YUPPIES TO HIPSTERS: TRACING AMERICA’S CULINARY GOLDEN AGE

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ABSTRACT

Andrew Noorani. Yuppies to Hipsters: Tracing America’s Culinary Golden Age.
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This thesis examines the progression of America’s culinary landscape over the past fifty years. While many accounts of American culinary history focus on the “Big 3”, Julia Child, Craig Claiborne, and James Beard, in the 50s and 60s, this paper will instead focus on those on the years after. The basis of this work asserts that a culinary golden age in the United States began in the nineteen-eighties. A short introduction will introduce the readers to the current trends in the Unites States culinary landscape. The first chapter will qualify the culinary golden age based on international and domestic restaurant reviews. The second chapter will focus on New York City, defined as America’s culinary capital, and how political, economic, and demographic changes within the city created the demand for a culinary golden age. The third chapter will discuss how a supply of chefs and restaurants formed to meet the growing demand for a culinary golden age. The fourth chapter examines how America’s food media industry took shape and how it is responsible for fueling the continuation of the culinary golden age. This thesis concludes by highlighting the importance of food in American society today and predicts that despite challenging economic conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the culinary golden age will continue.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Having written a thesis on America’s culinary history, I must thank those who have shaped my eating, cooking, and writing experiences. I must, of course, start by thanking my mother. The journalism major, Cordon Bleu graduate, and once caterer taught me to cook dishes like navarin printanier, made me Dröste hot cocoa, and has spent countless hours helping me improve as a writer. To my father, I owe him for pushing me to become a history major, read, travel, and form a more global perspective. I am incredibly grateful to my siblings too. Not for their subpar cooking skills, which forced me to cook, but instead for their endless support as older siblings.

While at Tulane, I have also been fortunate to have professors who helped me write and encouraged me to tackle topics I am passionate about. I want to thank professor Kalos-Kaplan, who taught my first writing course at Tulane, discourse on food. I am genuinely grateful to have started my time at Tulane in a class that considered food worthy of analysis and research. I want to thank professor Boyden, who has continued to help me develop as a writer in history. I think it is also important to note that my first paper for Professor Boyden was on foodways in Imperial Spain. I need to thank professor Gilpin, whose lectures and conversations in classrooms and his banjo filled office pushed my understanding and curiosity of American history. Though not directly involved in this thesis’s writing, I also want to thank my history advisor, professor Ramer. Upon finding out that I was learning Italian, he said, “I should have taken Italian instead of Russian; I would have eaten far better food.” Maybe the class was before lunch, or perhaps English and History professors are naturally drawn to food.

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INTRODUCTION
This thesis organizes America’s culinary landscape into two sections. The first section concerns America’s restaurant industry and the second the American food experience at home. The first three chapters focus primarily on America’s restaurant industry while the last chapter discusses America’s relationship with food at home. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic these two sectors of the American food identity are at serious odds with each other.

At the time of writing this thesis, the American restaurant industry is in a precarious position. Until March 2020, the industry had seen ten years of uninterrupted growth. Eerily, on February 28th, 2020, the National Restaurant Association released their yearly report, proudly predicting record industry sales of $899 billion, a four percent increase from 2019.1 Ironically, however, in the next three weeks after that report was published many Americans unknowingly ate their last restaurant meal, at least for a while, in what this paper refers to as America’s culinary golden age. By mid-March lockdowns to prevent the spread of COVID-19 began taking effect place across America’s cities, halting restaurant services. By September, the New York State Restaurant Association released its own report finding that 64% of all restaurants in the state could be forced to close by the end of 2020.2 While the ten years of growth might indicate to some that in ten years the industry can reach its peak again, such optimism fails to take into account the scale of destruction to the industry and does not fully appreciate the 40-year path which resulted in the peak of the American restaurant industry just before the pandemic reached the United States.

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Meanwhile, America’s food experience at home has had to pick up the slack unfulfilled by restaurants. There is perhaps a tinge of optimism to be found in the quarantine habits which many Americans developed to satisfy their culinary demands while they waited for restaurants to reopen. The sour dough bread and banana bread crazes during the height of lockdowns indicated the strength of America’s culinary interest. Despite these admirable efforts to fill the void left by restaurant closures, consumers immediately noticed the loss of restaurant dining and longed for its return. Americans have had their memory of the culinary golden age clouded by a year of lockdown home cooking, takeout, and more recently the hollow experience of dining with facemasks, QR codes and hand sanitizer kiosks. It is sadly necessary to research and remember the restaurant industry which existed prior to March 2020.

As the saying goes, you don’t know what you have got until it is gone. While there is certainly still hope for America’s restaurant industry, Americans are realizing what they have lost in this year. As Americans are realizing how good we had it, this thesis will explore how we were able to have it so good. These next chapters will answer these questions about the American food scene: how long has it been this good? Why did it become so good? Who made it so good? And lastly, how did it stay so good for so long?

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CHAPTER I: REVIEWING THE REVIEWS OF THE AMERICAN RESTAURANT INDUSTRY
In surveying the pre-COVID make-up of the US restaurant industry this chapter will analyze the highest level of ranking and reviews. The focus will be on the elite levels of restaurants, dining and professional reviews, rather than more democratic evaluations such as Yelp and Zagat. This is not to discredit mass review systems or more casual culinary endeavors, but rather to use these elite measurements to understand where the highest point of the American restaurant industry was. The accolades which this chapter will use to identify America’s upper echelon of cuisine are the Bocuse d’Or, The San Pellegrino 50 Best Restaurant list, Michelin Guides, James Beard Awards, and New York Times Restaurant Reviews. These accolades and review systems will indicate that America was in a “culinary golden age” and that it lasted far longer than the past 10 years of uninterrupted economic growth.

As trivial as it may sound, when nations send their participants to the Olympics and sporting competitions, they send their best athletes. They do not send an average group representative of a nation’s athletic ability. The United States is still capable of leading the world in Olympic medals even if one third of its population is obese. While the Olympics does not represent an entire nation’s athleticism, success in the Games still symbolizes prestige and athletic superiority to the rest of the world. This effect is also seen in what is often referred to as the “Olympics of cooking”, the Bocuse d’Or. In 2017 the US did not send an assortment of Olive Garden and Applebee’s line cooks to compete in Lyon, even if that does sound like the premise to a Food Network show. They sent Matthew Peters, the sous chef of Per Se in New York City, the highly rated and revered restaurant of American culinary giant Thomas Keller.  

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What exactly is this “Olympics of cooking?” The Bocuse d’Or, which began in 1987, is a biennial cooking competition held in Lyon, France. The competition is named after the late great Paul Bocuse, one of the most celebrated chefs of the 20th Century. The competition comprises 24 of the most talented and promising young chefs from around the world. They must prepare two recipes in 5 hours and 35 minutes, in front of an audience. A panel of judges, composed of prestigious chefs, determines the winners. Unsurprisingly, of the 16 competitions which have taken place, the home team, France, is the most successful with 6 victories. The United States had their own culinary “Miracle on Ice” when an American chef took home the top prize in 2017. By the measure of the Bocuse d’Or, in 2017, the best Chef in the world was from America. This victory illustrates that American culinary excellence can exist and was recognized as such in 2017. However, the news of victory in America was met with mixed reactions. Friends, fellow American chefs, as well as the New York Times responded and reported proudly on the victory. Others, such as Greg Morabito of Eater, the online restaurant publication, responded with asperity. Morabito’s article was titled “Holy Crap: The US team actually won the Bocuse d’Or” and subtitled “Three reasons we still don’t care”. Morabito did not applaud the victory because, he claimed, the food did not look appetizing, while moreover the event is hard to follow, and the competition over-represents white male chefs from elite restaurants. With regards to the food, there certainly is a focus on French Haute Cuisine, which the average American diner might not enjoy, but the goal is to create a challenging assignment for the chefs, which allows them to showcase their techniques. The event is hard to follow because

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any restaurant kitchen service is chaotic and hard to follow. The event is not televised and not meant to fit into a reality TV show format, but rather focus on the chefs’ abilities. On his final point, Morabito is correct that the competition is overly representative of white men, with only one woman, Lea Linster, taking first place in 1989. This overrepresentation, however, is not unique to the Bocuse d’Or. The restaurant industry, especially in awards and accolades, consistently underrepresents female and minority chefs.

While many Americans have not heard of the Bocuse d’Or and the competition lacks diversity, the American victory in 2017 still is important to the culinary arts in the United States. This success demonstrated that the training process of cooks in this country can produce chefs who can compete for the highest awards globally. In relation to the “culinary golden age” it illustrates that a cohort of cooks and chefs of the highest level exist in America. These chefs and others outside the competition have contributed to making the culinary landscape and restaurant industry better than it ever was. While the Bocuse d’Or might only recognize the chefs themselves, the San Pellegrino and Michelin Awards testify to the quality of the restaurants of these great American chefs.

Beginning in 2002, the World’s 50 Best Restaurants List created a global stage for ranking elite restaurants, as it undertook the seemingly impossible and certainly arbitrary task of designating the 50 best restaurants in the entire world for the given year. The reality is that the average American has never even heard of this list. More importantly, the restaurants on this list are not indicative of an entire nation’s restaurant industry. So then, why should we care at all who is on the list or if any American restaurants have made the list? The list of 50 provides an opportunity for nations to boast about their culinary environment. Sure, that only six US restaurants made the 2019 list might seem insignificant
to some. This number may seem even more irrelevant when other facts and figures of the American restaurant industry and American food consumption are considered. It is understandable that observers might find six restaurants in the top 50 list irrelevant or even immoral, considering 40% of the US adult population is overweight and more than 40 million Americans are food insecure.\(^7\) While the list covers very few restaurants, it still helps illuminate two important aspects of the American culinary peak. First, it offers a glimpse of the longevity of the era, and second it indicates that US restaurants are recognized globally. Figure 1 represents the number of US restaurants on the list from its inception in 2002. The graph shows that the US has been recognized by the world’s gourmands for far longer than this past 10 years of uninterrupted growth. Unfortunately, the list is not old enough to indicate when this era might have begun. The list highlighted its ability to promote a restaurants status when a little-known restaurant in Copenhagen, Noma, topped the list in 2010. Lisa Abend of the New York Times reported that if you wanted a reservation at Noma on Saturday, April 24, 2010, you would have easily secured a spot. However, the following Monday, after the restaurant topped the list, you would have faced competition from 100,000 people to get a table.\(^8\) The mission of the list is to provide a snapshot of some of the best destinations for unique culinary experiences, in addition to serving as a barometer for global gastronomic trends.\(^9\) If we are to take San Pellegrino at their word, we can confirm that the US has been one of the highest performers in culinary excellence for at least the past 17 years. Given that Chef Thomas Keller’s The

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French Laundry, in Yountville, California, topped the second list in 2003, it is reasonable to suggest that US had reached the high levels of Culinary excellence even earlier.

![Number of US Restaurants on San Pellegrino 50 Best Restaurant List](chart)

Turning away from the San Pellegrino list in favor of a more venerable determinant of culinary success, let’s examine the Michelin guide and its infamous 3-star award system. Yes, Michelin refers to the same Michelin which makes car tires. This is actually the reasoning behind the guides. In 1900, to increase the demand for cars and, accordingly, car tires, the Michelin brothers produced a small guide filled with handy information for travelers, such as maps, information on how to change a tire and where to fill up on petrol. In 1920 it included a list of restaurants according to specific categories. In 1926, the guide began to award stars for fine dining establishments, initially marking them only with a single star. Five years later, a hierarchy of zero, one, two, and three stars was introduced. The guide now rates over 30,000 establishments across three continents, and more than 30 million Michelin Guides have been sold worldwide since 1900.11 The history and far reach

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10 “The World’s 50 Best Restaurants 2002-2019”
of the Michelin guide speaks for itself in confirming its prestige in reviewing restaurants. The culinary success of the United States is well represented in the Guide. In 2019 the US recorded a total of 209 stars (See Figure 2). America’s 209 stars in only 5 cities can be held in high regard when compared to the nation with the most stars, France, with 628 across every single city and region. America’s culinary capital, New York City clocks in at 92 stars and is only narrowly edged out by Paris with 96 stars.\(^\text{12}\) There are two important caveats to the Michelin guide. First, there has long been suspicion that the Guide is overwhelmingly biased in favor of restaurants in France and French restaurants in other nations.\(^\text{13}\) Second, and perhaps more importantly in regard to this study of the United States, the guide has operated in France since its inception, but is still relatively new in the United States. The first guide in the US, published in November of 2005, covered New York City.\(^\text{14}\) Much like San Pellegrino’s Top 50 List, the history of Michelin in America indicates that America’s culinary rise has been recognized internationally at least by 2005. However, given its 2005 launch date are we to simply believe that this phenomenon of incredible food in America and its recognition did not exist until 2005? The San Pellegrino list which began in 2002 implies that the era began as early as 2002. Thankfully interviews with the operators of the Michelin Guide provide a clearer perspective on the guide’s move to New York in 2005. When the 2005 guide was announced there had been a large amount of hype around the list and the company making it over the pond. This excitement wasn’t just seen in New Yorkers and culinary patriots, but also Michelin itself. Of course, there was the added revenue from a new market, but when Édouard Michelin, Chairman of the


\(^{14}\) Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. Pp. 49-55.
company at the time, was interviewed by the *New York Times*, he claimed a New York guide had been a dream of his for the past 20 years.\(^{15}\) As further chapters will show, identifying 1985 as inspiring a plan of a New York Guide is not a coincidence. So, while the American version of the guide can’t directly mark the beginning of America’s Culinary Golden Age, Édouard Michelin has at least alluded to when the American restaurant industry began to grab his and his company’s attention.

![NUMBER OF MICHELIN STARS IN 2019](image.png)

*Figure 2\(^{16}\)*

Compared to the other 3 awards, the James Beard Awards and *New York Times* Restaurant Reviews offer far more American measures of culinary success. While these two accolades cannot be used to evaluate American success globally, they do offer insights


into the growth of the industry and its recognition by American audiences and diners. The longevity of the two awards should also provide a better indicator of the longevity of America’s Culinary Golden Age.

The mission of the James Beard Awards is to recognize the top culinary professionals in the United States. Awards are given in various categories such as best cookbooks, restaurant design, broadcast media, journalism, and best restaurants and chefs. The award ceremony occurs every year on May 5th, the birthday of the namesake of the awards.

Who was James Beard? In 1954, The New York Times described him as “the dean of American cookery.” He was a theatre actor, a caterer, a cookbook author, a TV chef, a cooking instructor, and a gay man in a very conservative and intolerant America. He passed away in 1985 and to honor him, his equally legendary culinary friend, Julia Child, set up the James Beard Foundation in 1986. The goal of the foundation was to provide scholarships to aspiring food professionals and champion the culinary tradition which Beard helped to create. Five years later in 1991, the first James Beard Awards ceremony was held in New York City, where 30 recipients, authors for their cookbooks and chefs for their restaurants, were recognized. By 2019 there were 68 recipients of James Beard medals in the year’s award ceremony. The James Beard Foundation and Awards highlight that America is a nation where culinary arts and literature are promoted and celebrated. The increasing scope of the awards and recipients indicated the degree to which interest in

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Culinary arts and Restaurants has grown and how supportive the environment for chefs and cookbook authors has been since 1986.

James Beard’s death itself set the stage for an important moment in marking the Culinary Golden Age. What was supposed to be an 82nd birthday celebration for Beard at the inaugural City Meals on Wheels charity gala, was instead changed to be a celebration of his life. The celebration gives a snapshot of America’s culinary capacity in 1986. The author of Beard’s biography, John Birdsall, noted that the event occurred in the midst of the “Reagan Renaissance” when the nation’s food would be crowned best in the world by the top food writers globally. The event brought fourteen of America’s best chefs and their food to Rockefeller Plaza in New York City. However, these chefs were not chosen exclusively from New York City restaurants. They included Paul Prudhomme from New Orleans, Jeremiah Towers from San Francisco and Wolfgang Puck from Los Angeles. The geographical diversity represented by the chefs brought in for the gala represented the scale and far reach of America’s culinary upper echelon. Beard’s celebration and legacy are evidence of an American population which demanded great food as well as literature about such food, creating a fertile atmosphere for the chefs, restaurants, cookbook authors, and restaurant critics to meet this demand.

The oldest operating restaurant review system in the US that will be discussed in this chapter is the New York Times Restaurant Reviews. According to food writers Andrew Dornenburg and Karen Page, The New York Times publishes the most influential restaurant reviews in the country, with an impact not just on the restaurants and diners in the city but

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19 Birdsall, John. P.361
across the country and around the world.\textsuperscript{20} The \textit{Times} began publishing regular weekly restaurant reviews beginning in 1963. However, the first food critic, Craig Claiborne, was rather different from the current critic Pete Wells today and those who came in between. When Claiborne joined the \textit{Times} in 1957, he was aware that the American restaurant industry was lacking in quality. According to Claiborne, the main reasons for the dearth of good dining options were effects of Prohibition and World War II. Prohibition seriously inhibited the restaurant business, which lost one of its leading revenue streams, while the war limited the male workforce for kitchens and luxury expenses such as dining out. Claiborne introduced the four-star rating system to the paper and was the first man to hold the title of food editor in the country;\textsuperscript{21} given the sexism of the times, this lent a certain essence of professionalism to the role. He also had the training and experience to bring expertise to the role and to his reviews. He had trained in Switzerland at the École Hôtelière de la Société Suisse des Hoteliers, giving him an understanding of a chef’s perspective and the ability to write cookbooks.\textsuperscript{22} Despite Claiborne’s perceived professionalism, critics are quick to point out that it would be incorrect to label him a true culinary professional. Claiborne is perhaps most famous for his article, “The $4000 dinner”, printed November 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1975. The dinner was a decadent meal full of foie gras, truffles, and some of the most expensive and noteworthy wines in the world. The $4000 of 1975 would be equivalent to spending $20,000 on a tasting menu for two in 2020. The article was so outrageous that even the Vatican issued a reprimand. The article demonstrated that Claiborne was out of

touch with the average American diner and even the average reader if his reviews. The article also shows a lack of culinary knowledge in its descriptions of food. For example, he claimed that beurre blanc (which he spelled incorrectly throughout the piece) should have been “very hot” rather than merely warm. The replacement for Claiborne, John Hess, who had spent nine years in Paris, pointed out “if it had been ‘very hot,’ it would no longer have been a beurre blanc.” Despite his critics, though, there are still some, such as food writer James Villas, who believed that Claiborne was one of the most influential individuals in introducing Americans to good food. While Claiborne was undoubtedly important in the development of *The New York Times* Food section, his full time successor Mimi Sheraton played a far more professional and important role as critic and in introducing American readers to fine food. Neither of Claiborne’s part-time successors, John Hess nor John Canaday, had any formal training in food or the hospitality industry. Mimi Sheraton took over from Canaday, after subbing for him for four weeks in April 1975. When Canaday returned from his four-week leave, he realized how seriously Sheraton took the role, and agreed to vacate the post for Sheraton by the end of the summer. Sheraton’s seriousness came at a particularly good time to legitimize the paper’s food writing since the section was moved from the Friday paper to the new “Weekend” section in the summer of 1975. It was under the simple heading “Restaurants,” but it significantly was placed among “At the Movies,” “Art,” “Theater,” and “Dance.” From the summer of 1975 *The New York Times* treated food as a bonafide category of culture. Sheraton’s style and work ethic

26 Davis, Mitchell. Pp. 60-72
matched the section’s new prestige and seriousness. Sheraton became famous for her disguises. Her credo was that she should experience the restaurant as the chef intended it to be for the average customer, not a perfected experience for a food writer. She would dine under false names or dressed up in wigs and costumes.\textsuperscript{27} Her objectivity is also reflected in the number of times she would dine before reviewing. She would try a restaurant five times, to account for any inconsistencies, or any preferential treatment had her cover been blown. Her relentless striving for perfection in reviewing is also clear in her survey of New York City’s best pastrami. Before crowning Carnegie Deli as the best in the city, she collected 104 pastrami and corned beef sandwiches and analyzed them in one day.\textsuperscript{28} Mimi Sheridan’s tenure as The New York Times restaurant critic from 1976 to 1983 set a standard for the ensuing long standing food reviewers. Her approach to her restaurant reviews and journalism legitimized not only American food journalism, but also American food. Her writing captured the beginnings of an American culinary awakening and an audience eager to read about it.

In reviewing these five rating systems for measuring outstanding food in America, a strong relationship between Americans and high-quality food emerges. The Bocuse d’Or, San Pellegrino Awards, and the Michelin stars which celebrate America’s chefs and restaurants indicate that America’s culinary success is noteworthy in comparison with other nations across the world. The James Beard Foundation and the countless New York Times restaurant reviews reflect a culture in America where food matters and should be discussed

and celebrated. The review systems also help indicate a start to identify a starting point for the golden age as the mid 80s, which this paper defines as 1985.

Food in America goes beyond sustenance. A sizable portion of the American public is interested in chefs, their backgrounds, their dishes and their restaurants. The growing number of good chefs and restaurants has been met by the strong demand from hungry diners and professional restaurant reviewers to shape the past forty years of cuisines and restaurants in America. The pandemic is an abrupt break in this supply and demand balance of the “golden age”. There is perhaps a tinge of optimism to be found in the quarantine habits which many Americans took to in order to satisfy their culinary demands while they waited for restaurants to return to operation. For many what they have missed most in the pandemic is restaurant dining. Simply put, restaurants have become an incredibly important aspect of life to Americans. The United States has quite clearly been experiencing a culinary golden age. This age has also lasted a significant amount of time, beginning in 1985. What started this culinary golden age? The following chapter will discuss the events outside the culinary world which helped launch the Culinary golden age in 80s America.
Meg Ryan, Carrie Fisher, and Lisa Jane Persky dine at the Loeb Boathouse in Central Park during a scene of *When Harry Met Sally*.

CHAPTER II: NEW YORK’S REBIRTH AND THE RISE OF THE YUPPIE
On July 13th, 1977, it would have been hard to believe that New York City would enter a Culinary Golden Age in eight years’ time. While a handful of fine French restaurants such as Lutèce and Le Grenouille had existed since the 60s, the city’s Culinary golden age would not begin until 1985.1 Before 1985, the US restaurant industry and its capital, New York, looked very different. Tourists visiting New York’s Times Square today might enjoy a trip to M&M World or to see their favorite cartoon character in costume. In the 70s, long before M&M World opened, Times Square was a squalid part of Manhattan comprised of porn theatres and street corners frequented by prostitutes.2 This chapter will explore how the city and, with it, its restaurant industry evolved into what we know today.

In many respects, the 1970s were a low point in the country’s history. At the close of the decade, the United States was divided and humiliated by the Watergate Scandal, an Oil Crisis, the Vietnam War, the ensuing recession, and the Iranian hostage crisis. These events and the environment of volatility which they created were not conducive to a culinary golden age. With regards to New York City, at 9.34 pm on July 13th, 1977, the fall of the city seemed more imminent than a Culinary Golden Age.

After lightning struck a substation along the Hudson River, all five boroughs lost power for the next 25 hours. To make matters worse, the NYPD was ill-prepared after many years of budget cuts imposed during Mayor Abraham Beame’s attempt to save the city from bankruptcy through austerity. Tension was high among the general population from the stresses of the financial crisis and fear of the son of Sam serial killer who had spent the summer attacking and murdering New Yorkers. During the blackout, the city

erupted into chaos and violence: looters robbed more than 1,600 stores,\(^3\) racking up damages of an estimated $150 million (just over half a billion dollars in today’s currency).\(^4\) Though the damage was immense, national opinion was far from sympathetic. A writer for the *New Yorker* observed that “instead of comfort, what New York received in the first days after the disaster was often the punitive judgment that it had just got what it deserved, considering the kind of place that it was.”\(^5\) Even before the blackout, critics across the nation viewed New York City as a dangerous, crime-ridden city. In 1976 Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* had given the American public an unfiltered depiction of New York City’s underbelly. As the protagonist Travis, played by Robert De Niro, states at the movie’s opening, “All the animals come out at night – whores…, dopers, junkies, sick, venal. Someday, a real rain will come and wash all this scum off the streets”.\(^6\) The blackout of 1977 confirmed to New Yorkers and Americans alike that the city was a hellscape. As population declined throughout the decade, it was apparent that New Yorkers were leaving, and fewer Americans were willing to move to the city.\(^7\) From 1970 to 1977 there was a total net outward migration of 634,400 New Yorkers.\(^8\) A declining population spelled trouble for New York’s restaurant industry. Given the situation in the 70s, who in their right mind would want to move to New York City let alone open a restaurant? The 70s saw

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the closure of Le Pavilion in the city, one of the countries most celebrated restaurants.\textsuperscript{9} And in the restaurants which would remain open, the food was for the most part, uninspired.

However, while the blackout caused substantial economic, social and emotional damage, it was also – arguably – one catalyst for change that the city so badly needed. Though the seventies were in many ways a dark period for American prosperity, a dawn of political, economic, and demographic changes occurring after 1977 gradually laid the foundations for a financially strong and critically appreciated restaurant industry. In particular, political change led to a redevelopment and securing of American urban areas, while shifting economic dynamics underpinned an upturn in the financial sector and a new accumulation of wealth among its professionals. Finally, and most pertinent to restaurants, demographic changes brought a new variety of American consumers, individuals with lavish discretionary spending behaviors and an interest in good cuisine. To borrow the analogy voiced by De Niro’s character in Taxi Driver, “a real rain” would come, brought about by these three interlinked changes.

The NYC blackout of 1977 became a wake-up call to urban communities in the United States. Up to the 1970s, New York City was a product of postwar liberalism, a quasi-welfare state with strong unions and a large public sector.\textsuperscript{10} However, after the blackout, political and financial institutions saw the necessity of reinvesting in the city. Private institutions began to advocate neoliberal policies that might revitalize the city. Chase Manhattan Bank wrote an internal report arguing that “the disorders brought to light

deep-seated economic and social difficulties that can and should be addressed.”¹¹ What journalist Chris Maisano refers to as a “bankers’ regime” saw the fiscal crisis and blackout as an opportunity to rid the city of “big-city liberalism welfare.”¹² Regulatory shifts in the 70s and 80s would pave the way for a neoliberal economic policy which would utilize private institutional investment to revitalize New York. For the “banker’s regime” the redevelopment of New York City offered a highly lucrative opportunity.

During the 1977 Mayoral election, the blackout heavily influenced the candidates’ policies. Though Ed Koch began the year polling at only 2%, he found himself perfectly positioned when the power came back on July 14th. Koch positioned himself as a liberal Democrat eager to rebuild New York, yet tough on crime. Though New Yorkers might have rallied to incumbent mayor Abraham Beame, just as they would rally to the previously unpopular Rudolph Giuliani after 9/11, Beame was not so lucky.¹³ President Carter, who had pledged help for the city while running for president, refused to declare New York a disaster area. This refusal barred Beame and the city from qualifying for massive federal relief funds. The mayor was given a cheque for $11 million, a drop in the bucket relative to the looters’ damage to the city. Ed Koch was quick to denounce Carter and Beame for failing to respond to the crisis adequately. With Beame’s campaign floundering, the race narrowed to one between Koch and Mario Cuomo. To Koch’s advantage, Rupert Murdoch had purchased the New York Post in 1977 and had begun to hijack New York’s popular culture, spreading terror with lurid headlines.¹⁴ The New York Times endorsed Cuomo, but

¹¹ Phillips-Fein, Kim.
¹⁴ Soffer, Jonathan. P.131
Murdoch put his media empire behind the tough-on-crime Koch. Koch thus came to occupy the privileged position (so unfamiliar by today’s standards) of running as a Democrat with the support of Republicans. After a run-off election, Koch would defeat Cuomo and spend twelve years in Gracie Mansion, overseeing an administration tough on crime and committed to austerity and redevelopment through the private sector. Koch’s tenure in the 80s marked a rebuilding process that would create the conditions for the birth of America’s culinary capital.

The Koch 80s ushered in an era of gentrification. In his first term, Koch secured a new round of loans from the federal government on the condition that the city would balance its budget within four years. By the mid-80s, through continued austerity and private investments, New York’s finances were transformed from one of continuous deficits to surplus. Austerity was a continuation of Beame’s policies, now more successful under Koch. As the public sector stabilized, investments in the private sector appeared to become more secure. The square footage of the city’s new commercial space constructed in the 80s alone was more than the entirety of all Boston and San Francisco’s commercial space combined. And though the now-disgraced Mayor Rudolph Giuliani might have claimed credit for the redevelopment of Times Square, 42nd Street, and the West Side Highway, these projects began with Koch’s administration. Koch’s time in power also coincided with that of Ronald Reagan, and while the two were of different political parties, their policies and policy outcomes were similar. Koch who dismantled

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17 Strausbaugh, John. P.537
unions, privatized segments of the New York’s public sector, and expanded the private and financial sectors, was a natural fit within the Ronald Reagan era.

Koch’s commercial redevelopment of New York City would benefit the wealthy, the white, and the business owners, leading to a robust economic environment for a culinary golden age to begin. However, gentrification saw relocation of New York’s more impoverished and underrepresented communities. When it came to less fortunate New Yorkers, Koch’s policies were inconsistent. One of the only departments that did not see cuts under Koch was the NYPD, which hired more officers and increased its budget.\textsuperscript{18} Critical commentators asserted that there was indeed a war on homelessness and a feud between Koch and the black community of New York throughout his tenure.\textsuperscript{19} Where development of commercial spaces boomed, Koch and Reagan both cut the development of affordable housing projects and programs for New York’s homeless population. Given presence of racism in the United States, the ghettoization and segregation of urban areas were perhaps appreciated by white business owners hoping to appeal to a wealthy, white clientele. Though gentrification benefits the affluent, it marginalizes poorer and minority communities. This marginalization has only begun to be understood recently as representation of these communities is growing.

While today we might associate gentrification with hipsters opening vegan food stores in Williamsburg, in the 80s, it was a young generation with a different label that championed New York’s rebuild and gentrification: Yuppies. And just like their successors, Yuppies and gentrification were controversial to the incumbent residents. What

\textsuperscript{18} Langan, Patrick. \textit{The Remarkable Drop in Crime in New York City}. US Department of Justice. P.7
\textsuperscript{19} Soffer, Jonathan. Pp. 334-53
is a Yuppie? The terms stand for Young Urban Professional. What made Yuppies different from previous generations? Why were they moving to New York City when the City and other urban around America had seen a sharp decline in population since the 50s? The unique goals of the Yuppies are found in analyzing their demographic in greater detail. For the most part, Yuppies were children who grew up with far greater privilege than previous generations. They were predominantly white, well-educated, and entered jobs with high paying salaries. Though conservative on taxation, social spending, and government regulation, they were more liberal than their predecessors on sexual and gender freedom, supporting women’s rights and abortion rights.\textsuperscript{20} Compared to the similar sounding Yippies, who were anti-authoritarian and non-conforming, the Yuppies were much more conservative and materialistic, caring about income, consumption, and possessions. In the aftermath of one of New York City’s worst decades, a new generation of workers, who yearned for an urban lifestyle, high salaries, and affluent consumption, graduated college and began to reverse the city’s population decline.

To the delight of Mayor Koch and the materially motivated generation, regulatory changes in finance and other industries gave the mayor the opportunity to rebuild the city, while the Yuppies began to amass wealth. Up until the 80s, the affluent professionals in the United States tended to be doctors and lawyers. While those two jobs are still well paying today, regulatory change in the 70s and the 80s brought the public’s attention to employment in the financial sector. What occurred in the 70s and 80s is what economists refer to as financialization. Financialization describes the increase in the size and

significance of financial markets, transactions, and institutions. The period from the FDR administration until the 1970s is frequently referred to as the phase of “boring banking” because banks that took deposits and made loans to individuals and businesses and were prohibited from engaging in investments and trading involving creative financial engineering and investment banking. The highly regulated financial era in the United States was not a problem to consumers, financiers, and corporations, providing that inflation did not get out of control. However, as mentioned above, the 70s saw the spike in oil prices resulting from the Arab oil embargo against the West in the aftermath of Yom Kippur War. This in turn triggered high inflation throughout the 70s. In response, the Fed lowered the interest rates, forcing financial institutions to find innovative, profitable products and to seek deregulation aggressively.

Beginning in the late 70s and during the 80s was an era of financial deregulation. This was vital to New York City’s rebirth. Deregulation of financial institutions and other industries such as the airlines led to more financial products, greater business flexibility, and innovation. The 80s saw a growing number of participants in the financial sector. Whether they were middle-class Americans buying a few stocks or institutional investors investing their pension funds, the ever-increasing demand needed a greater supply financial sector workers. To New York City, home of Wall St. and the New York Stock Exchange, the influx of business and a highly paid workforce was a godsend. During the 80s, 300 foreign banks opened offices in New York, and two hundred thousand white-collar jobs were created. Released ten years after the New York City Blackout, Oliver Stone’s Wall

23 Strausbaugh, John. P.537
Street (1987) showed how the City was reborn. While Taxi Driver (1976) opened with seedy nighttime shots of the city, Stone’s Wall Street begins with the sunrise over Manhattan as fashionable New Yorkers commute to Wall Street to the tune of Frank Sinatra’s ‘Fly Me to the Moon’.\textsuperscript{24} Popular culture romanticized the once frightening city. The hero in the movie is a young and ambitious trader played by Charlie Sheen. The character is a Yuppie, of course. The film showed Americans that New York had a new life, and posited that it was Yuppies, with their ambition at best and greed at worst, who were bringing fresh vitality to the city.

While the men of the Yuppie generation certainly played an important role, it was the women who shifted the gender roles in the United States and perhaps played the more significant role in promoting restaurant dining’s popularity. The generation of Yuppie women arrived in the city equally as educated and as ambitious as their male counterparts. While female equality in the workplace still has a long way to go even today, the substantial gains made in the 1980s caused a shift in societal practices. From 1972 to 1985, women's share of professional jobs increased from 44 to 49 percent, and their percentage of "management" jobs nearly doubled, growing from 20 to 36 percent. Looking specifically at the financial sector, women’s banking and financial management roles rose from 9 to 39 percent.\textsuperscript{25} Within the Yuppie cohort, the idea of a housewife was beginning to fade. Another term that garnered recognition and appreciation was “DINK”. DINK stands for double income, no kids, and is often associated with Yuppies. The existence of the term points to the substantial increase in the number of professional working women. In the 80s,

\textsuperscript{24} Stone, Oliver. 1987. \textit{Wall Street}. United States: Twentieth Century Fox.
it became more common for women to work professional jobs, to have children later in life, if at all, and to move away from the gender roles of earlier decades. The growing movement of female equality in urban settings such as New York City would grow demand for restaurants. A Credit Suisse market insight report noted how, as the female labor participation rate has increased, the amount food expenditures away from home has also increased (see Figure 1). This trend gained momentum in the 80s as women pushed back the age of marriage and childbirth. Not only did growing equality in the professional workplace mean that women would have more disposable income to spend, but they would also be more likely to spend it at restaurants.

With their high salaries, a penchant for consumption, and increasingly discriminating taste, the Yuppies would usher in a new era in American dining. The fine-dining establishments of their parents’ generation would not do. The Yuppies needed restaurants to match their salaries, outlook, and interests. Reports on Yuppie consumerism reflect the group’s quest for gratification. In 1986 a report from the Advances in Consumer Research asserted that Yuppies’ consumption was a result of high competition within the job market. With greater market competition than had been present during their parents’ generation, job advancement was more gradual, and Yuppies consumed as a substitute for professional gratification. Consumption amongst Yuppies gave rise to new and highly prized status symbols. Though partly satire, the *Yuppie Handbook*, published in 1984,

28 Silberman, Lauren. Pp. 18-20
presents the model Yuppie couple on its cover. The man sported a Burberry trench coat and a Rolex watch and held a co-op offering prospectus. The woman was accessorized with a Sony Walkman and Cartier tank watch. The status symbols did not stop at fashion; food and restaurants played an essential part in achieving high status in ‘Yuppiedom.’ In fact, the model Yuppies on the cover hold a gourmet food bag and fresh pasta. In the 80s, an era of opulence, status symbols were becoming more important, and those symbols had to keep up with demand. For example, as an automotive status symbol, BMW would see a 200% increase in sales in the US in the 80s compared to the previous decade. Fine dining and trendy restaurants, which marked the Yuppies’ status, were no different. As described in the previous chapter, the emergence of restaurant ratings such as *The New York Times* restaurant reviews began to influence diners. Furthermore, as later chapters will cover, an increase of cookbooks and cooking shows would create a more informed American dining cohort. Restaurateurs who were hoping to profit from Yuppies’ more free-spending habits met the growing demand.


Though fictional, Bret Easton Ellis’ novel *American Psycho* depicts a violent parody of a Yuppie’s quest for status through consumption. The plight of the psychotic main character Patrick Bateman is his inability to get a reservation at the fictional Dorsia. Dorsia is described in the book as worshipped by Bateman’s investment banking colleagues for its sea urchin ceviche. Though a fictional exaggeration, the depiction of restaurant crazed yuppies was grounded in reality. The sought-after Dorsia reservations certainly sound similar to the contemporary enthusiasm for Spago, which opened in 1981.

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31 Piesman, Marissa. P. 0
in Los Angeles. Reservations at Spago were hard to come by, and different tables, depending on their location, marked status among those who could even get in. As far as 80s New York City restaurants are concerned, Dorsia could have been Jonathan Waxman’s JAMS. Even before the restaurant had finished construction New Yorkers and reporters eagerly anticipated the opening. The Yuppie diners were so intent on getting seats at the restaurant that Waxman found himself sitting tables of 8 at tables meant for 4. On another occasion, the restaurant sat Princess Stephanie of Monaco, Dodi Fayed, and their friends in the “restaurant’s ramshackle office” as they refused to eat at another restaurant. For Yuppies and other beneficiaries of the opulent 80’s, eating out at the trendiest and best restaurants became as important to status as wearing a Rolex watch or having an apartment in an exclusive co-op.

Despite their relatively small numbers, the Yuppies and their spending habits had enormous weight in influencing Americans’ dining habits more generally. According to the previously mentioned Advances in Consumer Research Report, there were at most 1.2 million Yuppies in America in 1986. The report listed Yuppies as those between the ages of 25 and 30 earning $40,000 or more annually (worth about $100,000 annually in 2021), working in professional or managerial positions. How could 0.5% of the population possibly influence most of a nation’s eating and dining habits? This question might seem even more puzzling given broad resentment and disdain directed towards Yuppies and the gentrification they caused. However, as food historian Paul Freedman asserts, “Fine

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restaurants could not exist without a substantial upper class that wants to show off its sophisticated taste.”35 While another 80s phenomenon, so-called trickle-down economics, was already referred to as “political voodoo” by the 90s, trickle-down ‘yuppiedom’ appears to have been far more successful. Though only a small fraction of the population, the group received plenty of media attention and depictions in popular culture. Their images influenced other members of society and other countries. Americans were spending more in the 80s and 90s, and television was heavily influencing consumer trends. There were the ‘Sloane rangers’ in London, and the ‘bon chic bon genre’ in Paris inspired by the American Yuppies. The 80s marked an era of intense consumerism, and the Yuppies were the poster children of such an age. While the impact of Yuppies ranged in various areas such as consumer goods and fashion, one of their greatest legacies comes in the pre-Covid restaurant landscape of the United States. Yuppies’ spending habits and desire for status were essential in creating the demand that underpinned a robust American restaurant industry.

Though New York City’s future appeared bleak in the seventies, wrestling with bankruptcy, crime, and national vilification following the Blackout, the low point inspired an impressive recovery. Though the changes began on a local level, New York City’s recovery provided the blueprint for many other American cities seeking revitalization. The neoliberal policies of Ed Koch and the “banker’s regime” would be rolled out on a national level during President Ronald Reagan’s two terms. Financialization, from its beginnings in innovations and deregulation, would permeate all aspects of American commercial

activity. The result of financialization primed New York City, and then other urban hubs to emerge as commercial powerhouses. In the midst of this redevelopment and opportunity to amass wealth, Yuppies took high paying jobs in cities and began spending large sums of their money there. The lower economic classes aspired to the spending habits of Yuppies, as the 80s marked an intense consumerist era in America. These three shifts not only gave birth to a new New York City but also provided the economic landscape for a financially viable and critically acclaimed restaurant industry to take shape. Of course, the shifts mentioned in this chapter do not explain how a supply of skilled chefs emerged to meet demand. This will be discussed in the following chapter. But basic economic principles would suggest that there must be an increase in demand to dictate a rise in supply. Neoliberal economic policy, the US economy’s financialization, and the emergence of the high spending the Yuppie demographic created this demand. The changes which occurred after the New York City Blackout made New Yorkers and many other urban Americans hungry for new foods, chefs, and restaurants.
CHAPTER III: THE CHEFS AND RESTAURANTS WHICH SHAPED THE GOLDEN AGE
Gotham Bar and Grill was one of the first New York City restaurants to close down in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The restaurant opened in 1984 and became something of an institution, holding three New York Times stars and one Michelin star at its closing time. Alfred Portale, the chef from 1985 to 2019, was celebrated for dishes created in and shaped by the 80s. While working in Gotham’s kitchen as a line cook, I cooked these artifacts of the early culinary golden age. The restaurant’s most famous dish, tuna tartare, was a great representation of the culinary era in which it emerged. The tall dish (pictured on the chapter cover page) matched the period’s style and architecture. The composition of the appetizer revealed the revolutionary changes coming to American cuisine in the 1980s. Tuna tartare was inspired by French and Japanese cuisine and served at an American restaurant using locally sourced ingredients. Gotham Bar and Grill, Alfred Portale, and tuna tartare are apt representatives of the culinary golden age’s beginning in the 1980s.¹ This chapter will discuss the chefs and restaurants which were a part of the golden age and how they directed it.

As the demand for more culinary experiences rose, food and hospitality quality also improved to meet demand. The 80s saw chefs make two critical changes in their cuisine. First, a unified idea of an American cuisine formed as chefs emphasized locally sourced products, with the emergence of farm-to-table cuisine and seasonality. Second, chefs introduced a greater variety of foreign cuisine to the American dining scene. Restaurateurs also set out to deliver a better dining experience through new hospitality styles which opened restaurant dining to a larger population. These cuisine and hospitality style changes

were ultimately a means of expanding fine dining in America beyond French cuisine, which had traditionally dominated.

Though this chapter focuses on the chefs and restaurants of the 80s, a discussion of America’s culinary history would be incomplete without a glance at Julia Child and her legacy. Julia Child was never a commercial chef, nor did she ever have a restaurant, yet her transformative influence on American food, cooks, and restaurants is unquestionable. As is often said, Julia Child taught America to cook. Her teaching began when she released her magnum opus, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking, Volume One* in 1961. The book was a commercial and critical success. It sold more than 100,000 copies in its first five years and stayed on the best sellers list long after. Historian David Strauss praised the book for doing “more than any other event in the last half-century to reshape the gourmet dining scene.” The book was even adored by the extraordinary French chefs of the time, such as Jacques Pepin, who equated reading the book to an exciting novel. Though praised by these chefs, the book was for “the servantless American cook”. Child went to extreme lengths to ensure the book would be usable by American home cooks of the time. She included many hacks or shortcuts for making the dishes with ingredients available at any US supermarket. The book itself is composed painstakingly to simplify the process for the reader. The recipes are easy to follow as Child organized ingredients by stage. Though the recipes were technical, Julia Child and her co-authors Simone (Simca) Beck and Louisette

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Bertholle helped Americans understand and appreciate French cuisine and learn some of its techniques at home.

While it seems that every American might use her Boeuf Bourguignon recipe, Julia Child’s legacy went further. So successful was the cookbook that she made the jump to television. Her show, The French Chef, ran for 204 episodes and continued in reruns long after production finished. The series began in 1963 on Boston’s public television channel and eventually broadcasted nationwide on PBS. Despite her Boston base, audiences around America tuned in to see the show, which was so popular that supermarkets across America ran out of ingredients such as shallots when the broadcasters published the ingredient lists. The show permeated American culture so deeply that Child attained celebrity status. Comedian Dan Ackroyd brought the chef to all Americans, even those uninterested in food, when he satirized her on SNL in 1978. Although Child’s book and show primarily targeted a female audience, men too became interested in aspects of the cooking and dining experience. Paul Fussell, a literary historian and contemporary of Julia Child, pointed out that men also took notes from the cookbook’s wine pairing instructions, and began collecting wine and becoming foie gras aficionados. While not at the scale that emerged in the 80s, American foodie culture began to develop from Child’s teaching.

Julia Child’s legacy is most lasting for the children who grew up eating better food, helping their parents cook, or watching ‘The French Chef’ on TV. Alice Waters, Jonathan Waxman, Alfred Portale, and Suzanne Goin are all great American chefs of the culinary

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8 Kamp, David. P.125
9 Kamp, David. P.120

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golden age who were inspired by watching and reading Julia Child and tasting her cooking as children. The time between the publication of her first cookbook and the beginning of the golden age, 24 years, was long enough for a new generation of line cooks to enter the workforce. This new generation grew up in an era when more Americans knew French culinary techniques and appreciated the passionate relationship with food characteristic of France. As a result, a generation grew up inspired by Julia Child’s cooking and saw cooking as a profession.

Like Julia Child, many of the significant American chefs who followed also went to France and brought back what they learned. Alice Waters, who traveled abroad to France, epitomized the next generation of an American culinary family tree. Waters’ time in France was as transformative for her as it had been for Child. Waters noted how the French “just cared about food—they cared about buying it and the cooking of it…They bought the best bread and went to the farmers’ market two times a day.”10 While in France, Alice Waters latched on to the ideas of seasonality and locally sourced ingredients. These concepts would be the tenets of her culinary philosophy, which she taught to many American chefs who followed her. In bringing these concepts back to America, Alice Waters, like Julia Child, altered the way Americans cooked and ate. In 1971, Waters opened Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California. Food historian Paul Freedman has credited the restaurant for determining “the way we eat now” in his book, Ten Restaurants That Changed America.11 Though Waters had no formal culinary training or extensive restaurant experience, her restaurant was an immediate success and one of the best restaurants in the

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10 Kamp, David. P.161
Bay Area, if not the whole United States. When the most expensive restaurants in San Francisco were using frozen steaks and produce, Chez Panisse served the best fresh produce they could find in Northern California. The chefs would drive to San Francisco’s Chinatown for whole ducks and fresh fish, and her team also sought out and cultivated produce that the grocery stores didn’t carry at the time. They would even resort to foraging wild fennel and mustard greens along railroad tracks.¹² Eventually, sourcing ingredients became more manageable for the restaurant as provisioners heard about it. Some locals began showing up with their offerings to see if Chez Panisse was interested. This was the beginning of a strong relationship between American farmers and chefs which would later be classified as Farm-to-Table cooking. The Chez Panisse menu on opening night in 1971 was a Julia Child-inspired paté en croûte, duck with olives, a salad, and an almond tart, all made with fresh, seasonal, local ingredients.¹³ A new American cuisine took shape as chefs tied their menu items to their locality and the seasons.

Purveyors of produce were not the only group who began showing up at Chez Panisse, as eager young cooks arrived keen to learn the new cuisine approach. Chez Panisse’s transformative role in American cuisine is perhaps most evident in its alumni. The chefs and cooks who passed through that kitchen moved on to establish some of the most celebrated restaurants in America. Jonathan Waxman was a cook at Chez Panisse before he was the chef at Michaels in Santa Monica, and then he opened JAMS in New York City.¹⁴ Jerimiah Towers was the chef at Chez Panisse from 1972 to 1978. Towers

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¹² Kamp, David. P. 186
¹³ Kamp, David. P.168
went on to open Stars in San Francisco, which according to Ruth Reichl, “defined what a modern American restaurant could be.” The alumni and their success marked the shift which occurred between the 70s and 80s in America. These chefs who were part of the Chez Panisse bohemian and hippie lifestyle transformed to suit the materialist, Yuppie style of the 80s. Despite its critical success, Chez Panisse struggled to survive by the close of the 70s due to poor financial management. While the restaurant would ultimately weather the storm, Waters’ protégées took a far more business-focused approach to their restaurants. In 1985 *Rolling Stone* launched an ad campaign known as “perception/reality” where they depicted ongoing contemporary changes in attitudes, ideas, and lifestyle. One ad displayed a mushroom cloud next to a mushroom, describing the shift from the progressive anti-war sentiment of the 70s to the culinary fixations of the 80s (figure 1). Restaurants followed this trend illustrated by *Rolling Stone* Magazine and emerged as professional businesses in the 80s. Jerimiah Tower’s Stars became one of the top-grossing restaurants in the Bay Area before opening additional locations in Napa Valley, Palo Alto, Manila, and Singapore. Jonathan Waxman, once a hippie with long hair, would go on to open a JAMS location in London and start driving a Ferrari. These restaurants applied Alice Waters’ local and seasonal principles but brought the concept to the 80s and commercialized the food bringing it to a bigger market. The restaurants’ success inspired many other restaurants across America to follow suit in their approach to food and commercialization.

16 Kamp, David. P.178
18 *Jeremiah Tower: The Last Magnificent* (1091 Pictures, 2016).
19 Friedman, Andrew. P.387
As professionalism in the restaurant industry grew in the United States, so did the popularity of culinary schools. In 1975, The Institute of Culinary Education opened in New York City, and by 1983, James Beard and Julia Child were teaching classes there themselves. Another culinary college, The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) saw an influx of students in the late 60s and continued to grow throughout the 70s. In 1970, the school bought the campus of St. Andrew on Hudson college to keep up with enrollment increase. Some of the chefs who graduated from the CIA in the 70s and 80s and would work in the first restaurants of America’s culinary golden age include Alfred Portale, Anthony Bourdain, Larry Forgione, and Charlie Palmer, to name a few. The culinary

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schools ensured a continued supply of talented cooks and chefs to meet golden age demand. By the eighties, there was an American cuisine using American ingredients produced by American chefs. While great French chefs such as Jean Georges Vongerichten arrived in America in the 80s, just like Andre Soltner and Jacques Pepin had done decades before, French chefs were no longer the sole arbiters of fine cuisine in America. The development of American culinary education centers meant home-grown talent could propagate America’s culinary golden age.

While the 80s established a genuinely American cuisine, there was also an introduction of more foreign cuisines as interest in food as a whole grew. In particular, two cuisines that grew enormously in popularity and understanding in the early stages of the culinary golden age were Italian and Japanese. These cuisines would help expand the palettes of Americans.

Italian food arrived in the United States at the turn of the 20th century with Italian immigrants. However, until the 80s, Sicilian cuisine predominated and enjoyed little respect in culinary circles. Italian American cuisine had a Sicilian bias as most Italians emigrated from Sicily or other Southern Italian regions.  

This food also took on a distinctly less authentic and more Italian-American fusion as Italian recipes accommodated American abundance. Perhaps the most evident transition of southern Italian food to Italian American food is the transformation from Melanzana alla Parmigiana to veal or chicken “parm.” A breaded and fried eggplant casserole dish in the Old World became a meat dish, a luxury not commonplace for many southern Italians of the early 20th century.

this Italian American cuisine was quite delicious, and Americans would eventually appreciate it, ethnocentrism, nativism and racism impeded widespread acceptance of Italian Americans and their cooking. The racist narrative that Italians were thieves or murderers extended to the cuisine, believed to be greasy and associated with an offensive garlic stench.\textsuperscript{24} Italian restaurants were excluded from achieving fine dining status, where French cuisine held a monopoly. In the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Italian restaurants—mostly neighborhood pizza restaurants and trattorias—served the poor Italian American communities. This phenomenon has recurred more recently with Chinese and Indian restaurants. Racist tropes projected ideas that Chinese restaurants using MSG gave diners headaches and that eating at Indian restaurants would make you sick.\textsuperscript{25} Italian food was not respected as an appropriate cuisine for fine dining in America until the 80s.

Italian food began to grow in popularity in the United States as Italian Americans assimilated into American culture. Americans projected their racism on other immigrants instead, and globalization highlighted other Italian regions. By the 80s, more Americans were traveling to Europe and Italy for business and pleasure. Italian Americans were also becoming well represented in American culture as actors, musicians, and other celebrities. Italian food would also benefit at this time. Respect for Italian cuisine in the 80s is evident in the menus of established French restaurants in America. These arbiters of fine dining began listing Italian menu items. Sirio Maccioni, the owner of Le Cirque, a highly awarded French restaurant in New York City, broke with the status quo of Italian food in America. Maccioni gave his nation’s cuisine a platform to reach the culinary elite and earn respect.


His restaurant created Pasta Primavera, a seasonal spring vegetable pasta dish that expanded America’s understanding of Italian food past heavy red sauce and meatballs. The dish and its concept were among the most heavily imitated of the decade. As a result, Italian menus across America began to have more variety than red sauce and meatballs.

Dishes and ingredients of northern Italian cuisines arrived at American tables in the 80s. The new cuisine was exciting to the diners of the 80s who wanted new experiences. As American diners mostly abandoned their biases towards Italians and began to understand Italy’s regionality, American and Italian chefs hoped to cater to these new interests. The Ligurian specialty pesto alla Genovese skyrocketed in popularity. Jonathan Waxman at JAMS, Larry Forgione at An American Place, and chef Michael Romano at Union Square Café all had pesto on their menus. From these celebrated chefs, pesto permeated grocery stores, smaller restaurant chains, and by the 90s could be seen on McDonald’s menus. Today, Italian food is far more nuanced. There is a general understanding of Italian regional cuisine found in grocery stores and menu items across America.

A good example is how pasta carbonara evolved on menus from listing its pork ingredient as bacon to pancetta to guanciale. In his show Master of None, Comedian Aziz Ansari illustrates the advancement of American knowledge of Italian cuisine seen today. In a comedic scene, Ansari’s character Dev berates a friend who refers to bucatini as

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26 Kamp, David. P. 263
Spaghetti. “that ain’t spaghetti its bucatini it’s a thicker noodle Dummy!” Italian food provides one of the clearest examples of how America’s palette expanded in the 80s.

Japanese cuisine, much like Italian cuisine, was little esteemed in American culinary circles until the 1980s. For most of the 20th century, racism plagued Japanese American communities, which hindered their place in American society and their cuisine’s place in American dining. Japanese cuisine first arrived in the United States with Japanese immigrants in the early 1900s. Cheap Japanese labor was needed to replace Chinese laborers after the Chinese Exclusion act in 1882, which halted Chinese immigration to the US in response to xenophobic anti-Chinese sentiment. From 1901 to 1907, about 125,000 Japanese immigrants arrived in the US. However, like the Chinese immigrants before them, the Japanese met with racism and nativism from white Americans. As part of the “Yellow Peril,” which dominated American race relations on the West Coast, Anti-Asian and Anti-Japanese sentiment grew. The US government’s “gentlemen’s agreement” of 1907 with the Japanese government resulted in the freezing of Japanese passports for the United States. This agreement limited the rate of Japanese immigrants arriving in the US. More significantly, Pearl Harbor and the Second World War caused a massive spike in anti-Japanese sentiment in the US. The policy of internment broke apart Japanese communities and expropriated the property and capital of Japanese Americans. Though ostracized from American society, Japanese Americans were able to preserve their culture as they were ghettoized into their own communities. Across America’s West Coast, many

cities have a China Town, a Japan Town, and/or a Korea Town. These immigrant groups’
ghettoization meant mass American culture remained ignorant of Japanese and Japanese
American culture. The isolation of Japanese communities meant that the cuisine served
in the communities was avoided and ridiculed by many Americans. Racist assumptions
would characterize Japanese food in the minds of Americans for most of the 20th century.
Many American diners were disgusted by the concept of eating raw fish or seaweed
common in Japanese cuisine. This racism towards Japanese Americans and their cuisine
would shape how Japanese food slowly permeated the American palette.

While in the US Japanese food today is most celebrated for sushi, when Japanese
entrepreneurs first attempted to capture an American market, they had to serve Japanese
dishes more acceptable to America’s narrow palate. The first Japanese restaurants that
catered to Americans were mostly Teppanyaki restaurants known in the US as Hibachi
restaurants. The teppanyaki menu items such as seared chicken and rice were familiar and
approachable to Americans. The dining experience itself is something of a show, with each
table situated around a chef working on a flat top grill, cooking with an elaborate circus-
like flair. This concept was made famous by the Benihana chain, which opened in 1964 in
New York City. Hibachi marked the first step towards American acceptance of Japanese
food.

With its unfamiliar ingredients and technique, sushi would not succeed like hibachi
and needed creativity from sushi chefs to entice Americans to eat more of it. The creation

32 Oda, Meredith. "Rebuilding Japantown: Japanese Americans in Transpacific San Francisco during the
Anthropologist 103, no. 1 (2001). P.83
12, 2008.
of the California Roll illustrates the challenges Japanese chefs faced when trying to cater sushi to American tastes and one way these chefs succeeded. Though credit for the California Roll’s invention is up for debate, historians and researchers believe that it was created either by Hidekazu Tojo, a sushi chef in Vancouver, or Ichiro Mashita and Teruo Imaizumi in Los Angeles. In both accounts of the roll’s origin, the chefs noted that western diners did not want to eat raw fish or seaweed. The solution was to create an inside-out roll hiding the seaweed behind the rice. Then instead of raw fish, the chefs filled the roll with cooked crab. Made with cooked crab, cucumber, and avocado in an inside-out roll, the California roll was invented. This roll acted as a gateway for North Americans into sushi and became a staple for sushi restaurants opening up around America.

While the California roll was an essential boost in elevating Japanese cuisine, it was the 80s that saw the most significant rise. In the 80s, two critical factors led to Japanese cuisine rising in popularity and respect in America’s restaurant landscape. First, as mentioned in the previous chapter, diners became more interested in food and more adventurous about trying new foreign cuisines. Secondly, and more specifically to Japanese cuisine, Japan had an incredible economic boom in the 80s, which elevated American interest in and appreciation of Japanese products. This boom saw massive importation of Japanese goods into the United States. Americans began driving Japanese cars and using Japanese technology, while American children were watching Japanese cartoons and playing Japanese video games. The hostility towards Japan and its culture eroded

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35 Kamp, David, P. 361
during the 80s due to this rise in high quality Japanese imports. With this growing interest in all things Japanese, sushi became an “it” food.

Sushi also fit in well with Yuppies’ desire for manifesting their status through restaurant dining since sushi was trendy and inherently expensive due to the price of fresh raw fish. In 1987, Nobu Matsuhisa opened his first sushi restaurant in Los Angeles. Nobu catered to Hollywood A-list celebrities, and he came to meet actor Robert De Niro. De Niro was amazed by the cuisine and Nobu. The two became business partners and began opening a chain of high-end, highly celebrated sushi restaurants and eventually hotels across the US.\textsuperscript{38} Nobu elevated sushi as a luxury food. Since the 80s, sushi restaurants have continued to open up across the US, and sushi is served at all price points today. Japanese food has also influenced the menus of American and even French restaurants. Gotham’s tuna tartare mentioned earlier in this chapter was inspired by Japanese Tuna Sashimi. Eric Ripert, the chef of the three Michelin star French restaurant Le Bernardin in New York City, has heavily relied on Japanese products and techniques in his restaurant.\textsuperscript{39} Famous dishes of his have included Japanese Wagyu beef or sashimi-style fish. In the past decade, the rise in popularity of another Japanese staple, ramen, has shown how Japanese food has continued to broaden the American palette.\textsuperscript{40} As the culinary golden age began in the 80s, the obsession with trying new dining experiences was able to quell some of the racial stereotypes associated with specific cuisines and allow for the acceptance and celebration of Japanese food in America. The presence of Japanese food gave diners more variety of

\textsuperscript{38} Kamp, David, 362  
food to try than ever before, and also inspired chef specializing in other cuisines to learn from Japanese chefs and create more dishes.

While the American restaurant industry expanded to include more cuisines, American restaurants established a new hospitality style in the 80s. A more inclusive approach to hospitality brought better restaurant dining to more Americans. In 1986, restaurateur Danny Meyer, who would become one of the most successful and well-known restaurateurs in America, opened his first restaurant, Union Square Café in NYC. Meyer’s mission was to create a restaurant where the diners felt at home.\(^1\) To Meyer, to create an environment where the diner felt truly comfortable meant removing the pretense which dominated hospitality at fine dining restaurants. Before Union Square Café, American fine dining hospitality followed a French approach to hospitality. This French style was often stuffy and elitist. At many of New York’s most celebrated French fine dining restaurants, critics had long commented on the arrogance of the wait staff, maître’d, and sommelier. Such snooty service could make customers feel unwelcome or uneducated depending on their class, wealth, and knowledge.\(^2\) This type of service was exclusively welcoming to only the most affluent and sophisticated Americans. Meyer instead emphasized understanding different types of diners and, in doing so, created a restaurant whose hospitality was more welcoming to more types of customers.

To achieve a more welcoming dining experience, Danny Meyer implemented a series of practices that broke from the day’s French-inspired hospitality practices. Union Square Café broke the mold with a new approach to location, staff, and procedure. One of


Meyer’s first decisions that surprised many was his choice of location. Unlike the Mid-Town and Upper East Side fine dining institutions in New York City, Meyer opened his restaurant in the relatively run-down Union Square neighborhood. Meyer chose the location as he wanted to open in an “emerging neighborhood” and an area with “modest rent.” This choice helped the restaurant reach a varied client base and offer diners great value. With a location secured, Meyer turned his attention to the type of staff he would hire. His priority was to engage employees with emotional intelligence. With this in mind, he created roles intended to minimize arrogance found in other restaurants. He hired employees who could read their diners well. The restaurant’s wine protocol illustrates how the staff curbed possibly intimidating interactions. Instead of a sommelier, the restaurant changed the title to the wine director. However, interaction with the wine director was rarely necessary for diners, since Meyers trained all waiters to answer any wine questions. The waiters themselves were given outfits that were far less serious than the suit and tie found at other fine dining restaurants. The waiters wore brightly colored striped button-downs, with no jacket or tie, in order to appear as approachable as possible. Another way Meyer hoped to establish a welcoming atmosphere in his restaurant was through bar dining. At the bar, Danny Meyer began serving solo diners, whom many restaurateurs refused to seat. Traditional restaurateurs saw solo diners as a money waste taking up two spots for the price of one. Meyer not only saw solo diners as an opportunity but also as the ultimate compliment to his restaurant. Solo diners seated at the bar not only would not take up tables

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41 Bruni, Frank.
43 Bruni, Frank.
44 Ibid
for two, but also could create a more communal atmosphere as conversations could occur between bartender and diner and between diners.\textsuperscript{47} The hope was to have an environment without intimidation, and with a familiar neighborhood vibe. In its first review of the restaurant, \textit{The New York Times} highlighted its “Low-key, comfortable dining rooms with a neighborhood feeling.” The paper commented that the service was “Young, enthusiastic and well informed about the food.” Restaurant critic Bryan Miller awarded the less than year-old restaurant two stars, which meant “very good”.\textsuperscript{48} The new approach was an immediate success.

Finally, it is worth noting that Union Square Café’s cuisine incorporated elements of American, Italian, and Japanese cuisine mentioned earlier in this chapter. The chefs sourced ingredients from the local Union Square Green Market, and the menu included pasta, risotto, and Japanese-inspired dishes.\textsuperscript{49} The hospitality style which Meyer instituted treated all guests generously regardless of class, wealth, or sophistication. Union Square Café featured a far more inclusive approach to restaurant dining than other fine dining restaurants of the time. This approach to hospitality would create a concept that would lead to Meyer’s success with 19 restaurants before Covid, and a process that many other chefs and restaurateur would replicate.\textsuperscript{50} A generation after Meyer opened Union Square Cafe, renowned chef and restaurateur David Chang also employed casual dining strategies at his restaurants. The new hospitality strategy altered the American restaurant landscape in a

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{47}Meyer, Danny. P.47 \\
\textsuperscript{49}Ibid \\
\end{flushright}
way that far more Americans could enjoy the great food produced in the culinary golden age in a casual and inclusive environment.

To summarize, the fine dining restaurants which began the culinary golden age posed a challenge to the French monopoly over fine dining. As fine dining expanded beyond French cuisine, American’s culinary golden age took shape. Before the 80s, fine dining almost entirely consisted of French cuisine, catering to a small affluent market. As a new era of materialism and status symbols dawned, there was a demand for more varieties of cuisine. The 80s saw the emergence of genuinely American cuisine. Though inspired by French techniques, chefs altered modern American cuisine to suit American regional and local ingredients. Alice Waters pioneered Modern American cuisine as she brought seasonality and local sourcing to the American restaurant scene. Waters’ restaurant Chez Panisse and the expansion of American culinary schools helped create a generation of American chefs. Then, the rise of globalization and the waning of some racial and xenophobic biases in the United States allowed foreign cuisines to rise in popularity and appreciation. With the break away from French cuisine also came the break away from French hospitality. Danny Meyer at Union Square created an American style of hospitality that focused on a welcoming yet more casual and approachable dining experience. Starting in the 80s, fine dining involved more chefs, cuisines and diners.

The chefs and restaurants which opened in the 80s rose to the occasion to meet the immense demand for new and delicious dining experiences. These chefs, restaurants, cooking styles, and hospitality styles established a culinary golden age and created a fertile environment for the golden age to continue through the next generation of cooks. With a
break from French domination, demand for new cuisine, chefs, and restaurateurs created a culinary golden age.

CHAPTER IV: AMERICA’S COOKBOOK CULTURE

During the culinary golden age, food transcended the dining table. For many Americans fortunate enough to be food secure, food is more than just sustenance. To the self-described foodies, it can offer a personality or identity. Whether they describe themselves as foodies or not, throughout the past 35 years of the golden age, a growing number of Americans have become food obsessed. The food-obsessed population which Alice Waters witnessed on her pilgrimage to France in the 1960s has been replicated today in the United States. This ever-expanding group of food-obsessed Americans has been shaped and catered to by various food media. In this way, America’s culinary golden age is unique when compared to other nations with strong culinary cultures. America’s culinary culture has hugely benefited from America’s ability to produce popular culture. During the golden age, food has become a part of popular culture through cookbooks, TV shows, and online and social media content. As culinary culture jumped to each platform it has reached more expansive and more niche markets, resulting in a more culinary inclined society. As the platforms changed, they also offered the opportunity for more voices in the culinary field. Food-related media is one of the most critical factors in driving America’s culinary golden age.

Beginning with cookbooks, Julia Child, of course, deserves recognition for her pioneering success. However, other authors began to challenge her status as one of the nation’s most widely read cookbook authors. Perhaps the most apparent successor to Julia Child was Marcella Hazan. Hazan, a native of Emilia-Romagna, Italy, moved to New York City in the 50s. As a newlywed, she taught herself to cook using her day job skills as a scientist to figure out how to cook the dishes of her homeland in America. Hazan would publish several Italian cookbooks and be widely considered one of the world's foremost
authorities on authentic Italian cuisine and techniques. Hazan’s first cookbook, *The Classic Italian Cookbook*, was published in 1973, leading to great success and popularity throughout the 70s, and particularly in the 80s.

Though critics likened Hazan to Julia Child, Child did not appreciate such comparisons. The contentious relationship between the two celebrated authors and their cuisines reflected America’s turn from French food to Italian food. The French monopoly on haute cuisine in American culinary circles began to slip by the 80s. Child, America’s cheerleader for French cuisine, struggled to understand how Italian cuisine gained so much popularity in this time. The “French Chef” was once caught lamenting, “I don’t get the whole thing…They put some herbs on things, put them in the oven, and take them out again.” What Child failed to understand, or perhaps more likely just looked down upon, was the simplicity of Italian food. Such simplicity is why Italian food became so popular in America. Not only did Americans begin to eat more types of Italian dishes at restaurants, but they also started cooking them too. The success of Hazan’s cookbooks was due to the market which Italian cuisine could reach. A Marcella Hazan recipe is, for the most part, far less time-consuming and far easier to cook than a Julia Child recipe. Not only did Hazan ride the wave of Italian food’s growing popularity, mentioned in the last chapter, she also captured a much broader market of cookbook consumers by writing fewer intimidating recipes. Though Hazan’s recipes were easier, they did not include ingredient hacks for American grocery stores like Julia Child had done. Hazan’s cooking philosophy revolved around sourcing the most authentic and fresh ingredients. The success of Hazan’s book


despite the absence of such hacks perhaps illustrates the greater availability in American grocery stores as tastes changed.

Because her work was more accessible, food journalist Mark Bittman viewed Hazan as a more important author to Americans than Julia Child.54 While Child’s *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* includes complex preparations such as patés and aspics, Hazan’s work had simple pasta dishes and stews. Hazan launched a trend in cookbooks written for American consumers, which contained recipes that were more applicable to their eating styles and were easier to execute without a culinary degree. Simplicity in recipes allowed Hazan to reach a greater percentage of America’s population, who were less skilled at cooking. Simplicity would allow for better market penetration and would be welcome both to consumers and publishers.

By the same token, Sheila Lutkins and Julee Rosso began publishing cookbooks based on simplicity and usability, marketed for a growing population segment. The two women, one a former executive and the other a caterer who together opened up a gourmet food store on Manhattan’s Upper West Side in 1977.55 Their store, and eventually their cookbooks, targeted women who were working longer hours but still were interested in good food and wanted to entertain.56 As has been covered in previous chapters, the working women’s population was a growing market and included the particularly food-obsessed Yuppie demographic. Lutkins’ and Rosso’s food store allowed for working New Yorkers to pick up a delicious, simple, and exciting meal to serve to family or guests at home. In 1982, when *The Silver Palate Cookbook* was released, their quick and straightforward

54 Ibid.
recipes reached a national audience. Their first cookbook sold more than two and a half million copies. With the release of other cookbooks, all with a similar concept, they would sell more than seven million books.\textsuperscript{57} Carole Lalli, a cookbook editor at Simon & Schuster, who produced one of Rosso’s cookbooks, noted that the duo’s work “liberated a lot of people by showing them how to make really good food from scratch without working all day.”\textsuperscript{58} Perhaps the most notable legacy from the two was Chicken Marbella, a baked-chicken dish that draws its character from prunes, olives, and capers. The recipe was featured in their first cookbook, \textit{The Silver Palate Cookbook}, and quickly became a staple of 80s cuisine. The authors designed the recipe around the time constraints of a working man or woman. One could prepare the meal the night before serving it. Then as guests arrived, they could place it in the oven. Almost no “à la minute” work was necessary. Chicken Marbella was the duo’s most famous dish and one of the decade’s most celebrated because it was a natural fit for Yuppies with long hours.\textsuperscript{59} Chicken Marbella would set a long-term trend that recipes ought to be time-sensitive and clean-up friendly. It was simple to cook but involved exciting and exotic ingredients, invoking an Italian agro-dolce flavor note which could delight any guest coming for dinner. Sheila Lutkins and Julee Rosso were two of the most successful cookbook authors of the eighties because their recipes offered the possibility of sophisticated dining at home to a growing number of Americans who otherwise wouldn’t have the time for it. Good food was now more straightforward and quicker.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
In the late eighties, the publication of cookbooks evolved to reflect the emergence of chefs and the rise of celebrity culture in the United States. Before the 80s, the title of chef held conferred little prestige in the broader American culture. Most Americans did not know the names of celebrated chefs the way so many do today. Individual restaurants were more commonly recognized than the chefs who produced the food. If the chefs did elicit high praise, they were almost always French. However, due to the growing interest in restaurants and food, paired with the American obsession for icons, a new type of star was born, celebrity chefs. The 80s were ripe for a new kind of star. Not only were Americans becoming obsessed with food in the 80s, but popular fixation on celebrities was on the rise as well. MTV’s launch in 1981 and its success highlighted consumer demand for celebrities. Music consumers were no longer content with just hearing a new album. They wanted to see their favorite artists in music videos and listen to their opinions in interviews. Americans also began to consume more content on celebrities’ personal lives with the rise of celebrity gossip magazines in this era. So as America’s culinary culture rose in popularity along with America’s celebrity culture, the two phenomena combined.

In tracing the history of celebrity chefs in America, Julia Child is again perhaps the best starting point. However, she was never a chef but instead a celebrity gourmand or home cook. During the 80s, the chefs who ran restaurants and slogged in hot kitchens finally began to gain recognition as celebrities. Restaurant chefs started to write cookbooks, traditionally a role filled by skilled home cooks. Wolfgang Puck of Los Angeles’ Spago was one chef of the 80s who successfully achieved celebrity chef status. Spago’s success

launched Wolfgang Puck as a brand. Puck was one of the first chefs in America to break out of the confines of the kitchen and reach national popularity. Puck’s climb to celebrity status occurred before chefs regularly appeared on television. Instead, Puck’s fame arose from the popularity of his restaurant and his cookbooks. The release of his second cookbook in 1986 prompted *The New York Times* to report, “For a prominent or aspiring chef today, the insignia is not merely a toque, but a glossy cookbook.”

Though the book was criticized by the Times for some rather challenging dishes; its success was due to the mysterious chef’s allure. Readers found the author’s handwritten notes, sketches, and diagrams particularly intriguing. Just as music fans in the 80s were no longer content with audio alone, a growing number of Americans wanted more from chefs than just their restaurants. Wolfgang Puck profited tremendously from this new opportunity. He has published a total of six cookbooks, opened over 101 restaurants, including a series of airport restaurants, created a brand of frozen pizzas, and sells a line of cookware, knives, coffee makers, and rice steamers.

Wolfgang Puck’s success illustrated that chefs could create a brand in their image, in which the American consumers would be very interested. It has now become common for restaurant chefs to write cookbooks (or have them ghost-written). Chef-written cookbooks were the first essential steps in elevating chefs’ status in American culture.

As the era of celebrity chefs progressed, food television programming brought culinary culture to far more Americans than ever before. Though Julia Child’s show, the *French Chef*, and others were launched in the 70s, these shows did not involve restaurant

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chefs and were somewhat limited in their scope. In 1993 The Food Network, a twenty-four-hour cable channel devoted entirely to food and cooking, was launched. The Food Network allowed chefs to reach mass culture. Before, cookbooks limited chefs to mostly upscale and educated American consumers. The Food Network opened the food culture to any American who had a TV. What fueled the channel’s success was America’s new breed of commercially minded, exuberant, and physical chefs. The American celebrity chefs of the 90s made great tv stars which Americans relate to more than the European personalities that came before.

What’s more, the cinematography of the shows helped the audience develop an interest in food. The celebrity chefs invited viewers into their kitchen sets, and spoke right into the camera, seeming to offer direct access to their true selves. Not only did Americans come to know the names of chefs, but viewers were on a first-name basis with the nation’s most prominent chefs. With the advent of the Food Network, chefs became bonafide celebrities, and food became mainstream entertainment.

The celebrity chef who best represented the Food Network and the channel’s success was Emeril Lagasse. Massachusetts-born and New Orleans-based, chef Emeril gave viewers an authentic, American persona to which they could relate. He was an actual chef, too, graduating from Johnston and Wales University with a culinary degree before running the historic Commander’s Palace in New Orleans. Lagasse marked a clear difference from the pompous European chefs, like Graham Kerr, who appeared in the limited cooking shows that existed before. Instead of the alien French or Trans-Atlantic accent, Americans tuned in to a more familiar working-class Massachusetts accent.

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64 Hyman, Gwen. P. 45
Furthermore, Lagasse did not make his content overly serious. The chef’s on-screen trademark was to yell “Bam!” as he seasoned a dish with salt or his own brand of seasoning. As a result of a more authentic and relatable host, more Americans began to fall in love with food as a form of entertainment.

Consequently, as food culture established itself as entertainment, it began to focus on gendered market segments. In this way, it is unsurprising that some food shows would start to resemble sport. Food competitions on The Food Network such as Iron Chef and Chopped began airing in the mid-noughties. These shows’ goals were to create more entertaining content and gain a larger male audience whose TV habits revolved around sports. On the one hand, female celebrity chefs Ina Garten and Giada De Laurentiis presented particularly feminine shows in a traditional style. On the other hand, shows headlined by Mario Batali and Guy Fieri were overtly masculine. With the hope of capturing larger audiences, The Food Network and other broadcasters designed their shows to be overly gendered to maximize their female viewers for female shows and male viewers for their male shows. In this way, The Food Network was able to reach a growing market of male gourmands. Ironically, food culture, a category which traditional gender roles associated with women, was extended to men through overtly masculine portrayals in cooking.

Another way television aided the culinary golden age is how it created discussion around food beyond culinary instruction. Television was remarkably efficient for reaching

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those wanting to become more sophisticated in their food knowledge. Food would be the basis for many travel shows launched in the late nineties and early noughties. In his books and many TV programs, Anthony Bourdain helped Americans understand more about food and the restaurant world. Bourdain, like Emeril Lagasse, could charm American audiences with his authenticity and his humble background. What is perhaps more interesting about Bourdain as compared to Lagasse is that Bourdain was never a successful chef. The shortcomings of his restaurant career may have helped Bourdain to project a more faithful representation of the restaurant industry than idealized cooking shows. As a cook, Bourdain struggled in mid-tier restaurants throughout his career and, like many in the industry, battled substance abuse. Bourdain was ill-suited to teach Americans to cook, but his deep understanding of the food industry, his writing skills, and his curiosity about all things food-related allowed him to expand America’s palate. Bourdain traveled to far corners of the globe and different regions of America to highlight the best food, the best chefs, and their stories. Not only did Bourdain’s shows inspire Americans to travel more, but they also helped create an environment in America where new cuisines could thrive. He would challenge the prejudices against specific cuisines in America, for example, reassuring his viewers that “Indian food won’t kill you.” In watching Bourdain’s shows, Americans began to learn of the cultural and historical significance of many dishes and understood the hardships of the restaurant industry. His programs acted as a marketing scheme for the culinary golden age, encouraging Americans to go even further in their relationship with cuisine.

69 Hyman, Gwen. P. 51
The television age for food in America was responsible for bringing food culture to more Americans than ever before. With such easy access, such targeted concepts, and entertaining content, the United States became a food-obsessed culture. Together with a strong cookbook publishing industry, America’s culinary progress compounded. As a result, Americans’ culinary interest has grown exponentially throughout the golden age. In recent years, America’s “foodie” population has grown even more because of the prominence of culinary content on the internet and social media.

As television reached larger audiences, the internet age garnered even larger audiences through a more significant number of sources. Platforms such as YouTube have allowed many more voices to be heard in the culinary world. Where it might have taken Julia Child a decade to publish her cookbook and gain her status, now an enthusiastic YouTuber can become a culinary sensation overnight. One of YouTube’s earliest cooking stars was John Mitezewich, known as Chef John, who launched Food Wishes in 2007 as a hobby.71 Today, Chef John posts two videos a week for his almost 4 million subscribers. YouTube culinary programs have also had remarkable success in reaching younger audiences. In this way, the innovation of culinary culture through the internet has ensured America’s culinary obsession continues to the next generations. A report from Google in 2014 observed a 280% growth in food channels on YouTube in one year alone. Within this increase, millennials were the most significant grouping, watching 30% more food content than other demographics.72 Seeing this emerging market, existing players in the culinary culture industry leveraged their brands to excel on internet platforms.

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*Bon Appetit* magazine was particularly successful in making a transition online. The image of Bon Appetit evolved from a magazine to an all-encompassing brand. At a time when many magazines are struggling, Bon Appetit has gained strength. The success of Bon Appetit’s transition owes a great deal to the presenters they picked for their shows (seen in figure 1).73 Almost all of the chefs were millennials appreciated by their audience for their charisma, attractive looks, and cooking skills. In many ways, the food is secondary. Bon Appetit’s subscribers grew particularly invested in the dynamics between different cooks working in the test kitchen, present in the comments below their YouTube videos.74 The show, with its humor and workplace drama, began to resemble NBC’s *The Office*. In this way, Bon Appetit captured an audience interested in a more traditional entertainment TV set up while still involving food. This amalgamation of food and entertainment illustrated how engrained food has become in American society.

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Social media apps promoting restaurants and cooking to users have also proved incredibly important to America’s culinary age. As food media content has moved to social media on smartphones, it has become omnipresent in American society. Instagram has become a hive for sharing the food we eat and cook. As of March 2021, there are 434 million posts on Instagram with the hashtag “#food.” Interestingly both social media and food can bring people together. It appears as though the restaurant industry and social media have increased through synergy. An example of this synergy is how Instagram has intensified restaurants’ ability to act as status symbols. Many Instagram users who post at restaurants now tag the restaurant in the location of their post. This feature allows diners to employ restaurants as a clearly labeled status symbol broadcast to all of their followers. One can only imagine what *American Psycho*’s Patrick Bateman would have done to post an Instagram with Dorsia tagged. This feature is even better for the restaurants as it helps

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75 Murray, Laura. *Bon Appetit.*
their name become more widely disseminated and discussed. The increase in users due to food content is vital in increasing ad revenue for social media platforms. Perhaps the most significant innovation from social media has facilitated communication between restaurants and diners and between diners. Instagram and Twitter were instrumental in starting the food truck craze in America. With chefs having such ease to reach their diners, they could post their location for the day and have hungry Twitter and Instagram users flock to them.76 Yelp and other online review sites act as a means for diners to communicate to restaurants and chefs what they did and did not like about their dining experiences. Yelp helps restaurants figure out how they can improve, what to keep doing, and informs other likely diners. Technologically savvy diners are a lot more likely to read yelp reviews than they are to pull out a Michelin guide if one even exists for their city.77 Yelp has offered the average American a voice in the judgment of restaurants. Social media and review platforms have engulfed the restaurant dining and cooking experience of today. As a result, Americans celebrate restaurant dining and at home cooking more than ever before.

The combination of cookbooks, food shows, and social media has fed and sustained American culinary success over the years. Instead of merely a fad, food culture has become a mainstay in American society. Throughout the culinary golden age, food mass media has been very successful in democratizing the culinary world in America. The wedding of cuisine to popular culture is responsible for creating a food-obsessed nation that could continue and expand the scope of the culinary golden age. While other countries might try and replicate America’s food media, the strength and scale of the popular culture industry

in the United States are, for the most part, out of reach for others to replicate. In other words, America’s culinary strength through popular media is a uniquely American trait to its culinary golden age. Without the popularity of food media, it is unlikely the golden age could have continued as long as it has. Today, even in a pandemic limiting culinary experiences, it appears as though food media has cemented America as a food-obsessed nation.
CONCLUSION
This past year, 2020, has offered a unique perspective to researching and discussing America’s culinary golden age. While restaurants have been closed and restaurant workers worldwide have lost their jobs, it is tempting to believe that the era discussed is distant. Throughout this year, Americans have been longing for a return to normalcy. For many, that normalcy most craved is going to a restaurant or bar with friends and loved ones. Throughout that longing for restaurants to return, Americans turned to bread baking, Zoom happy hours, and other more ambitious culinary endeavors at home as a substitute. It became clear how ingrained food culture has become in America. In this hiatus from restaurant dining, it is necessary to figure out how and why it has become so ingrained in our society. The bottom line of the thesis has been to trace why food matters in America.

In determining why food matters, various questions had to be answered. Firstly, is there truly a culinary golden age? This question, of course, also needed the paper to establish when the golden age started? It was necessary to prove that a culinary golden age existed in the first place. The first chapter examined the review systems used for the most elite chefs and restaurants in America. It was apparent that globally the US ranks highly amongst the most culinary-minded countries, such as France. The domestic ratings gave evidence that the golden age was limited to a few cities and that there were incredible chefs and restaurants across America. The review systems also indicated that America’s culinary status had existed for longer than the restaurants’ ten years of interrupted growth. In analyzing when specific rating systems came into being and when critics began recognizing America’s culinary potential, the mid-nineteen eighties appear to be the beginning. It was the eighties when foreign critics started to notice America. It
was the eighties when American food reviewing and other institutions became truly professional endeavors. Food became serious in America in the eighties. This seriousness marked the beginning of America’s culinary golden age.

With a start date in mind, it must be asked what caused it to start? To understand food in America is to understand the capital of food in America, New York City. While San Francisco and New Orleans are important food cities, New York’s cosmopolitan superiority is without question. And to understand the eighties in America is first to understand the seventies. So, how did the eighties differ from the seventies in New York? The city didn’t just change in its portrayal in movies. The town in the 70s was crime-ridden, bankrupt, and losing its population. The 80s, meanwhile, were characterized by young new workers, development, and opportunity. The disparity between the 70s and 80s was immense. Herein lies the causes for the culinary golden age.

Simply put, until the 80s, an environment for a culinary golden age did not exist. The city rebuilt itself with a municipal government ready to invest. Mayor Ed Koch’s administration marks a new direction in American politics through neoliberal policy. America’s financial sector became the behemoth we know today in New York City. And to meet the excitement in the city were Yuppies. Young, high-earning workers arrived in New York ready to spend their money. They created the opportunity for restaurants to thrive.

So, how did restaurants and chefs rise to the occasion? How could they live up to the demand and high expectations established in this era of status, greed, and materialism? Interestingly, restaurants’ response diverged from the traditional format of high-end fancy dining in America, French cuisine. First, the concept of Modern
American cuisine established itself. This paper highlighted Alice Water’s Chez Panisse. Though opened in the 70s, Chez Panisse was the beginning of what American cuisine would be, hyper-local and hyper-seasonal food. Chez Panisse was a breeding ground for the chefs of the 80s. After learning the newly created Modern American cuisine, these chefs would go on to dominate the 80s. The push away from French cuisine would continue as Italian cuisine and Japanese cuisine rose in popularity due to globalism and rejection of certain prejudices. The rejection of French domination of restaurants would even extend to hospitality practices. In 1986, Danny Meyer offered a new hospitality style far more catered to the average American. The chefs, restaurants, and restauranteurs created a culinary landscape that catered more types of food than before to more Americans than ever before.

In the eighties, political, economic, and demographic changes created an environment in which America’s restaurant industry could strive. However, what stopped America’s culinary golden age from being another eighties fad like leg warmers, mullets, and shoulder pads? Popular culture engulfed culinary culture. First, Americans began interacting more with cookbooks as more authors, especially chefs, began writing them. Cookbooks also began to incorporate easier and quicker recipes which were open to more busy Americans. Then in the nineties, The Food Network launched. Food on television democratized food culture. Previously, a primarily female, wealthy, and sophisticated market consumed culinary media. However, food media on tv was able to reach all Americans who had a TV. Targeted cooking shows to different genders highlighted this new reach of culinary culture. The Food Network and competitors’ popularity marked how Food culture had garnered mass popularity and has established itself in American
culture. Food culture’s rise to the internet age illustrated how America’s strong food culture reached the next generation. Millennials and “Zoomers” consume large amounts of food-related content on YouTube and Instagram. The internet and smartphone age has made food culture omnipresent in American society. Because of the popularity of food in media, America’s culinary culture has been able to last for more than thirty years and has become an essential element of American culture.

In tracing America’s culinary golden age over the past 35 years, we can also make predictions of America’s culinary landscape. For most of 2020 and the pandemic, the next chapter of America’s culinary history has appeared very bleak. Just how many restaurants we will lose to the pandemic cannot be answered for quite some time. Many restaurants will continue to struggle even after lockdown restrictions end. For the original generation of chefs who started the golden age in the 80s and have lost restaurants, the appetite and energy to restart might not be there once normalcy returns. Despite how detrimental the past year has been to the restaurant industry; this thesis has an optimistic forecast of how restaurants emerge from the pandemic. As has been mentioned many times throughout this thesis, Americans quickly sought ways to substitute their desire for restaurants and food culture. This year has only heightened America’s demand for dining experiences.

What’s more, the economy appears to be weathering the economic downturn far better than many would have initially expected. For restauranteurs, there are a lot of opportunities. With many rents in urban areas so low and Americans, many with high disposable incomes still intact and ready to eat out, there should be tremendous growth in the industry. Before the pandemic, it became increasingly difficult to open up a restaurant
as competition and rent had climbed high. While speaking with David Kamp, an author, and journalist who has covered America’s relation with food in his book, *The United States of Arugula*, he gave a hopeful analogy. Kamp compared the pandemic to a forest fire, cleaning out the restaurant industry so healthy regrowth could occur. Because America is now a nation of foodies, it is doubtful that the restaurant landscape does not recover. For this reason, the culinary golden age is not over. There is good reason to believe the golden age is still expanding.

There have been many jokes on social media comparing the current 2020s to the roaring 1920s. In the 1920s, society bounced back from World War I’s misery in a very free-spirited way. Perhaps we shall see yet another roaring 20s, ready to celebrate the end of the pandemic at the restaurants and bars we have missed most during the pandemic.