

EDITED BY  
JAMES C. GIESEN | BRYANT SIMON



# FOOD AND EATING IN AMERICA

A DOCUMENTARY READER

WILEY Blackwell



## Guides students through a rich menu of American history through food and eating

This book features a wide and diverse range of primary sources covering the cultivation, preparation, marketing, and consumption of food from the time before Europeans arrived in North America to the present-day United States. It is organized around what the authors label the “Four Ps”—production, politics, price, and preference—in order to show readers that food represents something more than nutrition and the daily meals that keep us alive. The documents in this book demonstrate that food we eat is a “highly condensed social fact” that both reflects and is shaped by politics, economics, culture, religion, region, race, class, and gender.

*Food and Eating in America* covers more than 500 years of American food and eating history with sections on: An Appetizer: What Food and Eating Tell Us About America; Hunting, Harvesting, Starving, and the Occasional Feast: Food in Early America; Fields and Foods in the Nineteenth Century; and Feeding a Modern World: Revolutions in Farming, Food, and Famine.

The book:

- presents primary sources from a wide variety of perspectives—Native Americans, explorers, public officials, generals, soldiers, slaves, slaveholders, clergy, businessmen, workers, immigrants, activists, African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, artists, writers, investigative reporters, judges, the owners of food trucks, and prison inmates;
- illustrates the importance of eating and food through speeches, letters, diaries, memoirs, newspaper and magazine articles, illustrations, photographs, song lyrics, advertisements, legislative statutes, court rulings, interviews, manifestoes, government reports, and recipes;
- offers a new way of exploring how people lived in the past by looking closely and imaginatively at food.

*Food and Eating in America: A Documentary Reader* is an ideal book for students of United States history, food, and the social sciences. It will also appeal to foodies and those with a curiosity for documentary-style books of all kinds.

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The books in this series introduce students in American history courses to two important dimensions of historical analysis. They enable students to engage actively in historical interpretation, and they further students' understanding of the interplay between social and political forces in historical developments.

Consisting of primary sources and an introductory essay, these readers are aimed at the major courses in the American history curriculum, as outlined further below. Each book in the series will be approximately 225–50 pages, including a 25–30 page introduction addressing key issues and questions about the subject under consideration, a discussion of sources and methodology, and a bibliography of suggested secondary readings.

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# Food and Eating in America

*A Documentary Reader*

Edited by  
James C. Giesen

Bryant Simon

WILEY Blackwell

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## Series Editors' Preface

Primary sources have become an essential component in the teaching of history to undergraduates. They engage students in the process of historical interpretation and analysis and help them understand that facts do not speak for themselves. Rather, students see how historians construct narratives that recreate the past. Most students assume that the pursuit of knowledge is a solitary endeavor; yet historians constantly interact with their peers, building upon previous research and arguing among themselves over the interpretation of documents and their larger meaning. The documentary readers in this series highlight the value of this collaborative creative process and encourage students to participate in it.

Each book in the series introduces students in American history courses to two important dimensions of historical analysis. They enable students to engage actively in historical interpretation, and they further students' understanding of the interplay among social, cultural, economic, and political forces in historical developments. In pursuit of these goals, the documents in each text embrace a broad range of written and oral sources, as well as photographs and illustrations.

Each volume in the series is edited by a specialist in the field who is concerned with undergraduate teaching. The goal is not to offer a comprehensive selection of material but to provide items that reflect major themes and debates; that illustrate significant social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of an era or subject; and that inform, intrigue and inspire undergraduate students. The editor of each volume has written an introduction that discusses the central questions that have occupied historians in this field and the ways historians have used primary sources to answer them. In addition, each introductory essay contains an explanation of the kinds of materials available to investigate a particular subject, the methods by which scholars analyze them, and the considerations that go into interpreting

them. Each source selection is introduced by a short head note that gives students key information and a context for understanding the document. Also, each section of the volume includes questions to guide student reading and stimulate classroom discussion.

“No matter who you are or what you do or where you live, food stands at the center of life.” So begins James C. Giesen and Bryant Simon’s tasty offering, *Food and Eating in America: A Documentary Reader*. The editors offer a smorgasbord of primary sources covering the history of the preparation and consumption of food from the time before Europeans arrived in America (the pre-Columbian era) to the present-day United States. Although their presentation unfolds chronologically, Giesen and Simon organize their source material around what they label the “Four Ps: production, politics, price, and preference.” In doing so, they show readers that food represents something more than simple meals to consume and keep us alive. They demonstrate that the preparation and consumption of food by Americans has evolved over time and has been shaped by politics, economics, culture, religion, region, race, class, and gender. In fact, studying food and eating requires the kind of interdisciplinary approach that this documentary reader provides. Moreover, by looking closely and imaginatively at food, Giesen and Simon offer a new way of exploring how people lived in the past.

*Food and Eating in America* includes a broad range of primary sources that are bound to whet the appetite for consuming more than 500 years of American history. In this volume, Giesen and Simon present primary sources from a wide variety of perspectives. We hear from Native Americans, explorers, public officials, generals, soldiers, slaves, slaveholders, clergy, businessmen, workers, immigrants, activists, African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, artists, writers, investigative reporters, judges, and prison inmates, all of whom participated in and influenced the production and consumption of food. We hear their diverse voices through speeches, letters, diaries, memoirs, newspaper and magazine articles, illustrations, photographs, song lyrics, advertisements, legislative statutes, court rulings, interviews, manifestos, government reports, and recipes. In introducing and presenting these documents, Giesen and Simon guide students through a rich menu that offers them a better understanding of American history through food and eating.

*Steven F. Lawson and Nancy A. Hewitt*  
Series Editors





## Part I

# An Appetizer: What Food and Eating Tell Us About America

No matter who you are or what you do or where you live, food stands at the center of life. Obviously, you cannot survive long without food, and neither can the people around you. Communities and nation states can't build forts or ships or railroads or bridges or airports or nuclear reactors if people don't have enough to eat. Wars can't be fought, and can't be won, without food, food for soldiers in the trenches and food for production workers and their families behind the lines. No matter what their faith, nationality, or background, people celebrate holidays and milestones with food. Think of the first, or the most recent, Thanksgiving. It is an American national holiday built around food, the bounty and promise of the United States, and the symbolism of a shared meal. When families and friends come together for births, marriages, confirmations, bar mitzvahs, and deaths, they typically eat. Religious celebrations like Ramadan and Yom Kippur involve fasting, followed by prayers that bless the wine and bread, then, and only then, lavishly scripted meals. In the United States, the second biggest day for eating (after Thanksgiving) is Super Bowl Sunday. Indeed, much of contemporary social life revolves around food, the focus of going out, and getting together. We post photos of our burritos and take selfies with our desserts. Eateries dot the landscapes of cities and suburbs, highways, and back roads from Maine to California. Cooking shows take up the endless time slots on cable television channels and recipes fill up pages of websites, newspapers, and magazines. Food apps glow on our phone screens.

*Food and Eating in America: A Documentary Reader*, First Edition.

Edited by James C. Giesen and Bryant Simon.

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As food stands at the center of daily life, it not only sustains life, it also kills. It can be contaminated or tainted. Run-off from the farms that produce our food contaminates our rivers and streams. Food waste—parts of the plants and animals that we don't cook or the scraps from our plates—clogs the nation's waterways and overflows its landfills. For farmers and workers, producing and processing food can be deadly as well, due to the often dangerous working conditions on farms and in processing plants. Not having enough food and the illnesses that result from having too little to eat still kill millions each year—more than 21,000 per day to be precise—in the world, while in the United States, having too much of foods laden with fat, salt, and sugar threatens the health of countless people.

Despite food's central role in the daily life and rituals of people now and in the past, studying food has for a long time remained at the margins of history writing. To be sure, scholars have researched famines, talked about feeding troops during wars, and remarked on changing diets and agricultural practices. But, foodways, meals, and the act of eating itself rarely made it into college textbooks or classroom lectures prior to the twenty-first century.

In recent years food's place on the margins of history has changed. Relying on new evidence and looking at old sources in new ways, historians of food and eating have written stacks of imaginative, wide-ranging, and influential histories of things like sugar, cod, and the hamburger. They have looked at the social, cultural, and architectural significance of fast-food joints and high-end French restaurants, and the inner-workings of animal factories in the fields and the gory efficiency of slaughterhouses in the cities. They have paid close attention to changes in understanding of biology, horticulture, nutrition, and ecology. They have discussed gender, dieting, and eating disorders, the appeal of Chinese food to Jews and Gentiles, and the growth of culinary tourism and foodie culture. They have talked about Native American cooking and the foodways immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Africa brought with them to the United States and took to other places in the diaspora. They have analyzed global protests against McDonald's and boycotts against local butchers in ethnic enclaves. They have traced the early stirrings of vegetarianism and the first whiffs of the countercultural cuisines of the 1960s. They have recounted strikes at processing plants and the organizing campaigns of cooks and waitresses. Collectively they have begun to imagine, conceive, and write about food, as the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai suggested (in an article in *American Ethnologist* in August, 1981) that they do, as a "highly condensed social fact."

This idea of food as a highly condensed social fact is the organizing framework for this book. What exactly does this concept mean? Essentially, it suggests that food represents more than just something to eat, calories to burn, or carbohydrates churning in our stomachs. Each meal, dish, and ingredient represents a crucial intersection of vital social forces that involve what we're going to call the Four Ps: production, politics, price, and preference. The idea of food as a dense social fact means that every time we eat something we place ourselves within a complex mix of these four broad forces.

Think for a few minutes about what goes into a rather typical meal. Let's take as an example a Sunday dinner of roast chicken, mashed potatoes, and green beans. Perhaps the most obvious way to start thinking about this food is to ask how it arrived at our table. Each and every spice, ingredient, and item on the menu has a story, a process that brought it from the fields to our table, a process that throughout the majority of American history and for most Americans has meant many stops along the way. That process involves *production*, starting with who mined the salt, raised the chicken, picked the vegetables, and dug the potatoes. Who killed the chicken? Where did they do this killing? Where were the animals, for the meat and the milk, raised? What did they eat during their lives? What sorts of fertilizers or chemicals were sprayed on the beans or inserted into the soil? What role did the soil itself—or the rain, wind, and sunshine—play in the food's production? What networks were used to get these products to the stores and shops? In what form did they arrive? How did the feed get to farmers? Did it come from a local supplier or a big agribusiness? What role did science, research, and technology play in the process and in the development of new breeds of chickens, new potato plants, and new flavors? Who controls the parts of that process, from the growing to the science to the transportation?

As the documents that follow demonstrate, the answers to these questions changed over time. Before the American Revolution most Americans ate chicken rarely if at all, and the availability of green beans depended on the season and the location. Meals like this were unthinkable to most slaves, even into the mid-nineteenth century. As we'll read, potatoes had their own cultural place for Americans and the little tuber itself played a role in who became accepted as "American" and when.

Food involves domestic production as well. Who made the food for the Sunday dinner? A mother? A father? The whole family? A domestic worker? How was this work divided along gender lines? Did they make it from scratch? Where did they obtain and accumulate their culinary knowledge? How were the foods prepared and cooked? What devices or appliances were used to make the foods? Was it cooked on an open fire, or a gas or electric

oven, or in a microwave? Were the potatoes produced with a hand masher or a Cuisinart or did they come as a powder in a box? Did some or all of the food come from the store? Was it prepared ahead of time? Who served it? Was the table set? Did everyone sit down to eat together? Did the house they live in have a separate space for eating? What did that space look like and where was it in relation to the kitchen? Did the family or group eat at a table or in front of a newspaper, a radio, a television, or iPhone screens?

This brings us to our second “P.” Our food choices always involve *politics*. This might seem surprising. No one, of course, voted on that chicken dinner. It wasn’t legislated somewhere that the family get together to eat Sunday supper together. But the dinner itself is the result of a political history that involves slavery, industrialism, imperialism, and nationalism. Those big historical processes often determined who ate what, where they ate, and how they ate. Each of these processes is rooted in politics. Throughout much of early American history, dinner was determined as much by natural constraints as by any other force—it was who had control over grazing land, the crop land, the wild animals, the seas and waterways. This control was just as political as a modern U.S. Department of Agriculture agent inspecting chicken carcasses at a packinghouse. Were the potatoes Yukon® Golds or the more generic “golden potato”? Why does that difference matter?

These are more than agricultural questions; they are political ones. As you’ll see in the documents that fill this book, as the act of eating moves farther from the place of production, food becomes even more about politics. Think for a moment about where the green beans came from and how were they made it to the table. Did the farmer get a guaranteed price to grow them, or state-sponsored crop insurance? Were they produced by an American company on U.S. soil, or in another nation? Politicians have passed laws to encourage immigration so that landowners had access to cheaper labor, which in turn made the price of those beans, and our dinner, fall. Hopeful of winning votes in the Plains States, politicians give subsidies—basically a cash guarantee—for certain crops like corn, which pushes more farmers to grow the grain, a policy that, in turn, radically changes the price of food at the store and also our diets. Likewise, politicians and government agents insure that American farmers have access to foreign markets, and American eaters get “fresh” fruit from South Africa in the middle of winter. The United States government, like all modern governments, regularly gives advice on eating, pushing particular diets, and creating links between healthy people and good citizenship. In the documents that follow, food is at some times more politically important than at others. As you read the book, think about the eras when Americans’

politics and food intersected. Why is food more politically important at some moments than others?

Third, what's the *price* of this chicken dinner? What a family spends on food is usually related to how much the individuals who make up the family earn and how much they value what they eat. Food is also, then, about economic class. The French gastronome, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin commented in the early nineteenth-century, "Tell me what you eat and I can tell you who you are." Some might choose the chicken over beef, not because they prefer its taste, but because it is cheaper. For that same reason, they may have chosen a "regular" chicken over a free-range or organic bird. Yet sometimes Americans pick foods because they *are* more expensive. We want to treat ourselves or show off that we can afford them. Many of the documents in this book give us a look inside restaurant culture, where this is particularly true.

What, though, accounts for the price of a foodstuff at any given time and place? Certainly this involves supply and demand, but other factors are at work as well: natural disasters, land prices, machinery, fences, wages, energy costs, packaging, advertising, and research and development. Together these forces determine what a fast food chain or an individual grocer can charge for food. But what about the costs that aren't reflected on the menu or price sticker? How do we account for the environmental costs of some foods, the waste running off from animal farms, or the carbon emissions of trucks hauling vegetables from Florida to New York? What about the cost of injuries to workers in packing plants, or the health care bills for children who live on a steady diet of fast food? Who pays these costs? Are they incorporated into food price? What, in turn, are the *social* costs (or savings) of particular foods, menus, or diets?

The fourth question to ask about our Sunday dinner is why are we eating these things at all? This is essentially a question about our last "P," *preference*. What social and cultural factors lie behind our food choices? Why do we like the foods we like? People in some places and from some traditions eat things that others would never consider putting in their mouths. Where do we get our ideas about what food is, let alone what tastes good? Though genetics, biology, and chemistry certainly figure into our tastes, what we like and don't like is at the same time culturally informed. Just as we learn from those around us what to wear and what music to listen to, we learn what tastes good.

The first time someone cooks a Sunday dinner they may use a recipe, or have the help of a relative or friend working alongside. But where do the recipe come from? A family member? A television celebrity? How has it changed over time? What did a roast chicken look like in 1890 and then in

2010? What tastes complement the chicken, steamed green beans, or a casserole made from frozen beans and condensed mushroom soup topped with packaged fried onions? Did we pick this meal as a healthy alternative to meatloaf and gravy? How is “healthy” defined at a particular time and place? Where do we get our information from about what is healthy and what is not healthy? From people we know *and* from government agencies to be sure, and in the recent past from talking heads and food bloggers. How, by the way, does someone become an expert on food and healthy eating? Is science behind a given diet, or is it a TV celebrity? Do we choose to eat things that we think make us look good to others? Do we eat new things because we empathize with another culture, or because we want to show off our sophistication? Do we eat things that make us look more cosmopolitan or affluent, more manly or feminine? Food as performance has become more important in recent years as eating has become more public, especially through our Instagram and Facebook feeds.

In this book, students will learn how the highly condensed social fact of food reflects and shapes the America past, how our food choices reveal essential details about production, politics, price, and preference. But really the goal of this documentary reader is to show what food explains *to us about us* in the past and in the present.

As we’ll see, the history of food and eating in America makes it clear that none of us is simply one thing or has one identity or set of preferences or politics; we have overlapping, sometimes even contradictory concerns, and affinities. We never just choose the foods we want, and we never have. When someone in the colonial world looked for something to eat, they were confronted with the natural limits of the seasons, constraints on productive capacities, and certainly the politics of the moment. The food of today entails the same overlap. One thing, then, that the readers of this book will learn as they grapple with the idea of food as a “highly condensed social fact” is that eating cuts across intellectual boundaries and rigid categories of analysis. Thinking about food pulls together a range of economic, social, and cultural forces, tying together ideas about race, class, and gender and merging economic history with labor, agricultural, and environmental history. To study food means to think like a sociologist, anthropologist, and historian all at once. In other words, it means thinking in critical and interdisciplinary ways.

Beyond learning how to use food as an interdisciplinary window into the past, this book stresses one other important skill set for students: the close analytical reading of and engagement with primary documents. In order to detect and identify the layers of meaning in a document, whether

it is a bland government report, a tattered recipe, or a color-splashed advertisement, you need to become an active reader. That starts even before encountering the first word or image. As you approach each document, first ask yourself a set of key questions: When was the document produced? What was going on at the time, in that place? Does the document seem to reflect the times? Does the document have a geographically distinct origin and outlook? Perhaps most importantly, who produced the document and why? You cannot engage with the meaning of a document before understanding where it came from. Once you know who the producer of the document is, you can get to the ideas behind it. Is the author trying to “sell” a policy or an idea? A food or way of eating? An agricultural technique? How does the author or producer of the document make her/his case? What sorts of evidence does she/he use? Does the author produce statistics and tables of data to prove her/his claims? Do she/he use the testimonials of others? Does she/he suggest, as some advertisements do, that eating a certain food will make you happier, stronger, or sexier? Don’t overlook chronology either. What does happier, stronger, or sexier look like at the moment the document was produced? That will tell us a great deal about a society’s values. Posing the above questions will provide answers that help to better understand people, places and politics in the past.

This documentary reader has been organized to help students learn more about the history of food *and* about the history of the United States. At the same time, it will help you, the student, become a more active and engaged reader, a skill that is important not just for historical analysis but really any kind of complex thinking and reasoning. The chapters in the book have been organized in rough chronological order following the typical layout of a survey course in American history. The book starts before the Europeans arrived in North America and ends today inside a prison cafeteria. Each chapter features five to ten documents, and each document has an introduction that helps you to situate the source (and give you the crucial background information you need to become an active reader). The documents are followed by a list of discussion questions. These are rarely questions with a single easy answer; rather they are designed to help you better understand the document, think about its source, and reveal key aspects and tensions in the history of food and eating in the United States.





## Part II

# Hunting, Harvesting, Starving, and the Occasional Feast: Food in Early America



# Chapter 1      Food in the New World: Pre-Columbian Era through the American Revolution

## Document 1.1: The Cherokee Creation Story, “How the World Was Made, Wahnenuhi Version”

*Since at least the seventeenth century, the Cherokee tribe of Native Americans lived in the southeastern United States. In the late-1800s, James Mooney, a self-taught ethnographer who worked for the government studying Native Americans, recorded the following story told by Cherokees about the beginning of the world. Prior to this passage, the myth tells of the earth being covered in water until land rose up out of it forming an island. This excerpt gives us many clues about how Cherokees’ understanding of the process of turning animals and plants into food was central to their understanding of where life on earth itself came from.*

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After the world had been brought up from under the water, “They then made a man and a woman and led them around the edge of the island. On arriving at the starting place they planted some corn, and then told the man and woman to go around the way they had been led. This they did, and on returning they found the corn up and growing nicely. They were then told to continue the circuit. Each trip consumed more time. At last the corn was ripe and ready for use.”

Another story is told of how sin came into the world. A man and a woman reared a large family of children in comfort and plenty, with very little

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trouble about providing food for them. Every morning the father went forth and very soon returned bringing with him a deer, or a turkey, or some other animal or fowl. At the same time the mother went out and soon returned with a large basket filled with ears of corn which she shelled and pounded in a mortar, thus making meal for bread.

When the children grew up, seeing with what apparent ease food was provided for them, they talked to each other about it, wondering that they never saw such things as their parents brought in. At last one proposed to watch when their parents went out and to follow them.

Accordingly next morning the plan was carried out. Those who followed the father saw him stop at a short distance from the cabin and turn over a large stone that appeared to be carelessly leaned against another. On looking closely they saw an entrance to a large cave, and in it were many different kinds of animals and birds, such as their father had sometimes brought in for food. The man standing at the entrance called a deer, which was lying at some distance and back of some other animals. It rose immediately as it heard the call and came close up to him. He picked it up, closed the mouth of the cave, and returned, not once seeming to suspect what his sons had done.

When the old man was fairly out of sight, his sons, rejoicing how they had outwitted him, left their hiding place and went to the cave, saying they would show the old folks that they, too, could bring in something. They moved the stone away, though it was very heavy and they were obliged to use all their united strength. When the cave was opened, the animals, instead of waiting to be picked up, all made a rush for the entrance, and leaping past the frightened and bewildered boys, scattered in all directions and disappeared in the wilderness, while the guilty offenders could do nothing but gaze in stupefied amazement as they saw them escape. There were animals of all kinds, large and small—buffalo, deer, elk, antelope, raccoons, and squirrels; even catamounts and panthers, wolves and foxes, and many others, all fleeing together. At the same time birds of every kind were seen emerging from the opening, all in the same wild confusion as the quadrupeds—turkeys, geese, swans, ducks, quails, eagles, hawks, and owls.

Those who followed the mother saw her enter a small cabin, which they had never seen before, and close the door. The culprits found a small crack through which they could peer. They saw the woman place a basket on the ground and standing over it shake herself vigorously, jumping up and down, when lo and behold! large ears of corn began to fall into the basket. When it was well filled she took it up and, placing it on her head, came out, fastened the door, and prepared their breakfast as usual. When the meal had been finished in silence the man spoke to his children, telling them that he was aware of what they had done; that now he must die and they would be

obliged to provide for themselves. He made bows and arrows for them, then sent them to hunt for the animals which they had turned loose.

Then the mother told them that as they had found out her secret she could do nothing more for them; that she would die, and they must drag her body around over the ground; that wherever her body was dragged corn would come up. Of this they were to make their bread. She told them that they must always save some for seed and plant every year.

### Discussion questions

1. What factors make food easy or hard to attain in these stories? What role do the animals play in their transition from living organisms to food? What role does labor play?
2. Mooney tells us that the story explains the Cherokee understanding of “where sin came into this world.” What part about the story is sinful? How would Cherokee have used this story to teach a lesson about sin? Does the story relate to other religions’ ideas about sin?
3. How are the roles played by men and women different in these stories?
4. What do these stories tell us about the animals themselves? Are there differences between those used for food or not used for food? Do the myths suggest something about how Cherokees saw “wild” animals?

### Document 1.2: John Smith’s History of the Starving Times at Jamestown Colony (1609)

*Two years into the English colonial experiment in the Virginia Colony at Jamestown, conditions were bleak. The colonists had come to the New World in 1607 with dreams of easy riches, but had found instead tensions and violence with Indians, and an environment that both fostered disease and made agriculture difficult. More than half of the colonists died during the first winter. By the fall of 1609, John Smith, the leader of the colony, had enacted some measures to stem the starvation, including creating a trading arrangement with a nearby Powhatan tribe and by telling colonists that “he who works not, eats not.” In October, however, Smith was injured by an explosion of gunpowder and he left for England. At that point there were about 500 colonists in Jamestown. Seven months later only 60 colonists were alive. This period came to be known as “the starving time.” With Smith gone, the Powhatans stopped trading with the English colonists, and murdered many who they found outside of the Jamestown fort. In addition, stores of saved corn were found to be infested with rats. Smith wrote this history of the time of his absence based on the recollections of those who survived.*

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...the Salvages no sooner understood Smith was gone, but they all revolted, and did spoile and murther all they incountered. Now wee were all constrained to live onely on that [food that] Smith had onely for his owne Companie, for the rest had consumed their proportions, and now they had twentie Presidents with all their appurtenances...

Now we all found the losse of Captaine Smith, yea his greatest maligners could now curse his losse: as for corne, provision and contribution from the Salvages, we had nothing but mortall wounds, with clubs and arrowes; as for our Hogs, Hens, Goats, Sheepe, Horse, or what lived, our commanders, officers & Salvages daily consumed them, some small proportions sometimes we tasted, till all was devoured; then swords, armes, pieces, or any thing, wee traded with the Salvages, whose cruell fingers were so oft imbrewed in our blouds, that what by their crueltie, our Governours indiscretion, and the losse of our ships, of five hundred within six moneths after Captaine Smiths departure, there remained not past sixtie men, women and children, most miserable and poore creatures; and those were preserved for the most part, by roots, herbes, acornes, walnuts, berries, now and then a little fish: they that had startch in these extremities, made no small use of it; yea, even the very skinnnes of our horses. Nay, so great was our famine, that a Salvage we slew, and buried, the poorer sort tooke him up againe and eat him, and so did divers one another boyled and stewed with roots and herbs: And one amongst the rest did kill his wife, powdered her, and had eaten part of her before it was knowne, for which hee was executed, as hee well deserved; now whether shee was better roasted, boyled or carbonado'd, I know not, but of such a dish as powdered wife I never heard of. This was that time, which still to this day we called the starving time; it were too vile to say, and scarce to be beleaved, what we endured: but the occasion was our owne, for want of providence, industrie and government, and not the barrennesse and defect of the Countrie, as is generally supposed; for till then in three yeeres, for the numbers were landed us, we had never from England provision sufficient for six moneths, though it seemed by the bills of loading sufficient was sent us, such a glutton is the Sea, and such good fellowes the Mariners; we as little tasted of the great proportion sent us, as they of our want and miseries, yet notwithstanding they ever over-swayed and ruled the businesse, though we endured all that is said, and chiefly lived on what this good Countrie naturally afforded; yet had wee beene even in Paradice it selfe with these Governours, it would not have beene much better with us; yet there was amongst us, who had they had the government as Captaine Smith appointed, but that they could not maintaine it, would

surely have kept us from those extremities of miseries. This in ten daies more, would have supplanted us all with death.

But God that would not this Countrie should be unplanted, sent Sir Thomas Gates, and Sir George Sommers with one hundred and fiftie people most happily preserved by the Bermudas to preserve us: strange it is to say how miraculously they were preserved in a leaking ship, as at large you may reade in the insuing Historie of those Ilands.

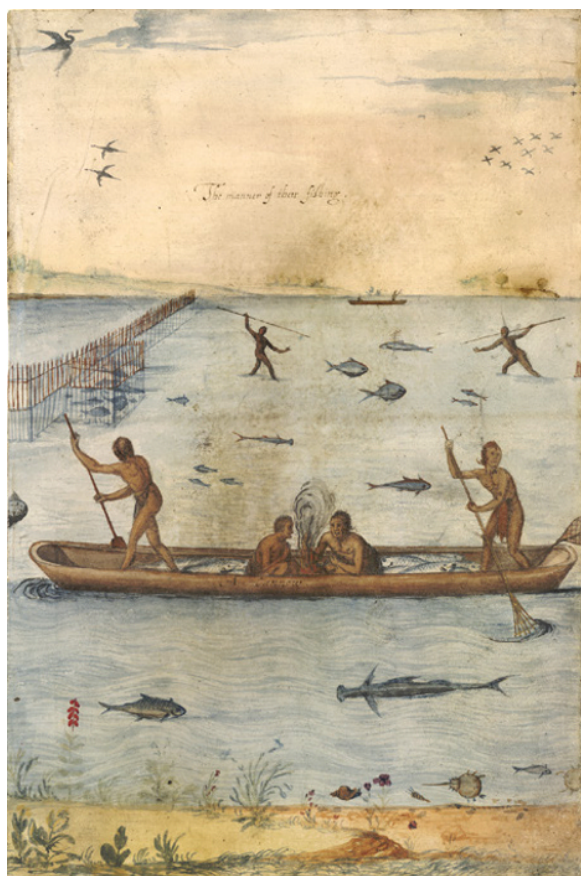
### Discussion questions

1. Many of the original colonists to Jamestown were gentry who believed they did not need to labor to provide their own food. What does this fact, along with the account of what happened as a result, tell us about social class and food production in the early colonial era?
2. Think about Smith's description of colonists resorting to eating "roots, herbes, acornes, walnuts, berries, now and then a little fish." What does that tell us about English expectations for what constitutes food?
3. Smith makes a point of saying that the starvation was caused not by the physical environment of Virginia ("not the barrennesse and defect of the Countrie, as is generally supposed"), but by the failure of "providence, industrie and government." What does he mean by this? Why might this be an important point to make to the readers of this history?
4. Historians and scientists have debated the legitimacy of Smith's claim that colonists resorted to cannibalism in his absence. Though for years many believed this to be only a story, recent scientific and archaeological evidence has confirmed at least one case of cannibalism. What does Americans' unwillingness to believe that cannibalism was possible tell us about the nation's relationship to its history? Does it tell us something about food taboos?

### Document 1.3: English Artist John White's drawings of Native Americans fishing, cooking, and preparing corn (1580s)

*In 1585, John White, an artist and illustrator from London, sailed with an English excursion to explore Roanoke Island, off the coast of present-day North Carolina. His sponsor, Sir Walter Raleigh, asked White to record in pictures the life of Native Americans that he encountered. Among his many maps and drawings of social and religious ceremonies are important records of Algonquin food production, preservation, and consumption.*

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### Discussion questions

1. Who was the audience for these images? How might people in England have understood these depictions of the Algonquin and their foodways? Are they depicted here as the savages that John Smith's history (Document 1.2) describes?
2. What does the fishing picture tell us about White's understanding of animal life underwater, on land, and in the air? What do we learn about the natural environment of the New World as it relates to food production?
3. The illustration of fish cooking over a fire can tell us about more than just how the Algonquins prepared fish. Think about what it reveals about preserving meat through smoking, about the amount of fish being cooked at once, and about where this fire might be.

**Document 1.4: Edward Winslow on the “First” Thanksgiving, 1621**

*There are many stories about the origins of the day that Americans now celebrate as Thanksgiving. The most common story of the holiday's origin revolves around a feast celebrated by Plymouth colonists and the Wampanoag nation in 1621, although established days of thanks certainly predate colonial times and were not solely an English custom. Despite presidents Washington, Adams, and Monroe ordering national days of giving thanks during their presidencies, Thanksgiving did not become a permanent American holiday until Congress declared it so in 1941. Edward Winslow, a leader of the Pilgrim separatists, wrote the following excerpted letter to a friend in England about the colony's 1621 feast as well as the availability of wild and cultivated foods.*

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**Loving, and old Friend,**

...We set the last spring some twenty acres of Indian corn, and sowed some six acres of barley and peas, and according to the manner of the Indians, we manured our ground with herrings or rather shads, which we have in great abundance, and take with great ease at our doors. Our corn did prove well, and God be praised, we had a good increase of Indian corn, and our barley indifferent good, but our peas not worth the gathering, for we feared they were too late sown, they came up very well, and blossomed, but the sun parched them in the blossom.

Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after have a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors; they four in one day killed as much fowl, as with a little help beside, served the company almost a week, at which time amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest King Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain, and others. And although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.

We have found the Indians very faithful in their covenant of peace with us; very loving and ready to pleasure us; we often go to them, and they come to us; some of us have been fifty miles by land in the country with them, the occasions and relations whereof you shall understand by our general and more full declaration of such things as are worth the noting, yea, it has pleased God so to possess the Indians with a fear of us, and love unto us, that not only the greatest king amongst them, called Massasoit, but also all the princes and

peoples round about us, have either made suit unto us, or been glad of any occasion to make peace with us, so that seven of them at once have sent their messengers to us to that end. Yea, an Isle at sea, which we never saw, hath also, together with the former, yielded willingly to be under the protection, and subjects to our sovereign lord King James, so that there is now great peace amongst the Indians themselves, which was not formerly, neither would have been but for us; and we for our parts walk as peaceably and safely in the wood as in the highways in England. We entertain them familiarly in our houses, and they as friendly bestowing their venison on us. They are a people without any religion or knowledge of God, yet very trusty, quick of apprehension, ripe-witted, just. The men and women go naked, only a skin about their middles.

...For fish and fowl, we have great abundance; fresh cod in the summer is but coarse meat with us; our bay is full of lobsters all the summer and affordeth variety of other fish; in September we can take a hogshhead of eels in a night, with small labor, and can dig them out of their beds all the winter; we have mussels and othus at our doors: oysters we have none near, but we can have them brought by the Indians when we will; all the spring-time the earth sendeth forth naturally very good sallet herbs: here are grapes, white and red, and very sweet and strong also. Strawberries, gooseberries, raspas, etc. Plums of three sorts, with black and red, being almost as good as a damson: abundance of roses, white, red, and damask; single, but very sweet indeed. The country wanteth only industrious men to employ, for it would grieve your hearts (if as I) you had seen so many miles together by goodly rivers uninhabited, and withal, to consider those parts of the world wherein you live to be even greatly burdened with abundance of people. These things I thought good to let you understand, being the truth of things as near as I could experimentally take knowledge of, and that you might on our behalf give God thanks who hath dealt so favorably with us.

...When it pleaseth God, we are settled and fitted for the fishing business, and other trading; I doubt not but by the blessing of God the gain will give content to all; in the mean time, that we have gotten we have sent by this ship, and though it be not much, yet it will witness for us that we have not been idle, considering the smallness of our number all this summer. We hope the merchants will accept of it, and be encouraged to furnish us with things needful for further employment, which will also encourage us to put forth ourselves to the uttermost.

Now because I expect your coming unto us with other of our friends, whose company we much desire, I thought good to advertise you of a few things needful; be careful to have a very good bread-room to put your biscuits in, let your cask for beer and water be iron-bound for the first tire if not more; let not your meat be dry-salted, none can better do it than the sailors; let your meal be so hard trod in your cask that you shall need an adz