Undergraduate Study Guide for Amelia Simmons’ *American Cookery* –

AML 3286 (Early American Women’s Words)

**Foodways** definition from *Merriam-Webster* online:

n. pl. the eating habits and culinary practices of a people, region, or historical period

Why examine food in cultural and/or literary studies?

“Food touches everything. Food is the foundation of every economy. It is a central pawn in political strategies of states and households. Food marks social differences, boundaries, bonds, and contradictions. Eating is an endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family, and community relationships.” (Counihan and Van Esterik 1)

**Early American Foodways – Ingredients and Preparation**

Read the following items

- Simmons, Amelia. *American Cookery* (1796) from Evans Digital
  - Read the title page, preface, and the advertisement/errata in the back; select 1-3 recipes in each section that interest you and read them
  - Due to the length of Glasse’s book, you will not be required to read the entire text. Read the title page and table of contents, then locate one or two recipes that overlap with Simmons’ book and compare them.
Go to the following web pages to view the images, and watch the two videos. You do not need to take notes on these, but they should provide additional visual context to the readings.

- “American Heritage Vegetables.” Center for Digital Humanities of South Carolina. [http://research.cdh.sc.edu/vegetable/index.php](http://research.cdh.sc.edu/vegetable/index.php)

**Discussion Questions**

Based on your readings, please come to class ready to discuss the following questions:

What distinctions can you see between Simmons’ American cookbook and the British example by Glasse? How do the recipes you selected and compared differ in preparation style and process?

> “…it is difficult for us to understand the harsh reality of the physical labor and constant drudgery the Colonial woman was subject to. In addition to her long hours of work, she constantly had to deal with pregnancy and infant mortality, as well as natural disasters, illness and disease and the adjustments to be made by leaving family and friends behind to venture off to a new country.” (Plante 16)

Women’s domestic duties were numerous, challenging, and took up large amounts of time. How might these demands affect women’s opportunities in areas such as education or employment beyond the home?

**Food and Cookbooks in Relation to Politics/Identity**

Read the following scholarly articles (available as PDFs in Webcourses):


**Activity and Discussion Questions**

Be ready to discuss the following questions, and participate in the activity during class.
Think about the foodways in your family and community. What connections can you make between those foods or methods of preparation and the political or social ideals shared within that community?

**Activity:** As part of this discussion of food and culture, please bring a copy of a recipe that is: a family recipe, a particular favorite item you like to prepare and/or eat, or one that is representative of your heritage. Be prepared to share these recipes and discuss them in the context of the question above. We will assemble a class cookbook including all the recipes you bring.

**Changing Patterns of Domesticity**

Read the following selections (available as PDFs in Webcourses):

Amelia Simmons is an orphan, and the advertisement/errata at the end of American Cookery notes that her work was vandalized by her go-between during publication. How does this connect to the debate about female education at the end of the eighteenth century as described by Cott?

Though American Cookery is marketed for “all grades of life” and it evokes a spirit of American egalitarianism, Trist’s diary reveals a sharp divide between her own urban resources and expectations and those of women on the rural frontier.

Works Cited


Further Reading

Secondary / Scholarly Sources


Primary Sources


