

Additional Resources

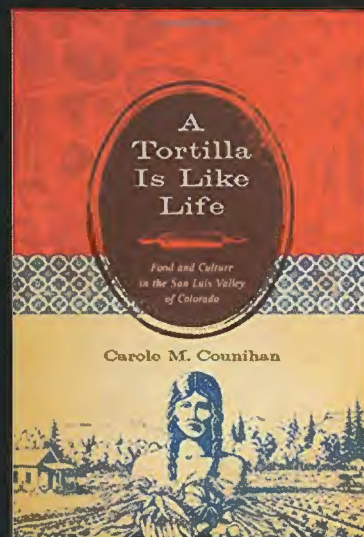
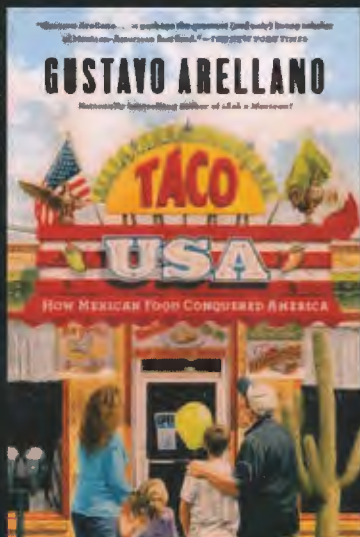
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FOOD FOR

THOUGHT

A critical look at
Tex-Mex Cuisine

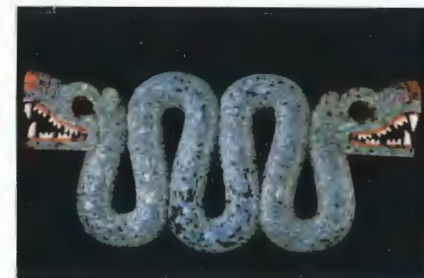


Cultural Syncretism



The Aztec diet still remains a staple in Mexico today - maize (corn), beans, avocados, squash, chilies, and tomatoes. The tomatoes used today are a different variety than were eaten before the arrival of the Europeans. chili peppers play a big part in Mexican food, which were so important to the peoples of central Mexico that special religious fasts involved keeping them out of their diets. Many of the meats eaten today were an addition from the Spanish, yet much traditional Mexican food is prepared the same way. The Mexican staple, the tortilla, is still prepared much the same way as it was traditionally. Maize, and lime, cooked on a stone slab. Tamales, a type of corn cake sometimes accompanied by tomato, also survived.

Nelson Foster, *Chilies to Chocolate: Food the Americas Gave the World*, <http://www.aztec-history.com/traditional-mexican-food.html>



What is the best meal you share with your family? List some reasons it reminds you of home.



Food in Traditions



El Día de los Reyes:
(Three Kings Day or Epiphany) on January 6 a special sweet bread, Rosca de Reyes, in honor of Christ's resurrection.

Día de los Muertos:
(Day of the Dead) on October 30, during which Mexicans decorate and picnic on the graves of their dead relatives, includes empanadas (meat-filled turnovers, an import from Spain) and tamales. Also included are chicken or turkey with mole, pan de muertos (a sweet bread, baked in a ring and with a tiny plastic skeleton hidden inside), and calaveras de azúcar (sugar candy skulls, bought at candy stores) all meant to honor the dead and express distinct family values.



Coloniality and Independence

On April 1519, Spain started their conquest on the Aztec, destroying much of their culture, civilization, and heritage. Setting up an encomienda system (forcing labor on certain groups), The Spanish enslaving natives and forced them to work tireless hours with no profit towards Mexico. The introduction of foreign diseases ran rampant among the natives, who hadn't built a resistance yet, killing many as a result.



On the early morning of September 16, 1810, Catholic priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla rang the bells of his church and gave the call of arms that Mexico would seek independence, an event that would come to be known as the Cry of Delores after the city in which the church was based. This event sparked the Mexican War of Independence, an 11 yearlong conflict that ended on September 27, 1827 with Mexico gaining its rights as an independent nation. Nowadays the 16th of September is celebrated in recognition of the long battle for freedom.

US intervention in Mexico

Unsurprisingly, national attention is once again focused on the US/Mexico border. Each time this happens (some might say, "Has this ever not happened?"), historically minded scholars remind us this is a recurring state of affairs. Not only is it the most crossed national border in the world,¹ but at the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848 and subsequently the Gadsden Purchase of 1853, Mexican nationals existed on both sides of the border.² To this day, citizenship along the border is a blurry matter.

Kent Ono, *Borders That Travel*



THE MARKET-PLACE

Quick and Easy!



Ramifications of cultural assimilation

“Much folk wisdom has viewed assimilation as a linear process of progressive improvement and adjustment to American society. The general assumption is guided by an implicit deficit model: to advance socially and economically in the United States, immigrants need to “become American” in order to overcome their deficits in the new language and culture.”

National Academies Press (NAP)



“My mother, father, siblings, and I had been living in a poor part of town in Guadalajara, Mexico. My father worked as a ranchero and my mother used to waitress at a local pub and restaurant. I was the oldest of all my siblings and therefore, the leader. I had to set an example for the younger ones and had to take care of them from the dangers of the world. One day, I was at home when I found out my father had been killed. It was a tragic day and my mother, devastated from the loss, wanted to move to America, speaking of being safer there and how America could help us all. We moved the following week, wanting to leave Guadalajara and the crime of the small town. We were missed and there was no one else to care after the ranch since my father died, so they closed it down, but it was necessary. We no longer wanted to live in such a dangerous place, so when we moved to America, we found out we had taken up all of the small apartment complex. After we moved in, there was no more room, so I guess we were lucky. My siblings and I went to school and had good grades, my mother working as a waitress, yet again. I grew up to be a police officer, wanting to be able to prevent crimes in my city, New York, like to what happened to my father. I thank American for the opportunities that it has given me and will be forever grateful.”

Marisela

<https://myimmigrationstory.com/>

How Mexican Food Took Over The US

“Once refugees started coming up, they wanted to eat the food of their homeland. They start eating tacos at home, and tacos started getting sold in Mexican restaurants. That’s what started happening in southern California around the 1920s, where the first famous tacos were taquitos – rolled tacos.... But the idea of authenticity has driven the popularity of Mexican food among Americans for 100 years. Once they’ve eaten a dish enough that it’s not longer “authentic,” they go and try to find the next authentic food. At one point, people thought Taco Bell was authentic Mexican food. It was exotic. Now it’s the new synonym for McDonald’s.”

Gustavo Arellano

Randy Dotinga, The Christian Science Monitor



“It’s unfortunate because it’s almost an attitude like, ‘What have you done for me lately?’” Arellano sighed. And what many Americans can forget is that “dishes that were fads and phenomenons become assimilated into the American diet.”

Katharine Shilcutt, Houston Press

TEX·MEX

Yellow cheese



VS

White cheese



VS

Ground beef



VS

Shredded chicken or pork



Flour tortilla



Corn tortilla



They are closely related, but Tex-Mex cuisine has been adapted for the Anglo taste while Mexican food has almost no influence from the United States. Border thinking gave birth to the term Tex-Mex entered the American vernacular in 1875 in reference to the Texas Mexican Railway, which was abbreviated as TexMex. In the 1920s, the hyphenated form was used to describe the railroad and people of Mexican descent born in Texas, and eventually it became synonymous with the Mexican food of area.

What's lost?

One of the key aspects lost in the transitions across the border is the meticulous amount of detail and time that is put into authentic Mexican dishes. For instance, one of the most complex sauces to make, the "mole", contains an upward of 20 ingredients, ranging from chilies, nuts, chocolate, and even parts of tortilla. taking hours to complete and the tedious steps along the way make Mexican food a unique and time consuming process that most Tex-mex cuisines fail to understand.



"With the Mexican elite, they have just hated the fact that Americans love Mexican food and despise the fact that when Americans cook Mexican food they cook Tex-Mex. It's a psychic wound," he explained. "Not only did the gabachos steal half of our territory, now they're stealing our food."

Gustavo Arellano
Katharine Shilcutt, Houston Press



Media Representation

In some ways, people feel cheated. They feel that Tex-Mex masqueraded as Mexican food for all these years. And now that more of mainstream America is discovering what they perceive to be “authentic” Mexican food, the more they’re turned off by the lard-and-cheese-laced plates that most Texans adore. Outside of Texas the tide has turned against Tex-Mex despite its deep roots in the US. It seems that even though it has been tailored to a certain audience, Americans are nowadays becoming more enticed by the idea of having an real authentic experience then the assimilation of a culture.

Portland Burrito Cart Closes After Owners Are Accused Of Cultural Appropriation

Critics say the women bragged about stealing recipes while in Mexico.



By Carolina Moreno

Two Portland-based women were forced to shut down their burrito food cart over accusations of cultural appropriation and recipe stealing.

Liz “LC” Connelly and Kali Wilgus’ [Kooks Burritos business](#) was [featured in the Willamette Week on May 16](#). During the interview, Connelly described how the duo made their own tortillas after taking a trip to Puerto Nuevo, Mexico, in December and obtaining information on the process.

The method by which the two non-Hispanic white women obtained the information on tortilla making is questionable.

“I picked the brains of every tortilla lady there in the worst broken Spanish ever, and they showed me a little of what they did,” Connelly [told the Willamette Week](#). “They told us the basic ingredients, and we saw them moving and stretching the dough similar to how pizza makers do before rolling it out with rolling pins.”

Counter Argument

in 1960’s chef and cookbook author Diane Kennedy was the first person to create a division between real Mexican food and ‘fake’ Mexican food. In her book *Cuisines of Mexico*, she wrote that Mexican food north of the border shouldn’t qualify as Mexican food, a perception that stuck.

“We can all thank Diana Kennedy for inadvertently granting Tex-Mex its rightful place in food history. By convincing us that Tex-Mex wasn’t Mexican food, she forced us to realize that it was something far more interesting: America’s oldest regional cuisine,” wrote Robb Walsh in *The Tex-Mex Cookbook*.

Although Kennedy may have convinced people to approach Tex-Mex with suspicion, it is still a highly-recognized cuisine worldwide, able to create a space in-between the American and Mexican culture for self- and community- identification.



Effects

"When a new group arrives, there's always going to be tension. The first thing the majority group does is make fun of their food: Mexicans as beaners and greasers, the French as frog eaters, the English as limeys. But the fact that Americans love Mexican food is really a start because at least you've embraced the food.

It seems like a flippant analysis, but look at history. It's very easy to dismiss a bunch of college kids foraging at Chipotle, but that's progress, it absolutely is. They might not eat tortillas in a can, but to give credit to the American consumers, they're always accepting Mexican food in one way or other."

Gustavo Arellano
Randy Dottinga, The Christian Science Monitor



Tex-Taiwan

¿Solución?

Although there is no direct solution to the cultural assimilation that became Tex-Mex, there is a more positive way of looking at this food that was created through the rhetoric of difference. Just as Spain heavily influenced Mexican cuisine, so too does Mexican food influence the US.

This topic is up to debate, and I am just a single voice. Please feel free to voice your own opinion on the topic in the space below. Thank you for taking the time to read my Zine!
