Filth into Food? Lessons from the Past

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ABSTRACT

Waste disposal is one of the greatest environmental challenges we face today. It is also an ancient problem faced by our ancestors. Matthew Morse Booker, Ph.D., explores: does the recent past offer any useful solutions (or warnings) for our current crisis? The rise, fall and revival of the urban oysters — which turn filth into food by filtering water and recycling urban waste into urban food, but can also be a vector for disease — offer intriguing insights.

Booker is vice president of the National Humanities Center and an environmental and agricultural historian at NC State. His book *Food Fights: How History Matters to Contemporary Food Debates* pairs essays by scholars debating food safety, agricultural and food subsidies, genetically modified organisms and other urgent disputes about food. His first book, *Down by the Bay: San Francisco’s History Between the Tides*, is a history of the West’s greatest estuary and oldest city. He publishes blog posts, articles, books and digital mapping projects about oyster growers and oyster pirates, the origins of American food safety laws and the United States’ first urban national wildlife refuge. He often collaborates with scientists, especially on the human story of sourdough cultures.

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TRANSCRIPT

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

1. [Freshwater Mussels Presentation](#) by Dr. Jennifer M. Archambault