Melissa Fuster is associate professor of public health nutrition at Tulane University.

Caribeños at the Table

How Migration, Health, and Race Intersect in New York City

Melissa Fuster thinks expansively about the multiple meanings of comida, food, from something as simple as a meal to something as complex as one's identity. She listens intently to the voices of New York City residents with Cuban, Dominican, or Puerto Rican backgrounds, as well as to those of the nutritionists and health professionals who serve them. She argues with sensitivity that the migrants' health depends not only on food culture but also on important structural factors that underlie their access to food, employment, and high-quality healthcare. People in Hispanic Caribbean communities in the United States present high rates of obesity, diabetes, and other diet-related diseases, conditions painfully highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both eaters and dietitians may blame these diseases on the shedding of traditional diets in favor of highly processed foods. Or, conversely, they may blame these on the traditional diets of fatty meat, starchy root vegetables, and rice. Applying a much needed intersectional approach, Fuster shows that nutritionists and eaters often misrepresent, and even racialize or pathologize, a cuisine's healthfulness or unhealthfulness if they overlook the kinds of economic and racial inequities that exist within the global migration experience.

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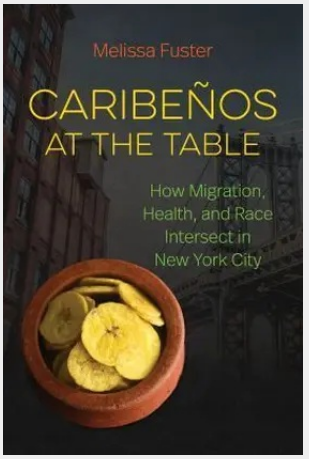

31,00 €
31,00 € (zzgl. MwSt.)

Nicht mehr lieferbar

Artikelnummer: 9781469664576
Medium: Buch
ISBN: 978-1-4696-6457-6
Verlag: University of North Carolina Press
Erscheinungstermin: 19.10.2021
Sprache(n): Englisch
Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 2021
Produktform: Kartoniert
Gewicht: 313 g
Seiten: 192
Format (B x H): 156 x 234 mm

Kundenservice Verlag Dr. Otto Schmidt KG
Neumannstraße 10, 40235 Düsseldorf | kundenservice@otto-schmidt.de | 0221-93738-997 (Inland)