

# Right Now

The expanding Harvard universe

MEAT-FREE MACHO

## The Rise of Vegan Culture

**D**ISTANT are the days of *Annie Hall*, when Woody Allen resigned himself to a plate of alfalfa sprouts and mashed yeast. Over the years, vegan eating has gone from tasteless to trendy to making inroads into the mainstream. One sign of the times: in 2016, Tyson Foods, the largest meat processor in the United States, bought a 5 percent stake

in the plant-based protein producer Beyond Meat. (The company's best-known product, the Beyond Burger, is pinkened with beet extracts and reportedly sizzles when grilled.) No longer fettered by associations with hippie kooks or radical politics, veganism has ascended to the astral plane of aspirational living. These days it keeps mixed, and more glamorous, company: famous bod-

ies belonging to the likes of Tom Brady and Beyoncé have been fueled by vegan diets.

Sociology graduate student Nina Gheihman is researching social aspects of veganism's spread. Veganism was at first closely bound to the ideology of the animal-rights movement, she explains, which initially aimed at a range of targets, like wearing fur and testing products on animals. Once activists shifted focus to farm conditions and food, veganism took on the features of what scholars call a "lifestyle movement." Over time, it's become more closely associated with general environmental concerns and a "healthism" mentality, bound up with notions of perfecting the body. Trust-

worthy numbers on how many people identify as vegan are hard to come by, says Gheihman, but a growing number practice veganism in some way: incorporating meat and dairy substitutes in their meals, or restricting their diets at certain times of day or for a period of weeks.

Social scientists have studied veganism as it relates to animal-rights activism, but there's been less research into the current lifestyle movement's mechanisms and structure. Gheihman is especially interested in analyzing leading figures whom she's provisionally termed "lifestyle advocates," arguing that they have changed the nature of lifestyle activism. They usually come from fields not typically associated with activism, she says, especially entrepreneurship—and the "cultural work"



they do isn't strictly defined by their official occupations. This work has expanded veganism beyond its ideological core, enabling a greater variety of people to participate even if they don't conform all aspects of their lives to all its tenets.

Gheihman sorts these players into three categories. Some lifestyle advocates create opportunities for consumption—for example, by starting a vegan meal-kit subscription service, opening a restaurant, or stocking plant proteins in their grocery stores. Another group works in what she calls “knowledge production,” creating the educational resources—films, books, and blog posts—that people circulate to share culinary tips and advice, or to persuade others to change diets. Third, and most abstract, is the kind of advocacy involved in what she calls “meaning production” or “interpretive work.” These figures change the cultural associations of veganism: “the symbolic essence of what veganism means,” as Gheihman puts it. Brady is a striking case: by lending his name to a line of meal-kits from vegan start-up Purple Carrot, he links veganism with the macho physicality of pro football. (“TB12 Performance Meals”

claim to help “athletes and active individuals stay at their peak” and “maximize your performance on the playing field” for \$78 a week.)

Gheihman plans to conduct field research and interviews to examine the evolution of veganism in two other national contexts. The first is France, “the obvious place to study a food movement, because it is so central to the notions we have around what makes good food, or proper food.” The country’s *cuisine* might seem inimical to cashew cheese, or chickpea runoff (called “aquafaba”) as an egg-white substitute, but the hierarchical structure of its food *culture* could pave the way for dramatic change. In recent years, haute cuisine chefs, catering to a high-end international clientele, have had to experiment with vegan menus and pastry-making. Their trickle-down influence has been amplified by a network of vegan food blogs and cookbook writers—even as other institutions resist the spread of this lifestyle. The French ministry of health, Gheihman points out, warns that following a *régime végétalien* will result in nutritional deficiencies and long-term health risks, and the government’s nutritional standards for school cafeterias

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mandate a dairy product with every meal.

The second case is Israel, where by some estimates, nearly 5 percent of the population is vegan; Tel Aviv has earned a reputation as one of the vegan capitals of the world. The Is-

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raeli Defense Force even provides animal-free menus in mess halls, and leather-free boots and helmets to vegan soldiers. But beyond the numbers, Israel provides an interesting contrasting example, Gheihman explains, in part because veganism there remains firmly rooted in animal-rights concerns, and is practiced across the political and the religious spectrum. She is also interested in how the vegan

lifestyle has evolved within Israel's cultural context, undergirded by national symbolism surrounding land and water usage, and informed by the country's farming traditions and Mediterranean diet.

Gheihman's own vegan lifestyle, meanwhile, reaches well beyond the radius of her individual plate. She's involved with the Council for Sustainability, the Harvard

Vegan Society, the Ivy League Vegan Conference, and the Boston Plant-Based Millennials, which hosts monthly potlucks. "There's one this Sunday, actually," she adds, not quite casually. —SOPHIA NGUYEN

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#### THE ON-CALL CALAMITY

## How U.S. Companies Stole American Jobs

**T**HIRTY OR 40 years ago, companies like General Motors and Chase Manhattan Bank hired their own janitors and clerical staff, not just top executives and engineers. Today, low-skilled jobs are often outsourced, with effects that are rippling across the American workforce.

Throughout the 2016 election cycle, immigrants and globalization proved politically popular scapegoats for the disappearance of American jobs. But according to Allison

professor of economics Lawrence F. Katz, erecting physical walls or championing protectionist legislation won't staunch the losses. The truly responsible parties, he says, are American companies that subcontract jobs in areas such as security, custodial services, and dining. And complicit in this mounting problem of eroding job opportunities are American workers themselves, who are increasingly moving toward "alternative work arrangements" as temps and freelancers.

Although traditional labor statistics

suggest that self-employment and multiple-job holding are in decline, the increase in tax filings indicating sole proprietorship and multiple sources of income during the past few years led Katz to doubt this. He and Alan B. Kruger, Bendheim professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton, teamed up to conduct their own research, examining data from February 2005 to late 2015. They documented a 4.9 percent increase in workers engaged

in alternative work arrangements: comprising not only those who are either on-call or placed through a temporary help agency, but also contract workers and freelancers. More than one in five of those individuals worked in health services or education; only 2.6 percent found manufacturing jobs that had been contracted out.

Katz believes that making these "alternative" jobs more meaningful and rewarding—both in compensation and career development—is the key to building a robust workforce today. "We're just not going to bring back 1950s production jobs and manufacturing," he says. "And even if we did, no one wants to buy black-and-white TVs or drive Studebakers, which is essentially what we'd have to be doing to produce jobs like that."

The "alternative work arrangement" spectrum encompasses very different experiences for the workers themselves. Freelancers are theoretically able to choose their own hours, set their own rates, and accept work that challenges or intrigues them. But for on-call or temporary workers, the situation is far less desirable: "Theirs is a much more precarious situation where they don't get the same benefits," says Katz. "And the nontraditional schedules of on-call workers cause [them] a lot of dissatisfaction." Somewhat surprising to those unfamiliar with the labor market, the alternative workforce does *not* consist predominantly of young people with full-time jobs who want to make a few extra dollars on the side. Katz finds that in reality, the niche provides ample opportunities for those of retirement age. The one group with rising labor-force participation, he says, are those over 55, "and it doesn't seem to be that...they're desperate for work.... This is a way to combine activities like caring for grandchildren, but still doing work and staying involved."

Involuntary displacement—being fired or laid off—is another key reason for people to turn to alternative work engagements, of course. Katz has found that workers are

