

Exploring Food, Drink, and Place: Exam 2

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Many of the authors argue that obesity and hunger are related to various inequalities in our society. What would the democratization of the food system entail (see Levkoe chpt. 40)? What steps would need to be taken to democratize our food system? Please explain.

The lack of nutritious food is often the cause of obesity and hunger, but the issue runs a lot deeper than that of food itself. Many socioeconomic conditions and inequalities in our society force many people to make poor food choices. The obese are trapped by society because the very existence of obesity legitimizes a “norm” and creates a common enemy for society, while the poor and hungry are trapped by a socioeconomic loop that prevents them from accessing better food and making better choices. The democratization of food would solve both of these problems by bringing people close to the source of their consumption and granting them better access to and understanding of food.

Alice Julier addresses obesity in *The Political Economy of Obesity* by discussing the role of the obese and their political, economic, and social function in society. Julier argues that the obese create an entire industry focused on them, since obesity has been medicalized and turned into an “epidemic”. “Labeling obesity an epidemic creates jobs for a number of occupations and professions that serve or ‘service’ the diet, exercise, and health industries”. The obese as a group “can be identified and punished ... in order to uphold the legitimacy of conventional norms”. Julier summarizes this is a profound comparison that “by making public health ... entirely about individual behavior, we limit people’s autonomy regarding the vast number of reasons they choose to eat, ... we lose a great deal by valuing food

for little but its nutrients ... and by valuing our citizens for little but their appearance”. Society imposes a great burden on the obese, and as long as this burden is imposed on them, society will always enforce this divide and isolate them as a group.

As a solution, Charles Z. Levkoe argues that “by reframing hunger as an issue of poverty, it ... will enable marginalized people to make choices around the foods they purchase”. Levkoe argues that democratizing food could entail participating in a community garden, which would serve to educate people on democratic principles. He argues that this democratizes food by allowing participants to “take responsibility for a number of tasks and follow them through while recognizing their rights within a larger system”. In addition to “breaking systems of charity ... by producing their own food, ... the garden serves as a model for the community of what can be collectively accomplished”. On top of all this, the democratization process brings consumers much closer to the producers and lowers dependence on mass production based food corporations, which “establishes a greater sense of control and power” over the lives of the participants.

Levkoe’s proposed solution is not only sustainable, but good for the community and the environment. This would serve to address both the problems of obesity and poverty induced by society by empowering people to make smarter food choices and improving ways in which communities can help themselves.

This course has focused on a critique of the industrial food system. Would you agree that organic foods and the slow food movement provide an acceptable alternative? Please explain your point of view by making concrete references to our text.

The industrial food system has been criticized for its inhumanity, disregard for nature, and disregard for human safety. The meatpacking industry itself is notorious for its lack of safety measures and protocols, leading to accidents and injuries. It is safe to say that moving towards organic food would benefit not only society, but also the environment.

In the words of Charles Z. Levkoe, industrial food systems are driven by nothing but profit motive and puts a “focus on people, not as citizens, but as consumers”. He states that “the perspective of consumer implies an identity defined by a direct relationship with the market, one in which profit becomes the most important factor”. Eric Schlosser describes the industrial

meatpacking industry in *The Chain Never Stops* as deceitful, noting that they “[have] a well-documented history of discouraging injury reports, falsifying injury data, and putting injured workers back on the job to minimize lost workdays”. He describes the experiences and injuries of former worker Kenny Dobbins, who is now forced to rely on public assistance due to his injuries.

It is clearly obvious that organic food and the slow food movement would be more than acceptable as an alternative. Levkoe notes that “by reclaiming public space and growing organic vegetables, [people] are breaking dependencies on ... the market economy by producing their own food”. Aside from the aforementioned plethora of benefits to consumers as described in the essay above, the slow food movement pays homage to the diversity of cultures and cuisines by actively preserving local traditions. As described by Alison Leitch in *Slow Food and the Politics of “Virtuous Globalization”*, the slow food movement emphasized “the importance of food as a cultural artifact linked the preservation of a distinctive European cultural heritage”. This so-called “endangered foods campaign” served to protect regional tastes due to effects of the industrial food system such as farming monocultures.

In addition to addressing issues such as industrial exploitation, the slow food movement empowers consumers and improves access to better and healthier food. The push for more organic food would address the national issue of obesity in the United States. It is clear that organic food and the slow food movement would be a positive alternative to the predatory industrial food system.