

FOOD AND SOCIAL STATUS IN A RURAL SOCIETY*

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In a particular rural-to-urban, sacred-secular change, one of the transitional features is the development of a status system based upon economic position, stimulated by the desire for security in an insecure economy. One of the important symbols of status, and of aspiration for higher status, is *food*. Its psychological and symbolic functions in the status-prestige structure of an Ohio riverbottoms culture are analyzed in detail.

IN THE literature covering the sociology of diet there is a growing tendency to consider food as an indicator of cultural values and social processes.¹ In all societies, whether folk or urban, attitudes toward food tend to become implicated in the social structure—food is both object and subject of the social structure. In smaller societies, more nearly approaching the folk type, food achieves a deeper integration within symbol and value-systems, since food-getting activities constitute the largest part of human endeavor. In a complex urban culture, food-getting tends to be a utilitarian enterprise by contrast, entering only superficially into the pattern of symbol. The smaller the society, therefore, the greater the chance that food can be used as an indicator of basic social values.

This paper will describe how in a contemporary American rural society, food is a

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¹ Cora du Bois ("Attitudes toward Food and Hunger in Alor," in *Language, Culture and Personality*, Sapir Memorial Volume, 1941), shows how food can be used as an indicator of cultural drives, "basic logics," and personality types.

prominent element of the prestige and status structure.

THE CULTURE

In the riverbottoms area (the "Bottoms"), there exists a series of socio-economic groupings:

River People. Shantyboat-dwellers, fishing for a living, who migrate up and down the river during the year, tying their craft to regular landings on farm property.

Riverbank People. Ex-fishermen who beach their boats and live on farm-land as permissive squatters, acting as laborers for tenant farmers; or, landless families occupying small shacks or tents, fishing and/or doing farm labor.

Sharecroppers. Families sub-sharing land from tenant farmers, or sharing land with landlords on a one-sixth or less basis. May also work as farm laborers, and may assist riverbank people in fishing.

WPA Workers. Often combining WPA work with sharecropping.

Tenant Farmers. Families sharing land with landlord on a one-fourth to three-fourths basis; economically the most stable and affluent group, but by midwestern farm standards, impoverished.

Among these five groupings of the Bottoms population, economic ties and common understandings are sufficiently strong to form a "society." Despite the high mobility of families in such an economically insecure environment, a nucleus of values, social forms, and solidarity persists.²

² A detailed analysis of this Bottoms culture can be found in the author's paper, "Some Problems of Status and Social Solidarity in a Riverbottoms Community," *Rural Sociology*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Sept., 1943. It is concluded in this paper that the Bottoms

The semi-nomadic river people have the fewest relations both with one another and with the surrounding Bottoms groups. Riverbank people tend to group together and support one another in times of misfortune and economic pressure. They very frequently exchange food. Sharecroppers and WPA workers who also sharecrop tend to attach themselves to individual tenant farmers, rather than to each other. This aggregate of sharecroppers and tenants forms a mutual-aid grouping. Tenant farmers have their own loosely-organized clique, beyond their participation in mutual-aid.

The mutual-aid system, which engages the labor and machinery of nearly all the tenants in the Bottoms (sharecroppers furnishing only labor), enables the individual tenant to operate his farm economically. It operates as an organized reciprocal exchange of labor and equipment.

None of the usual criteria (with the exception of a school) for a true "community" organization were found. The Bottoms lacked a church, a trading center, kin ties among the inhabitants, communal assemblages, and any developed network of inter-familial visiting. The only fairly complex form of social interaction was the mutual-aid system, and in a lesser degree, the symbiotic organization of the riverbank people.

Within this limited community organization, individuals in the five socio-economic groupings were distributed in a ranked status system based upon economic pursuit, personality, familial origin, and other criteria. Tenant farmers were the top of this system, the sharecropper families intermediate, and the riverbank people on the bottom. River people had a special pariah rank, apart from the groups on land.

Since food-getting, through gardening, livestock-raising, and the necessary cash purchases, constituted a major activity and matter for concern, it was hypothesized that the society would display attitudes toward food

is a case of transition between folk and urban ideal types—displaying homogeneity in some contexts, heterogeneity—caused by the impact of alternative values—in others. The picture of loose community organization combined with social solidarity and a relatively complex status system is an expression of this transitional type.

similar to those found in certain "primitive" cultures, in accordance with the generalization made in the first paragraph of this paper. Moreover, since status was one of the most important pre-occupations of the people, it was reasoned that food should be one of the symbolic values around which the status-behavior was organized.

However, inasmuch as the Bottoms was not a true "folk" culture, but showed certain urban features, such as intense individualistic striving and great secularization, it further followed that food would lack much of the organized ritualistic involvement found in primitive cultures.

To test these hypotheses, interviews and testing devices similar to the paired-comparison technique were conducted with all informants in the various socio-economic levels. The details of these techniques cannot be given here for lack of space.

PRELIMINARY STUDY

Early in the investigation it was thought that evidence for status symbolism of food might lie in the body of beliefs known as "food folklore": good and bad foods, "hot" and "cold" foods, foods causing or curing illness, and other usual categories. The results of this study showed little homogeneity and a marked shallowness of belief upon such matters. Inconsistency and indifference toward the few "beliefs" that were found demonstrated that status symbolism certainly did not lie in this sphere.

As this fact became evident, it was believed that an investigation of food preferences in general might give some indication of the special values under search. Schedules and interview tests were accordingly shifted to this context. The problem, as formulated for this stage of the study, was: Do people actually "like" what they *eat*, or what they *desire*, or both?

The study of food preferences had two results: First, a large number of foods which had been previously suspected of having prestige value³ were found to be liked or dis-

³The ascertainment of prestige in the case of individual foods was made gradually throughout all phases of the study, by close observation of informant-reactions in all contexts. The food-prefer-

liked with fervor, but it was difficult to secure statements upon how much was eaten. A second result was the very evident low emotional involvement, or affect, of all foods. There was a conspicuous lack of interest in food as something-to-eat, but a developed interest in food as a symbol of prestige.

Prestige foods were plainly marked in the preference lists not only by appearing in high frequency, but also by their apparently contradictory appearance in both "liked" and "disliked" lists for the same individuals. Some of these foods were: Fish, chili, cocoa, green peas, iced tea, eggs, and bologna. For example, chili was a new food introduced in cans about 10 years ago, and it represented a relatively high urban-prestige article. Everyone had tried it—those who declared they did not like it noticeably exaggerated their dislike, as if to apologize for its lack in their diet. Green peas seemed to be a sensitive status indicator; they marked the high urban-valued farmer, whereas ordinary crowder peas were a common, everyday food. Fish showed the most contradictory responses, and also the most fervent; it was therefore suspected of having important value.

It was concluded that Bottoms people were governed in their tastes by standards based upon food-prestige of various sorts. Food-preferences were not natural, and a fortuitous result of taste alone, but were controlled by individual response to cultural values.

FOOD PRESTIGES

At this point those foods with response patterns that indicated their high, low, or contradictory value were subjected to new tests, and intensive interviewing with all informants was carried out in an effort to secure the total context of cultural situations in which these values might be operative. The results of this study will be presented by giving a rough, non-analytic classification of prestige foods, and then analyzing and refining features of this classification.

Foods with High Prestige through Attachment

ence tests tended to clinch or validate the judgments on prestige, and to expand the interpretation.

to Status System. In general, these were all foods eaten by tenant farmers, including milk and eggs. The ability to purchase store foods, as well as the foods themselves, was also admired by persons subordinate to the tenant level. One shantyboat family scorned this tenant diet, holding up their different "river food" as the ideal—the exception that proves the rule.

Some foods attached to the status system had in certain contexts a low prestige value. Fish is such a food. It will be more carefully discussed later.

Foods with High Prestige through Attachment to Urban Positive Values. These appeared principally in the tendency for the non-tenant families to desire such exotics and luxuries as fresh fruit, candy, hamburgers, oysters, etc. A few of the urban-oriented tenants desired to "eat like the town folks," also, and consequently tended to prepare foods by urban recipes.

Foods with Low Prestige acquired through Symbolizing In-Group vs. Out-Group Attitudes. "Nigger food" (muskrats, yellow corn bread, wild game, and greens). German foods:⁴ Blood pudding, excessive use of white bread. Urban foods in general: "City people are too stingy" with such farm foods as grease gravy, for example. This latter low prestige urban value was separate and conceptually unconnected with the high prestige value surrounding urban exotics and luxury foods.

Foods with High Prestige Acquired through Attachment to Ceremonial Functions. These were foods that were traditionally regarded as reserved for picnics, family gatherings, holidays, and church suppers. Few of these events occurred in the Bottoms, but they were in the cultural tradition.

Table 1 summarizes informants' responses to prestige foods.

It was found that any one food may have prestige connotations within several or even all of these categories. Thus fresh milk (high prestige) functioned as a farming-status indicator, as a symbol of healthy urban life, or conversely, as a symbol of healthy rural life, depending upon the status rank of the family or individual. Also, salmon salad functioned in a ceremonial-prestige context (as a special church-supper dish), or as a symbol of identification with urban luxury standards. A generalization: Any given food can be used to express the values adherent to any social re-

⁴ Referring to a German farming group in the Hills region north of the Bottoms.

lation or attitudinal complex. The negative or positive aspect of these relations and/or attitudes will determine the high or low prestige of the food.⁵

In addition to positive and negative prestiges, some foods brought forth consistent ambivalent responses from informants.⁶ It was found that ambivalent prestiges occurred when a particular food (1) becomes involved in features of the social organization con-

Several foods received ambivalent reactions. The most important of these was fish, and an analysis of its meaning follows:

Data secured from older informants attest to the frequent use of fish as a food in the past:

All the people et fish in them days, a lot of it. They don't eat much now. . . . I don't know why, but I guess fishin' is too nasty a job for 'em now. Fisherman work as hard as any farmer.

TABLE 1. MODES OF INFORMANT-REACTIONS TO PRESTIGE FOODS

Type of Prestige	Tenants	Sharecropper-WPA-Farm Laborers	Riverbank Squatters-Fishermen-Farm Laborers
<i>Positive</i>	Little emotional response, but sometimes voluble if they have conspicuous amount of the food.	Declarative; tend to say they have the food, even if do not, or say they wish they had it.	Wistful desire to have the food; admiration of "farm grub."
<i>Negative</i>	Indifference, or casual disgust.	Explicit denial of use, or avoidance of subject, especially if they are forced to eat food because of economic pressure. Disgust strenuously expressed. Ambivalences.	Usually denial, but sometimes unwilling admission of use. Ambivalences.
In-Group vs. Out-Group—Negro, German, urban vs. "farm diet."	Mention only if subject introduced. Disgust, or humorous response, or expression of pride in own diet.	Same as tenants.	Generally same, although these people rarely know region well enough to have precisely-formulated opinions.

nected with highly-sanctioned values, or (2) in areas where a conflict between an older behavior-pattern or attitude and a newer alternative (usually urban) value has occurred.⁷

⁵ In the earlier stages of the study, prestige foods were designated as "high" or "low." Later, when the subtle and involved character of the situation was revealed, the terms positive and negative were substituted. Thus, once a *high* prestige food can be related to a specific social attitude or form, it can be called *positive* prestige.

⁶ While in the food preference stage of the study, ambivalent prestige reactions were denoted "contradictory," as has been mentioned. After refinement and study of the prestige contexts, these contradictory foods, both liked and disliked by the same families and individuals in different contexts, were seen to show ambivalent prestige—both positive and negative—in different contexts and status positions.

⁷ A theoretical statement might be offered: The degree of ambivalence—that is, the tendency to vary, in individual cases, between positive and negative prestige—is a measure of the degree and dura-

tion of the conflict. Some hypotheses from this statement: The more prominent the ambivalence, the more intense the conflict of social forms, symbols, and alternative values. The more prominent the ambivalence, the longer the duration of the conflict. The author offers these hypotheses for further test; they will not be dwelt upon in this paper.

but they ain't as good. Fishermen was always called thieves in them days. . . . There used to be a sayin' 'a fisherman had a hook fer anythin' he could catch.' When a fisherman would tie up at yer place, he would give you all the fish you could eat. (Ike Williams, age 83.)

The above and other statements suggest that fishermen and river people in general fell under a severe social taboo, perhaps even more severe than today. However, the data show that fish as an article of diet did not share in this negative social evaluation, and was freely eaten by the agricultural population.

At the present time, and apparently back at least 15 years, fish as a food has fallen

into the sphere of this low social evaluation, and is now regarded as low-prestige, hardly fit for regular use. Furthermore, the intensity of dislike is variable, ranging from complete negativism, through ambivalence, to indifference. No positive reactions, save one of a very special sort, to be discussed later, could be found.

A careful study of the materials evoked the following generalization: The symbolic value of fish varies according to: (1) The degree and type of conflict over negative evaluation with rational desire or need, which in turn really varies in relation to (2) the particular status position of the individual expressing the given reaction. An analysis of the ramifications of *fish* within status rankings, illustrating these principles, follows:

To the fisherman, living on the riverbank or in a shantyboat, but making all or most of his living from the river, fish represents a means to a living—a cash crop—and as such is not valued as food.

Why, we fishermen don't eat much fish. We eat less than most people. We got to sell all we can git!

Closer observation of this economic explanation reveals that it is used in most cases as a rationalization of the fisherman's consciousness of the negative prestige value of fish. This type of rationalization is particularly acute if the fisherman is economically linked to a tenant farmer, as a farm laborer. In this case he experiences a conflict between the desire to identify with the farmer group, which requires a rejection of fish, and the proximity of fish as an easy source of food to help eke out his meager diet.

Another type of ambivalence, one which features an apparent exception to the rule of general negative prestige for fish, was found in a family who operated a fishing camp and also fished for a living. They had rationalized fish to a positive level, because of their intense admiration for the farmers' "human way of livin'." Farmers were their principal customers, therefore the head of the family played up fish and fishing as his unique specialty in life—a specialty which he set against farming as of equal importance and skill, but which at the same time he

subconsciously recognized as lower in the local scale. Of fish as a food, he stated,

Now fish should be et once a week. It's good fer everybody. It ain't considered meat at all—it's a real food.

In a later interview, however, he associated fish with "them lower type of river people," thus illustrating his fundamental ambivalence brought about through his attempt to rationalize a low status occupation into a specialty and consequently into a higher status. In his context of unique economic pursuit, as contrasted to farming, fish had positive prestige. In the context of the scorned river people, with whom this man desired not be identified, fish had negative prestige.

The shantyboat-dwellers, who have large investments in fishing equipment and make their entire living from fishing, also say they cannot eat fish because of the necessity for selling it. Since they must sell all the fish they can catch in order to insure a cash supply, the economic reason for not eating fish is in their case a genuine one. In addition, they are exterior to the Bottoms status system, and do not react to it with rationalizations as do the riverbank people.

To the farm laborer or sharecropper striving toward the tenant farmer level, and in many cases helping a riverbank person in his fishing, fish represents a low-class food, eaten only by "them river rats," and not fit for human consumption. Occasionally these people will admit they eat fish, but hasten to add, "not very often." Actually fish is often a necessary part of their diet, but they will conceal this fact from the interviewer.

On the tenant level such decided negative reactions are not found. Fish is not eaten frequently "because the women don't like to cook it," or,

We eat fish once in a while. The kids all love it. Harry and I like it once in a while, too. We only had it once last year. (Mary Murray, tenant housewife.)

Thus the ambivalence on the tenant level is expressed differently than among fishermen and riverbank people. Fish is dismissed rather carelessly as unimportant, and the investigator receives the impression that it is a rather vulgar food not eaten by "farm folks"

and hardly worth discussing. The negative prestige of food in this type of ambivalence is not contrasted with positive prestige, but rather with an attitude of indifference.

Non-Tenant	Attitude varies between
Ambivalence . . .	Positive and Negative Prestige
Tenant	Attitude varies between
Ambivalence .	Positive Prestige and Indifference

This ideal picture may be distorted by the fact that some riverbank people, especially those depending upon a tenant farmer for support, will respond to questions about fish in a manner identical to tenants. As one riverbank woman declared,

They claim fish is a healthy thing. We eat it once in a while, for a change. Not very much. I love fish.

The ambivalence and indifference is clear in this statement, and it was almost identical with reactions secured from the Murray family, with whom this riverbank family was in economic symbiosis. Since this woman visited Mary Murray constantly, it is likely she assimilated the tenant attitude, and therefore used this attitude as a demonstration of her identification with tenant values. This riverbank woman showed her desire to be like the tenants by copying tenant attitudes; other riverbank people and sharecroppers, who are not as close to a tenant farmer, and who feel their frustrated position very keenly, will show their desire to identify with the tenants by expressing exaggerated revulsion toward fish.

It must be emphasized that the processes at work in the status system are wholly dynamic, and although status-reactions are relatively fixed, transition and apparent contradictions may occur. Direct imitation of tenant attitudes by riverbank people can distort the logical symmetry of the picture. With sharecroppers, however, we are dealing with a group economically and socially intermediate between tenant and lower levels. Sharecroppers are desperately trying to rise to a tenancy status, and feel the need to strongly identify with all phases of the tenant level. This means that their reaction to fish will be exaggerated and intensified, rather than simply imitative of the tenant attitude.

In general, fish is eaten more frequently in the lower levels than informants will admit, according to constant check on actual meals. Apparently tenants do eat it as rarely as they say, however. Since the tenants have an abundance of foods that can be substituted for fish, they feel no economic or dietetic compulsion to eat it. Therefore they have no need to rationalize or falsify their statements on quantity.

In order to portray further the relation of food prestiges to the status system, we will consider in addition to specific foods like fish, the *total response pattern* to a number of foods in certain type-families. This pattern may be defined as the general impression of prestige and status reactions derived from a study, in each family, of all the foods they feel have prestige of the various sorts. This total response pattern, emerging from a series of tests and interviews, helped determine the value assigned to any given food. Extensive analysis of interview material was necessary before precise conclusions could be drawn. The pattern itself was useful in sharpening the assignment of status to a given family or individual.

Only a few of the prestige foods for each family are shown in Table 2. The list covers only two families in non-tenant positions, but the tenant level lists bring out the contrast with non-tenants. Tenant lists also show differences between farm-oriented and urban-oriented tenants.

The Garrell family "squat" on the riverbank making a living by fishing and farm labor. The Sayers are sharecroppers, but pick up extra money by fishing "partners" with the Garrells. Of this fact Shang Sayers is not proud, and tries to conceal it. Ginny Garrell resents her low status, and before marriage was accustomed to a small town store-bought diet. She wishes to return to the urban life. Jim Garrell has a Kentucky hillbilly background and aspires to a "farm"—meaning a sharecropping arrangement. The Sayers are desperately trying to rise to a tenant status.

The prestige lists (Table 2) bear out these facts. The Garrell positive list reflects Mrs. Garrell's desire to have the urban exotics she has been deprived of since marriage. She wants urban foods, whereas her husband wants the typical farm foods. The Sayers' positive list re-

flects desires for urban exotics, brought about by severe economic deprivation, but it also shows the desire to identify with the farm diet, in such items as grease for cooking, homemade lard, chickens, and so on. The ambivalent-to-negative attitudes toward fish illustrate the analysis made earlier.

Comparison of these lists with tenant lists is instructive in the differences in food-prestige caused by status aspiration and economic deprivation. Thus the sharecropper *desires* chickens and fresh milk, because they have

The penetration of the tenant diet by urban foods was impressive. Studies of interview material and weekly purchase-slips showed such items as peanut butter, pork and beans, canned peaches, canned corn and tomatoes, canned salmon, canned cocoanut, cookies, mustard, crackers, and dry cereals. These articles were found in varying degrees of integration and prestige value. Even the most important prestige items, however, had relatively less prestige for tenants than for non-tenants. To the sharecropper or river-

TABLE 2. SOME RIVERBANK AND SHARECROPPER PRESTIGE FOODS

Positive		Ambivalent		Negative	
Garrell	Sayers	Garrell	Sayers	Garrell	Sayers
Strawberries and rare fruits	Fresh fruit	Mrs. G.: Fish	Fish	Mr. G.: Fish	
Desire for fresh milk	Roast beef			Canned milk	
Chicken and duck	Chicken and duck				
Chicken grease	Meat grease for cooking				
Hamburger and beef	Oysters				
25-cent bacon	25-cent bacon				
Iced tea	Cakes				
Mrs. G.: Very fancy urban foods	"Good old farm foods"			Mrs. G.: "Farm foods"	"City foods"
Store-bought lard	Home-made lard				

farm-diet prestige; fresh milk has prestige for tenants because they are proud to have it, and because (in one case) "city children" always have fresh milk. The sharecropper and the riverbank family alike desire some urban exotics (although more marked in the latter, of course), since they both have general feelings of deprivation. Interview material indicates that at least in the Sayers' case there was a tendency to associate urban exotics with the farm diet because both urbanisms and farm food had high prestige for them. This finds an echo in the marked reaction of satisfied pride by most tenants in their *ability* (i.e., cash supply) to buy things like fresh fruit, cookies, and canned goods.

bank person, these articles were financially out of reach in addition to being identified with the tenant level, and therefore they represented higher value.

An interesting situation appears here. Tenants are actually closer to the urban food goals of some of the riverbank people than they are to the stricter "farm food" aspirations of the sharecroppers. This is the case because the tenants have the cash to buy these urban foods. The sharecroppers, in their eagerness to show identification with tenants, tend to overlook the urbanisms in the tenant diet, and yearn for the "farm foods." These latter foods are more within their reach, since they have small gardens and some livestock.

One simple device utilized to test the farm-urban relationship was the question, "What do you consider to be an ideal meal?" In each case the query gave the informant an opportunity to express his deprivation-feelings and aspirations—to show the relative degrees of his yearning for "farm grub" and urban delicacies. "Ideal" in the non-tenant families was generally defined as the typical tenant diet, plus a few urbanisms, like oysters, canned salmon, celery, and hamburger.

Although it is possible to give generalized lists of prestige foods for each of the status positions, it should be noted that within each position the individual will tend to use food to solve his own particular status problem. One riverbank fisherman used food to symbolize his extreme poverty; a shanty-boat fisherman used fish to symbolize his unique status as a member of a vanishing group—the river nomads; a sharecropper used food as a symbol of his desire to get a "piece of land" and raise a big garden—and so on.

In some of the more extreme cases, prestige-reactions completely dominated the food-preferences and tastes of an individual. He liked what he thought he *ought* to like. By and large, however, Bottoms-dwellers will consider foods to have prestige if they symbolize: (1) Desire for upward social mobility, toward the tenant level, and (2) Foods symbolizing the in-group as vs. the out-group. Urban-valued foods occupy places within both these major categories, and display many shadings of attitudes within each. Ceremonially-valued foods occupy a position largely within the first category, since it is only the tenants that can participate in the rare communal gatherings. Non-tenants place these ceremonial dishes in the emulated tenant context. The above paragraph can be regarded as an analytic breakdown of the classification given at the beginning of this discussion of prestige foods.

The preceding analysis has concentrated upon foods with social valuation of three types: positive, negative, and ambivalent. It was found that the reasons for such evaluations lie in the desires and aspirations of individuals, according to their position in the local rank order.

A fourth category of food-evaluation, a *neutral* area, was found. This consisted of foods with no prestige of any sort; they also lacked any emotional meaning as good-to-eat, and were taken for granted as common articles of diet. Significantly, however, these foods varied by status position—neutral foods for one rank were prestige foods for another.

One area where neutral values were strongest was in the WPA cold-lunch pattern, which was of relatively recent introduction in the region. A series of new foods, such as store-bought cookies, Vienna sausage, bologna, pork and beans, and soft drinks had become popular since they were easy to purchase and carry in lunch boxes. These foods were regarded with colorless, neutral attitudes. They were not even considered as integral parts of the diet, and were rarely mentioned unless the investigator specifically requested cold-lunch menus. Since WPA was a low-status occupation, one might expect the cold lunch to acquire negative prestige. This did not seem to be the case, however, and may have been a result of the recent introduction of WPA. It might also have been the function of the colorless, beaten attitude of most WPAers—they seemed to have reached a point of insensitiveness in regard to many values.

It will be noted that many of these neutral WPA lunch foods represent high-prestige urbanisms to the riverbank people.

Another neutral food area was found in the large, relatively stable tenant families, where the basic farm diet plus urbanisms represented an achieved goal. Food in general was not subject to prestige valuation in these families, and the neutral category was correspondingly larger.

It might be concluded that the more insecure or status-conscious a family or individual is, the smaller will be the neutrally-valued food area. It should be emphasized that neutral values are not necessarily confined to the top, or tenant level, but appear also in special cases in the lower groups.

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that diet is involved in Bottoms social organization, and more particularly, in that feature of it concerned with so-

cial mobility. This should function as an instrument for dietary change in the lower status positions, inasmuch as they desire foods occurring in the upper levels. Actually the rate of change is very slow, and is checked by the basic economic deprivation. Since it is virtually impossible for a non-tenant to secure a tenancy, these people lack the land necessary for gardens and farming. Without a farm, they lack the money for store foods and livestock.

Secondly, food is more important as a symbol than as nutriment—Bottoms people value food for social reasons more than for dietary reasons. Dietary change in the Bottoms is also inhibited by a series of powerful traditionalizing factors: lack of interest in recipes and menus, little inventiveness on dishes and recipes, few contacts between families, and particularly, between women, and in general, no interchange of food ideas. It is traditional for a riverbank person to use food as a symbol of his desire to rise in the local rank order, but this does not mean that he will ever so rise. Sharecroppers do make a partially-successful effort to match their diet to the tenant type, because they usually have a small piece of land for a garden. The tremendous labor required of a 'cropper, however, keeps him away from home and garden, and consequently the garden is rarely a complete success. Moreover, the tenant gardens are located on the finest soil in the area; non-tenant gardens on the sun-baked back fields or sandy riverbank.

The symbolic interest in food operates largely as a mode for relieving tension, since it allows non-tenants to talk about the desire for change without actually striving to change the diet. Most of the high-prestige foods are beyond the means of the non-tenants, since they have neither the cash for store foods nor the land and time for a large garden. Secondly, although they talk about having a large garden, and envy the tenant gardens, non-tenants will frequently fail to plant even a small garden, though they may have the time and land.⁸ Fundamentally they are not interested in food as nutriment, and are content to get along

on a very limited diet, even though they will "desire" gardens in a symbolic way. Factors leading toward modification are thus held in balance by factors of traditionalization.⁹

Despite the fact that dietary change through food prestiges is counteracted by inner cultural conditions, prestiges do provide an opening wedge for changes brought from the outside. The growing prestige of urbanisms, brought about by the urban penetration of the tenant diet, furnishes an opportunity for introducing other urban foods of high vitamin content. Farm advisors and county nutritional experts could manipulate their appeal in such a manner as to "sell" dietary innovations as farm-prestige foods to the non-tenant families. From a wider viewpoint, we might generalize that in any rural community where there is conspicuous economic inequality, caused by the deprivation of one or more groups of land, food will tend to acquire prestige values which can be used for the manipulation of diet.

In accordance with the original theoretical statements in this paper, it can be seen that Bottoms diet lacks the highly ramified character of food in the ritual and social organizations of primitive societies. At the same time, however, Bottoms food has a symbolic value within the social organization that transcends the relatively superficial, secularized value of food in the urban milieu. The Bottoms would seem to stand somewhere between the two extremes—folk and urban—in this matter. We might therefore call it a transitional folk-urban culture, at least from the dietary standpoint. In these smaller groups, food is one of the most important symbolic expressions of social forms; it can be utilized most fruitfully in the Bottoms and we venture to predict, in other rural societies with Bottoms-type organization, as an indicator of basic social structure.

⁹The tendency toward equilibrium in these processes is the key to an understanding of this changing culture. In all phases of the culture, traditional folk-type (sacred) elements either resist or accommodate to the newer (secular) alternatives. The process of "urbanization" can be viewed as the adjustment and rationalization of folk-type values and social forms to economic change and materialistic values. (Cf. H. Passin & J. W. Bennett, "Changing Agricultural Magic in Southern Illinois," *Social Forces*, forthcoming).

⁸Generally speaking, this does not include the sharecroppers, who do plant gardens.

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