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From “Unfit for Human Consumption” to Taco Tuesday: Mexican food in Los Angeles
from the Early 1900s

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Abstract

The study of food—how it is prepared, marketed, discussed, or consumed—can shed light on the development of social relationships, the allocation of power, the formation of identity, and the cultural appropriation of gastronomy. In Southern California during the early 1900s, Euro-Americans were curious about traditional Mexican dishes and devised methods to appropriate Southwestern cuisine, making it more to their liking. As part of this process, Euro-Americans promoted restaurants, menus, and cookbooks as agents of appropriation to recreate a Spanish fantasy past or to fabricate a marketable version of “Old Mexico.” As boosters, railroad owners, and preservationists desired to further extend the Spanish legacy in Los Angeles, they modeled several restaurants to evoke a Spanish mission-like environment suitable to a clientele that disregarded the presence of Mexicans in the city. Such restaurants presented Mexican food to elites by disguising or mislabeling it as “European.”

Euro-Americans defined Southwestern cuisines as “safe” and palatable fragments of the past because many believed Californios and Mexicans would inevitably vanish from the city. To further displace Mexicans from a Euro-American society and establish themselves as the rightful inheritors of California, Euro-Americans promoted the commercialization of Mexican food as “Spanish” or “Spanish-Mexican” since both terms indicated a European, foreign legacy. Furthermore, Euro-Americans constructed their identities as sophisticated and civilized in contrast to the fabricated images they created of Mexicans who they viewed as remnants of a “primitive” past. Though some scholars have begun to study Mexican food and its culinary legacy in the United States, this study of Southwestern cuisine in Los Angeles demonstrates how Euro-Americans appropriated

Mexican food and used it as a tool to marginalize and caricature the Mexican and Mexican-American population while also promoting a civic image appealing to Euro-American society. Restaurants, menus, and cookbooks thus became products of cultural hegemony imposed by Euro-Americans that reflected their attempts to “sanitize” Mexican food. The study of Mexican food in Los Angeles during the early twentieth reveals the transition from an appropriation of food to accommodating it as a part of the Southwestern culture.

Introduction

On a Friday evening in 1899, an Angeleno resident named Miss Maude Hufford became severely ill after consuming a tamale. Over the course of the night, her pain drastically increased to the point where she required the immediate medical attention of a physician. The physician, alarmed at seeing Hufford in such a precarious condition, declared her to be in grave danger as she experienced symptoms of indigestion and constant vomiting for several hours. He emptied her stomach and, extracting a semi-digested tamale, determined that the "putrefied tamale" contained harmful ingredients that had precipitated her illness.¹ In this sensational story from the *Los Angeles Record*, Ms. Hufford's encounter with the debilitating tamale "informed" its Euro-American audience of the consequences from consuming tamales or any sorts of Mexican food. The *Los Angeles Herald* also reported this incident but provided more details as to what exactly caused Miss. Hufford's illness. According to the article, danger lurks within food that "is [both] mysterious and occasionally suspicious" (Figure 1). The tamale, from both articles, exemplifies the uncertainty with which many Euro-Americans viewed Mexican cuisine. Furthermore, the author of the *Los Angeles Herald* Frank Oakey provides no evidence of how the tamale contained seagull coated with *chile coronado* as the cause of Hufford's sickness.² From these articles, late-nineteenth century newspapers in Los Angeles often

¹ Victor M. Valle and Rodolfo D. Torres, "Mexican Cuisine: Food as Culture" In *Latino Metropolis*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 67-100; Amy Bentley, "From Culinary Other to Mainstream America: Meanings and Uses of Southwestern Cuisine." in *Culinary Tourism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 209. Progressive reformers in the United States strongly supported "containing" foreign food and favored dishes that did not require to mix the ingredients. Many criticized Mexican food for its mixture of condiments and preferred to replace tortillas with bread and have beans with lettuce. Progressives and most Euro-Americans scrutinized Mexican food and warned against its spiciness. According to the Progressives, adding spiciness or sauce to food correlated with decadent behavior.

² Frank Oakley, "Toothsome Tamale: Should be Investigated by the Beef Commission." *Los Angeles Herald*, May 14, 1899. <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH18990514.2.232&srpos=2&e=-----en--20-LAH-1--txt-txIN-Tamales+AND+Death>

denigrated tamales and linked the dish with tragedy. Euro-Americans continued to devise rhetorical devices that mislabeled Mexican food in the early-twentieth century, but they transitioned their perceptions of the cuisine as they now pursued an agenda tied with the appropriation of food and boosterism.

In this study, Mexican food is not peripheral but rather central to the questions and themes of identity, citizenship, and Americanization in Los Angeles during the early 1900s. The examination of Mexican food coincides with the period when city boosters were fascinated with selling the city and food through a Spanish romanticism palatable to an audience who viewed the increasing presence of Mexican as a threat to their community. Even though Euro-Americans did not view Mexican food positively in the late-nineteenth century, a clear movement emerged in the early twentieth century to appropriate and “sanitize” Mexican food. Today, Mexican food is no longer associated with Spanish gastronomy and the Mexican community has furthered its Mexican identity in the United States through cultural traditions closely tied to food. The shift from marginalization to accommodation details the legacy of Mexican food in Los Angeles and how its perspectives change throughout the years.

The perceptions of Mexican food have changed considerably since Hufford’s time. Celebrated throughout the United States, Mexican food has become appreciated as a part of Southwestern cuisine. In Los Angeles, Mexican food intertwines with the culture of the city and has grown to be a local favorite.³ During the heated protests in Los Angeles when

³ Saul Gonzalez, “In LA, unwrapping tamales is the heart of the holidays.” *PRI’s The World*. December 25, 2018. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2018-12-25/la-unwrapping-tamales-heart-holidays> Not only are tamales culturally significant for Mexicans, the meal has a large consumer base and many people from different communities consume tamales during the winter holidays. Eliza Mills, “National Taco Day in Los Angeles,” *KCET*. October 4, 2012. <https://www.kcet.org/food/national-taco-day-in-los-angeles> Favorably in the United States, Mexican dishes such as the taco has its own national day in the United States and various media sources encourage Americans to try local Mexican restaurants during this date. Specifically

public school teachers struck for better pay and organization of class size both the local branch of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the Los Angeles International Socialist Organization (ISO) supported the teachers' cause by providing them with lunches from taco vendor trucks.⁴ The organizations received tremendous help from social media after posting a GoFundMe campaign online and received up to \$15,000 in donations to support the movement (Figure 2). In recent years, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who operate these taco trucks and Mexican restaurants have reclaimed traditional dishes as symbols of their cultural identity. Mexican food has come to illustrate the racial interplay between Mexicans and Euro-Americans in Los Angeles.⁵

Although many Americans can distinguish the difference between Mexican and Spanish food, this was not the case during the early 1900s. Numerous early Los Angeles restaurants, menus, and cookbooks encouraged Euro-Americans to consume Mexican dishes, which were rebranded as "Spanish" food (Figure 3). Most restaurant owners in the early-twentieth century preferred to advertise the cuisine as Spanish or as a Mexican-European hybrid to reassure patrons that the food posed no risks. The new hybrid featured the finest European ingredients. Initially, most restaurants in Los Angeles avoided selling

in Los Angeles, the city offers rich, vast approaches to make the taco appealing to customers. Tacos such as *al pastor* (marinated pork), *asada* (steak), pho marinated beef, and the Korean short rib are among local favorite dishes that are common to Angeleno nowadays.

⁴ Josh Hafner, "Tacos for Teachers: Food trucks show up to support protestors during LAUSD teacher strike." *USA Today*. January 14, 2019. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2019/01/14/lausd-strike-teachers-find-taco-trucks-waiting-along-picket-line/2574236002/>. Steve Saldivar and Melissa Gomez, "Taco trucks feeding striking: 'It's L.A. What else are you going to bring?'" *The Los Angeles Times*. January 14, 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-edu-lausd-teachers-strike-tacos-20190114-story.html> Lynn Brown, "The Rise of the Taco Truck." *JSTOR Daily*. March 6, 2017. <https://daily.jstor.org/rise-of-the-taco-truck/> Accessed April 4, 2019. Indeed, the taco trucks have such a fundamental history with Los Angeles since the first taco truck appeared in 1974, and the popularity for Mexican food at convenient locations and hours has influenced consumers' passion for street food and food trucks.

⁵Carolynn Carreno, "The Wrap That Ate L.A.; It's Not Just Rice and Beans Anymore These Days, Burritos are Positively 'Stylin,'" *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 10, 2004. <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/nov/10/food/fo-burrito10>

Mexican food or integrated it with familiar non-Mexican dishes such as spaghettis, omelettes, casseroles, sandwiches, or dumplings. Still, one could hardly label them as “authentic” and the results were unfamiliar to Mexican nationals but embraced by Euro-Americans.⁶ In other instances, restaurants often labeled genuine traditional Mexican dishes as American or Spanish (Figure 4).⁷ Very few restaurants dared to label Mexican food as “Mexican.”

An examination of Mexican restaurants in early twentieth century Los Angeles reveals how the city’s Euro-American elites developed a civic “brand” and where they placed Mexican and Mexican Americans in that vision. Euro-American elites who embraced Mexican cuisine during the early twentieth century nonetheless remained hostile to the first waves of Mexican immigration, suggesting the contours of the relationship between power and food. In fact, Euro-Americans’ preoccupation with Mexican food coincided with their attempts to marginalize Mexicans from mainstream Anglo society in Los Angeles. Euro-Americans romanticized Mexican cuisine, culinary products, and restaurants as “Spanish” or “Spanish-Mexican” to embrace an imagined white past of the city while racializing Mexican residents as the “Other.” Additionally, Euro-Americans constructed their own identities, as well as the civic identity of Los Angeles, as modern, sophisticated, and civilized.

⁶ Los Angeles Public Library Special Collections, Menu Collection. Advertisement for The Spanish Kitchen. Reference number for Legacy Database: 24331 <https://dbase1.lapl.org/images/menus/fullsize/b/24331-cover.jpg> Accessed Date May 5, 2019. Viewers will notice how “for a real Spanish dinner” text boldly displays on top as to assure the customers that the meals are all genuine Spanish gastronomy.

⁷ *Tamale restaurant, East Los Angeles*. Photographic prints. East Los Angeles: TESSA: Digital Collections of the Los Angeles Public Library, Security Pacific National Bank Collection. Order number: 00068648 <https://tessa.lapl.org/cdm/ref/collection/photos/id/106785> Date accessed October 17th, 2018. According to the website, this restaurant specialized in “Hispanic foods.”

Recently, California historians have examined Mexican food and its social and political impact on the local culture. Showing how the study of foodways can contribute to the understanding of culture, they have established a connection between food and social identity in Los Angeles⁸. This connection was especially clear during the early 1900s as the city experienced a convergence of “ethnic” foodways. These cultural and culinary encounters enabled different groups to construct new identities of themselves and others.⁹ New definitions of race and citizenship also informed the perceptions and consumption of Mexican food. This process also highlights how Euro-Americans identified themselves as the proprietors of “civilization” and “modernization” in the U.S. Southwest. Their culture, they believed, would soon replace a Mexican culture that was already fading into the past.¹⁰

Early 1900s Los Angeles restaurant menus show how Euro-Americans used food to advance a political agenda and to establish an imagined past. In *To Live and Dine in Los Angeles: Menus and the Making of Modern City*, Josh Kun and Ray Choi encourage readers to rethink the last century of Los Angeles history by considering menus as relics of the past. Kun and Choi believe that menus are fundamental to the study of Los Angeles as they can inform readers about "economics, culture, taste, race, politics, architecture, class,

⁸ Arellano, Gustavo. *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America*. (New York: Scribner, 2012). Food historian Gustavo Arellano examines how Mexican food became widely popular throughout the twentieth century. Farley Elliott. “Racism Forced LA’s Oldest Mexican Restaurants to Call Themselves ‘Spanish’” *Eater Los Angeles*. April 15, 2019. For a more recent discussion of how racism prompted whitewashing the Mexican past in Los Angeles see Farley Elliott’s online article.

⁹ Aaron Hutcherson, “Eat Your Words: How we talk about ‘ethnic’ food matters, and here’s why.” *Tasting Table*. <https://www.tastingtable.com/culture/national/ethnic-cuisine-food-media> August 10, 2017. Often termed as “ethnic food” in the United States, most Americans regard Mexican food as cheap when compared to Italian or Japanese cuisines. Referred to as a “coded language” and used historically to describe immigrants as “outside the norm,” the term “ethnic” in Mexican food is a method of “otherization” that places Mexicans at a disadvantage when compared to other cultural cuisines since customers are not willing to pay “a high[er] price for food they consider ethnic, but instead reserve their wallets for so-called international dinners, like Japanese omakase.” Indeed, such categorization has influenced a wide community to view “ethnic” food as cheap, greasy, and inexpensive.

¹⁰ William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004,)

design, industry, and gender.” The authors point out that restaurants’ menus depict how various Mexican dishes were identified as “Spanish food” not only to make them more appealing, but also to mask Mexican influence and instead link the cuisine to an “authentic” Spanish-Mexican cuisine (Figure 5).¹¹ Although previous historians had not explored the relationship between restaurants, their menus, and the Spanish fantasy past in any detail, Kun and Choi remind us that it is important to understand how early Los Angeles restaurant menus associated the romanticism of Spanish culture with food.¹²

Early Los Angeles

The history of Los Angeles’ infrastructure growth and its transformation to an industrial city coincided with a political agenda that established the power relations between Euro-Americans and Mexicans. The aftermath of the U.S.-Mexico War drastically changed the population and political structure of Los Angeles and the Southwest territory. Ten years after the U.S. acquisition of California, boosters and real estate agents were

¹¹ *Menu for El Cholo Restaurant*, 1938. Image. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection, Los Angeles Identification number: 00008701. Accessed date May 5th, 2019. For more information about menus and how the Spanish fantasy extended across Los Angeles, see the Los Angeles Public Library Menu Collection. Located in San Francisco, many restaurants like Tortola often reinforced Mexicans as caricatures and depicted them wearing sombreros and ponchos. Not only does the menu depict these illustrations, it also presents Spanish speakers ignorant as they attempt to speak broken English.

¹² Josh Kun and Roy Choi, *To Live and Dine in L.A.: Menus and the Making of the Modern City*. (Los Angeles: Angel City Press, 2015); Delmar T. Oviatt Library, California Tourism and Promotional Literature Collection, 1860-1990, 69-71. Hotel Greeters Guide and Hotel Directory of California Special Collections and Archives, California State University, Northridge Series 20: Los Angeles County, 1885-1997 > Box 5 > Folder 8: Hollywood Theater and Restaurant Booklets, Quarterly Magazine and Guide, 1929-193. In this study, Josh Kun argues that researching menus helps us understand the consumer culture of Los Angeles and how it fostered Americanized versions of immigrant food. Containing over two hundred menu samples, the book examines how each restaurant menu detail the history of the city. For more information on finding early Los Angeles restaurants and its relation to rebranding Mexican food as Spanish or European, the CSUN Special Collection Library contains various advertisements from restaurants such as El Paseo Inn, La Olvera Café, and La Golondrina. Many of these restaurants preferred to advertise *enchiladas*, tacos, and tamales as Spanish. For instance, El Cholo’s ad labels itself as the “best Spanish café in town.” (Figure Another restaurant such as El Paseo Inn listed tamales and *enchiladas* as “Mexican and Italian Dishes also American Cooking.”)

already exploiting the region's history to sell Southern California to the Northeasterners.¹³ In doing so, they created a Spanish fantasy past to delimit the presence of Mexicans.¹⁴

Before Euro-Americans established a stronger sense of belonging to the newly acquired lands, U.S. officials had to acknowledge the essential role that the Spanish language played in the newly acquired regions to govern the land. After the U.S.-Mexico war, the U.S. government established an entrenched control of its newly acquired lands and pursued *cooperation* with its existing new citizens. The system of an alliance between U.S. officials and the *alcaldes* (governors) required that both groups maintain the Spanish language to build the Southwestern states. Not only did the Spanish language remained as the predominant language to govern land after the annexation of California, many Euro-Americans did not impose the English language and preferred to keep stability. As the historian Rosina Lozano has noted, the U.S. government faced numerous challenges to maintain its authority in the Southwest territories and feared native groups would threaten Washington's claim of sovereignty. Indeed, Lozano argues that *nuevomexicanos*, citizens who gained citizenship rights in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, used the treaty as the basis for their official claims from the U.S. government.¹⁵ Due to demographics and the dominance of Spanish in the Southwest, the *alcaldes* were able to govern the newly

¹³ Warren James Belasco and Philip Scranton, *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*. (New York: Routledge, 2002). For more information on selling the city, the book provides a chapter on how city boosters also used avocado to sell land.

¹⁴ Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008) Euro-Americans who lived in Southern California viewed Mexicans as a mixed-race and inferior to Spanish descendants. They also viewed Indians as the "least civilized people of the world" who abandoned the values Spanish friars brought to them. According to many city boosters, it was up to Euro-Americans to restore the beauty and history of the Spanish legacy since Mexico failed to develop California.

¹⁵ Rosina Lozano, *An American Language: The History of Spanish in the United States*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018) Lozano uses the term *nuevomexicanos* to refer to the Mexicans that were integrated as American citizens after the Mexican-American War. What is compelling about Lozano's argument is that she reveals that the United States did not impose an English language to "mandate holding for statehood and were forced" to recognize Spanish speakers to establish social and political institutions.

acquired regions of the Southwest and the U.S. government was required to negotiate political treaties with them. Although U.S. officials acknowledged the importance and influence of the Spanish language in Southwestern political institutions, eventually Euro-Americans' increasing dominance and control led to a reconsideration of the need to cooperate with Spanish speakers. By 1880, the Euro-American population had risen considerably and further displaced Mexicans and Californios from the land.

As Southern California became ethnically Euro-American, the development of Los Angeles required a narrative that explained how whites influenced the city to modernize it from a "pueblo to metropolis."¹⁶ When the Southern Pacific Railroad first appeared in the city in 1876, it immediately stimulated the local economy. City building projects emerged, and city boosters invested in public infrastructure to expand Los Angeles. Land developers favored residential housing, transportation, urban landscape, and agribusiness to support the growing population. As Euro-Americans attributed their success to modernizing the city's past from "quaint" to "civilized," they isolated Mexicans from these narratives and portrayed them as an "idle" race that remained tied to a pre-capitalist past.¹⁷

An "Americentric" Approach to Mexican Food

In the late nineteenth century, Euro-Americans devised food narratives to *promote* the dehumanization and marginalization of Mexicans in the United States. Following the end of the Mexican-American War, Euro-Americans expressed racist sentiments against Mexicans and described Mexican food in derogatory terms. In looking at the South Texas

¹⁶ David Kipen, "Pueblo to Metropolis." In *Los Angeles in the 1930s: The WPA Guide to the City of Angels*, 24-60. University of California Press, 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnt9t.17>.

¹⁷ William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004,) 26. Harry L. Watson and Eric Foner. *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*. 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990) In this book, many Euro-Americans viewed Mexicans as an idle group.

political environment, Anglo-Texans were critical of Mexican food and viewed Mexicans “as a detestable human race.”¹⁸ Euro-Americans’ initial attitudes and perceptions of Mexican food reflected a public concern that it was inedible. They also contended that wild animals would not dare to eat the carcass of a Mexican because spices saturated the decomposed body.¹⁹ This characterization of Mexican food was widespread, and Euro-Americans provided the propaganda to further contest Mexicans and Mexican food.

During the early 1900s, Euro-Americans produced literature on Mexico and the Mexican population within the United States. Historian Gilbert Gonzalez traces how between 1880 and the 1920s American writers vilified Mexicans as a “problem” for the nation. In a poem from the early 1910s, one author even managed to dehumanize Mexicans while simultaneously describing their food. The poem begins by illustrating a caricature of a Mexican named Don Jose Calderon, a man from the “land of the lazy men...fleas and revolution” who vowed vengeance against the Texans. Calderon swore to avenge the death of his grandfather by selling tamales in Austin. The poem further warns its audience against consuming tamales since men like Calderon added “rat terrier, spitz dog, and poodle. Maltese cat...” to contaminate and punish Euro-Americans.²⁰ The inclusion of tamales in the story further reveals the anxieties many Euro-Americans had about Mexicans as they perceived them as a contamination of American society. As the story interchangeably describes tamales and Mexicans in demeaning terms, the author explains how the spread

¹⁸ Mario Montano, "Appropriation and Counterhegemony in South Texas: Food Slurs, Offal Meats, and Blood." In *Usable Pasts: Traditions and Group Expressions in North America*, 50. (Utah State: University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Montano, "Appropriation and Counterhegemony in South Texas."

²⁰ Gilbert G. Gonzalez, "The “Mexican Problem”: Empire, Public Policy, and the Education of Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930." *Aztlán*. 26, no. 2 (2001): 199-207; O, Henry. *Rolling Stones* New York: Doubleday, Page & company, for Review of reviews co, 1919.

of tamales is a national concern, “This is your deep revenge, You have greased all of us, Greased a whole nation With your Tamales, Don Jose Calderon.” The term “greased” reflects how the author perceived Mexican food as greasy and a vermin to white society.

When Euro-Americans first began to arrive in the Southwest territories, many exhibited racial hostility against Mexicans and used racial slurs.²¹ They also used racial slurs when describing Mexican food to demean Mexican people and described the spiciness of Mexican food as unnatural and therefore “unfit for human consumption.”²² According to historian Mario Montano, many Anglo Texans in the Lower Rio Grande Border stigmatized Mexican culture and used “food slurs” to express their racial attitudes. Anglo Texans grounded racism in their perceptions of Mexican food as they viewed both Mexicans and their food as unhygienic, dirty, and a contamination. They would often critique Mexicans for having a substandard diet and specifically paid a lot of attention to the spicy Mexican food which they believed was not worthy of consumption. Terms such as “greasers” and “beaners” reflect Euro-Americans’ desire to ridicule both Mexicans and their food.²³

For many Euro-Americans, the depiction of Mexican food remained a critical part of expressing their hatred of Mexicans. In the *Los Angeles Record* story of the Hufford tamale-poisoning incident, the author focuses on the female victim’s physical features and uses this event as a metaphor for the racial and sexual threat that the Mexicans represented to whites. Hufford’s experience of “lying at a point of death” seems a warning for Euro-Americans to avoid ingesting Mexican food as it can cause not just physical harm, but also

²¹ Greg Hise, “Border City: Race and Social Distance in Los Angeles.” *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2004): 545-58.

²² Montano, “Appropriation and Counterhegemony in South Texas.” 51.

²³ Montano, *Ibid*

a loss of social reputation and standing.²⁴ The article further instills a sense of fear in its growing Euro-American audience curious about Mexican food. In fact, it constitutes a deliberate attempt to stigmatize Mexicans as unhealthy because they consume spicy food that can lead to chronic illness or death. It further altered the public to be ever weary of Mexican food.

Furthermore, the article conveys a growing concern about miscegenation by presenting Mexican food as a symbol of racial inferiority and places women's fragility at the center of the story. The article specifically focuses on Hufford's physical features and associates her whiteness with racial purity. It instills the notion that Hufford, "one of the handsomest girls in Los Angeles...[with] flaxen hair; a pearly complexion and large expressive blue eyes...21 years of age" became morally corrupted after she ate the tamale.²⁵ The stories attempted to justify the policy of racial segregation as they portrayed certain foreign food as unsuitable for Euro-Americans. Hufford's consumption of a tamale reaffirmed the prejudiced views against Mexicans as evildoers who contaminate food and the diet of Euro-Americans.

Like the *Los Angeles Record* story about the "ptomaine poisoning," the article also seeks to emit fear towards an audience that is familiar with Mexican appreciation of spicy food. In this article, real estate marketer Mr. H.E. Bennett and his wife decided to partake a tamale sided with a can of chili con carne. According to the article, this was not the first

²⁴ Valle and Torres. "Mexican Cuisine" In *Latino Metropolis*. Depicted in a tragic narrative, the renowned image of Miss Hufford was at stake due to the consumption of a tamale that resulted to a near death experience. The author's preoccupation with Hufford's physical features symbolized the loss of racial purity and encourages people to reconsider eating a tamale.

²⁵ Valle and Torres, *Ibid.*,

time the couple decided to eat “Spanish dishes” and they were quite already “fond of it.”²⁶ Despite how the couple were familiar with spicy food, the chili con carne can contain “deadly poisonous germs” that caused severe pain for both the husband and wife. While both stories sensationalize the dangers of spicy food, the *Los Angeles Herald* story also describes how the chili was responsible for the death of Mrs. Bennett. Examining the meal, the doctor found “ptomaine poisoning;” the same hazardous ingredient found in the tamale Hufford had once ate.

As Euro-Americans viewed the consumption of Mexican food with utter disgust, they presented their food as more sophisticated, civilized, healthier, and a model for all immigrants to follow. Progressive reformers paid much attention to foreign food and believed in modifying their food to “Americanize” immigrants’ habits and customs. For Progressives, there was no need to consume spicy food or embellish it with sauces; it was simply natural for them to consume food that did not require mixing the ingredients. Many progressive reformers also believed that individuals’ choice for food was hereditary and therefore, it was “unnatural” for whites to eat spicy food whereas other social groups “from the tropics” digested it more easily. According to the reformers, adding spiciness was an indication of gluttony and a “warning sign that the eater was more concerned with flavor and enjoyment than with nutrition.”²⁷ The perception of consuming spicy food as an

²⁶ Chili Causes Wife’s Death; Husband Ill,” *Los Angeles Herald*. February 15, 1909.
<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19090215.2.2&srpos=4&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-chili+AND+Death-----1> Accessed Date May 5, 2019

²⁷ Helen Zoe Veit, “Americanizing the American Diet: Immigrant Cuisines and Not so Foreign Foods,” in *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 128. Many reformers also believed that excessive consumption of sauces and spices prompted the following addiction to alcohol and drug abuse.

inhumane decision would alter after World War I, but remained prevalent throughout the early 1900s.²⁸

Euro-Americans deliberately situated Mexican food as exotic and it differentiated them from Mexicans. Progressive politics during the early 1890s particularly shunned foreign food in their efforts to “Americanize” foreigners. The stigmatization of Mexican food would gradually change as early as the 1880s and it coincided with a period when Euro-Americans attempted to further marginalize Mexicans from the Los Angeles society.²⁹

How did boosters, railroad and restaurant owners, and cookbook writers sell Mexican food for Euro-Americans?

Encouraging an American audience to consume Mexican food required a reconceptualization of Mexican dishes as Spanish and exotic. During the early 1920s, restaurants and cookbook writers presented Mexican dishes under a European influence context. Within Los Angeles various menus, restaurants, and cookbooks advertised Mexican-style meals as Italian-Mexican, Spanish-Mexican, and American-Mexican. Such “safe” descriptions of including Mexican food with European or American influences in the title encouraged Euro-American consumers to try the enticing tacos, *enchiladas*, *tortillas*, *chile rellenos*, and *chili con carne* under deception; they preferred to market Mexican food as less Mexican and more European. Similarly, cookbooks vividly created an appealing setting in which Euro-American readers could cook and consume Mexican food in the comfort of their home.³⁰ Furthermore, these mediums publicized the notion of

²⁸“Chili Causes Wife’s Death; Husband Ill,” *Los Angeles Herald*. February 15, 1909.
<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19090215.2.2&srpos=4&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-chili+AND+Death-----1> Accessed Date May 5, 2019.

²⁹ Helen Zoe Veit, “Americanizing the American Diet,”

³⁰ Bertha Haffner-Ginger, *California Mexican-Spanish cook book*. (Los Angeles: Citizen Print Shop, 1914). It is also worth noting that the author of this cookbook provides a “modern way to make a tortilla.”

viewing Mexicans in the United States as antique and a vanishing population. In one of the earliest cookbooks, one author attempted to make a connection with encouraging tourism through food.

The Landmarks Club Cook Book: A California Collection of the Choicest Recipes from Everywhere...Including a Chapter of the Most Famous Old Californian and Mexican Dishes is an early twentieth century cookbook that attempts to explore the culture of Los Angeles through the discussion of food. Within the field of food studies, scholars have cited *The Landmarks Club Cook Book* as an influential source. The source, published in 1903, presents Mexican recipes, along with French, Chinese, British, and Peruvian food recipes likely to appeal to Euro-Americans. Specifically this cookbook appeared in the early 1900s when most progressive reformers were active and sought to “contain” immigrant food.³¹ Published in Los Angeles, Charles F. Lummis’s cookbook explores the customs, culture, and the history of California within the context of collection of recipes. Its sole purpose is to situate Los Angeles as an incomparable location with which no other city can compete, by introducing readers to availability of local food. During the early growth of Los Angeles, city boosters intended to sell Los Angeles as a historical tour site of “Old California.”³² As an early newcomer in California, Charles F. Lummis became

³¹ Howard Markel, *The Kelloggs: The Battling Brothers of Battle Creek* (New York: Pantheon, 2017). Like many progressive reformers, John Harvey Kellogg was a strong believer in reforming food and preferred food that is plain.

³² Charles Fletcher Lummis, *The Landmarks Club Cook Book: A California Collection of the Choicest Recipes from Everywhere...Including a Chapter of the Most Famous Old Californian and Mexican Dishes* (Los Angeles: Out West, 1903), I. In his introduction, Lummis argues that Los Angeles features a wide array of Latino and European cultures, “there is no other city [than Los Angeles] in whose household are in vogue so many varieties of cookery from many lands and localities...it is a place where housewives...[go] outside their own ward...exchange recipes of English puddings, New England pies French sautes...Mexican chocolate...the dishes of every land, and from typical housekeepers thereof.” Furthermore, Lummis argues that the cookbook is a compilation of “personal sources” designed to preserve famous recipes of “old-time (sic) California, Mexico and Spanish America...” This cookbook captures residents’ food recipes compiled for Angelenos genuinely interested in consuming these recipes.

astonished at the sight of the Spanish missions in desperate need of help and devised a cookbook to associate food and the preservation of the Spanish legacy.

In the introduction of the cook book, Lummis emphasizes why the Landmark's Club is concerned with Los Angeles and links Mexican food to a mission to expand the Spanish fantasy. Within the first couple of pages, readers will notice the pictures of Spanish missions in Los Angeles. Under the description of several of these pictures, Lummis depicts the poor conditions of Spanish missions and how the Landmarks Club has fixed the buildings, in hopes of restoring their legacy. Lummis dedicated his life to repair missions such as San Juan Capistrano, San Luis Rey, and the San Fernando Mission from decay and considered them essential historical landmarks. As president of the Landmarks Club, he hoped to "preserve from further spoliation and decay the remains of the old Franciscan Missions...the noblest and most impressive ruins in the United States..."³³ As a city booster, men like Lummis romanticized Spanish missions as institutions that projected a "noble" history about the Spanish legacy within the United States. His efforts to sell Los Angeles in a cookbook were one of his many schemes to broaden the Spanish legacy. As he used Mexican food to create a political agenda in culinary texts, Lummis also sought to define an identity for early Euro-Americans in Los Angeles. In his cookbook, food and Spanish missions are representations of cultural artifacts belonging to a "vanished" society that inevitably became replaced during the early twentieth century.

In recent years, historians such as William Deverell, Phoebe Kropp, and Sarah Portnoy have shed light on how Euro-Americans became fascinated with abandoning

³³ Lummis, *The Landmarks Club Cook Book: A California Collection of the Choicest Recipes from Everywhere...Including a Chapter of the Most Famous Old Californian and Mexican Dishes* (Los Angeles: Out West, 1903),

Mexican history and preferred to romanticize Southern California with a “noble” past of Spanish fantasy and missionaries. In his book, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past*, Deverell demonstrates how Anglo-Americans appropriated and fictionalized Mexican culture to create a white Angeleno environment that erased the Mexican past. To do so, city boosters worked intensively to mold Los Angeles as a tourist site.³⁴ Many cookbooks and restaurants widely promoted an invented history of California. This culinary fabrication influenced Euro-Americans to perceive Mexicans as products of a Spanish past.

Equally important, historian Sarah Portnoy coins the term, “stage authenticity” in her book, *Food, Health, and Culture in Latino Los Angeles*, to describe early twentieth century restaurants attempt to “Americanize” Mexican food. During the 1920s-1930s, Los Angeles restaurant owners hosted Mexican food within Spanish-Moorish architectural buildings. For instance, many restaurant owners thrived on creating an “authentic” Spanish restaurant and the structural building of the El Coyote featured a Spanish mission as a restaurant (Figure 6). Despite how the restaurant did not offer Spanish cuisine, it nevertheless conditioned the public to misinterpret Mexican food.³⁵ As restaurants attempted to modify Mexican food, it intended to “distance themselves from the negative stereotypes associated with their neighbor to the South” and present their version as superior.”³⁶ Both the restaurant and the menu redefined Mexican food; it reflects how these

³⁴ Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*

³⁵ Martin Turnbull, “Original location of the El Coyote café at 105 N. La Brea Ave, Los Angeles circa 1940s,” Martin Turnbull. June 28, 2018, <https://martinturnbull.com/2018/06/28/original-location-of-the-el-coyote-cafe-at-105-n-la-brea-ave-los-angeles-circa-1940s-2/> Accessed Date May 6, 2019.

³⁶ Sarah Portnoy, *Food, Health, and Culture in Latino Los Angeles*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) *The Los Angeles Herald*, February 13, 1905.

political tools established efforts to disbar the acceptability of Mexican influence in Los Angeles.

Casa Verdugo, of the earliest examples of a restaurant that commercialized Mexican food as “Spanish,” opened in 1904 and reflected an early attempt to recreate a Spanish past. Henry E. Huntington, a nephew of Henry P. Huntington, had the idea to create an atmosphere of a Spanish fantasy. It was important for Huntington to attract the attention of consumers and he conveniently placed a railroad station for visitors to stop and have a meal. Huntington desired a restaurant that restored an environment with gardens found in “Old California.” The restaurant attracted numerous Euro-Americans who tried Mexican food under the Spanish label and offered various dishes such as “*Sopa de Albondigas, Ensalada de Chile Verde y Tomates, Chile Con Carne, Tamales, Enchiladas, Chiles Rellenos, Frijoles, Tortillas, Huevos a la Rancheros*” (Figure 7).³⁷ Aside from creating “Spanish” dinners the restaurant also attempted to restore adobe structures to reinforce an authentic experience of visiting a “quaint” society.³⁸ Various restaurants in the 1920s and 1930s also continued to misinterpret Mexican food.

Not only did restaurants reinforce a yearning for a Spanish past, but culinary books also appropriated Mexican’s history. Euro-Americans’ fascination with the Spanish fantasy integrated in culinary texts was a critical method to characterize food that was once racialized as unfit—versus something that was now consumable and palatable. Cookbooks—along with the other two mediums— were one of the earliest mediums that

³⁷ “Railway Officials Are Hosts to Newspaper Men: Pacific Electric Company Entertains Party at Quaint Old Casa Verdugo,” *Los Angeles Herald*. February 13, 1905. <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19050213.2.58&srpos=4&e=-----en--20-LAH-1--txt-txIN-%22Casa+Verdugo%22+AND+%22Spanish+restaurant%22-----1>

³⁸ Steve Vaught, “Casa Verdugo—Old L.A.’s Famous Restaurant “Out Glendale Way.” *Paradise Leased*. January 17, 2011. <https://paradiseleased.wordpress.com/2011/01/17/casa-verdugo-old-l-a-s-famous-restaurant-out-glendale-way/>

Euro-Americans took the initiative to categorize cultural cuisines within mainstream American cuisine. It articulated how Euro-Americans examined Mexican food and rebrand it as a commodification under the interpretation of a dominant culture. This interpretation consisted of reimagining Mexican food as antique and a reflection of the declining Mexican presence in the United States. Food became portrayed as a product of the past and an exotification of Mexican culture for Euro-Americans. By the early 1900s, Mexican food became consumed, but many restaurants and cookbooks avoided including the title “Mexican” in Mexican food and preferred to sell it mixed with Spanish. In her 1914 cookbook, Bertha-Haffner Ginger’s illuminates the glorification of the Spanish past and presents an early approach to “refine” and consume Mexican food.³⁹

Within the Southwestern regions of California, Texas, and New Mexico, Mexican cuisine became increasingly popular as Euro-Americans equated it with the ideas of escapism from the industrial environment⁴⁰ Bertha-Haffner Ginger’s cookbook, *California Mexican-Spanish Cook Book*, was published during a moment when Euro-Americans

³⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*. 25th Anniversary Edition. with a New Preface by the Author. ed. (New York: Vintage Books 1994),42. In chapter one of *Orientalism*, “Knowing the Oriental,” Said notes how Europeans justified the need to occupy Egypt through the emphasize of knowing the subject’s history. In Said’s example, Arthur James Balfour, member of the English Parliament, presented the themes of “power and knowledge” in his survey on the history of Egypt. To have the knowledge of the history of Egypt “is to dominate it, [and] to have authority over it.” Parallel to Balfour’s description to speak for the Egyptians, dominate their history, and deny them their say of their culture, Bertha Haffner-Ginger shares this idea as she presents an Americentric approach to understand and write about California’s history; her intention is to not let Mexicans speak about their culture and she presents her perspective as the dominant race that knows the subject. In having knowledge of the Orient, or in this case, Mexicans, Haffner-Ginger creates the racial distinctions between Euro-Americans and Mexicans, presents Mexican culture as a primitive past, and labels Mexico as the Other. Such knowledge included in this cookbook influences readers to formulate their thoughts of Mexicans as individuals unaware of modernization as it depicted and labeled “Indian’s adobe stone” incomparable to the Euro-American’s “modern” kitchen.

⁴⁰ Portnoy, *Food, Health, and Culture in Latino Los Angeles*.

became interested in the preparation and consumption of Mexican food.⁴¹ The early 1900s witnessed a wide demand for Mexican food as it was now socially acceptable, as long as Mexican food was presented as a blend of European, American culture. The attempts to place Mexican food as Spanish cuisine opened a larger consumer base and was associated with Spanish nostalgia; a yearning for the history of Spain and its romantic history of “civilization and missions.”⁴²

Beyond informing an English-speaking audience about the wonders of “Mexican-Spanish” food, Ginger’s cookbook reinforces the Ramona and Spanish mission myth. From Helen Hunt Jackson’s book *Ramona*, many Euro-Americans celebrated and gained an appreciation of a romanticized history of the Southwest. The Ramona myth evoked a sudden appeal for the Spanish mission revival as the story associated the religious institutions with spreading “civilization” for natives. From the cookbook’s first page, it presents paintings of an indigenous woman with a child titled, “the mission of the old padres was to make life brighter for such as these.”⁴³ Never did these authors attempted to explain how brutal the Spanish Crown’s diplomacy enacted upon natives during the late sixteenth century. Further on, Euro-Americans were fascinated with the idea of portraying Spanish missions as touristic sites and would devise culinary texts to market Southwestern culture as a “primitive” past.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Bertha Haffner-Ginger, *California Mexican-Spanish cook book*. (Los Angeles: Citizen Print Shop, 1914). It is important to note how Haffner-Ginger comments about the misconception of naming Mexican food as Spanish. Despite how she illuminates the difference between Spanish and Mexican food, Haffner-Ginger further lists various Mexican dishes as a pure European influence.

⁴² Haffner-Ginger, *California Mexican-Spanish Cook Book*, 8.

⁴³ Ginger, *California Mexican-Spanish Cook Book*; Valle and Torres, "Mexican Cuisine: Food as Culture." In *Latino Metropolis*, 67-100. For more information on cookbooks. *The Landmarks Club Cook Book* appealed to Euro-Americans’ political agenda to further commercialize narratives and symbols in which Mexicans in Los Angeles “could be revalorized as a fantasy landscape of Spanish romance.”

⁴⁴ Conducted by Mrs. Bertha Haffner. "Progress at the Times School of Domestic Science." *Los Angeles Times* (1886-1922), Apr 22, 1913. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest->

Parallel to Bertha Haffner-Ginger, Pauline Wiley-Kleemann's cookbook, "*Ramona's*" *Spanish-Mexican Cookery: The First Complete and Authentic Spanish-Mexican Cook Book* (1929), approaches a reconsideration of Mexican cookery within acceptable terms. In her foreword, the author argues how chili peppers are beneficial to the human body since they contain "capsicum." The author further acknowledges the significance of consuming chile peppers by citing the medical professional's testimony on why it is nutritious to eat spicy food. Despite how Euro-Americans initially ridiculed Mexican food for its spicy peppers, it became socially acceptable to eat spiciness as these culinary books permeated the idea.

Furthermore, the cookbook often includes the title "Mexican" throughout recipes, but often exaggerates in its inclusion of the term throughout the book. Spanish tamales and Sweet tamales a la Mexicana.⁴⁵ The cookbook further list various generic "Mexican" dishes within familiar terms for Euro-Americans. Dishes such as "Beans a la Casserole a la Mexicana," "Mexican Rice a la "Don Porfirio," or "Albondigas a la Guanajuato" are just a few examples of how cookbooks devised marketing methods to a "toned-down and reassuring version of Mexican dishes."⁴⁶ As cookbooks popularized the acceptability for Mexican food, it would then transform from a political tool to reaffirmation of culture for Mexicans.

com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/159843413?accountid=7285. It's also worth noting how the author became a huge celebrity chef in Los Angeles. According to the article, Haffner-Ginger's cooking skills impressed a group of Spanish women who were excited to see their "primitive" cooking used in Ginger's "progressive" cooking lectures.

⁴⁵ Pauline Wiley- Kleemann, *Ramona's Spanish-Mexican Cookery: The First Complete and Authentic Spanish-Mexican Cook Book in English*. Los Angeles: West Coast Pub.Co., 1929.

⁴⁶ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, "From "Montezuma's Revenge" to "Mexican Truffles": Culinary Tourism across the Rio Grande." In *Culinary Tourism*, edited by Long Lucy M., (University Press of Kentucky, 2004)

Mexican food as Culturally Mexican

Mexican and Mexican-Americans' reclamation of Mexican food in the mid and late twentieth century ensured the development of a national identity within the Southern California communities.⁴⁷ Although Euro-Americans constructed stereotypes and tried to exercise cultural hegemony, Mexicans nonetheless established the relation between foodways and identity as status markers in their communities. From the early 1930s to end of the twentieth century, Mexicans would define Mexican food as a cultural symbol of identity and used as a method to express their nationality as various dishes originated from different regions.

In Natalia Molina's study of restaurants, she analyzes how El Nayarit reflects Mexicans' attempts to establish place-makers. El Nayarit provides a case study of how Mexican immigrants established community race relations. From the location of the restaurant in Echo Park, it provided "a sense of belonging" for its customer base. The restaurant owner, Natalia Barraza, sponsored many Mexican immigrants and gave them the opportunity to work, build a life, and establish social networks within a multicultural crossroad environment. What remains significant about this restaurant is the meaning it conveyed to the community. The commercialization of Mexican food strongly supported Mexican's cultural identity in the United States and reassured members to establish new homes within a social network.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey M Pilcher, *Que Vivan Los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998) From Jeffrey Pilcher's argument, food plays a significant aspect of culture as it unites people into national communities.

Such continuation of cultural traditions reveals how cultural gatherings like *Las Posadas* construct the relationship with food.⁴⁸ *Las Posadas* (The Inns) presents an example of how culture sustained and reinforced Mexican traditions with food. Celebrated on December, the Inns are widely associated with family and religion. It is common for Hispanic communities to celebrate *Las Posadas* with *tamaladas* (tamale-making event) and many participants describe these cultural events as providing a sense of belonging to the community and a reassurance of good social standing.⁴⁹ Members who participate in this event partake in social roles and reaffirm their cultures, followed by festival traditions of food.⁵⁰

The Legacy of Mexican Food

By the late 1940s, the numerous tropes used to caricature Mexicans undoubtedly remained popular among Angelenos and proved to be non-lasting despite how boosterism was no longer prevalent. Postwar restaurants continued with the same kind of language and imagery to attract people to consume Mexican food and experience an invented history of early California. From the restaurant's menu, Zarco used the Spanish romanticism as a marketable strategy and proved to be suitable to the Euro-American clientele. From the menu's description the following quote vividly creates a setting of whitewashing Mexican past through food: "Our horseman depicts the Spaniards who brought to California the

⁴⁸ Natalia Molina, "The Importance of Place and Place-Makers in the Life of a Los Angeles Community: What Gentrification Erases from Echo Park." *Southern California Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (2015): 69-111. doi:10.1525/scq.2015.97.1.69.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey M Pilcher, *Que Vivan Los Tamales!* The cultural event of tamale-making derives from the 19th century as it was a characteristic of social life for the Mexican community.

⁵⁰ Lynn Simross. "Las Posadas Part of Latino Holiday Custom." *Los Angeles Times (1923-1995)*, Dec 25, 1982. During Christmas Eve, Hispanic communities recreate the Reenactment of Mary and Joseph search for a shelter in Bethlehem as a religious, social event. Part of this event relies on the person organizing the event to offer their hospitality and food to the community. To offer one's house and food is an integral part of the event and a social recognition that grants respect to one. The religious event is always associated with food and members of the community often offer tamales.

romanticism...and the appreciation of beauty that is inherent in their race. Their contribution to the ultimate culture was basic and important in helping to transform a semi-wilderness into the complex and dynamic California of today.”⁵¹ Despite how the restaurant offered various American and European dishes, it nonetheless served *enchiladas* and tamales (Figure 8). Other restaurants such as La Fonda promoted Euro-American modernity and superiority and illustrated Mexicans as stereotypical figures such as the “sleepy Mexican.”⁵²

Today, most Mexican restaurants considered “authentic” contain “Mexican” in the title, and mainstream America has accepted the cuisine within food culture. Various popular “American” dishes have integrated Mexican ingredients such as tortillas and guacamole, while tacos and salsas are all widely popular year-round.⁵³ The emergence of “Taco Tuesday” as a weekly ritual further indicates how restaurants present tacos to consumers as a cheap and convenient meal option all the while enhancing the reputation of Mexican food within contemporary U.S. culture. Despite how popular Mexican food remains among Angelenos in the twenty-first century, the history of Mexican cuisine in Los Angeles began as a narrative of cultural hegemony in which Euro-Americans sought to exploit both Mexican culture and food.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Los Angeles Public Library Special Collections, Menu Collection. Zarco Menu

⁵² Los Angeles Public Library Special Collections, Menu Collection La Fonda Menu.

⁵³ Ruth Tobias, “Is There Such a Thing as ‘American’ Food?” *Tasting Table*. July 13, 2018.

<https://www.tastingtable.com/culture/national/defining-american-food-cuisine> Here I use quotation marks in ‘American’ food since scholars argue that American food culture is non-existent.

⁵⁴ Chuck Morse, “Mixed Feelings at El Cholo L. A.’s Original ‘Spanish’ Café.” *L.A. Taco*. December 19, 2017. <https://www.lataco.com/mixed-feelings-at-el-cholo-l-a-s-original-spanish-cafe/> For a parallel argument, *L.A. Taco* editor Chuck Morse argues that early Los Angeles restaurant owners avoided labeling Mexican food as “Mexican” since white consumers preferred a more “acceptable” version that paid homage to Spanish history. Before the 1960s Civil Rights Movements, many restaurants such as El Cholo sold Mexican food “as Spanish to placate the white supremacist anxieties about “the Mexican.” By the late-twentieth century, restaurant owners explored different cultural food and popularize attempts to commercialize regional style in food.

Conclusion

On April 10, 1976, President Gerald Ford visited San Antonio, Texas as part of his presidential campaign for reelection and the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT) welcomed him. During his visit, President Ford ate a tamale. The President took a bite of it without removing the corn husk, unaware that he needed to remove it! He then ate the one part of a tamale that is inedible. Skewered by comedians and the public as clumsy and absent-minded, President Ford reinforced a pre-existing narrative of his cluelessness when he failed to eat the tamale properly; the media quickly labeled the scenario as the “Great Tamales Incident.” National news was quick to depict the President’s unawareness of eating Mexican food as a humorously ignorant act (Figure 9). The President’s lack of familiarity and knowledge of what had become a food that was now as common as apple pie may have resulted losing Texas in his electoral defeat in 1976.⁵⁵

Comparing President Ford’s tamale incident with the “tamale poisoning” of Miss Maud Hufford reveals how much the United States shifted from warning Euro-Americans about the dangers of Mexican food to the ridiculing of the commander in chief; his ignorance of not knowing how to eat a tamale became a political gaffe as Ford attempted to win the Latinx vote through the consumption of food. In the mid-nineteenth century, Euro-Americans had no interest in integrating Mexican food and viewed its consumption

⁵⁵ William Safire, “Why Reagan Caught the Ayes of Texas.” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. May 4, 1976. According to an interview with President Ford, he once quoted that the two things he learned in Texas was “[to] never underestimate your opponent...and always shuck your tamale.” Many journalists labeled the “Tamale incident” as a political gaffe to further discredit his character as president. James M. Naughton Special to The New York Times. “Ford, in Texas, Requests Stronger Drug Penalties.” *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Apr 10, 1976. <http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.csun.edu/docview/122705312?accountid=7285>. Adam Chandler, “A Briefing on the Eating of Tamales.” *The Atlantic*, February 2, 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2015/02/a-briefing-on-the-eating-of-tamales/385196/>

as a morality issue. They would often ridicule Mexican food and associated it with disgust since Euro-Americans believed Mexicans were inferior, un-American, and exotic.

Before becoming culturally accepted for a Euro-American audience, Mexican food required a transformation. Initially perceived as “unfit for human consumption,” then it became the Euro-American’s political tool for manipulating Mexico’s history in Los Angeles, and finally a cuisine that is both favorable to the United States and abroad. Many of the cookbooks I include demonstrate how Euro-Americans used it as tools of conquest to promote a political agenda for readers to view Mexicans as a quaint civilization and appropriate Mexican food. In addition, cookbooks presented an Americentric approach to cultural cuisines and popularized the romanticism of Spanish in Los Angeles. Today, at almost every location, Mexican food permeates throughout the local community and several restaurants offer specific regional styles. When examining the three culinary products, these mediums of appropriating Mexican food integrates the study of how Euro-Americans romanticized Mexican cuisine as “Spanish” or “Spanish-Mexican” to diminish Mexican influence in Los Angeles. These three mediums show how Euro-Americans used food to differentiate themselves from Mexicans, who they racialized as the “Other.” For Euro-Americans, the appropriation of Hispanic food coincided with an agenda that sought to marginalize Mexican-Americans and to present their culture as static, primitive, and “uncivilized.” In contrast, Euro-Americans constructed their identities as modern, sophisticated, and civilized.

Euro-Americans’ methods to appropriate Mexican food kept Mexicans from claiming and asserting their culture, described Mexicans from a Eurocentric perspective, and portrayed Mexican culture mysterious, un-American, and obsolete. By the mid-

twentieth century, however, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans would reclaim Mexican food as ethnically Mexican. Indeed, they used cuisine to formulate a shared sense of national and social identity within their community. Mexicans would redefine food as a symbol of belonging and preservation of expressing their cultural identity in the United States.⁵⁶ Today, almost all Mexican restaurants advertised themselves as authentic Mexican food and list *tamales*, *pozole*, *chile rellenos*, *enchiladas*, *tacos*, and *quesadillas* as culturally Mexican, not Spanish. By the late 1960s, Spanish food gradually became commercialized with Spanish gastronomy and Mexican food no longer became mislabeled as Spanish. This confirmation of Mexican food as culturally Mexican remains prevalent in Los Angeles and has impacted American cuisine from originally neglecting it to now acknowledging it as a part of Los Angeles's unique culture.

Mexican food continues to impact the city and defines how Los Angeles is central to the study of food. Los Angeles has recently announced a new museum dedicated to Mexican cuisine. On November 21st of 2018, La Plaza de Cultura y Artes announced a plan to create the first national museum dedicated to the history of Mexican food that will open in early 2019. According to the LA Plaza CEO John Echeveste, "Los Angeles is the Mexican food capital of the country, and it deserves a place that celebrates the history and culture that we have with Mexican food."⁵⁷ La Plaza Cocina will go beyond offering exhibitions, cultural events, cooking classes, and programs; it aims to inform the public of

⁵⁶ Amy Bentley, "From Culinary Other to Mainstream America: Meanings and Uses of Southwestern Cuisine." in *Culinary Tourism* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 209. For more information, see chapter, "From Culinary Other to Mainstream America: Meanings and Uses of Southwestern Cuisine" from the book. Food studies Professor Amy Bentley narrates how contemporary mainstream America has accepted Mexican food, despite how Euro-Americans were initially hostile to integrate it within the society.

⁵⁷ Hadley Tomicki, "This New L.A. Museum Will be Completely Devoted to Mexican Food," *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/food/dailydish/la-fo-re-plaza-cocina-20181120-story.html>

how Los Angeles and the nation perceives Mexican food.⁵⁸ Initially marginalized in an Angeleno environment, our current awareness of Mexican food illustrates the transition from appropriation to accommodation. Despite how city boosters yearned for a Spanish past that omitted Mexicans in their narratives, the contemporary presence of Mexican dishes within an Angeleno society informs us about how Mexicans triumphed on placing “Mexican” in Mexican food.

⁵⁸ Hadley Tomicki, “This New L.A. Museum Will be Completely Devoted to Mexican Food,”

Illustrations

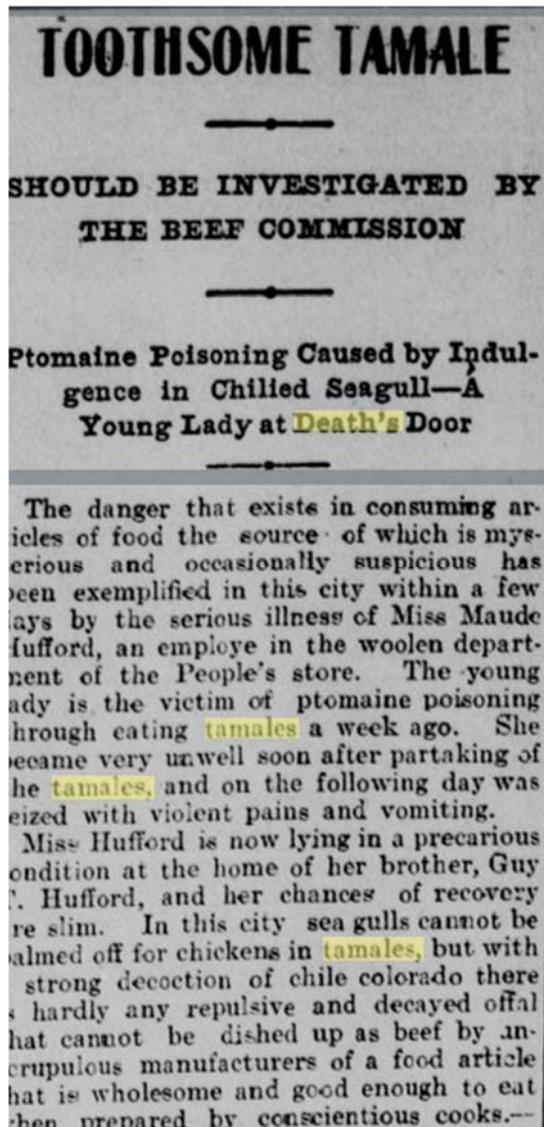


Figure 1. "Toothsome Tamale: Should be Investigated by the Beef Commission." From this article, the author attempts to illustrate Mexican food as a tragedy that nearly took the life of Maude Hufford. Despite how the author includes no evidence of the tamale containing seagull meat, his description of the food presents the dish as a dangerous meal available in Los Angeles. Frank Oakley, "Toothsome Tamale: Should be Investigated by the Beef Commission." *Los Angeles Herald* May 14, 1899.

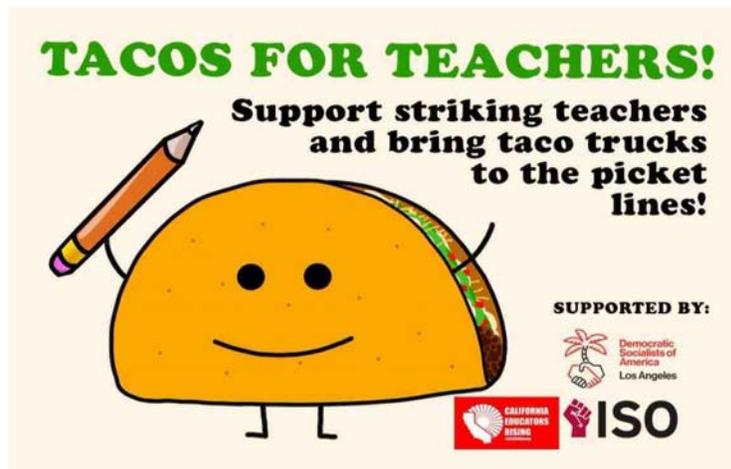


Figure 2. *Tacos for Teachers*. To raise the awareness and support the teacher’s cause, both the Democratic Socialists of America (DSO) launched a campaign to provide educators with a gracious lunch. The use of the hard-shelled taco in a political plight speaks much of how the city has become familiar with Mexican food as a part of the culture and identity in Los Angeles. Lizzy Saxe, “How ‘Tacos for Teachers’ Embodies Los Angeles,” under “Munchies.” *Vice.com*, January 18, 2019.



Figure 3. *El Cholo is the Best Spanish Café in Town*. Casa Verdugo often held elaborate events and its reputation of featuring “Spanish” dishes were a local favorite. Oviatt, Delmar T. California Tourism and Promotional Literature Collection, 1860-1990,69-71. Hotel Greeters Guide and Hotel Directory of California Special Collections and Archives, California State University, Northridge Series 20: Los Angeles County, 1885-1997 > Box 5, Folder 8. California State University, Northridge Special Collections.



Figure 4. *The Tamale Restaurant*. Located in East Los Angeles, The Tamale restaurant attempted to commercialize tamales as a “Spanish delight” and included hamburgers, hot tamale pie, chili, and malted milk. Such restaurants became highly popular in Los Angeles during the 1930s and onwards. *Tamale restaurant, East Los Angeles*. Photographic prints. East Los Angeles: TESSA: Digital Collections of the Los Angeles Public Library, Security Pacific National Bank Collection. Order number: 00068648.

Minimum Service 25 Cents		NO DOGS ALLOWED	
Spanish-Mexican Dishes		∴ A la Carte Service ∴	
SOUPS		TAMALES—(Beef) Chile Sauce	30c
ALBONDIGAS (Spanish Meat Ball Soup)	35c	ENCHILADA (Cheese and Onions)	35c
" (1/2 Order)	20c	ENCHILADA (Beef)	40c
VEGETABLE SOUP	10c	(With Fried Egg — 1/2 Extra)	
RELISHES		ENCHILADA (With Beans, Rice or Spaghetti)	40c
Combination Salad	30c	CHILE RELLENO	35c
Sliced Tomatoes	20c	TOSTADA	25c
Hearts of Lettuce	15c	SPANISH EGG OMELETTE	45c
Mex. Pickled Peppers or Onions	10c	SPANISH SAUSAGE WITH EGGS	50c
DRINKS		CHILE CON CARNE	35c
Coffee	5c	CHILE CON CARNE (With Rice and Beans or Spaghetti)	35c
Tea	10c	CHILE BEANS	25c
Milk	10c	FRIED BEANS WITH CHEESE	30c
Chocolate	10c	SPANISH RICE	35c
Draught Beer	10c	MEXICAN SPAGHETTI	35c
Local Bottle Beer	15c	HAMBURGER STEAK, with Chile Beans, Spaghetti and French Fried Potatoes	40c
Dry Ginger Ale	25c	GREEN CORN TAMALES (In Season)	35c
45¢		TORTILLAS	CORN TORTILLAS OR BREAD INCLUDED WITH MEALS MILK OR TOASTED CORN TORTILLAS — 1/2 EXTRA
Special Plate Lunch			
11:00 to 3:00 P.M.			
VEGETABLE SOUP			
Choice of One:			
ENCHILADA	TAMALES		
CHILE CON CARNE	with		
FRIED BEANS	and		
RICE or SPAGHETTI	TORTILLAS or BREAD		
Coffee	Glass Beer		
Glass Chart			
60¢			
Combination Plate			
SOUP			
Albondigas or Vegetable			
Choice of One:			
ENCHILADA	TAMALES		
CHILE RELLENO	CHILE CON CARNE		
with	FRIED BEANS		
and	RICE or SPAGHETTI		
TORTILLAS or BREAD	Coffee or Milk		
Glass Beer	Glass Chart		
EL CHOLO SPANISH CAFES — LOS ANGELES, 802 SO. BROADWAY PLACE — LONG BEACH, 1311 E. 2ND STREET			
ORDERS TO TAKE OUT — REASONABLE PRICES			

Figure 5. *El Cholo Menu*. A 1938 menu from El Cholo Spanish Café. *Menu for El Cholo Restaurant, 1938*. Image. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection Los Angeles. *Menu for El Cholo Restaurant, 1938*. Image. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection, Los Angeles Identification number: 00008701.



Figure 6. *El Coyote Restaurant*. Considered to be one of the earliest Mexican restaurants in Los Angeles, El Coyote branded itself as a Spanish restaurant. The restaurant’s exterior reflects a Spanish mission. Martin Turnbull, “Original location of the El Coyote café at 105 N. La Brea Ave, Los Angeles circa 1940s,” Martin Turnbull. June 28, 2018.

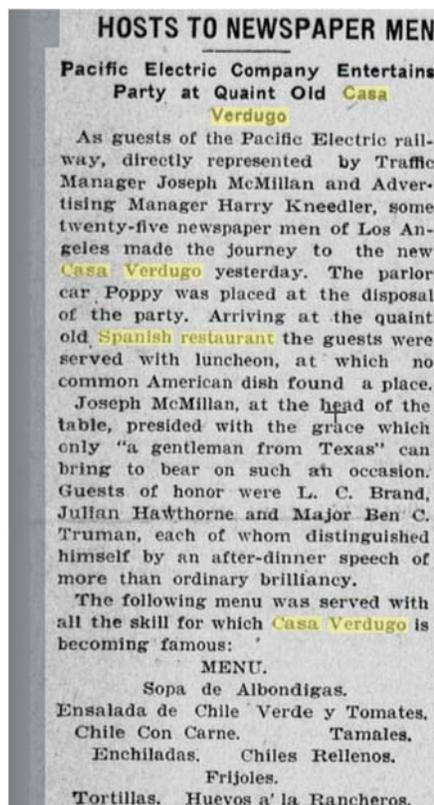


Figure 7. “Railway Officials Are Hosts to Newspaper Men: Pacific Electric Company Entertains Party at Quaint Old Casa Verdugo,” Widely known for their elegant events, Casa Verdugo became a well-known restaurant among the community. *Los Angeles Herald*. February 13, 1905.



Figure 8. *Zarco Restaurant Menu*. By the 1950s, restaurants such as Zarco continued reinforcing the romanticism of the Spanish legacy. Los Angeles Public Library Special Collections, Menu Collection. Zarco Menu.

Ford, in Texas, Requests Stronger Drug Penalties: Campaigning for ...
 By JAMES M. NAUGHTON Special to The New York Times
New York Times (1923-Current file), Apr 10, 1976; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times
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CAMPAGNING IN TEXAS: President Ford starting to eat a hot tamale during a visit to the Alamo yesterday. The snack was interrupted after the first bite so that his hosts could remove the corn shucks, which serve as a wrapper and are not supposed to be consumed. He also spoke at Bicentennial ceremony in front of Alamo, below. Page 10.

Figure 9. *Campaigning in Texas*. Despite how this article emphasizes on President Ford's campaign to enforce drug penalties in the United States, readers will first notice how the photograph of the tamale incident challenges the president's character as someone who does not know how to eat a common dish. Following the embarrassing accident, the author states that Ford later spoke at the Bicentennial ceremony. James M. Naughton, "Requests Stronger Drug Penalties: Campaigning for Primary, He Asserts," *The New York Times*. (April 1976)

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