

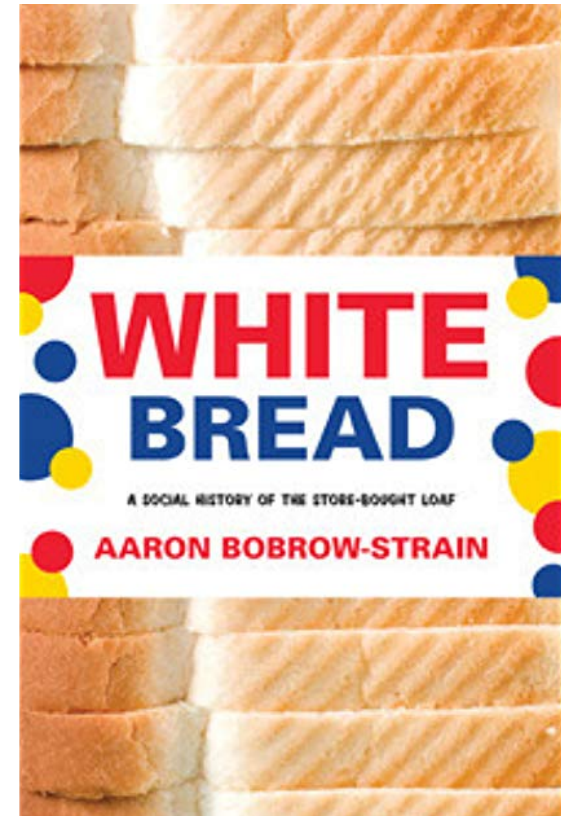
Let's start with a few questions:

- What have whole grains **meant** to U.S. consumers throughout the 20th century?
- What is **the cultural context** surrounding whole grains in the past, and today?
- What **historical influences** shape today's eating present?
- How can this knowledge help us to understand **what today's consumers really want** from whole grains?

The social history of white bread...

...tells the story of America's changing relationship to bread related to dreams of:

- purity & contagion
- control & abundance
- health & discipline
- strength & defense
- peace & security
- resistance & status



Why tell a white bread story...

... at a whole grains conference?

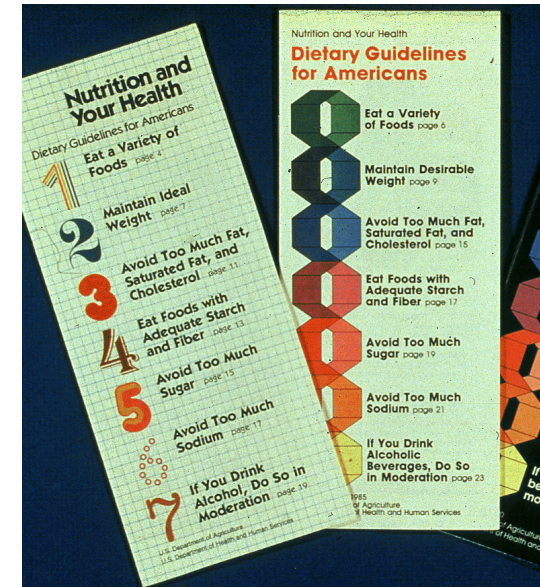
- **Food isn't just food**, an ingredient, or a product.
- Even a single, simple, hearty, **whole grain** is never just that.
- Food is a **marker for identity**, one that tells a **complex story** about culture, politics, and much more.

Whole Grains in the 20th Century U.S.

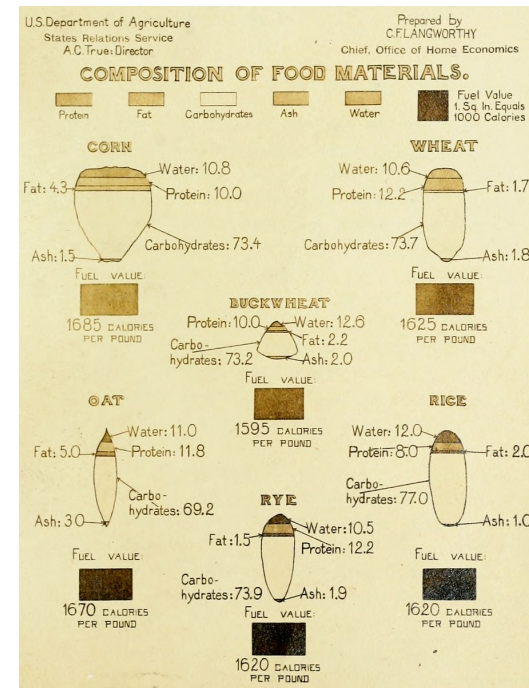
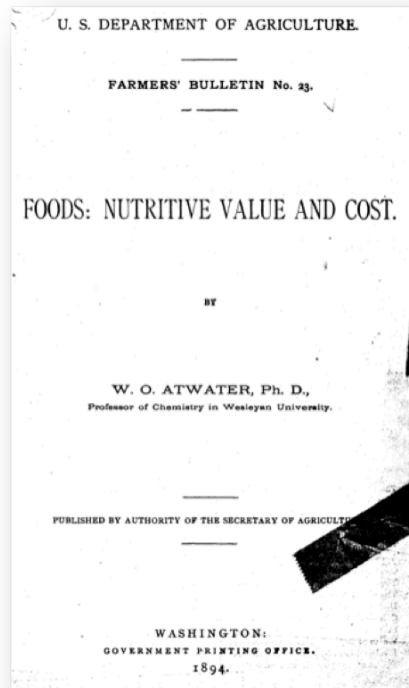
U.S. Department of Agriculture
 Prepared by
 2,500,000,000
 2.5 Billion People

COMPOSITION OF FOOD MATERIALS.

| Grain | Water | Protein | Carbohydrate | Fat | Ash |
|---------------------|-------|---------|--------------|-----|-----|
| CORN | 10.8 | 10.0 | 73.4 | 1.8 | 1.7 |
| WHEAT | 10.5 | 12.2 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| BROOKLYN RYE | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| RYE | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| BARLEY | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| BUCKWHEAT | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| SPELT | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| TRITICALE | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| AMARANTH | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| QUINOA | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| MILLET | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| TEFF | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| WHEAT | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| BARLEY | 11.0 | 11.0 | 77.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
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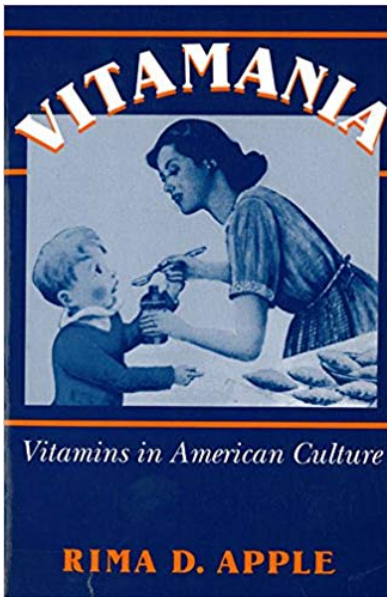


1900s: Food as (Modern) Fuel



Context keywords: modern nutrition science; **the quantification of diet**; industrialization, immigration, urbanization

1910s-40s: Vitamania



Context keywords: “Golden Age of Nutrition Science” and high public faith in science; **social anxiety about industrial food**; concern for productive workers & healthy armed forces

1930/40s: Want & Sacrifice



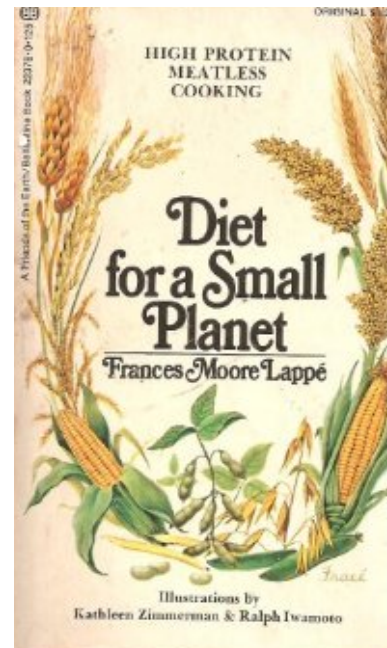
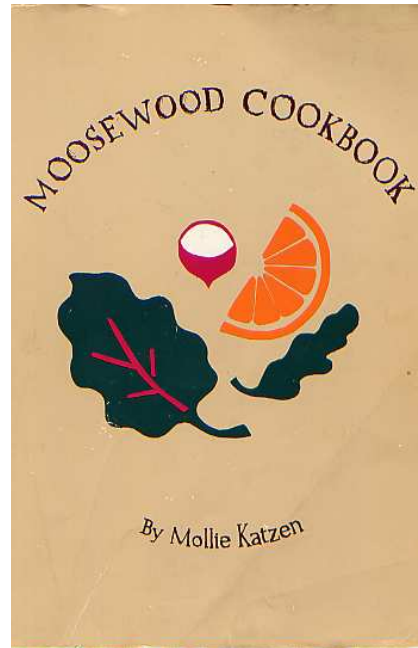
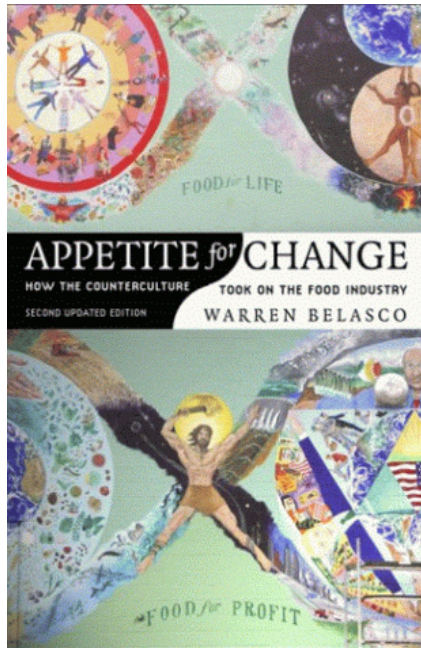
Context keywords: Great Depression “bread lines;” **concern for productive workers**, healthy armed forces, and sustained allies

1950/60s: Convenience Cuisine



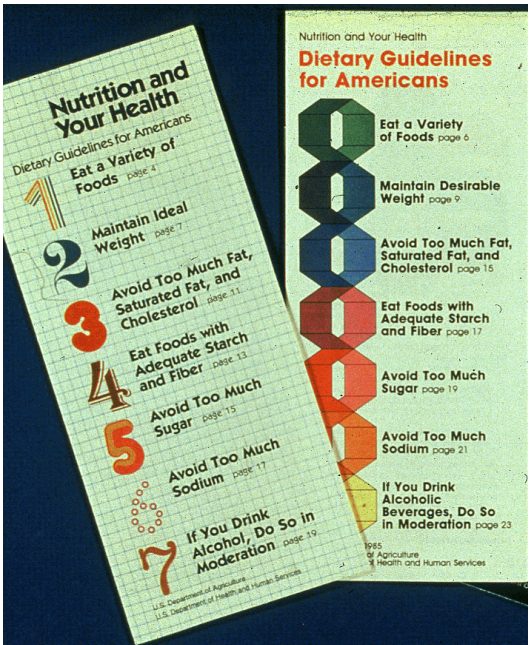
Context keywords: More highly processed products of the military industrial complex seek domestic markets; suburbanization, supermarkets, women and work; **middle class identity & status**

1960/70s: The Counter-Cuisine



Context keywords: **Food as resistance** to convenience cuisine and a host of colliding political, social & environmental problems
natural vs. plastic, brown vs. white, process vs. processed, slow vs. fast, light vs. heavy

1980/90s: Health, Yuppies, Govt.



Context keywords: Some counter-cuisine elements are modified and mainstreamed: **health & healthism, naturalness, nostalgia**

Whole Grain Culture Themes Today

1. **Health** as an identity
2. **History** as nostalgic narrative + connection
3. **Hope** as aspiration + anxiety

Context: Somewhat like the 1960/70s, the 2010s have been a time of significant social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental anxiety, conflict, and change.

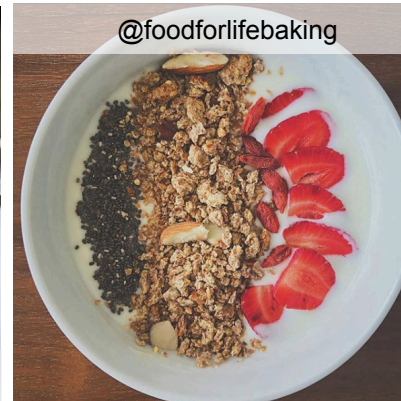
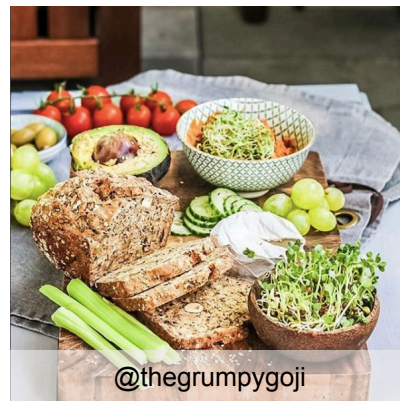
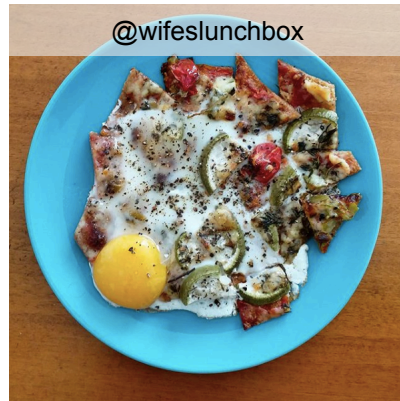
Within such a context, food emerges for eaters all the more powerfully as a marker of identity and as a proposed solution to larger problems.

Pop Culture, e.g. Food Instagram

Considerations:

- You are what you eat, or at least what you post
- “Instagrammability” over deliciousness or even edibility
- Creates a curated, rather than realistic representation
- Produces both social connection and isolation

Health + History + Hope



#wholegrain / #eatwell / #healthy #cleaneating / #eatrealfood

- Instagram amplifies the notion “you are what you eat.”
- Instagram makes even private eating public and transforms it into an aspirational act as much about identity as health.
- Eaters perceive whole grains as “real” foods with an honest history in an age when much feels unreal, fake, broken, and untrustworthy.

Another Example: The Paleo Diet



- Although largely anti-whole-grain, Paleo Diet followers voice similar cultural concerns as whole-grain devotees regarding **longstanding anxieties about modernity's potentially negative effects.**
- Fears regarding sedentary jobs / leisure, digital tech & industrial ag., manifest as fears of **degenerating cultural vigor and strength in the form of masculinity, muscularity & individual achievement.**

Key Take Away Points

- **Our eating culture today retains aspects of our food history**, such as the nutritional language of quantification, wartime concerns for productivity, and the quest for status and identity through food.
- **Context shapes food culture**, as it's influenced by factors like social shifts, economic affluence or downturns, political moments, etc.
- **Foods (like whole grains) are more than just what we eat**, as they tell complex stories that we can acknowledge and promote through genuine product narratives.

Thank you!

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