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Diverse Rhetorics

How To Bridge Communities: An examination of Jell-O and Funeral Potatoes

A guide to Utah gatherings: if you're running late- grab a Jell-O packet; if you want to be the hit of the party- pick up potatoes and creamy chicken soup the next time you're at the store. Jell-O and Funeral Potatoes are staple dishes in Utah and are accredited to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. A core value of the church is to be self-reliant and such sufficiency relies on a consistent food supply. With traditionally large families, non-perishable or high-carb-easy-to-prepare meals are favorable. Jell-O is often served by itself or made into Green Jello Salad. This is a combination of green Jell-O with cottage cheese, mayonnaise, cream cheese, evaporated milk, and pineapple. Some people may have stopped reading after cottage cheese, and many more might have been lost at mayonnaise. However, historically Jell-O was meant to be served in a true salad fashion and the tradition has survived in Utah. Funeral Potatoes contain more comfortable ingredients for most: potatoes, cream of chicken soup, sour cream, shredded cheese, fried onions, and corn flakes. Do not be alarmed at the last part, corn flakes only make up the crust and it's delicious. This dish is a carb-o-load delight and became so popular when introduced to non-Utahns at the 2002 Olympics that pins were made to commemorate it. Although the name originates from its association as an after-funeral food, it is typically seen at most Utah events due to its popularity and unique flavor. Jell-O and Funeral Potatoes run deeper than being favorable Utah dishes. Each food has presented a unique opportunity for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and non-members in Utah to interact with one another and share cultural values because the dishes are welcome at events not affiliated with the church.

In Utah, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) is not open to public spectators unless a person is actively considering joining. Most non-LDS Utahns' knowledge of LDS practices does not extend much further than what is known by non-Utahns, but Utahns do not prey on LDS stereotypes. Daily interactions between LDS and non-LDS members look like a trip to the doctor's office, a work meeting with a colleague, or waving to your neighbor. In short, a majority of Utahns do practice the faith and are respectable community members.

A common misconception is that Jell-O is popular in Utah because LDS members love sugar. However, if that were the case, any other sugary pastry or dessert could suffice. Jell-O maintains its position at gatherings because it's easy to prepare, it's consistent, and most importantly, every Utahn expects it to be there. At some point before me, LDS members began to bring Jell-O to gatherings with non-LDS Utahns and the appeal was transcendent. My life has been filled with more Jell-O than I can count, and I plan on it being on my plate at every Utah event. Jell-O is a talking point at gatherings and any Jell-O lover attempts to remove the stigma around it, especially if statements target harmful LDS stereotypes.

Funeral potatoes arose in popularity in a similar fashion to Jell-O, but are also attributed to the LDS belief of doomism. Preparation for the "Second Coming" is a main actor within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Boxed potatoes and canned soup are attractive "Doom's Day" stock because they have a long shelf life and can sustain large families as they are high in carbohydrates. Combining these ingredients becomes more than just an end-of-the-world treat, however. Funeral Potatoes are the ultimate Utah comfort food. The once after-funeral luncheons dish began to merge Utahns of different faiths and appear at multifarious gatherings as non-LDS members fell in love with it. Funeral Potatoes are especially attractive in Utah because the ingredients are easily accessible year-round, which is not typically the case living in a desert

with extreme winter weather. Accessibility and uniqueness unify Jell-O and Funeral Potatoes and the Utah communities that enjoy them. My first memory of eating these dishes was at an LDS wedding as a young child. Due to the exclusive nature of the church and my age, there were not many connections to make to the people around me. However, I remember the joy on the faces of LDS members sitting at my table when I told them I loved the sweet taste of the Jell-O and wanted more potatoes immediately. They told me how the foods were made, and to this day, they remain the main dishes at my non-LDS family functions.

The resounding impact of these unique Utah foods provides the opportunity to examine how religion operates within and between communities. The dishes function as modes of connection because they are one of the few elements tied to the LDS religion that are not private and are openly shared with non-LDS members. Many negative elements of LDS culture are typically evaluated in dissections of non-LDS and LDS communities, but these dishes have had a positive effect on Utahns of different backgrounds engaging with one another. To participate in the preparation or event of eating Jell-O or Funeral Potatoes is to engage in religious and cultural rhetorics in Utah. The dishes make Utah more inclusive and provide Utahns with the opportunity to comfortably gather, have common ground, and create a culture unique to the state.