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Diverse Rhetorics
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11 May 2022

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.

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Commented [1]: This is one of my favorite pieces I've written in my undergrad so far. It's a rhetorical analysis and my own interpretation of Utah culture, so it was a fun challenge to only use my knowledge as a source and inspiration for the project.

Commented [2]: I wanted to set up this intro sentence to capture the whole piece. I chose a "sly" approach to hook the reader into this novel concept and to open the space to learn about a unique cultural dynamic.

Commented [3]: I chose to integrate a strong author presence throughout this text, which is less typical of my writing style, but I wanted to maintain my voice and dialogue with the reader to create a fun and light-hearted atmosphere.

Commented [4]: This interception aimed to reaffirm the "goofy" energy in the text and to build trust with the reader that I am aware the concept may sound silly. My goal was to acknowledge the elephant in the room to encourage the reader to keep working through the text to find larger meaning.

Commented [5]: I wrote in shorter sentences to open the piece to a larger audience and to not be perceived as an overly academic text. I wanted the piece to be approachable and engaging in this way.

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.

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Commented [6]: From my experience, many people know very little about the practices within the LDS religion and/or the interactions between LDS and non-LDS Utahns, so I provided this background to encourage those less familiar with the concept to still engage with the text.

Commented [7]: This is a secondary point central to my purpose of engaging readers with a novel concept. The artifacts of Jell-O and Funeral Potatoes promote community and I clearly state the harm of passing judgment on the LDS religion because it often transcends to a negative relationship with all Utahns, LDS or not. The highlighted sentences were intentionally blunt and straightforward, because many conversations around religion dance around the subject, which can weaken the discussion or argument at hand.

Commented [8]: Creating community is a central element to this text, so I repeated it here to emphasize the community connection to funeral potatoes.

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.

Commented [9]: My objective in this text was simple, create a consistent story line and argument for the reader to view Utahns more holistically, so I reiterated the effects the artifacts to solidify my message.

Commented [BS10R9]: also a repetitive side note, but I wanted to highlight the intention behind sentence structure and word choice.

Commented [11]: I consistently aimed to create a simple and fun text. The main features I utilized were: basic syntax structure, author voice, shorter sentences, repetition, conciseness, and precision. These choices allowed me to interact with the audience and share my personal opinion and relationship to Utah in a fun way in order to encourage more holistic perceptions of Utahns.

I'll Tell You Why Utahns Love Jell-O and Funeral Potatoes

Many people don't know much about LDS culture in Utah, and what they do know doesn't always make sense. Is it true that Mormons love sugar- or do the foods they serve have greater meaning as part of Utah culture?



Green Jell-O Salad is seen as a delicacy to many in Utah-- and it's not far off from this recipe.

By CodenameSailorEarth

By Bella Shaw

May 11, 2022

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My first memory of eating both Jell-O and Funeral Potatoes 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.

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

from 1940-1970 it was a prized American treat that was easy and cheap to make following [World War II](#).



1930s Jell-O advertisement “America’s Most Famous Dessert”

However, Jell-O began to lose its popularity as a sweet and/or savory treat across the country during the rise of the [Jell-O shot](#) and frat house “Jell-O Wrestling” in the 70-80s. Consequently, Jell-O [rebranded and marketed to large families](#) and hired Bill Cosby as a spokesperson. It’s safe to say that, today, Jell-O Brand is happy to be linked to a state known for modesty rather than drunk and slimy fraternity brothers of the 80s. The LDS church welcomed this title as well, and for the next two decades Utahns sought to beat out Iowa as the state with the highest Jell-O consumption. In 1999, Utah BYU students launched the “[Take Back the Title Campaign](#)” and finally claimed the first place title in 2001. Shortly after, Jell-O became [the official Utah state snack](#) and named Bill Cosby an honorary Utah citizen (an unsavory and poorly-aged choice). Utah is now also referred to as “[the Jell-O Belt](#)” as Utahns’ consume twice as much Jell-O annually than the average American and twice as much lime Jell-O [than anyone else on the](#)



[planet](#).

Jell-O received not one, but four commemorative pins at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics.

By LDS Daily

But Jell-O isn't the only beloved Utahn delicacy; funeral potatoes are a smash (or mashed) hit for Mormons and non-mormons alike. The cheesy-potato dish furthered its notoriety during the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympic Games, a much more digestible, and familiar dish passed around in Salt Lake hosting communities. Funeral potatoes came as such a pleasant surprise to people tasting the dish from around the world that commemorative Olympic pins were made for both [funeral potatoes](#) and [Jell-O](#) that sell for a pretty penny today! As the official snack of Utah, Jell-O did not need to worry about outsider opinions to make it to pin status.



Funeral potatoes are best served right out of the pan with a nice, crunchy cornflake crust.

By Utah State Historical Society

Funeral Potatoes are made with potatoes, cream of chicken soup, sour cream, shredded cheese, fried onions, and corn flakes. But do not be alarmed at the last part; corn flakes only make up the crust and it's delicious. Although the name does originate from its association as an [after-funeral](#)

[food](#), it is typically seen at most Utah events due to its popularity and unique flavor. Like Jell-O, funeral potatoes were easy to make, available in large portions, and affordable. Jenn Rice in her [2017 Food & Wine article](#) claimed funeral potatoes to be, “one of the most oddly satisfying creations that exists in America—nay, the world.” However, not everyone was onboard with the Mormon-originating dish and name. The [New York Times](#) called Walmart’s deal to label frozen versions of the dish as “Funeral Potatoes” a “disturbing” choice and included tweets of many curious customers wondering if they were being threatened.



Chip Coffey ✓
@chipcoffey



You've just gotta yell out loud "WTF?!?!?" when this Walmart ad pops up on your Facebook feed! LMAO

Really?!? FUNERAL POTATOES?!?!?



A tweet by Chip Coffey wondering how Walmart could partner with a death-wish meal.

By Chip Coffey

Despite some dubious opinions, Jell-O and Funeral Potatoes run deeper than being favorable Utah dishes to Utah residents. 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.

So, do you think you'll look at Jell-O and potatoes again? Are you ready to try Green Jell-O Salad? Even if it has ham?