

**THE FOODS WE EAT:
CONSTELLATING WORKING-CLASS EXPERIENCES**

By

Kelli Renea Gill

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy—Master of Arts

2018

ABSTRACT

THE FOODS WE EAT: CONSTELLATING WORKING-CLASS EXPERIENCES

By

Kelli Renea Gill

This thesis explores food symbols by constellating working-class experiences. The challenge of examining working-class food symbols is not in identification of the symbols, but rather in understanding how certain foods come to represent certain stories. This thesis identifies and analyzes three foods (white bread, casseroles, and greens), to explore the commonalities among working-class foods. Utilizing storytelling as methodology, this thesis demonstrates the messy reality of meaning-making. By placing a variety of working-class stories in context with one another, this thesis explores the encounters that shape my understanding of working-class culture. Encounters with stories (through experiences, narratives), other people (or relations), and the places and spaces I inhabit. In constellating my own encounters through each food, I examine not just what makes a food working-class or a symbol, but I also reflect on my own identity as a working-class person.

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Baylor, for listening and loving me always.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my family, for providing me the space and support to pursue anything. To my mother, for telling me to go where I am needed. To my father, for reminding me daily of the weather back home. To my sister, your phone calls ease my homesickness every time.

Thank you to my committee, Dr. Dànielle Nicole Devoss, Dr. Stuart Blythe, and Dr. Julie Lindquist, for your support in this project. Dànielle, thank you for your mentorship—for your attention to even the smallest of details. Stuart, thank you for your kind words and for patiently helping me navigate theory. Julie, thank you for your questions—your work allowed me to see the knowledge produced in any place, through any people.

Thank you to Analisa, Autumn, and Jay. Your company has made this journey all the better.

Lastly, to the places which have left their mark on my life—Whitton, Canton, Athens, Denton, and Dallas—I continue to learn from my time there long after I am gone.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Working-Class Food Stories</i>	2
CHAPTER 1: FRAMING AND BACKGROUND	5
<i>Food as more than just Food: A Humanities Approach to Food Studies</i>	7
<i>Researching Food within its Cultural Context</i>	9
Storytelling	12
Relations	14
Space and Place	15
<i>Modeling a Cultural Rhetorics Framework for Food Projects</i>	17
CHAPTER 2: MESSY METHODOLOGIES	19
<i>Constellating Origin Stories</i>	24
<i>Combining Memories and Research</i>	26
<i>Storytelling as Method</i>	28
Sharing Stories (Telling)	28
Observing Stories (Listening & Retelling)	29
<i>Mapping my Methods</i>	31
<i>Building a Heuristic: What is a Working-Class Food Symbol?</i>	37
<i>A Heuristic for Working-class Foods</i>	39
CHAPTER 3: WHITE BREAD	44
<i>A Story Retold</i>	45
<i>White Bread/White Trash: Exploring Media Symbols</i>	46
<i>Shifting Narratives: How Stories Shape Food Icons</i>	48
<i>Food Myths: Discourses of Health, Morals, and Shame</i>	50
<i>Defining Versatility in the Working-Class Kitchen</i>	53
CHAPTER 4: CASSEROLES	58
<i>Making-Meaning through Comfort Food</i>	59
<i>Overview</i>	60
<i>Composing Casseroles: How Construction reflects Values</i>	61
Ingredients	62
Time	63
<i>Feeding a Crowd</i>	69
<i>Funeral Potatoes: Comforting Others through Food</i>	72
<i>Considerations for the Casserole</i>	74
CHAPTER 5: GREENS	76
<i>Neiman Marcus and Collard Greens</i>	77
<i>Classed Spaces</i>	77

<i>Where Poor People Shop</i>	82
<i>Land-bound Foods: Making Meaning through Place</i>	84
CONCLUSION	88
<i>Limitations</i>	89
<i>Future Work</i>	90
Naming Working-class Encounters	90
Exploring Food Rhetorics	91
<i>A Final Food Story</i>	92
BIBLIOGRAPHY	95

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Visual Map of Processing and Identifying Working-class Foods	32
Figure 2: Visual Representation of Meaning Making	35
Figure 3: Common Factors That Determine Working-class Foods	39
Figure 4: Growing up Poor Meme	55
Figure 5: Simple Quiche Recipe Card. Written by Debbie Gill	66
Figure 6: Map of the North Park Center	78
Figure 7: Tweet by Thomas L. Strickland	83

INTRODUCTION

It's Saturday night, and we're wedged in a small apartment a few miles down the road from the university. All five of us are barely arm's length away from each other in the kitchen. Analisa is chopping onions. Every few minutes one of us takes a few steps towards the stove, leans over the pot and speculates on its contents. We're making sweet potato chili. Having dinner with a few of my cohort members is a pretty standard occurrence. When my husband, Baylor, and I moved to Michigan we hosted dinner with my classmates regularly—it often felt like survival. We clung to each other's company in the way that new graduate students tend to. Talk turns to food.

We're discussing chili. This is my first time eating a vegetarian chili. Back in Texas, chili is mostly meat, tomatoes, and spices—never beans. Tonight, beans are the meat.

Autumn starts to tell a story about when she visited Oklahoma this past summer, where Jay grew up and how her family couldn't believe she'd never had canned chili.

What? Wolf brand, Hormel if you can't find Wolf, no beans, Texas-style. Canned chili over Fritos and cheese was a staple in my house. Sometimes you would even dump the chili into a bag of Fritos, referred to affectionately as "a walking taco."

Stories about home and the food we ate growing up start to unravel. About how picky our fathers were. Jay started talking about how her dad would only eat bland foods. The star meal being tater tot casserole. Autumn agreed. They ate a lot of potato based hot dishes growing up...and green bean casserole.

Analisa chimes in, "Every time my mom was away was hot dog night. Me and my brother Tor were always excited, because my mother never let us have food like that." Her dad

grew up poor, they ate a lot of hotdogs, and she always thought it was funny that that was what he cooked for them when their mother wasn't there.

Baylor mentioned that his dad also grew up very poor, but for a while had the opposite reaction. He didn't like certain foods, because they were "poor people food." His dad refused to eat peanut butter until he started dating my husband's mom. She loved peanut butter and her family was rich. It was like her opinion finally disassociated the food with his family's income. He ate peanut butter all the time after that.

The conversation spun out after that, in the way that conversations among groups tend to. A string of associated foods started to be listed, with nodding heads we all confirmed these were *the foods* we grew up with. Hot dogs, casseroles, Jiffy corn bread, lots of potatoes... In those moments, over food, about food we seemed to learn so much about each other.

What did I take away from this conversation? Though we were discussing food, there seemed to be so much more to what was being said. This story is much more than a night with friends. It is a demonstration of how people connect through food. In that moment I felt the connection, a feeling of belonging, but what I want to know is *how*. How do stories like this one demonstrate the dynamic and rhetorical nature of food?

Working-Class Food Stories

I'm interested in exploring how certain foods come to symbolize narratives—particularly working-class narratives. It is no accident that a conversation about canned chili turned into a conversation about poor people foods and the ways we were exposed to those foods growing up. The challenge of exploring working-class food symbols is not in identification of the symbols—the story above demonstrates how quickly we can point towards foods that we feel represent

some aspect of a working-class life. Rather, the challenge is in understanding *how* certain foods come to represent certain stories. How does a material object like food come to symbolize a certain experience that transcends just basic need?

My interest in working-class food stems from my family's relationship with food. I grew up in a low-income household. My father was a carpenter, my mom a housekeeper, substitute teacher, and janitor among many other jobs. Food was very central to our family and where we lived, a small farming community named Whitton in East Texas. It would not be unusual for our dinner table to have fresh tomatoes from our garden alongside spam, collard greens next to Kraft macaroni and cheese, or fried squash next to frozen chicken nuggets. Pairings that all demonstrate how food can be considered "poor people" food, but for very different reasons. The latter more similar to the food my friends referenced in the opening story—packaged, cheap, low quality food, and the former a poor food only in certain communities. To us, only rich people would *buy* greens or tomatoes. Why buy something you could grow yourself?

I share my background, because in connecting food from my childhood to larger working-class narratives I want to recognize how my experiences differ from other working-class homes. I hope to seek out moments of commonality among working-class food stories, but I realize that there are many factors that impact the food we eat such as region, income, race, traditions, and availability. Our opening story demonstrates these factors well. While each person mentioned similar foods or related to the stories we shared about our families—we did not all grow up in a working-class home. We each came from different states, income brackets, and political backgrounds. Sometimes the differences were expressed through declarative statements, for example, Analisa never having eaten canned chili. Other times they were positioned—my husband explaining that his father grew up very poor, but that he did not. These differences were

not positioned as arguments though (over what a working-class food was) or for show (as if it were a contest of who grew up poorest). They were simply stories shared among friends.

However, we can see the way food is framed rhetorically in daily conversation, and how these statements point towards the complexity that surrounds our food stories and experiences.

In sharing my food stories, as a person with a working-class, rural background I want to work *towards* an explanation of the rhetorical nature of food and the narratives they symbolize. I acknowledge that any criteria I create for working-class food symbols is a localized definition based on my experience—it is created, though, with an understanding that there are working-classes, food stories, and food narratives that are unique and might resonate with some people, but not be universal for all.

CHAPTER 1: FRAMING AND BACKGROUND

As I embark on this task—to examine the rhetorical nature of food and the working-class narratives they symbolize—I will be leaning on food stories (such as those referenced in the opening of this thesis) and food scholarship (texts that are formally published). In this chapter, I will be providing background to my thesis around food studies scholarship and building an argument towards a Cultural Rhetoric framework. I want to begin with a discussion of current food studies scholarship while addressing how the field could benefit from a Cultural Rhetorics methodology (which I will establish in this section and demonstrate in this thesis).

As an interdisciplinary topic, food studies scholarship falls across a broad spectrum and does not necessarily have a central location, but here I would like to outline two potential reasons for this. First, food can be researched from multiple disciplines and in multiple ways. Second, many scholars do not study food from within a “food studies” department or even publish in food specific journals such as *Gastronomica*, *Food, Culture, and Society*, or *Foodways and Food Studies*. Rather many scholars publish in journals recognized by their discipline, thus their scholarship must meet the demands of *both* their field *and* a broader community of food scholars. This means that food is not often referred to as a research area, but rather a special topic.

For some scholars, their food research might be a single article in a prominent journal in their field (such as Mahlhauser and Schafer’s *Women and Language* article, “The Daily Gas: Rhetoric, Bodies, and Beano” or Elizabeth Fleitz’s *Present Tense* article, “Cooking Codes: Cookbook Discourses as Women’s Rhetorical Practices”). Other scholars might organize a special issue focusing on food (such as *The Community Literacy Journal*’s 2015 issue, “Community Food Literacies”). More might approach food as part of a method or discussion, but not as the sole topic of a research project (such as Kristin Arola’s work on rice harvesting as a

lesson for slow, digital composition). Food scholarship is often presented at conferences but might only be represented at national meetings that have more space for niche topics (such as the presence of food panels at the Popular Culture Association's National (PCA) Conferences¹, but not at regional conferences). Even more scholarship is located in less formal publishing spaces like blog posts (such as Dale Grauman's "Thinking Rhetorically about Ronald McDonald, the Hamburger-Happy Clown"). Lastly, the scattering of food research across a variety of disciplines with an infinite potential of foci means that food research is far more often published as chapters in anthologies or articles in special issues rather than as full-length books (such as *The Rhetoric of Food* and *Food, Feminisms, Rhetorics*).²

I share this information to not only situate my thesis within two research areas (food studies and Rhetoric and Composition), but to explain the choices in my thesis—to recognize that *who* is represented, cited, and referred to is based on a history of interdisciplinary work within a larger, scattered, research area. As a thesis on the rhetorical nature of food, I am tasked with meeting the standards of my discipline—Rhetoric and Composition—and honoring the scholarly work that has been produced about food across disciplines. I will do my best to make these choices clear through notation and positioning, but I ask that you, as my reader, be open and willing to follow along as I attempt to place these different disciplines in conversation with one another. I acknowledge that even in discipline specific work it is impossible to include *everyone*, but here the risk of exclusion is greater and in no way intentional. Within this next section I want to share who I am drawing from within food studies.

¹ To place this in perspective, the PCA has over 3,000 members, and this year (2018) food topics are represented by three panels consisting of nine presentations. There could be more represented in a different subject area that isn't labeled "food," but much like the search for food scholarship—when the panels are scattered they can be hard to locate.

² The examples I have chosen are explicitly those located within Rhet/Comp as a demonstration of my ties to the field—evidence that my topic is grounded in a deeper, disciplinary conversation. However, similar examples could be found in many disciplines.

Food as more than just Food: A Humanities Approach to Food Studies

To narrow the scope of this project, I focus here on a humanities approach to food studies. Drawing from *Gastronomica*, this approach seeks to understand “the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of food” (“About”). Studying food through these lenses depends on an understanding of food as not *just* a survival need—it relies on the agreement that food serves purposes in addition to nutrition, generally within the contexts of culture, community, and social hierarchy. As sociologist Alice P. Julier points out, “Meals provide a landscape from which to explore all manners of cultural and economic dilemmas. Decisions about whom to eat with, in what manner, and what kinds of food are inextricably tied to social boundaries” (Julier 2). Julier’s claim demonstrates food as a useful topic to explore class and culture, both central to a thesis about working-class food symbols. Many interdisciplinary food scholars argue that food acts as a symbol with meaning beyond materiality (Dejmanee, Lavis), as a form of communication (Stajcic, Stano) or as a visual symbol of status, identity, and creativity (Calefato et al, Campbell, Cronin, Jordan, Roe et al, Kniazeva and Venkatesh).³

To argue that food acts as a symbol is not new. Roland Barthes⁴ argued that food acts as “a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior” (Barthes 29). His recognition of food as symbolic meshes well with Saussure’s argument that symbols are never empty (68). Food as a signifier for complex meaning makes the idea of food as a tool for storytelling seem obvious. However, Barthes claim of food as communication is grounded in a narrative of food as a progression *from* function *to* form—an assumption that I view as not only inaccurate, but representative of a Western framework. To make his argument

³ This is in no way a complete list

⁴ This thesis is not grounded in structuralism or semiotics, but in food scholarship within the humanities (English, Communication, and Sociology especially) Barthes is highly cited for his work on food symbols and I choose to briefly recognize the role semiotics played in food scholarship. .

of food as a cultural symbol, Barthes repeats the narrative of a move from collecting food in the wild to using food as more than just survival (Barthes 30). Barthes argues that the use of “communication by way of food” happens *after* a foraging phase. Though I am drawing from many food scholars who cite and use Barthes’s text on food, I want to recognize that his narrative ignores the potential for food to be both a product and practice, survival and pleasure, material and immaterial. Additionally, it excludes the practices of indigenous scholars who are so integral to object-oriented rhetorics⁵.

A Western-centric narrative about food should be avoided if food scholars want to understand the ways that food acts as communication as both product and practice. If we want to create an accurate picture of the ways food is used to tell stories, we must move away from food narratives that do not recognize food (from seed to harvest to cooking and eating) as cultural sites of symbolic meaning-making⁶. In arguing that food is symbolic, we are urged by Schell and Rawson to take a transnational analytic approach that pays “particular attention [to] how...symbols and symbolic practices are appropriated, translated, and historicized” (62). We must shift away from traditional ways of understanding food (such as Barthes’s analysis) and move towards transnational food stories as suggested by the work of Royster and Kirsch. Foods, practices, and narratives that are located in multiple cultures, people, and communities that use food to eat *and* communicate. While this project may focus on working-class, rural food symbols, I want to recognize that these aren’t the *only* food stories. We must be skeptical of food literature that looks only to white examples of cooking literacy, to food studies that discuss

⁵ Due to the size of this project, there is not space to discuss at length the topic of object-oriented rhetorics or the specific work of indigenous authors, but I feel it is important to recognize the risks of excluding this scholarship altogether.

⁶ I refer to “meaning-making” as the way that individuals use food (and other rhetorical devices) to understand and make sense of their experiences, identity, and actions.

indigenous practices with scientific distance, and most importantly we must understand food within its cultural contexts. With this discussion of food studies in mind, I move now towards my primary framework—Cultural Rhetorics.

Researching Food within its Cultural Context

The previous section points towards a few concerns for food studies.

1. Many scholars are isolated in their disciplines, thus there is a need to bring that scholarship into conversation with one another.
2. As a foundational author in food scholarship for the humanities, Roland Barthes is often used as an anchor in research on food and communication, which can lead to Western-centric narratives about food that exclude the voices of indigenous scholars and others producing decolonial food scholarship.
3. Western-centric narratives reinforce a food binary of product vs practice, survival vs pleasure, materiality vs immateriality.
4. To avoid reinforcement of these binaries, we need to produce food scholarship that recognizes the existence of multiple food stories within their cultural context.

To address these concerns, I propose that food studies and Rhet/Comp scholarship be placed in conversation with one another through a Cultural Rhetorics framework. According to the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab, “A cultural rhetorics approach is meant to focus on how specific cultures are built around particular beliefs and practices, which lead that culture to value some things and not others” (1.2, Note 12). Thus, a Cultural Rhetorics approach would allow me to not only explore how working-class culture is formed around particular practices, but how those practices lead to valuing and symbolizing some foods over others. While currently there is no

published Cultural Rhetorics scholarship focusing on food⁷, this project is an attempt to develop and demonstrate a Cultural Rhetorics approach to food studies, which seeks to answer the four concerns outlined in this section.

This thesis will focus on three main aspects of a Cultural Rhetorics framework—storytelling, relations, and space and place. While Cultural Rhetorics as a discipline is linked to decolonial projects, the scholars of the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (CRTL) acknowledge that not all Cultural Rhetorics projects are decolonial (“Our Story Begins Here” *Enculturation*). I recognize that although this thesis is paying special attention to working-class stories (a community whose stories are underrepresented in both the academy and food media), these working-class stories are often authored by white people (with myself being one of them). In this chapter specifically, I will address this history by recognizing the ways food scholarship has (and still does) colonize, and the potential ways food scholars can disrupt this practice through a Cultural Rhetorics methodology. I believe for food scholars (and this project) framing food work through storytelling, relations, and space and place is a good place to start.

Looking at the four outlined concerns above, this thesis (1) places food studies in conversation with Cultural Rhetorics by bringing in stories from both disciplines, my personal life, and content online. (2) This thesis is not decolonial in nature but recognizes that who is cited matters. I will work to position myself and the stories I share within the context of systems of power, whiteness, and privilege. (3) Within this thesis I seek to disrupt food binaries, by exploring a more nuanced understanding of food. (4) As I share food stories, I will trace their usage within working-class spaces while sharing others’ stories as well.

⁷ There are currently some cultural rhetorics projects utilizing food underway such as Jaquetta Shade’s project, “Alisdayhv: A Cherokee Foodways Memoir,” Forthcoming with *Enculturation* and Santos Ramos’s project, “Making Chicanx Foodways: Rhetoric, Mexican Cooking & Cultural Continuation.”

I will demonstrate both through my own stories and the stories of others that food is rhetorical. I argue that taking a Cultural Rhetorics approach to food scholarships emphasizes the relations among food, the people, and the land it comes from. The relations among a type of food and its consumer⁸ tells a story. Lastly, a study of working-class, rural food symbols must acknowledge place and space as integral to making meaning through food. By focusing on these three aspects, this thesis recognizes that food acts as a complex symbol whose meaning is determined by our stories, our relations, and the spaces and places we (and our food) inhabits. In studying food through these Cultural Rhetorics concepts, we might ask, what stories are being told here, what are the relations, and where do we find them?

To demonstrate the usefulness of a Cultural Rhetorics (CR) approach, I want to move towards an analysis of three pieces of food studies scholarship. The analysis will serve to introduce my three key concepts (storytelling, relations, and space and place) and build a framework for the thesis overall. I present this analysis as a discussion—one that seeks to demonstrate that many scholars who study food within the humanities are already making CR moves, but simply not labeling it as Cultural Rhetorics⁹. By presenting this framework through food scholarship, I want to demonstrate the usefulness of Cultural Rhetorics to those outside the field of Rhetoric and Composition. I hope to situate each author within a CR conversation that I will later use to position my own stories about working-class food symbols.

⁸ Consumer here refers to a person who consumes food, rather than a economic definition of a consumer as a person who buys (although in some cases a person buying and then eating food acts as both)

⁹ The following sections are not to imply that food studies authors *should* have used a Cultural Rhetorics approach, which is discipline specific and very new to the field. Rather I want to reflect on the aspects of CR that would be useful to food studies scholars.

Storytelling

Storytelling is a vital aspect of Cultural Rhetorics work. As the scholars of the CRTL state, “The way we say it—if you're not practicing story, you're doing it wrong. Or, in traditional academic discourse: our primary methodology in this article is to tell stories” (1.1). Marvalene H. Hughes’s work in her article, “Soul, Black Women, and Food,” embodies the Cultural Rhetorics approach of story as method. To explain the importance of soul food in the Black community, she uses both personal and historical stories to recognize the importance of food in the formation of Black American identity. In one scene, Hughes describes her garden in relation to community. She states, “I noticed my garden was different from my neighbors’ garden. I had corn, black-eyed peas, squash, watermelon, string beans (“snap beans” as we learned back home), radishes, beets, green peas (“English beans”), and tomatoes (just like mom’s)” (Hughes 274). Here, Hughes gives subtle nods to community through the differences between her garden and her white neighbor’s. Phrases such as “as we learned back home” point towards the context of vegetable names. Hughes points out to us, her readers, that both “snap beans” and “English beans” bear different names depending on the community you belong to. Even tomatoes are defined within the context of family, *just like mom’s*. The garden represents not just food to be eaten, but has symbolic meaning stemming for the relations of Hughes to her family and to Black culture.

Hughes’s references to history and culture throughout the piece allow for her argument that soul food maintains its symbolic meaning even when eaten outside of Black homes. Soul food, according to Hughes, is a result of a complex history from Africa to America with undeniable ties to slavery. Hughes brings power relations into the story of soul food, because the colonial history of Black food made soul food symbolic for Black Americans. Without this

relation, soul food would not exist or hold a place in Black culture. Hughes argues that, “Black food is all soulful, too. All black-eyed peas are soulful whether prepared in a Black person’s kitchen, a white kitchen, or a Jewish kitchen. Just as Blacks have adopted Western behaviors, many aspects of the Black culture have been adopted by non-Blacks” (Hughes 275). Hughes’s recognition of the ways that food travel from one culture to another mirrors the transnational approach suggested by Schell and Rawson. Outside of the context of Black history, the Jewish kitchen or white kitchen may not realize the soulful nature of black-eyed peas, but to Hughes this does not erase its soulfulness. In fact, Hughes even provides us with a story of a friend who makes black-eyed peas during New Years, and when she asks why, he answers *I’m from the deep South* (275). Hughes argues that Southern food traditions are tied to the presence of Black women in white kitchens (as house slaves, servants, and maids). This story juxtaposed with the claim that black-eyed peas maintain their soulfulness even outside of Black communities points us, as readers, to reflect on how food symbols “...are appropriated, translated, and historicized” (Schell and Rawson 62) and how power relations affect those translations.

Power relations are at the root of Black food identity, but Hughes does not paint this as a weakness—but rather as an illustration of strength and creativity in Black communities. In reference to the makeup of soul food as “leftovers,” Hughes provides us with an example of food as both product and practice (a move away from Barthes’s claim that cultural meaning occurs beyond necessity). She states, “She cooked the portions of a hog that the master (and white America) discarded; she cooked the roots and leaves of a plant; she cooked leftovers. Blacks learn to enjoy the leftovers and turn them into something special” (Hughes 276). The ability to turn a survival method into “something special” shows food as function *and* form. Though Hughes admits that this form of survival is not necessary as Blacks move into both the suburbs

and middle class, she argues that soul food remains a symbol, the root of Black community. An important note though, is that while Hughes argues for the soul food as a symbol for Black food identity, the cooks in her stories are always distinctly female.

Relations

Hughes is not alone in her recognition of gendered cooking practices. Elizabeth Fleitz argues in “Cooking Codes: Cookbook Discourses as Women’s Rhetorical Practices” that kitchens are gendered spaces where women had to learn to develop cooking literacies. While Hughes only references women (mothers in particular) and gives her cook a female pronoun, Fleitz’s focus on gender is more explicit. The power relationship in the previous text was racial, while the current is gendered. As Daisy Levy states in “Our Story Begins Here,” “We believe studying those power relationships is central to the project of studying rhetorics” (1.2). Thus, both authors here are doing the work of pointing out power relations, the differences though is in the place and relation.

Fleitz begins by discussing the ownership of recipes. Quoting McDougall, she argues that recipes are distinctly communal. From oral practices of handing down recipes to online food texts, “the authors of and audience for cookery texts is primarily female” (Fleitz 2). Kitchens served as gendered spaces where women were allowed to develop unique literacy practices. Just as Hughes argues that meaning making happened out of necessity, the way women communicated in the kitchen became both a practice and a product. Fleitz argues that women developed cooking codes as a way to communicate without consequences from oppressive male figures. She states, “When the women’s language is coded, they are free to communicate with each other without fearing consequences from those outside the community” (Fleitz 3). Here

Fleitz is pointing towards community as a context for symbolic meaning. The identity and relations of women in the kitchen make up the rhetoric used when cooking. Fleitz recognizes here the power relations that led to cooking literacy practices. She argues that, “Because women’s literacy was devalued, women had to develop a new, useful literacy that would permit their communication practices to continue while fulfilling the duties of their gender role” (4). So once again we see a theme of survival and strength. Both authors (Fleitz and Hughes) show that paying attention to power relations and historical context allow us to avoid the dominant food narrative of cultural meaning *post-survival*.

Space and Place

Space and place play a very important role in a Cultural Rhetorics framework. Bratta and Powell argue that “The formation of such cultural communities, according to the CRTL, connects tightly to place and space, which allow ‘groups [to] organize under a set of shared beliefs and practices’” (“Entering the Cultural Rhetorics Conversations,” *Enculturation*). Justin Eckstein and Donovan Conley’s “Spatial Affects & Rhetorical Relations, At the Cherry Creek Farmer’s Market” is a good example of how attention to place can help us understand food practices. Instead of focusing on a larger community spread across different spaces (such as Fleitz’s attention to women in kitchens or Hughes’s focus on Black culture), Eckstein and Conley choose one place, the Cherry Creek Farmers Market (CCFM), as a community based on location. They argue that their work is “grounded in the politics of place, which describes the constellations of material affects that undergird a location and enable different kinds of relations and movements” (Eckstein and Conley 172).¹⁰ For Fleitz’s work, the women’s space and

¹⁰ Note Eckstein and Conley’s usage of “constellations,” relations, and movements—all cultural rhetorics terminology, although they do not appear to be claiming a cultural rhetorics framework specifically.

community was determined by the power relations between genders. However, Eckstein and Conley's piece demonstrates the ways place can create relations and arrange communities around food.

The CCFM, according to Eckstein and Conley, is a site that showcases affects in everyday spaces. They argue that "a greater attention to the ways bodies are organized spatially produces a better understanding of how communal formations are preconditioned" (172). Unlike Fleitz and Hughes, the focus in this piece is on place and space, symbols, and assemblages of moving "bodies." From a Cultural Rhetorics standpoint, we might ask, *who are these moving bodies?* While the previous authors described (to some extent) the identities of their subjects, Eckstein and Conley leave their community anonymous. Outside of their visits to the CCFM, we don't know who these individuals are or what other communities in which they belong. This anonymity appears intended however, as Eckstein and Conley argue that "the bumps and shocks of smell, taste, and sound excite conversations and thereby establish new relations between strangers" (178). Here the relation among market goers are not dependent on deep relations or histories, but instead are based solely on a common place. Though we could argue that their identity is most likely middle to upper class (Eckstein and Conley identify the market as "Denver's upscale urban destination"), we could also say that Eckstein and Conley provide us with a better understanding of another way relations can be established through food. If a goal of Cultural Rhetorics is to uncover layered stories, to create a broader constellation of food stories, then Eckstein and Conley's account of the CCFM should be welcomed in its attempt to better understand the ways that food and place converge to create temporary communities and relations.

In addition to relations between market goers, Eckstein and Conley take extensive care to note the role that senses play in the relation between the individual and food. The second half of their chapter is divided into three senses—smell, sound, and taste—to explore the ways that sense “assign meaning and texture to geography” (Eckstein and Conley 185). While this method of division may appear linear (just as a criticism of Fleitz’s linear division was noted), Eckstein and Conley quickly point out the limitations of this division, “Of course, any linear categorization of the senses is inherently problematic, as they operate simultaneously and in crosscurrents of varying intensity” (178). While Eckstein and Conley still divide their chapters this way, their admittance of its limitations points towards a Cultural Rhetorics framework. Overall, Eckstein and Conley make a very convincing argument that places like the CCFM are sites for placemaking, arguing that, “place thus becomes space through a particularized network of symbols, formations, and lived relationships; that is, through a specific assemblage of moving bodies” (176). Eckstein and Conley’s attention to relations show us how smell, sound, and taste create meaning for places—it has the ability to tell us stories about the place we are, with reference to the past and the other moving bodies around us.

Modeling a Cultural Rhetorics Framework for Food Projects

Though none of the authors reviewed here claim to be doing “Cultural Rhetorics work,” using a Cultural Rhetorics framework can illustrate how each essay is making important moves in food scholarship. From a CR framework, we can consider the ways story and relations play part in food scholarship and the ways food studies can avoid colonizing practices (such as Western narratives that leave out oppressed voices). Each author demonstrated how symbolic meaning plays an important role in our food practices. Though it isn’t difficult to argue that food

is symbolic, what those food symbols are and how we discuss them makes it clear why we need a Cultural Rhetorics framework in the study of food. We must be careful with the ways that we, as researchers, tell stories about food and the cultures that give context to its meaning. By looking at the symbolic value of food and the ways that scholars explore this symbolism through storytelling, relations, and place, we are able to understand how our discipline can talk about both the material and symbolic value of food, the stories we tell with it, and the narratives perpetuated by looking to Western food framework only.

CHAPTER 2: MESSY METHODOLOGIES

Due to the format of this thesis, the following origin stories are presented linearly. However, they are meant to be read side by side, in no particular order. Between each story, I have placed a divide to indicate a new story.

I am sitting in a large lecture hall among about a hundred other undergraduate students taking Philosophy of Food. My professor has once again focused the conversation on veganism. We've just watched a documentary about factory farmed chickens, which featured a particularly grueling scene in which male baby chicks were tossed live through grinders. It was shocking and hard to stomach, but my professor used it to pose the question—why isn't everyone vegan? One response sticks out to me. A student said, "Well, being vegan is expensive. Many people can't afford it." To which my professor responded,

just eat beans

According to him, beans are cheap and nutritionally balanced enough to be eaten for every meal. For me though, my blood boiled at the claim that all poor people should just eat beans, or the argument suggested that all people who ate meat were unethical. I wanted to ask him,

Do you, a white man who is college educated and works at a university, just eat beans?

Do you, a man who has been on NPR, just eat beans?

Do you, a person who has just gotten back from a trip to Thailand, just eat beans?

Surely not.

This course was the first time I was exposed to food in the academy. It was the first time I realized food *could* be studied in the humanities as a research topic. It was also one of the most frustrating classes I took when getting my Bachelors. The only book we used was an anthology my professor edited. He told us there were very few people doing work in food and philosophy. I now realize that is not entirely true. The rest of the class was comprised of pro-vegan documentaries and a few articles on things like wine and Soylent (an expensive meal supplement popularized by Silicon Valley techs who found eating to be a chore). I do not think the conversations we had in class were invaluable, rather I felt that they were not complete. They seemed to represent the professor more than the makeup of the class or an average person's eating habits. What I missed was conversations about food in different contexts and cultures. Beans might be a solution for some people or some meals, but for many, food is not just a utility. Food is home. Food is a side effect of our relationships with others and the land, and sometimes food is *the* relationship itself. While many of the ways we produce and consume food is unethical, most of our food choices are more complicated than that. So instead, I want to leave us with an alternative image to the documentary with the chicken slaughter.

To my sister who brought home one day nearly 10 baby chicks from our tractor supply store. Chicks who my father built a coop for next to our garden. Who all have old lady names like Henrietta and Doris. Who have grown into hens and are visited daily, often held, and lay more eggs than my dad knows what to do with. If you were to visit my family's home, you would be offered some and you would take them to your house in an old Styrofoam egg carton that had been used several times before.

I am the type of person who seeks out food online. My Instagram is filled with pictures of latte art and fancy baked goods like macarons. I follow accounts like @LifeandThyme, @SundaySuppers, or @MyDailySourDoughBread. Accounts devoted to the aesthetics and skills of cooking. My Pinterest contains similar imagery; pins of recipes for dishes like pot de crème or parmesan zucchini fries. My Facebook, however, is less controlled. Try as I might to follow businesses and blogs who share recipes I'd find interesting, my Facebook is filled with dishes I would never make. This morning I timed myself when I opened the app and scrolled through my newsfeed, how long before I pass a recipe video? 7.93 seconds. I came across this [video](#) of a recipe for "Buffalo Fried Deviled Eggs." At first the recipe appears like a normal deviled egg, until the hands in the video begin battering and frying the (already boiled) egg white. It was shared by a woman who attends my childhood church.

I honestly hate these types of recipes. *Tasty*, an internet cooking series created by BuzzFeed, has popularized short, easy, and overly decadent recipes. The recipes do not usually have any instructions, but rather they simply show (sped up and edited) the food being prepped from an aerial view. Often few, if any, special cooking tools or ingredients are required. Many, like the example above, would be considered "unhealthy."

This project began first as a question about what made *Tasty* so popular. Why were people so drawn to the videos? Rhetorically, how were the videos composed in such a way that interested people or more accurately *certain* people? What I learned as I started working on that project, was that not everyone's newsfeed is filled with food recipes. In fact, some audience members at conferences I've presented at had never even heard of the series. That led me to start thinking about why *my* newsfeed contained so many. I don't follow *Tasty*. I don't like, repost, or

even comment on their videos. So why does Facebook’s algorithm result in so many being shared on my newsfeed?

When I first started this project, I had a lot of internal, subjective claims that these videos aren’t “real” recipes, they don’t teach actual cooking skills, they don’t show “good” food. But when I talked about the project I found myself sounding more and more like my philosophy professor. *Just learn to cook* isn’t too far off from *just eat beans*. In the same way my professor didn’t consider availability, relationships, place, or taste—I also wasn’t considering the people who share and love these videos. I was only looking at the limitations of the recipes, and not the possibilities.

While on some social media platforms food media is something I can control (to an extent), my Facebook feed is comprised of the content shared by those I am friends with. In a way this topic was crowd-sourced, a direct result of my relationships online. Food videos, such as the one above, are most often shared by people from my hometown—people from lower-income backgrounds living in a rural, small town. People who can’t go out and buy coffee with latte art or fancy macarons. I know, because I never saw those things until I moved away for college. People who do not always have the time or money to drive hours away for special ingredients or the energy to develop cooking practices that require specialized tools or extensive prep. That is not to say that all people who are from small, rural towns or working-class lack the time, energy, and money to cook certain types of recipes. Rather, it is to say that these recipes do not look dissimilar to the types of food my family prepped daily. Like many working-class folk, my parents did not always have the time to cook. The more complicated stuff was saved for holidays or special occasions when a trip to Dallas was feasible or when a certain cut of meat was on sale.

I am currently in the community garden harvesting vegetables when someone asks me to help pack up the “cole-robby.” *I don’t know what that is.* I’m a little embarrassed and slightly panicked. I like to think of myself as a bit of a foodie, but I have no clue what that is or what it looks like. I ask for some direction and am pointed towards a pile of what looks like very large green and purple turnips. Kohlrabi, as I am told, is quite tasty and very easy to grow. I wonder though, if the people who are signed up through our Community Sponsored Agriculture (CSA) program know what it is, or whether they are also intimidated by unfamiliar produce in their weekly box.

Many people who utilize the program, according to my volunteer training, live in food deserts. They are part of the greater Lansing area that does not live near a grocery store and rely on convenience stores or restaurants for most of their meals. Constrained by resources and other demands such as work or family, they are not able to get to a grocery store that has fresh produce. The CSA program meets that need by offering fresh, local produce every week. An underlying assumption of this program is that if you make fresh produce more accessible, people will choose it over processed foods. A challenge to this assumption though is that not everyone who has access to fresh produce is healthier. Growing up in a farming community, I know first-hand that having access or even eating fresh, local produce does not always result in a healthier diet overall.

Our community garden is next to a park. It contains a green house and several sections of veggies and flowers outside of it—all contained within a fence that separates it from the surrounding land. Just a few minutes down the road is a university, several shopping centers, and large highways. It is tended by mostly young, white, able-bodied people. Many of the volunteers

are also college students. Among explanations of kohlrabi or endives are also discussions of making kimchi or the best places to buy hiking gear.

To contrast I offer this image of the preacher from a local community church my grandmother attends. On the days he doesn't preach he is a farmer. He is a large man, with a receding hairline and much like my dad, a deep permanent tan that is a result of many years spent working in the sun. His name is David Fretwell, and each year he harvests acres and acres of watermelon, cucumber, corn, and squash. Among the fields of fresh produce, he can be found on any day snacking on ding dongs between picking ears of corn, sometimes consuming three or four before noon. I want to contrast these images, not to disagree with the community garden or argue its assumptions—but rather to demonstrate that we need to consider more rhetorically nuanced understandings of availability, diet, and food literacy. Though the individual in the urban food desert and the farmer in the rural small town might have different experiences and different solutions to healthy eating habits—there are overlapping stories in their working-class experiences that can be explored through food.

Constellating Origin Stories

I have presented here three origin stories. I share them to demonstrate how we rhetorically construct our beginnings. I could have shared only one. Had I stopped at the first story, I could have achieved a similar effect—to show that more representation of working-class food stories is needed in the academy, and the readers would not know they missed other stories. The first story is certainly stronger writing and presents the more poetic image of rural life in contrast to the other two. But realistically many of my experiences are not poetic reflections, they involve a lot of mindless scrolling online or more embarrassing moments where I realize

I'm not as food literate as I imagined. Those moments shaped my understanding of working-class experiences just as much as the first.

Perhaps you, the reader, feel more confused by having three stories—I do too. This project for so long has felt like a jumbled mess in my head. I felt (and still feel!) that there are so many connections in my life that led me to this topic, and they feel *central* to the ideas that have come forward. I have also felt a pressure (by no one's fault, but my own) to present these narratives and ideas in an organized way. To weed through my experiences and find the single thread that best represents my ideas. The truth, though, is that there isn't *one*. What I hope to demonstrate through these stories, is that as researchers we cannot control how we come to our research questions, but we do have the choice, as writers, about how we present them to our readers. I have chosen to present them in a messier way.

All three origin stories are true representations of some experiences and ideas that led me to this project, and none of the three were more pivotal than the others. By placing the origin stories in conversation with one another I am able to not only show the complicated experiences that led to this project but also demonstrate the act of constellating practiced by Cultural Rhetoric scholars. As Andrea Riley-Mukavetz states,

All cultural practices are built, shaped, and dismantled based on the encounters people have with one another within and across particular systems of shared belief. In other words, people make things (texts, baskets, performances), people make relationships, people make culture... The practice of constellating gives us a visual metaphor for those relationships that honor all possible realities ("Our Story Begins Here" Enculturation).

Within each story I constellate the encounters that I have had with others that have shaped my understanding of working-class cultures. The act of constellating requires that I acknowledge my position, experiences, and past encounters.

I feel that a Cultural Rhetorics approach lends itself well to this messiness. Much like each story argues for more context or a more complete representation, this thesis is an attempt to create a constellation of stories that contribute to the creation and identification of working-class food symbols. A constellation that is in opposition to linearity. A constellation, which instead of centering on a single person, place, or thing, bounces from story to story in order to demonstrate the complex ways working-class, rural people make meaning through food.

Combining Memories and Research

While some scholars may argue that your research should contain no trace of the researcher, many in the humanities argue that we should place ourselves in our research. I believe I cannot be *placed in* this particular research, but rather that I am always there. My research is a result of my life experiences as a working-class person, and ever more specifically as a working-class person who has had many experiences with people and places that working-class people do not usually encounter.

You might notice that my origin stories are quite recent. These encounters deeply shaped my research questions, because they all led me to consider myself as a working-class person. They are all dependent on my transition from my rural hometown to a larger city. Without that experience I would not have been exposed to new foods, people, or research that contrasted what I ate growing up. Certainly, I knew that being in East Texas meant that my family's cooking was very influenced by "Southern cooking," but I don't know if I would have considered or identified

as another culture—a working-class culture—had I stayed in a predominantly working-class area. More so, I am unsure I would have realized how my working-class rural experiences differed from the working-class urban communities I’ve encountered living in Lansing, Michigan. My geographical transitions—the places I moved and lived in—have deeply influenced the lens with which I do this work. I cannot know how different this project would be had I not moved away for college, not moved away for grad school, or not taken that Philosophy of Food class. This project might not have existed at all. To that extent, this account is a very privileged one. A working-class person who has been able to move, attend college, work in very upper-class culinary spaces, and with enough resources to enjoy hobbies like cooking or the leisure time to volunteer in urban food projects.

Even so, while my income status or my home address can be changed, my childhood and memories growing up working-class cannot. Even as I adopt in this piece and future ones, an academic tone, I still carry with me my working-class stories. There will be more future bonding moments with other working-class people over ways to hack a hot dog and surely there will be more kohlrabis to misidentify.

So, in addition to recognizing that this project is *highly subjective*, I also want to recognize that my position is unique and not all the experiences I share may resonate with all working-class people, working-class rural people, or rural people in general. It might also resonate with people who would not identify with any of these terms or who did not personally grow up working-class. Instead I embrace a messy methodology that encourages constellation and visibilizes my own memories to demonstrate the meaning-making *some* working-class, rural communities experience.

Storytelling as Method

Though storytelling has been referenced frequently throughout this thesis, I want to focus this sections on the ways I will be using story to identify working-class food symbols. I will rely on two types of storytelling.

1. Sharing Stories (Telling)
2. Observing Stories (Listening & Retelling)

Though these are simple methods, they have distinctions that I outline below.

Sharing Stories (Telling)

As I previewed in my origin stories, storytelling as a method will involve constellating my own memories. Each data chapter will include personal stories that reflect on the experiences that led me to view the food as working-class. I have chosen to share these stories as a method of building a heuristic for working-class food, because they are the experiences that shaped my connection with working-class culture. As I discussed in the introduction, the challenge of creating a heuristic is not in pointing towards working-class food, but rather it is in explaining *how* the foods transform into symbols. I believe that food symbolizes certain experiences, but it is only when we recognize and share the experiences that we can come to explain their formation. This thesis is not just about telling the story, but also sharing my memories with the readers, who will see a broad constellation of working-class culture through the experiences of me, a working-class individual.

I relied on memories to create my list of working-class foods. I chose to focus on white bread, casseroles, and greens, because they are foods I have many experiences with and feel represent different aspects of working-class life. There are many foods that could be added to the

list (which I will demonstrate in the heuristic later in this chapter) and perhaps some people might not feel belong, but I felt that in order to offer the most to the reader it was important that I had a connection with the food. Let me be clear, the connection does not mean that I love the food. I did not choose to talk about my favorites. Rather, I took the time to create a list that I felt reflected my family's eating habits and demonstrated the components of a Cultural Rhetorics framework discussed in Chapter 1 (Stories, Relations, Place and Space). Additionally, due to time constraints, I felt three foods (rather than 5, 10, etc.) would allow for a deeper analysis.

Some foods like white bread immediately came to my mind as an iconic working-class food. Foods such as casseroles were suggested by other working-class people. And some like greens were chosen because of my home—a food loved by my family, but that I do not personally like to eat. There are limitations to this list. I recognize in this section that I could have provided reasons for their selection, but much like my origin stories I do not feel these reasons accurately represent my methods. The truth is that not everyone in a culture will agree to what represents them and often we rely on our own experiences to form our beliefs and find “better” reasons later. In creating my heuristic, I will seek out other stories to constellate among mine— “proof” that my experiences are not isolated events. In the end, however, it is up to you to decide if these experiences are enough to constitute a symbol, for me the meaning-making has already happened, and I do not believe I will ever see these foods outside of the culture and lens that are constructed by my own memories.

Observing Stories (Listening & Retelling)

While I do believe a large part of my own identification of food symbols are a result of my memories and experiences as a working-class person, I do not believe these experiences are

isolated. Rather than say I am just using stories to build my argument, I hope to show a distinction between my telling of stories and my observation of others’.

I want to draw attention to the word observe. I am hesitant to say just observe or just listen, because they are not fully accurate terms for the rhetorical work that will follow. By retelling another person’s story, I am simultaneously listening and telling, reader and writer, audience and author. I will do my best to accurately portray the content I share and stay true to the story being told, but as an internet user or participant in a conversation I do not always have the option of turning off my subjective thoughts or reaching out for clarification. Many stories will not have a clear author and so I will retell them from my own viewpoint.

In the food data chapters I will constellate my own experiences with other people’s food stories. Some stories will be shared by scholars. An example of this type of storying will be my analysis of Hugh’s piece about soul-food. I observed her use of storytelling and shared them as a theme in the piece. Some stories will be conversations I have had with other people. These stories are my memories, but a memory of a conversation. A retelling of a story I was told. But most stories will be online. I will share comments, recipes, and images where I feel individuals are sharing working-class food stories.

I have chosen to constellate my experiences with online stories for a few reasons. The first is that I spend a lot of time online. As my second origin story indicated, this project was partly inspired by digital food media. All of the digital stories shared in this piece were found *before* creating my heuristic and I encountered many before I even knew this was a research project. The second reason I relied on digital stories was because it was data that was available to me. I could have chosen to interview other working-class people, my family, or conducted a survey asking participants to identify working-class food symbols, but many of those options

were not reasonable for the time and resources I had to complete this project. To keep the scope of this project manageable, I chose content that was easily available and still allowed me to stay within a Culture Rhetorics framework. Future work would need to be done to expand this section to include participants or co-authors.

Mapping my Methods

Drawing from the last section where I discuss a storytelling method, I would like to share a visual map of my process. Prior to sharing that map, I would like to explain what a visual map provides that the previous section did not. While the previous section, “Storytelling as Method,” outlines the types of stories I will tell and why stories are needed, it does not adequately show the process that gave those stories meaning or connected them to working-class culture. Mapping out my process will not only explain how I came to identify some foods as working-class, but also will demonstrate how that identification stemmed from stories, relations, and places—an explanation of how individuals *make* culture. Though I recognize I could refer to previously published work to define symbol (symbolize, symbolization), a Cultural Rhetorics framework recognizes that, “All cultural practices are built, shaped, and dismantled based on the encounters people have with one another within and across particular systems of shared belief” (Riley-Mukavetz, *Enculturation*). To identify the foods I share in this thesis (white bread, casseroles, and greens), I had to draw upon my own experiences. This thesis did not tell me what working-class food symbols are, rather this research provided me with space to reflect on *why* I identified them as such and to connect those reasons to others in the working-class communities that I belong to.

The “Telling Stories” branch maps my reflection-based inquiry. These branches represent my thought process when I think about working-class foods. When I say in this thesis that I am using memories to tell stories, these branches are examples of how certain memories came to mind. They explore when I became exposed to certain foods and then proceed to ask questions about where. For example, on the left branch I ask myself “When I think of “working-class” what foods come to mind?” This is the type of question I would ask myself at the beginning of this research project. This question represents a prompting reflection-based activity. The question that follows, “Where did I see these foods?” demonstrates the way that my identification with a particular food stems from place. From that branch to the next set of nodes, I have listed different places I would encounter working-class foods (such as on TV, at my friend’s house, in church, or at community events in Whitton). The next set of questions is an attempt to think about the type of thoughts that led me to consider that food and that place working-class.

For example, the node, “at my friend’s house,” attempts to reflect on what went through my mind as a child at a friend’s house. I thought—what made me connect my friend’s house or my friend as belonging to the same culture I am? Many thoughts I had as a child were not just about food, but about the similarities and differences between my family and theirs, my house and their house. Instead of explaining my friend’s houses through class (I didn’t know their household income at age ten), I focused on the things that I remembered as a child. Things like whether their furniture matched or whether they had duct tape on their appliances. I reflected on whether my parents seemed comfortable around theirs or whether they asked me to take off my shoes when I was inside. These questions may not seem related to food, but these were all things that made up my notion of working-class. If my friend seemed to be pretty well off (they have

the newest, expensive toys and a refrigerator with the icemaker on the front) and their parents feed us salad for dinner, I'm going to be a lot less likely to identify salad as a working-class food. They are signifiers of similarities and now as an adult when I think of working-class foods, my mind is taken back to those moments even if I am not actively aware of it.

Alternatively, on the "Listening to Stories" branch, I map out how I identified observed experiences I had during the research process as working-class. These observations were not recorded as field notes. Rather, they were daily occurrences (unplanned, not sought out) that reaffirmed my reflections on the left branch (my stories told). Sometimes these experiences were noted in the thesis (I might save a post I saw or a picture I came across), but other times they were left out. All of them became, though, a part of my framework—my working-class lens.

These questions are not just a way of mapping out a research process, they are the way I believe I came to understand working-class culture. They are the experiences, thoughts, objects, people, places, and ideas that shape my conception of working-class food. It is important to show this process, because it demonstrates how people make meaning. Though I defined meaning making as the way that individuals use food (and other rhetorical devices) to understand and make sense of their experiences, identity, and actions—this map visualizes that understanding. When I say I'm making sense of my experiences, this is how. The problem is that, even if individuals do the rhetorical work of meaning making every day, it is not always laid out linearly like this map. It honestly looks a lot more like the one below.

To demonstrate the unraveling of threads, I ask that you imagine following the map's branches. On the "Listening to Stories" branch, the nodes branch off in this order (each number is a new node): (1) observed experiences, (2) while shopping, (3) where is it placed, (4) what other foods is it grouped near, (5) is there another section of food distinct from this one that is labeled "gourmet," "high-end," or "special selection?" These questions follow a thought process of learning class markers through observing grocery store placement and labels. Why I illustrate the unravelling of these encounters though, is so that I can demonstrate how unravelling isolates these encounters. Once you reach the end of a branch, you would no longer be able to see the rest of the map. The more you follow one concept, the less context you can see for the map itself. While you might understand how advertising, product placement, and grocery shopping shaped my understanding of working-class food, that information alone does not constitute a symbol. In order to make these ideas clear, we risk reducing the ideas to just one thing—one story, one definition, one type of working-class symbol. When we see symbols out in the world though, our mind doesn't think of one encounter, it pulls from a broad spectrum of encounters, questions, and experiences, but this broad spectrum of encounters can be difficult to translate in just a few concepts.

This problem demonstrates the need for a Cultural Rhetorics framework. The act of constellating doesn't just encourage me to map out all the encounters that shape my understanding of working-class culture—it allows me to place the branches in conversation with one another. When I state that I will be constellating my stories with those I observe, I want you to imagine visually bouncing from one branch to another. My data chapters will constellate in order to provide a fuller picture. That constellation means looking not just at childhood memories, but also maybe bouncing to online content, over to a conversation I had with a friend,

and back to a place that I identified as a working-class. It allows the branches to be in conversation with one another and it allows me to provide you with a more accurate representation of how I make meaning through food.

My process of unraveling threads and constellating my encounters with working class foods serves as a method of defining working-class culture. Rather than defining working-class culture or identity through a survey of working-class scholarship—I focus on food as a cultural product through which working-class culture can be explored. This task was not only more manageable for the scope of this project but allowed me to focus on what working-class foods and food stories make possible. Working-class foods enable us to understand working-class experiences and identities, without creating criteria for *who* can be considered working-class. Even my own family, who I refer to as working-class, probably wouldn't identify as such. For me (and this project) it felt more important to explore the similarities between working-class, than the differences.

Building a Heuristic: What is a Working-Class Food Symbol?

While a large goal of this thesis was to do the work of constellating working-class food stories, I also wanted to understand the common factors of a working-class food. While the visual maps I just shared outline *my* process of understanding working-class foods, they are more about the identification of foods which are cultural symbols, and less about *how* those foods became working-class. The common factors are characteristics of certain foods which make them popular with working-class people. To explain what a working-class food is, I aimed to create a heuristic.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the process of creating this heuristic, especially in terms of order. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, this heuristic was not made prior to choosing the working-class foods I discuss in the chapters that follow. I worried that if I made the heuristic prior to writing my data chapters, that I would end up attempting to make the food symbol fit my criteria. Rather, I chose to let the foods shape the criteria.

I did not create this heuristic to make a product that non-working-class people can take and use in the process of identification (though some might have the desire to use it that way). Building this heuristic is also not an attempt to make a set of rules to police what people are allowed or not allowed to call working-class. There are foods that might not follow the heuristic, yet still symbolize working-class experiences. Additionally, there might be foods that do follow the heuristic, and yet are still not a working-class food. These limitations of the heuristic demonstrate why a Cultural Rhetorics framework is necessary to provide context. While the heuristic might point to particular foods that are working-class, constellating demonstrates *how* and *why* they symbolize working-class culture. The stories, relations, and places and spaces that make working-class foods symbolic provide cultural context which gives the heuristic meaning. Shown below in figure three is the heuristic I developed as a result of my process constellating.

A Heuristic for Working-class Foods

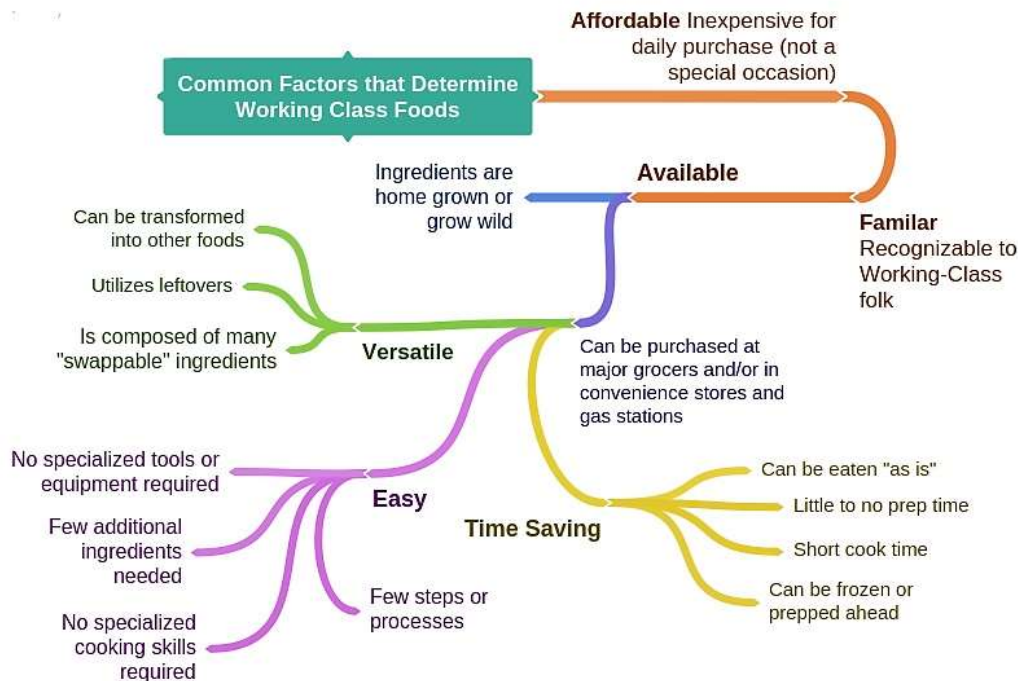


Figure 3: Common Factors That Determine Working-class Foods

As I wrote my data chapters, I found myself noticing trends that shaped the stories I chose to constellate. To create this heuristic, I reviewed the chapters making notes of trends and commonalities. These commonalities were characteristics that appeared to constitute a working-class food. I created my initial list in terms of questions:

- Is the food affordable?
- Is it available?
- Does it save time?
- Is it versatile?
- How easy is it to make?
- Is it familiar?

I did not prioritize any of the questions except for affordability. I felt that a food could not be working-class if working-class people couldn't afford to buy it. So, I placed these

characteristics in the map with Affordability as the first characteristic and all the other questions funneling out.

I wanted to indicate however, what I meant by each characteristic, so I added other questions based on my data chapters. For example, instead of just saying, “Is it available,” I provided two potential branches: (1) foods available from common grocers or convenience stores and (2) ingredients that are home grown or grow wild. I felt these categories allowed for a more nuanced understanding of availability. I had to consider the different ways an urban or rural working-class person might define available.

At this point, I rearranged my heuristic. I realized that affordability could not be the only “check point”. For example, in the last chapter of this thesis, I look at greens as a working-class food. I argue that greens are a working-class food in the South and use Poke Salat as an example. In Texas, Poke Salat grows wild, thus it is free—resulting in many poor rural people eating it. Poke Salat checks off affordable and available. What the heuristic at the time did not prompt me to ask though, is whether it was recognizable. The familiarity factor is what makes Poke Salat a symbol in East Texas. If people could not recognize the green, they would not know it was available to eat. Thus, familiarity had to come before availability on the heuristic. Familiarity also accounts for recognition of foods in stores or the media. Although edamame is an inexpensive food, if a person does not know what they are (or know where to buy them), they would not seek them out to eat. Additionally, some working-class people might identify foods as working-class (even if others disagree), because they are familiar with them. While I identify squash as a poor person food, because I grew up in a farming community, someone who lived in a food desert would disagree, because not only were they unavailable, but they were not seen. The final order of the factors is:

1. Affordable
2. Familiar
3. Available
 - a. Versatile
 - b. Easy
 - c. Time Saving

While affordable, familiar, and available are all considered “check point” criteria that were true for each food I researched, the last three categories may not be true of all working-class foods.

Versatility was an observed factor shared by both white bread and casseroles. Versatility was defined by the ability of a food to be transformed into other foods (white bread), composed of many “swappable” ingredients (casseroles), or utilizing leftovers (casserole). Versatility is a positive quality in working-class foods, because they can be used for more than one purpose. Additionally, they often require working-class people to purchase less ingredients, since they utilize other foods already on hand.

The next factor, easiness, considers how simple a food is. Each food I surveyed demonstrated various types of easiness. White bread was a food that required no specialized tools, extra ingredients, or cooking skills to eat (as it can be eaten without cooking). Greens easiness was not demonstrated in the cooking process, but rather in terms of skills and equipment. Though greens do require a longer process and more steps to cook—they are not complicated and usually only require a pot, stove, and water. Lastly, casseroles demonstrated easiness best by satisfying all three easiness criteria. Casseroles not only require no specialized skill, excessive steps, or equipment—but are also identified often as simple and easy.

Lastly, the time saving category recognized time saved through cooking time, cooking process, and ability to prep ahead. White bread offers a cook the ability to skip bread making (a very long process) and can be eaten “as is.” Casseroles on the other hand can take up to an hour (or more) to cook. Instead of time saved by eliminating cook time, casseroles display time saved

by allowing the cook to step away from the oven while the casserole is baking and by being frozen or prepped ahead of time. Greens are the exception to the time aspect, as the cooking process is very time intensive. Greens is an example of a food that fits some, but not all qualities outlined here.

Using this heuristic, we can look at other foods, which though not discussed in this thesis, could follow our model. For example, boxed macaroni and cheese would be a food that is affordable, familiar to working-class people, available in major grocers and even often in gas stations. While a box of Kraft might be easy (few ingredients needed, no special equipment, easy instructions) and time saving (it can be microwaved, it is cooked quickly), it is not very versatile.

Another example could be cornbread. This would be a food more specific to a working-class, rural community. A corn kit is not only inexpensive to buy, familiar (common at many meals), and readily available at most grocery stores, but it requires few additional ingredients (simply add eggs and milk), and no specialized equipment or cooking skills. It is time saving, because it has little preparation and can be made ahead and eaten later. While the cook time might not be quick (usually twenty minutes), the cook does not have to tend the stove while making it. Versatility is more difficult to determine. Growing up in a Southern, rural family meant that corn bread was served in a lot of meals. It could be used for a sandwich, dipped in soup or chili, eaten alongside barbeque, or just as a snack. It could also be transformed into dressing or added to a casserole.

The versatility of cornbread points towards the need for this heuristic to be used alongside a Cultural Rhetorics framework. While I, as a working-class person, know whether a food is familiar or whether Jiffy cornbread mix is versatile—these are based on my own experiences. While the heuristic does set out many qualities that can be understood outside of

working-class culture, they are ultimately based on the work I do in the chapters that follow. These factors might not be true of all working-class communities, and surely the list is not complete.

To provide context for this heuristic, I will focus on three foods (white bread, casseroles, and greens). The data chapters that follow are constellations of each food that attempt to explain how they fit in the heuristic and how they represent working-class experiences.

CHAPTER 3: WHITE BREAD

I can tell you the exact loaf of bread that sat, week after week, in our kitchen cabinet when I was growing up. Sunbeam, split top, white bread. It's the kind of sugar filled, overly processed, starchy white bread that people are referencing when they say, "white bread." It's the kind of bread my grandmother would quit when she was going off carbs and trying to lose weight. The kind of bread my mom was referring to when we were at the store and she needed to check bread off her list.

The white bread was located on the third aisle at Walmart. Right past the frozen items, next to coffee, jam, and peanut butter. It was the first stop we would make when grocery shopping. My mother would squeeze, lightly, different loaves to decide which was the softest. If you too walk down a grocery aisle and squeeze loaves of bread (a practice I've realized is not as common as I was led to believe when I was younger), you'll notice that some loaves are indeed squishier than others. The "good loaves" had give when you'd press your thumb on one side and the remaining fingers on the other. You had to do so delicately, or else you'd smash the bread. Sometimes, before I'd mastered the art, I would transform a good loaf into a bad loaf by pressing too hard. The "bad loaves" would not easily give. They were stiffer or flattened. They didn't *feel right* when you grabbed them. We left those on the shelves. Even now, if I have to buy white bread for some reason, I can't help but test them. Check for quality. It's more ritualistic than anything.

I realize now that the bread never tasted different. It was always the same squishy, pliable, air filled slices. It didn't look or taste like anything we'd ever made ourselves. It lacked the substance that I associate with a hardy wheat, rye, sourdough, or the yeast dinner rolls my

family baked on holidays. The truth is that white bread, for my family, wasn't really valued for those reasons.

A Story Retold

While this thesis uses storytelling as a method for various foods, I have chosen white bread as an object that best illustrates how stories are used to devalue food and the people who eat it. This chapter will be divided in four main sections.

The first section, "White Bread/White Trash," looks to media representations of white bread to explore implications of white trash stereotypes. The second section, "Shifting Narratives," will discuss the origin stories of white bread and how narratives have shifted to associate white bread with working-class people. Within the third section I will focus on the food myths that perpetuate working-class stereotypes and assign moral value to the food we eat. Lastly, I narrow the focus to more specific food stories to demonstrate the versatility of white bread. I have arranged this chapter to illustrate the ways that broader narratives are implicated in the interpretation of localized experiences. Additionally, within these stories I will talk about transformation, both the transformation of stories and the transformation of white bread. By starting the chapter with current assumptions and narratives of foods and ending with a new definition and potentiality of white bread I hope to construct a rhetorical transformation of the food narrative—to demonstrate the power of stories to reimagine, redefine, and reinterpret material objects.

White Bread/White Trash: Exploring Media Symbols

As a cheap food found in most working-class homes, white bread is recognizable by many poor people. What makes it symbolic though, is how recognizable it is to people who didn't grow up working-class. As I have talked with people about this project, I have yet to meet someone who cannot identify the red, yellow, and blue circles of a Wonder bread package or doesn't understand the difference between "white bread" and the contrasting artisanal varieties. While conversational anecdotes quickly show how other people identify white bread as a food symbol, I recognize that this type of sampling isn't representative of American culture. I want to demonstrate the identification of white bread as a working-class icon in the media. If we look to media representation, we can see how working-class people are associated with white bread. I want to also explore the types of working-class people that are represented through these associations—specifically the ways that white, rural, less educated folk are used to demonstrate the "white trash" stereotype of white bread.

White bread appears in the media notably through movies and television. Sometimes it is exposure of a certain brand and other times it is the use of white bread in a specific scene. Take for example the movie *Talladega Nights*, which features the brand Wonder Bread as a Nascar sponsor. In the movie, Will Ferrell plays a race car driver and Wonder Bread's logo can be seen on his car, suit, and helmet. What's interesting about this type of brand display is that it was not part of a product placement sponsorship. The writers of *Talladega Nights* chose to use Wonder Bread as a mock sponsor (Wonder Bread is not an actual sponsor of Nascar). Though we are unable to infer why the writers chose Wonder Bread, looking at Nascar's demographics might give us a better understanding of how Wonder Bread appeals to working-class people. ESPN writer, LZ Granderson argues that Nascar is undeniably associated with white, country culture

and that the association leads people to stereotyping Nascar fans as “hillbilly, redneck or dumb” (Granderson ESPN The Magazine). Demographics show that 94% of Nascar’s fans are white and they are twice more likely to be from rural areas (Nielsen’s 2013 Year in Sports Media Report). The association of white bread and rural, white people is manifested in the fictional Nascar sponsor Wonder Bread.

Other media representations involve scenes that white bread is used as a prop. For example, in the movie *Benny & Joon*, Sam, an illiterate white man is shown using the classic white bread to make grilled cheese sandwiches with an clothing iron. This scene is but one the of the multiple quirky eating habits in the movie—but it’s a telling one. Sam, though illiterate, demonstrates a different literacy skill in his use of an iron instead of a pan (I’ll expand on this idea of cooking literacy in working-class kitchens more in the last section of this chapter). In addition to the association of white bread with uneducated people, white bread is often used as a metaphor for blandness and whiteness. The Woody Allen film, *Hannah and Her Sisters*, has a scene where character Mickey attempts to become Catholic. He is shown bringing home a crucifix, bible, a jar of Hellman’s Mayonnaise, and a loaf of Wonder Bread. The two latter items in the scene are used as symbols of goyish culture—representing blandness in contrast to the Jewish rye. While many of the scenes involving white bread are funny, because they demonstrate the eating habits of particular cultures, others use the icon of white bread to reduce the food to only a few qualities—cheap and devoid of nutrition. When you extend those ideas to stereotypes, the people who eat white bread are also reduced to a few qualities—poor and bland.

Piet Defraeye, producer of the play *White Bread*, argues that white bread is, “...an iconic cultural symbol in our taxonomy of physical and spiritual nourishment, of which there typically is precious little in the case of white bread” (Defraeye 102). In this play, white bread symbolizes

a lack of substance and depth. Though these metaphors may seem harmless they are ideas that are expressed through deeper misconceptions about white, working-class people.

In the book *White Bread: Weaving Cultural Past into the Present*, Christine Sleeter explores a phrase she'd noticed white teachers using in the classroom— "I'm just plain white bread American" (Sleeter 3). She argues that variations of this phrase are often perceived as a strategy by white teachers to "shrug off implications that racial and ethnic identity might matter," but that they are really an indication that many white people are unsure of where they fit. They do not know if there are any collective white identities in which they belong. Sleeter's commentary points to the danger of white bread symbols that are reduced only to poor, white, bland, empty, "only air," or of no value. When white, working-class people are equated to white bread, we assign those same quality to them. When media representations affirm those stereotypes, we raise generations of people who think they have "no culture" or identity. Though many poor, white people might not want to associate or identify with working-class culture, we should seek to understand culture in more nuanced ways. This thesis, and this chapter, seeks to demonstrate that nuance.

Shifting Narratives: How Stories Shape Food Icons

When we start to unravel the narratives of white bread it is apparent that the story about white bread has not always been the same. While white bread is currently understood as a symbol of working-class people, it was not *always* so. That shift in narrative demonstrates how a culture can reassign value to a food through stories.

When white bread was first invented it was anything but a symbol of the poor. The phrase "the best thing since sliced bread" is a remnant from previous narratives that painted

white bread as a symbol of industrialization. Whereas today many people would argue that homemade bread is healthier, in the 1920s, homemade bread was more associated with poor people and poor diet. Many people became suspect of homemade bread due to overcrowding and lack of sanitation laws for food prep. Aaron Bobrow-Strain, a professor of food politics in his book *White Bread: A Social History of the Store-Bought Loaf*, traces the history of white bread. He argues that white bread while originally a solution to hygiene, quickly became a way to criticize poor people. White bread became part of a food purity discourse used against working-class people. He writes,

In a fashion reminiscent of many community-garden and anti-obesity campaigns designed to teach the poor about “healthy eating” today, reformers poured into the country’s urban tenements and rural hill countries. What they achieved was not an attack on the economic root causes of poverty, but the spread of a gospel of progress through healthy habits (Bobrow-Strain 36-37).

Later, white bread became fortified with vitamins and acted as a staple food during the Great Depression. Ironically, white bread was touted as a solution to the poor person’s diet and lack of resources and today it is often cited as the problem. In comparison to other foods or alternatives, white bread *was* a better option for many people. However, somewhere along the line reformers stopped associating white bread with health and shifted to a new narrative. This narrative is the one that is most common today, that white bread is devoid of nutrition—a “bad” food.

Bobrow-Strain argues that the history of white bread demonstrates the dangers of food purity discourses. While industrialization and health narratives that produced white bread also made for safer food preparation law and a better understanding of nutrition, these narratives served to benefit mostly wealthy, white consumers. Rather than *for*, these narratives were used

against working-class people to criticize their eating habits and belittle them for being poor. Health fears “combine with larger social anxieties and reinforce other kinds of exclusion and distract from root causes” (Bobrow-Strain 49). It’s important to recognize this shift in narrative, because it demonstrates how a discourse surrounding a food changes. The value of white bread cannot be reduced to its genetic structure or nutritional value alone—because it is understood within a cultural context that defines those values.

The stories we tell about a food shape its meaning, but the meaning is not permanent. As Kristie O’Neill and Daniel Silver explain, “we can treat food as items of objective culture and laden with multiple possibilities of cultural meaning” (O’Neill and Silver 100). This means that white bread can be eaten and understood without participating in working-class culture, it has the potential of taking on multiple cultural meanings. By tracing a shifting narrative, I hope to demonstrate how stories change our interpretation of food. Once a symbol of food purity, white bread is now a symbol of poverty. Its meaning and status as a symbol is rooted in that transformation.

Food Myths: Discourses of Health, Morals, and Shame

I remember once a moment when a friend was over to my family’s house, and we were cooking something that called for butter. I went to our refrigerator and pulled out the tub of Country Crock to which my friend commented,

Oh, my mom only buys real butter.

Now I don’t recall what age this happened or who was over. I don’t even remember what we were making. But—I do remember how I felt at that time. It was the same feeling I got when my dad picked me up from school in his work clothes or when I was in class and everyone was

sharing vacation stories. My family wasn't dirt poor by any means. We had plenty to eat, in the summers I'd go to church camp, and every once in a while we'd go to the movies. However, there were things my dad wouldn't pay, things I'd never known were "poor people" things until some middle-class friend of mine would toss the phrase "real butter" at me. I didn't realize at that point that there was such a thing as fake butter the way I'd known I wore Walmart clothes or knew my family couldn't afford a trip to Disney World. It was a new level of feeling different that didn't go away after I left the classroom or the grocery store. A sense of shame in my own damn kitchen.

I want to emphasize that there is nothing wrong with a food associated with a certain group of people. It's true that my family never bought "real" butter (i.e. the sticks made with dairy cream) and always had Sunbeam white bread. It's also true that many other working-class people eat those same foods. This thesis obviously wouldn't be possible if there wasn't truth to the food symbols examined. However, it becomes a problem when that food symbol is used to shame poor people or to reduce working-class people to the food they eat. My friend's comment about the butter didn't just make me feel bad because it made me feel poor, it also made me feel like my family's food wasn't good enough. If you are what you eat, then what does fake butter make me?

To take the conversation back to white bread, there is nothing wrong with acknowledging that white bread is a food commonly eaten by working-class people. There is a problem, however, with judging people based on the foods that they eat. The issue, which Chimamanda Adichie explains well in her TED Talk, is that "the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story"). Within this section, I

will explore the ways food stereotypes are masked by health narratives in order to regulate, shame, and perpetuate stereotypes.

In the last section, I traced the history of white bread to demonstrate how narratives shift. While white bread was once a symbol of industrialization and health, it is now viewed as unhealthy and cheap. Understandings of white bread that ignore the history and shift in narratives are food myths. Food myths are narratives that pretend to have always been true. Food myths appear stable through scientific rhetoric. By acting as a scientific authority, food trends appear as facts. However, history shows us just how inconsistent food trends are. Popular diets shift constantly all with a claim to be rooted in nutrition and science. Low calorie, high protein, low carb, no fat, non-gmo, organic diets shift from decade to decade (O'Neill 21). Food myths evoke a sense of science, but are caused by history, cultural, and economic influences. A food myth effectively ignores that nutrition and science is shaped by a culture—results of a power structure rather than raw data unaltered by human interpretation.

Food myths might appear harmless, but they are not. I share my personal stories to demonstrate that food discourses powerfully shape our understanding of our community, our diet, our bodies, and our worth. While food myths might hide beneath health narratives, (*It's bad to feed your children white bread, because it doesn't have nutrients!*) rhetorically they participate in hierarchies where the poor person's diet must be regulated by the virtuous upper class. Myths are so powerful that individuals will come to regard themselves or their specific community as the "originator of all that is humanly good and true" (Calefato 377; Schrempf 110). As Isabelle de Solier explains,

These lowbrow processed foods are associated with the consumption practices of the lower classes. Moral consumption, for foodies, involves purchasing 'good quality' food

from alternative shopping spaces—such as greengrocers, butchers, bakers, delicatessens, ethnic grocers, specialty shops, markets and farmers’ markets—rather than supermarkets. The foodie’s morality of quality, then, cannot be separated from matters of class (de Solier 22).

There are serious consequences to assigning moral value to foods and authority to those who can afford what is “good.” It creates a hierarchy of consumers where poor people are at the bottom; it creates a system where people who can’t afford real butter or healthy bread are ranked as “bad.” Most important, it ignore *why* people eat certain foods or *how* those foods come to be associated with certain groups.

While I have demonstrated in these last few sections how white bread landed in the homes of working-class people and how American culture understands and interprets white-bread as a working-class food, I want to explore why white bread continues to hold its place. A question I believe can be answered by looking at the material qualities of white bread as a versatile ingredient.

Defining Versatility in the Working-Class Kitchen

I believe that the affordability of white bread is what made white bread a working-class food symbol, but that its versatility is what makes it unique. While many people consider bread to be a finished product (and sometimes it is), I believe that bread is an ingredient that is utilized by working-class people at each meal of the day. With each recipe the story of white bread is retold. Much like paper or the blinking cursor in a word processor it is limitless with possibilities. It is not just that white bread is cheap or that white bread is versatile that lends to its

working-class nature—it is just how quickly it can transform itself and just how inexpensive that transformation is.

To illustrate—last week I was baking a birthday cake for my husband. It called for chocolate frosting, which I made, ambitiously, by scratch. It called for simple ingredients: butter, powdered sugar, cocoa powder, and milk. Many cooks would agree that these are versatile ingredients that lots of people keep on hand, some are cheap (like milk) and others are pricey (like butter). They could be rearranged with a few other simple ingredients to become something entirely different (such as adding flour to create gravy, yeast to make bread, or eggs to make pancakes). The distinct difference comes at the moment I threw my first batch of frosting out, because it “didn’t look quite right.” What should have been a smooth, glossy, warm frosting looked exactly like coffee grounds mixed in oil. The frosting had separated, and, in my confusion, I tossed it. My experiment became a failure, but what upset me most was that I had wasted food.

After a quick call to my mother-in-law and a new batch thrown in the mixer I had my glossy frosting. This redo, though, would never had happened in my family’s house growing up. We did not keep “real” butter on hand, but had we purchased some for a special occasion it would *never* have ended up in the trash. While butter is versatile it is not cheap. It would not be something we’d be allowed to experiment with in the kitchen. Had we been allowed to make a batch of frosting, there’d be no guaranteed that there was another stick in the fridge or more powdered sugar to try with. My family lived quite a way from a grocery store and we did not take trips to pick up single ingredients. In a working-class kitchen, experimentation and play aren’t necessarily discouraged, but what is up for grabs must be cheap, always available, and

able to be transformed quickly. White bread fits the bill. When I typed the phrase “growing up poor” in Google’s image search engine, the first result to pop up was figure four below.

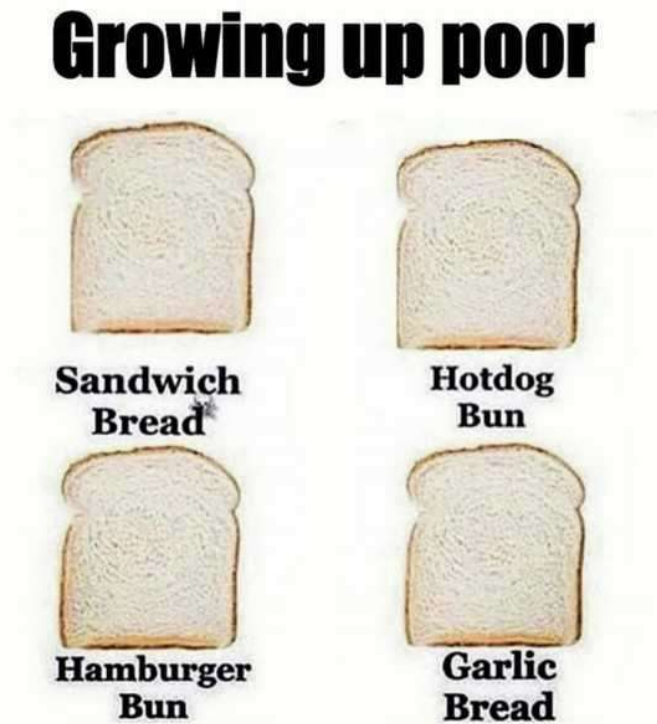


Figure 4: Growing up Poor Meme

Some people might look at this picture and see four slices of white bread, but a working-class person like me envisions many potential variations. A loaf of Sunbeam had all the potential of being dipped in egg to make French toast in the morning. Slathered with peanut butter and jelly to make lunch or used as a sponge to soak up the last of dinner’s gravy.

My favorite thing to make with white bread growing up was cinnamon toast. After many trial and errors I came up with a method that was not only tasty but didn’t require using the oven (making it quick without wasting gas). I would place white bread and put it in the toaster. Next, I would butter it with my fake butter¹¹, and sprinkle cinnamon and sugar on top. Last, I would

¹¹ The interesting thing about Country Crock spread, is that much like white bread, its virtues are demonstrated most in its differences from “real” butter rather than its similarities. Unlike stick butter which must sit out at room

microwave it for about 15 seconds. Ta-da! Cinnamon toast. We always had these things in the kitchen, so even if my mom hadn't been grocery shopping that week it was a reliable snack.

What these stories (the meme and my reflections) illustrate, are the transformative nature of white bread. While an outside perspective of white bread sees its qualities (squishy, air-filled, lacking substance) as negative—the working-class person sees those qualities as virtues. Imagine trying to make a hotdog bun out of sourdough bread—nearly impossible. Its firm structure prevents it from being bent to a new shape. Alternatively, imagine if your eight-year old child took the last of your brioche to make an after-school snack. The very things that other people perceive as “bad” are what makes the transformation of white bread possible.

I see this transformation embraced not just in my childhood, but also in recipes online. Recently on Facebook a friend shared a video of a recipe for [“French toast roll ups”](#) (French Toast Roll Ups, *Tasty Junior*). The video shows white bread being rolled flat, smeared with sweet ingredients like peanut butter and strawberries, rolled up, battered, and fried. I can see this recipe embodying working-class qualities even if it is a dish a working-class person may not make. The use of white bread rolled into a portable fried snack reminds me of my cinnamon toast.

If you watch the video, you will also notice both adult and children's hands. *Tasty Junior* is a cooking vlog that creates recipes that children would want to make (and eat). The smashing of bread and hand-held dipable nature of the roll-ups might be child-like, but that does not mean it is only a child's food. I feel though, that a child's perspective of white bread might be

temperature for it to be spread, margarine and other vegetable spreads are easily scraped across a piece of bread. Thus “fake” butter is quicker and easier to use—especially when applied to white bread which is much softer and more easily torn if too much force is used.

the most enlightening. My childhood perspective didn't regard white bread as poor people's food, but rather just my family's food. Of all the stories Bobrow-Strain provides in his book about white bread, the one I find most perceptive is the first paragraph where he writes:

Supermarket white bread can pick up difficult bits of broken glass, clean typewriter keys, and absorb motor oil spills. Squeezed into a ball, it bounces on the counter. Pressed into my palate and revealed in a big gummy grin, it gets giggles from my kids, who can also use it to sculpt animal shapes (Preface).

So often in our discussion of working-class foods we focus on cost or nutrition alone, but when we look beyond the limits and start thinking about the possibilities its easy to see how white bread holds nostalgia even for those of us who have moved on to different loafs.

CHAPTER 4: CASSEROLES

When my mother passed away I knew I would be faced with a lot of uncertainties. I did not anticipate fridge space to be one of them. In the days passing her death we received visitor after visitor all carrying with them a container of food. I don't remember what they brought, only that it was too much for a, now, family of three to eat. Our appetites faded and the casseroles all started to look the same. I'd never considered that a gesture with such kind intentions—to feed and comfort those grieving—would become such a burden. After a few days we told people to stop coming. We sent the message down the church line to hold off on the cheesy potatoes.

I remember many times growing up when someone would pass away and my mom would immediately start cooking. We would pack everything up in Tupperware and tin pans and drive to their home. While my mother talked to the family, I would be charged with taking the food to their kitchen and sitting quietly while the grown-ups talked. I learned that this is the way you comfort people—with food. When I was in high school, my best friend's dad died. My first question to my mother was, what should we cook for them? We settled on baked spaghetti. We brought it by with gallons of sweet tea and garlic bread. When my mother died this same friend brought food to my house where we later discussed how little you feel like eating when you're grieving. Our conversation made it apparent that the baked spaghetti was never eaten, but that they appreciated the gesture.

Making-Meaning through Comfort Food

The casserole is a dish I feel encompasses the intersections of working-class, rural, and Southern identity. It is something that I think most people experience, but that is distinctly working-class. It is not something you would find on restaurant menus or at a formal event. It is rarely prepared with expensive ingredients. Even with its many components, it is still simplistic in terms of preparation. It is often referred to as a humble food. As one *Southern Living* writer stated, “A casserole baking in the oven promises something good, honest, and wholesome to come” (“The Cult of the Casserole”). This writer’s analysis is not singular, but rather an echo of the many ways people speak of casseroles.

While in the media casseroles can sometimes be painted in very Stepford Wife-esque ways¹² (especially through cooking literature like *Good Housekeeping* recipes and in middle class spaces like junior leagues and women’s clubs), I think it’s important to note that casseroles were popularized in a time when the gap between the lower and middle class was not as large as it is now and when a working-class job could afford many families a (now) middle-class lifestyle.

This overlapping of a class symbol demonstrates the need for a constellating method that pays attention to relations and place. In my search for recipes and articles about casseroles, I came across mostly middle-class representations. The recipes created for *Good Housekeeping* or *Southern Living* were designed and distributed to middle-class women. While they might mention saving money or time, they wouldn’t be for the same reasons as a working-class family.

¹² There is not space in this thesis to discuss the complex ways that a food can simultaneously symbolize two class experiences, although I believe it is entirely possible.

A large distinction between casseroles consumption are *why* and *how* a person makes the dish. As a working-class food, casseroles present themselves as a practical option for reasons such as cost, time, availability, and convenience. Though many American families may opt to save money at the grocery store or time cooking—a working-class casserole is created out of a necessity for these things (out of lack of money or lack of time), rather than a choice. Many middle-class families *want* to make casseroles, most lower-class families *have* to. The casserole presents working-class people with an opportunity to comfort, communicate, and provide for others even with very few resources. This utility is what I believe makes it symbolic.

I do not identify casseroles as a working-class symbol because a magazine or cookbook labels them that way. I recognize casseroles as working-class, because my relations identify them as such. They were a food I ate in working-class spaces, made by working-class people, and designed to comfort each other. Relations are not something that casseroles *make*, People *make* casseroles in order to *make* working-class culture.

Overview

For this chapter, I will explore the way that food is relational. I have chosen the casserole as a dish that demonstrates our relations with others for a few reasons:

1. Casseroles are seldom made for a single person, but rather for a family or group.
2. Casseroles are often shared at community gatherings (such as potlucks).
3. Casseroles are a comfort food—they are made to comfort others.

I also chose casseroles for personal reasons of familiarity. There are few events in my life that were not accompanied by a casserole. Growing up in the church, I've had my fair share of

cheese/potato/meat casserole varieties (some good, some very, very gross). At school, the cafeteria lunch line churned out scoops and scoops of chicken spaghetti. Nearly once a week, my mother cooked a Tex-Mex casserole comprised of hamburger meat, ranch-style beans, a can of corn, and a single packet of taco seasoning (topped with cheese—obviously). Throughout this chapter I will weave stories of specific dishes with broader discussions of the rhetorical construction, distribution, and consumption of casseroles.

This chapter aims to discuss casseroles in three specific ways. First, I will discuss the composition of casseroles in order to define it as a working-class food and argue that its construction reflects a value in relationships. Second, I will look at the ways casseroles are used in community eating. Lastly, I will look at casseroles as an illustration of comfort food. Within this chapter, I hope to illustrate not only the ways that ways that food is used to commune with others, but also the working-class values the casserole exhibits.

Composing Casseroles: How Construction reflects Values

This section will look specifically at the construction of casseroles as relationship-centered. By looking at the ways a casserole is constructed, the ingredients utilized, and the purposes of the dish—we can understand how casseroles demonstrate working-class principles. Discussion of these principles will demonstrate components of the heuristic—specifically versatility, easiness, and time saving techniques.

For the purposes of this thesis, we can understand a casserole to be any dish composed of multiple ingredients baked in a single pot/pan for an extended period. Though layering (stacking ingredients in single sheets) is most associated with casseroles, I do not feel it is a required component. While many casseroles I grew up eating were often mixed and then covered in a

final layer (such as cheese, a sauce, or crunchy topping), or mixed entirely and baked without distinct sections, all casseroles have size and method of cooking in common (a single, large pan/pot and cooked for a longer period of time).

Ingredients

Stephen Cushman's poem, *Casserole for the Bereaved*, begins with, "Please, it's nothing. Just what there was lying around..." (1-2). This sentiment embodies the ingredients of most casseroles—a combination of food already in the kitchen. If white bread is a symbol of a versatile ingredient (one that can be used for multiple dishes), then the casserole is a symbol of a versatile dish (one that can be made of *anything*). This practice, of using whatever food is lying around can be demonstrated well in the phrase, "everything but the kitchen sink," which is often used as a name for casseroles with seemingly odd ingredient choices.

For example, in one "Kitchen Sink Casserole" recipe, Addie Gundry writes, "This dish was made popular in the 1930s when higher priced meats just [weren't] practical (or even available) to the middle and lower class. Instead, people used things like bologna and other forms of protein (beans and cheese) to help fill them up fast and for long periods of time" (Gundry, *Recipe Lion*). Gundry's recipe includes bologna, pork and beans, and canned chili. Her recipe illustrates the convenience of a casserole. Convenience is illustrated in the use of affordable, available, time saving ingredients. While these are beneficial to most families, as stated earlier in this chapter—some families *choose* to make convenient foods, most working-class families *have* to.

The ingredient list in Gundry's recipe is rhetorical, it indicates a history ("made popular in the 1930s when higher priced meats just [weren't] practical"), an audience ("middle and lower

class”), and a purpose (“to help fill them up fast and for long periods of time”). Gundry’s notation about the recipe is most likely an attempt to explain to the new audience (assumedly internet users reading the recipe) why the recipe contains odd ingredients or cheap foods. By pointing specifically to foods like bologna, beans, and cheese she not only demonstrates an understanding that these foods are cheap, but that they served a specific purpose. The casserole, here, is about utility and practicality.

This recipe points towards how working-class people work with what they have. Cost becomes the main priority (how can you cook a food if you can’t buy it?), with time coming in as a close second. By using, “what is lying around,” people save both time and money. The leftovers utilized in many casseroles would go to waste if not used, and time is saved by avoiding a trip to the store. If you consider these factors, it’s no wonder most casseroles seem alike. Most utilize the same base ingredients (bulky, inexpensive protein like hamburger meat, beans, eggs, and cheese), the same fillers (like potatoes), and the same sauces and spices (like “cream of” ____ soups or premixed seasoning packets like ranch, onion soup mix, or taco seasoning). These combinations symbolize the priorities and resourcefulness of working-class people.

Time

In discussing the priorities of working-class people, I want to point towards the value of time. For my parents, time was very related to our class. I remember when I was very young that my father worked in Dallas. He drove over two hours every day for his job as a maintenance director at a school. One day he left that job to take a position working as a carpenter for a man in my hometown. He’s told me many times that he gave up a better paying job so that he could

spend more time with us. Our family made much less, but we gained better relations with one another. For my father, time was worth money.

My mother also valued saving time. She was not the type of mom who cooked four course meals, or made her own cookies. She made a lot of quick dishes. These foods were not built out of lack of desire to cook—but rather a desire to spend time elsewhere—with us. The casserole demonstrates well how valuing time points towards valuing relations.

What I would like to consider is how the value of time shapes the construction of the dish. In addition to saving time by cooking with leftovers (that I discussed in the previous section), many casseroles utilize prepacked or processed ingredients to save time as well. Common prepackaged foods utilized in casseroles would include: canned soups, seasoning packets, canned food, chips (such as potato chips or tortilla chips), cereals (like corn flakes), noodles, tortillas, canned biscuits, or pie dough. Not only would these ingredients be shelf stable (thus able to be kept on hand without worry of spoilage) but would save money by allowing the individual to buy one item instead of investing in multiple ingredients. While some might point out that buying multiple ingredients in bulk would save an individual more money over time (for example, purchasing spices in whole and then mixing them to create an onion soup packet), it's important to understand that purchasing in bulk is a privilege. Many working-class people do not have the means to purchase whole containers of spices or bulk ingredients upfront (much less space to store them) and instead rely on less expensive (though perhaps at a higher cost per ounce) premixed packages that they can afford to buy only when needed.

In addition to saving money, time would be saved when making casseroles that contain sauces or breads. Casseroles would take considerably longer to put together if the cook had to make their own tortillas or a roux prior to assemblage; it would also require more cooking skills.

Skills that would also require time to practice and learn. Though some working-class people have advanced cooking skills, many may not have the luxury to risk wasting practice batches or learning techniques. As I highlighted in the last chapter with my example of making frosting, experimenting in the kitchen is not discouraged in all working-class homes, but the privilege of experimenting and skill building should not be assumed as given. The use of a processed or prepackaged item saves time and ensures that the dish will turn out right the first try.

In addition to saving time by prepackaged food, casseroles also save time by their cooking method. Casseroles utilize a dumping technique in which all ingredients are mixed (or layered), placed in a single dish, then cooked all at once. There are little instructions needed, because rather than the individual the oven does most of the work. This method frees up the cook so that they can do other things while dinner is cooking instead of having to tend a pot. The cook would also save time cleaning, since it reduces the number of dishes in preparation. Lastly, time is reduced by the practice of making food ahead. Casseroles are often cited as freezing well, many individuals use this to their advantage by prepping their meals ahead of time.

To demonstrate the time saving qualities of casseroles, I would like to share one of my family's recipes for quiche, which is shown in the recipe card below. I share this recipe for a few reasons. First, there are only a few recipes of my mother's that I have, and I appreciate the opportunity to honor it in this thesis. Second, though, I think of quiche as a working-class food, because it was made by my mother. Working-class foods are not just identified because they display working-class qualities; they are also defined by those we eat them with. As I showed in the visual map I created in chapter two, when I understand a working-class food, it is based on a series of encounters I've had that make up my understanding of working-class culture. If I presented quiche without the context of those encounters, it wouldn't be clear *why* I felt fit

within a working-class category—much like how the casserole read only through *Good Housekeeping* would only appear middle-class.

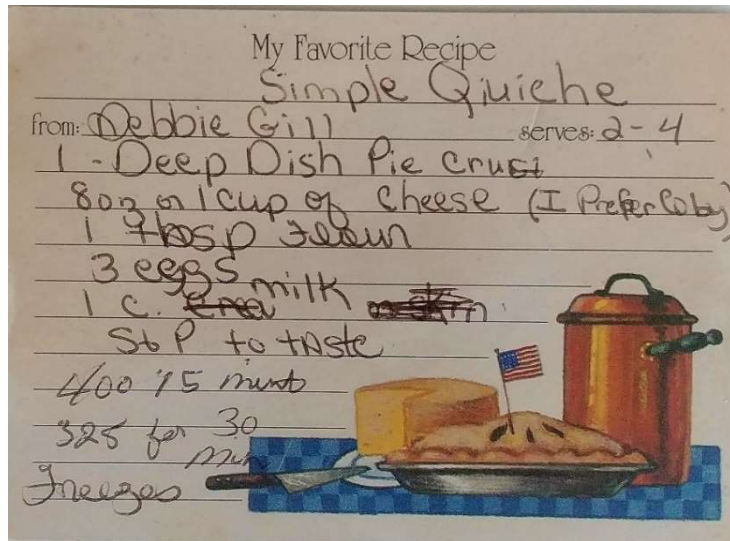


Figure 5: Simple Quiche Recipe Card. Written by Debbie Gill

My mother was not an avid cook. I think she would have been if she'd had the time and resources to learn how. Many of the working-class aspects of food that I have discussed in this thesis were noted by reflecting on the dishes I ate growing up (especially the ones my mother cooked). My mother did not grow up learning how to cook. My father has joked many times that when they were first married, my mom only knew how to make bologna sandwiches and that once she accidentally packed him a lunch of only white bread and mustard. This did not compare though to her younger sister who frequently made a "tomato soup" that consisted of only ketchup and water. The types of foods I remember my mother cooking most were casseroles (like the Tex-Mex one I referenced in the opening of this chapter), strawberry cake (made using Jello mix, boxed cake mix, and frozen strawberries in syrup), and this quiche. I preface this recipe with context, because I want to emphasize that although quiches are often considered "fancy" my

mother's was not. Additionally, when we look at the recipe, we can see many of the casserole qualities I've already begun to outline in this chapter.

First, I want to point to the title of the recipe labeled, "Simple Quiche." This labeling aligns with the larger narratives of casseroles as *humble, easy, honest, and wholesome*. The recipe does not just state it is simple, it demonstrates simplicity in its structure. Most notable is the lack of directions. This reaffirms the idea that casseroles save time by eliminating complicated steps or long cooking processes. Though not listed, I know from cooking this dish and watching my mother make it that you can easily use one bowl to mix your ingredients, which you can pour into your pie dish.

If we look to the ingredients themselves, we can also see working-class qualities. The recipe calls for a "deep dish pie crust" rather than providing ingredients or directions to make the pie crust. My mother assumed in writing this recipe that those using it¹³ would buy the crust premade. In addition to the use of premade ingredients, this recipe utilizes cheaper protein such as milk, eggs, and cheese rather than expensive meats.

We can even note that on the line listing milk two notations are crossed out. The first, "crea," we can assume to have been the beginnings of the word cream, the second "skim" would refer to skim milk. Though we are unable to ask her what she meant this could be for a few potential reasons. Writing milk rather than specifying cream could be a choice of affordability. I know that growing up we rarely had cream stocked in the fridge (as it was expensive, and we had little use for it). However, the marking out of "skim" makes that assumption more complicated

¹³ I would like to note that I do not know if my mother created this recipe card for her own records or for someone else. I also am not sure if she created the recipe herself, although she does list herself as the author. At the time, I am the only person who has this card, so when I speak of assumptions it is based partially on the way the recipe is written and partially on my knowledge of how my mother has explained the recipe before. Though I had seen the recipe card prior to her death, I usually just asked her for the recipe and she gave me instructions from memory.

(as skim does not usually cost more than just whole milk). It's possible that rather than specifying a certain type of milk, my mother wrote milk to keep it open for whatever kind of was in the fridge. This openness to different ingredients on hand (and the potential for using leftovers) can be seen in two other ways in this recipe. The first is the notation of cheese in which she writes "I prefer coby" in parenthesis, indicating a partiality but also an openness to swap by stating a preference rather than listing Colby cheese as the ingredient. Secondly, though it is not noted in the recipe, I know that this recipe was a base recipe. My mother never made a quiche plain, but instead often added different things depending on what we had at home. Our favorite was potato and bacon although during the summer she would sometimes add tomatoes from our family's garden.

The last part of the recipe is only the word "freezes," which we can understand to be an indication that the dish can be frozen. This statement lets the audience know that this dish can be prepared ahead of time and thawed later. My mother often saved time by making multiple quiches at once, which we would eat for several days.

In speaking about time, it is important to discuss how all this points towards relations. I share this recipe and the stories of my mother to not only point towards how foods can be relational through the passing on of recipes (recipes that enable me to feel a connection to my mother even after she has died), but through the saving of time. My mother, like many women in rural, conservative areas was tasked with taking care of the house (and for the most part taking care of us, the children). She assumed this gendered role even though she also worked outside the home. Throughout her life she held many jobs, many manual jobs that involved cleaning, that took her out of the home at odd hours. She was not always home for the entire afternoon like some of my friend's parents were. Towards the end of her life she worked as a night cleaner for

an internet company in our area. Even though she worked at night, she always made sure she was awake when we were home. She valued time spent with us over cooking fancy meals. Casseroles like this quiche was a way for her to fulfil her role as a mother and wife. The time she saved cooking was time spent with family. The ability to fulfil that role was a balancing act—trying to spend time with your family while also trying to do what was best for them (feeding them healthy food, paying for bills). This is a balancing act many parents in working-class homes practice. While the casserole freed many middle-class housewives of the gendered role (by getting them out of the kitchen), it was a way my mom felt she was able to satisfy it. It is no wonder the foods I remember her most for are some mix of premade and homemade. Though many people in the cooking community might not call this cooking (or more rudely “cheating”), I see this as a compromise—a way to comfort, feed, and love those around you through food when your time and resources are few.

Feeding a Crowd

My mother’s recipe provides us with one more consideration for the construction of the casserole, which is serving size. Within my mother’s recipe she states for the serving “2-4,” which is common for many casseroles (though some can feed far more depending on the size of the pan). A serving size does not just indicate how many meals you can get out of a dish, it literally points towards relations by indicating that the food can be shared with other people. It is a dish that is not meant to be eaten alone. In looking at the size of a casserole, we can see how the food is used to foster community.

The ability for casseroles to be easily baked, time-saving, and in large amounts make it ideal for serving groups of people. Though my previous discussion of casseroles is centered around

families, the casserole can be found in other working-class spaces as well. Growing up I had casseroles at home, in my school lunch line, at community events, but most notably I ate them at potlucks.

Though middle-class people participate in potlucks (graduate school has been one space that has demonstrated this phenomena), potlucks are working-class in nature. While many moments might be celebrated over a large dinner, for working-class people these gatherings would become too expensive and would be riddled with uncomfortable social questions about who is paying, whether they can afford it, how much should the tip, whether they order drinks or stick to water, etc. The potluck is able to sidestep those anxieties by crowdsourcing the food. Thus, potlucks allow everyone to take part in the preparation, consumption, and clean-up. It allows for connecting with others while allowing people to contribute what they can—if they can.

At many potlucks (especially church potlucks) casseroles comprise half of the meal. In examining the potluck casserole, we are not only able to see the ways that casseroles are relational (because they are made for community events), but also because they reflect the people in the community.

When I attended a potluck, I understood casseroles by not just a working-class framework, but within the context of my community. When I went to potluck at my family's church I would likely see classic casseroles like green bean or tater tot casserole, because women in the church would try to make dishes that were more familiar (and appealing) to a larger group of people. A potluck in the more local farming community I grew up in, however, would often make casseroles based on what was in season. A squash casserole in the summer would recognize both the relation between the farmer and land, but also the relationship between the

people cook and those attending. People generally cook with their audience in mind, but a potluck is a space where relations really matter. Potlucks are less about the individual's preference, and more about the needs of the whole. Casseroles illustrate this idea well, because they are designed to be eaten by more than one person.

Though many recipes feed more than one, the casserole is different in that it is cooked in one batch and then divided. When you cut into a casserole you change the composition of the dish. Rather than taking an item divided before consumption, you make the dish, divide, and then serve the rest to others. There is a significant distinction between making a large amount of food for other people versus making a dish that is large and splitting it up. Consider for example, hamburgers, which are often cooked for crowds. When you grill a patty, it is cooked on its own. It might cook at a faster rate than others. By the time everyone eats your burger could be cold while your neighbor's could be burning hot. Served on its own bun, you can determine what condiments and toppings it contains. It is just yours.

While certainly community is still fostered over food regardless of the type, there is something unique about a dish like the casserole. When you bake a casserole, it is all cooked in the same pan. To serve you must cut into the dish, with each person eating a part of a whole. Your piece is not singular, it was shaped by the other pieces that were cut before yours—it is shaped by a relation. When you eat the casserole, everyone eats the same thing. The act of eating pieces of a whole is a communion. The casserole signifies a connection a larger group, and by sharing the meal you bring people together.

Funeral Potatoes: Comforting Others through Food

For this last section, I want to look specifically at the ways casseroles are used to comfort people. I began this chapter with a story about a death, because I feel it is a time when people are most in need of comfort. For working-class people, death is particularly hard. Bills do not stop to grieve and neither do people who have to pay them. For my family, my mother's death was not just about how we would emotionally move forward, but also how my family could pay bills without her income. This is the case of many working-class people who are forced to continue working right after the death of a loved one, because they cannot afford to take time off. Funerals, I learned, can also be incredibly expensive and many homes want the (tens of) thousands of dollars up front. My father has told me many times that before my mother's funeral an old friend of his came up and gave him a hug, slipping him a hundred-dollar bill in his pocket. He says he would not ever forget it, because it actually helped, and there lies the problem. When poor people need help, money is usually a solution, but when you live in working-class communities there is rarely money to spare. When you consider this context, it's easier to understand why so many people line up to give a grieving family food—what else can they afford? The funeral casserole is a comfort food. It seeks to take one thing off the mind of those grieving, without putting the giver in financial trouble.

A few weeks ago, I was scrolling on Facebook and came across a video one of my friend's moms had shared. The [recipe](#) called "Funeral Potatoes" includes frozen hash browns, cream of chicken soup, cheese, and sour cream, and a few seasonings. It is all topped with crushed corn flakes and baked for forty minutes. Now I've had this dish before, I've seen it many times at a church potluck and at a few meals following a funeral, but I had never known its name

(usually, I'd refer to it as "that gross potato casserole"). This recipe has all the markers of a working-class food. It is a simple dump and mix recipe. It features a few premade foods (frozen hash browns, cream of chicken soup, and corn flakes). It also uses inexpensive protein (cheese) and cheap filler (potatoes). What is most illustrative, though, of this casserole is its name—*Funeral potatoes*.

It is unsurprising that potatoes are a popular dish to make for funerals. They are not only inexpensive, but they are well liked. My experience of potato casseroles is something that can be seen in various rural, working-class communities. Jennifer A. Jordan writes of an interview where she asks a woman about memories associated with certain foods. She states,

At a funeral she had recently attended, there were no less than fourteen basically identical potato dishes brought to feed the mourners. Providing the potatoes is just one of the ways that the women of that community step up in a time of mourning, caring for those experiencing loss with a big pan of potatoes topped with corn flakes or cloaked with a thick layer of canned, cream of mushroom soup (64).

The recognition of the potatoes as associated with funerals and the countless stories and recipes, which can be found online, demonstrate the symbolic nature of the casserole. Implicit in the term "comfort food" is the aim of the object—to comfort and nourish. In dishes like funeral potatoes that comfort is directed at others. A funeral casserole provides comfort to both people in a working-class relationship regardless of its consumption. Those grieving are comforted knowing they will not be responsible for getting food on the table. Even if they do not consume the food, they are also comforted by the gesture. On the other end of the relationship, the giver is comforted by knowing they are able to help. In working-class communities where money is

scarce, this gesture utilizes the resources available (time, labor, inexpensive foods or leftovers) to reach out or “step up” as Jordan states.

Considerations for the Casserole

By examining the casserole, we can take away a few key components of a working-class food. First, in both of our foods so far (white bread and casseroles), cost has been the most important factor. Secondly, time was a major consideration in preparing dishes. These two factors are very much assumed to be concerns of most low-income people. What the casserole demonstrates well though is a commonality with white bread—versatility. By utilizing leftovers and feeding large groups, the casserole proves to be a versatile food. The consideration of prepackaged foods to reduce costs and time was also noted in chapter one and emphasized here. A new concept introduced in this chapter was “partially homemade.” This process, demonstrated through the quiche recipe, involves taking a processed or premade food and combining it with other ingredients to make something yourself. This practice allows working-class people to comfort or nourish others while also considering their own time and resources (which was demonstrated through the funeral potatoes). Lastly, while white bread illustrates the ways that stories shape our understanding or conception of a food, casseroles illustrate the ways foods are shaped by our relations with one another. Casseroles demonstrate identification through relationships. How we identify foods is dependent on who made the food, who we ate them with, or who we made them for. The casserole is a dish I experienced in working-class spaces—being cooked by church members, by friends, and by my mother. Making a casserole not only saved time to be spent with family but was a way to strengthen our relationships. In each aspect of the

casserole, we are able to see how working-class people understand food as a powerful way to connect with others.

CHAPTER 5: GREENS

This chapter will discuss greens as a working-class food. I focus on greens as an example of making meaning through space and place, as greens are both an integral part of Southern cooking (Collard, Mustard, and Turnips), and a plant (Pokeweed) that grows wild in East Texas. Space and place not only play a large role in the types of food we eat, but the way we interpret that food. As I noted in chapter one, place and space allow ‘groups [to] organize under a set of shared beliefs and practices’” (CRTL, “Entering the Cultural Rhetorics Conversations”). When we examine food through the spaces and places it appears, we are able to better understand the shared practices of working-class people. In this chapter I want to demonstrate how different places constellate to create cultural meaning—how the landscapes where we experience food construct the meaning of food. I want to take us to a specific story about greens.

Before I start, I want to acknowledge that this is a single working-class story about greens, by no means the only story about greens. It is a story about my home, my family, and my experiences—and as a result, a story about a rural home, a white family, in white spaces. Greens, as an iconic soul food, has a history rooted in the South, slavery, and black culture. I assume that this history is why my family cooks greens—that as a white family living in the South our stories and cooking practices are interwoven with trauma. When I speak of greens, I do not seek to romanticize it, but rather to discuss it as my family does, as homecooked, good food. Though this thesis is not about racial narratives, or raced foods, it is about working-class experiences, and not all working-class people are white.

Were this project bigger or my timeline longer, I would have sought to constellate my stories with other working-class folk with different experiences than mine. Since that is not an option, instead I am choosing to acknowledge that history here, and ask that you, my readers

understand that I cannot go back and change my experiences or memories to reflect the diverse group of people that grow, harvest, make, and consume greens. I cannot diversify my family experiences. I can, however, argue that when we talk about, make, or consume food, we should not do so without acknowledging where it comes from. To produce foods with no context is to act as if they can be removed from the land where they grew, where they are loved, and who they are loved by. In 2016, I realized just how important that context is.

Neiman Marcus and Collard Greens

It was November 2016, I was sitting in a coffee shop in Michigan browsing on Facebook when I saw a post about Neiman Marcus selling greens for \$66.00. Friends on my social media were outraged at the fact that an elite department store was selling frozen packages of greens online as part of their Thanksgiving dinners. Many were poking fun at the rich, white people who were buying them, others were calling attention to exorbitant prices, calling them #gentrifiedgreens. My mind kept thinking about Neiman Marcus, about how conflicting the image of greens and my image of the store were. I was taken back to my memories of a mall in North Texas.

Classed Spaces

The North Park Center is a large mall in Dallas, Texas. Unlike many of the shopping centers across America that are half empty, North Park is an active shopping complex for most Dallasites and many out-of-towners who make the trek once or twice a year for Christmas presents or special occasions. While my family never went to this specific mall (too far away, too

crowded, too expensive), when my parents let me drive to the city it was a popular spot for my friends and me to go—to walk around and browse as entertainment.

The mall is divided in four main sections, which are marked by the department stores that act as corners of the building. In figure six, which is shown below, is a map that the website provides online to help shoppers navigate the mall.

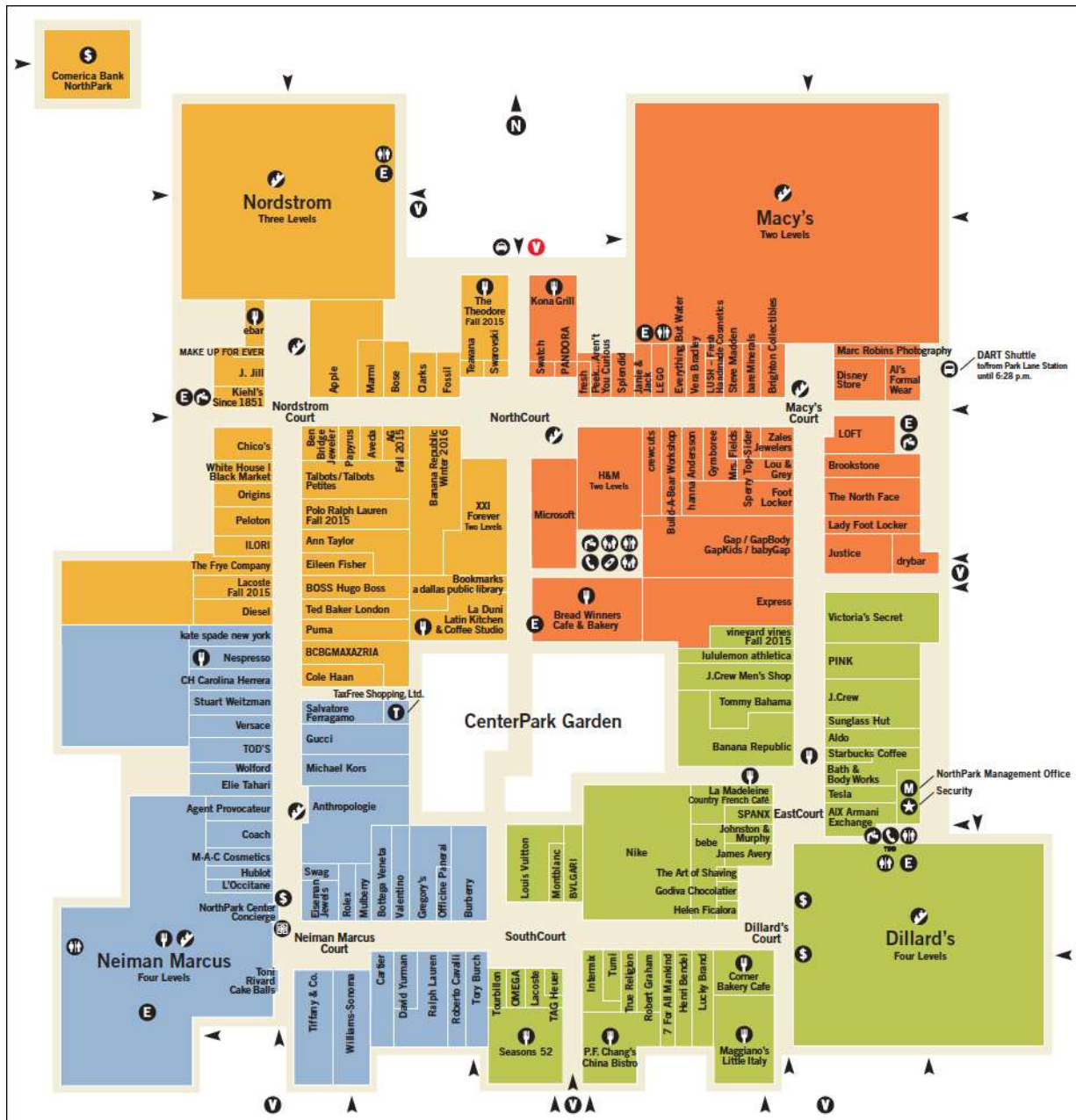


Figure 6: Map of the North Park Center

Each store on the corner has its own separate entrance. The map contains many of the markers found in most malls. It contains icons for restaurants, escalators, restrooms, and entrances. It contains labels for stores and sometimes names for certain spaces that correlate to direction, such as the “North Court” and “South Court.” What the map does not provide however, is a legend for colors. A map user could make their own assumptions about what the colors mean. A user who has never visited might think that the spaces are separated by doors, gates, or other physical markers. A user could also assume that it is separated by stores, with certain colors indicating a certain type of store (such as apparel in a green mall section and home goods in another). However, if you have been to the mall then you know these assumptions are not true.

The mall is split by four colors based on the department stores that create each corner. There are no signs or descriptions as to why else they are divided, but when you walk in the mall as a shopper it is clear that the mall is divided based on economics. The space would more accurately be split into two classes—the wealthy and everyone else.

The blue section represents the most expensive stores. Names like Tiffany & Co or Versace can be identified as luxury brands. Many stores in that section are marked by less products rather than more and subsequently less shoppers filling each space. Many of the products have no price tag. Browsing in these spaces is an intimidating act. There are less bodies to hide among and less products to look at. There are also distinctions between the different bodies that occupy those spaces. The few times I have walked in these stores I have felt very out of place.

I want to bring your attention specifically to the Neiman Marcus store in contrast to the Macy’s store. I want to focus on these two stores because they demonstrate how the mall is classed and the ways in which place play a part in isolating working-class people from spaces

designated for wealthy people. Based on the map alone we know that Neiman Marcus has four stories and only one direct entrance. It is next to the mall's concierge service. Its bathroom is in the back corner of its store. If you wanted to use its restroom when shopping at other stores, you would have to walk through the entire store to get there. Based on personal experience shopping at the mall, I know that Neiman Marcus has its own coffee bar, a café where you can purchase alcohol, a grand piano, and that its restrooms contain private nursing rooms and sitting areas.

Outside its entrance is a small pond filled with ducks and turtles and other decorative features like landscaping and benches. Lastly, this side of the mall contains covered parking garages with nearby security officers. If you were to park in this section, you could walk directly from your car to the store entrance without passing another store. Theoretically you could park your car, go shopping, get a drink, and take a break in a sitting area all without entering the rest of the mall (and subsequently passing by any people who don't shop at Neiman Marcus).

In contrast Macy's is only two levels, and three entrances from outside the mall. It has a larger parking area with no garage or coverage. Its bathrooms are to the side closest to the rest of the mall. From personal experience I know that the Macy's restrooms contain no nursing area or seats where you could rest.

If you look at the icons near Macy's, you will notice a bus stop. While the blue and green sections of the mall have dollar sign icons (\$) most likely indicating ATMs), the orange section is populated with icons depicting families (the male, female, child pictures) and public amenities like payphones, water fountains, and restrooms. Its store is surrounded by household brands more familiar to a wider range of families (like Disney, Lego, or Zales).

I don't believe my family ever shopped at Macy's. Most of our purchases for department store type things were purchased at Walmart. However, I use Macy's to illustrate the different levels

of comfort working-class people feel in middle to upper-class spaces. If you refer back to the visual map I created in Chapter two, you'll notice a node that asks, "Do I feel comfortable in this space?" (follow Listening to Stories > Observed Experiences > Shopping > top yellow branch). From that branch I have a series of questions asking why I feel comfortable and how the store is perceived. I placed these questions about comfort and place, because I feel that even when I'm in spaces that I cannot afford—there are levels of discomfort that indicate who the space is designed for.

I am familiar with the entrances and parking garages of Neiman Marcus, because once or twice I did decide to park in the covered garage and walk through the Neiman Marcus store, and when I did I could feel the sense of unbelonging. The feeling I think most working-class people get (regardless of their current income) when they find themselves in a fancy store or in formal wear at event, and you start to become anxious at the thought that you will be found out. While the mall overall represents many brands that are out of reaching for working-class families (this analysis in no way argues that this mall is designed even in part for working-class people), Macy's section of the mall is overall more populated by non-wealthy customers. The people in those spaces looked more like me, dressed more like me. Though I do not shop at Macy's it's conceivable that I could (perhaps for a gift or special occasion outfit). When I walk around a Macy's I can pass as a customer. When I walk around in a Neiman Marcus—I feel like I don't belong. The closer to the blue side of the mall I would get, the more I felt out of place. "Out of place" describes this feeling most accurately—as it demonstrates how my body knew it belonged elsewhere.

I chose to set the scene of this chapter with a mall, because when I saw the outrage on the internet over the Neiman Marcus advertisement, I was taken back to this mall. I was in

Michigan, thousands of miles away from that entrance that was always marked by police cars for security and the clothes I could never afford to buy. A food so familiar to me, so integral to my home and the place I felt like I most belonged was suddenly being intruded by a product I would never buy in a store I would probably never shop at. I now must constellate those two spaces—a mall and my home—in order to provide accurate context as to how I know and understand greens to be a working-class food.

Where Poor People Shop

I want to note, that the issue with Neiman Marcus selling greens isn't just about the price or just about an inexpensive food being sold by an upper-class retailer. Having worked in the food industry, I know that there are many foods with large profit margins. Foods like popcorn, snow cones, hot dogs, or bottled waters and sodas are all very inexpensive to make. Some can be enjoyed at home for a very low cost, while others (like snow cones) are nearly always purchased elsewhere. While many people, like my dad, scoff at paying high prices for movie theater popcorn, you don't see outrage over the costs—they are not labeled gentrified.

I believe that this is because they are not out of place. Cotton candy and snow cones *belong* at the fair. Hot dogs can be appropriately called ball park food, but greens do not belong in Neiman Marcus. That association points us towards a meaning in place—*where* a product comes from matters. When people criticized the store, they drew attention to not just where greens should not be (Neiman Marcus), but where you *should* find them.

In the tweet shown in figure seven below, User Thomas L. Strickland states, “Walmart will sell you collards \$4/lb, pre-washed. Your local farm stand will be half that. Your grandpa

might have greens in his backyard” (Tweet). The tweet demonstrates appropriate places where you could find greens for a reasonable price.

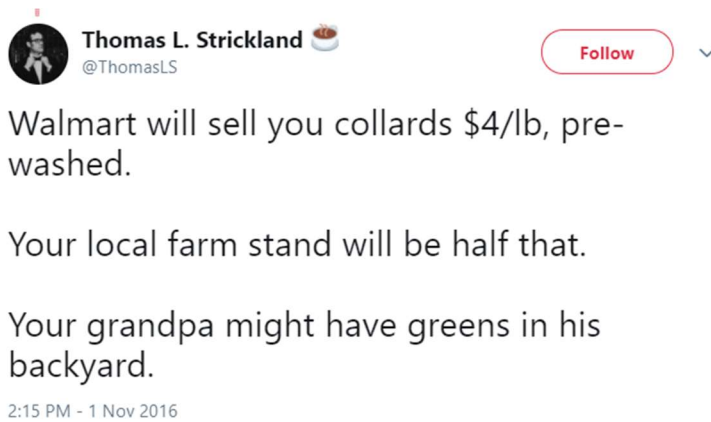


Figure 7: Tweet by Thomas L. Strickland

While Strickland’s tweet could have just stated that greens don’t usually cost \$66.00, it emphasized that there are other places where greens are usually bought or found for free. What is significant in this tweet though, is the choice of places to list. Many users demonstrated greens association with poor places—Walmart specifically. User Dmadscientist tweets, “Wal-Mart sells them for \$1” (Tweet). User Black Kerouac states, “Who orders collard greens from Neiman Marcus...Neiman is now Walmart?” (Tweet). If you search for #gentrifiedgreens you could find other tweets making comparable statements. Writer Chris Fuhrmeister states, “Neiman Marcus doesn't mention what particular spices go into the greens, but it's a good bet they're similar to what's found in a 27-ounce can of "Margaret Holmes Seasoned Southern Style Heat N Serve Collard Greens," available at Walmart for a single buck” (*Eater*). While there are many stores that sell different greens (like Mustard, Turnip, Collards, or even Dandelion), Walmart was the example given to demonstrate the absurdity of Neiman Marcus’s product. Many stores that have

middle to upper-class target audiences sell greens (like Whole Foods), but these are not provided as examples.

I believe that what is listed as a default location, indicates the classed nature of greens. In contrast to Neiman Marcus, Walmart is very associated with poor people. In many rural areas, Walmarts are the only grocery store available. Whereas Neiman Marcus is designed with wealthy people in mind, Walmart is a space where poor people (and their food) would not be out of place. Though my family would not buy greens at a grocery store, I am not offended by Walmart's decision to sell them in a can. The image of Walmart and the image of my home do not conflict, because Walmart is not a space where I have been made to feel like I'm unwelcomed. However, just because I *could* buy greens at a local Walmart, doesn't mean my family would. Instead my family has and probably always will pick greens themselves.

Land-bound Foods: Making Meaning through Place

Greens are an exception to other working-class foods that are valued for their quick preparation. They are, instead, all about time. While in the last chapter I discussed how time saved can make time for relations, I want to redirect to another understanding of time. Within this section, I will illustrate how time with food establishes relations to the land. I want to be clear that presenting a food that requires a lot of time does not contradict the way working-class people value saving time. Rather, it demonstrates how working-class foods differ depending on *where* the community is. Though my parents saved time by taking lower paying, but closer jobs and making quick foods on many weeknights, my family also valued the time spent within the community. My father's family has lived in Whitton for a long time and preparing foods like greens is practice integral to our community. While the process is time-consuming, the relations

with the land and time spent with others is still a practice interwoven with our working-class experience.

First the greens are gathered. Though my family eats many varieties of leafy greens depending on the season (and who preps them), the greens most unique to our home are Pokeweed, also known as Poke, Pokeberry, and Poke Salat (which my family says as Poke “salad”). Poke Salat grows wild in East Texas, making them free to eat and easily available. In our family, when greens are picked you gather as many as you can. Poke Salat is best to pick at an early stage when the leaves are most tender. Once gathered, the greens are divided and placed in Walmart sacks to be sent off to other family members. My immediate family did not always pick greens growing up, sometimes a couple bags arrived at my grandmother’s house and she would send some to us. The picking and distribution of greens represents the community.

A bag of greens from a family friend was not the same as a can of greens bought at the store. Though a can of greens might offer a distribution center—a Walmart sack Poke Salat tells a story of the land and the people that make up our community. We know where the greens come from, we know who picked them. They arrive from a network of other members of our community who know the land well enough to identify and pick the leaves and know our family well enough to understand that we want them. The picking of greens is a shared practice that demonstrate a value of the land and the foods that come from it.

The Walmart sack is not unique to my family. To quote a recipe called “The RIGHT WAY to Cook Greens” uploaded by a user named rjckuns, “A mess of greens is about as many greens as you can cram into a plastic shopping bag” (allrecipes). The plastic bag is important, it not only indicates the use of a non-traditional measuring tool for cooking (demonstrating how working-class people will use what’s on hand), but also the importance of repurposing.

The Walmart sack is also a recognizable item. It points towards a place where my family would be comfortable. A plastic Walmart bag shows that other's in our community shop at the same grocer. The idea of that place juxtaposed to the greens does not discomfort, it feels familiar—it does not make me feel out of place.

The greens at this stage would be washed (multiple times) and boiled (sometimes fried). Many people wash and boil greens multiple times (each with a new batch of water), to help reduce bitterness. Poke Salat is unique, because it is poisonous when eaten raw. A video produced by The Southern Foodways Alliance explains that consuming Poke Salat without a second boil will cause you to become sick and that people have even died by eating its berries (York). My grandmother boils Poke three times. Her boiling displays knowledge of the food—it shows that she understands its distinction from those you'd buy in a store. The time put into cooking Poke Salat is a result of her understanding of the land and the traditions that stemmed from it. The last boil contains additional seasonings (usually just salt and pepper) with ham hock or bacon (depending on what she has handy). She also sometimes throws in grease if she had fried something beforehand or a bit of green onions.

All of this is done in a large pot and once cooked is either eaten (if it's a family dinner) or divided and sent to my family's house, my uncle's, and my aunt's (whose houses all occupy the same street I grew up on). For my family and many other people who make and consume greens, it's not about just the taste or even the nutritional properties. Greens are a communal food, gathered and distributed among others. Greens do not just come from an understanding of the land, but they represent the value of a place. To pick Poke Salat is to establish a relationship with the place our family lives—to distribute it is to establish relationships with those who live there too.

Poke Salat represents a working-class food that demonstrates a particular literacy. While you might be able to buy a bag of kale from a store and eat it as is—you cannot buy Poke, nor can you decide to gather and make it on your own without knowledge of the land (lest you risk poisoning yourself or picking the wrong plant). Instead, poke is relational and land-bound. Putting that food in a new space, the Neiman Marcus, demonstrates where it belongs (and where it doesn't). These properties illustrate how a food's meaning is made through place.

Reflecting on how place and space shape our understanding of food, we can see how greens fit within our heuristic. Greens are affordable, *because* they come from the place where we live. Greens demonstrate familiarity in a few ways as well. First greens come from a familiar place (places near our home in East Texas), that place is one that my family recognizes through farming and foraging. Second, greens are cooked and served by the work of other community members, the sharing of greens with those around us demonstrate familiarity. Third, greens represent comfort. They are a food I saw growing up, watched my grandmother make, and watched my family eat at many meals. Greens are familiar, because they belonged to a space where I felt comfortable, was exposed to, and felt welcomed. When we view greens within the context of nonworking-class spaces (such as Neiman Marcus), we are unable to understand *why* they are working-class. The next criteria on the heuristic is availability. Greens are made available through the land, but also through picking or receiving them from community members. Though greens do not overlap with white bread and casserole in terms of versatility or easiness—they demonstrate that not all working-class communities are the same. The place where a community resides shapes and changes our definitions of affordable, familiar, and available.

CONCLUSION

Within this thesis, I wanted to seek out moments of commonalities among working-class foods. I wanted to examine foods and stories to better understand how certain foods come to symbolize working-class narratives. I believe I am working towards that understanding.

Through the process of constellating, I outlined three foods using a Cultural Rhetorics framework (White Bread, Casseroles, and Greens). This constellating not only allowed me to build a heuristic that maps out the factors that contribute to working-class foods but allowed me to deeply analyze what constellating means. When I first began this project, constellating was a term I used to explain how I was placing stories within context of each other. The result was what looked mostly like textual analysis. I felt very confined by this word document. I tried to demonstrate all the stories, content, and memories that contributed to my understanding of a food. I think even with the constraints, I provided insightful analysis. However, did it really get to what I felt was constellating. Was it truly showing how a food became a symbol?

My solution was to create a visual map. The maps that I present in chapter 2 was an attempt to offer another explanation of constellating and to portraying how I *actually* came to consider certain foods working-class. If we, working-class people, create culture, then our encounters are what result in the identification of symbols. To understand what makes a working-class food symbol, I first have to try to understand what encounters shaped my understanding of working-class culture. Encounters with stories (through experiences, narratives), other people (or relations), and the places and spaces I inhabit. The resulting visual shows how messy a Cultural Rhetorics methodology can be, but it also demonstrates a better portrayal of what meaning making looks and feels like. Displaying meaning making involves

untangling those encounters and unfolding the questions, ideas, and experiences that shape my understanding of myself and my communities. In order to make those things clear I expanded and reframed those encounters, but the result risked isolation of ideas. It risked presenting only one narrative or concept. In order to frame those concepts accurately, I had to constellate—to place the stories within context of the stories of others who belong to my community.

In constellating my own encounters through each food, I didn't just learn about what makes a food a working-class symbol, I was also able to reflect on my own identity as a working-class person. I was able to consider what it meant for me to be in the academy doing this work.

Limitations

Though I feel there were many moves in this thesis that expanded on an underrepresented area of scholarship, this project was not without limitations. I was reminded of the most major limitation in a recent opinion piece about the Roseann reboot. Roxane Gay writes,

What often goes unsaid is that when the working-class is defined in our cultural imagination, we are talking about white people, even though the real American working class is made up of people from many races and ethnicities (*The New York Times*).

I do not want this limitation to be left unsaid. Since this thesis is largely built off my own memories—it is largely white. My relations are mostly white. My hometown is majority white. The farming community I grew up in is all white. While I have positioned my experiences within this thesis, I recognize that my representation of working-class culture is not complete here. To be more accurate in scope, this thesis is not about working-class food symbols, but really *white*, working-class, rural food symbols. While many of the foods discussed within this thesis

probably also represent people of color in some working-class communities—their constellation might look different.

The largest limitation to a storytelling method is that no matter how many stories are included, there will always be some left out. Here, the risk is amplified, because the stories being left out are the ones that are always left untold in academic spaces. While the scope of this project did not allow for coauthors, as I continue this work I hope to build onto my understanding of food symbols by working with other working-class folk with different backgrounds, experiences, and identities than myself.

Future Work

As I reflect on this work, I am not only reminded of the valuable things I can learn from the encounters I have with stories, my relations, and the land—but also, I am reminded of how I can give back. I can see this work expanding in a few different ways.

Naming Working-class Encounters

I want to continue sharing working-class stories in academic and working-class spaces. In chapter three (White Bread), I reflected the notion that white people do not have culture. I have seen this idea expressed in the protests of my students—*how do I write about a cultural object if I have no culture?* I have also seen this expressed in dangerous beliefs in the media and daily conversations—*I don't see color* or *We're all just a melting pot!* Certainly, I do not want to argue that white experiences are underrepresented, rather I think there is value in reflecting on the rich knowledge that stems from different cultures. This reflection on our meaning making practices do not change what is already true—but it provides us with the tools to talk about those

experiences. Imagine how much different the 2016 election would be, if families like mine recognized how our working-encounters differed from the Republican politicians who represent us. Imagine how much more invested my white students would be if they understood their identity in an intersectional way—one in which working-class was not a label of shame, but could be discussed, named, and reflected on for its positive values. Understanding how our class shapes our beliefs, values, and literacies gives us an ability to talk about our identities in a productive way. This project provided me space for this process, and I feel I am better for it.

Exploring Food Rhetorics

I want to also continue exploring food rhetorics as a research area. As I've demonstrated in this thesis there is a need to continue bringing interdisciplinary work in conversation with one another. To connect food studies with Rhetoric and Composition, I plan to publish at least one piece from this work in a food studies journal. As I explained in chapter 1, the largest problem with developing methodologies for food studies is that many people write in accordance to their home discipline or only publish in their home discipline journals. I believe that the themes of CR outlined here (storytelling, relations, and place and space), not only point towards the ways that we create culture (which gives meaning to our food) but are concepts accessible and relevant to all researchers.

As I continue working on food rhetoric projects, I would like to consider more deeply how food is rooted in power systems, especially online. Further research in this area might consider how recipes online are rhetorically constructed, how media representations reflect class, race, and gender, or how digital spaces create opportunities for people to share stories about food.

A Final Food Story

Recently, I visited home for the first time this year. I was having lunch with my aunt at a Mexican food restaurant in Fort Worth called El Fenix. We call her Pill. She is a very loud, eccentric woman. When she laughs all her jewelry shakes. On her breast pocket area are three pins—a large bedazzled flower, a US flag, and a button with the shape of Texas and the letters JESUS written across.

We were talking about graduate school, as I was in town for a visiting weekend. She made a comment about what I studied, asking me if I was majoring in English...*you know, like literature and stuff, you write a lot, right?*

Usually when relatives say this type of thing I just nod or say *yeah similar to that* or something like *same field, different subdiscipline, but it doesn't really matter* or *not really, but close*. It's not that I'm trying to be patronizing, it's just that I'm not good at explaining what I study, and I haven't met many people who genuinely seem interested when they ask. My entire life I've been pretty used to my parents not understanding my schoolwork or knowing what I was studying. My family is proud of me, but I'm the first person to go to college. No one in my family really reads except for the Bible. No one in my family ever moves away.

This time though, I decided to try to explain. I told her about this project. I explained that I was trying to write about the way food is used to communicate. Specifically, this project is trying to understand how some foods become working-class symbols. She looked at me and goes,

Well I have some poor people food stories for you!

And she did.

She told me about how her mother used to take her and her sons fishing. That she would set up a fire right next to the river and bring Ziplock bags of cornmeal. After they'd catch a fish, she'd cut it up right there, fry it, and eat.

She told me about one time when her electricity was out due to a storm. She said they had a propane tank that she used to power her stove. She got up that morning and cooked eggs, bacon, and made coffee. Her husband Ken woke up and was so confused. She said he got so upset, because he didn't understand how she made coffee without a coffee maker.

You know, Ken likes to think he's redneck because he bales hay and wears his cowboy boots... but you know, I'm real country. I grew up dirt poor. You know how I made that coffee, right Kelli?

Well, yeah Pill, you boiled it...

And she just cackled.

I could analyze that moment. I could talk about the ways that Pill's story illustrated the distinctions between country people and people who play country¹⁴. How her story about coffee illustrates the association between working-class foods and simplicity (such as the heuristic's criteria of requiring specialized equipment). I could also talk about the identification Pill demonstrates, recognizing that her mother's time saving technique of cutting the fish right after the catch was a "poor person" thing to do.

¹⁴ I like to call these people Ree Drummonds after Food Network's "Pioneer" Woman

Instead of analyzing that moment though—I want to share what it made me feel like. There was bonding in that moment. I was not only able to listen to the stories she told—stories that reflected on her relations and place—but I got to share in meaning making. For the first time, I was able to share with a relative a research project in which they contributed back. That moment, for me, is why this project matters. I have often reflected on how I want to write in a tone that is accessible for broad audiences. I have set out to write about things “that matter to those outside the academy.” But for all my reflection, I was not considering the communities *for who* that work was serving. This whole time I thought my tone and language was what was in the way, but I realize it was the content.

If I want to do meaningful work that honors my family, I don’t have to change my writing style, but I do have to start drawing from the principles I’ve outlined in this thesis. I have to be willing to share and listen to stories not as anecdotes, but as theory. I have to consider not just power relations—but my relations. I have to recognize that my experiences and lens stem from my encounters with family, friends, and others in my life. Lastly, I must recognize that the places and spaces I inhabit contribute meaning to my understanding of the world. How can I contribute to my communities if I distance myself from the knowledge they have provided me with?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adichie, Chimamanda. TEDTalks: Chimamanda Adichie--The Danger of a Single Story. TED, 2009.
- Barthes, Roland. "Chapter 2 Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption." 1961. *Food and Culture: A Reader*. Ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik. New York: Routledge, 2013. 23-29. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Trans. Harry Zohn. *Illuminations*. 1955. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Reprint ed. New York: Schocken Books, 1986. 217–52. 1968.
- Bobrow-Strain, Aaron. *White Bread*. Beacon Pr, 2013.
- Calefato, Patrizia, Loredana La Fortuna, and Raffaella Scelzi. "Food-ography: Food and New Media." *Semiotica* 2016.211 (2016): n. pag. Web. 12 Dec. 2016.
- Cushman, Stephen B. (American poet). "Casserole for the Bereaved." *Southwest Review*, vol. 98, no. 1, 2013, p. 40. General OneFile, http://link.galegroup.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/apps/doc/A320072290/ITOF?u=msu_main&sid=ITOF&xid=a573f902. Accessed 10 Apr. 2018.
- Defraeye, Piet. "White Bread." *Transcultural: A Journal of Translation and Cultural Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2016, p. 101., doi:10.21992/t9jh0d.
- Dejmanee, T. "'Food Porn' as Postfeminist Play: Digital Femininity and the Female Body on Food Blogs." *Television & New Media* 17.5 (2015): 429-48. Web.
- de Saussure, Ferdinand. "The Nature of the Linguistic Sign" and "Mutability and Immutability of the Sign." *Course in General Linguistics*. (Philosophical Library 1916/1959), pp. 65-78.
- de Solier, Isabelle. "Making the Self in a Material World: Food and Moralities of Consumption." *Cultural Studies Review* 19.1 (2013): 9-27. ProQuest. Web. 13 Dec. 2016.
- Dmadscientist (Dmadscientist). "#GentrifiedGreens OMG!!! \$66 at Neiman Marcus, my Grandmother and Mother are rolling over....Wal-Mart sells then for \$1". 03 Nov 2016, 20:04 UTC. Tweet.

- Eckstein, Justin, and Donovan Conley. "1. Spatial Affects & Rhetorical Relations, At the Cherry Creek Farmer's Market." *The Rhetoric of Food: Discourse, Materiality, and Power*. Ed. Joshua Frye and Michael S. Bruner. New York: Routledge, 2013. N. pag. Print.
- Elkins, James. *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Faigley, Lester. "Material Literacy and Visual Design." *Rhetorical Bodies: Toward a Material Rhetoric*. Eds. Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. 171–201.
- Fleitz, Elizabeth. "Cooking Codes: Cookbook Discourses as Women's Rhetorical Practices." *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society* 1.1 (2010). Web.
- Foss, Sonja K. "Visual Imagery as Communication." *Rev. of Semiotics of Visual Language, Metaphor & Art: Interactionism and Reference in the Verbal and Nonverbal Arts, and Evisioning Information. Text and Performance Quarterly* 12.1 (1992): 85–90.
- Foss, Sonja K. *Framing the Study of Visual Rhetoric: Toward a Transformation of Rhetorical Theory. Defining Visual Rhetorics*.
- Fuhrmeister, Chris. "Neiman Marcus Wants to Sell You Collard Greens at an Insane Markup." *Eater*, Eater, 2 Nov. 2016, www.eater.com/2016/11/2/13490464/neiman-marcus-expensive-collard-greens.
- Gay, Roxane. "The 'Roseanne' Reboot Is Funny. I'm Not Going to Keep Watching." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 29 Mar. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/03/29/opinion/roseanne-reboot-trump.html.
- Granderson, LZ. "NASCAR Fans Must Be Rednecks?" *ESPN*, ESPN Internet Ventures, www.espn.com/espn/page2/story?page=granderson%2F070118.
- Greenberg, Julia. "Food Has Eaten the Internet and It Tastes Like a Vampire Taco." *Wired*, Conde Nast, 3 June 2017, www.wired.com/2016/05/internet-reached-perfection-looks-like-vampire-taco/.
- Hughes, Marvalene H. "Soul, Black Women, and Food." *Food and Culture: A Reader*. Ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik. New York: Routledge, 2013. 272-81. Print.
- Jordan, Jennifer A. "Forgotten Plums and Funeral Potatoes." *Contexts*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2017, pp. 64–66., doi:10.1177/1536504217696065.
- Jordan, J. A. (2007), *The Heirloom Tomato as Cultural Object: Investigating Taste and Space. Sociologia Ruralis*, 47: 20–41. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9523.2007.00424.x

- Judkis, Maura. "Hands and bowls and melty cheese! Why does every Web recipe video look the same?" The Washington Post, WP Company, 12 Apr. 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/food/this-has-literally-become-the-most-amazing-way-to-show-food-on-the-web-ever/2016/04/12/4a0b212a-fa96-11e5-886f-a037dba38301_story.html?utm_term=.a36e533482bd.
- Julier, Alice P. *Eating Together: Food, Friendship, and Inequality*. Urbana, Ill.: U of Illinois, 2013. Print.
- King, Thomas. *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*. (U. of Minnesota P., 2003/2005).
- Kniazeva, M. and Venkatesh, A. (2007), Food for thought: a study of food consumption in postmodern US culture. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 6: 419–435. doi:10.1002/cb.232
- Kerouac, Black (Mehkavelli). "Who orders collard greens from Neiman Marcus. You picking up jeans and collards? Neiman is now Walmart? <https://t.co/gDmd1STTet>". 02 Nov 2016, 01:31 UTC. Tweet.
- Lavis, Anna. "Food Porn, Pro-anorexia and the Viscerality of Virtual Affect: Exploring Eating in Cyberspace." *Geoforum* (2015): n. pag. Web.
- "MORE INFORMATION." Quick Tips to Make Your NorthPark Holiday Shopping a Breeze | NorthPark Center, www.northparkcenter.com/posts/quick-tips-to-make-your-northpark-holiday-shopping-a-breeze.
- O'Neill, Kristie, and Daniel Silver. "From Hungry to Healthy." *Food, Culture & Society*, vol. 20, no. 1, Aug. 2016, pp. 101–132., doi:10.1080/15528014.2016.1243765.
- Rjkuns. "The RIGHT WAY To Cook Greens! Recipe." Allrecipes, 31 Aug. 2011, www.allrecipes.com/recipe/218443/the-right-way-to-cook-greens/.
- Royster, Jacqueline Jones and Gesa Kirsch. *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2012.
- Roe, Maggie, Ingrid Sarlöv Herlin, and Suzanne Speak. "Identity, Food and Landscape Character in the Urban Context." *Landscape Research* 41.7 (2016): 757-72. Web.
- Schell, Eileen, and K. J. Rawson. *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods and Methodologies*. (U. Pittsburgh P., 2010).
- Schrempp, Gregory. "Catching Wrangham: On the Mythology and the Science of Fire, Cooking, and Becoming Human." *Journal of Folklore Research* 48.2 (2011): 109-32. Web.
- Sleeter, Christine. *White Bread: Weaving Cultural Past into the Present*. SensePublishers, 2015.

- Stano, Simona. "Lost in Translation: Food, Identity and Otherness." *Semiotica* 2016.211 (2016): n. pag. Web.
- Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- "THE CULT OF THE Casserole." *Southern Living*, Jan. 2014, pp. 98–107.
- The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (Malea Powell, Daisy Levy, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Maria Novotny, Jennifer Fisch-Ferguson). "Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics Practices." *enculturation: a journal of rhetoric, writing, and culture* 18 (2014): n.p. Web <http://enculturation.net/our-story-begins-here>.
- Thomas L. Strickland 🐦 (ThomasLS). "I'll just say this ... If you buy collard greens from Neiman Marcus, you will not get into Heaven." 01 Nov 2016, 21:16 UTC. Tweet.
- Williams, Hannah. "French Roll-Ups Four Ways." BuzzFeed, Tasty Junior, 25 Feb. 2017, www.buzzfeed.com/hannahwilliams/french-roll-ups-four-ways?bffbttasty.
- Williams, Raymond. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. 1974. Routledge Classics. Ed. Ederyn Williams. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1990. 2003.
- Wilkerson, Abby. "Judging, Tasting, Knowing "Good" Food." *Food, Culture, & Society* 19.2 (2016): n. pag. Web.
- York, Joe. "What Is Poke Sallet?" Southern Foodways Alliance, www.southernfoodways.org/film/poke-a-film-bite/.