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21W.730-4 Writing on Contemporary Issues: Food for Thought:
Writing and Reading about the Cultures of Food
Fall 2008

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Homework #13

*Due online and in class T 10/21***Essay 2**

Write an essay in which you analyze and reflect on ideas from *In Defense of Food*, developing your own idea as you do so. Use at least one additional reading in your discussion. (5 pages)

Your goals:

- To develop an argument that explores, expands on, clarifies, questions and/or challenges other writers' ideas.
- To write muscular, energetic sentences and to link them in paragraphs that unfold in a graceful, dynamic way.
- To make your essay as interesting as possible to readers—especially readers outside our class.

Options: Please choose one of the following prompts for Essay 2:

1) In *In Defense of Food*, Pollan claims that traditional food cultures are the best guides to eating well. Explain what he means by that, and explore/defend/question/challenge this notion. Use as reference points traditional food cultures you're familiar with; you may also refer to the food culture of your childhood (traditional or otherwise).

2) Pollan suggests that we shouldn't need "experts" to tell us how to eat; in particular, he discusses the roles played by nutritionists and journalists. Explain what P. means, and explore this idea with reference to your own experience and your reading. Your essay should, among other things, get readers thinking about the ways we depend on all kinds of experts.

3) Pollan claims that in recent decades we (i.e., Westerners and, especially, Americans) have tended to think of food in terms of the nutrients it delivers—what he terms the "nutritional bias." What, in Pollan's view, is wrong with this emphasis? How *should* we think of food? –what does he think; what do you think? Why?

4) Pollan delivers a fair amount of history (including, but not limited to, political history) of American food culture in his book. What's the value of understanding history in regard to eating habits, attitudes toward food, health, etc. –how does it help us understand/act on the predicament we're in today? Your essay should represent Pollan's thinking to readers, and also include your own thinking.

5) We are at once "overfed and undernourished," according to Pollan. He sees the relationships among diet, medicine and health as problematic, particularly the role of the medical establishment. What does P. mean when he says we've "medicalized" the issue of diet? Represent Pollan's thinking to readers, and critique it. Your essay should get readers thinking about their expectations of the medical establishment—doctors, pharmaceuticals, surgery, insurance...as well as their expectations re: diet.

6) Pollan says, “I no longer think that it’s possible to separate our bodily health from the health of the environment from which we eat or the environment in which we eat...” (p. 144) Explain and explore what Pollan means; give readers a good sense of how these environments are relevant to our bodily health, using examples from Pollan, your own experience, other texts we’ve read . . .

7) According to Pollan, we (Americans, especially) need to put more effort into obtaining and preparing food; we also need to accept that we will have to pay more for food (i.e., real food; good food). Assuming one agrees with his analysis, what challenges do you see in getting Americans to sign on to this agenda? What do you think would be persuasive, to which audiences/demographics? What might get in the way?

8) Write a letter to a (*real*) friend in which you share some of Pollan’s ideas and your thinking about them. Focus on one theme, and develop one idea that you particularly want this friend to take away from your discussion of *In Defense of Food*.

Further options:

- Your essay must take its ideas seriously, but the tone and approach are still yours to choose: exploratory or persuasive; straightforward or playful and humorous.
- Your audience is, most generally, high-school and college educated readers. But if you like, you may target a more particular audience—doctors; parents; school food programs; teenagers with eating disorders...

Requirements:

- Your essay must develop an argument, i.e., an idea, that is your own—not just be a series of comments, reflections, questions and/or allusions to texts.
- It must make substantial and accurate use of *In Defense of Food* and at least one other text we’ve read in this class.
- It must be 5 pages double-spaced (1250 words).
- It must follow the format I gave you with the Essay 1 assignment.

Hints:

- Essays that analyze, discuss, critique and reflect on ideas succeed according to three main principles:
 - They demonstrate real interest on the part of the writer, and a real desire to get readers thinking about the writer’s topic and ideas.
 - They accurately and clearly represent the ideas of others and the writer herself or himself.
 - They are briskly paced—they are full of intellectual energy.
- As in Essay 1, references to texts should be handled informally—name the writer or source in your sentence; do not use parenthetical references. For example, “As Pollan states in his Introduction, ...” Do, however, keep a list of page numbers for your own reference, and in case I ask to check them.