

Script

Title: Life through the Lens: Food, People, and Photography

Guest: Professor Dino Chiecchi

Hostess: Laura Mae Heredia

Music (keep playing as background when introduction begins)

Hi, I'm your guest, Professor Dino Chiecchi, for El Paso Food Voices. Today, I'll be sharing with you how food is used in photography.

(Music as transition)

Welcome, I'm your host, Laura Mae Heredia, for today's episode. El Paso Food Voices explores El Paso, Texas' food landscape by gathering food-based stories from El Paso's residents. EPFV offers a taste of a living history that speaks of ethnic and racial cross-cultural connections. If we are what we eat, we are committed to highlighting the food-base culture and history of this city. In this spirit, let's begin our conversation on how photographers choose to include or exclude food in photography with our guest, Professor Dino Chiecchi.

(Music as transition)

Topic #1: Autobiographical Information

What can you tell me about yourself and your experiences?

What is your relationship to El Paso?

What led you to become a journalist and now a journalism professor?

- Reflecting on your history of taking photographs, in particular those featuring El Paso/ Ciudad Juárez, how often did you or do you incorporate the idea of food or food itself? How often do you intentionally exclude food to make a point about the absence of food in people's lives?

- When I think about the absence of food in people's lives, four particular topics come to mind: food distribution, poverty, war, and famine. One could imagine that photographers in third-world countries might have more opportunities to capture images that illustrate these issues. How might a photographer go about illustrating the reality of these circumstances in a first-world context?

Topic #2: Food in Photography: Food Distribution

As everyday consumers, we fail to acknowledge food distribution in relation to its process(es), which includes the growers, pickers and transporters. In a photograph taken from the Aultman collections at the El Paso Public Library, Otis A. Aultman captures a farmworker, most likely a bracero, picking a crop from a farm in El Paso, Texas. This image brings to mind the topic of food distribution.



- What does this image seem to suggest to you about food distribution?
- What is significant about showing food in its raw form, i.e. in the fields or its natural environment, as opposed to a supermarket?

- As a photographer, how would you compose an image that captures the different relationship(s) a farmworker might have towards food versus a consumer, who merely goes to the grocery store?

Topic #3: Food in Photography: Poverty

Poverty is one of the most common social issues people face on a daily basis, both in first-world and third-world countries. In a photo featured in *Images in America: African Americans in El Paso*, Dorothea Lange in 1938 shows “a woman cooking a meal for her family outside of El Paso because many African Americans were relegated to low-paying jobs, they often moved in with family or became transients for a time before they could afford a home” (47). In this photo, an African American woman is shown cooking on a single cast iron pan over a stove made of stones surrounding what we’d assume are a few pieces of wooden coals.

This 1938 Dorothea Lange photograph shows a woman cooking a meal for her family outside of El Paso. Since many African Americans were relegated to low-paying jobs, they often moved in with family or became transients for a time before they could afford a home. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)



- What does the composition of this photograph say to you about food in relation to social issues of class, gender, and race in El Paso during the 1930's?
- The necessity to survive leads people to be creative when it comes to obtaining and preparing resources like food. How is this creativity, born out of necessity, portrayed in this photograph?
- What conclusions might a contemporary day El Paso/ Ciudad Juárez audience draw from this photograph?
- Can a photo speak about our past, present, and future simultaneously? How? Does this photo accomplish this? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- Why is it important, photographically, to show the effects of poverty, specifically in relation to food?

Topic #3: Food in Photography: War

War affects not only the soldiers actively participating in the conflict but entire families, communities, and countries as a whole. Otis A. Aultman, in another photograph, captures soldiers with empty bowls as they wait in line to receive food rations.



- From your perspective as a journalist and photographer, what does Aultman's composition say about the relationship between war and food?
- We've been able to have a short discussion about how photographers capture the lack of food through historical moments as we have seen in Aultman's and Lange's photos. In our present historical moment, people living in El Paso border area are still experiencing food shortages which lead to food insecurities. How can the absence of food in people's lives (i.e. citizens, immigrants, refugees) be captured through the lens of a camera?

(Soft background music)

Public Service Announcement

Thank you for joining us today at El Paso Food Voices. If you are interested in learning more about how food was used in photography pertaining to famine, poverty and war, you can visit the El Paso Holocaust Museum located on 715 N. Oregon St, El Paso, Tx 79902. You can visit their official website elpasoholocaustmuseum.org or visit their Facebook page, El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center. Some of their collections capture the role food played during the Holocaust.

Let's get back with our guest, Professor Dino Chiecchi.

(Soft background music)

Topic #4: Food in Photography: Famine

First-world and third-world countries experience famine in varying degrees, from homelessness to mass starvation. Famine can be associated with the 3 topics we previously discussed: food distribution, poverty, and war. While I did not find an image that reflects famine in the El Paso border area, I want to discuss why famine is important to capture photographically and how such images can reflect the impacts of this social issue.

- What is significant about whether a photographer chooses to include or exclude food within his/her photos when reflecting a social issue that stresses the lack of food or water for survival?
- What tips would you give your students or future photographers who want to capture the social issues we discussed during this podcast?
- As we draw to the end of our podcast, is there anything else you'd like to add about the interconnection between food, photography, and the El Paso border area based on photographs you've taken?

We want to thank Professor Dino Chiecchi once more for sharing his knowledge on how food is used in photography, a fascinating food-based topic.

Music begins again (the section that will end the podcast)

El Paso Food Voices was created by Meredith E. Abarca, professor of Food Studies and Literature at the University of Texas at El Paso; produced by Adrian Mesa from UTEP's Creative Studios, and the music composed by Jake Jacobs. To learn more about how food practices, memories, and stories shape a city's history, culture, and its character, please visit us at El Paso Food Voices. Thank you.

Ending with Music