

## "Glazed America"

Professor Paul Mullins tells us about his love for doughnuts and how it led to his book about the history of doughnuts.

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### Transcript

[P. Mullins] I was attracted to doughnuts anthropologically because people had such strong feelings about them. In those feelings folks were focused on things like nationalism, body discipline, cultures, social structure, class - so all these profound kind of consequential dimensions of their identity, but they're wrapped around a seemingly innocuous commodity, and that's like a lot of food. I thought there was something really interesting in that with such meaningful dimensions in culture life and everyday identity were wrapped up in doughnuts.

There's kind of two big periods of growth with doughnuts. Doughnuts have been made in a kind of circulatory form that you and I recognize really since the mid 19th century. Fried dough goes back to the Neolithic. What you and I recognize as mass production and mass consumption of doughnuts really didn't happen until about 1920, when doughnut machines were introduced. Making a doughnut by hand is actually a difficult task. Dealing with pastry is always a little challenging. Baking is kind of a hassle. If you've ever made doughnuts at home, they're a huge mess. On the other hand, baking in a machine, you can produce tons of them very inexpensively.

And then the thing that happens in the 50s, is all these little doughnut shops that are mass-producing doughnuts, they begin to spring up along these car, commuter routes as these cities suburbanize, and Indianapolis does that. You know, lots of people leave the corps around and after war to go out to the west toward Speedway or the north to where what's now Carmel. And doughnut shops spring up along those routes and the doughnut is a perfect commuter food - cheap, filling, delicious. You can eat it quickly. You can drive reasonably safely while eating a doughnut. Doughnuts often do come back to kind of nationalist imagery.

When you ask people overseas, "What is a food that's emblematic, kind of iconic of American culture?" they will often point to doughnuts because they associate a fast food diet and high carbohydrate foods, sugary foods, and unhealthy foods and rampant obesity. They often associate all of those things with Americans. They often associate the encroachment of McDonalds and all these kinds of fast food joints overseas with the doughnut so they often look at the doughnut as kind of the, if you will, the marines leading the rest of the infantry into battle. This is the leading wave is the doughnut. The doughnut is right there alongside the hamburger taking over the world, getting rid of local cuisine. All these regional cuisines all over the world are being set aside for mass American food waves.

For a lot of people a doughnut is sort of emblematic of the war they are waging with their body. On the one hand, you have some doughnut consumers that embrace that desire. They realize they want to eat a doughnut so they consume doughnuts, and they consume it knowing they're sort of breaking some dominant code. Then, on the other hand, you have these folks that deny themselves doughnuts who believe that this is the greatest affront to their personal body discipline is coming from a doughnut itself. You have kind of this battlefield over body discipline for many people—it's symptomatic of what goes on in doughnut consumption.

There are often kind of class divisions in the way people view doughnuts. Doughnuts are often looked at as being a sort of working class food. What is happening now with doughnuts, it's a little different, is we do have lots of bakeries that are producing essentially designer doughnuts. They're trying to cater to essentially the same crowd that is catered to at Starbucks.

There certainly was a point in time where we would have found the predominance of heavy cake doughnuts in New England, much more yeast doughnuts that are lighter and tend to hold a sugary glaze much better in the South. Those variations, actually, are increasingly less visible on the landscape.

Today, if you have a Krispy Kreme, obviously, anywhere on the face of the planet it tastes exactly the same. What Canadians did is create a culture around the doughnut with strong coffee. Places where you would eat a doughnut, they have a you know - Tim Hornton's is the home to the doughnut. I'm a fan of Long's cream horns, actually. I like super sweet doughnuts. I have that Southern heritage going on in me. I like a doughnut that packs a whole lot of sweetness alongside very strong, unsweetened coffee.