

Interactive Hospitality: Immigrant Food Memoirs with Recipes

Wednesday, March 22, 12:15 p.m. University Club, IMU

In this talk, I argue that immigrant voices have been largely excluded from national immigration policy debates by tracing the shift away from the pride and optimism of J. F. Kennedy's *A Nation of Immigrants* to the 45th President's controversial executive order on immigration that embodies the current era's fear of future immigrants as potentially dangerous to our nation's safety. As a response to this gradual pendulum swing, food memoirs with recipes written by immigrants constitute a form of virtual but interactive hospitality because they warmly welcome readers into the domestic space and show them how they live and eat. These first-person texts serve to lift the curtain and broach the subject that so many want to know about but are afraid to ask:

what makes people leave their homes and families and move to a strange land to begin their lives anew?

While there are almost as many answers to that question as the number of people who immigrate to the United States every year, these memoirs share their writers' experience of that journey. They also extend the notion of the "Welcome Table" by inviting readers to recreate the meals featured within their pages by making their families' lives an open book in the most literal sense. This gesture allows readers to share a first-hand 'taste' of the experience of immigration and adaptation to U.S. culture. Finally, I conclude by tracing the legacy of the trauma of immigration down the generations, creating a type of marked citizenship that I call the "half-immigrant" condition of the first U. S. born generation. These children of immigrants negotiate their own ambiguous relationship to the immigrant generation and to their American peers by alternating their eating choices to reflect their sense of belonging to each of their communities.

The Immigrant Kitchen

Food, Ethnicity, and Diaspora



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