

Panel Proposal: 71st GAAS Annual Meeting: “Archiving America/American Archives,” June 12 – 14, 2025, University of Siegen

Panel Co-Organizers:

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Beyond the Pantry: American Food and Foodways as Archives of America

“The gateway to another culture often happens first through food”

-Padma Lakshmi, *Taste the Nation*, Season 1

Food practices are inherently communal acts. Sharing a meal fosters a sense of community among participants, while preparing a national dish can locate the cook within the context of their nation. In this sense, food and foodways are not merely only about nourishment or sustenance, but actively participate in cultural negotiations of self and other, region and nation. Food-centric texts can serve as “archives of taste” (Klein 3) that document and narrate national, local, regional, and deeply personal histories. At the same time, interactions with food—through its production, preparation, and consumption—can function as performances of cultural knowledge, engaging with the “archives of America.” Diana Taylor’s concept of the “repertoire”—embodied practices and/or knowledges such as ceremonies, rituals, or symbolic acts—offers a useful lens for understanding how meanings, memories, and histories are embodied in everyday practices, complementing the “archive,” which—according to Taylor—is accessed through texts and other recording media (19). If we then read food items as “scriptive things” (Bernstein 2009, 69), it allows us to “coax the archive into divulging the repertoire” (Bernstein 2011, 13), uncovering aspects of American food and foodways that participate in a performative archiving of America.

This panel seeks to examine how food acts, food writing, and culinary practices preserve and present historical and contemporary knowledge about American food and foodways. Conversely, this panel is also interested in how food itself serves as a prompt for memorial performances. In both of these approaches to food and the archive, a guiding interest is how knowledge regarding race, class, gender, for example, is always already simultaneously part of and embedded within any and every interaction with food—be it through text or concrete food items.

In examining American foodways as “archives of America,” this panel invites contributions that will address the following key questions and topics:

- How do these “edible archives” inform our understanding of U.S. American society today?
- What roles do media—both historical and contemporary—play in shaping our knowledge of food and foodways?
- How do food and foodways present an archive of material culture and social histories that are otherwise inaccessible?

- How are food and foodways used to imagine, narrate, and signify not only what was, but also what could be?
- How can food and foodways be considered not merely as subjects of study, but as archives through which American identities, memories, and knowledge are continuously recorded and performed?
- How can digital humanities approaches and methods open up new possibilities for food-centric archives and repertoires?

Confirmed Speaker:

Markus Diepold (University of Regensburg): “Eating Meaning: Food Culture, Indigenous Cosmologies, and Cultural Transfer in 18th-Century North America”

Works Cited

Bernstein, Robin. “Dances with Things. Material Culture and the Performance of Race.” *Social Text*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2009, pp. 67-94

Bernstein, Robin. *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*. NYU Press, 2011.

Klein, Lauren. *An Archive of Taste: Race and Eating in the Early United States*. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Duke UP, 2003.