

The \$16 Taco: Contested Geographies of Food, Ethnicity, and Gentrification

Pascale Joassart-Marcelli

Abstract

Barbacoa tacos, bibimbap, bánh mi, pupusas, and other “authentic ethnic” foods are drawing white, middle-class, and college-educated eaters into historically segregated neighborhoods where residents, mostly people of color and immigrants, have long struggled with limited food access. Does this signal the emergence of a more inclusive city?

In this talk, Pascale Joassart-Marcelli will present research from her recent book, *The \$16 Taco*, on the role of food in transforming urban landscapes. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in San Diego, she will document the evolution of San Diego’s urban foodscape away from serving the needs of longtime minoritized residents to pleasing the tastes of wealthier and whiter newcomers in search of “authenticity.” She shows how this trend – fueled by media attention and capitalized on by developers – contributes to gentrification and the displacement of the very people who have produced these foodscapes through self-reliance in the face of food apartheid. Her research illustrates how food can both enplace and displace immigrants, shedding light on the larger process of gentrification and the emotional, cultural, economic, and physical displacement it produces.

Bio

Pascale Joassart-Marcelli is Professor of Geography, Director of the interdisciplinary Food Studies and Urban Studies programs, and Founding Director of the Center for Better Food Futures at San Diego State University where she has been teaching courses such as *Geography of Cities*, *Geography of Food*, *Food Justice*, *Feeding the World*, and *Food, Place, and Culture*. Pascale’s research focuses on the relationship between place, ethnicity, and food, including the role of food in creating just and sustainable cities for all, with an emphasis on immigrant communities. She has published over 50 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, is the author of *Food Geographies: Social, Political, and Ecological Connections* (2022) and *The \$16 Taco: Contested Geographies of Food, Ethnicity, and Gentrification* (2021) and the co-editor of *Food and Place: A Critical Exploration* (2018). Her research has been funded by the National Science Foundation and other private and public funding agencies.