Teaching Essay: Food in the First Half of the American History Survey

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"Food in the First Half of the American History Survey" is the first in a series of commissioned articles for the Book Channel that aim to help teachers and professors incorporate the latest research into their curriculum. Helen Zoe Veit is an Associate Professor at Michigan State University and specializes in nineteenth and twentieth century American history. Her first book Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century was a finalist for the 2014 James Beard Award in Reference and Scholarship. More on Dr. Veit's project on the intersection of food and American history can be found at her website.
Nineteenth-century cookbooks can also open up windows onto gender and class for students who too often blithely assume ... Some were too busy working in fields or factories or in other people's homes. And some middle-class and wealthy women ... One of the advantages of using primary culinary sources is the element of surprise; students can be ... just like them, with different clothes. Try showing students suggested menus from nineteenth-century cookbooks: why would ...}

Indeed, food lends itself to teaching with primary sources. Besides primary source readers, there are now an impressive number of historical American cookbooks available in digital form. One of the richest sites is Michigan State University's ... Century Maryland, is a student favorite.

Including a reliance on boiling and baking and a preference for wheat bread, dairy products, puddings, large cuts of meat, beer, and cider? James McWilliams's 2005 ... didn't bison or whale or other foods enjoyed by some native North Americans ever become part of broader American cuisine?

Century, an ecology of New England, is a student favorite. 

Food was an important part of the exploration and empire-building that usually occupies early lectures in the survey. Building on Sidney Mintz's classic commodity study, ... usually ends, in the late nineteenth century, but there are important exceptions. A small and growing body of excellent ... lectures, adding classroom activities, and, not incidentally, sparking student interest by talking more about food.

Recommended Readings
Michigan State University Feeding America: The Historic American Cookbook Project