

Conflict Cuisine: An Introduction to War and Peace Around the Dinner Table

www.conflictcuisine.com

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"You can always tell where the conflicts are in the world by what restaurants are opening up." – Washington DC proverb

Course Description and Objectives

In a turbulent world food has become a symbol of resilience and survival. Food can be the cause of conflicts, and it can be used by governments as a weapon of war. This is an international relations course that examines current and past conflicts through the lens of food. It covers a broad range of subjects from culinary diplomacy, gastrodplomacy, gastromediation and gastronationalism to the way these trends manifest themselves in our community. It looks at food security, global migration, and climate change as drivers of migration and puts these trends into a local view of how conflict cuisines become a proxy for much more profound stories of war, resilience and new beginnings. In this course we will examine the nexus between food and conflict. We will focus on learning about particular conflicts that drove diaspora populations to Washington, and how those populations, through their food, became the inadvertent gastro-diplomats. These new residents used their cuisines to create an international food culture in Washington arising from the conflicts that brought them here. Oftentimes, the only engagement we have with immigrant populations is at restaurants, tasting foods either familiar or foreign to us. How can we use that entry point, the dinner table, to look beyond the cuisine to what drove a particular group to their new home? The countries we will study (Vietnam, Ethiopia, Central America, the Sudan and now Syria) have all been involved in significant conflicts in the last forty years, either with the United States as a direct combatant or an indirect influencer. There were 68 million refugees and internally displaced around the world as a result of 50 conflicts which have accounted for the majority of the forcibly displaced every year since 1991 (*World Bank - Fragility, Conflict and Violence* 2017). This coupled with greater intolerance for newcomers is the defining feature of a time in our history that makes the study of conflict cuisines an even more compelling area for those interested in the connection between food and diasporas. Washington has always been a city of migrants. It is the perfect laboratory to study these connections.

Background

During the Cold War Georgia Senator Wyche Fowler was once quoted as saying that he had wished that the Russians had sent tanks down the Champs Elysee in Paris so that Washington would be guaranteed a good French restaurant. The good Senator was not red-baiting when he made that statement. He was speaking a truth about how Washington, D.C., the nation's capital and the nexus of global power and politics, had benefited from the conflicts of the Cold War in terms of culinary choice.

Washington had long been a wasteland of substandard, overpriced steakhouses and other uninspired eating establishments. This is not true today in part thanks to the diversity of new residents who come to this metropolitan area from countries that have experienced conflicts. They come as refugees, as economic migrants or as victims of war. Many use their culinary memory to help them build a new life. In the process, they have given us the conflict cuisines of their homeland, while making their way to the American dream.

Over the course of the Cold War, it gained not only a huge number of new residents from places where the U.S. had been engaged in warfare, but also new eateries that served their Diasporas. Washingtonians grew accustomed to the fusion of new flavors and now take for granted the evolution of this city's food culture. Even twenty years after the Cold War ended, Washingtonians continue to benefit as the Diasporas of war-torn nations continue their exodus to our town. As many anthropologists have noted, if language is the first thing to disappear in a group's assimilation to its new home, food is often the last. And it is precisely this factor which motivates me to teach this course about conflict cuisines. How better to learn the history of a country's conflicts than around the table?

Goals of the Course

During this course, students will:

- Learn specific terms related to what is now called social gastronomy, the use of food to promote the common good.
- Learn about culinary diplomacy, gastrodiploamacy and how governments and civil society use these concepts to build a more peaceful world through food.
- Learn about the way food drives conflict, and the complex interrelationship between climate change, water supply, and urbanization.
- Learn about U.S. policies to support global food security.
- Learn about diaspora cuisines in Washington, DC area and in other parts of the United States.
- Appreciate the importance of food as tool for social justice, for empowerment, and for resilience. • Research local projects that practice social gastronomy and report on them.
- Consume meals prepared by diaspora chefs and learn how these foods are prepared and where these ingredients are sourced.
- Gain a better understanding of why food, which we all take for granted, is essential not only for survival, but for the economy.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will:

- Be able to identify the complex causes of conflict and assess the impact on food security that affect the lives of people living in war-affected environments.
- Recognize through readings why by sharing a communal table has an impact on creating dialogue.
- Learn how the histories of conflicts studied in this course are expressed in the cuisines prepared by diaspora chefs.
- Have an opportunity to interact with culinary practitioners and other experts in classroom and restaurant experiences.

- Learn to synthesize and present diverse, inter-disciplinary materials for their presentations and fieldwork assignment. final project that involves written materials, videos, and interviewing techniques that are incorporated in this exercise

Sample Assignments

- Write a blog post on the topic: Can you use food to see the world?
- Examine food projects where chefs are engaged to help do good.
- Building a Nation-Branding Plan: Gastrodiplomacy in Action
- Final Project Field Assignment

The Course – Week by Week

Week One: Introduction to Conflict Cuisines

This week we will discuss the course, its goals, and its requirements. We will introduce the concept behind the course: Why study conflict cuisines? What you learn will go far beyond the specific conflict cuisines you will try. We will look at whether food can build peace or drive conflict. Students will introduce themselves and talk about why they are interested in conflict cuisines. We will start to answer the question of why these conflict cuisines may be part of something bigger than a local phenomenon, but rather a manifestation of globalization, a reflection of larger issues that we face – climate change, urbanization, and food security.

Week 2: Culinary Diasporas & Refugees: Global Conflict at our Door

This week we discuss the culinary diaspora within the United States. This class will explore the globalization of American cuisine. Food is dynamic and we are always seeking authenticity, but this class will explore whether the food of immigrants is really a variation on the food of their homeland or the creation of a new cuisine that adapts to a new locale. We will start with the Vietnamese culinary community. We will look at both the history of the conflict itself and the impact on the Vietnamese populace, both in Vietnam and those who joined the Diaspora. We will discuss the DC-area Vietnamese community, and preview the visit to Minh's the following week. We will also discuss the way that food becomes an important connection to home when refugees are forced to flee.

Week 3: Can Food Build Peace? Food as Soft Power

This week we will focus on a major component of the course, food. We will look at the ways food has been used to project national power. We will discuss how food is a way to project a national identity or promote diplomatic goals dates back to the Romans. We will read about the anthropology of food, one of the best-studied angles to understand it. We will finally look at one of the newest fields of food studies, the idea of *culinary diplomacy*, that food can be used as a tool of soft power, both for diplomacy and for conflict resolution. And of course, we will look at gastrodiplomacy, the use of food as a symbol of national identity. There will be guest speakers for one of the hours.

Week 4: Can Food Drive War?

We will focus our third-class meeting specifically on the study of food and conflict. Research shows the connection between natural events such as climate change and conflict. Droughts, natural disasters that ruin agricultural production and growing urbanization all underlie tensions

that can erupt into violent conflict. This week we study of the unintended consequences of conflict, including the relationship between displacement and hunger, as well as food as a driver of conflict. From the current conflicts, to the ultimate conflict cuisines, meals ready to eat that militaries use in the field, you will learn and also sample the ultimate conflict cuisine.

Week 5: Social Gastronomy: Chefs Doing Good

In recent years chefs have become the driving force behind a growing movement that uses culinary skills to help those who lack the means to feed themselves. Social gastronomy is a global movement and is now lead by some of the most famous chefs in the world. From helping hurricane victims in Puerto Rico to rebuilding lives of the homeless in Milan, chefs and their colleagues in the kitchen have chosen to use their abilities to ensure that quality food is served to those who need it most. This movement also embraces the sustainable development goals of the United Nations which include ending hunger by 2030. In the Washington, D.C. area and beyond there are many examples of social gastronomy programs. Your job will be select a project – either a local one or one that is listed on Blackboard – and discuss why these programs are important to promote food justice, to reduce food waste, and to ensure that food deserts eradicated through providing poor communities with access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Week 6: Vietnam's Diaspora – A Forty-Year Journey

This week we will visit the Eden Center in Seven Corners, Virginia to taste Vietnamese cuisine and understand how it fits into the narratives of the conflict-driven diaspora population. We will have the opportunity to speak with the proprietors of different restaurants and bakeries to learn the history of this important Washington diaspora and how they connect food and conflict.

Week 7: Food Security and Conflict Cuisine: Crisis in the Middle East

As the war in Afghanistan winds down, conflict in the Middle East continues to rage, forcing people into refugee situations in Turkey and Lebanon. With a famine a man-made famine in Yemen, and one in Syria, the region's food security situation faces the challenges of a generation of warfare complicated by the consequences of climate-change. The Middle East represents a situation of conflict where people who are middle-class are suddenly thrown into warfare. Food shocks are as much a part of conflict in the Middle East as food creativity among the displaced. We will discuss how the Middle Eastern cuisines have played an important role among the Diasporas who come to this country. We will discuss the impact of conflict on refugees, how the Middle Eastern cuisines have traveled, not only to the United States, but to Africa, Latin American and the Caribbean. We will end with a brief discussion of the war that has occurred over the past decade, and how it has not created a sizable diaspora in the US due to visa restrictions. This will preview our conversation in the last class on current and future conflicts.

Week 8: Persian Cooking (takes place outside of the classroom)

We will continue the discussion of the Middle East and Central Asian conflict, as well as learning a bit about the cuisine of Iraq. It is much less well known than the other cuisines we are studying this semester, as well as that of its neighbors, Pakistan and Iran. What makes up Iraqi cuisine, and how has it been preserved in the US?

Week 9: The Economics of Conflict Cuisine – How wars, climate change, urbanization and trade all impact on food security

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This week we will look at the linkage between global conflict, urbanization, and its impact on the future supply of food. We will discuss how women are the major producers of food in the global south and what that means in an ever-urbanized world. Will we all end up eating meals of insects? The nexus of food and peace, of security and development is central to the future of global stability. Finally, as we discuss newer conflicts, we will also ask why we do not see as many new Diasporas arriving in Washington. Is the age of Washington's conflict cuisine bonanza over?

We will also discuss the food security challenge in Africa. That continent has remained a central focus of international food assistance programs. Countries such as South Sudan, Central African Republic, and Somalia have all suffered not only from agricultural failure but also on the impact that war has on agriculturalists. Even the recent Ebola epidemic has wreaked havoc on urban food systems in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Bissau; as people are unable to travel from rural farms to market, thus limiting access to vital commodities.

This week we will study the Ethiopian Civil War of the 1970s and 1980s, another conflict driven by the Cold War. One important aspect of the war in Ethiopia was famine, a lack of access to food, which affected many more people than just those involved in direct conflict. We will also explore two other man-made famines – South Sudan, northern Nigeria and Yemen.

Week 11: Central American Diaspora – Refugees old and new Culinary Diplomats (outside the classroom)

This week we will look at the wars of Central America of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, focusing in particular on the country from which DC's largest Latino population originates, El Salvador. These conflicts, Cold War proxy wars, drove millions of people north to settle around the United States. We will review the nature of the wars in Central America, focusing on how these events set the stage for peacebuilding that followed in the region. We will also look at the changing face of the new immigrants from South of the border as Mexican cooking becomes part of United States' regional cuisine. This class will include a visit to the District's largest public training program that serves so many new immigrants at the Carlos Rosario Charter School.

Weeks 12-14: Class Presentations

For more information on bringing the course to your campus, group or community, contact johanna@jmendelsonforman.com.