

Try the Frybread, It's to Die For!: Exploring Frybread's

Native American frybread is structurally simple and easily conjured up. As listed on a magnet gifted to me by my Grandmother, the ingredients for “Indian Fry Bread” include 2 cups of flour, 1

and social science of all the different tribes that make up the Indigenous population. This

mention the insidious role played by smoking and alcoholism in these categories as well. This
of
list of disparities sets apart Native Americans today not r .

necessity for a hunger-stricken community—with the few ingredients they were given. Because numerous tribes were subject to food disruption and commodity distributions, the recipe for frybread forcefully nestled itself into common Indigenous cuisine. Although its recipe originates from these dark and unfortunate circumstances, frybread has grown beloved among many tribal communities.

The admiration that frybread has acquired, however, is not shared by all. Criticisms of the

States, frybread is not a foreign concept. Frybread should not come across as strange to anyone who has ever eaten a waffle or a donut. In an even closer comparison, frybread is to powwows as funnel cake is to county fairs. A serving of each is roughly the same in terms of calories and their presence at their respective events is a large part of their appeal. Assuming that Kelly had been introduced to or even indulged in a plate of funnel cake—fried batter also “splattered” with “bargain brand” toppings—their notes on frybread seem more so dependent on predetermined misunderstandings than a substantial comprehension of Native culture. Kelly’s unjust remarks reveal the danger of misinterpreting Native customs. Failure to understand traditional practices can lead to those outside of tribal

Nostalgic—and Complicated.” What she refers to as “the most ubiquitous” Native food, is “at best...a complicated symbol of Indigenous resilience....At worst, it’s a relic of cultural genocide” (Nelson). Nelson further develops this distinction between symbolic meanings by exploring various Native academics and restaurateurs who have decided whether frybread is worthy of embracing or rejecting entirely. Some like Sherry Pocknett from the Wampanoag, Nephi Craig from the Diné, and Ben Jacobs from the Osage have all opted in (Nelson). Their renditions of frybread have a place on the menu alongside dishes containing traditional Indigenous ingredients such as bison, venison, and the infamous Three Sisters: corn, beans, and squash. Frybread, in these restaurants, represents the strength within Native communities and the ability to persevere through colonial intervention, which was disruptive, disempowering, and severely violent. On the other hand, activists like Suzan Shown Harjo from the Cheyenne assign only the feelings of immeasurable pain towards frybread (Nelson). Harjo does not discredit frybread’s ability to foster community and resiliency, but rather highlights the illness, oppression, and hostility that linger in frybread’s recipe and the bodies of those consuming it. Conversations about what frybread symbolizes to those in the Native community directly contrasts the discussions centered on frybread’s physically unhealthy contributions to Native culture. Given these interpretations of frybread’s presence within Indigenous spaces, it is clear that the conflict surrounding frybread is largely dependent on the value and meaning assigned to the food rather than entirely on Native health concerns.

It would be simple to evaluate frybread through the lens of either symbolism or the health risks the bread poses to the community. However, the various symbolic traits assigned to frybread and Native American health are not exactly at odds with each other. By understanding frybread and all the associations that follow, we can begin to evaluate frybread’s influence on

Indigenous people, given that its very existence is subject to a wide array of complications. With its strong ties to both the negative and positive sides of Indigenous Americans' history and present values, frybread reveals to us how difficult it can be to navigate certain aspects of Indigenous culture. Native practices and values, by means of government control, have historically been under threat of suppression and extinction through the laws and residential schools that were heavily imposed on previous generations of Indigenous people. For instance, both of my great grandfathers were sent off to attend the Carlisle Indian Boarding School—one of the most notorious residential schools in the late 1800's. The goal of the residential school was to eradicate the remaining Native peoples. These widespread institutions served to assimilate Indigenous people by separating them from any culturally significant practices and demanding complacency with white customs. An enormous number of Native people were brutally stripped of their language, traditional clothing, rituals, and their birth names. Traditional understanding and practices that date back before the birth of Christ, are lost forever with those that were forced and removed from their families and homes.

the fact that frybread is one of few traditions that the First Nations have had the ability to keep hold of despite the actions taken to absolutely obliterate Native customs. Although frybread is home to a sea of beliefs, opinions, health statistics, political tactics, and symbols, what it all boils down to is whether we Natives choose to

myself who are looking to reconnect with their tribes. Aside from my father and his side of the family, my close relatives do not live on or anywhere near our tribe's reservation, which means our connection to community practices is very limited. Living out in the city for the majority of our lives, we did not learn our Native language, and our cultural identity is a mere accumulation of all that we've managed to gather from our grandparents. In a deeply felt way, those

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