

Glazed America: Anthropologist examines doughnut as symbol of consumer culture

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Few things say as much about our culture as the food we eat. A new book, *Glazed America: A History of the Doughnut* by Paul R. Mullins, Ph.D., an Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis anthropologist, explores the development of America's consumer culture through our relationship with the doughnut, beloved by many, a symbol of temptation and unhealthiness to others.

Sometime in prehistory someone dropped flour into oil and the ancestor of the doughnut was born. Since that time every culture has fried flour and many have added something sweet to the dough.

Dr. Mullins traces the arrival of the modern doughnut to American shores to the early 18th century when the Dutch pastry, olykoek, began to appear in New York and other cities. The first cookbook mentioning doughnuts was an 1803 English volume which included doughnuts in an appendix of American recipes. By the mid-19th century the doughnut looked and tasted like today's doughnut and was viewed as a thoroughly American food.

Like the automobile, automation came to the doughnut in the early 20th century. During the 1920's machines began to make doughnuts in bulk – producing tons and tons of fragrant doughnuts at a low cost to consumers. Unlike bagels, whose manufacture was closely controlled by unions, the mass produced doughnut spread rapidly across the United States, becoming the staple of both mom-and-pop establishments, regional outlets and national chain doughnut shops (Krispy Kreme

opened in 1937 and Dunkin Donuts in 1950).

Over the past quarter century doughnuts have survived onslaughts from competing foods, including the bagel and muffin, and from anti-carbohydrate diets. The most damaging attack has come from the health community concerned about the food's contribution to the nation's rising obesity rates. Yet doughnuts remain popular and doughnut chains are expanding.

Doughnuts have always elicited strong feelings among Americans, says Dr. Mullins. "Americans don't sit on the fence – they either love doughnuts or they don't. You just can't say the same thing about lettuce or tomatoes or salt, all of which also have interesting cultural symbolism."

Source: Indiana University

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