



Yes, Chef! And Other Ways to Pretend You're Not a Classist

Description

Yes, Chef!—two words that have somehow been elevated to sacred status in kitchens and television sets across the globe. Once the bark of underpaid cooks scrambling to avoid a verbal flaying, it now drips with reverence, a battle cry for culinary artistry. But the phrase doesn't just carry the weight of hierarchy; it's also the soundtrack of an industry stuck in a deliciously absurd contradiction. Chefs claim they're democratizing food while clinging to the gilded edge of exclusivity, a balancing act that's as stable as a soufflé in a hurricane.

Let's start with the theater of it all. Fine dining has long operated as a temple of privilege, its rituals shrouded in the kind of mystique usually reserved for secret societies. The brigade system—basically a culinary monarchy dressed up in French jargon—ensures that every kitchen operates like a tiny feudal kingdom. The chef is king (or queen, though let's be honest, the patriarchy rules here too), and everyone else exists to fetch, chop, and grovel. It's a structure that practically oozes classism, yet it's defended as "tradition." Because nothing says progress like a system invented in the 1800s.

And then there's the dining experience. Picture it: a hushed room, tables draped in crisp linens, and a server who whispers the night's menu like they're revealing state secrets. You're handed a dish that looks like a Kandinsky painting and tastes like, well, good food, sure, but is it *\$300-a-plate* good? Of course it's not. What you're paying for is the illusion—that by eating this dish, you're participating in something profound, a culinary revolution that's somehow still inaccessible to the masses.

Meanwhile, the chef—the self-proclaimed democratizer of food—will wax lyrical about their "humble roots" and their desire to bring quality ingredients to everyone. And by "everyone," they clearly mean the type of people who think nothing of dropping a small fortune on foraged moss and a wine pairing so obscure it practically requires a secret handshake to understand. Local ingredients are "elevated," street food is "refined," and the people who originally made those dishes—whose lives depend on them—are nowhere to be seen. Corn doesn't need to be espuma; it needs to be affordable.

But wait, it gets better. On Instagram, these same chefs will post about their philanthropic ventures, usually involving a community kitchen or a pop-up event in a "historically underserved" area. They'll hashtag their way to sainthood, all while flying back to their tasting menu empires on private jets. It's performative allyship with a side of microgreens. You can practically hear the TED Talk: "How My \$500 Prix Fixe Menu Is Changing Lives."

And yet, despite all this, we keep saying it: "Yes, Chef!" We say it because the food is incredible, sure, but also because we've bought into the myth of the chef as a rebel genius—a pirate who stormed the high seas of gastronomy and returned with treasure. Except the treasure is \$90 plates of "deconstructed" lasagna, and the pirate is wearing a sponsored apron.

The truth is, food doesn't need gatekeepers. It doesn't need white tablecloths or edible foam or a brigade system that's just a fancier way of saying "know your place." What it needs is what it's always needed: to nourish, to connect, to bring people together. But that's a lot less glamorous than a tasting menu with its own PR team, isn't it?

So here's to the chefs who are actually doing the work—who are ditching the Michelin stars and the pretension, who are feeding people because it matters, not because it trends. And to the rest? Well, let's just say the next time I hear "Yes, Chef!" I'll be thinking less about respect and more about who really deserves it.

Category

1. Human Stories

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