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## Understanding the Significance of Food

I don't think I've ever put so much time and thought into food as I have in the last month since starting this class. It seems our lives revolve around food... or do they? Traditionally this probably was the case. When I think of a traditional life style I think of my parents and grandparents. They always talk about how things used to be and how simple life was. Families would gather together twice if not three times a day cook a nice meal. The woman of the house would prepare this tasteful meal and often kids would be forced to help as the dad came home from a long day at work (dinner.) Once the father came home and dinner was ready, everyone would gather around the table, say a prayer thanking God for what they had, and then the wonderful meal was enjoyed. If you were a kid, you hoped you liked what was for dinner because otherwise you were force feeding yourself or otherwise going hungry. So what do we have now? I'll compare the traditional style of dinner time with what a typical night for me was this summer. I would work all day till around 5:30 – 6:00, and then I would call up my buddies and hang out. We would go over somebody's house what would be the first thing we would do? We would find something to eat. However, we weren't ones to actually put effort into it; we go a couple miles down the road to a Wendy's or McDonalds. Why would we do this and why do a majority of people of the United States choose this option as well? Well there are a variety of reasons but I believe it all boils down to one thing. Convenience. It is really easy to drive your car into the drive through, order a meal, and pay a minimal amount for a "seemingly large" portion of food. However, after the first part of this semester between class time discussion and reading *The Omnivores Dilemma* by Michael Pollan and the documentaries *Fat Sick* and *Nearly Dead 1 and 2*, *Forks over Knives*, and *Spinning Plates*, we can see there are huge flaws on our food system as a nation right now. Over the course of watching these documentaries, reading, and class I have learned to look at what I am eating in a whole different way because of these and in this paper I will explain why.

I can remember back into my days in middle school and high school watching documentaries about food and how food was bad and whatnot but at the time I was probably just too young and immature to really care what they were even saying. When I watched *Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead 1 and 2* (for the purposes of this paper I will consider both movies as one message), I would definitely say this is not about the traditional family dinner that I talked about in the intro to this paper. Joe Cross takes things to the extreme. However, during the film, he goes a good deal on why the food we eat everyday isn't all that great for us. This part of the film goes pretty hand in hand with Michael Pollan's book which I will get to soon. What the film does really well in is giving the audience a personable main character someone to relate to. I know personally that I am not in terrible shape but this film even made me consider trying this new healthier life style. Obviously I wouldn't go as hardcore as Joe Cross did because that would

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counterproductive for me. Joe Cross is almost making an attempt to “sell you a product” in a way. His product is to get people to eat strictly whole foods and mostly plant based. It seems simple in theory, however in the new world we live in, it has become quite an effort to eat healthier but things may be starting to get slowly better.

The next documentary I watched was Forks over Knives. This movie brought up a new concept that I had never heard about before. This film explained that animal based protein, no matter if it was organic or not, was leading to the obesity problem in the United States. This was kind of alarming to me seeming how pretty much every meal I eat contains some sort of meat product. However, after watching it a while I became less and less convincing to me. Humans are meant to both meat and vegetables, so when the film suggests we eat only whole food plant based diets, I kind of lost interest. Yes, Joe Cross sort of had the same message but in Forks over Knives I just didn't get a good impression. Maybe it was the fact that it lacked a main character like Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead, or maybe I was just tired of hearing the same message three times in a row. Either way that film didn't really do it for me.

Now I'd like to talk about the big one being The Omnivore's Dilemma. This book seems to provide an overview to our entire food system in a relatively easy to understand way. I don't think I've ever heard the word corn said so many times in such little time. But that's the point. Our food is almost all corn in one shape or another. Factory farm raised chemical rich, corn. From an ice cold coke, to cereal, to even the steak on your dining room table (oh yeah who does that?.. eating at the table) on a day to day most of what people consume has corn in it. Pollan describes everything from how the corn is grown with artificial enhancers and antibiotics to the politics surrounding it and the government subsidies to keep the price down. I think it is kinda sad that farmers can grow thousands and thousands of acres of corn (with nothing else) and still barely scrape by. This is because the government wants to keep the price of corn low so food products will stay low. It is so low that the government has to pay subsidies to keep the farmers afloat. Never the less, the farmers continue to make more and more and more corn to the point where we almost have too much of it so we are having to find things to do with it. So on one side we want to help out the farmers and allow them to get more money for their product but on the other hand consumers don't want to pay more for their Big Mac.

So what is the solution? In part three of Pollan's book he goes on an adventure. He goes to the polyface farm just outside of Washington DC. What he finds is a totally different style of life. It isn't the hustling and bustling of the new world most people live in today. The polyface farm is very much still into the traditional life style. The food they ate wasn't from thousands of miles away and flash frozen to preserve the food. No, it was picked straight off the plant and brought right to the table. The chicken was slaughtered and brought right to the oven. Pollan explains his personal experience of working on the farm and living the life they live. From what he describes, it really is a whole other world. The concept of working for your food is much different.

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Instead of working all day in an office munching on Cheetos, the polyface farmers are conducting the efficient cycle of how a real farm should work. I find it intriguing that a place like the polyface farm can still exist. The owner even mentions that he isn't allowed to slaughter his own cows because the USDA won't let him. The only reason I can see why a place like the polyface farm can still be around is because of books and documentaries like these that we as a class have watched. It is the knowledge of what goes on in our food system today that deters people and draws them toward the whole foods market and I think that more and more people are becoming aware. But the food companies are no dummies. Organic food is a relatively recent thing and it isn't a mistake. Food companies realized that people were starting to catch on to their ways of doing things so they came out with something new advertised it as being healthier for you. Some of this is true as organic food is chemical free and all but the word organic is simply a legal term and there are many ways around it. Farmers are happy to do what the public wants but they still have to make money. So what is the result? The cost of organic food is more expensive. And then, not only that, but you have to actual prepare a meal yourself. So much effort right? That's the issue. However, as more and more people become educated on how our food we eat on a daily basis is made, I believe people will decide to give "organic" foods a try and we may eventual move away from processed foods and enjoy more whole foods.

Not all whole food meals have to be made at home. Restaurants have also noticed the trend of people going toward a whole foods diet. There are now many smaller places, especially in cites, that people can go to get a quote higher grade of food. Whole foods are slowly becoming more accessible and as this happens, I think we are going to see the price obstacle start to subside as well. So maybe whole food really is the way of the future. I decided to try it out for myself (plus it was an assignment to eat food, I could resist.)

I was going to make a nice steak dinner. However, it wasn't gonna be just any steak. This steak was going to be a premium cut. Where I found it was at the local farm down the road from my dad's house called the Kelly bros. Farm. They primarily raise beef and dairy cows but the nice thing is all of his cows are free range and they graze in the summer through the many fields of grass Mr. Kelly owns. So I drove down the road and talked to him. He had a very thick Maine accent but he seemed like one of those people you would call one of the "good ole fellas." Anyway I asked for one his best cuts and he recommended his sirloin cut so I took it. It was 20 bucks but honestly that didn't seem all that bad. Sure it isn't the cheapest but I figured it would be pretty good. Plus it was easily enough to feed two if not three. Secondly, while I was there I asked for some of his fresh whole milk. He said hold on, and a minute later he came out with a fresh glass bottle of milk. He instructed me to make sure I put it in the fridge right away and I did. Next I needed to get some corn. I decided to just go to Hannaford for this one however as I was driving in to get it is saw this little farmers market so I decided to stop. They had some sweet corn from this little place in Nobleborrow called Spears Vegetable Farm. This little farm

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has 100 acres of corn and it is all picked by hand! I thought that was pretty incredible for so many acres. They also had some fresh potatoes from some farm but I can't remember where from. Anyway, I didn't have to go to Hannaford anymore so I turned around and went back home. Shortly after I got there my dad came home. So I started up the grill and got her warmed up. I took some of the steak rub out of the cupboard. I have no idea what that is made of but it was spices so I figured it wasn't a big deal. At the same time I put the potatoes in the microwave and started nuking them. I usually just warm em up in the microwave and finish them on the grill. I also got a pot of water boiling for the corn. When the steak hit the hot grill the smell was just amazing. The steak had a thin layer of fat around the edge but what really surprised me was how nice and white it was compared to normal store bought beef. This was followed by the shucking of the corn, boiling them, and putting the potatoes on the grill. After about 20 minutes or so it was about ready. I put everything on our nice porcelain-like plates and me and my dad had a feast around the dinner table. I was most impressed by how juicy and tender the beef was. It was unlike any store bought beef id ever had. The corn was ever so sweet. And the potatoes (with store bought "real" butter and some ketchup) it was just amazing. The whole thing was about 25 bucks which isn't bad at all.

So after making this meal all by myself I actually felt pretty good. I got to sit down with my dad and just talk to him about stuff which honestly doesn't happen as much as I'd like. Usually ill just heat up a microwave diner and have that while my mom just makes something for herself. This is really for a few different reasons. This happens because for the most part we eat totally different things. She eats like a bird and I tend to eat greasy, unhealthy food. Another reason this happens is because often times her or I don't get home till later in the evening so it just isn't practical to cook a big meal. Even when we do eat a prepared meal, it is usually in front of the television and neither of us talks much. Maybe now with my knowledge of good food and a healthy family relationship I can change things a little for the best.

So whether I'm in a rush and have to grab a bite quickly at the fast food restaurant or I'm just bored at home maybe I'll make the better choice. Like in the movie Spinning Plates, Food should be more than just something you have to do on a daily basis. Food should be art. It should be experience with friends and/or family and it should be enjoyed. I honestly believe that not everything has to be super healthy for you either. As long as you like the people you're with and everything is in balance your fine. Sure America doesn't have the deepest traditions in food, but we should just stuff our faces till we die. Then again, pizza is pretty good haha. But maybe, just maybe this class will influence my food choices for the future.

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