



Eating Easy: How Convenience Food Became a Part of the American Identity

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Introduction

Food is a *product of culture* which aids in shaping one's *identity*. While it might be hard to imagine what kind of flavor profile defines a country as vast and diverse as the United States, this becomes easier when considering that flavor may not be a contributing factor at all. Rather, modern day Americans often find their food choices revolving around *convenience*.

What is Convenience Food?

Three main components define convenience food as it is understood in this project:

- *Minimal preparation*
- *Ease of consumption*
- *Relative affordability*

A Working Class Innovation

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, convenience food was introduced to Americans as a *working class necessity*, usually in the form of immigrant-run *food carts* and *saloons*.

The 1930s saw a convenience food boom through *commercialization* with the widespread availability of *freezers* in the average American household.



The 1930s saw an influx of kosher-certified products aiming to corner the Jewish market, especially during Passover.

Image via Gastronomica

Forging an American Identity

In the United States, access to convenience food offers a sense of *integration* into society. For groups with certain *dietary habits or restrictions*, this requires being taken seriously as a *consumer base* in order to influence decisions regarding accommodations.

Key Example: Kosher Certification

Lack of knowledge about *ingredients and production methods* caused the exclusion of many Jewish consumers from convenience food options. Advocacy in the early 1910s led to the formation of the *kosher certification system*, which became widespread and set a precedent for other certification systems such as fair trade.

Modern Sustainability Concerns

Food Insecurity

While convenience foods pose health concerns for all consumers due to various additives, *low income individuals* needing to budget both money and time are particularly at risk, with most affordable options often *lacking nutritional balance*.

Environment

Packaging technology offers *sanitary, long-term storage methods*, but generates vast amounts of *waste*. Even modern day recyclable and compostable solutions often require hard-to-access *industrial processing* in order to break down the material.

Conclusion

Over the past several generations, convenience food has become cemented as a part of the American identity thanks to modern day *preservation technology* and *commercialization*. However, while convenience food embodies *human innovation* in many ways, this has led to the *exploitation* of both consumer and environmental health.