

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?

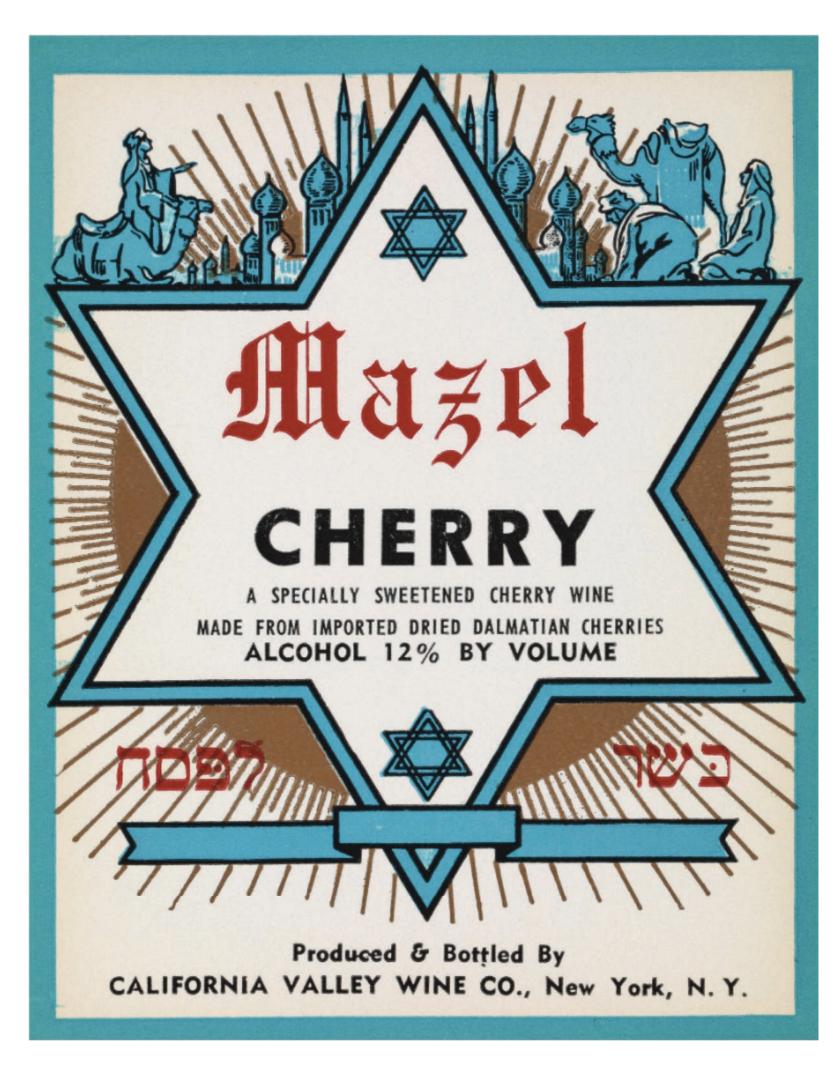
Three main components define convenience food as it is understood in this project:

- 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, longterm 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.