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Foodies

Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape

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INTRODUCTION

ENTERING THE DELICIOUS WORLD OF FOODIES

We begin this book with a confession: We have never really considered ourselves foodies. Yes, we bake our own bread with a sourdough culture that we vigorously tend to like a beloved pet, religiously adding filtered water and organic flour to sustain its bubbly natural yeasts. And yes, our idea of a good time on New Year's Eve is not a raucous night on the town, but staying home with friends to make (and eat) home-made gnocchi. We'll admit, we do follow the aspiring culinary stars on the Bravo Network show *Top Chef*, and are inspired to cook things after flipping through the pages of glossy food magazines like *Gourmet* or *Savueur*. After watching Bobby Flay's show, *Throwdown*, we were thrilled—even touched—when friends flew home from Boston illegally transporting six sticky buns from the bakery ("Flour") that whooped Chef Flay's celebrity behind. The sight of the "hello-kitty" cake pops and "14 layer cake" on the food blog "bakerella" both inspires us and makes us laugh out loud. We know the names of our city's most acclaimed chefs, and read many of their reviews, even though the demands of having young children (and professors' salaries) means we rarely eat their food.

At the same time we unconsciously acquire knowledge of high-end food establishments, we frequent an extensive roster of lower-cost eateries selling foods like bi bim bop, lamb roti, and barbeque brisket. We try to eat organic and local foods as frequently as possible, but we are not

above tucking into food court french fries, or using the occasional bribe of fast food to obtain compliance in our children. We enjoy the challenge of learning how to make unusual food items at home, like marshmallows or osso buco, but we frequently fall back on homey staples like rice pudding, roast chicken, and cinnamon buns. Perhaps because both of us were raised in remote outposts where jello salads and hamburger helper were culinary mainstays, we are acutely conscious of how “fancy” food can mark you as a snob and an outsider. While we tend to reject many of the packaged foods of our rural food culture (e.g., a neighbor’s chocolate fudge made with Velveeta cheese), we genuinely love eating many dishes prepared from rural community cookbooks¹—even though we know that a “sophisticated” palate provides ease and comfort in many settings, like high-end restaurants and fancy university functions.

Given our obvious affection for foods of various varieties and genres—high and low, fast and slow—doesn’t this make us foodies? We hope this book will shed light on both the contested term “foodie,” and the phenomenon that surrounds the label: the food television, the obsession with celebrity chefs, the glossy food-porn, the food blogs, and the general obsession with culinary pursuits. We can’t hope to provide all the answers, or all of the information on the foodie world—especially since we ourselves discover new foods, cookbook authors, restaurants, and food blogs on a regular basis—but we do hope to outline some of its defining features and contradictions. In particular, we focus on the contradiction between foodies’ democratic openness to exploring new food cultures, alongside the continued existence of exclusion, inequality, and exploitation in the gourmet foodscape. Put differently, we explore the world of foodies to discover what they can teach us not only about eating, but also about the cultural politics of belonging, exclusion, and status. We use the gourmet American foodscape as a lens to explore the complexities and contradictions of elite cultural consumption, particularly as it evolves in a cultural context that endorses democratic ideals and rejects overt snobbery.

Before proceeding, it is worth clarifying what we mean by the term “foodscape.” Drawing from geographic and sociological literature on landscape (e.g., Mitchell 2002; Zukin 1991), we use the concept of

“foodscape” to describe the cultural spaces of gourmet food. We understand the foodscape as a dynamic social construction that relates food to specific places, people, and meanings. Just as a landscape painting has a mediated, indirect relationship to place, a foodscape may variously capture or obscure the ecological origins and social implications of food production and consumption. The advantage of the term “foodscape” is twofold: First, it recognizes that our understandings of food and the food system are mediated through social mores and cultural institutions like the mass media; second, it suggests the interrelationship between culture, taste, and physical landscape, or ecology. Our focus in this book is on the foodscape occupied by foodies, what we call the “gourmet foodscape” (mainly because of the obvious problems with the term “foodie foodscape”), but we will provide a brief overview of the broader American foodscape below.

In the field of cultural sociology today, it is widely recognized that cultural elites—including gourmets—have exited a period of straightforward cultural snobbery and entered an “omnivorous” era (Peterson 2005) where the traditional divide between highbrow and lowbrow has eroded. (Omnivorousness is explored more in Chapter 1.) In this context, terms like “foodie” have emerged as a counterpoint to the cloistered world of high-culture food snobs. While American gourmets are interested in a diversity of cuisines, this does not mean that any and every food is now appropriate for gourmet connoisseurship. This book documents and explores how new markers of high-status food have emerged: Quality, rarity, locality, organic, hand-made, creativity, and simplicity all work to signify specific foods as a source of distinction for those with cultural and economic capital. Clearly, food snobs have not disappeared from the cultural landscape. Instead, we document the existence of a culinary tension in the American foodscape between democratic inclusion (the foodie who declares a willingness to eat anything), and status-based exclusion and cultural distinction (the foodie who declares the only Mexican food worth eating is hand-made by peasants in Mexico).

We have two major goals in this book. Our first goal is to investigate food’s continuing role establishing symbolic boundaries and status

distinctions. Despite the apparent openness of foodies to consuming *anything*, our research reveals that foodies shape their world—the gourmet foodscape—around distinctions between “good” and “bad” foods. We argue that the drawing of these boundaries between good and bad foods reveals how people think about cultural consumption more broadly. At the same time that they genuinely enjoy food, foodies engage in identity politics and status distinctions through their eating practices. In making our argument, we also document the particular qualities of food that are used to draw the boundaries between worthy and unworthy culture. These qualities—particularly authenticity and exoticism—tell us a great deal about how cultural consumption functions to produce status in the contemporary United States.

Our second goal is to use foodie culture as a lens for investigating the political dimensions of food practices. The rise of food politics in the current decade creates an opportunity for food journalism and for foodies to integrate environmental issues, labor rights, animal welfare, and health concerns within discussions of gourmet food. We find that, although there is growing awareness of these issues within the gourmet foodscape, not all these concerns receive attention. Moreover, the attention they do receive frequently takes on a particular form, one that privileges an individualized stance on personal consumer ethics over a collectivist approach to solving social problems through food policies and collective action.

To study the culture and politics of the gourmet foodscape, we juxtapose the omnipresent need for cultural distinction with the potential for democratization that stands alongside the politicization of food choices. We find productive analytic possibilities by exploring the democracy/distinction tension, and resist the tendency to either extol or denounce foodie culture. While our writing is focused on American gourmet culture, it is important to situate the gastronomic field within a larger context of globalized food production and all its attendant inequities, social anxieties, and ecological risks. For instance, while the demand for organic food represents a critique of conventional agricultural practices, it also embodies the inequalities of the global system; 98% of organic food in Mexico is grown for export (Lotter 2005)—a

pattern that holds true for many developing-country agricultural producers. While gourmet food culture is inextricably implicated in inequitable global commodity chains, gourmet food culture may create transformative cultural spaces—spaces where food journalists emerge as public intellectuals, and some foodies attempt to express their social and environmental commitments through grocery shopping.

To fully understand the significance of an omnivorous foodie era where food choices are more open and politicized, we need to see how gourmet culture evolved from a snobbish era where French cuisine dominated the culinary hierarchy. In the following section, we briefly describe the long-term shift in the United States away from a focus on French food as the primary high-status cuisine. We follow that description with a look at some key foodie phenomena, providing information about current food trends that give the gourmet foodscape some of its color and flavor.

The Fall of the French: A Historical Perspective

Prior to the 1960s, America's gourmet food culture was the terrain of an elite minority. America's oldest culinary magazine, *Gourmet*, had been launched in 1941, and had a small, loyal, and elite following. In the first years of its publication, *Gourmet's* most popular feature was a column about “the help”; “Clémentine in the Kitchen” was an account of an American family and the French country girl they hired to be their cook (Kamp 2006: 39). Other regular features included “Specialités de la Maison,” “*Gourmet's* LIVES,” and “Kitchen Mechanics.” A few early cooking shows, such as James Beard's fifteen-minute segment “I Love to Eat!”, drew small audiences of middle-class housewives seeking tips for daily food preparation (Fussell 2005: 34). Despite these early glimmers of food media, epicurean food culture was a relatively elite affair and the average American consumer considered eating a mundane feature of daily living.

While not having a mass following, gourmet culture was alive and well for a certain sector of society. A historical perspective on the gourmet in the United States begins with French food. While the French reference point for haute cuisine waxed and waned throughout the 19th century,

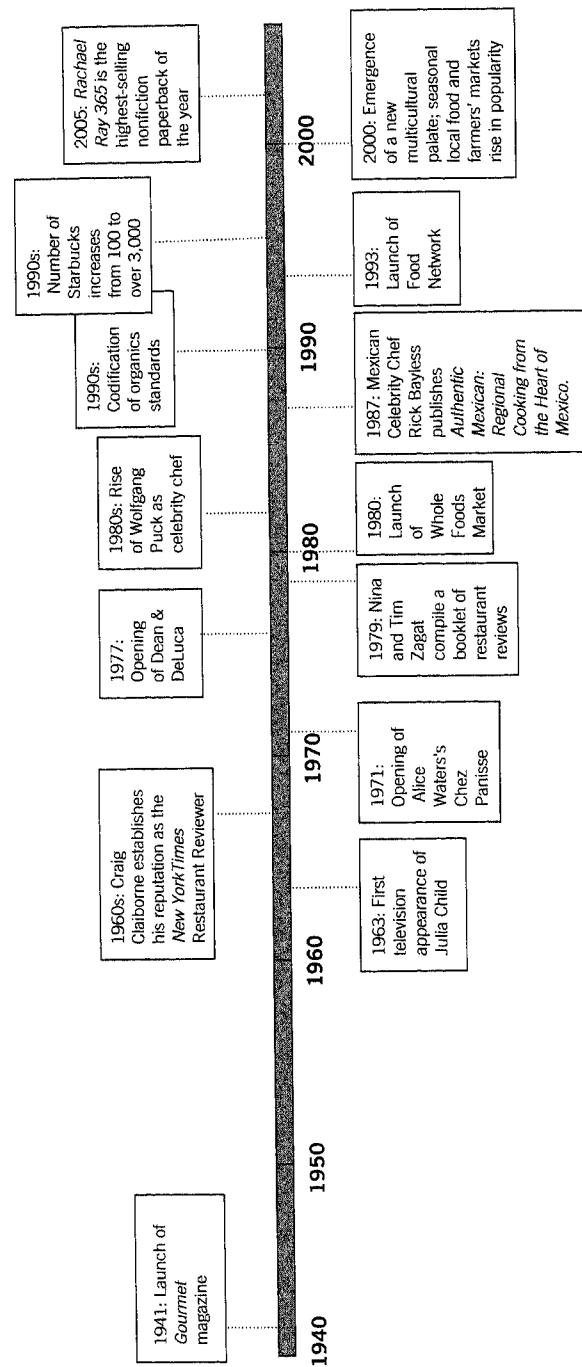


Figure 0.1 Major events in recent American culinary history

elite American food culture was dominated by French haute cuisine at the turn of the 20th century (Mennell 1996: 134). Prestigious hotel restaurants like the Ritz-Carlton and Waldorf-Astoria were run by French chefs such as Auguste Escoffier, and in the early post-World War II period, the 1941 opening of Le Pavillon both exemplified and perpetuated the high-status of French cuisine amongst American elites. Run by French immigrant Henri Soulé, Le Pavillon emphasized the subtleties of refined French food as well as “le standing”—an anglicized term referring to the class of elites who gained access to the elevated dining experience (Kuh 2001: 12–17; 32–33; Levenstein 1989: 71, 78; Kamp 2006: 39). The elevation of French haute cuisine through restaurants like Le Pavillon represented a form of culinary “sacralization”—a North American cultural phenomenon that prioritizes ‘Old World’ knowledge, values professional cultural producers over amateurs, and valorizes a singular model of legitimate Culture, or in this case, Cuisine (L. Levine 1988: 139, 168).

While sacralization was a key characteristic of restaurants like Le Pavillon, this trend began to unwind in the post-war period. The de-sacralization of haute cuisine was perhaps best symbolized with the opening of the Four Seasons restaurant in the Seagrams building in New York in 1959 (Kuh 2001: 58). A new ‘modern’ menu was overseen by James Beard—an emerging culinary giant who dared to include ‘genuine’ American food items such as Amish ham steak with prune knödel, and showed a shocking insouciance toward French culinary classics (Jacobs 2002: 262; Kuh 2001: 60–70; Kamp 2006: 64).² The de-centering of French haute cuisine was not limited to New York’s gastronomic elites, but signaled an emerging culinary curiosity about exotic foods like curry as well as interest in defining American cuisine—a broadening trend that slowly but surely knocked French haute cuisine off its high pedestal.³

While elite restaurants broadened their menus beyond the French culinary canon, interest in French food expanded amongst the middle class.⁴ As French food became more accessible, its role as an exclusive, almost mystical culinary reference point and status symbol diminished (Levenstein 1989: 80–81). The year 1962 marks the year of a highly celebrated event in this process of de-sacralizing French food: The first

television appearance of spirited media personality, Julia Child. Child's bestselling text, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, and television show introduced French menus to the middle-class host and hostess. In Child's own words, "[w]hat I was trying to do was to break down the snob appeal" (cited in Levenstein 1993: 143). With her candid performances on "The French Chef," Child welcomed viewers into the realm of sophisticated cuisine, and made it accessible to middle-class viewers. In the words of Betty Fussell, Child "changed we happy few to we happy millions by taking the la-dee-dah out of and putting the hee-haw-ho into French cooking" (2005: 47). Her appeal was broad: In November of 1966, Child was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine, with the title "Our Lady of the Ladle" (Civitello 2007: 336). Over the years, Child has been revered as perhaps the most significant American figure in the democratization of gourmet food. According to biographer Laura Shapiro, "Julia attracted love, torrents of it, a steady outpouring of delighted love that began with the first pilot episode of *The French Chef* in 1962 and continued through and beyond her death in 2004" (2007: xiv). After Child died, she was remembered in glowing tributes offered by many major media outlets, including PBS, CNN, and the Food Network, each celebrating her life's work. Each tribute interpreted Child's contribution "as opening a *lumpen* land up to sophistication in a way that it could stomach" (Miller 2007: 135).

Not only did television broaden the knowledge of gourmet cuisine, but food writing also worked to broaden middle-class knowledge of the elite food world. Besides Julia Child, another key food figure in this development in the 1960s was Craig Claiborne. Working as the restaurant reviewer at the *New York Times*, Claiborne "turned food writing into a bona fide arm of journalism and invented the make-or-break starred restaurant review" (Kamp 2006: xv). As the "first man to hold the title of food editor in the country" (Davis 2004: 14), Claiborne took seriously his duty as restaurant reviewer; he insisted on maintaining professional standards and provided consumers with critical assessments that departed from the tradition of more superficial, generally flattering accounts (Zukin 2004). Each restaurant review functioned as a lesson in culinary education for the average American newspaper

reader. In the words of Betty Fussell, Claiborne was "the first to systematically let us in on the secrets of famous chefs, to take us behind the scenes of restaurants we'd never dreamed of visiting, to tease us into sampling exotica like Nuoc Mam Sauce that we could cook before we could pronounce" (2005: 40). Modeling the refined tastes of a discerning consumer, Claiborne's reviews quickly gained "cultural currency" among *Times* readers, and restaurant-goers came to rely upon his culinary expertise (Davis 2004: 64).

French haute cuisine was further "de-sacralized" as a singular culinary model in the American context through its transmogrification into the relaxed, pluralistic cooking style of California cuisine.⁵ Of particular influence here was the celebrated Chez Panisse, Alice Waters's renowned Berkeley restaurant that drew from French culinary classics, but bucked convention to emphasize the importance of seasonal, local ingredients—perhaps best symbolized by the salad of fresh baby greens accompanied with a round of warm goat cheese that they popularized. Alice Waters was one of the first chefs to openly recognize the political consequences of personal eating habits. Her restaurant, Chez Panisse, which opened in 1971, featured seasonably-available California foods, and has been credited with inspiring interest in local ingredients and direct connections with farmers (McNamee 2007). Elizabeth David's literary works on working-class and peasant cooking in the Mediterranean, Italy, and France (1998a, 1998b, 1998c) inspired the chefs at Chez Panisse, who tended to lack formal culinary training but possessed university degrees and the political acumen of the Berkeley counterculture. Influenced by the countercultural influences of the late 1960s, the gastronomic emphasis was on the "revolutionary" spirit, not a stuffy, rule-bound nod to haute cuisine formal conventions, and less a statement on the status of those who dined in elite restaurants.

The broad counterculture movement that developed throughout the 1960s decade raised difficult questions about consumption practices (Belasco 1989), and furthered the de-sacralization trend of gourmet food. After the groundbreaking release of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, the discourse of ecology circulated widely (Binkley 2007), and some politically-minded individuals "began eating with a

consciousness about the environmental consequences of where their food came from and how it was produced" (Civitello 2007: 338). The counterculture movement also provided a forum for vegetarianism, popularized through publications such as Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971), as well as the 1973 launch of the Moosewood Restaurant. Embodying this seeming politicization and democratic opening of gourmet culture, the then *New York Times* food critic, Ruth Reichl (2005: 228), who herself emerged from the 1960s Berkeley counterculture, rebutted the charge that gourmet cuisine was about "restaurants where rich people get to remind themselves that they are different from you and me," and claimed that although eating in good American restaurants in prior decades had a cultural resemblance to opera attendance, it had more recently become both casual and accessible.

The 1960s and 1970s also saw an increasing interest in ethnic foods.⁶ One factor driving these changes to American food culture was shifting immigration patterns. More migrants from Latin and Central America and Asia were granted entry into the United States after the 1965 Immigration Act which put an end to national quotas that favored British migrants over those from other regions; these migrants brought ingredients and cooking styles that were new to the American foodscape. New ethnic cuisines were picked up by the counterculture (Belasco 1989), but eventually many of these new tastes and flavors made their way into the mouths of gourmets and food critics. In a culinary walking tour of New York, writer Calvin Trillin declared the Immigration Act of 1965 a major turning point in the history of American cuisine, and remarked of the pre-1965 immigration policies, "I guess the idea was that people who like bland food make good citizens," adding, "In food terms, it wasn't a good policy" (Farmer 2008).

In the 1970s, food became a central component of a stylish lifestyle, and the American gastronomic field matured in important ways. Food writer Douglas Kamp notes that the emergence of the term "lifestyle" signaled the broadening of stylish living beyond the aristocratic class, as style advice was pitched to those seeking upward mobility through food choice (2006: 211). This cultural shift paved the way for successful

specialty food stores such as Dean & DeLuca in 1977, and Whole Foods Market in 1980.⁷ American chefs also gained substantial legitimacy as professionals in the 1970s. The American Culinary Federation successfully lobbied for their status as professionals in 1976 (in the U.S. Department of Labor's *Dictionary of Official Titles*), and this status was publicly affirmed at the first anniversary party for *Food & Wine* magazine in 1979, which marked the "first gastronomic event anywhere to present American chefs . . . on the same footing with recognized stars of France and Italy's nouvelle kitchens" (Batterbury and Batterbury 1999: 341). Also in 1979, food criticism began to take a more democratic flavor, as Nina and Tim Zagat put together a short booklet of restaurant reviews derived from a survey they had circulated among friends. (A decade later, the couple would leave their jobs as lawyers to devote themselves fulltime to the annual release of the Zagat Guide, which today represents the voices of over 140,000 reviewers worldwide [Zukin 2004: 194].)

Gourmet culture in the 1980s was actively shaped by the decade's conspicuous consumption trend, a trend fueled by a new class of consumers—the "Yuppies" in everyday parlance—who were thought to cultivate dining experiences as a source of status. Binkley describes this cohort as "a new class of aspiring, urban young people who had abandoned social conscience for the pursuit of social prestige and career success, yet had brought with them all the personal and cultural assets of the countercultural lifestyle experience, centered on individual choice and personal authenticity" (2007: 70). While these status-oriented diners sought "taste sensations [and] exotic new foods" (Lovegren 1995: 57), a nascent movement for local cuisine arose emphasizing the virtues of American ingredients and flavors, such as Cajun and Creole. Prominent chef personalities clearly existed in earlier decades (e.g., James Beard), yet an increasing number of celebrity chefs rose to prominence in the 1980s. Rick Bayless promoted the virtues of Mexican cooking through both his cooking show and 1987 cookbook, *Authentic Mexican: Regional Cooking from the Heart of Mexico*. Wolfgang Puck gained public attention with the opening of Spago in Los Angeles in 1982, an A-List restaurant that foreshadowed the omnivorous trend

by marrying upscale culinary credentials and gourmet ingredients on a casual, but exotic, gourmet pizza menu.

In the years that followed, the gourmet foodscape developed more star chefs, more star-chef restaurant empires, more gourmet food branding, and more capital. Throughout the 1990s, the number of Starbucks expanded from under 100 to more than 3,000 (P. James 2002: 1); this not only increased the availability of gourmet coffee, but also promoted a national interest in techniques and sourcing of beans to make beverages previously associated only with European coffee culture. Star chefs like Emeril Lagasse achieved celebrity status and media omnipresence, a trend that was in large part facilitated by the 1993 launch of the Food Network, a cable television channel devoted entirely to food. Restaurant giants like chefs Thomas Keller (*French Laundry*, and *Per Se*) and Charlie Trotter came of age during this decade. The 1990s also saw the growth of demand for organic food, along with the institutionalization of the organics movement. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) developed uniform national standards for organic crop production in 1990, and many of the original organic brands were purchased in the subsequent wave of corporate mergers and acquisitions (Fromartz 2006; Goodman and Goodman 2001: 101).

Foodie tastes came to veer not just towards “natural” and “organic” foods, but also towards the “exotic.” Throughout the 1990s, an increasing range of consumers welcomed new “ethnic” cuisines, a world of tastes cultivated by heightened processes of globalization and the diversifying cultural make-up of the population. According to United States Census Bureau data, the white, non-Hispanic proportion of the United States population shrank from 75.6% in 1990 (itself a drop from 79.6% in 1980) (Gibson and Jung 2002) to 69.1% in 2000 (Grieco and Cassidy 2001). Over the same decade, the foreign-born population in the United States grew in size by 57%, from 19.8 million to 31.1 million, with growth occurring in all regions of the country (Malone et al. 2003). Members of the foreign-born population come from every continent, though some countries and global regions are represented more heavily than others, such as Mexico, Latin America

generally, China, the Philippines, and India. The increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the United States is undoubtedly a key social change that has been driving changes in American food practices, specifically the increased interest in “exotic” ethnic foods. This interest has grown not just at the level of *national* cuisines, but also at the level of foreign *regions* (e.g., Szechuan rather than Chinese). It also stands to reason that Americans’ increased exposure to cuisine around the globe has contributed to the same process. In continuation of a long-standing trend of growth, over the 1990s international travel by Americans increased considerably, from fewer than 16 million trips overseas in 1990 (excluding Canada and Mexico) (International Trade Administration 1998) to 26,853,000 overseas trips in 2000 (International Trade Administration 2001). These processes of growing ethnic diversity and awareness of elements of cultures from around the globe continue, of course, in the current decade, contributing to greater awareness of “exotic” cuisines.

In sum, the realm of gourmet food evolved from a relatively narrow, elite focus on French food, towards a more complex terrain with greater mass appeal. As gourmet cuisine became more prominent in the public eye and Emeril became a household name, new modes of making status distinctions emerged. Exemplifying the continuing importance of hierarchy and exclusion in the culinary field, Chef Charlie Trotter noted that “sometimes it’s better for me to take care of those who really understand [my] type of dining and not to worry about trying to satisfy everybody. We have deliberately, definitively cut off more and more segments of our customer base” (Kamp 2006: 328). While stratification persisted, foodie culture took up values of ecological sustainability, ethnicity, and authenticity and served them to the broad audience watching food television and buying celebrity chef cookbooks. The de-sacralization path described by food historians and scholars brings us to the contemporary gourmet foodscape—a space where food’s authentic and exotic qualities appear paramount relative to formal markers of snobbery, and where the relationship to social status and distinction must be carefully analyzed to reveal its latent content. Revealing this complex, and implicit, relationship between cuisine,

class, and social distinction, Ruth Reichl later wrote that her *New York Times* defense of elite dining as broadly accessible was “a cop-out,” and that “deep down I knew that there was something basically dishonest about what I had written” (2005: 229).

The Contemporary Gourmet Foodscape

While it is clear that more and more people are now interested in food, the gourmet foodscape is a large and complex entity. While there is a democratic notion that everybody should have access to good food, and that “anybody can be a foodie,” the most highly valued foods and food experiences—the foods that provide maximum distinction—are far from universally available. Non-elites may have knowledge about gourmet foods, and may desire things like cappuccinos, organic produce, and meals at celebrity chef restaurant destinations, yet such knowledge and desires are restricted by economic capital. The American food system is a highly segregated terrain where what you eat depends heavily not just on your income, but where you live. Food deserts, understood as large geographic areas without access to healthy and affordable foods, plague the American foodscape, and typically have a racial and class dimension (Raja et al. 2008). Having access to good food is not simply a matter of convenience or pleasure, but is strongly associated with health outcomes (Gallagher 2008; Cook et al. 2004; Stuff et al. 2007). Food security remains a significant national issue, affecting an estimated 11.9% of households (38 million people) in 2004 (American Dietetic Association 2006: 448). The food banks and pantries that appeared in the 1980s as temporary stopgap measures have not disappeared, but have only expanded and become more deeply institutionalized (Daponte and Bade 2006), while participation in the food stamp program has increased alongside poverty rates (American Dietetic Association 2006: 447).

While there is growing interest in organic foods and local foods, as evident in the surge of interest in farmers’ markets that have enjoyed unprecedented sales in urban settings (Porjes 2005), most Americans do not consume a diet comprised primarily of fresh, locally-grown produce. Americans’ consumption of fruits and vegetables rarely lives

up to health recommendations,⁸ and significantly, is highest amongst the college-educated, affluent population (CDC 2005). At the same time more Americans have become aware of epicurean indulgences like truffle oil, mascarpone, and foie gras, there has been a collective panic about fast food and the obesity “epidemic” thought to plague the country’s working- and lower-middle-class population, as well as certain ethnic minority groups.⁹ The high rates of obesity among children are a major concern for some culinary icons, most notably Alice Waters. In an interview Waters remarked that obesity is “really a moral issue. We’re killing our children here” (*School Library Journal* 2008).

Related to these concerns about the food system and public health, the American food system has also been critiqued for the influence of large corporations on food policy and population nutrition (e.g., Nestle 2003). Food corporations have reacted to these critiques by adopting health-promoting and environmentally-friendly discourses, and have become heavily invested in the organic sector and frequently employ a discourse of “local” food (Johnston, Biro, and MacKendrick 2009). Besides adopting new nutritional claims (e.g., margarine with Omega 3s, and transfat-free Oreos), they have also sought out culinary personalities to endorse their products.¹⁰ Chef Rick Bayless’s endorsement of a low-calorie Burger King meal in 2003 resulted in a flurry of controversy in the foodie world, as well as an email rebuke from Alice Waters. While the idea of a top chef endorsing a fast food chicken sandwich offended culinary purists, Bayless defended himself as being a realist who was more connected to what the mass public was actually eating (Garber 2003). Indeed, as Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation* documented, Americans spend half of their food money eating out, and a quarter of Americans buy fast food every day (spending \$110 billion in 2000—more than was spent on personal computers, new cars, or higher education) (Schlosser 2001: 3).

These general critiques of the broader American foodscape—on grounds of health, sustainability, equity, and corporate dominance—remind us that the rarified world of foodies is a relatively exclusive, and segregated terrain. This exclusivity has a discursive dimension: despite the embrace of “multicultural” cuisine within an expanding gourmet

foodscape, dominant foodie culture in the United States continues to feature a particular demographic—namely, white and relatively affluent—as the normative ideal. A quick scan of the glossy photos of celebrity chefs on Food Network.com or a perusal through the pages of *Gourmet* magazine is likely to reveal a sea of predominantly white faces along with the occasional person of color. Indeed, the launch of the Food Network's first program featuring African-American hosts in February 2008 sparked heated debate on the foodie blogosphere. While some bloggers were optimistic that "Down Home with the Neelys" signaled a trend toward more diverse representation of culinary icons (We Are Never Full 2008), many viewed the program as a superficial gesture that relied upon troubling racial stereotypes. One critical viewer commented that "[f]rom the very first episode, Pat and Gina Neely were basically bouncing off the walls with catch-phrases and Southern twang." The critique continued: "The show was met with high ratings, but at what cost to the countless viewers in the South who decry this type of characterization for the network's first show hosted by an African American couple, especially considering Food Network was nearly 100% white for so long" (Food Network Addict 2008).

In a related post entitled "Is the Food Network the Whitest of Cable Stations?", another blogger observes that the program launch happened to coincide with Black History Month, and points to how racial tokenism restricts non-white chefs to stereotypical personas:

Yes, it seems Food Network is very behind the times here. All the white cooks can do all kinds of different ethnic foods. Ingrid Hoffman only gets to cook Latin-inspired dishes since she's Latina. And since Giada and Mario identify with their Italian heritages so they must cook everything Italian. Guess the philosophy of Food Network is if you want the freedom to cook whatever you want and cross those ethnic boundaries, don't let it be known what your racial or ethnic heritage is—or you'll be forever segregated into a cooking ghetto.

(Racialicious 2008)

These bloggers' critiques add important nuances to the general observation that the American foodscape is becoming more diverse and interested in ethnic, exotic cuisine. Yet bloggers are not the only people to highlight the significance of race within foodie culture, nor is the Food Network the sole site where these dynamics are apparent. Recently, a handful of food scholars have examined how whiteness operates within alternative food practices in the US. Julie Guthman's research on Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and farmers' markets in California finds that "these institutions disproportionately serve white and middle to upper income populations," even in racially diverse communities (2008b: 392). Analyzing participant narratives within a range of alternative food projects, Guthman argues that "the alternative movement has been animated by a set of discourses that derive from whitened cultural histories, which, in turn, have inflected the spaces of alternative food provision" (2008a: 435). Similarly, Rachel Slocum critiques the absence of anti-racist practices within community food movements, which she characterizes as "a predominantly liberal, white, middle class social change effort" (2006: 331). Slocum argues that it is not simply a matter of coincidence or individual preference that leads to the predominance of white consumers in alternative food spaces, but rather the product of "a culture of food that has been made white" (2007: 526). She writes:

How this food is produced, packaged, promoted and sold—engages with a white middle class consumer base that tends to be interested in personal health and perhaps in environmental integrity. White, wealthier bodies tend to be the ones in Whole Foods, at co-ops (e.g. in Syracuse's Real Food Co-op, the Wedge in Minneapolis), the people attending CFSC conferences, those making certain purchases at the St. Paul Farmers' Market and the leaders of community food nonprofits.

(Slocum 2007: 526)

Slocum and Guthman both clarify that their analyses should not be read as implying that *only* white people shop at farmers' markets or

Whole Foods Market, or use CSAs, since that is clearly not the case. Rather, these studies draw attention to how race continues to structure the American foodscape such that particular spaces are normatively coded as white.

These scholars' observations on race make clear that the foodie quest for culinary diversity and exoticism exists within a highly inequitable foodscape—a dualism that reflects the underlying tension between democracy and distinction we explore throughout this book. In our analysis, particularly in Chapter 3's discussion of exoticism, a primary focus is the reference point of the Euro-American foodie, since that is the dominant perspective represented in the larger foodie discourse. (In addition, the majority of the foodies we interviewed were white, despite attempts to make the sample more inclusive.) This focus is not intended to deny the complexity of a foodscape where inter-ethnic consumption, cultural appropriation, and discrimination occur, nor do we want to perpetuate the centrality of a white Western perspective (Kadi 1996; Narayan 1997: 183–184, 187). Rather, our objective is influenced by the anti-racism imperative to theorize hegemonic ideals, like “whiteness,” in the foodscape and to unpack the seemingly neutral, Euro-American vantage point used to construct a sense of the culinary core (versus the exotic periphery). Despite foodies' interest in broadening the culinary canon, we want to show how race and social class remain a key part of the gourmet foodscape.

Clearly, important questions must be asked about who has legitimate access to “gourmet” status and foodie culture. While the food system remains highly segregated on multiple levels, the appeal of gourmet food culture has undeniably broadened to reach a larger segment of the general population. Daily, American newspapers feature numerous stories on our more obsessive, and more intimate, relationship with gourmet food. One article declared 2006 “the year the people took back the food,” as “the Food Network edged aside chefs like Mario Batali to make room for home-cooking queens like Paula Deen, Sandra Lee and Rachael Ray” (Moskin 2006: F3). Food bloggers work around the clock to meet the needs of “diners hungry for the next, the newest, the best, and with no patience to wait for the annual Zagat Guide”

(Salkin 2007: 9). A booming business has emerged to serve the sophisticated palates of growing young foodies, as children's cooking classes reach record enrollment across the country (Denitto 2008: WE1). Even babies can be identified as foodies with relevant reading material (Colman 2008), and themed onesies heralding slogans like “sippee cup sommelier,” and “aspiring foodie” (<http://www.elliesparty.com/>). These stories join a chorus of commentaries by leading journalists, culinary experts, academics, and market research firms that remark upon Americans' “near-obsession” with food (Adema 2000: 114). According to these gastronomic authorities, consumers continue to refine their “sophisticated palates” (Porjes 2005: 10), and increasingly feature food-related activities centrally in their daily living (Granastein 1999: 50).

To understand the cultural transformation that gourmet food has undergone in recent decades, we can look to culinary indicators that include (among others) the rise of culinary tourism driven by a growing appetite for global cuisines, the appeal of local, organic, and sustainable foods along with concern over ethical consumption, the widespread popularity of gourmet foods and specialty ingredients, the enormous success of food television, anchored in the popular icon of the celebrity chef, and the proliferation of media discourses about food and the establishment of food journalism as a valid profession. While these changes suggest a democratization of food culture, as more Americans devote more time, money, and attention to food, we remain sensitive to persistent divisions within the gourmet foodscape.

In the following section we draw from food industry data to give an overview of primary consumption traits in the American foodscape. Our goal is not to supply an exhaustive account of every element of the gourmet foodscape and its associated industries—a task that exceeds the confines of any one book, let alone an introductory chapter—but to provide material details that give color and flavor to the foodie story we develop in the rest of this book. These details are not focussed on the discursive dimension of foodie culture, but are instead directed at its material dimensions, thereby providing a context for succeeding chapters examining the discursive justifications for defining good food.

Even a casual glance at a trendy restaurant menu or food magazine reveals a few standout traits: an increased interest in eating locally and seasonally and a hunger for exploring ethnic cuisines. A 2007 National Restaurant Association survey of over 1,100 members of the American Culinary Federation (ACF) offers a snapshot of the hottest food trends, and confirms these findings. Close to 80% of ACF chefs indicated that “seasonal availability of foods is exerting great influence on how and what diners consume,” making this the most universally-cited trend (Kruse 2007: 50). As well, over two-thirds of participants agreed that “ethnic cuisines continue to have a significant impact on menu trends,” and said that chefs are experimenting with foreign dishes by “marrying the exotic with the familiar” (Kruse 2007: 50). The food industry data we consulted confirm the impressions of ACF chefs, and suggest that while the culinary marketplace is vast and complex, the prevailing patterns in tastes involve three overlapping trends described below: (1) enthusiasm for local and organic foods, reflecting consumers’ interest in authentic food and concern with ethical consumption; (2) the growing popularity of “ethnic” cuisines, linked to Americans’ developing “global palate”; and (3) widespread consumption of specialty and premium ingredients, often as a means to satisfy the two previously mentioned trends. Describing these trends, we aim to provide some rudimentary details about how food has become more prominent in the lives of Americans, while simultaneously exploring how ideologies of distinction and material inequalities continue to segregate the broader American foodscape.

Local, Organic, Seasonal

Eating locally is a very old concept, describing how many people ate before the advent of mass refrigeration and modern transportation systems. What is new, however, is “locavorism”—a culinary and political ideal that values eating locally and seasonally as much as possible, and perhaps even forsaking long-distance fare. While the parameters of locality are debated by locavores and food system activists, the term generally refers to food that travels hundreds (rather than thousands) of miles from farm to fork; these are foods that can be transported

to market within a few hours of truck transport, rather than a few days of transnational air-transport supply chains (see Halweil 2005). Understanding locavorism as an ideal helps make clear that the practice of locavorism can vary considerably—from one foodie who makes sure to bake something with the seasonal bounty of apples, to another foodie’s commitment to avoid all imported produce. While the implementation of locavore principles varies, its accolades are uniformly positive. Eating locally was named the “hottest trend in food” in 2006 by the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Ness 2006: F1), and many food system activists consider “local” food to be the new organic, particularly with the corporate-takeover of large sections of the organics sector (Johnston, Biro, and MacKendrick 2009).¹¹ DuPuis and Goodman write: “local has become ‘beautiful’, just as small was beautiful in the 1970s, and organic was de rigueur in the 1990s” (2005: 359). As evidence of this trend, “locavore” was declared the 2007 word of the year by the *New Oxford American Dictionary* (Zelman 2008).

Locally-grown foods constituted a \$5 billion market in 2007, up a full billion dollars from five years previous (Porjes 2007a: 5). According to the National Restaurant Association’s 2008 Restaurant Industry Fact Sheet, 86% of fine-dining restaurants in the United States serve locally-sourced food items (National Restaurant Association 2008). In a 2006 survey conducted by Technomic Information Services, 39% of respondents said the availability of local foods would affect their impression of a restaurant, making this concern second only to diners’ desire for more trans fat-free options (Sloan 2007a: 35).

In the search for local foods, more and more consumers are forgoing the disconnected shopping routine of the traditional supermarket in favor of market experiences that facilitate a firsthand connection with food producers. According to the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), the number of farmers’ markets in the United States reached 4,685 in August 2008, an increase of 3,000 nationwide since the AMS began tracking farmers’ markets in 1994 (Shaffer 2008). In addition to shopping at farmers’ markets, many Americans are becoming members of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs. According to LocalHarvest.Inc., there are now over 2,000 CSAs in the

United States, up from an estimated 50 in 1990 (LocalHarvest 2008). While local foods have a broader appeal, it is important to recognize that this is by no means universal. In a study of consumer preferences for shopping location, only 30% of respondents expressed a desire to always buy from local producers and 20% reported no preference for local sources (Keeling Bond, Thilmany, and Bond 2006).

Farmers' markets appeal not only to those in search of locally-produced foods, but also those seeking organic goods. While locavorism may have surpassed organic's ethical appeal, the appeal of organic food remains strong, and is associated both with healthfulness and ecological sustainability. Between 2002 (when national organic standards were implemented) and 2005, the acreage of certified organic farmland doubled in the United States (Porjes 2007a: 8), and the terms, "natural" and "organic" lead the ethical claims on new products launched in 2006" (Porjes 2007b: 26). Sales records suggest that "natural" and "organic" labels have an influence on purchasing behavior, as individuals respond to cultural pressures to exercise their social and environmental responsibility through conscientious consumption. A study conducted in 2006 found that consumers were willing to pay an additional 37 cents on each dollar for organic foods and 27 cents for natural foods (Sherwood B. Smith 2006). An article in *Restaurant Business* notes the growing popularity of "hot dogs for the haute-and-healthy," as "organic, natural, grass-fed and nitrite- and nitrate-free" dogs find a willing market (Tanyeri 2006: 28). Even infants are seen as deserving of natural and organic goodness, as evidenced by the popularity of all-natural baby foods (Sloan 2007a: 31). Industry giant Sysco (the nation's largest food service provider for restaurants and institutions like hospitals) revealed a new logo in 2009 featuring a green leaf sprouting from the "y," and boasted that it can provide restaurants with "grass-fed, antibiotic-free, and humanely raised animals," as well as "seasonal and organic produce" (Sen 2009: 46).

Culinary and food marketing experts suggest that the attraction toward ethically-infused food descriptors like "local" and "organic" as well as "fair-trade" or "free-range" is not simply a passing fad, but a more fundamental shift in the way that shoppers engage with food, and a

challenge to the apolitical dining of an earlier gourmet era. The magnitude of this shift can be seen in *Food & Wine* magazine's August 2006 issue, devoted entirely to "How to be an Ecoepicurean," or in *Gourmet* magazine, which began featuring magazine articles and web content under the heading "Politics of the Plate" in 2006. By 2008 *Bon Appétit* was running a regular feature on the "conscious cook consumer" on its website and also published a special "ways to eat green" issue in February of 2008.

While the issues surrounding ethical, sustainable foods are developed further in Chapter 4 (Foodie Politics), it is worth briefly noting here that the appeal of fresh, local, and organic foods cannot be interpreted solely as evidence of a developing American foodie conscience, but that the industry also understands these labels as connected to consumers' desire for products which are "real" or "authentic" (explored further in Chapter 2). As chef Patrick O'Connell states, "the consumer is tired of chasing 'the next big thing'. They want realness" (quoted in Lang 2007: 2). One way to achieve a sense of realness and authenticity is by buying local, seasonal foods, and developing personal connections with local growers and producers. Beyond the local realm, consumers can identify culinary authenticity by a food's regional specificity, as identified in the *Culinary Trend Mapping Report* by the Center for Culinary Development (2007): "The current trend in Mexican cuisine is regionalization. This indicates a growing awareness that will soon equal greater demand for more sophisticated, subtly flavored foods from South of the border" (12). The center's business development manager, Rachel Koryl, explains further: "We see Mexican food evolving to include a wide range of Latin American cuisines, including Oaxacan, Guatemalan, Cuban, Argentinean, and Peruvian fare" (quoted in Arnott 2003c: 18). Similarly, "it's not just Chinese anymore, with Szechwan, Shanghai, and Mandarin cuisines becoming more desired and sought out by consumers" (Arnott 2003c: 18). In expressing preference for these regionally specific cuisines, consumers are demonstrating a more sophisticated knowledge of exotic fare, and this pattern leads us to the second major food trend: the growing popularity of ethnic cuisines.

Ethnic Foods, Exotic Flavors

Another pattern noted universally throughout the food industry literature is the burgeoning interest in exotic cuisine. Compared to a previous gourmet era when fancy food was equated with French food, Americans "have become more adventurous in their tastes" (CCD 2007: 6). This trend is not limited to a narrow epicurean elite, but rather, "the craving for adventure and intense flavors is pushing mainstream consumers to explore ethnic cuisines" (Arnott 2003b: 31). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the appeal for adventurous foods is highest among younger consumers. A 2003 study found that "25-to-34-year-olds showed the greatest enthusiasm for ethnic foods. Fully 50.4% of them agreed to some extent that they 'enjoy eating authentic foreign foods,' compared with 46.4% of 35-to-44-year-olds, the group with the next-highest percentage" (Arnott 2003c: 6). Age is not the only factor segmenting the foreign foods market. Class position is also a distinguishing feature, as "more educated, more highly paid professionals are more inclined to like spicy food than lower-income individuals" (CCD 2007: 16). The National Restaurant Association's "Ethnic Cuisines II" study found the greatest preference for foreign flavors among "young professionals living predominantly in major metropolitan areas" (Arnott 2003b: 23).

Complicating these findings is the fact that popular understanding of what is "ethnic" food varies across time and space. The previously cited study conducted by the National Restaurant Association found that Cantonese and Chinese cuisine have become "so ingrained in American culture that [they are] no longer considered ethnic," and are now integrated into the American palate alongside Italian and Mexican cuisines (quoted in Arnott, 2003b: 18), while sushi "is largely considered 'sooo 1980s'" (Purcell 2008). This normalizing tendency highlights how "ethnic" identifications are constituted through historically situated understandings of the foreign and exotic. As further evidence of these shifts, when Turkish food was highlighted at the Culinary Institute of America's Worlds of Flavor conference in 2005, this emerging cuisine was described as "where Indian was ten years ago" (Cobe 2006: 59). According to gourmet food entrepreneur Laxmi Hiremath,

"these days, spices that used to be viewed as exotic are commonplace" (CCD 2007: 60). Tim Tsao, vice president of marketing at Kahiki Foods, notes that even supermarkets are working to provide a wider availability of "ethnic" foods in stock. In Tsao's words, major grocery chains are "recognizing that customers have a more worldly palate, and they're allowing them to satisfy that craving in minutes" (quoted in Wray 2007: 80).

Exotic appeal is not limited to unknown foreign cuisines, but can also refer to unconventional or unusual culinary combinations. A recent report tracking "Emerging Food Concept Trends in Foodservice" offers the following dish descriptions:

Boursin stuffed kangaroo nachos with roasted avocado corn salad and huckleberry habanero demi-glace. Chocolate-covered caramel topped with Welsh smoked sea salt. Hanger tartare, pickled Asian pear, amaro, Béarnaise ice cream. Roasted red pepper with goat cheese Kettle chips. Has it really all come to this? These actual foods that you can actually order off a menu or buy in a store are emblematic of several of today's food trend innovations.

(Lang 2007: 1)

Exotic combinations may not be available in mainstream eateries or chain restaurants, but can instead be understood as charting new horizons of gourmet cuisine. In a report on "The United States Market for Emerging Ethnic Foods," industry readers learn about "products and cuisines that have not yet reached mainstream or even trendy status among ethnic foods," but which "have begun to attract a following among 'foodies' and food professionals" (Arnott 2003c: 1). Much like a fashion cycle (Simmel 1957), elite food professionals and food enthusiasts constantly push the boundaries of what is considered daring, bold, and exotic; some (but not all) of these trends slowly filter down to mainstream eaters, and are then reclassified as bland or passé by the food avant-garde.

Another way that food with exotic appeal is created is through the creative hybrids constructed when chefs take a novel approach to

familiar dishes. These creations range from the lobster and white truffle mac'n cheese at CIRCA in San Francisco (Lang 2007: 4) to Chicago-based Alinea's unconventional flavor pairings in its tasting menu (e.g., butterscotch, apple, thyme and bacon, or bubble-gum, long pepper, hibiscus and crème fraîche) (http://www.alinea-restaurant.com/pages/menus_top.html). While not all economic elites consume such adventuresome fare, it is important to note that these unconventional taste hybrids are primarily available to high-end consumers who can afford to pay the price of exotic distinction. While a standard hamburger remains a fixture of many low-income diets, a high-end hamburger of Kobe beef, foie gras and truffle can sell for as much as \$175 (*New York Times*, 4 June 2008: F8), while a 24-course dining "tour" at Alinea costs \$225 per guest.

Gourmet, Specialty, Artisanal Ingredients

Related to the quest for ethnic and exotic flavors, as well as the desire for authentic and ecologically-friendly foods, is the growing American demand for gourmet and specialty food products such as artisan cheeses, gourmet coffees and single-source dark chocolate. This market draws on foodies' search for ever more rare, exotic ingredients (Sloan 2007b), at the same time it reflects the broadening interest in gourmet foods. In 2004, total retail sales of gourmet foods and beverages reached \$41.2 billion in the United States, representing a growth of 9.8% over the previous year's sales, compared with a 1.4% annual growth rate in the overall food and beverage market (Porjes 2005: 6). Industry reports note that specialty products serve a typical shopper who is affluent, with an income exceeding \$100,000 (Purcell 2008), yet gourmet foods also appeal to younger, less affluent consumers with a strong interest in gourmet trends (Sloan 2007b: 59). Having grown up with greater exposure to gourmet goods, this discerning group of young food consumers "frequents restaurants regularly and is accustomed to everyday luxuries such as a \$4 latte" (Purcell 2008).

While most gourmet foods and specialty beverages are associated with small businesses and artisans, large food conglomerates represent a growing presence in the specialty foods market, and illustrate the

populist dimension of foodie culture: Mass markets are taking up more "gourmet" elements, at the same time specialty products seek to broaden their market-share. A 2005 report on *The United States Market for Gourmet and Specialty Foods and Beverages* notes that consumers come across more specialty, gourmet products than ever before, "even at the fast-food level, with chains like Dunkin' Donuts offering fresh-brewed espresso and Subway and McDonald's incorporating artisan breads and fancy salad greens into their new menus" (Porjes 2005: 12). At the same time mass-market eateries work to add a more gourmet, artisanal dimension to their menus, specialty food producers proliferate and seek to broaden their appeal. An article in *Specialty Food Magazine* offers advice on "Taking the 'Fancy' Out of 'Fancy' Food"; noting that "for many potential customers, the terms 'gourmet' or 'specialty' food still conjure up outdated notions of a fancy, elite and exotic world that is expensive, exclusive and filled with jargon-loving foodies and chefs," the article provides tips on how to "shift away from that white-tablecloth-and-fine-china perception" in order to attract mainstream consumers (Shoukas 2008). Specialty food suppliers are also using innovative marketing techniques, like the Etsy model of online handicraft sales (etsy.com). The website foodzie (<http://foodzie.com/>) describes itself as "a marketplace to discover and buy food directly from small passionate producers and growers," and offers a wide array of specialty items ranging from "thyme walnut and cherry butter crunch" candy (\$17 for 2 ounces) to jerky made from organic, grass-fed bison (\$11 for 3.5 ounces), to a slab of marshmallow you can cut into chick shapes with cookie cutters (\$13.50 for a 9" x 6" slab).

The immense success of Starbucks is frequently cited as an indicator of the broadened appeal for gourmet products. In the words of one writer, "Starbucks . . . nails a magical American success formula: Its core product is both elitist in appeal and also altogether massified, even inescapable" (Collins 2007). Another good example can be found in the case of chocolate, the high-end market for which is growing rapidly and the taste for which can serve as "a sign of a discriminating palate" (Buford 2007: 69). The market research firm, Packaged Facts, comments that "the increased availability of such products is fueling

what is being called the ‘democratization of luxury’ as lower- and middle-income consumers aspire to buy products that once were the purview of the very rich” (Porjes 2005: 14). While the aspirational quality of gourmet food is an important dimension of foodie culture, and fits within a larger consumer context characterized by upscale emulation (see Schor 1998), it is also critical to recall that the typical consumer for specialty foods is somebody with a six-figure salary (Purcell 2008), and that many Americans cannot afford a \$4 or \$5 daily coffee habit, or the \$15 single-malt scotch chocolate bars that foodzie.com makes available.

The popularity of Whole Foods Market (WFM) symbolizes this tension between democratic accessibility and high prices, as well as what some experts have dubbed a “synergy” between gourmet food and natural food genres. Since it opened as a single store in Austin, Texas, in 1980, Whole Foods Market has grown exponentially to become the world’s largest supermarket specializing in natural and organic foods, but also selling a wide range of gourmet items like exotic cheeses and artisan olive oils. In an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* in 2006, John Mackey, Whole Foods’ co-founder and CEO, commented on how the natural and organic food movement was “penetrating into the mainstream” (Gray, 4 Dec. 2006: B1). While WFM may attract consumers from across the socioeconomic spectrum,¹² regular shopping for its specialty, organic and natural items requires the possession of cultural capital as well as economic resources (see Johnston 2008). For instance, a journalist comparing a basket of monthly food goods (based on a minimal, USDA-recommended “low-cost food plan”) required to feed a small family calculated that the basket would cost \$232 plus sales tax at WalMart, and \$564 at Whole Foods Market (using only the lowest price foods in each category, and excluding the store’s popular luxury items) (Cox 2006).¹³

Industry analysts predict a growth in the market for specialty, “artisan foods,” which encompass “a combination of emphasis on the uniqueness and quality of each ingredient, traditional craftsmanship and artistry, the place where the products are made or grown, and the passion and personality of the producer” (Porjes 2005: 25). This forecast

highlights the interrelated discourses of craftsmanship, authenticity, and exoticism that define the current culinary vogue. While mass market firms attempt to incorporate some dimensions of these trends—offering more specialty items and greener product lines—not all of these items are broadly accessible, and will remain restricted to those with sufficient cultural capital to seek out these items, and the economic capital required to purchase them.

Chapter Overview

We lay a foundation for our argument in Chapter 1, where we discuss the analytic tools anchoring the book: discourse, omnivorousness, and the concept of the “foodie.” In Chapters 2 and 3, we discuss the nature of foodie discourse through in-depth explorations of the two main frames used to distinguish worthy food: Authenticity and exoticism. Chapter 2 explores the role that authenticity plays in the evaluation of food. Based on an analysis of food journalism from a wide variety of sources as well as our interviews with foodies, the chapter identifies the rhetorical devices that foodies employ to justify select foods as authentic. We also situate the importance of authenticity in food within a broader idealization of authenticity in contemporary culture. Chapter 3 accomplishes the same task with regard to the second frame, exoticism. For both frames, we show how worthy foods are identified through discussions of the contexts in which food is produced and consumed. Although the characteristics of food are naturally significant to its evaluation, we find that foodies present the social context of food more prominently to justify its worth.

In Chapter 4 we address the political dimensions of food preferences and choices, relying again on both food journalism and the interviews with foodies. We find that although the political implications of the food system are more visible to foodies than ever before, they take a backseat to more traditional foodie concerns with deliciousness and food adventurousness. In addition, to the extent that food politics influence foodies’ preferences, they take the form of individualized ethical stances, primarily on the environment, rather than encouraging a collective approach to solving the serious social problems stemming

from the food system. In Chapter 5, we again bring together information from both food journalism and the interviews to discuss the role of food in generating social status and in class politics. We show how foodie culture embodies a larger cultural tension in American society between an inclusive democratic ethos and a tendency for food consumption to serve as a means by which people demonstrate cultural sophistication and signal high status.