society.

Belasco’s first chapter lays the foundation for my research, however it only briefly mentions the ways in which food was used among activists during the 1960s and 1970s. Outside of this work, there has been little published on the role of food in activism although; among food studies scholars, the idea of food being central to both identity and one’s view of the world is widely accepted: “common among works [on food studies] is the notion that studying the most banal of human activities can yield crucial information and insights about both daily life and world view.”¹² It is also widely believed among scholars that our individual experiences with food distinguish us from others. Deborah Lupton, author of *Food, the Body and the Self* identifies: “Food and eating...[as] intensely emotional experiences that are intertwined with embodied sensations and strong feelings...central to individuals’ subjectivity and their sense of distinction from others.”¹³ While Belasco effectively articulates why food may have been an effective tool for change, I hope to demonstrate exactly how it has been used by providing specific examples from the Countercultural Movement, Civil Rights and Black Power, and the Ecology Movement.

Chapter Overview

The first chapter will explore the use of food within the countercultural youth movement, including its use in urban co-ops and on rural communes. I will discuss the use of food in radical ideologies, such as that of the San Francisco Diggers, as well as its role in the lives of

communards escaping the modern, industrialized world. These groups used food in terms of consumerism, production, and distribution, as well as a therapeutic and spiritual tool. Although many of these experiments were short-lived, it is important to examine their use of food because they were extremely vocal about their rejection of mainstream American cuisine and therefore, they paved the way for later food activism.

The second chapter will examine the use of food among Civil Rights and Black Power advocates. Food is discussed in relation to the African American community and explores the role of food in the lives of oppressed communities as well as militant groups such as the Black Panther Party. In addition, I will discuss food's ability to transform communities and the importance of specific cuisines to different African American cultures during this era. African American cuisine is both important and fun to look at because it is a source of pride and a defining feature of African American culture.

The third chapter explores the role of food among environmentalists of the 1960s and 1970s. Food is discussed in relation to the environment as well as human health. Radical ideologies regarding the earth and agriculture are examined as well as individual food choice and ecology. The connection between food production, consumption, and distribution and the health of the planet is emphasized, as counterculturalists during this era became increasingly aware of human's detrimental impacts on the environment.

Throughout each chapter, women's roles within the three movements and the ways women have interacted with food will also be explored. Women are traditionally linked to food and throughout history have always had a different relationship to food culture and eating than men. The intersection between women, food, and activism is important to examine in order to fully understand the countercultural movements and their specific uses of food.

In citing the three historical examples of food activism from the 1960s and 1970s, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which food promotes social change. Belasco articulates the centrality of food to every aspect of our lives in noting that: “food is a strong ‘edible dynamic’ binding present and past, individual and society, private household and world economy, palate and power.”¹⁴ The status of food in a society reveals the status of that society as a whole. As Miller states in her book *Edible Action*: “when we fight about food we are also fighting about social change.”¹⁵ Each movement addressed food in its different stages, whether it was production, distribution, preparation, or consumption, to make a statement. Counterculturalists during this era used food in their efforts to better American society and the legacies of their works can still be seen today.

Chapter 1: The Youth Counterculture, Food Cooperatives and the Back-to-the-Land Movement

During the 1960s tensions developed among youth in America who, among other things, felt jaded by the war in Vietnam, inequality with regards to race, gender and socio-economic inequality and serious environmental concerns. The youth who acted out against mainstream American society and who emerged from the Free Speech Movement composed what is now referred to as the “counterculture.” Many had participated in the sit-ins of the Civil Rights movement and returned to Northern universities ready to change American society. The youth movements of the time included the peace movement, environmentalism and Civil Rights. Each movement had a distinctive subculture, defined by a characteristic set of norms, values, artifacts, language, symbols, or forms of knowledge that distinguished them from the dominant culture.¹⁶ The “Hippies” made up the largest of these subcultures and became the face of all the alternative subcultures in America. The counterculture reached its peak between 1967 and the early 1970s during which thousands of American youth migrated to the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco following the 1967 Summer of Love. The majority of youths comprising the subcultures were united by their feelings of disenchantment towards the American government and their anticorporate views. Their rejection of dominant values was embodied in the rock music of the time performed by artists such as The Beatles, The Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix. Music however, was not the only arena in which counterculturalists expressed their new ways of thinking and being.

In line with their rejection of the establishment, the counterculture opposed the food industry with its canned and processed foods and factory farms. Food was one of the factors that counterculturalists used to define their subcultures. Counterculturalists sought to differentiate

themselves from the culture they had grown up with, including its food which valued processed products and large amounts of meat, like spam and wonderbread or jello and twinkies. Members of the counterculture sought to source their food outside of the dominant system, resorting to natural food stores, co-ops, or even growing their own produce. The “countercuisine,” a system of foodways based on countercultural values, including organic, local, seasonal produce grown ethically by responsible producers, comprised the diets of these young Americans.^{3,17} Out of this cuisine came many of the symbols of countercultural rebellion such as brown rice, tofu, granola, yogurt, and bean sprouts. Although today these foods have become clichéd images of alternative groups, such as the Hippies and tree-huggers, during the 1960s, many were newly introduced and soon became staples of the countercuisine. In going beyond these “natural” staple foods, young radicals also drew inspiration for their cuisine from different ethnic groups, creating strange combinations using grains and dairy such as walnut-cheddar loaf or sesame eggplant parmesan. The counterculture made food into a political issue and encouraged all Americans to consider the political impact of their daily food choices: by choosing wheat bread over Wonder Bread or a co-op over a superstore, counterculturalists demonstrated their commitment to their beliefs and independence from corporate America.¹⁸

Subcultures of the counterculture used food in different ways and for various purposes which will be examined throughout this chapter. The first section looks at the ways several countercultural groups used food to express their radical social and political views and why food is particularly effective at doing this. The second part takes a closer look at communes of the

³ Foodways are the eating habits and culinary practices of a people, region, or historical period. Essentially, it is every “stage” of food that I have mentioned: production, distribution, preparation, and consumption.

“Foodways,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Academic Edition*, (5/9/12)

<http://www.britannica.com/ursus-proxy-11.ursus.maine.edu/bps/dictionary?query=foodways>.

1960s and 1970s. It aims to demonstrate that although communes of this era were best known for their experiments with sex and drugs, in reality, food was at the center of commune life. The experience of women on rural communes is then explored. This section aims to incorporate a feminist viewpoint of communal life and women's experiences within the countercultural movement which are otherwise omitted from historical accounts of the movements. The fourth section reveals food's ability to act as a community builder among counterculturalists. Next, I examine food in the context of co-ops and conspiracies and the effectiveness of alternative businesses. Vegetarianism within the counterculture is then explored including a discussion of vegetarianism within religious groups of the time and within the feminist movement. The seventh section focuses on the ideas of food as an inherent right and free food within the context of the counterculture movement. Lastly, I explore food symbolism among the countercultural ideologies and its implications for the various subcultures and the wider American society during this era.

Food as an Expression of Radical Societal and Political Views

For the members of the counterculture, food was an essential medium with which to articulate one's beliefs. Because food is so intricately tied to identity, it was used as a tool for making revolutionary change during the social upheaval of the 1960s and early 1970s. In *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry*, Warren Belasco notes that counterculturalists "saw diet as a way to transform consciousness, to integrate mind and body, to overcome personal alienation, and to take social responsibility."¹⁹ Counterculturalists recognized that the food one eats is an important facet of one's individual and group identity. The youth of the counterculture believed that "all food preferences are political positions,"

therefore, they made sure that their countercuisine present on rural communes and in urban co-ops was in every way different from the food mainstream Americans were eating.²⁰ This meant placing more emphasis on the health benefits and spiritual potential of food rather than thinking of food solely in terms of economics and efficiency. Counterculturalists used food to denounce the status quo and to urge people to question contemporary American society. Culinary ethnographer, Eve Jochowitz notes that “foodways may be one part of a large and complicated set of cultural performances, or they may be the only thing left, but the mundane activities of shopping, cooking, eating, and drinking tell insiders and outsiders who we are.”²¹ The counterculture recognized food’s ability to express identity and used it to reject mainstream American cuisine.

During this period, radical youth felt that their anxiety towards mainstream society did not stem from the typical fears that go along with the transition from adolescence to adulthood, but rather that these anxieties were indicators of deep seated social and political problems in the United States stemming from corporate and government abuse of power. Furthermore, they believed that these problems could not be solved by individuals acting alone, seeing as they originated from an individualist, capitalist ideology. The solution, counterculturalists argued, was collective action; their generation had to unite in order to produce the change they felt was necessary.²² One way countercultural youth did this was through the establishment of communes.

The Importance of Food to Rural Countercultural Communes

After the events of the Summer of Love (1967) in San Francisco, the Haight-Ashbury district was no longer a welcoming refuge for young radicals as it had once been; Haight-Ashbury was overrun by serious drug users, curious tourists, and lost youth. The originators of

the countercultural movement sought a new outlet through which to experiment with new, freer ways of living. This time they left the city for the country in the hope that they could build alternative societies that better reflected their ideals of peace, harmony and a more natural, healthy lifestyle. William Hedgepeth, a young writer, toured communes all over the country, participating in communal life. His experiences were published in 1970 in an account titled *The Alternative Communal Life in New America*. While many Americans expected young radicals to return to their middle-class ways after the Summer of Love, Hedgepeth believed that the young Americans' readjustment to their parents' world never took place: "hip communes of every genre imaginable were silently cropping out of the earth by the hundreds. This time, however, the young migrants were a little less noisy, a little more sophisticated, and a damn sight more serious about why they were leaving and what they were headed for."²³ These counterculturalists were determined to create a better society for themselves beyond the boundaries of white, suburban, middle-class America.

Between 1965 and 1970 more than two thousand communes were established in the United States. At the time, this exodus seemed radical to the baby-boomer generation of parents who had sought comfort and prosperity in the post-WWII era. Many of these parents were devastated by their children's rejection of the lives they had envisioned for them. The urge to live communally off the land, however, was not original to the youth of the counterculture. Throughout American history, groups have sought refuge away from society and in nature where they could return to their "roots," or what they consider to be a more honest, old-fashioned way of living. The first settlers of America lived communally, as have many societies after, such as the Quakers. Historically, many of the first American communes were founded by religious sects, including the Shaker communes, established during the late 18th-century.²⁴ Since, however,

many nonreligious communities have been established whether for ethical, social, or political reasons. Additionally, individual Americans such as Thoreau have frequently looked to isolation in nature in order to grapple with modern changes in American society such as industrialism and technology.

Given many Americans' historic desire to return to nature during times of uncertainty, the disillusioned youth of the 1960s unsurprisingly escaped to rural outposts for comfort as other alienated Americans had before them. Communards of the era were acutely aware of the historical tradition of American communes; Hedgepeth notes many groups that predated the communards of the 1960s including the Pilgrims, the Harmonites in Pennsylvania, the Shakers in New York and the New Harmony commune in Indiana. While discussing the influence of these communities on the communards of the 1960s, Hedgepeth states: "Utopian experiments are both natural and even traditional in a country that started off as one itself...Historically, the land has been a vital element in the American's outlook on the world: A man on his own land, by God, could stand off all the evils of the universe."²⁵ Given this history, young counterculturalist's aim in establishing their rural outposts was to start over at the beginning and to create a new American culture. In 1969 journalist Robert Houriet toured several communes in New England, Oregon, California, Colorado and Virginia and found that communards really did want a new beginning:

Somewhere in the line of history, civilization had made a wrong turn...The only way, they felt, was to drop out and go all the way back to the beginning, to the primal source of consciousness, the true basis of culture: the land. There they would again move forward, very slowly, careful not to take the wrong turn and keeping to the main road and to the central spirit and consciousness that modern man had lost along the way.²⁶

Counterculturalists viewed their exodus from the city and into rural communes as an opportunity to model alternative American societies. Each hoped their commune could successfully serve as an oppositional society to the dominant one which they felt was no longer adequate; as food scholar Stephanie Hartman puts it, “commune residents sought to situate the disorders of American culture—ethnocentrism, racism, aggression, greed, disregard for the environment—within the interaction of daily life and to change their own behavior, including eating habits, as a step toward reshaping the world.”²⁷ These revolutionaries asked only for the freedom to do their own thing— to create their parallel culture and social system, whose success they assumed, would naturally inspire a similar value-shift throughout the rest of society.

Every commune established during this period had different reasons for going back to the land and varying ideologies which were the basis for their communal lives. Most, however, placed a good deal of emphasis on the importance of health, including particular dietary choices. Advice on “Forming Communes” from a magazine of the time stated: “Our intentions are to raise our own food, our animals’ food and our states of consciousness.”²⁸ In rejection of the canned and frozen foods of the “instant gourmet” mentality of the 1960s, which valued money and power over the health and general livelihood of Americans, counterculturalists sought to reclaim simpler foods grown and prepared from “scratch.”²⁹ Because health was a central concern to commune members, what food should be eaten was a common topic of conversation and debate. Houriet found that food really was at the center of commune life for many reasons; one being health:

Food is selected and prepared from a nutritional standpoint. It often becomes a subject for dinner table discussion. “Mmmm, this kale is far out. I bet it has more vitamins than spinach.” “The food industry has found out that white products, white sugar and grains,

sell better,” Claudia remarked, “even though the nutritious elements have been thrown away.”³⁰

As Claudia’s statement makes clear, even the health choices of communards had political implications. Commune members recognized the detrimental qualities of processed goods that the food industry was pushing on Americans at the time, so they created an alternative food culture that valued health over fads or brand name popularity. This basic premise allowed Americans of differing backgrounds, including race, religion, and socio-economic status, to unite around their passion for food free of corporate influence.

Food played a central role on communes of the late 1960s and early 1970s and food choice demonstrated communards’ set of beliefs better than any other medium. Historian Stephanie Hartman argues that “food was inseparable from, or at least coincident with, the most closely held values of commune residents, who tried to live what they believed through what they ate, how they grew their food, and how they divided the labor.”³¹ Food was central to commune life and it was inseparable from the values of commune residents. Houriet explains this significance of food while reflecting on his visit to the New Buffalo commune in New Mexico:

At New Buffalo and communes everywhere, a lot of effort, thought and discussion go into the preparation of food, not only because it’s a common need, like clothes or housing, but also because food can be a direct vital expression of man’s relationship to the whole life cycle. Significantly, George had once proposed that the commune be named Corn.³²

During his travels between communes, Houriet found that food was the most frequent topic of conversation among counterculturalists. There were endless debates on communes about what

was okay to eat: “the chief topic of conversation in communes was food, not sex or God. [Food was] the key to understanding the communal experiment.”³³ Commune residents denounced processed food made by large corporations for healthy, real food prepared and enjoyed as a community. Counterculturalists who felt disillusioned by American society went “back to the land” in order to find, what they believed to be, the true basis of culture in nature through the creation of their own food systems.

Women on Communes of the Back-to-the-Land Movement

Social experiments on communes were particularly difficult for women, largely because gender roles among activists of the 1960s and 1970s did not tend to be equal. Women’s participation in any of the countercultural movements often meant doing menial tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and completing paper work while male participants took credit as the leaders of the rebellious efforts. Although some members of the New Left and the counterculture did care about developing new gender roles, most men were more occupied by the idea of free sex coming out of the Sexual Revolution. Belasco quotes one Berkeley communitarian in saying that for many men “the best way to ‘smash monogamy’ was to sleep with several women.”³⁴ In addition to being sexually available, women were also required to do much of the hard labor on communes. In *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, a first-hand account of commune life published much later in the century, historian Timothy Miller notes the role of women on most rural communes:

At High Ridge Farm, as elsewhere in American society, the women as a group still bear most of the responsibility for the children. Out in the country there is a natural impetus to revert to traditional roles: Women stay inside, cook...However, in other communes

women are making attempts to counter this traditional tendency by learning to work chain saws and drive tractors, sometimes dumping babies who need to be changed in the laps of their men. In some communities (not here) the women belong to women's liberation groups, but in most, the redefinition of what it means to be a woman and mother is gradually taking place, with little rhetoric and few hassles.³⁵

Although these women may have been well-versed in Feminist ideology, commune life remained structured by old-fashioned gender roles. Some women demanded equal treatment and were allowed to participate in "male" chores and vice-versa, but usually male and female communards accepted their traditional gender roles.

On most rural communes women were required to sacrifice a lot for the benefit of the group. Another female communard quoted by Miller notes just one of the sacrifices she had to make in moving from the suburbs to a country commune in Oregon: "It took a while to get used to the kitchen not being my own. I think it was Margaret Mead who said that American society is based on the precept: 'One woman per kitchen.' But the kitchen was only the first thing I had to relinquish."³⁶ Without a kitchen of their own, women on communes lost their only space of control while also taking on the added burden of food production, in addition to preparation. The sexist attitude of men on many communes and their difficult experiences living off the land would later encourage many women to embrace the feminist movement.

Belasco notes how sexist treatment among countercultural men and women inspired many women to unite for better treatment. Communal work brought women together: "Moving into all-female communes, some women found that they *could* drive tractors...butcher hogs, and otherwise do quite well without men."³⁷ As this quote from Belasco suggests, communal life, when not alienating women, could also unite women particularly around tasks related to food.

Community building within the feminist movement was in many ways centered around food; especially on female communes, coops, and restaurants.

Many women during the 1960s and 1970s sought to create business environments free from patriarchal oppression. For example, Jill Ward and Dolores Alexander opened the Mother Courage Restaurant in New York in 1972 which was run exclusively by women. In speaking about the restaurant, the owners expressed that the restaurant was founded upon “the idea of creating a social milieu where women could get together over good food, where THEY would set the tone, not male waiters, owners, customers.”³⁸ Other revolutionary women interested in food opened restaurants that became models of alternative business. Many were cooperatively run or were more concerned with providing safe meeting spaces to discuss social issues, than actually making a profit. Alice Waters’s Chez Panisse (Berkeley, CA, 1971) and Mollie Katzen’s Moosewood Restaurant (Ithaca, NY, 1973) are both examples of restaurants founded upon countercultural ideals. Chez Panisse was funded by Waters’s close friends and opened as a place for young radicals to meet and enjoy good, local food. Moosewood was created upon similar principles and in addition served strictly vegetarian meals and operates as a collective, meaning that employees own an equal share of the restaurant. These spaces allowed women to express their own radical beliefs surrounded by food and friends and out from under the oppression of patriarchal society. As alternative businesses they also communicated discontent with the way mainstream groceries and restaurants functioned.

Food as a Force for Community Building

In addition to providing alternative economies and allowing for individual expression, food also acted as a force for community building among counterculturalists. Food was

paramount to life on communes in that it allowed for consciousness raising and the formation of cohesive communities. Commune life revolved around the planning of meals and communal dining experiences. Hartman notes that coordinating meals and cooking was an important factor for determining the health of a communal society: “dinner was often the center of commune life, the one time that everyone was together...commune residents described dinner as a barometer of how well a household was working.”³⁹ Food was the central driver in bringing commune residents together. Belasco also notes the effectiveness of food in the embodiment of countercultural values, especially on communes: “communal food experiments received less press than the drug or sex-centered ones but were more successful in bringing people together and raising awareness.”⁴⁰ Communes offered counterculturalists the opportunity to experiment with alternative ways of living; here they could reject capitalist greed and educate themselves about the teachings of Marx, Mao, Thoreau or Jefferson.

For some communes that had trouble with population control (as wanderers drifted in and out of residence), food served as one way to weed out the serious communards from those less inclined to complete the menial tasks involved with living off the land. During this era, the majority of rural communes qualified for government food stamps because of their low income levels and the number of people living under the same roof. Most communes accepted the rations they were handed, but some rejected the handouts either for ethical or health reasons. One member of the New Buffalo commune in New Mexico explained his commune’s reasoning for declining to use food stamps:

[one] reason for the kitchen’s decision to forgo stamps was to bring the commune closer together by weeding out drifters. By reverting to a more Spartan diet, they hoped to

starve out the less committed souls and stomachs—those who couldn't survive without a diet of meat and carbohydrates. Diet became an index of communal loyalty.⁴¹

This commune used food as a way to test the solidarity of their community in order to foster a closer environment.

Food also served as a tool to bring commune members together because of the coordination and cooperation required to feed large groups. Houriet observed on every commune he visited that food preparation was the one area of communal living which required real organization both in the kitchen:

The commune has only one schedule, a recent one at that—a chart of who cooks the evening meal. “Joe and Claudia—got into a rut doing the dinner trip,” Maureen explained. “They felt overburdened, but they got angry when other people tried to do things in *their* kitchen. Other people felt excluded from cooking.”⁴²

And in the garden, Houriet wrote; “I thumbed through a notebook Peter had compiled about last year’s garden. On one page was a diagram of the garden’s irrigation system—it was one of the few traces I saw of organization.”⁴³ For commune residents, both growing and preparing meals required a great deal of organization. Communes of the time tended to be fairly chaotic and disorganized as every free-spirited member wanted to “do their own thing.” The necessity of organizing food cultivation and preparation made a commune’s food status a barometer of its overall success. The most successful communes were the ones that strategically preserved their summer surplus for use during the winter months, while those that failed often had to buy food from outside or rely on food stamps.

Like communes, co-ops offered urban residents the opportunity to be a part of a communal experience. Most co-ops required members to work a certain amount of time in the

stores, which fostered a feeling of community many of them desired. In a 1979 study of food co-ops around the country, journalist Daniel Zwerdling quotes one Minneapolis co-op member as he reminisced about the way working in the store fulfilled an emotional need:

I can't tell you how much joy I feel working here... In a way it's brought back the days when a grocery was still a social event—people around the wood stove, drinking coffee, talking. We do the same thing here, slicing up wheels of cheese, drinking herb tea, and talking. And maybe it sounds corny, but I feel I'm doing something important for my family and community.⁴⁴

The organization of food on both co-ops and communes acted as a unifying force for members, allowing for greater cohesion in their efforts to undermine what they saw as the detrimental forces of mainstream American society.

Food Cooperatives and “Conspiracies”

In the 1960s, the tumultuous political, social, and cultural forces of the time spurred new interest in food cooperatives, then often referred to as food “conspiracies.” Conspiracies consist of a group of people who order their food wholesale and split it among themselves for cheaper prices and to avoid a middle-man. Most co-ops functioned in a similar manner with cooperative members sharing ownership of the store and volunteering a certain number of hours a month in order to receive the health foods the co-op offered at wholesale prices. The counterculture established food cooperatives as an alternative business when commercial health food stores were no longer seen as reliable and responsible. In addition, food cooperatives promulgated the countercuisine to urban residents who could not grow their food like the communards.⁴⁵

Like communes, cooperatives date back much farther than the 1960s. In 1752, Benjamin Franklin established the first successful cooperative in the United States and in the early twentieth century the first food cooperatives were established by several immigrant groups of European descent. The Great Depression of the 1930s spurred the growth of food cooperatives because food bought in bulk and shared among members was cheaper than what was available at grocery stores. The establishment of co-ops was also encouraged by Roosevelt's New Deal although most disappeared later in the 1940s and 1950s with the wealth of an economic stimulus caused by WWII.⁴⁶

The purpose of co-ops during the 1960s and 1970s was to function as alternative businesses with countercultural ideals central to the inception of the store. Counterculturalists who began founding food co-ops in the late 1960s believed that food was a defining element of community and that co-ops helped to facilitate the discussion around food that was happening during this time. They were aware of cooperatives that had operated during the Depression years and modeled theirs off of successful ones. The co-op was more than a store to its members. Because of the cooperative manner in which they were run and the produce that they chose to sell, the co-ops of the 1960s and 1970s were expressions of the beliefs and values of its countercultural members. In her analysis of the Park Slope Food Coop, Jochnowitz concludes that "food itself is essential to the definition of community and to the makeup of the ideologies of the Coop's constituents."⁴⁷ Like the countercuisine present on communes, co-op food expressed members' desire to dissociate from the dominant food system.

While some co-ops during this era claimed not have political agendas, others strongly believed that their co-ops served as a tool for revolutionary change. Zwerdling found that while co-op founders' philosophies varied greatly from one to the other, they all created needed

alternatives to corporate supermarkets. In this way, they served to undermine dominant establishments whose only goal was to make a profit. Zwerdling explains the reasoning behind co-op members' belief that their purchasing power made a true political statement:

the ultimate purpose of food co-ops is precisely politics—the politics of revolution. They talk about food stores as “strong, effective organizing tools,” for launching “radical programs which will help bring about the demise of capitalism,” “Selling food isn’t our goal,” as one member of the Fields of Plenty alternative food store explained. “It’s just a pretext for building living and breathing models of revolutionary change.”⁴⁸

Food cooperatives offered urban radicals who were unhappy with American society the opportunity to source their food outside of the corporate system. In *Appetite for Change*, Belasco similarly recognizes the importance of co-ops as a space “to find nonprofit food sources and to fight corporate capitalism in quiet, nonviolent ways.”⁴⁹ Co-ops were one of the most successful experiments of the counterculture because their establishment required organization from the outset; because of this many co-ops established in the early-1970s still operate today.

Vegetarianism in the Counterculture

Vegetarianism was another dominant practice among young radicals who sought to differentiate themselves from mainstream culture. Members of the counterculture frequently discouraged the consumption of meat either for spiritual and/or health reasons. Communitarian counterculturalists, notably members of co-ops and communes located on the West Coast, embraced vegetarianism. The reasons for this vary, but all relate to the broader ethics the radicals sought to embrace, such as peace, harmony, and physical and spiritual health. Although

vegetarianism was never fully embraced by the majority of the counterculture, it became a defining food practice of the movement.⁵⁰

During his travels, Houriet found that most communes were not strictly vegetarian but that overconsumption of meat was frowned-upon as an indulgent practice typical of mainstream Americans. Houriet describes the diet of members on the High Ridge Farm commune in Oregon:

An alternative vegetable dish is prepared for the three vegetarians... The rest of the family are occasional meat eaters who prefer mainly a vegetable diet, not for philosophical or religious reasons but out of a common-sense conviction that the all-American menu of sirloin, Cokes and refined starches is unhealthy.⁵¹

Most communards were extremely cautious of what foods they chose to put into their bodies, partly as a result of skepticism towards the processed foods embraced by mainstream America.

Another incentive for vegetarianism was based on religious thought. The counterculture was greatly influenced by Eastern religions, many of which encouraged a vegetarian diet. In *The Alternative Communal Life in New America*, Hedgepeth notes the prevalence of vegetarianism in religious communes. He quotes one member of the Messiah's World Commune in California as he explains the beliefs behind their community's vegetarianism:

Because of improper diet—from eating like children, from eating meat and other impure things—our bodies are at a slower vibration than the rest of the universe. Much slower than they should be. If our bodies are to serve as vehicles for the Higher Spirits we've got to cleanse ourselves with natural foods.⁵²

Refraining from eating meat was a common practice among religious groups because of the suffering it caused animals and its “impure,” earthly qualities. Vegetarianism was another form

of expression for counterculturalists and it became increasingly popular as a result of their influence.

Food as a Human Right and the Significance of Free Food

Another commonly held belief among counterculturalists was that food is an inherent human right. Just as they fought for civil rights and women's rights, young radicals fought for equal food access in America. In *Getting Back Together*, Houriet documents a member of the High Ridge Farm commune's declaration that

We've got to stop thinking of food and everything in terms of prices. It's like charging people to breathe the air. It belongs—to all of us, to God. If we could do away with private ownership and charging money for food, why, we could cultivate enough land to produce enough food for everybody.⁵³

Young radicals who valued the community over the individual often supported or even spearheaded movements that sought to grant all Americans access to life's necessities—food being the most essential one.

The first radical group to support universal food access during the 1960s was the San Francisco Diggers. The Diggers took their name from the original English Diggers (1649-50) who envisioned a society free from private property and all forms of buying and selling. The San Francisco Diggers evolved out of two radical traditions that thrived in the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid-1960s: the bohemian/underground art/theater scene and the New Left/civil rights/peace movement. In 1966 the Diggers started their free food program and distributed food to people in a park of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. On Jan 14, 1967 the Diggers provided free food at the "Human Be-In," or the "Gathering of the Tribes," which took place in the Polo

Field of Golden Gate Park and was the prototype for later countercultural celebratory events. In addition, the Diggers created free stores and also distributed free food to anyone who wanted it. “Submariners,” Diggers who distributed food from a bus made to look like yellow submarine (no apparent relation to the Beatles’ song), used food to demonstrate unhappiness with America’s capitalist society and to educate those around them.⁵⁴ Belasco points to the Diggers as one of the first groups to turn to food as a tool for activism:

Yelling “Food as medium,” the anonymous submariners...also handed out mimeographed sheets crammed with political and philosophical speculation. The “Digger Papers” were features in what became regular “Feeds”; their aim, according to Digger Emmett Grogan, was as much to teach as to feed—to use food as medium to develop “collective consciousness and social action.”⁵⁵

The Diggers used food to educate the public about radical politics and philosophy. They recognized the effectiveness of food to communicate a certain message and they used this to promote their anti-capitalist beliefs about American society.

The Diggers also believed that everyone deserved equal food access. Belasco notes that the Diggers used the argument of food as a human right to claim food for themselves and their supporters:

When the Diggers distributed stolen food with the claim, “It’s free because it’s yours,” they invited recipients to act *as if* it did belong to them. The implication was that if everyone started acting as if food were truly common property, perhaps it would become so.⁵⁶

The Diggers used food to encourage the people around them to join in their efforts to fight American capitalism. They justified their free food programs by declaring food access as an

inherent human right.⁵⁷ In “Reading Commune Cookbooks,” Hartman notes that counterculturalists held a similar belief that it was alright to steal food from those who exploited you. Crescent dragonwagon, the author of the *Commune Cookbook*, was included among this group.⁵⁸ At the end of a chapter of her cookbook, dragonwagon adds: “I find ‘stealing’ to be truly liberating and not stealing at all—liberating not only of goods but of myself.”⁵⁹ Although stealing may not be the solution to inequality, demanding equal access to good food was a laudable campaign.

One co-op, described by Zwerdling in “The Uncertain Revival of Food Cooperatives,” appears to have also believed that all Americans deserved access to food. In their store, a sign hung stating: “We feel that food is a basic right and that it shouldn’t be sold for profit...Milk being a staple necessary to most diets, is being sold for only a few pennies above our costs so that those in need can afford it.”⁶⁰ For counterculturalists, free food signified freedom from capitalism; therefore, they stole or distributed food to demonstrate their discontent with the dominant American structure. Many members believed that taking what they believed to be theirs would encourage others to do the same; which would eventually result in a less individualistic attitude among Americans.

Food Symbolism among Counterculturalists

As briefly discussed earlier, food symbolism held significant importance to the counterculture, as can be seen in one author’s discussion of bread. In her cookbook/manifesto titled *The Commune Cookbook* (1971), crescent dragonwagon discusses the image of “bread” in American society and what it suggests about social class and capitalism. dragonwagon writes during the early 1970s about food and its social implications from her experiences living in a

Brooklyn commune. She believes that homemade bread has long been one of the symbols of the American dream and explains why many outsiders commend the communards on baking their own bread: “It’s American—it goes with the pioneers and the beginnings and family and life itself, and really, *that’s* why people are so turned on to us baking bread—it’s that they maybe see *all* these things as unattainable and bread is a symbol of that and of a family we have.”⁶¹ She notes that worldwide, unhealthy foods have traditionally been the more expensive, “elitist,” and sought after products (although this now has changed at least in the United States as wealthy persons have come to value less processed food). dragonwagon provides the example of refined white flour and unrefined wheat flour. Originally white was more expensive because more processing was required to make it, but as more and more people demanded it the price went down and the cost of healthy wheat flour increased.⁶²

In America, baking one’s own bread, as the common phrase “bread winner” suggests, indicates self determination and independence. With this in mind, dragonwagon conducts an experiment of selling the healthy bread that she bakes every day as a test of the American Dream. Unfortunately, crescent finds that her high quality “ideal American bread” is too expensive to make a profit of off, indicating to her that the American capitalist system does not work. As this example makes clear, food holds much more significance to Americans than it is often given credit. More than just fuel for our bodies, food creates memories, builds relationships, spurs new ways of thinking, and even inspires revolutions. Although a radical revolution may not have taken hold as a result of the counterculturalist’s food activism, they did begin a discussion surrounding food production and consumption.

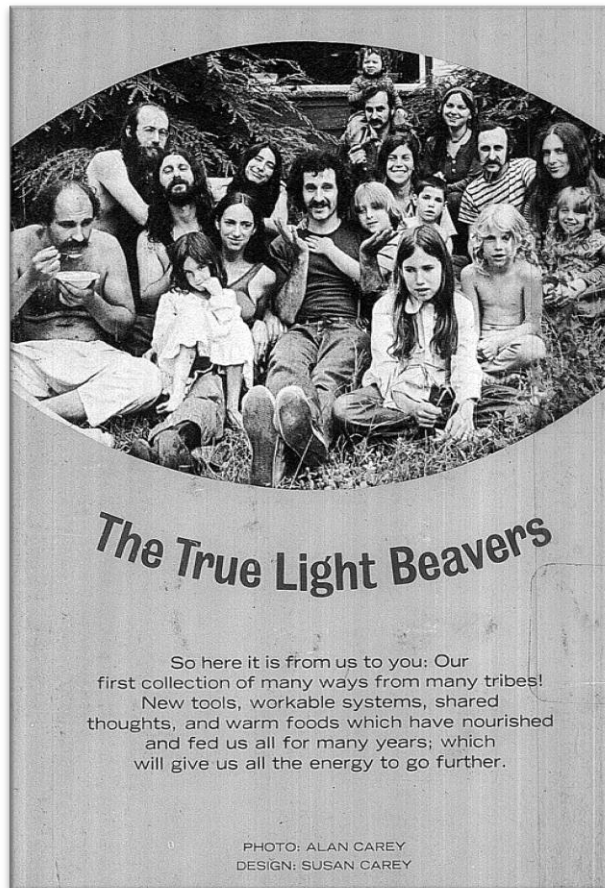
Conclusion

Food was paramount to all the subcultures of the counterculture in that it allowed for political, social and religious expression, consciousness raising, and the formation of cohesive communities. Food choice was a central characteristic that helped the youth of the counterculture distinguish themselves from mainstream America. In *Getting Back Together*, Houriet recounts one amusing story that reveals how difficult rejecting one's culture can be. He describes an outing that he and two other communards embarked on one day from the New Buffalo commune in New Mexico:

The three of us were in the midst of a passion for zu-zus. (Zu-zus are plastic food, high in carbohydrates and preservatives, *e.g.*, Fritos.) On the way to the general store, we confessed to each other our ugliest repressed desires.... After weeks of dietary celibacy we fell lustily from grace, the all-American zu-zu way. God, it was great. Guiltily we stole back to the commune, passing the sherbet among us. Back at the commune, we guardedly doled out the Snickers Bars to the other zu-zu freaks... It was not long ago that we were all guileless suburban children of the Pepsi generation, who ran Pavlov-like to the tinkle of the Mister Froste bell. It takes some time to break the cord.⁶³

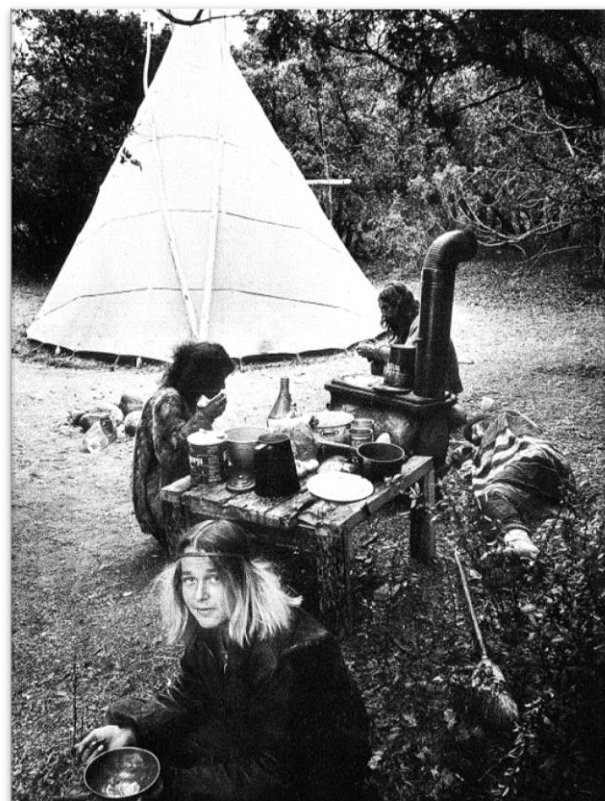
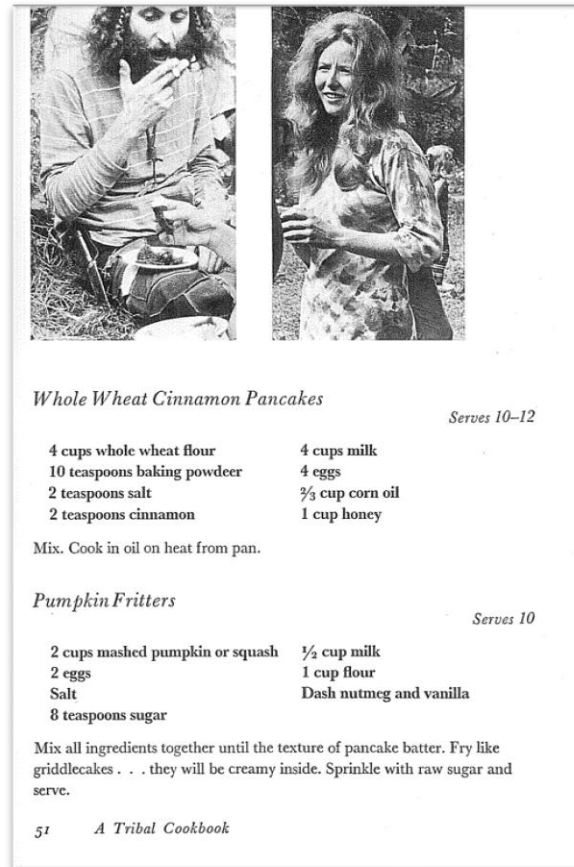
This passage demonstrates the centrality of food in American culture even for those who seek to challenge its influence. Despite the harmful habits so ingrained in all Americans' minds, the young radicals of the 1960s and 1970s rejected the dominant food culture in the United States and created a countercuisine of their own. They found that alternative ways of producing, preparing, and purchasing food were effective means of protest in a society they were unhappy with. Although many of the experiments were short-lived and less than successful, the influence

of the counterculture's alternative systems continues to this day and can be seen in the expanding market of health foods and community efforts being made to increase access to good, local food.



Figures 1 and 2: Commune Cookbook
(The True Light Beavers. *Eat, Fast, Feast: A Tribal Cookbook*, 1972)

Figure 3: Food Consumption on a Rural Commune (William Hedgepeth, *The Alternative Communal Life in New America*, 1970.)



Figures 4 and 5: Digger Free Food Distributions (Fred W. McDarrah, *Anarchy, Protest and Rebellion and the Counterculture that Changed America*, 2003.)



At the beginning of the 1960s the Civil Rights Movement was already firmly established. As early as 1955, black leaders began to organize using direct action and nonviolent resistance, later deemed civil disobedience, to convey their frustration with inequality in the United States and especially the South. The Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1956) in Alabama was one of the first test runs of this strategy and gave the movement an icon in Rosa Parks. By 1960, resistance in the form of sit-ins became popular among black college students.

Sit-ins were staged in more than one hundred cities in the South and North during this era, causing the lunch counter to become a national symbol of the South's inequalities. Previously, in the South, black restaurants were places where African Americans knew they would be accepted when white establishments were far from welcoming. In the 1950s and 1960s, restaurants became gathering places for dissent where black organizers strategized their efforts for full equality in America. The location was fitting, given the more than three hundred and fifty years African Americans had been sequestered in the kitchen by white society. Later in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s, food, like every aspect of African American life, had become a battleground for identity.⁶⁴

Soul Food: Expression of Black Power

In the 1960s urban African Americans first began to identify rock music (rhythm and blues) and later southern food as "soul" music and food. Faced with increasing ethnic diversity in urban areas, African Americans adopted soul as a broad-reaching concept to define their culture and ethnicity as an alternative to white, mainstream culture. "Soul food" became labeled as such after the term was coined within the African American community in reference to their music.⁶⁵

At its most basic, soul is the ability to survive and to continue on despite racist obstacles that inhibit black Americans from obtaining life's necessities. Soul emerged out of the larger Black Power Movement that called for a black culture separate from white culture and which embraced black Americans' African heritage.⁶⁶ Soul allowed African Americans to define the boundaries of their own culture and it helped upwardly mobile African Americans stay connected to their roots after their migration to white suburban neighborhoods.

Soul food was one way African Americans' demonstrated pride in their African heritage and therefore, the cuisine was celebrated. Soul food contained elements of both West African cuisine and traditions left over from American slavery. It used unwanted foods such as pork back and pigs' feet to make hearty, satisfying meals. Collard greens, black-eyed peas and sweet potato pie all included vegetables originating in West Africa and became staples of soul food. Some argued that what made soul food the most unique and genuinely American cuisine was that it evolved with very little European influence.⁶⁷ Others argued that the main criterion for soul food was emotional attachment, rather than what was actually being made. Nevertheless, the unique cuisine helped create a collective sense of identity among black Americans and it was one element of the soul subculture that was exclusive to those who lived the black American experience.

"Black is beautiful" was a popular slogan among black Nationalists of the Black Power Movement. Lamenta Crouch, a student at Virginia State College who participated in the Black Power Movement, associates the term "soul food" with the movement of the 1960s and 1970:

I can't remember exactly the first time I heard it, but it was in the same era of black power, soul brother, and all that business of having an identity that was uniquely ours...it was during the era that soul food came up and I think it was kind of like, ok this is ours.

This is something we can claim is ours and identifies us as a people and we [have] some value and we have something to contribute.⁶⁸

As “black is beautiful” spread across the United States, restaurateurs were encouraged to put soul food on their menus. Not only did poorer African Americans become more prideful of their cuisine, but wealthier blacks took a new interest in the food as well. They ate soul food as a “counter-revolutionary” act that mocked the white bourgeois diet. Soul food helped to create a sense of community among black Americans whether they lived in the rural South or the urban North.⁶⁹

Later in the 1960s and into the 1970s, as Black Power became increasingly militant, a debate over soul food emerged. As before, some African American intellectuals argued that soul food was uniquely part of black culture and that the cuisine should be maintained and encouraged among black Americans. White southerners argued that soul food was not strictly black cuisine but Southern. A third party also emerged among members of the Nation of Islam and African American college students who both advocated for healthier, natural food diets and insisted that soul food was not to be celebrated because it was killing black Americans.⁷⁰

Dick Gregory, a black comedian and activist, was one public figure to speak out against soul food early in the 1970s. He articulated what he believed to be the broader implications of eating an unhealthy soul food diet in his vegetarian manifesto *Dick Gregory's Natural Diet for Folks Who Eat*:

I personally would say that the quickest way to wipe out a group of people is to put them on a soul food diet. One of the tragedies is that the very folks in the black community who are most sophisticated in terms of political realities in this country are nonetheless advocates of “soul food.” They will lay down a heavy rap on genocide in America with

regard to black folks, then walk into a soul food restaurant and help guide the genocide along.⁷¹

Gregory advocated strongly against the Black Power movement's inclination to encourage soul food eating as a demonstration of black solidarity because he believed that it was hurting the African American community more than they were benefitting from it.

Malcolm X, a leader of the Black Power Movement and a member of the Nation of Islam (NOI), also urged African Americans to give up soul food and especially pork, which is banned in the Muslim diet. Foodways played an important role in the work of the Nation of Islam which offered black Americans an alternative to the docile nature of the Civil Rights Movement's civil disobedience. Aside from religious reasons, Malcolm X argued that soul food was an unhealthy habit taught to black slaves by their white masters. NOI leader Elijah Muhammad also advocated for a healthier diet among the African American community.⁷² In 1967, he published a dietary manual for his followers titled *How to Eat to Live* which advised members to reject soul food for a more natural diet:

Do not eat the swine—do not even touch it. Just stop eating the swine flesh and your life will be expanded. Stay off that grandmother's old fashioned corn bread and black-eyed peas, and those quick 15 minute biscuits made with baking powder. Put yeast in your bread and let it sour and rise and then bake it. Eat and drink to live not to die.⁷³

Given that pork was the staple of most African Americans' diets, Muhammad's demands appeared radical but they did successfully differentiate members of the NOI subculture from other black Americans and arguably created a healthier community of African Americans.

Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown, founding members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and later members of the Black Panther Party (BPP), gave

lectures on college campuses encouraging black students to adopt a healthier diet. Rejecting the argument that soul food was authentically African American cuisine, they encouraged black Americans to eat foods with West African origins. Carmichael insisted that “if we are going to go all the way back and claim who we are, then we should be eating as we did indigenously.”⁷⁴ This debate reveals that individual’s perspectives on what constituted African American identity often conflicted. While some valued their North American slave heritage, some preferred to pull from West African for traditions, while others sought to embrace new American customs separate from either influence.

Some African Americans also argued that soul food was not only unhealthy, but that it was also a tool of oppression. In a 1981 article in the *Black Collegian* titled “What’s Wrong with Soul Food?” students Ralph Johnson and Patricia Reed insisted that soul food was responsible for causing high rates of hypertension, stroke, and cancer among African Americans. Although Johnson and Reed’s complaint comes after the era that this project focuses on, it demonstrates many of the ideas circulating about soul food in the late-1970s. The students argued that soul food was not a unique element of African American culture but rather another means by which black Americans were repressed by white society. The soul food that African Americans continued to eat, in part because they believed it to be their native cuisine, actually originated from cheap slave food provided by slave owners such as white refined rice, cornmeal, potatoes, pig fat, salt pork, grits, and sweet potato. Because soul food is so unhealthy, Johnson and Reed encouraged black Americans to “start to reverse those health statistics and gain back their health by utilizing the West African diet, which is rightfully ours to begin with! Black Americans should unchain their dietary habits and let the ‘soul food’ diet die along with the concept of

slavery!”⁷⁵ Breaking with soul food and embracing the diet of one’s African ancestors became an expression of black cultural consciousness as well.

Food Symbolism

The Black Power slogan “black is beautiful” also meant that “white was not necessarily right,” an idea which easily translated into discussions surrounding food. Another participant in the Black Power movement, Edward Williamson, recalls “hearing the message ‘anything that is white is not good for you.’ Carmichael especially emphasized that processed and refined white foods ‘were evil.’ His message was ‘don’t eat white bread, don’t eat sugar, don’t eat potatoes, and don’t eat white rice.’”⁷⁶ The symbolism of white food was significant in the Black Power movement. White food represented white culture and all the negative consequences its consumption had on black society. For African Americans during the 1960s and 1970s, food choice was another form of resistance to the dominant American culture. It allowed African Americans to demonstrate allegiance to countercultural groups as well as exhibit pride in their African heritage.

While counterculturalists of every background were eating brown bread, ethnic or traditional foods and vegetables of every origin, “straight” Americans continued to buy into the industry belief that processed, white food was superior to whatever else was out there. During the 1960s and 1970s French food was still praised as the finest cuisine. Popular cookbooks gave recipes for beef bourguignon and green bean casserole. Meat was still the main dish of the meal and companies such as Crisco and Cambell’s published their own cookbooks including recipes using their products for the quickest recipes for rewriting traditional dishes with processed food. Counterculturalists rejected this diet not only for its unhealthy qualities, but also because of its

broader implications. Dick Gregory attributed this unhealthy American diet to many of the country's wider issues. In his vegetarian cookbook, Gregory states:

I believe that diet is at the root of all problems. Americas who think so little of their own bodies that the average individual American consumes one hundred pounds of refined, “drugged” sugar each year will certainly allow the continued dropping of millions of tons of bombs on innocent people in Southeast Asia.⁷⁷

Gregory believed that Americans' indifference to their own health represented their unhealthy attitudes towards events such as the War in Vietnam. The American diet symbolized Americans' value system which prioritized wealth and power over peace and health.

Fuel for a Revolution: The Black Panther Party Free Breakfast Programs

During the 1960s, Civil Rights leaders forced the federal government to assert national standards for voting rights, employment, education and benefits. One of these benefits included school lunches. Demanding free lunch services in the underserved African American communities highlighted the belief of equality of the Civil Rights Movement onto a very concrete program that was run everywhere in the country. The Black Panthers were the first to create a free food program for school children when they established their “survival programs” in 1969. The survival programs of the Black Panthers were placed in communities to sustain black Americans in need until the “revolution” took place, aside from free food; services included free sickle cell anemia testing and clothing giveaways. One BPP official explained that “the programs, which cover such diverse areas as health care and food services as well as a model school... are meant to meet the needs of the community until we all can move to change social conditions that make it impossible for the people to afford the things they need and desire.”⁷⁸

Party members understood that in order to maximize a community's potential, members' immediate needs had to be met.

The first free breakfast program started in January 1969 in Oakland, California. By November 1969, twenty-two Black Panther chapters had started free breakfast programs. The organization estimated that it had served twenty thousand meals by this time. Food was donated by local businesses, and volunteers were recruited to serve the children. The Black Panther Free breakfast program fed any students that joined the program.⁷⁹ One poster calling for food donations listed suggested foods for the Breakfast for Children Program; these included "breakfast meats, butter, canned fruit, cereals, donuts, eggs, grits, hot dogs, jams and jellies, milk, pancake batter."⁸⁰ The meals that the Panthers served were based in soul food culture, although they made what they could with the ingredients that were donated. Soul food influence can be seen in what they aimed to serve; meals usually consisted of pancakes, grits, sausage, bacon, toast, coffee, and milk, all of which were staples of a soul food diet.⁸¹

One important aspect of the Free Breakfast for School Children program was the recognition that children were central to the health of the Black Power movement and to gaining improvements for the black community. *The Black Panther*, the publication of the BPP, states in one issue, "The youth we are feeding will surely feed the revolution."⁸² Children in black communities were considered members of the revolution and were expected to develop early social and political consciousness and to consider themselves as soldiers in training. Given these high expectations, it is no wonder that the Panther Party leaders found feeding black youth to be of high priority. The Party linked the importance of adequate nourishment with educational performance. In an interview, BPP leader Bobby Seale exclaimed: "How can our children learn anything when most of their stomachs are empty?"⁸³

Free Food in the Black Panther Party Survival Programs

A Free Food Program was also established by the Black Panther Party in the early 1970s. Party volunteers working for the program, which was founded as a protest of white-run grocery stores that continued to raise their prices, distributed weekly rations to black families in need. The program was intended to fight the oppression of the current capitalist system that kept poor black families hungry.⁸⁴ In an interview published in the *Oakland Tribune* in 1972, Bobby Seale states that “the survival programs are tools and institutions which we organize our people around...There are 20 million people hungry in this the most wealthiest country in the world. Why? Because we’ve been lied to, jived to, tricked and beat for 400 years.”⁸⁵

The Party solicited donations in each community from local grocery stores. They essentially forced market owners, both black and white, to donate to the BPP food programs by threatening to boycott, which they did when San Francisco Bay Area Safeway stores refused to cooperate. A poster encouraging the black community to boycott the store states:

The Black Panther Party calls on the community to boycott Safeway stores in the East Bay. Why? They will not donate to the free breakfast for school children program. This avaricious (greedy exploiting) business man who owns the Safeway stores must come forth and donate to the breakfast for school children. We the people shop there, making the businessman fat and rich...We the people must demand that each Safeway store donate, in food items of \$100.00 dollars every week or cash. Not to feed hungry children is low and rotten.”⁸⁶

As this statement makes clear, the success of the Black Panther programs relied entirely on the cooperation of the black community as a whole. The survival programs were instituted to

bolster the African American community therefore, all members were required to participate in order to ensure that no one went hungry.

Like members of the youth movement, the BPP spread the message of food as a universal human right. The Panthers advertised widely in black communities for donations and to notify African American residents about distributions. One poster from 1972 states: “Just like you have the right to vote, you have the right to eat. Together we can achieve all our rights. For three days there’ll be free food, free sickle cell anemia tests, political speakers, and entertainment.”⁸⁷ The Black Panthers believed that food was an inherent right; therefore they worked to feed all members of the black community. They believed that gaining access to food was as important as gaining the right to vote. At their food distributions BPP members handed out bags of groceries with a chicken in every bag. An article printed in the *Oakland Tribune* in 1972 states that following speeches by Party members “6,000 bags were given away. Despite the huge crowds, the distribution of the free groceries was well organized and ran smoothly until the end when there were few bags and still many people left.”⁸⁸ Free food was one way for the Black Panthers to redistribute wealth among black community members. This sort of cooperation depended upon the dedication of many individuals which in turn helped to foster better relations within black communities.

The Black Panther free breakfast and the free food programs were in part created to build a feeling of solidarity among black community members. The Panther leaders believed that the programs would encourage a more cohesive black community where businesspeople and families cooperated and children felt the love and support of their community. Because of the genuine intentions of these programs, they brought in the support of many middle-class blacks who had previously refrained from being associated with the radical Panthers. Following his

release from prison in May 1971, Bobby Seale returned to Oakland and took charge of the survival programs. One Panther member recalls the affect of Seale's food programs on the community

He created the most magnificent food giveaways. The big ones become major community events, even reported in the media...Bobby organized a campaign to give away bags of groceries to whole families, with a stalking panther printed on each bag. The community and the press went wild. Bobby's giant good giveaways begat tremendous support for all our other Survival Programs. Even middle-class blacks, heretofore, reluctant to support or be identified with the party, began endorsing it and making contributions.⁸⁹

Because food is a basic human need, efforts to feed children and the poor had the ability to unite the black community around this common goal. The Black Panthers' free breakfast program was the most popular of the Party's initiatives for this very reason.

Hunger as a Means of Oppression

The success of the Black Panther breakfast program and free food programs was not ignored by dominant American society. The Black Panther Party was looked upon as a terrorist group by the American government and the success of the breakfast program made government officials very nervous. In an interview from the *San Francisco Examiner*, party member Emory Douglas explains why the breakfast program was targeted: "The No. 1 threat was the breakfast program, not our guns...We had the ability to organize and develop. We were serious about overcoming the problems in our community."⁹⁰ BPP leader Huey Newton once commented that the "survival program that seemed most laudatory—that of providing free breakfasts to schoolchildren—was pinpointed by J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, as the 'real long-range

threat to American society.”⁹¹ During the 1970s the breakfast programs became a target of the FBI Counterintelligence program that sent letters to churches discouraging them from hosting the program and to store merchants to dissuade them from donating food. The FBI went so far as to leak into the media accusations of extortion in the financing of the breakfast program and in brainwashing school-age children with anti-white propaganda.⁹² The success of the BPP breakfast program threatened the reputation of the Federal Government which had targeted the Party as “terrorists.”

Many participants in the black freedom struggle during the 1960s and 1970s recognized that throughout American history, hunger had been one of the main tools by which African Americans were oppressed. In his novel *Hunger Overcome?* (2004), American studies scholar Andrew Warnes explores the idea of hunger as a means of oppression. He argues that the American government’s paranoia surrounding the Panther food programs stemmed from the fear that satiation among poor blacks would result in “a collapse in the docility that, produced by hunger, had reconciled the poor to their penury.”⁹³ Furthermore, he argues that Hoover’s anxieties toward these same programs during this era also stemmed from a fear that the abolition of hunger might facilitate education and then political upheaval. Warnes argues that these reactions to such a well-intentioned program suggest that malnutrition was the cement that held racial inequality together.⁹⁴

Before the publication of Warnes’ book, the Black Panthers came to this same conclusion. A Black Panther Declaration titled *The Black Panthers Speak*, 1969, states:

For too long have our people gone hungry and without the proper health aids they need. But the Black Panther Party says that this type of thing must be halted, because we must survive this evil government and build a new one fit for the service of all the people...

It is a beautiful sight to see our children eat in the mornings after remembering the times when our stomachs were not full...At one time there were children that passed out in class from hunger, or had to be sent home for something to eat. But our children shall be fed, and the Black Panther Party will not let the malady of hunger keep our children down any longer...Hunger is one of the means of oppression and it must be halted.⁹⁵

By the 1960s, leaders in black communities and among black radicals recognized that in order to gain equality, black community members first had to be fed. The food distributions and free breakfasts organized by the Black Panther Party attempted to nourish the bodies of disadvantaged African Americans so they would be better fit to rise up and demand equal rights.

Women's Experiences as members of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements

Women comprised a large portion of the participants in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements although their leadership and the importance of their participation is rarely acknowledged in historical accounts of the black freedom struggles. Black female activists of this era acknowledged that their “double burden” of womanhood and blackness had left them with very little privilege in American society. Women within these movements fought for both racial and gender equality, claiming that once black women were liberated, all Americans would be free.⁹⁶

Like women in the other countercultural movements, black women acted behind the scenes and supported the movements, although there were some female leaders who did assume positions of power. For example, activist Vicky Garvin, was the “go to” person of the Civil Rights Movement, but she is much lesser known than Martin Luther King or Malcolm X because the story of black radical female leaders has been neglected.⁹⁷ An anonymous paper written by a

female member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1964 listed many examples of women's mistreatment within the organization; one stated: "A woman in a field office wondered why she was held responsible for day-to-day decisions, only to find out later that she had been appointed project director but not told."⁹⁸ Women were exploited within civil rights groups which took advantage of their dedicated work ethic without acknowledging their contributions to the movement.

Black Panther leaders Elaine Brown and Ericka Huggins were similarly indispensable to the efforts of the BPP but refrained, for the most part, from bringing up gender issues in public to maintain a united front within the media. During the chaotic early years of the Party's existence when members were frequently incarcerated or killed, the BPP relied upon female Panthers to continue community organizing. Because of this, active women within the movement did not have time to write down their experiences, like many male Panthers who had time to reflect while in prison. In addition, the majority of black women's experiences within the movement were far less glamorous than the stories told by their fellow male members. Women completed paper work, collected and prepared food for the Party's food programs, provided sickle cell anemia testing, ran education programs, and many more tasks. Women cooked all the breakfasts that were distributed throughout the country and assembled the giveaway bags for the food distributions. Although women comprised a majority of the BPP in 1968, as noted in Bobby Seale's publication *Seize the Times*, their efforts remained fairly invisible as they ran the social programs within the BPP which received much less press than the violent radicalism that male Party members took part in.⁹⁹

Vegetarianism and Civil Rights

Vegetarianism had less of an impact on members of the Civil Rights Movement than it did for other countercultural groups of the 1960s and 1970s, but there were some Civil Rights advocates who chose to become vegetarian for political reasons. Violence within the black freedom struggle polarized many activists into groups of militaristic advocates for racial equality and more passive groups such as those calling for nonviolent action. Both groups inevitably encountered violence while protesting or rioting; the radical nature of the era made the government and the police nervous enough to react quickly and in a violent manner to any sort of resistance. Of the vegetarian activists that existed, the most well known was African American comedian and activist Dick Gregory. In his history of African American food culture, Frederick Douglas Opie recalls an interview with Gregory in which he explains his reasoning for giving up meat:

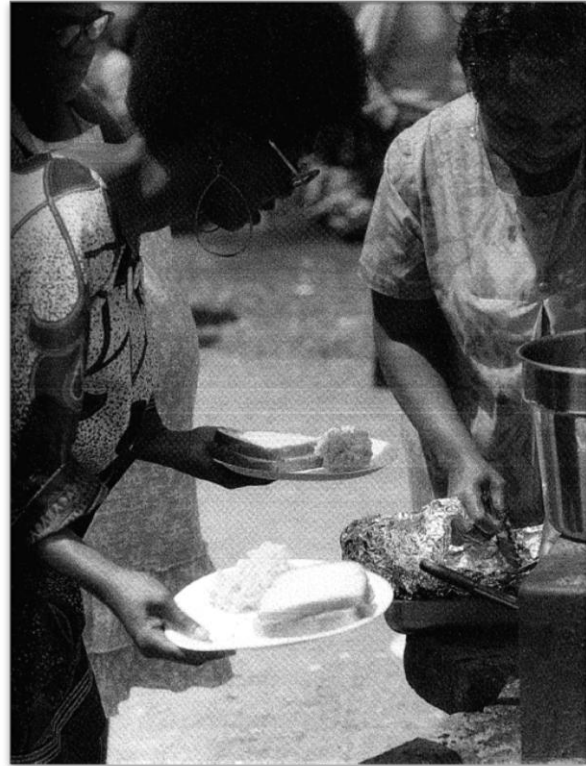
He explained that one day, possibly during a civil rights march in the South, a sheriff kicked his wife, and he didn't come to her defense. "I had to convince myself," says Gregory, "that the reason because I didn't do anything about it was because I was nonviolent." He adds, "Then I said, 'If thou shalt not kill,' that should mean animals too. So in 1963, I just decided I wasn't going to eat anything else that had to be killed."¹⁰⁰

By choosing not to eat meat, Gregory was better able to demonstrate his belief of nonviolence; his commitment to nonviolence was enhanced by the commitment to a violence-free diet.

Conclusion

During the radical period of the 1960s and 1970s, food gave black activists an additional means to express their individual and group identity. It allowed for community organizing,

unification, and a sense of heritage and belonging among black Americans. Alternative diets demonstrated rejection of mainstream American ideologies which all counterculturalists sought to undermine. Civil Rights and Black Power advocates worked to better American society through their discussions of food preparation (soul food) and through food re-distribution.



Figures 6 and 7: Black Panther Women Working to Distribute Free Food (Ruth-Marion Baruch, *Black Panther*, 1968, 2002.)

Figure 8: Pamphlet for the Black Panther Legacy Tour ("Black Panthers," The Berkeley History Room Archives, Berkeley Public Library)



The ecology movement, which took hold in the late-1960s, highlighted the indisputable fact that consumption of food directly impacts the earth and that how we eat communicates a great amount about our relationship with nature. The importance of food is more apparent in the ecology movement than the other two movements because of the concrete connection between the environment and food production. Environmental activists adopted new diets including natural foods and vegetarianism to decrease their ecological footprint.

During the late 1960s an environmental crisis ignited Americans' renewed interest in the environment. Rachel Carson's publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962 marked the beginning of the ecology movement in America. The book described the environmental disasters occurring in the United States as a result of DDT use and sparked a desire in many Americans to reverse the negative effects they were causing the planet. The environmental crisis peaked in 1969 when news stations reported an oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, smog paralyzing Los Angeles, Cleveland's Cuyahoga River catching on fire, mass defoliation in Vietnam, the toxic effects of DDT and stories about world hunger. A member of the ecology movement writing for the *Whole Earth Catalogue* expressed these fears in the fall 1969 issue of the widely read publication:

Each of us is aware of the crisis we all share. The entire planet and specifically the consuming, wasting, worrying population of the United States, is freaking and sinking into a time of turbulence...increasing poisoning and pollution of the air, water, soil and food; increasing population growth and decreasing resources to support it.¹⁰¹

These frightening events inspired a movement among activists who aimed to preserve the planet and its natural resources.¹⁰²

The ecology movement was a reaction against the destruction of nature taking place both in the United States and Vietnam. Young activists protesting the war in Vietnam found unity in supporting environmental health. For counterculturalists, environmentalism offered an alternative to other subcultures that by the end of the 1960s were divided over differing issues; it unified counterculturalists who had lost a sense of community within other movements. In addition, during this era the federal government was particularly paranoid about any form of rebellion and was quick to react to countercultural movements. With the ecology movement and its genuinely peaceful ideology, however, the government could find little to object to. On the first Earth Day in 1969, even President Nixon praised environmentalism as patriotic: “No one can say that a man trying to save the American environment does not love his country.”¹⁰³ Environmentalism was something that could bring people together and counterculturalists who felt rejected by American society could take comfort in being a citizen of the planet. Environmentalism was a point of convergence for New Left critics of hierarchy and corporate capitalism and the counterculture’s rejection of possessive individualism and social conformity. Environmentalism was rooted both in radicalism and in popular reactions to the well-publicized risks associated with pollution and pesticides.¹⁰⁴

The People’s Park Take-Over

The ecology movement came to the forefront of the national consciousness after the People’s Park take over on April 20, 1969 (pictured in figures 9 and 10). On the morning of the twentieth, several hundred members of the makeshift Robin Hood’s Park Commission invaded an empty lot belonging to the University of California at Berkeley. Here they got together to plant vegetable seeds and trees and to share food, wine, drugs, and music. The counterculturalists

present at the take-over encouraged participants to seize back any open land and to plant food crops. This event inspired the American Federation of Teachers to organize a teach-in to confront questions “about the quality of our lives, about the deterioration of our environment, and about the propriety and legitimacy of the uses to which we put our land.”¹⁰⁵ The park take-over instigated a violent reaction from California governor at the time, Ronald Reagan, who sent in the National Guard to occupy all of Berkeley during the peaceful protests. These actions encouraged activists even further, one stating that “It is the way of the world! Trees are anarchic; concrete is Civilization.”¹⁰⁶ Protesters were angry over the Federal government’s priorities which appeared to value winning the Vietnam War over the health of people and the planet. Out of the People’s Park take-over came a new population of environmentalists concerned with the health of the planet to which food production was closely tied.

The protests in People’s Park joined student critics of the university and its military allies, counterculturalists and their community gardens, and environmental defenders.¹⁰⁷ These activists saw Americans’ neglect of the planet as indicators of their society’s broader shortcomings and they united under the goal of changing America’s interactions with their environment. In one article titled “Heap Good Garbage...The Story of Compost,” the author explains the connection between environmental concerns and politics:

This is a story about compost. So why am I wasting all this space ranting about schools and politics and money. Because it is the very framework of thinking and living which is the very reason why most people are NOT making compost today. It is the reason war is now being waged on the earth and on us by the profit-mongers and their quite willing consumer cohorts, the “silenced majority.”¹⁰⁸

Environmental activists believed that advocating for better treatment of the planet also would mean advocating for a healthier society in general. If more people were concerned with the environment, they would also be more receptive to change in other areas of society. These activists believed that Americans' self-centered attitude was at the root of all society's problems.

Ecology and the Organic Food Movement

Ecology allowed Americans to take actions that would yield immediate results. They argued that anyone could begin recycling or plant their own vegetable garden to lessen their environmental footprint. Among environmentalists, organic gardens became the symbol of a more peaceful and cooperative society. They believed local food was better both for the environment and the community.¹⁰⁹ "Organic" became a defining term for the movement due to both members' food choices and their love of all things natural and close to the earth.

Environmental activists believed that responsible food consumption is equivalent to responsible action in nature because of the political power it holds. In other words, everyone must eat therefore, food issues are everyone's concern. They also believed that responsible consumption is important both for communities as well as for the health of the planet. The ecology movement rediscovered organic foods which inspired a parallel organic food movement devoted to advocating for chemical-free food production.

Mass-produced food was one of the areas of American society targeted by environmentalists. With the environmental crisis of 1969 came increasing skepticism toward industrial food production. Food sold as a commodity by impersonal businesses added to this skepticism as Americans began to ask whether they could trust the food they were eating. "Plastic" became a negative term given to anything that was produced industrially or artificially

without regard for the environment. This included Twinkies and Wonder Bread, both of which decompose at an alarmingly slow rate, versus the rice, cheese, beans, lentils, and brown bread of the counterculture which radicals praised for their closeness to the earth. Natural foods were embraced by the environmentally conscious subculture which valued wholesome meals made with care over foods processed in a plant. Once again, the symbolism of bread was embraced by the subculture which circulated the phrase, “If a man bakes bread with indifference, he bakes a bitter loaf that feeds but half his hunger.”¹¹⁰ Food made from scratch represented the rejection of capitalism and values that placed importance on land, community and health.

Environmentalists sought to enjoy food in its most natural form, as it was grown on the earth. The organic movement emphasized the advantages of natural foods over artificial ones, and for members of the movement, changing the way we produce and consume food was a part of a larger project of social reform.¹¹¹ Reformers linked the perils of artificial food to wider social ills. Some radicals argued that learning to grow organic produce would protect Americans from inevitable disasters to come in the future as a result of industrialism. J.I. Rodale, the founder of the publication *Organic Farming and Gardening*, declared that organic production and consumption would protect communities from technological domination: “While today being organic is a comfort—an added plus that gives texture and meaning to life—tomorrow being organic could be the only alternative to a technological concentration-camp style of life.”¹¹² The idea was that when technology failed, only those who knew how to subsist off of the land in a sustainable manner would survive.

Food choice, organic advocates consequently believed, was tightly linked to social reform. Buying organic produce was a simple act that would foster a food system that was both economically and socially sustainable.¹¹³ The organic food movement’s influence spread across

countercultural groups. At first the words “natural” and “organic” were used exclusively to describe chemical-free fruits and vegetables but they quickly became terms used to describe a certain lifestyle. In 1974, a writer for *Organic Farming and Gardening* describes living organically as “a style of being, a way of coping, a learning process. It’s eating for health, cooperating with nature, recycling wastes. It’s making [do] with less and *enjoying* it.”¹¹⁴ Organic advocates clearly supported the countercultural mantra that “the personal is political.” They believed that personal choices about how to farm or garden and what to eat would bring about social change where it was needed. Growing and consuming organic foods both subverted big agriculture and big government while also freeing individuals from “unnatural” constraints.¹¹⁵

Diet for a Small Planet: Environmental Vegetarianism

Frances Moore Lappé’s *Diet for a Small Planet* published in 1971, was the first book to equate diet with environmentalism. The book’s central concern was maximizing the earth’s potential to meet the nutritional needs of people while minimizing disruption of the earth in order to sustain it. Lappé advocated for vegetarianism as an ecological act. Belasco references Lappé’s book as the foundation for the ecology movement and the importance of vegetarianism to the movement: “*Diet for a Small Planet* soon became *the* vegetarian text of the ecology movement...by feeding vegetable protein (grain, soy) to animals rather than directly to humans, Americans were wasting scarce protein resources at a time when much of the world went hungry.”¹¹⁶ Lappé supported vegetarianism as a way to reduce our negative impact on the earth and notes that “the act of putting into your mouth what the earth has grown is perhaps your most direct interaction with the earth.”¹¹⁷ In the book, Lappé focused her energy on showing that Americans could get a sufficient amount of protein from plants if they made an effort to alter

their diet appropriately. Lappé introduced the idea of protein combinations where consumers could get a well-rounded dose of proteins from plants through specific combinations of foods—for example, beans and rice. The book included recipes for innovative dishes such as walnut cheddar loaf and soybean casserole. In addition, Lappé noted that during the 1970s, not only were people abroad dying from hunger, but there were also Americans suffering from a lack of protein consumption while American livestock were fed huge amounts of grains containing protein. She noted that growing vegetables and grains utilized far fewer acres than livestock in terms of protein per acre. The most extreme example was spinach which produces twenty-six times more protein per acre than beef.¹¹⁸

Another important argument Lappé made for vegetarianism was that foods lower on the food chain, such as vegetables, absorbed far fewer chemicals (aka DDT) than did foods higher on the food chain like fatty animals. Along the food chain, chemicals built up and concentrated into fatty animals causing a much higher level of toxicity in animal products than plant products. The author also noted that the chemical poisons of the time were organochlorines which are oil based and accumulated in fat. If a consumer wanted to avoid high levels of toxic chemicals, Lappé encouraged them to take up a vegetarian diet.¹¹⁹ This idea of eating low on the food chain was adopted by many environmentalists concerned with both environmental and human health. With the publication of *Diet for a Small Planet* came a new way of thinking about food consumption in America. Lappé's book inspired Americans to consider the effects of their food choices on the environment and in every area of their lives. This work has positively affected American food culture because it simply lays out an extremely important argument for vegetarianism and conscious food consumption.

Wendell Berry and New Agrarianism

Wendell Berry is another extremely influential environmental writer who has had a vast impact on contemporary nature writers, including Michael Pollan. He began publishing essays in the 1960s about the relationship between Americans and the land but has not been as widely read as would be expected given his influence on environmental thought. Berry's essays written during the 1960s and 1970s most frequently discussed the benefits of small-family farming both for the land and people. What made Berry different from other environmental writers of the time, who tended to focus mainly on the preservation of the wilderness, is that he concentrated on agriculture and the ways in which humans could use nature without destroying it. In essence Berry was, and continues to be, an agrarian writer advocating for a resurgence of local values that prioritize the community and land over economics. He believed that in terms of nature, Americans had always been conflicted between exploitation, with a focus on efficiency and profit, and nurture, with a focus on the health of the land, the individual, the family, the community and the country.¹²⁰ Today, Berry continues to express that "agrarian concerns are everyone's concerns and that agrarian politics are everyone's politics" because we are all members of the living community and earth's natural cycle, and because we all must eat.¹²¹

During the 1970s, Berry advocated for responsible use of land in small-family farming. Berry also spoke of the importance of food in the discussion of nature. Many of Berry's ideas were rooted in the work of Sir Albert Howard, a British agronomist. The most influential of Howard's works stated that "eaters must understand that eating takes place inescapably in the world, that it is inescapably an agricultural act, and that how we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used."¹²² One scholar discusses Berry's take on this idea:

There are innumerable ways in which we can take control of our lives and communities, starting perhaps with Berry's idea that we should "eat responsibly." If one of the things we desire out of our politics is to gain (or regain) some control over our communities, then new agrarian theory begins to map how this might be so. "The condition of the passive consumer of food," Berry writes, "is not a democratic condition. One reason to eat responsibly is to live free."¹²³

Berry's work argued for the importance of responsible consumption of food for the community as well for the health of the planet. He argued that our eating habits directly reflect our views on the environment and that we had to think about what we were consuming if we wanted to bring about real change in the United States with regards to both our own health and that of the planet.

Berry additionally argues that much of the anxiety Americans felt around food during the 1960s and 1970s, and continue to feel today, also stemmed from knowledge about the production of our food. The industrialization of our food system had left many Americans during this period feeling like they had lost control over an elemental part of their lives. The issue of factory farming was at the forefront of this discussion, and Berry frequently discussed the perils of negligent farming practices in his works. Berry also argues that much of the anxiety Americans felt towards their food and the environment was due to a lack of a stable eating culture in America. He believed that Americans' ever-changing food culture with its fad diets and convenience foods caused us to lose sight of what good, nutritious food was. A stable eating culture, where members of a culture all eat a similar cuisine based off of a restricted number of staple foods, limits consumers' choices making eating healthier easier and more intuitive. This argument continues to be discussed today by authors such as Pollan. Berry's solution to Americans' lack of a stable eating culture, which eventually made up the ideology of New

Agrarianism, was rooted in a belief that Americans needed to connect to their food production either by growing it themselves or through participating in a community supported agriculture program that would allow them to know their local farmers better. Through the establishment of this closeness to food production, Berry believed Americans could foster healthier relationships within their local communities, with the environment and with their food.¹²⁴

Women and the Ecology Movement: Vegetarianism and EcoFeminism

Women played a significant role within the ecology movement. Because women have traditionally been linked to nature more than men have, environmental activism was one arena where women acted on the frontlines during the late-1960s and early-1970s.¹²⁵ Vegetarianism, an important aspect of environmentalism, was also embraced by many members of the feminist movement. Within the feminist movement vegetarianism was used as both a means for expression and as a tool to actively protest the patriarchal systems in American society. In *Sisterhood is Forever*, activist Robin Morgan recalls an argument she made in a 1979 magazine article encouraging feminists to embrace vegetarianism:

“If it is our goal to live in a world without oppression, where does meat-eating fit into this vision?” Meat-eating becomes a central concern because of its many overlapping exploitative practices...I have argued that opposition to vegetarianism in patriarchal culture occurs because of the *sexual politics of meat*: meat-eating is associated with virility, seen as symbolic of masculinity (meat advertisements now position animals in classic pornographic poses so that men can indirectly enjoy the exploitation of women without even being honest about it.)¹²⁶

Feminists recognized that to improve their own place in society, they had to live what they preached. If American women did not want to be objectified and mistreated by men, they could not do the same to animals. Advertisements like the one mentioned by Morgan (figures 12 and 13 give examples) made it all too clear that patriarchal society equated women and animals. Feminists embraced vegetarian diets to protest patriarchal systems and to protest the mistreatment of animals, which included negligent farming practices. They believed that meat production and meat-eating was another way in which American society oppressed women and encouraged them to oppress animals in return. The politics of meat in the context of feminism is an issue that took hold later in the 1980s and is still discussed today.

Ecofeminism, a movement established in 1974 and stemming out of the environmental movement, also focused on violence against women and animals as well as the destruction of the earth itself.¹²⁷ Ecofeminists both contested and validated the idea that women were closer to nature than men. In her famous article “Goodbye to All That,” printed in New York’s underground paper the *Rat* after it was seized by a group of feminists, Robin Morgan articulates women’s complicated relationship to environmental thought and activism:

Goodbye to a beautiful new ecology movement that could fight to save us all if it would stop tripping off women as earthmother types of frontier chicks, if it would *right now* cede leadership to those who have *not* polluted the planet because that action implies power and women haven’t *had* any power in about 5,000 years, cede leadership to those whose brains are as tough and clear as any man’s but whose bodies are also unavoidably aware of the locked-in relationship between humans and their biosphere—the earth, the tides, the atmosphere, the moon. Ecology is no big shtick if you’re a woman—it’s always been there...Goodbye to the New Nation and Earth People’s Park for that matter,

conceived by men, announced by men, led by men—doomed before birth by the rotting seed of male supremacy transplanted into fresh soil. Was it my brother who listed human beings among the *objects* that would easily be available after the Revolution: “Free grass, free food, *free women*, free acid, free clothes, etc.?”¹²⁸

During this time, ecofeminism was in its beginning stages, but it drew from history and the traditional tie between women and the earth. As a whole, ecofeminists sought to undermine the idea that men could be equated with culture while women were more similar to nature. However, conflicting views emerged as women debated whether to embrace their earth-mother image which allotted them a certain amount of power within the ecology movement or to reject this image which supported the men/women, society/nature, and reason/emotion dualisms.

Conclusion

The Ecology Movement, while arguably the least radical movement of the era, has had some of the longest lasting effects of all the countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s. By firmly establishing the connection between the health of the environment and food consumption, environmentalists created a new way of thinking about food during this era. Some of the most important legacies of this movement have been the organic food industry and Americans’ acknowledgment that their food choices have a direct impact on the environment. This movement was instrumental in conveying the interconnectedness of food choice with political and social consciousness. By emphasizing the importance of sustainable food production and conscious food choice, the ecology movement successfully used food to change American food culture for the better.

Figure 9: “Making the Park,” May 1969 (People’s Park Archives, <http://www.peoplespark.org/69gall1.html>)



Figure 10: “Enjoying the Park,” May 1969 (People’s Park Archive, <http://www.peoplespark.org/69gall2.html>)



Figure 11: Defending the park from National Guards, May 1969, (People's Park Archives, <http://www.peoplespark.org/69gall8.html>)



Figure 12 (left): Hamburger Advertisement (Carol J. Adams, *The Pornography of Meat*, 2003.)
Figure 13 (right): Pork Advertisement (Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 2010.)



Conclusion

Throughout American history, food has consistently played a central role in activism. As early as the Boston Tea Party up until today's Occupy Movement, American's have relied on food to express discontent with society and to display allegiance to certain beliefs. As the three case studies have demonstrated, food can be used as a tool for social activism. The effectiveness of food for social change however, varies between movements.

The most effective use of food among counterculturalists of the 1960s and 1970s was within the ecology movement. Conscious consumption of food for the betterment of the planet is an idea that was introduced by the Ecology Movement and which has remained in American food culture. The second most effective use of food was by the Black Panthers and Civil Rights activists. They recognized the centrality of food to a community and the ways in which peoples can be oppressed by hunger. Today community organizers are working in low-income neighborhoods to improve healthy food access. Although the back-to-the-land, commune and co-op founders may have been the most enthusiastic good food advocates during the 1960s and 1970s, many of the subcultures they established were short-lived. Most communes ceased to exist beyond the 1970s; however, the movement did leave some lasting influences on American food culture. The final section of this research will examine the legacies of the three movements that are in existence today to evaluate exactly how influential and effective the movements' uses of food in the 1960s and 1970s actually were.

Legacy of the Movements: American Food Culture Today

Since the 1960s and 1970s, American food culture has changed dramatically in some areas and has remained static in others. Today there is much more activism surrounding actual

food issues than there was during the 1960s and 1970s. The current obesity epidemic has inspired many doctors and scholars to revisit food issues in discussing the declining health of Americans and in proposing ways to remedy the broken American food system.

Despite the counterculture's short life-span, it has left some important cultural changes that remain apparent today. The countercuisine of the youth counterculture has arguably had the greatest impact of all the countercuisines of the 1960s and 1970s on America's mainstream food culture. Health foods, and especially natural and organic foods, have become extremely popular and have entered the mainstream American eating culture. Organic is no longer just for crunchy, granolas but also for cautious moms. Natural and organic foods are now sold in every grocery store. Food justice advocates are working to make organic food more readily available to lower-income groups as well and to close the food-gaps that still exist in American society. In addition, many alternative businesses created during the 1960s and 1970s are still operating and continue to gain popularity as Americans seek to support small businesses such as local grocery stores, coops and restaurants.

As in every community, food continues to be an important element of African American culture. Soul food is still embraced by Southerners and Northerners alike and barbequing has now become an American pastime. There has also been a recent upsurge in the number of chefs and cookbook writers of the African American community attempting to make soul food that is healthier. Since his days as a Black Panther Party leader, Bobby Seale has become a cookbook writer and enthusiastic barbeque advocate. In a 1987 interview Seale explains what his work with the Black Panthers and his new career have in common:

"I barbecued all through the Black Panther Party days," Seale said. "Everyone knows that I was the organizer, chairman and founder of the Black Panther Party. But no one knows

that I was also the Black Panther Party's top cook. I was barbecuing for my fellow Black Panther Party members all the time." Asked why the nation never became aware of this, Seale said: "J. Edgar Hoover, rest his racist soul, was more interested in stereotyping me as a threat to the internal security of America than in letting people know that I was a barbecue expert."¹²⁹

Seale recognized the importance of food to his own identity and to that of his community. In his cookbook/manifesto *Barbeque 'n with Bobby* published in 1988, Seale recalls his early interest in barbeque inspired by his Uncle Tom's restaurant and his later interest in food from an anthropological viewpoint. In college Seale wrote a paper about the African roots of his favorite soul food dishes. He came to learn that many food-related words incorporated into African American dialect originated from West African words for example; "yams" originally meant "to eat" in Senegalese and "gumbo" was a Bantu word for "okra."¹³⁰ For Seale, these connections enhanced African Americans' relationship to their heritage and encouraged him to pursue his love of soul food and barbeque. Bobby Seale continues to barbeque to this day and still claims to make the best barbeque around.

Much of the ideology behind the Black Panther free food programs also exists in food efforts being made today. Hunger as a means of oppression is now something that many community organizers are aware of and they now acknowledge the detrimental effects inadequate food distribution can have on a community. Efforts have been made to bolster individuals of low-income communities by allowing food stamp users to buy local, healthy produce at farmers markets. This program has both improved the accessibility of healthy produce for low-income families and has provided additional support for local farm economies.

Urban and community gardens are also making a resurgence in American cities to offer fresh produce to people living in the city. Many neighborhoods are turning abandoned lots into community gardens where residents can plant crops on their own plots of land or share spaces with their neighbors. Programs, such as City Slicker Farms in Oakland, California, have established community gardens to provide low-income neighborhoods with fresh produce and to encourage a more just food system. This type of garden program is typically supported by volunteers and the produce grown is distributed at donation-based weekly markets to ensure that all residents can afford the healthy produce; no one is turned away due to a lack of funds. Anyone can volunteer and those with no gardening knowledge quickly learn to grow their own good, allowing for greater self-sufficiency in the community.¹³¹ Just like the Panther's free food programs, the gardens offer low-income community members extra support in providing healthy food for their families so they can be successful in other areas of their lives.

The most prominent legacy of 1960s and 1970s food activism was left by the ecology movement whose influence can be seen everywhere in American society. Today farmers markets, CSAs, and community and school gardens have sprung up in every community. The number of farmers markets in the United States has sky-rocketed recently as American consumers have become more conscious about sustainable farming practices and the importance of supporting local farms. Wendell Berry has noted not only the prevalence and benefits of farmers markets in the United States today, but also the potential they hold to create an agrarian resurgence:

I know from friends and neighbors and from my own family that it is now possible for farmers to sell at a premium to local customers such products as 'organic' vegetables, 'organic' beef and lamb and pasture-raised chickens. This market is being made by the

exceptional goodness and freshness of the food, by the wish of urban consumers to support their farming neighbors, and by the excesses and abuses of the corporate food industry. This, I think, gives the pattern of an economic revolt that not only is possible but is happening.¹³²

Berry recognizes the possibility of a revolution in society as consumers choose to express their alliances through food choice and take interest in supporting responsible food producers.

Another visible strand of the ecology movement is the proliferation of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs. CSAs first came to the United States in 1986 and have recently become extremely popular among urban consumers looking to make responsible food choices. CSA programs consist of gatherings of nonfarm families and individuals who contract with farmers to grow fruits and vegetables. Members share the costs of production with the farmers including the risks inherent to farming, such as loss of crops to disease or inclement weather. Sometimes CSA members volunteer on the farms or even contribute labor by working in the fields, sorting produce, and arranging deliveries and pick-ups. Throughout the growing season CSA members receive weekly boxes of produce from the farm they have subscribed to. CSA farms almost always refrain from using inorganic pesticides and fertilizer and having subscribers oftentimes allows them to keep their prices reasonable despite the high market costs of organic produce. CSA programs are beneficial to farmers in that they have a reliable source of income all year long and they are able to distribute the risks of farming among the various subscribers.¹³³

School gardens, once a somewhat common addition to the American schoolyard during the early twentieth-century, had become virtually extinct until fairly recently. In 1995, Alice Waters, the world-renowned chef and founder of the restaurant Chez Panisse in Berkeley,

California, started the Edible Schoolyard at Martin Luther King Middle School, causing a resurgence of the idea of “edible education.”¹³⁴ While planning the garden and fundraising for its establishment, Waters describes the philosophy behind the project that very much reflects the vision of New Agrarianism which was discussed in the ecology chapter. She states that

The core of the intended learning experience for the students is an understanding of the cycle of relationships that exist amongst all of our actions. The tangerine peel that gets tossed into the compost pile becomes a feast for the organisms that will turn it into humus, which enriches the soil to help produce the fruit and vegetables that the students will harvest, prepare, serve, and eat. The health and well-being which they derive from the garden is recycled back into their attitudes, relationships, and viewpoints. Thus the discarded peel becomes the vehicle which provides tomorrow’s city planners, software engineers, artists, and master gardeners their first adult understanding of the organic concept of interconnectedness.¹³⁵

This notion of interconnectedness is a fundamental element of both Environmentalism and New Agrarianism. Fortunately the necessity of this work is being recognized. School gardens are now springing up all over the country and many garden programs are establishing new curricula to integrate the gardens and the produce grown into all facets of student’s learning. Michelle Obama has spearheaded efforts to encourage Americans to lead healthier lifestyles that include exercise and healthy eating habits as well. She established the White House Garden to provide her own family with home-grown food and she is working to encourage more national garden and exercise programs in schools with her Let’s Move campaign.

The importance of knowing where your food comes from is a notion that has reemerged in recent years and which has taken hold throughout the United States. Americans are just as, if

not more conscious about environmental issues, including responsible food production and consumption, today than they were in the 1960s and 1970s. Vegetarianism and conscious eating practices are extremely common. Writers such as Michael Pollan and Eric Schlosser have inspired many Americans to alter their food choices to bring change to the American food system which unfortunately remains backward.

The relationship between women and food has not change very much since the 1960s and 1970s. Unfortunately men continue to dominate the discussion about food in the United States. While women's rights have improved since the previous era, the discussion of women and food has very much remained the same. A recent article written by New York University Food Studies scholar, Marion Nestle, discussed a *New York Times* contest calling on food ethics experts to explain why we should eat meat. The paper elected some of the most prominent food writers in the Unites States who all happened to be white males and who all promote, to some degree, meat-eating.¹³⁶ This example demonstrates that Americans remain somewhat close-minded when it comes to women and food despite women's advances elsewhere in society.

While much has changed in United States since the radical period of the 1960s and 1970s, food continues to be a central aspect of American Society. By tackling food in its different stages, whether it was food production, distribution, preparation, or consumption, activist groups did change American society for the better in some way or another. While the ecology movement may have had more lasting impacts than the youth counterculture, every movement has had an influence on the current food culture in America. The groups innovatively used food as a tool for social change before discussions surrounding food had even started. Because of the work of the counterculturalists of the 1960s and 1970s, Americans are much more aware of the effects food can have on a community and of its power to transform society.

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