



CULTURAL SHOWCASE POTLUCK

Latino Princetonians

March 7, 2019

BRIEF

In the United States nothing screams more diversity and inclusion than its food culture, literally representing the ultimate melting pot.

The variety of restaurants and their menus constitute a cultural collage that, in some cases, offer interesting fusion experiments like a burrito sushi or chicken chipotle pizza.

No matter where you live in the United States, what you eat has been influenced by migrants from all over the world. Great taste and diversity of flavors all around.



BRIEF

In the same way as Spanish language, Latin food is native to the United States as we know it today.

Ancient indigenous food traditions in Mexico added some Spanish aspects, and later on blended with the Anglo traditions after the US-Mexico war in 1848.

The annexation of Puerto Rico in 1898 expanded the contributions of Latin food with the influences of new dishes and cooking techniques (like *sofrito*).

Later on, during the 1900s, a new wave of immigration from other Latin American countries enriched even more the already vast menu of Latin food in the United States.



BRIEF

Nachos and burritos are two examples of Latin dishes already in the mainstream food in the United States .

Burritos were created in the early 1900s in Northern Mexico (Sonora and Chihuahua). A burrito is a dish which can be a mix of any meat, rice, beans, vegetables, salsa, avocado, sour cream, and more all wrapped in a flour tortilla in a form of a cylinder. It is just not only delicious, but it is also portable. Ideal for a fast pace society like the US.

It was called burrito because, at that time, the main means of transportation was a burro (donkey). People prepared their lunch meal, wrapped it in a flour tortilla and packed it on the side of a burro, hence *burrito* (or little donkey).



BRIEF

Nachos were created around mid-1900s in Piedras Negras, Coahila, Mexico. Legend has it that a group of US officers' wives were in town, stopped at a restaurant to have drinks and asked for a snack. But the cook was out at the time, so the owner, Ignacio Anaya, prepared a quick meal with chip tortillas, melted yellow cheese, and jalapeños. The wives loved the snack and when asked for the name, Ignacio replied that they were a "Nacho's special". In Mexico, Nacho is the nickname for Ignacio.

See:

- Gabaccia, Donna R, *We Are Wat We Eat. Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, 1998
- "How the burrito conquered America", <https://www.vox.com/2015/5/1/8525335/burrito-history-invention-america>



BRIEF

Latin food is known for its rich flavor, great vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes, and the mix of fresh and healthy ingredients.

For example, a taco that is making its way into the US mainstream food is *taco al pastor*. Created in Mexico City in 1966, is a mix of thin slices of charcoal roasted marinated pork loin, cilantro, onion, morita pepper, and pineapple on a tortilla (and folded).

Scientists have found that eating tacos al pastor activates chemicals associated with happiness (see <https://tinyurl.com/yxr4hqlz>).



BRIEF

Tacos al pastor are representative of Mexico's own melting pot. "Al pastor" refers to the spit roasting method. "Pastor" means "shepherd", shepherds used to roast meat on a horizontal spit.

The meat in *tacos al pastor* is roasted on a vertical spit, a technique created by the Ottomans (now Turkey) in the 19th century with the *doner kebab* ("rotating grilled meat"), which influenced the Shawarma ("turning", in Lebanon) and the Greek gyros ("turn", in Greece). Lebanese immigrants brought the Shawarma to Mexico, which combined with the local cuisine gave birth to *tacos al pastor*.

Kebabs and gyros are already mainstream in the US, *tacos al pastor* are joining with the main difference being the type of meat and wrap: pork on a tortilla.

See:

- "Tacos Al Pastor's Story Of Origin May Surprise You", https://www.huffpost.com/entry/tacos-al-pastor-origin_n_6192788
- "The Story of Doner Kebab: The World's Most Popular Spitted Meat", https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-story-of-doner-kebab_n_5063049



BRIEF

Tacos al pastor are one succulent example of the variety of tacos in Mexico and in the United States.

Tacos can be made of anything and are as ancient as the history of Mexico. However, the name “taco” in recorded history dates back to the late 1900s in Mexico’s mining industry. Miners used gunpowder in a hand-rolled paper to mine the rocks, the rolls were called “tacos” (“plugs”).

The miners lunch was a meal with hot salsa in a hand-rolled tortilla, it was called “taco” because of its explosive flavor (miner’s tacos).

Nowadays, a number of restaurants feature tacos in their menus with their own interpretation and flavors. Tacos are also part of the fast-food industry in the US marketed by Taco Bell with its hard-shell U-shaped tortilla.

See:

- A Brief History Of The Taco, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/a-brief-history-of-the-taco_n_12687046
- Where Did the Taco Come From? <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/where-did-the-taco-come-from-81228162/>



ON THE POTLUCK...

Thank you to Lisa Linn De Barona for coordinating such a great event showcasing great dishes from different Latin American countries.

Thank you to those who contributed with their dishes from their country of heritage.

Thank you to those who attended the event.

Looking forward to the next one!

Please see some pictures in the next pages.

*Text by Oscar Torres-Reyna

* Pictures courtesy of Veronica Olivares-Weber









