

The Restaurants Book
Ethnographies of Where We Eat

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devoid of artwork, save for the ubiquitous portraits of Mao, while men and women alike clad themselves in drab-colored suits (which have since come to be known in English as Mao suits, but are often referred to in China as “blue clothes” [*lanyi*]) or imitation army uniforms. Even one’s hairstyle was dictated by these revolutionary norms. Former Red Guards have recounted stories to me of the efforts to which they went to force public compliance with visual uniformity, one woman mentioning how she and several of her cohort waited on the sidewalks for unsuspecting passers-by with long hair, which they promptly grabbed and cut off.

5. The phrase is from Jenner 1988, cited in Chen 2003: 387.
6. This is not meant to imply the lack of gender of the Maoist laboring body, but the refiguring of gender that labor policies provoked. For a more radical critique of the degendering of the laboring body, see M. Yang (1999).
7. A Cultural Revolution restaurant owner used the phrase “excessively romantic.” That conversation will be discussed at length below. I have written elsewhere about these debates over the meaning of the Cultural Revolution in a study of Mao badge collecting in contemporary China (Hubbert 2006).
8. This latter interpretation was particularly apparent in the many conversations I held with college students who spoke of the Cultural Revolution experiences of their elders as the reason behind the post-Mao successes of that cohort. See the discussion with Ms Hu detailed below. There is a growing literature on the contemporary significance of the Cultural Revolution. For only a small example, see Sausmikat 1999; F. Yang 1991; G. Yang 2003.
9. It is important to note here the selective nature of state critiques of the Cultural Revolution. While official assessments are highly critical of the Gang of Four, they maintain the continued importance of the era’s Maoist ideological lessons. Thanks to Mingbao Yue for pushing me on this point.
10. For instance, while an official Cultural Revolution museum is scheduled to open in Sichuan, its restaurant, decorated in period style, is intended to “bring back the memories of workers, farmers and soldiers eating communally and ridding themselves of bourgeois liberalism” (http://www.chinaartnetworks.com/news/show_news.php?id=2068).
11. Such examples contradict what Simoons calls a “tradition of frugality” in which excessive consumption of food and alcohol was a sign of moral turpitude (1991: 18). Food in China has also played a complex role in political dissent. The refusal of food through public hunger strikes was a mechanism of remonstrance throughout the dynastic years and re-emerged to a global audience in 1989 as pajama-clad, oxygen-sporting college students employed these tactics to force a dialogue with the contemporary regime (Gang 2002; Wasserstrom and Perry 1992).
12. On the relationship between consumption and generation in China, see Hubbert 2003.
13. I borrow this title from Yurchak 2003.

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Ethnic Succession and the New American Restaurant Cuisine¹

Krishnendu Ray

Introduction

Even casual observers of the American restaurant scene will notice that there are certain niches – such as diners and take-outs – where particular ethnicities predominate. If they have some familiarity with the history of American restaurants they would also know that there is a pattern of ethnic succession over time. Foodwork that used to be done by German and Irish immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century was performed by Italians and eastern Europeans at the end of the century, who in turn were replaced by Greeks, and then by Asians and Latinos at the end of the twentieth century. At least that has been the case for cities in the northeastern United States.

Tastes have changed too. Continental cuisine gave way to French cuisine, which has conceded its place to Italian cooking in America’s most expensive restaurants, accented by Asian and Latino ingredients today. Even a new cuisine called American Cuisine has come into being. There is a twofold ethnic succession here: one in the sphere of food served; and the other in the ethnicity of the labor force. The two are shaped by each other in counterintuitive ways.

Observers often notice that kind of ethnic succession, but they rarely try to explain it, perhaps because of the fear that they might be seen as perpetuating ethnic stereotypes. In the process they avoid facing an essential truth about the restaurant business – it is kept afloat by a labor force that is segmented by ethnicity – and as a result abandon us to uninterrogated theories of racial preferences for particular business niches. If so many Greeks are in the diner business, then Greeks must have a natural affinity for it, goes the typical line of reasoning. Even sophisticated academics have fallen prey to such easy generalizations. Joseph T. Manzo in an otherwise impeccable piece entitled “From Pushcart to Modular Restaurant” (1998: 222) notes that one of the reasons for the ubiquity of Greeks in the diner business is “the seriousness which they applied to the business, the added touch of homeyness that developed in diners because family members worked there and the ‘openness’ with which they shared their feelings and philosophy, the latter two being distinctive

of southern Europeans.” Is seriousness about business, homeyness, or even openness a peculiarly Greek characteristic?

A common-sense association between race and profession, based on the obvious empirical predominance of particular groups in certain business niches, begins to be read as a sign of racial affinity in the absence of better-developed theories. There can be much better explanations. To develop them I need to do two things: (a) take a few steps back to identify the long-term pattern of ethnic succession in the restaurant business; and (b) restrict the analysis to one segment of the restaurant industry – full-service, fine-dining restaurants – in one place (mostly New York City), so as to make the data manageable. A brief excursion into the history of American fine dining, which I pursue in the first section of this chapter, shows the replacement of French food with Italian, accompanied by a progressive Americanization of taste. Accounting for this process requires a close examination of changing tastes in ethnic food as well as an analysis of changing restaurant labor markets, both of which I undertake in the last two sections. Rather than any primordial affinity for particular professions, I will show that ethnic succession in the fine-dining segment of the restaurant industry can be explained by changing ideas about what constitutes fine dining, as well as by shifts in American labor markets.

A Historical Sketch of Fine-dining American Restaurants

There have been three major waves of restaurant building in the United States. The first wave coincided with the Gilded Age, which not only gave us numerous American restaurants but also the cocktail (Thomas 1862). Delmonico’s, established in 1833, arguably the most famous American restaurant of the nineteenth century, preceded this expansive phase. It was followed by venerable institutions such as Antoine’s (1840) in New Orleans; Parker House (1855) and Locke-Ober (1875) in Boston; Maison Dorée (1861), Hoffman House (1864), Knickerbocker (1871), Sherry’s (1881), Lüchow (1882), Waldorf-Astoria (1899), and Rector’s (1899) in New York; Jack’s (1864), Palace (1875) and Shroeder’s (1893) in San Francisco; Grammer’s (1872) in Cincinnati; Rector’s (1884) of Chicago; and Bookbinder’s (1865) and The Bellevue Stratford Hotel (1902) in Philadelphia. The outliers were Grossinger’s in the Catskills in 1919 and Colony in 1921 in New York.² When Congress passed the Volsted Act in 1920, to enforce the prohibition amendment to the Constitution, it closed the first chapter on American fine-dining restaurants.

By some accounts, Delmonico’s was the only recognized restaurant in New York City in 1833, while there were up to six thousand such establishments by 1876 (Root and de Rochemont 1976: 334). According to Harvey Levenstein, the pre-eminent historian of American food habits, this was the classic period of conspicuous consumption, when a newly rich class sought to establish itself in the realm of consumption as theorized by Thorstein Veblen, who was writing at precisely this moment (2001: 13).

The Civil War and the financial speculation that followed produced a whole new crop of super-rich parvenus, who soon provided a monumental spur to the spread of French cooking in America... As imposing new mansions marched relentlessly up New York’s Fifth and Madison avenues, their kitchens, manned by newly-imported French chefs, became major armories in the battle. When daring forays were made out of private homes, the ranks were drawn up at Delmonico’s, the Fifth Avenue Hotel, the Brunswick House, and the Hoffman House, all of which served French food (Levenstein 1989: 70–1).

The simultaneous presence of old elites and the newly rich – by one count 84 percent of the rich in the 1880s were newly minted (Stanley and Danko 1996: 16) – made these restaurants the perfect locale for intense status competition by way of showy dinners and restrained manners. By the 1880s the competition for conspicuous consumption had reached absurd limits, with menus engraved on silver plaques, a \$100,000 dinner for fifty hosted by Diamond Jim Brady, and a \$10,000 breakfast for seventy-two by Edward Luckmeyer, who hosted a banquet with four live swans caged in gold wiring crafted by Tiffany’s on a lake carved on the dining table.

The food was stringently haute French. Surprisingly, until the 1870s, “the taste for French food [had] never entered the [American] mainstream,” writes Levenstein (2003: 11). He notes that a French chef became a necessity in establishing the new code of dining only by the 1870s:

The ascendancy of French cooking is evident in many menus that survive from the upper and upper-middle-class hotels of the post-[Civil] war era. In the late 1860s and early 1870s they tended to be mainly English/American in their offerings and language, with only an occasional French touch. By the mid- and late-1870s, however, a wholesale invasion of French terms and French dishes was under way. (Levenstein 2003: 15)

There were a few exceptions, such as Lüchow’s (1882) in New York City, Shroeder’s (1893) in San Francisco and Grammer’s (1872) in Cincinnati, that served German cuisine, while Parker House (1855) in Boston served New England cuisine, but these merely underlined the otherwise wholesale addiction of the elite to French food.

The second wave of restaurant building clusters between the Second World War and the Vietnam War. Le Pavillon in New York, established in 1941 by the staff of the French pavilion at the World Fair, leads this group (Smith 2005). It is followed by Brennan’s in New Orleans (1946), La Côte Basque (1959), Four Seasons (1959), La Caravelle (1960), Lutèce (1961), La Grenouille (1962), and Le Périgord (1964), finishing off with the outlier Le Cirque (1974). Interestingly, with the exception of Four Seasons and Brennan’s, the names are fervently Francophone – leading the New York restaurateur Drew Nieporent to characterize it as the Le/La phase of American fine-dining (Nieporent quoted in Bruni 2005: F4). This list is also a lot

shorter than the one that precedes it in the Gilded Age and the other that follows in the post-Vietnam era.

Chez Panisse (1971) carried the Francophone resonances of the Second Wave, and yet brought a markedly different aesthetic of the Arts and Craft Movement to American cuisine in the post-Vietnam War era. The new focus was on “organic architecture,” and a sparse informal style arrayed against the opulence of the Le Pavillon variety. The craftsmanship of bourgeois home-cooking was the new posture, contrasted with the mannered style of French haute cuisine. There was also an explicit critique of the ornate neoclassicism of Delmonico’s oeuvre. Rusticity replaced elegance. That went hand-in-hand with the crusade of Alice Waters – the owner of Chez Panisse – on behalf of organic and seasonal produce. She also unlocked the door to the Mediterranean by way of the south of France.

The list of fine-dining restaurants that opened in the United States in the wake of Chez Panisse is impressive. To identify some of the most visible ones we have to include Jean-Louis at the Watergate (1979), Spago (1982), An American Place (1983), Stars (1984), Rattlesnake Club (1985), Union Square Café (1985), China Moon Café (1985), Frontera Grill (1987), Susanna Foo’s (1987), Hammersley’s (1987), Trotter’s (1987), Nobu’s (1987), Coyote Café (1987), Citrus (1987), Aureole (1988), Olives (1989), Lark Creek Inn (1989), Biba (1989), etc. The list is interminable both because of the explosion in restaurants and the proximity to our own time, when it becomes impossible to discern between a flash in the pan and a legitimate star with staying power. Perhaps a convenient stopping point would be Emeril’s Delmonico (re-opened in 1997), which nicely closes the epoch that opened with Delmonico’s in 1833.

Perhaps we are too close to the details of the current expansion to get some perspective, but there is an emerging consensus among American food writers that we are in the midst of a culinary revolution. As proof they point to the explosion in good restaurants in the United States in the wake of Chez Panisse. The disagreement is only about the signal temporal moment. Some date the great transformation in American culinary culture to Craig Claiborne’s naming of chefs in *The New York Times* restaurant reviews in the 1960s (Brenner 1999: 79). A convenient date for some is the day in 1966 when Julia Child made the cover of *Time* magazine under the title “Everyone’s in the Kitchen.” Some date the revolution to 1972, with the publication of James Beard’s *American Cookery*, which celebrated American regionalism (Brenner 1999: 194). Some insist on 1976, when Jeremiah Tower, the chef at Chez Panisse, featured the first Californian menu, with dishes such as “Monterey Bay Prawns” and “Walnuts, Almonds, and Mountain Pears from the San Francisco Farmers’ Market.” Some have argued that American foodies still needed the jolt of June 1976 to free themselves from excessive Francophilia. That was when two Napa Valley wines bested the best of French wines in a blind test, in the over-heated narrative of the time. Freed from too much veneration for things French, Americans were willing to play with their food. Others draw attention to the

groundwork done by the birth of *Gourmet* magazine in 1941 and especially the self-assurance with which the Four Seasons, which opened in 1959, described itself as an “American” restaurant – “people had their first cherry tomatoes at the Four Seasons; they had their first baby avocados in the Four Seasons; they had their first snow peas in the Four Seasons . . . And so there was this emphasis on product as opposed to the emphasis in a French restaurant, which is on ‘cuisine’ and sauce.”³ Leslie Brenner finds the early Four Seasons menu replete with American regional specialties such as Smithfield Hams, Virginia Blue Crab, California Teleme Cheese, seasonal vegetables and field greens (Brenner 1999: 39–40). We can also take 1982 as the benchmark year, when Zagat produced its first formal survey of New York City restaurants (informally the survey began in 1979). A commercially successful survey is good evidence both of the number of restaurants and its importance to a reading public. Be that as it may, I want to draw attention here to another aspect of the recent explosion of new American restaurants, and that is its relationship to ethnicity in two ways: the ethnicity of the food served and the ethnicity of the labor force.

Ethnicity of the Food Served: The Valorization of Italian-American Food

On December 5, 1881, a *New York Times* correspondent noted, “I have never during many years of discourse on culinary topics, disguised my opinion that the modern Italian ‘cuisine’ is, next to the Spanish, the most detestable in Europe” (1881: 3). In 1889 when Alessandro Filippini, the chef at Delmonico’s, published his cookbook called *The Table*, there were hardly any distinctively Italian recipes in it. More than seven decades later James Beard could still dismiss Italian cooking: “My opinion of Italian cookery is not too high,” he wrote from France in 1955 (quoted in Kuh 2001: 61). Addressing what appears today to be the inexplicable disrepute of Italian cuisine, Patric Kuh notes:

If rusticity was the direction food was to take, then it could easily be thought that Italian food would have had a head start . . . The problem for Italians was precisely that their best food stood in direct contrast to the aesthetic of refinement that was the ideal throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. (Kuh 2001: 180)

Kuh is right. Sometimes aesthetic evaluations of food have nothing to do with the nature of the food or the skill involved in producing it. The Italian misfortune – at least in American eyes – may have been that Italian-Americans were poor and derided, and hence their food was dismissed for those reasons, rather than for any objective evaluation of their cuisine. When American Italians climbed out of the ghetto and into sports arenas, corporate offices, governors’ mansions, city halls and movie studios, Italian food was reassessed in the American imagination.

Today, by contrast, Italian food is everywhere, not only in "Italian" but also in "American" restaurants. It is instructive to look at the food at one Zagat-rated, self-described American restaurant, where the chef describes his cooking as a blend of "a variety of international flavors including Asian, Southwestern and Italian, with classical French technique." It is a norm in this class of restaurants to refer to their "techniques" as French, even when pot-stickers and pasta are served. The appetizers are calamari tempura, French soufflé, Vietnamese spring roll, and potato gnocchi. The entrées are olive oil poached salmon, truffled risotto, grilled rack of lamb with a port wine demi-glace. Sometimes the dishes acquire an Asian, Latino or Caribbean twist, such as horseradish crusted ahi tuna with a miso aioli. The food is basically Franco-Italian with an exotic accent.

We can see a similar pattern of change in the menu of the restaurant that has become a paradigm for the Third Wave – Chez Panisse. Italian food and techniques have been incorporated into the canon at this temple of New American cuisine at least since Paul Bertolli. (Although from the very beginning, Alice Waters was drawn to the Mediterranean coast.) In the winter of 2006 the menu included mushroom gnocchi with Parmesan cheese, cauliflower crostini, bresaola with faro, wild rocket, and Parmesan, a few kinds of pizzetta, ricotta ravioli, and side dishes of olives, anchovies and Tuscan olive oil.

As Stanley Lieberman (2000) has shown, in any fashion cycle what follows depends much more on what precedes. Lieberman points out that the new style is never completely different from what went before, because then the new approach would be both incomprehensible and ugly. In identifying patterns of popularity in children's first names, Lieberman detects external and internal dynamics (feminism or black ethnic activism in the former case, phonemic preferences in the latter), both contributing to incremental changes in way names are chosen or invented. One can see a similar incrementalism in American tastes in restaurant cuisine. The American gustatory model for fine-dining restaurants has moved progressively in a geographical arc from Paris, through Marseilles, to northern Italian cities, then to Naples and Sicily, and on to the Mediterranean coast of Spain. By analogy with Lieberman's phonemes, one can also see the gustomic movement – from butter, sour cream and chives, to olive oil, garlic and herbs. Of course, such a change is incremental only when the viewer is peering in from Asia. For locals distinctive differences from neighbors are never incremental.

Changes in the curriculum at the leading cooking school – the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) – point in the same direction. In 2001 "The Cuisines of Europe" was changed to "Cuisines of Europe and the Mediterranean," underplaying the formerly hegemonic Germanic cuisine of spätzle, sausage, pork chops, dairy and cabbage, and highlighted the cuisines of Italy, southern France and North Africa. One special unit in the new curriculum is exclusively focused on pastas – including the making of fresh pastas such as tagliatelle, tortelli, fettuccine, cavatelli, orecchiette, etc. (Rascoll 2004, personal communication). In a presentation on the future of American

restaurants in 2005, CIA's President Tim Ryan noted the growth of American, Italian, Latino and Asian cuisines and virtually ignored the French, which is remarkable given that the CIA's curriculum is still structured around French techniques. That is changing too.

Major surveys of American restaurants – such as Zagats – also reflect changes in the same direction. But before I present the Zagat data let me provide some caveats. First, Zagat lists are enigmatic. Zagat-rated restaurants are not randomized. The selection gets filtered through two layers of opinion-makers – the first, tens of thousands of self-selecting surveyors who volunteer to rate a restaurant. Second, the reviews are not analyzed by any scientific statistical method. They reflect the preferences of the editors themselves, who cull the reviews and assign overall scores by no publicly discussed system. As far as we know these are opinions of the Zagat editors matched to a certain degree of popularity among Zagat reviewers. Yet, in spite of these weaknesses, Zagat reviews do reveal some trends as opinion-makers.

A second set of concerns centers on how I have counted the restaurants under various cuisines. I have excluded all numerically small categories of ethnic restaurants from the total – such as Irish and Swiss. And that is because each year Zagat lists more and more categories of ethnic restaurants – forty-nine in 1990 and sixty-seven in 2006 – and hence the percentage of every category of ethnic restaurant falls, but that figure gives an inaccurate image of the relative importance of each category over time. Hence my method of keeping the ethnic categories constant over time gives a better picture of their relative importance. One last point: when a restaurant like Vong is listed both under Thai and French, I have counted it under both categories on the assumption that such self-identified double-counting gives a better picture of the universe, rather than forcing it into one singular category according to my judgment. Now on to the data. Since 1982, when Zagat began publishing its New York City survey, Italian cuisine has sustained its popularity by remaining around a quarter of all Zagat-rated restaurants, while French restaurants (down to 14 percent in 2006 from 24 percent in 1986) and especially Continental cuisine have been losing out among the fine-dining clientele (see Table 7.1). Continental cuisine, so derided by Calvin Trillin (1994), has effectively vanished from the scene over the last two decades.

Japanese is the only ethnic cuisine with a consistently strong showing of 4–7 percent, while every other notable cuisine – Mexican, Indian, Soul, Thai and Vietnamese – hovers under 4 percent. Japanese restaurants figure in the top restaurants in almost every American city surveyed by Zagat in 2006, with the highest numbers visible in Los Angeles, New York and Miami. Part of the strength of Japanese cuisine in American restaurants is related to the rise of Japan as a major economic and cultural power, which has made its food an exotic "foreign" commodity, a designer commodity if you will, somewhat akin to the role once played by French food in the American imagination. Japanese businessmen, traveling with a strong yen after the Plaza Accord (of 1985, which halved the yen-value of the dollar) were the early

Table 7.1 Ethnicity of Zagat-rated New York City restaurants as a percentage of all ethnically identifiable restaurants (columns = percentages for selected years)

Cuisines	1986 ¹ (%)	1990 (%)	2000 (%)	2006 (%)
Italian	26	28	27	27
French	24	18	16	14
American	13	18	22	19
Continental	10	6	2	1
Chinese	8	7	5	4
Japanese	4	4	6	7
Pizza	4	3	4	3
Mediterranean	0	2	4	5
Mexican/Tex-Mex	3	4	2	3
Indian	2	2	2	3
Soul/Southern	2	2	2	2
Thai	1	2	2	3
Greek	1	1	2	2
Spanish	1	1	2	2
Korean	0	0	1	1
Vietnamese	0	0	1	1
Total	99 ²	98 ²	101 ²	98 ²

Note 1: 1986 is the earliest publicly available published Zagat Survey.

Note 2: Does not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Printed Zagat Surveys.

patrons of expensive Japanese restaurants serving *kaiseki ryori* in restaurants such as *Nippon* and *Benihana* in New York City (Kishimoto 2006). American businessmen and professionals modeled their behavior after the newly stylish Japanese. The other part of the rising popularity of Japanese *haute cuisine* in American restaurants has to do with the end of the stream of Japanese migration into the United States, which removed the taint of the domestic underclass that every “ethnic” cuisine labors under (Ray 2006).

Interestingly, the popularity of Chinese has been falling in estimation from a high of 8 percent. Yet Chinese ingredients such as bok-choy (pak choi) and Sichuan peppers, and techniques such as stir-frying, steaming and wonton-wrapping are becoming more common in “New American” restaurants. China is both a rising economic power and a major source of migrant labor to the American restaurant industry; hence the future of Chinese *haute cuisine* in America is at a tipping point. If the Chinese economy continues to grow and out-migration recedes one can foresee the rise of Chinese *haute cuisine* in American restaurants; but if the migration stream continues I foresee a continuing struggle for Chinese cuisine to hold on to a few islands of prestige in the fine-dining arena. Revealingly, the talk

about Chinese restaurants reached a peak in 1965 (if we count the number of articles on particular ethnic restaurants in the *New York Times*) and has since declined to about 20 percent from a high of 35 percent of articles. This happened precisely when the new Chinese immigration took off, which was in 1965. So I am hypothesizing an inverse relationship between the prestige of a cuisine (identifiable by price and volume of talk in the upper reaches of the media) and the number of immigrants.

Data from the annual survey of The National Restaurant Association – which unlike the previous material includes “Limited Service” establishments – shows that Italian eateries do even better as check averages fall under \$25. There are hardly any French restaurants under that figure. It is interesting to note that between 2000 and 2006/7 French/Continental restaurants fell from 13 percent in the class of the most expensive restaurants (where the French have always done the best), to below 1 percent where they had to be subsumed within the “others” category. In contrast, the Italian figure has gone up dramatically, from 5 percent in 1984 to 15 percent in the most-expensive category in 2006/7; a clear sign of the upward mobility of Italian eateries.

Nevertheless French restaurants do much better in Zagat’s national survey of “America’s Top Restaurants” (Table 7.2), where almost 25 percent of the restaurants serve French foods of various kinds, from Bistro to Classical French, with the former increasingly replacing the latter in popularity. Consistently, over the years since Zagat began its list of “America’s Top Restaurants” (1992), the number of Italian restaurants on that list has oscillated between 14 percent and 18 percent, while the French have hovered around 25 percent. The most dramatic improvement has been in the fate of “American” cuisine, especially the New American cuisine. Very clearly a self-consciously American restaurant cuisine has been born in the last two decades, and interestingly at the same time it has begun to regionalize, notably into Californian, Southwestern and Northwestern variants, especially in the leading cities of these regions, such as San Francisco, Phoenix and Seattle, respectively. (The older categories of Cajun and Creole preceded this phase of regionalization.) Looking at the ethnicity of Zagat-rated restaurants in every major American city one can conclude that the “American” trend is blowing in from the west coast, while the Italian trend has been gathering momentum on the east coast. Furthermore, the intimate relationship that was established between American elites and French cuisine at the end of the nineteenth century is beginning to disintegrate.

Immigrant Cooks

Waverly Root and Richard de Rochemont (1976: 313) opened their chapter on American restaurants with: “An incidental result of the influx of immigrants into the United States was that it provided somebody to run America’s restaurants.” Historical census data confirm this correlation between food-service occupations

Table 7.2 Zagat-rated restaurants among “America’s Top Restaurants” (columns = percentages for selected years)

<i>Cuisines</i>	1992 ¹ (%)	2000 (%)	2006 (%)
American ²	26	38	38
French	25	26	24
Italian	18	14	15
Continental	12	6	4
Chinese	5	2	2
Japanese	4	4	7
Asian	0	3	3
Cajun/Creole	3	2	2
Mexican	3	2	1
Thai	2	1	1
Vietnamese	1	1	1
Indian	1	0	1
Total	100 (N=722)	99 ³ (N=883)	99 ³ (N=1010)

Note 1: Started in 1992.

Note 2: American includes American (New) + American (Traditional) + Californian + Northwestern.

Note 3: Does not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Printed Zagat Surveys.

and new immigrant groups ever since jobs and birthplace have been identified in the Census, beginning in 1850. Census data show that the foreign-born numerically dominate certain occupations such as agricultural laborers, domestic servants, hotel and restaurant employees, hotelkeepers, saloon keepers and bartenders, traders and dealers in groceries, tailors and bakers. Cooks (as a subcategory of domestic servants) were first identified in the detailed published tables of the 1910 Census. Cooks were listed as a separate *public* occupation, distinct from domestic servants, in the 1940 Census. I hope to develop a detailed picture of the historical census of occupations and ethnicity over time.

For now, I can see a strong correlation between foreign birth and occupations in the food industry. For instance in 1850, in the New York City area, 70 percent of Employees of Hotels and Restaurants and 80 percent of Hotelkeepers were foreign-born, mostly of Irish and German heritage, in a context where the foreign-born constituted about a third of the labor force. Fifty years later, according to the 1900 Census, 63 percent of Employees of Hotels and Restaurants in New York City were foreign-born (mostly Irish at 22.2 percent and German at 16.2 percent) and 65 percent of Hotelkeepers were foreign-born (mostly German, followed far behind by the Irish and English-born). Restaurantkeepers, a newly significant occupation by 1900, were 67 percent foreign-born (led by Germans at 26.7 percent and followed by Austrians

at 16.7 percent, Russians at 10 percent and Italians at 6.7 percent), at a time when the foreign-born in New York City were about 50 percent of the population. Even by the 1950 Census, when the immigrant wave had subsided, 64 percent of cooks in restaurants were foreign-born, Italians now replacing others at the top, constituting 8.4 percent of cooks (but only about 6 percent of the population), followed by Greeks at 8.1 percent, Chinese at 5.9 percent and Germans at 5.3 percent. In the 2000 Census 64 percent of restaurant workers in New York City (or, even more dramatically, 75 percent of cooks) continued to be foreign-born; but the leading regions of nativity were now Mexico, the various nations of Central America, the Caribbean Basin, South America, China and the old USSR. In general, from 1850 to 2000, while food industry-related occupations have been numerically dominated by the foreign-born, members of the clergy, lawyers, government officials and physicians have mostly been native-born (Ruggles *et al.* 2004; ROC-NY 2005).

Stepping back from the details of the Census data at the broadest level one can identify three immigrant waves into the United States, totaling about 65 million in all (until 2001). The dominant template for American home-cooking was provided by the first 20 million Northern European immigrants in their regionalized variants (see Gabaccia 1998), but the effect on American restaurant cuisine was minimal, because there were hardly any restaurants serving American food.

A perusal of respectable American newspapers such as the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Atlanta Constitution* shows that there were numerous reports of ethnics working ethnic restaurants. Commentary on the “dinner-saloons” and “beer-gardens” of the ethnics – often defined as German, Irish and Scandinavian up to the 1880s – were almost always embedded in racy narratives of crime, prostitution, and punishment. Public eating in ethnic restaurants was embroiled in deep-seated anxieties about race, gender and gentility. For instance, on August 6, 1871 the *New York Times* worried both about the number of immigrants allowed and that “restaurants and boarding-houses are fast multiplying, and threaten at no distant day to usurp the place of the family dinner table as well as the family mansion.” Anxieties about the “domestic” in its multiple resonances – of family, home and nation – are typical in almost all commentary on “cheap restaurants,” which are often referred to as “German, French, and Italian Dining-Saloons.” Yet there is sometimes a hint of urban excitement, often balanced by ethnic disgust. One can see the exhilaration in an 1852 piece on Philadelphia subtitled “An Era of Saloonism,” which ends with the following:

Scores of waiters, like dumb mutes, stand ready to receive your orders, and to convey them to that concealed and invisible sanctuary whence issues so many multitudinous preparations, whose fantastic names tickle the ear, and whose superlative qualities please and exhilarate the palate. Surrounded by these exquisite means of gratification, you ... are persuaded that, lost in the mazes of the city, you have entered, by accident, into some secret avenue, which has conducted you into an elysian state of existence – some

Mahomedian paradise, adorned with marble and gold; perfumed with frankincense and myrrh; and lighted by the brilliant eyes of beautiful houris. ("Victor" 1852: 2)

In fact, this mid-nineteenth-century urban excitement with the exotic recedes by the 1880s until we get someone like Helen Bullitt Lowry in the 1920s, who has to rehabilitate and normalize the "old world" of Greeks, Jews and Italians through their foods in New York (1921). Until then, ethnic food, if referred to at all, was subject to open disgust in titles such as "Found in Garbage-Boxes stuff that is utilized for food by some people" (*New York Times* July 15, 1883) and the shrill announcement of "An Octopus Eaten by Chinamen" (*New York Times* December 6, 1880). Distaste easily marks the outer boundary of a taste community.

In contrast to ethnic places, society restaurants such as Delmonico's are welcomed with open arms. On April 7, 1862, the *New York Times* warmly embraced the new up-town location of Delmonico's with the following words:

When the best families were clustered around the Bowling-green, and gentlemen dandies who promenaded on the Battery were expected to wear white kid gloves, the name DELMONICO first became known to the lovers of good living in the City. This establishment was the resort of the fashionable, as it now is of the commercial classes of the metropolis... The establishment (which was formerly the mansion of Mr. MOSES II. GRINNELL) has been fitted up with faultless taste, and is without any exception, the handsomest place of this kind in the City. (*New York Times* 1862: 5)

Every new location of Delmonico's is received with rapture, and contained by some vague patrician referent such as "formerly the mansion of Mr. Moses." And every society ball, held in one of these venerated restaurants, is announced with much fanfare in the dailies. In general, German restaurants are unfavorably compared to Delmonico's, Sutherland and the Cable. Yet, on January 19, 1873, the *New York Times* could publish a long and relatively even-handed piece titled "German Restaurants." In it the eponymous institutions are distinguished by their cheapness and abundance. They are said to serve "the odd things that foreigners love" along with roasts, "pumpkin pies and dumplings baked." For the Frenchman there is "lentil soup, in which masses of Bologna sausage are floating, while the Irishman is vigorously to [*sic*] work on something like fish-balls smothered in red cabbage," all of which is served with an "enormous supply of coarse German bread." The unnamed author notices two customers "who are certainly Jews ... discussing Vienna sausage, with mashed potatoes and sauer-kraut." The waiters, the author suggests "are clearly German" (*New York Times* January 19, 1873: 5).

By the early twentieth century, with some regional exceptions – such as small, local traditions such as pasties in the Upper Michigan peninsula, and Pennsylvania "Dutch" food – a national text was created in the United States. The first step was the erasure of Native-American gustatory experience. Second, the national market, born

by way of the transportation revolution, corporate consolidation, and the print media, tied together and flattened the uneven contours of regional cuisines (Gabaccia 1998). In 1935, in an article titled "Our Wide Taste in Food," Helen Morgan could write: "Strange dishes have been taken from one home to another, until, as a consequence, an American family of 1935 might reasonably concoct a meal like this: fruit cocktail, sauerkraut, spaghetti, mutton or lamb or meat balls, corn on the cob, garlic salad and apple pie." She assures us that "undoubtedly any one subject to [such] nightmares would not survive, yet such a hodge-podge is not impossible" (Morgan 1935: SM17). From our vantage point the menu hardly looks like a hodge-podge. Furthermore, such a collation was possible because the Germans, the Irish, and the Scandinavians submerged their gustatory identity in a white, Anglophone text. One consequence is that we cannot much recall their distinctive foods any more, other than as caricatures of excessive drinking – difference became drunkenness, which echoes the original anxiety about ethnic "saloonism."

This wave of 20-odd million "ethnic" immigrants – Italians, Slavs, Eastern European Jews, and Greeks – wouldn't melt away. Not because they were more virtuous than the first wave, but because of their sheer volume and concentration both in terms of space (northeastern cities) and time (1880–1924); equally because of their gravitation towards long-lasting ethnic enclaves; and to some degree because of their temporal proximity to our own times (so that we can still see them as distinct). As Donna Gabaccia notes in *We Are What We Eat* (1998), by the end of the nineteenth century, region had given way, on the one hand, to a relatively homogenized national gustatory experience, and on the other hand, to the creation of ethnic enclaves (1998: 35). Ethnic eateries flourished within the ghetto, far from the Waldorf-Astoria, Delmonico's, and the Hoffman House. It would take a long time for these folks to break into the American fine-dining scene.

From 1924 to 1965, that is for two generations, with few immigrants coming in – about 7 million over four decades compared to four times that figure before and after that period – Americans would elaborate a form of naturalized and standardized American cooking, with the help of radio and television to spread the word. It is the food of this period that most Americans today would come to identify as unambiguously American food – Germanic food, often delivered by corporations, with a few ethnic accents, which were primarily Italian, Greek, Southern and Eastern European. Cuisine, on the other hand, would be Continental, which would be a vague shorthand for the imagined food of European elites.

The next group of migrants – another 20 million or so, this time from the very places blocked by the racialized laws of the pre-Civil Rights era – would break upon our shores as a terrifying and exhilarating horde, as if the very tower of Babel had collapsed on our heads, destroying the layered sedimentations of the first and the second scores of millions. This would be the death of American food as we know it.

Since we are still in the midst of this transformation, it is not yet normalized into a paradigm. Yet the breaking of the established American mould would also

allow the food of the ultimate racial other – Blacks – to be reinvented as Soul food (first mentioned by the *New York Times* on September 18, 1966). The ferment at the bottom would finally bubble up to the top to inflect American cuisine and destroy the established templates – Continental and French. Difference would be democratized. In the process we would find ourselves in the midst of a reconfiguration of the culinary canon (as was shown in the last section) and Italian-Americans – ethnic but white – would play a crucial role in our re-imaginings. In the process we would also find the courage to invent an American cuisine aided by the media, especially television this time around (see Ray 2007).

The importance of the Civil Rights Movement, which taught us both toleration and the pleasures of cultural miscegenation, cannot be underestimated in the transformation of American tastes. That movement is the single most important reason why we see so many Asian and Latino migrants in the United States today, and can taste versions of their food in fine-dining restaurants. These newer immigrant groups have become the source of substantial innovation in American cuisine, from mojitos, tacos, wraps, and salsas, to wantons, wasabi and beyond. The Civil Rights Movement provided the cultural and legal opening, while Italians and Jews provided the institutional opening in terms of restaurants and their clientele.

The demand for a new restaurant cuisine at the end of the twentieth century was met by a supply of entrepreneurs and workers from the segmented labor market that was patterned around ethnicity. For a long time, expensive American restaurants were run by French or German chefs partly because of the reputation of French and especially of “Continental” cuisine. Neither of these groups could supply enough chefs to satiate the feeding frenzy of the last quarter of the twentieth century. As the French and German economies had recovered from the Second World War, the pool of emigrants had dried up. New immigrants, old ethnics and white Americans poured into this opening, often trained in mushrooming cooking schools run by German transplants (the Culinary Institute of America) and French expatriates (The French Culinary Institute). The United States had a large supply of down-scale ethnic talent that could be quickly up-scaled.

One group of ethnics was particularly well-positioned to take advantage of this opening – Italian-Americans. Italian food was slowly rediscovered in America by way of northern Italy, which followed Milan’s and Florence’s style-setting standard in the world of *haute couture*, and was aided by the upward mobility of Italian-Americans and the gustemic proximity of Italy to southern France. What had been repressed by the downward mobility of southern Italian migrants was reclaimed in the name of the opulent city-states of fifteenth-century northern Italy, who after all had given Europe its first fashionable cuisine (Braudel 1981: 188). The resurgent reputation of Italian food was only one-half of the equation. There had to be a supply of chefs. And not everybody was willing to be a chef, not yet.

For instance, early in the twentieth century upwardly mobile American Jews left behind the delicatessens and hot-dog stands they had run in the nineteenth

century. With higher rates of literacy than other immigrant groups, second- and third-generation American Jews quickly moved into City College and out of the delis (Steinberg 1989). They got into the retail trades of healing, teaching and litigation, which were now closed, college-certified professions. As professionals, particularly in trend-setting eastern cities such as New York, the Jewish cohort moved quickly from being suppliers of ethnic food in delis and hot-dog stands to consumers of the cuisine of others, such as the Italians and Chinese. Italians, on the other hand, burdened as they were with much lower rates of literacy, and with a rural background, continued to be the producers of some of the best American food and wine.

Gabaccia (1998), Hasia Diner (2001) and Joel Denker (2003) show quite convincingly that there would be no renaissance of American cuisine without transplanted regional Italian foods in American restaurants and Italian suppliers of California wine and local herbs and produce. Denker (2003: 62–3) demonstrates that Italian-owned pizzerias in Connecticut were replaced, after the retirement of their owners, by full service restaurants run by their children and by Greek-owned diners. In turn, he notes, the Greek owners may now be replaced by more recent immigrants from the Third World. Gabaccia (1998) provides exquisite details of ethnic entrepreneurship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She talks about German brewers, Italian restaurateurs, Chinese immigrant cooks and Greek street-vendors, one after the other, but rarely does she thread them together over time, and theorize about who replaced whom, and why. Nevertheless, ethnic succession slips through the cracks, when she notes “Around 1900 Greeks took over the manufacture and sale of candy and sodas from German and French confectioners” (1998: 105) and how “Germans had opened the first delicatessens in New York,” which subsequently came to be identified as Jewish food around the time “Lillian and Louis Zabar founded their delicatessen in Brooklyn in 1934” (1998: 108). She lets go of her historian’s caution only when she talks about the Charleston market, where new immigrants challenged German and Irish dominance in the grocery and liquor trades after 1880: while the first Greek opened a restaurant in Charleston around 1900, by “1910 Greeks ran 17, and Italians 5, of Charleston’s 60 restaurants” (1998: 114–15). Here we get the first clear measure of ethnic succession in her work.

For much of the twentieth century the restaurant world appeared to prefer French chefs and Italian *maitres d’hôtel*, often working for Italian owners made invisible by the French names of their restaurants – a tradition that would slip into the twenty-first century with Sirio Maccioni’s Le Cirque. Richard Duffy, in a 1909 article commenting on the New York City dining scene, had noted, “In the old days ... the restaurants cherished by gourmets were nearly all owned by Italians.” But he hastened to add that “If an Italian wishes to make a fortune as a restaurateur, he gives his place a French name and models his menu after those to which Paris devotes so much talent...” (Duffy 1909: 567). That is analogous to Chinese ownership of sushi

establishments today and Bangladeshi proprietorship of Indian eateries. The clientele could not figure out the difference, and the prestige of French, Japanese and Indian food was higher, mostly for non-culinary reasons. Yet it was much more expensive to hire a French, Japanese or Indian chef because of the demographic profile of immigrants from those nations. In contrast, a poorer, working-class migration from Italy, China and Bangladesh fed the supply side of the labor market equation for these establishments.

The sociology of ethnic entrepreneurship reveals the dynamic of ethnic succession. There are four parts to the theory (Granovetter 1995; Landa 1981; Light 1972; Portes 1995; Sassen 1995). First, a low capital cost makes it relatively easier for ethnic entrepreneurs to enter into the business of feeding others. Cultural capital – knowledge about unfamiliar foods – gives them a competitive edge over better-capitalized mainstream entrepreneurs in this niche market. Social capital – kin or fictive kin networks of loyalty that allow the borrowing of money on a rotating basis without collateral – enables ethnic entrepreneurs to raise the necessary cash for a small eatery without the normally required assets. Self-exploitation – long hours of work and the unpaid labor of kin and fictive kin – permits these enterprises to compete with better-capitalized businesses. Self-exploitation turns sweat and loyalty into capital. Finally and most importantly for our purposes, both migration and entrepreneurship exhibit serial patterns. That is, people who know each other, and come from the same regions, work in, and own similar enterprises, built with money and expertise borrowed from co-ethnics. They effectively develop an informal, intra-ethnic consulting and banking system. A paucity of assets to collateralize loans and unfamiliarity with the language and norms of a consumer society deepens the dependence on co-ethnic money, information and expertise.

Yet many ethnic eateries are unsuccessful in remaining in business for long because they are under-capitalized and cannot weather the inevitable fluctuations of the market, and they often run out of luck in their fragile wager on endless over-work and perpetual good health. Those who succeed send their children to college; and these on completion are unwilling to accumulate sweat capital because of their better credentials. If they stay in business it is because they have better connections, English-language capabilities, and assets to trade in, creating a more upscale business where returns are greater. A typical route is from the successful pizzeria or diner to a white-tablecloth restaurant. The Greek cohort is going through that upgrading right now.

The above of course is a broad prototype of an explanation. The theory of ethnic succession will never reveal why particular groups end up in particular niches in the first place. It can only explain why niches appear and why segmentation persists. To understand how the first Greek-Americans ended up in the diner business we need biographies and ethnographies that we do not yet have (with the exception of Manzo and Denker).

Reprise

I have argued a handful of points in this chapter. First, the recent efflorescence of fine-dining restaurants in the United States is not the first time we have seen such a surge. We need to enlarge our temporal horizon to include the First Wave between the Civil War and Prohibition. Only when we look back over the long run do we find interesting patterns. Second, I have sought to enumerate the changes in American cuisine, specifically the rise of Italian-American food, by counting what can be counted. Third, changing sources of migration have both changed the supply of cooks and transformed our palates, but in unpredictable directions. I have identified a pattern of ethnic succession in food work and in taste. I have also noted that too much or too little upward mobility is bad for leaving a mark on American fine dining. I hypothesize that large-scale migration from any source is inversely related to the number of fine-dining ethnic restaurants native to that group at the temporal peak of the group's in-migration, although the same group tends to predominate in the restaurant labor-force at the same time.

Fourth, to begin to understand the changing resonances of ethnicity and race and hence ethnic food one has to understand these classification systems – race and ethnicity – as discursive fields, where for instance the Irish did not change their color; but they did become white in the course of the Civil War (Ignatiev 1995), and hence never developed a gustatory identity distinct from the normative white culture (cf. Diner 2001; see Ray 2004: 101–14). Whereas Jews, once considered a different race because of their religious identity, are in the process of becoming white folks (Brodin 1998) and hence are losing their capacity to retain their culinary identity as a mark of difference, and whereas Italians continue to bring a different kind of whiteness to bear on their food, which has as much to do with class as race. The demographic weight of the Italian-American community, the end of Italian migration, and the medial nature of Italian migrants, as white but not quite, plays well in the current contours of the American fine-dining market, as it undergoes gustemic slippage away from its historic Francophilia, driven by incremental distinctions in the fashion cycle.

Finally, a methodological comment. I began by pointing to a weakness in Joseph Manzo's work on Greek diners on the American landscape. To the question why there are so many Greeks in the diner business he responds that food and commensality are important to Greeks. His answer is internalist and culturalist because he only studies the Greeks in America. The study of any ethnic group over-represented in the food business leads to the same point. If we listen to the Japanese owners, Korean restaurant-keepers, Thai entrepreneurs, and Bangladeshi restaurant owners in New York they say the same thing – we are in the food business because food is important to us (Kishimoto 2006; Ongwat 2006). That is the limit of the ethnographic method in the food business at that level of generality. To get beyond that answer (and in

general beyond ethnic sentimentalism) we have to study more than one ethnic group, and compare their demographic profiles over time. We need multi-ethnic studies that compare labor-force participation profiles over time to get past the internalist and culturalist dead-end. Culture is important, but only as something nested within a comparative, demographic analysis, which is often invisible to insiders.

Notes

1. Critical comments by David Beriss and David Sutton helped me sharpen the focus of this chapter. Thanks to Sierra L. Burnett for downloading the data on ethnicity and occupation from IPUMS and organizing it in a manageable format for this project.
2. This list of restaurants is based on: (a) a census of restaurants mentioned in the secondary literature – Batterberry and Batterberry (1973), Cummings (1970), Root and de Rochemont (1976), Hess and Hess (1977), Levenstein (1988, 1989, 1994, 2003a,b), Reardon (1994), Kuh (2001), Brenner (1999), Dornenburg and Page (2003), and Andrew Smith (2005); (b) verification and addition to the list through interviews with 102 chefs at *The Culinary Institute of America* in the Fall of 2004; and (c) a perusal of current newspaper and magazine articles. I am working towards validating and amending the list by a statistical analysis of the number of times these restaurants are mentioned in newspapers such as the *New York Times* (1852–2003), the *Los Angeles Times* (1891–1985) and the *Chicago Tribune* (1891–1985). The list is a work in progress, but the patterning is too dramatic to miss.
3. This claim must be taken with a pinch of salt, because Brenner is here quoting Michael Whiteman, who was the partner at *Restaurant Associates* of Joseph Baum, who owned *Four Seasons*.

From Khatchapuri to Gefilte Fish

Dining Out and Spectacle in Russian Jewish New York

Eve Jochnowitz

Everything happens in restaurants. We meet, we consume, we celebrate or commiserate, we feel utterly alive, and yet the ever-present posters instructing us on the Heimlich maneuver are a constant *memento mori*. Many of our most intense experiences occur in restaurants. In a famous scene in Rob Reiner's 1990 film "When Harry Met Sally" the Sally character played by Meg Ryan visits a Jewish restaurant and has an orgasm. Within the narrative context of the movie, Sally is faking an orgasm for reasons necessary to the plot. I have argued that in fact Sally's reaction to the multisensory and polysemic environment of a Jewish restaurant could not be more real (Jochnowitz 2000: 222). This chapter will address the performances in the restaurants of Russophonic Jewish communities of New York.

The Russian-Jewish communities of New York had little or no contact with one another in the former Soviet Union. Since settling in the United States, however, they have become united by the Russian language, Russian-language radio, television and newspapers, and their new identity as Russian-speaking immigrants. They are united as well by geographic proximity, and shared civic and political concerns. Restaurants are important places of contact and conversation within the new communities – what Shalom Staub calls "esoteric interaction," or interactions among members of one community (Staub 1989). Staub distinguishes these interactions from "exoteric" interactions between members of one community and outsiders. For the purposes of this study, I have found that a liminal category of *mesoteric* interactions between these two exists, when members of two or more Russophonic communities interact with each other. Russophonic immigrants in New York were unaware of one another's cuisines in the old country, but they have begun to sample the cuisines of other Russophonic Jews with great interest. This is one of the ways they have become, in the words of Fran Markowitz, "A community in spite of itself" (Markowitz 1993).

Jewish immigrants to the Americas from the former Soviet Union come from four distinct language and culture areas, each with its own specific cuisine. Ashkenazic Jews from Ukraine, Romania, Moldova, Lithuania, and parts of Russia itself come from a Yiddish-speaking tradition. Bukharan Jews from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have a Judeo-Persian language they call Farsi.¹ Jews from in and around the republic