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ENG 110-H5

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The Origins of Food

Evolution is a modern conception of how life has transformed into the 8.7 million species that comprise the planet. The basis of this widely-believed theory focuses on a common ancestor that unites all life at the root of creation. Human beings are part of this lineage, though we have developed into complex primates with the capacity to uncover these truths about the world, to love, and to live in unison with the rest of our species, in a way that no other animal has done. When historians trace back who we are now to what made us diverge so uniquely, they find cooking as the defining characteristic that separates our species from the rest, and which gave us the advancement that led to the expansion of society.

As evolution continues, and technology advances the human world, the practices that once made us human must evolve as well. Within the last 50 years, as developed countries hit the era of industrialization, technologies that ease the burden of cooking for the home-chef have transformed the way we think about food and has redefined what we categorize as cuisine. However, the human race has hit a stand still. We have the resources to eliminate the work of growing and preparing food all together and living off the basic nutrients to survive but the human race rejects to accept this technology as the new way to live. As observed in a series of favorite meal narratives, food gives us a lot more than just the sustenance it provides, and we need the occasion that food brings to hold on to human nature. We have hit the point where we refuse to let go of this aspect of what it means to be human and due to its instinctual origin, most of us don't even know why cooking hits on that deep, an emotional level. Yet, as Michael Pollan describes in the article, "Out of the Kitchen, Onto the Couch", even as people themselves have less

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time to dedicate to preparing food, we cling to food network, watching others tirelessly slave over a stove, as a means to fulfill this instinctual urge. Human beings have an innate connection with the art of cooking and the tradition that encompasses food that stems back to where we diverged from the ancestral line, that makes us refuse to give up this characteristic distinction which defines who we are despite the constant advancements in the rest of society.

The success of the human race likely boils down to our ability to see the value in group mentality and the benefits of altruism. To compete against the rest of nature, against species that had existed for millions of years before us, we had to unite. Michael Pollan describes this view by anthropologist, Richard Wrangham. When humans discovered fire, they found benefit in sharing resources, sharing food, and with that, sharing meals. By cooking with the fire, not only did we discover new possibilities in what we could eat that made hunting easier, but we also identified a culture and became civilized in a way that allowed for future success. More recently, our lives have become too fast and busy for us to cook but we still seek the experience of cooking and sharing a meal with others because it is the defining trait of humans that has been coded into our genes for millions of years of progress. As the rest of our world advances, food and cooking continues to be a central part of our lives, like it always has been, because we innately know we need food to survive and that the act of cooking and sharing the experience with others is what led us to become modern beings. When we lack the time to partake in this human constituent ourselves, we turn to TV, to watch others of our race do it for us.

The premise of food network seems like an implausible entertainment. Cooking has become a chore, like doing laundry, that we have put at the end of our list of things to do which often is only there for occasion or on the off chance that after everything else, there is time for it. However, food network doesn't do our cooking for us. There is no meal delivered through our TV's at the end of a program. Yet, still, we watch food network to satisfy the human instinct that is engraved deep within us. We see food as more than just something to eat. Pollan writes, "Yet even the most ordinary dish follows a similar arc of

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transformation, magically becoming something greater than the sum of its parts. Every dish contains not just culinary ingredients but also the ingredients of narrative: a beginning, a middle, and an end” (Pollan 13). Pollan is describing our culture of food. For humans, who hold the process of cooking to be a defining trait of the race, we focus today, watching people cook, on the process of getting to the end point with no care that we will never get to eat it. In her favorite meal essay, Natalie analyzes this connection. She writes, “Eating may sometimes feel redundant and a time killer, but after taking part in not only eating my dad’s home cooked, mouth-watering salmon, but taking part in the traditions that surround it, reminds me that food is not just a necessity for our bodies physically, but a necessity for our emotional and social well-being” (Freeman). Food and cooking are exactly that, a necessity for our emotional health. Outside of just eating to absorb the nutrients to survive, the process of getting to the food and the human tradition that goes with it, fulfills a requisite. This exemplifies our deeper obsession with the traditions that surround food; we need cooking, whether we are doing it or simply watching it, to connect us with our roots of origin. By satisfying this innate desire, an emotion is hit that we don’t even consciously know is there.

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Very nice start, I really like your attention to detail when describing things, such as the part about evolution from the intro.
I think the biggest thing you need to edit is adding more quotes in from the Pollan article and the Favorite Meal essays.
The other big part is the "text-on-text" aspect of this essay. Jesse wanted us to find support for our ideas with both the Pollan article and the meal essays, adding a layered effect, seeming like the two texts are in conversation with each other.
Overall I really enjoyed your essay, the organization of it is great. I think you've got a great start here.