



## Food Fights and American Values

In 1939, an unemployed writer charged by the Federal Writers' Project to describe New England's foodways lamented the decline of traditional foods—"forced out," he claimed "by the products of the fast freight and the canning factory and to some extent by the influence of immigrants." As proof, he described a trip to his local supermarket. There, "near the cans of Boston baked beans and codfish cakes" stood "cans of spaghetti and chop suey." "Or is it chow mein?" he concluded wearily, clearly not caring about the difference, and wishing he could instead return to a culinary past when superior, and unquestionably American, foods reigned.<sup>1</sup>

With immigrants, Americans, and ethnic foods regularly crossing over ethnic boundaries by the turn of the twentieth century, the confrontation of values represented by America's many cultures of eating seemed inevitable. Vast food corporations increasingly dominated the food marketplace, though they did not attempt to define a single national cuisine. That was to become the task of well-educated American women, who sought to convince enclave eaters that the simple, abstemious fare of Puritan New England provided a scientific, modern, and patriotic diet. Other reformers took more direct political action to stop the spread of enclave foods. But

after a fifty-year food fight, the reformers' foray into culinary nationalism collapsed.

Between World Wars I and II, America's intellectuals and other self-appointed guardians of national culture gradually developed an alternative philosophy of American eating which was respectful of difference and pleasure, and thus reconcilable with both America's cultural diversity and its corporate food processors. At least in the culinary domain, intellectuals abandoned their notions of Americanizing immigrants and working-class outsiders and decided instead to celebrate culinary cultural pluralism.

While middle-class observers had long noted, and decried, the eating habits of poor Americans—and had begun to study them as early as the 1870s, in their efforts to define an American standard of living—fear and loathing of immigrant foodways crescendoed around the turn of the century. Just before World War I, nationalist demands for "100 Percent Americanism" intensified reformers' interest in immigrant kitchens. Sauerkraut became "Victory cabbage," and a visitor reported an Italian family as "still eating spaghetti, not yet assimilated."<sup>2</sup>

Just what was wrong with the way urban immigrants ate? First, Americans saw foreign diets as being dictated more by hidebound custom than by dietary or financial rationality. Mabel Kittredge, the founder of a model flat in New York City, believed that ignorance, more than poverty, rendered the meals of the foreign-born inadequate. Another reformer, Lillian Betts, noted that "ignorance prevents [an immigrant mother] from buying or preparing the kind of food that would give nourishment and satisfy the cravings of hunger."<sup>3</sup> A New Yorker insisted that immigrants did not understand the impact of migration and life in a new country on their dietary needs. A diet adequate to sustain life in Italy, wrote one, "is not suitable in the colder winters of this country. Animal foods form but a small part of their diet, [resulting in] a gradual but sure deterioration in stamina."<sup>4</sup> Immigrant cooks did not appreciate American foods like corn, or know about vitamins or "preservative" foods. They ate too little meat and too little milk; they drank too much coffee and alcohol; they ate too many sweets and rich, fatty foods. And the women responsible for cooking meals knew nothing of order and routine. "Poor little tenement girl, she does not know

that in the well-managed home, breakfast is bought the day before," Kittedge lamented.<sup>5</sup> In this view, the education of women could end the power of culinary conservatism in ethnic communities around the country.

The consequences of female ignorance in the kitchen were supposedly grave. Jacob Riis believed that "half the drunkenness that makes so many homes miserable is at least encouraged, if not directly caused, by mismanagement and bad cooking."<sup>6</sup> John Spargo, who found only 7 percent of school children eating breakfast, compared children's craving for "stimulants" (mainly pickles) to the craving for alcohol in adults who did not eat properly.<sup>7</sup> The Depression of the 1930s raised further concerns that inadequate diet weakened the nation's youngest citizens. In New York, estimates of rickets rates among school children exceeded 50 percent, of decayed teeth more than 90 percent. Health officials in the public schools judged 20 percent of New York City school children to be underweight. Defining malnutrition as the "constant use of improperly chosen food," health workers at the Mulberry Health Center in New York judged malnourished fully 30 percent of "apparently well" and healthy Italian children. Home visits revealed that 227 of 275 families "needed instruction in preparing food, including assistance with marketing and greater economy."<sup>8</sup> Armed with height/weight data, Dr. Josephine Baker of the Department of Health concurred: Malnutrition "was the most serious and widespread physical defect found among school children."<sup>9</sup> Thus the reformation of foreign foodways seemed necessary for national strength and health.

Most shocking to American sensibilities was the lack of interest in milk among Asian and southern European immigrants. Welfare workers urged milk-avoiding Italians that in America "latte per tutti" was possible, and that canned, evaporated milk should be substituted for coffee.<sup>10</sup> Noting that Japanese families consumed only half the milk of native-born Americans, Carey Miller, a dietician, concluded that "milk, either fresh or evaporated, markedly improves the quality of the average Japanese diet. Not less than a pint a day for every child should be the goal . . . Children should be taught to drink milk without added sugar or flavoring such as chocolate."<sup>11</sup>

Those who criticized immigrant diets argued that immigrants did not eat like Americans. But how did Americans eat? What was the model to which immigrants should aspire, and toward which education should lead?

In culinary matters, regionalism reigned. Thus, reformers faced a glaring problem—the absence of a widely accepted national cuisine.

The United States had become an independent nation without creating a national cuisine that matched its sense of uniqueness. Its eating habits were firmly regional. Perhaps the yeoman farmers idealized by Thomas Jefferson found anything national—even a cuisine—a violation of their enthusiasm for the local; perhaps cuisine simply seemed too exalted a term for simple, republican eating habits. Americans did on occasion link patriotism and eating: In New England, for example, old residents eager to celebrate the special American origins of their new republic ritualized summertime clam roasts into clambakes, claimed they had originated with Native Americans, and then carried on their invented tradition to celebrate a town's founding or the Fourth of July. A few patriots even renounced foreign wines and spirits, or pledged "to drink no other strong liquor than [corn] whiskey," produced in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Only in reaction to the arrival of immigrants in the late nineteenth century did the cultural elites of the Northeast attempt to define what American eating should be. The alternative seemed to be national suicide: "Will Uncle Sam be swallowed by foreigners?" one concerned cartoonist challenged, choosing an appropriate metaphor.<sup>13</sup> Educated American women instead proposed to Americanize the foreigners, by teaching them what, and how, to eat, and by developing a "domestic science" or "home economics" appropriate for American citizens. Domestic science emerged almost simultaneously from many sources: middle-class cooking schools in Boston and New York, the cookbooks of their organizers, the new middle-class women's magazines, and the social settlements that worked closely with poor and foreign-born communities. Collectively, these efforts defined the years between 1870 and 1900 as the era "that made American cooking American."<sup>14</sup> By proposing a national cuisine, domestic scientists helped arm a variety of reform movements aimed at limiting, or even turning back, the tide of cross-over foreign foods and eating customs.

As scientists, these culinary reformers did share some core values with the developers of modern, corporate food industries. In particular, they shared a concern with efficiency, careful planning and measurement, and

scientific solutions to practical problems, all of which found a place in their domestic science textbooks and training programs. "Chemical analysis should be the guide for the cookery book," wrote a lesser known expert in the field, while Ellen Richards, the founder of modern domestic science, wanted rational cooking to form one branch of "the business of housekeeping."<sup>15</sup>

Still, culinary reformers saw but little place in the national cuisine for either corporate foods or consumer pleasures. For culinary inspiration, domestic science turned instead to the austere traditional cooking of rural New England. Ellen Richards, in her 1900 book *The Cost of Living as Modified by Sanitary Science*, argued that the rich shared with the poor a "temptation to spend for things pleasant but not needful" and that "nutrition should be aimed at but not overstepped." Richards wanted all American cooks, regardless of class, to teach at the table "the virtues of self-control, self-denial, regard for others, good temper, good manners, pleasant speech."<sup>16</sup> New England's simple dishes—cod fish, brown bread, baked beans—symbolized a restraint that domestic scientists hoped all Americans would learn and practice.

Indulgence and pleasure had no place in domestic scientists' recipes for workers, immigrants, and poor farmers of the South or Southwest. Just as home economists wanted the poor to purchase simple, wood furniture and bare linoleum, they recommended particularly spartan versions of the New England diet as the model for modern American cooking. Financial necessity meant that a woman providing food at 5–15 cents per person per day could purchase nothing canned, and little more than potatoes, rye meal, corn meal, wheat flour, barley, oats, peas, beans, salt codfish, halibut, meat at 5 cents per pound, oleomargarine, and skimmed milk. Still, Richards worried that those with incomes under \$500 wasted the most food. In her *Fifteen Cent Dinners for Working-Men's Families*, published in 1877, Juliet Corson, superintendent of the New York Cooking School, described a day's menu as broth and bread for breakfast, mutton and turnips for dinner, and barley boiled in broth for supper.

In Richards's New England Kitchen, cooks prepared the traditional foods of New England with a scientific concern for standardization. By selling these foods cheaply, women reformers hoped to educate the poor. Richards described the kitchen as "a friendly but strictly educational estab-

lishment where neighborhood people could purchase at low cost a few different soups and stews, perhaps a rice pudding or a nourishing broth . . . the kitchen would provide not only impeccable New England cookery but absolutely invariable New England cookery . . . every portion of tomato soup and beef stew to be exactly the same from day to day."<sup>17</sup> The menus of the New England Kitchen, according to food historian Harvey Levenstein, were "resolutely New England, featuring fish, clam, and corn chowders, 'Pilgrim succotash,' creamed codfish, pressed meat, corn mush, boiled hominy, oatmeal mush, cracked wheat, baked beans and Indian pudding."<sup>18</sup>

At the same time that they sought to promote the regional foods of New England as a national cuisine for newcomers, some domestic scientists encouraged innovation, and even frivolity, in kitchens that were already firmly middle-class and American. While public school girls learned about baked beans and Indian pudding, middle-class ladies learned from Fannie Farmer and others not just the principles of scientific cooking but the pleasures of preparing and serving all-white or all-pink meals. According to one of her students, Fannie Farmer—known best for her insistence on careful measurement in the kitchen—also insisted that "if a cook can make a good cream cake, baking-powder biscuit, & creamed codfish, she can cook almost anything."<sup>19</sup> Cookbook writers for the middle classes of the late nineteenth century, including Farmer, supplemented such basics with white sauce and "composed salads." White sauces smothered everything from beets that had been "boiled all day, then reheated the next," to novelties like boiled "Frankfort sausages," to old New England standbys like roasted turkey.<sup>20</sup> Salads—once made mainly of meat or poultry—became works of art, with apples, nuts, cottage cheese, celery, slices of pepper, and asparagus tips arranged in "dainty" compositions on decorative plates. These salads formed a "fragile, leafy interlude that was something of a nutritional frill."<sup>21</sup> Composed salads made substantial use of canned produce, from sliced peaches and pineapple to olives and asparagus. While reformers urged new immigrants and poor Americans to learn the restraint and moderation of New England cooking as a kind of apprenticeship in American culinary life, they did not always want the middle classes to eat like new immigrants. Having already served their apprenticeship in culinary restraint, these Americans could be allowed the convenience of the

modern marketplace, with its new processed foods, and the pleasures of innovation and creativity.

Domestic scientists did not stop with describing a national cuisine or demonstrating its dishes in model kitchens for the poor. They brought their program for culinary change into public school classrooms and health programs serving poor communities across the country. Educators attempted to tailor their advice to particular groups. Italians learned that "it is not right to cook meat, cheese, beans, and macaroni together" (since dieticians insisted that combinations hindered digestion).<sup>22</sup> Health workers urged Italian children to substitute bread and butter or milk and crackers or fruit for their highly prized "cheap cakes and candies" bought at the corner "poison stand." Health workers particularly disliked the European custom of eating sweets as an afternoon snack and warned that "sweet rich food should never be eaten except at the end of a meal."<sup>23</sup>

Dieticians especially emphasized the supposedly unhealthy qualities of traditional foods. For example, they attempted to persuade Mexicans to reduce their use of tomato and pepper, in order to make "a blander dish, easier to digest and not harmful to the kidneys." They discouraged Hungarian, Polish, and Jewish children from eating dill pickles (with their supposedly negative impact on the urinary tract). Bertha Wood deplored the sour and pickled flavors and the rich foods popular among Eastern European Jews; these caused "irritation," she argued, rendering "assimilation more difficult" in a people already so "emotional" that they went too often to their doctors.<sup>24</sup> Health care workers also found Jewish mothers too "indulgent" of children—by feeding them fine cuts of meats, and "Grade A eggs," they failed to teach self-denial.<sup>25</sup>

To create a scientific, healthful, and national cuisine, domestic scientists proposed somewhat similar programs of education for immigrants and minorities throughout the United States. School girls in St. Paul in 1920 learned in their textbook to analyze starch and to measure liquids properly while also learning that corn was an excellent, cheap source of fat and starch, that "vegetables are served with butter, salt and pepper, or with a medium white sauce," and that good breakfasts required oatmeal or cornmeal mush. When they prepared inexpensive classroom lunches (about 20 cents per meal), students could choose a menu of cream of pea soup, veal croquettes, creamed potatoes, cottage cheese balls, rolls, "snow pudding,"

chocolate cake, and coffee. The five suggested menus in the textbook included no green vegetables; canned produce appeared only as soups and fruit cocktail appetizers.<sup>26</sup> As late as 1940, the Home Economics Section of New York's Department of Welfare recommended that immigrants should eat the old colonial creoles: for breakfast, hominy grits with milk and sugar, bread with butter, and milk and coffee; for dinner, baked beans, coleslaw with carrots, bread with butter, and custard pudding with raisins; and for supper, cream of carrot soup with rice, cottage cheese and prune salad, bread with butter, and tea.<sup>27</sup>

Farm extension services and university-sponsored home-demonstration agents offered much the same advice to the country's sizeable populations of poor rural women. In the South, the Tuskegee Institute hired a farm agent in 1906, and classes at the residential Penn School in the coastal sea islands introduced principles of scientific cooking and farming to African-American farmers. In the Midwest, farm extension agents introduced better seed and livestock, the use of machinery and fertilizer, and principles of soil treatment, but also new techniques for canning fruits and vegetables, meat and fish, especially the water-bath canning method (which replaced the open-kettle methods of the late nineteenth century).<sup>28</sup>

Protestant missions to rural Catholic Hispanos, like most domestic science programs, focused on re-educating girls. They assumed that when they educated a boy, "you educate an individual; educate a woman and you educate a family." The Home Mission Board focused girls' education "on home economics and general training for homemaking" in order to produce "better housekeepers, more devoted mothers, and more intelligent and economical wives." Mission workers encouraged Hispanic sons and fathers to take over gardening and fieldwork from women. And they urged women to set American-style tables, with proper knives and forks, and to stop dipping with tortillas from a common pot. In the 1920s, Anglo home economics teachers in New Mexico quizzed students on "an inexpensive substitute for meat" and offered "baked potatoes, suet pudding, rice or baked beans" as choices. Their menus included a dinner of meatloaf, mashed potatoes and gravy, buttered carrots, bread with butter, baked apples, and a cafeteria lunch of salmon croquettes with white sauce, hot rolls and whole wheat bread with butter, Waldorf salad, milk and hot chocolate.<sup>29</sup>

Rural American eaters in the South and Midwest found the New-England-based cuisine as curious as did urban immigrants. At Atlanta University a northern teacher of southern blacks conceded, "To introduce soups and stews . . . roast beef, rare steak, Boston baked beans, Boston brown bread, codfish balls, creamed codfish, Johnny cake, Graham gems and hash was not by any means an easy task."<sup>30</sup> Midwest immigrant farm women preferred their own one-pot soups and stews based on homeland recipes to the home agent's peculiar "Project Dish" (a seven-layer casserole of potatoes, barley, rice, onions, ground meat, tomatoes, carrots). One Finnish boy, whose mother assisted a local agent, teased her, "Yes, mother, tell the ladies Anna Tikkanen is coming to tell them how to put vanilla into mashed potatoes."<sup>31</sup>

Even the peoples who had first cultivated corn in the Americas found themselves subject to campaigns for culinary Americanization. And they too viewed such programs with considerable skepticism. By the nineteenth century, groups like the Cherokees in North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee had already adopted intensive farming and animal husbandry based on European models. Forced removal from their eastern and midwestern homelands and relocation to "Indian Territory" (Oklahoma) and scattered western reservations destroyed newly developed strategies for subsistence. To prevent starvation, the federal Indian Bureau provided reservation food rations—and these typically did not include corn. Iron Teeth, an elderly Northern Cheyenne woman, complained in 1916 that "I am given very little food. Each month our Indian policeman brings me one quart of green coffee, one quart of sugar, a few pounds of flour and a small quantity of baking powder."<sup>32</sup> While domestic scientists saw corn-eating as a way to Americanize new immigrants, they seemed eager to wean Native Americans off cornmeal, and onto white wheat flour and baking powder breads.

Between 1880 and 1920 the Bureau of Indian Affairs regularly taught cooking to girls in Indian boarding schools. Commissioner Thomas Jefferson Morgan, appointed in 1889, wanted the schools to Americanize Native Americans. Training in home economics also provided female vocational training. Students at the Cherokee Female Seminary in Oklahoma ate austere but well-balanced meals and remained healthy. Still, worried parents, if they lived nearby, often brought "buttermilk, desserts, produce

from their gardens and fresh fish from the Illinois River."<sup>33</sup> In another school, Anna Moore Shaw, a Pima Indian, thoroughly enjoyed her introduction to cornflakes. In general, food at the Indian schools drew little complaint from students, who were otherwise not shy about expressing sharply negative reactions to American clothing and language. But girls' culinary Americanization often could not survive the trip home: a Hopi girl shocked neighbors with a school recipe that wasted three eggs on one cake. Overall, then, domestic science succeeded in creating a vast program for culinary change among the poorest Americans, but without convincing many enclave eaters anywhere to accept the national cuisine it promoted.

**W**hile women reformers battled in campaigns to Americanize women cooks and consumers, other culinary reformers fought instead to limit the spread of ethnic foods, businesses, and eating practices. Typically, they perceived these as dangerous to the health and well-being of American eaters and the nation. Progressive-era reformers, many of them male, often turned to government regulation of the production and retailing of food and its associated business practices, especially those originating in ethnic communities, as another pathway to modernization.

Already in the nineteenth century, sanitary reformers like Ezra R. Pulling in New York had found the German and Irish Fourth Ward's market stocked with foods of terrifyingly bad quality: "piles of pickled herrings . . . exposed to the air till the mass approaches a condition of putridity" and sausages with "fragments of bread and other farinaceous food."<sup>34</sup> Although concern about corporate processors of meat in the "jungles" of Chicago also sparked new interest in federal inspection, the 1906 pure food and drug law actually passed with the active support of corporate meatpackers, along with mass food producers like brewer Frederick Pabst and canner H. J. Heinz. Corporate producers saw increased regulation as a hardship to small producers, and thus a way to diminish competition.

The strategy worked. A sausage company founded in 1919 in San Francisco by Luigi Managhi and his son provides a case study of the impact of regulation on a small businessman. Run by Luigi's son Mario and a business partner, the Swiss Italian Sausage Factory prospered until World War II,

but it marketed its products only in San Francisco because it lacked a federal certificate to ship across state lines. Even with a Chicago-based corporate manager, the family chose to sell its remaining equipment to a corporate sausage maker and cease business when federal requirements again changed in the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> Even local codes could be exacting. New York regulations required that "all meats, poultry, game, fish and similar products . . . shall be kept within closed refrigerated display cases"—a not inconsiderable expense for small businessmen. Seventy-seven inspectors for the Bureau of Food and Drugs enforced 36 such regulations.<sup>36</sup> Small businessmen experienced regulation as harassment.

Reformers explicitly attacked immigrant businessmen as unsanitary when they worked out of their homes. In New York, progressives drove small-scale bakeries and pasta-manufactories out of tenement basements; they legally and precisely specified dimensions for floors, ceilings, and windows of factories, and the quality and location of furnishings, troughs, utensils, and ventilation. In response, a Brooklyn Polish-run bakery of the 1930s defensively changed its name to the Greenpoint Sanitary Bakery and Lunch Room. The head of New York's Bureau of Food and Drugs even claimed that modest restaurant owners along the Bowery had become so fearful of city regulations that they were cleaner than "the classy establishments on upper Fifth Avenue [which] . . . may be whited sepulchres."<sup>37</sup>

Campaigns to ban pushcarts affected immigrant businessmen almost exclusively, and reformers justified these regulations, too, on sanitary grounds. In 1905 Mayor McLellan appointed an investigating commission and tightened the licensing of street vendors. East Side peddlers, responding to what they claimed was police harassment, held meetings to propose counter-legislation. *The American Hebrew* supported the vendors, claiming that the food they sold was "as good, if not better" than supplies sold in neighboring stores.<sup>38</sup> New York then tried to end the sale of hot or cold street foods but quickly relaxed the ban as unrealistic: too many workers depended on them for their lunch. In 1936 New York's first Jewish-Italian mayor, Fiorello La Guardia, again succeeded temporarily in ridding the city of the pushcart markets he viewed as "colorful, shaggy and artistic" but also odorous, chaotic, noisy and unsanitary.<sup>39</sup> With WPA funds, La Guardia's administration herded Jewish and Italian pushcart vendors into new buildings, like the Essex Street and First Avenue markets. The city designed the

buildings "for comfort and convenience of customer and merchant alike": they were heated, cooled, and well lighted, and "offending odors are banished by a suction system and each vendor must dump all refuse into huge Department of Sanitation trucks, loaded one after another all day long in a glass enclosed section of each building."<sup>40</sup> La Guardia and other New Deal reformers challenged the pushcart merchants to look at the change as a step up in the world: "Remember," he said, "you are no longer peddlers. You are now merchants."<sup>41</sup>

But when the Department of Markets told 900 Jewish pushcart operators they were a traffic hazard and must remove to the new Essex Street market, only 475 rented stalls.<sup>42</sup> WPA writers found that "despite the shrill cries of enterprising vendors and the persistent buzz of bargain-hunters, there is pessimism in the faces of the aged Jewish tradesmen who resent the change to order, cleanliness, and regulation that the younger generation has readily accepted."<sup>43</sup>

In a similar move in San Antonio in 1936, the Health Department removed the city's chili queens from market squares, on grounds that flies and unsanitary food-preparation techniques threatened the town's health. Outraged, liberal mayor Maury Maverick then helped build—and ostentatiously patronized—screened booths with central washing facilities, in the hopes that the chili queens could continue to attract local and tourist consumers. Ultimately, however, Maverick lost the battle with his health department, and chili queens disappeared from San Antonio plazas.

In San Francisco in the same years, city reformers sought to remove shrimp-cleaning operations from Chinatown homes. As in New York, San Francisco opposition emphasized both the sanitary threats of home production and the frequent use of child labor in family enterprises. A powerful poster of the period showed a small child, with bleeding hands, peeling a shrimp.<sup>44</sup> The implication was clear: Patriotic Americans would not eat foods produced in such foreign circumstances.

By far the most effective campaign in the food fights of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was aimed at the drinking of alcoholic beverages, and thus at the largest and most successful of nineteenth-century cross-over businessmen. Prohibitionists, overwhelmingly of native birth and Protestant faith, succeeded in passing the Eighteenth Amendment to the federal Constitution in 1919. Responding to the significant

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consumption of alcohol typical since colonial times, moral reformers had worried already in 1815 about the United States becoming a nation of drunkards. After decades of arguing for individual abstinence and sobriety, reformers in the 1840s turned to regulation, like the famous Maine Law which licensed vendors of drink. But just as Americans appeared willing to change their drinking habits in response to religious revival and reformers' pleas, a new wave of immigrant Irish reintroduced customs like drinking at funerals, and the German brewers convinced urban Americans to take up beer drinking.

The arrival of millions of new Irish, German, and Italian drinkers, the growing popularity of beer, and the spread of the saloon spawned a national countermovement seeking "national unity through national self-restraint."<sup>45</sup> Natives complained of "the beer-soiled notes of the 'Faderland,'" the salty pretzels of the saloon's free lunch, and the Limburger cheese that smelled as "if all the vile odors from the public sewers were mingled with those of Chicago's fragrant river and glue factories."<sup>46</sup> Sabbatarians like Billy Sunday reminded Americans that most cities had more saloons than churches, schools, libraries, jails, or parks, and more saloon-keepers than ministers. By the 1890s scientific racism added new founts of prohibitionist fervor, as when a Chicago minister in 1903 promised that "deliverance will come, but it will be from the sober and august Anglo-Saxon south, unspoiled and unpoisoned by the wine-tinted, beer-sodden, whiskey-crazed, sabbath-desecrating, God-defying and anarchy-breeding and practicing minions from over the sea."<sup>47</sup>

Immigrant Swedes, Finns, and Norwegians sometimes formed their own temperance movements. In North Dakota, Democratic pietist Norwegians set themselves apart from other immigrants by not drinking and by supporting both the Populist and prohibitionist movements which their German neighbors in the Republican Party opposed. Irish immigrants founded a Catholic Total Abstinence Union in 1872; an Irish priest had already toured the United States in support of abstinence twenty years earlier.

More often, however, immigrants mounted stiff opposition to a prohibition movement dominated by Protestant natives. Not surprisingly, Germans led the defense. Brewers had organized to protect themselves once already, in 1864, when the federal government imposed a tax of one dollar a barrel on beer and a licensing fee on brewers. Around the turn of

the century, the most important German voice defending drink was the National German-American Alliance (founded in Pennsylvania), and its president, Charles J. Hexamer. The formation of state branches of the Alliance usually occurred in the midst of state prohibition campaigns in the early years of the century. Hexamer developed a defense of drinking that was both culturally German and deeply American in its references to natural rights, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. In 1912 Hexamer told Congress that "as devoted citizens of this country, we Americans of German birth or descent hold ourselves second to none in our devotion to the cause of true temperance and to all that makes for the sanctity and purity of the home, and decency and order in the States . . . as free and sovereign members of a free and sovereign people, we believe that we have the right to regulate our lives and our homes as we see fit. The right to drink our wine and our beer, and to import it, we consider as absolute an attribute of human liberty as is the right to buy any other food."<sup>48</sup>

Alas for Hexamer, World War I called his blending of German and American values into question. Patriotic Americans especially hated beer dynasties like that of Adolphus Busch, who died just before the war in Europe began. The Busch family, with its frequent trips to Germany and its very public enjoyment of its vast wealth, symbolized the arrogance of the kaiser to many Americans, and Anheuser-Busch sales fell from \$17 million to \$14 million in 1914. Sizeable charitable contributions, pledges of loyalty, and the removal of busts of Bismarck notwithstanding, the Busch estate was sequestered by A. Mitchell Palmer of the Treasury Department and title to the property was placed under the control of the federal government. Undermined still further by the anti-German sentiments of the war years, the brewers lost their battle against the prohibitionists.

Hexamer's 1912 predictions about the consequences of prohibition were nevertheless prescient. He had warned that "attempts at prohibition will cause contempt for the law, will create law-breakers, will be an additional incentive to try 'the forbidden fruit,' and, in prohibition States will drive people to the vile stuff of the smuggler, the bootlegger, the speak-easy, the blind tiger, the gambling houses, the brothels and other dens of vice."<sup>49</sup> In fact, immigrant home brewers of bathtub gin and dago red in the 1920s not only legally evaded prohibition (since production for home use remained legal) but illegally attracted enough new native-born consumers to make



Prohibition an era of good profits for those businessmen willing to become criminals.

Prohibition, along with almost all the other efforts of the nationalizing food reformers of this era, failed miserably. It is easy enough to see why. While adopting a language of business rationality, science, and technology in order to create a national cuisine, food reformers discouraged Americans from viewing food in the ways consumers, corporate food processors, and cross-over businessmen alike saw it—as a source of pleasure, novelty, stimulation, and profit. Few Americans were disposed to forgo the pleasures of the food marketplace for Puritan simplicity, self-reliance, and self-denial. As Dr. Victor G. Heiser, a nutrition consultant to the National Association of Manufacturers, ruefully reminded reformers, “Most people think of food as a form of recreation. Only a few look upon it as the fuel which keeps our body functioning,” so few were sufficiently concerned to think mainly about what they needed “to function efficiently.”<sup>50</sup>

Between 1920 and 1940, the food fight gradually waned as America’s reformers and intellectuals, far more than America’s eaters, changed their views on ethnic eaters and their foods. Intellectuals speaking for the nation gradually came to terms with America’s diversity—a diversity no longer contained in enclave economies but reaching out into urban and regional marketplaces—and with the industrialization of America’s food industries.

Cultural reconciliation began within the movement for social welfare and in some of the same institutions that had pioneered cooking classes as a form of Americanization. As early as the 1920s in San Francisco’s Chinatown, Donaldina Cameron occasionally wore Chinese clothing and often ate the Chinese food of the women prostitutes she sought to rescue. Elite acceptance of immigrant contributions flowered briefly as “cultural pluralism” during the otherwise tribalist 1920s. While food was nowhere the centerpiece of pluralist thought—neither in Jane Addams’s industrial museum nor in Horace Kallen’s writings—culinary expressions of toleration nevertheless proliferated in the interwar years.

As a relatively short war, World War I required but limited sacrifices of American consumers. Still, for the first time the federal government—fu-

eled by Progressives’ enthusiasms for rationality, planning, and national unity—sought to manage food shortages and issued wartime directives to housewives facing shortages of wheat and meat. Patriotic eating required the substitution of beans for meat. To prevent consumers from “suffering protein and wheat shortage,” the government distributed foreign recipes that were both rich and meatless. Dieticians, aware of the newly discovered vitamins in so-called “preservative foods,” also pushed for greater consumption of fresh vegetables. No longer completely strange, and loaded with healthy vegetables, Italian cookery became a wartime boon to readers of women’s magazines. But wartime recipes in local newspapers did not always reflect this sudden federal interest in culinary diversity. Food columnists in Pittsburgh were concerned to substitute other grains for wheat flours, too, but their featured recipes seemed more influenced by the “national cuisine” of the home economists than by recent immigrants: recipes for “seed bread, brown potato soup, spinach croquets” predominated. The most exotic suggestions were northern European treats like butterscotch and roast goose with gooseberry sauce.<sup>51</sup>

More sustained interest in immigrant culinary gifts subsequently developed during the 1920s at the International Institutes of the YWCA. A participant would later call the 40 institutes (which roughly resembled settlements) “the eatingest places ever known.” The International Institutes popularized ideas with long lives in twentieth-century thinking about ethnicity, namely that “food and fellowship go together, whether in the home or in community life” and that ethnic food’s main contribution to American life was “VARIETY—the spice of good eating as well as of life.”<sup>52</sup> The Institutes created food programs to help immigrant women “develop a better insight into the problem of adjusting their food habits to those of America” but also saw immigrant foods adding “to our American dietary, giving it greater variety,” as Lelia McGuire noted in her *Old World Foods for New World Families*, originally published in 1932. During the Depression they emphasized, “It is not the Institute’s aim to change the diet habits of a family when their diet is excellent.”<sup>53</sup> The Institutes even published cookbooks for American cooks, like St. Louis’s *Menus and Recipes from Abroad* (1927), or Lowell’s *As the World Cooks: Recipes from Many Lands* (1938). Notably missing were recipes from Jewish immigrants (who avoided the programs of the clearly Protestant “Y”). Milwaukee’s Jewish-

oriented settlements had, however, produced their own very popular *Settlement Cookbook* (1903), which provided a best-selling blend of American and immigrant recipes.

A number of the Institutes' programs moved beyond woman-to-woman contact to encourage cross-over business. The Boston Institute produced a tourist's guide to foreign food restaurants; by the 1930s its list of "nationality" shops and restaurants urged consumers, too, to remember that "understanding and friendship are often built around meals."<sup>54</sup> In St. Paul/Minneapolis and some other Institutes, workers sponsored Old World Markets, Festivals of Nations, and International Bazaars that sold foods and goods, offered by both ethnic women's organizations and by restaurant owners, grocers, and importers from immigrant communities.<sup>55</sup> These festivals grew into regular events and became even more popular in the 1950s.

With the onset of the Depression, the Institutes urged Americans to remember that immigrant communities held important culinary resources. "Under-privileged communities," they pointed out, had, by the mere fact of their poverty, "learned to know a lot about food substitutes and economies in buying."<sup>56</sup> The poor had useful skills—like the urban African-American woman who, drawing on her southern childhood experiences, reported that, for her, "during the Depression, fishing was survival."<sup>57</sup> Reformers urged native-born Americans to see themselves critically as immigrants sometimes perceived them to be—spoiled and indulgent—and to learn from their poorer neighbors. One observer noted that "Croatian immigrants, foreign-born people used to make disparaging remarks about the native American women sitting in the shade in the summer heat fanning themselves while the foreign-born women sweated in their kitchens putting up hundreds of jars of beans, tomatoes, preserves, jellies, pickles, beets, fruits of all kinds. Instead of putting up vegetables, meat, etc., for the winter native Americans bought canned goods from the store. None of the foreign-born women would be caught dead with store bread on the table."<sup>58</sup> These women knew how to "make do"—a skill much in demand among all Americans during the 1930s.

In New York, Depression-era social workers became enthusiastic advocates of multi-ethnic eating for low income families. Spaghetti entered the "advised" lists for inexpensive menus, distributed in Spanish to newly arrived Puerto Ricans.<sup>59</sup> The welfare department not only offered recipes

in Yiddish for cooking oatmeal but praised the thriftiness of a kosher dairy meal like cheese blintzes, combination salad, bread with butter, and milk and coffee. Welfare brochures even included English-language instructions for making tzimes.<sup>60</sup> From Americanization, social welfare workers had rather quickly moved on to a celebration of the economic practicality, social rewards, and gustatory pleasures of culinary cultural pluralism.

Still, the food fight was not completely over in the 1930s, and nowhere was cultural confusion over the definition of American foodways more apparent than in the *America Eats* portion of the Federal Writers' Project. Begun in 1938, this project organized intellectuals (including writers like Nelson Algren) in 42 states to write a guide (never published) to American eating.<sup>61</sup>

Correspondence between administrators in Washington and their many employees in the states reveal differences of definition that marred the project from its beginnings. One editor in Washington complained that some states "could not get away from the idea that 'America Eats' was to be a cookbook . . . a few undertook to write dissertations on food in the worst women's magazine manner. One or two became fascinated with the commercial festivals supposed to give publicity to some local food-stuff. Yet others devoted too much attention to the food-habits of groups of recent foreign origins."<sup>62</sup> *America Eats* editors consistently requested descriptions of traditional American celebrations of community through food. What its writers found, however, was universal interethnic mingling and the popularity of corporate and "invented" foods. Were not these, too, "American"? Editors in Washington were reluctant to call them that.

Administrators of *America Eats* easily accepted that American foodways were regional. They requested state units to describe foods typical of their particular natural environment or agriculture. On the list submitted by Florida writers was terrapin, coquina broth, conch, grunts, rattlesnakes, key limes, oranges, wampus, and comtie. The files of Delaware and Massachusetts overflowed with stories of shore dinners and clambakes. For the vast midsections of the country, arguments arose. Iowa writers insisted there was no product or dish unique to their state; Washington suggested corn. Editors queried Montana about the possibility that miners there had

invented ham and eggs with potatoes, “a unique American contribution to good cookery.”<sup>63</sup> Trying to choose among recipes submitted from Kansas, Walter Kiplinger wondered if “buckwheat cakes and buffalo meat barbecue [were] representative.” State writers informed him that the state grew very little buckwheat. They had found several buffalo barbecues near Milford, but these had been introduced three years earlier by Chamber of Commerce boosters. Nor could they explain “why Milford boosters hit upon the buffalo idea,” since at most “the herds . . . in the old days paused there to satisfy their thirst at the old shogo-spring.” Impressed that the 1941 Milford barbecue had served 10,000 barbecue sandwiches, Kansas writers reported also that “the buffalo idea” had spread to Czechs and their Sokol—which now sponsored its own buffalo festival.<sup>64</sup>

Federal administrators welcomed accounts of the historical evolution of foodways in colonial Massachusetts and Maine; without comment they accepted as genuinely American the reports on the eating habits of Native Americans and of frontier miners and ranchers. Even Spanish-origin foodways qualified if their roots were deep enough. The state file on Florida described the “creole” influence of Spanish and Majorcan settlement, and included descriptions of popular “pilau” dinners of rice and chicken (or what writer Stetson Kennedy termed “A ton of Rice and Three Red Roosters”) “cooked in large iron pots over open fires.” Southwest writers recognized a regional cuisine that blended Mexican, Indian, and Spanish into barbecue sauce, a “dark crimson blend of tomatoes and chili peppers,” and that included tortillas, chili con carne, tacos, enchiladas, tamales, and a variety of wheaten baked sweets and corn dishes.<sup>65</sup>

Reports from the American South proved both rich and thoroughly uncontroversial as descriptions of regional, but completely American, eating. Portraits of skillful white housewives unloading baskets of hams, potatoes, and fried chicken onto “snowy white” tablecloths for a rural church picnic or “all day preaching” alternated with rhapsodic, condescending descriptions of Negro cooks and servers, male and female. White writers praised the bounty of the simple food of white housewives, but noted that “most everyone brings the same things, made much the same ways,” so that “the ambrosia which Mrs. DeShazo is taking from her box is identical with that which Mrs. Ballew is setting on the tablecloth.”<sup>66</sup> Whether barbecue, Alabama eggnog, fish fry, or “candy pullings,” fine food in these

accounts instead emerged almost exclusively from black hands. One WPA writer insisted that “the making of the masterpiece does not lie in the food, whether or not it be modern, but in the secrets of preparation, buried deep in the brain of many an ancient Negro retainer.”<sup>67</sup> Sometimes this retainer was an Uncle Felix (who cooked for the white members of a Georgia “fish camp” clubhouse); more often it was a mammy or “mauma.”

A few of the eating events described in *America Eats*—notably possum roasts and “chitlin struts”—were all-black. And in Delaware the white community’s Big Thursday (celebrating the end of the yearly ban against oyster fishing) preceded the comparable Black Saturday by several days. Generally, however, patterned intermingling of the races prevailed, and few food items (with the possible exception of chitlins) found favor among only one race. In those parts of the South where immigrants had earlier settled, their adoption of the southern regional creoles was well advanced. In Savannah, the March Salzburger Gathering picnic no longer included “delectable sausages and puddings made with specially fattened smoked porks” or imported wines. Instead “year by year all the old German foods have been replaced by Southern American cooking. Even sour potato salad and Austrian jellies have disappeared”—replaced by “mulatto rice,” chicken pilau, and “real home-made southern custard [ice] cream.”<sup>68</sup>

In contrast to their positive reception of regional variations on American culinary themes, project administrators and writers were of two minds when faced with submissions that described hasenpfeffer, lutefisk, or other immigrant dishes as American food. Florida writers saw Tampa’s Sicilian-Spanish-Cuban community of cigar workers, along with their arroz-con-pollo and Cuban bread festivals at the town’s Asturiano Club, as recent expressions of a traditional regional creole. And New York writers proclaimed, without apology, the distinctive eating habits of their city, which was totally unlike the rest of the United States precisely because it had been so influenced by recent immigrants. Not so in New England. There, writer R. Cameron, in an awkward piece of fiction, described the travails of a Connecticut Valley working woman who sought to carry on a local, Protestant church May Breakfast in a town where foreigners and “their thick, dark sandwiches, their great hunks of soggy-looking cake,” and “peppers and garlic fried in erl” overwhelmed and disgusted her. “Foreigners’—she hated them all.”<sup>69</sup> In Indiana, too, a local writer claimed

that foreigners "have exerted little influence on the balance of the State, and almost none at all upon its eating habits," perhaps because "the true Hoosier doesn't like unusual foods; he sticks self-righteously to his meat and potatoes, corn, beans, and pie." But a second writer from Indiana in "a pitch-in Dinner after a Funeral Service," noted that the widow was "an excellent kraut maker," known also for her "cabbage relish with pepper"—both German specialties.<sup>70</sup>

The vast upper Midwest, with its predominantly immigrant-origin farmers, posed the toughest issues for the project's definitions of American eating. North Dakota's Thomas Moodie alerted project administrator Florence Kerr of the trouble his writers had in preparing a list of recipes "for popular traditional North Dakota dishes that do not represent recent foreign influence. The State's population has been so greatly influenced by foreign groups that few, if any, dishes have been developed that are traditional to North Dakota alone."<sup>71</sup> Editors in Washington actually sent Wisconsin writers in search of "a typical German New Year's Even feast," only to be disappointed that "they had never heard of such a feast." The same administrators turned down the Milwaukee proposal that herring salad and mulled wine, both commonly served in German homes for New Year's, be included. (These, sniffed Mrs. Florence Kerr, were "not peculiar to Germans.")<sup>72</sup>

The Wisconsin unit instead gained Washington's permission to explore lutefisk suppers when "several members of the staff . . . indicated their willingness to eat the fish in their eagerness for basic research." But Washington then turned down Iowa's request to include lutefisk (along with Amana bread) as "not representative enough for our purpose." Writing to Washington in 1941, Administrator S. L. Stolte passed along the editors' sense that "the Norwegian LUTEFISK supper and the German 'booya' are more interesting as examples of traditional community eating in the state than the Kolacky or sauerkraut events."<sup>73</sup> Only Mrs. Kerr knew why.

In fact, lutefisk—a Norwegian codfish Christmas dish made notorious most recently by Garrison Keillor—appeared as representative in submissions from all over the upper Midwest. A dish of codfish soaked first in lye, then in water, then cooked, then served with melted butter or cream sauce, lutefisk had wide appeal as a novel dish for multi-ethnic eaters. Church and community groups all over the Midwest held lutefisk dinners

in the fall, not merely as a Christmas celebration. The Minnesotan who described these events noted, "Its traditional Scandinavian features are more or less incidental" as the third generation understood not a word of their native language. Neither were they the largest group of eaters at lutefisk suppers. Instead, he wrote further, "Torggrim Oftedal's German wife is there because she hasn't missed a parish function since she was married. Henry Bleecker, who came to Minnesota from up-state New York and married Anna Olson, is there because he always goes to church with his wife."<sup>74</sup> Wisconsin writers too believed that lutefisk church dinners had become so popular, beginning in the 1920s, that humorous Norwegians had formed "a Norwegian Lutefisk Protective Association to make sure that Germans and Irish don't get more than their fair share of the traditional Christmas delicacy." Immigrants and their children apparently delighted in introducing newcomers to the "gastronomies of lutefisk." "They will tell him, with an air of complacent knowledge, 'You won't like it. Nobody likes lutefisk at first. You have to learn to like it. Better take meatballs.' For Swedish meatballs are served the uninitiated who have yet to grow to a liking of the strong fish."<sup>75</sup> (In the South, "possum" feeds, chitterlins, "Kentucky oysters," and Brunswick stew with squirrel sometimes provided the same moments of occasional culinary frisson for middle-class, and usually urban and male, white cross-over eaters.)

While happy to welcome as American any foods that originated in colonial America, and while being somewhat confused and ambivalent about ethnic customs, *America Eats* editors vigorously rejected foods or events they regarded as commercial or corporate. Contributions from California sparked particular anger in Washington. Faced with descriptions of California novelties like the burrito, French dip sandwich (invented by an Italian), and Texas Tamale Tommy's Ptomaine Tabernacle, and with an article on health food "a la concentrate," a federal administrator lost his patience. "What these contributions exemplify is the mongrel character of Southern California today—its eagerness to have traditions, the commercial character of its attempts to make such traditions."<sup>76</sup>

But California was not alone in liking cross-over and commercial treats: hot dogs appeared everywhere, even in the rural South; Oklahoma City boasted of Ralph A. Stephen, owner of the Dolores Restaurant and Drive-In, who had invented Suzi-Q potatoes and a machine to cut the potatoes

into the requisite spirals. In Atlanta, a Georgia writer noted a recent development: ladies meeting between 11 and 12 in the morning for Coca-Cola parties, which included "trays of tall iced glasses filled with Coca-Cola" followed by "platters of crackers and small iced cakes."<sup>77</sup> Colorado found its drive-in restaurants sufficiently novel that the writer explained, "You 'drive-in,' honk the horn, read the menu painted on the high board fence in front of you, or accept one thrust into your hands by a pretty girl . . . wearing a jaunty slack suit," and then order hamburgers, hot dogs, or ribs with Cokes.<sup>78</sup> All of these entries were marked for exclusion from the final publication.

That publication never came, however, as the Second World War ended federal programs for unemployed intellectuals. The notes and files of the America Eats project, frozen in time, stand as a lasting reminder of the legacy of earlier food fights. Disagreement and discord, not national unity, still characterized the efforts of American intellectuals to define American eating.

**T**he confusion about what constituted regional American, as opposed to ethnic, corporate or invented foods in the America Eats project resolved itself in the face of a national wartime emergency. Any and all foods that helped solve a food crisis caused by shortages and rationing found acceptance as sufficiently American. World War II intensified exploration of the nation's many eating communities, in large part because the Army had 15 million soldiers to feed, many of them of foreign descent. As one northerner noted, "I never ate grits or black-eyed peas or broccoli until I came into the Army." Another confessed, "I had never eaten eggplant. Fried eggplant's real good too. Broccoli I don't care for at all. You say it's called the aristocrat of vegetables?"<sup>79</sup> At the request of the National Defense Advisory Commission, the National Research Council (NRC) together with the U.S. Department of Agriculture decided to research food habits of Americans, and formed a Committee on Food Habits. Wartime researchers sometimes assumed that foreigners might still need special education, if only to handle the rules of rationing; the International Institutes in particular worried that "submissive" foreign housewives might not resist or report store owners who overcharged or operated black markets.

But the judgmental condemnation typical of many earlier studies by food reformers was entirely absent in the work of the NRC.<sup>80</sup>

On the home front, ethnic foods became central to campaigns to remind American cooks that "every time you cook you can help or hinder Hitler."<sup>81</sup> Under the auspices of groups like the Common Council for American Unity, public programs again stressed learning from one's multi-ethnic neighbors. Reported one Council worker, "In general, foreign-born housewives are more careful both in their food-buying habits and in the economical preparation of food." They also "know a lot about food substitutes and economies in buying, and might make a real contribution." She suggested neighborhood meetings where individuals exchanged experiences, methods, and food recipes.<sup>82</sup> At the close of one such meeting, foreign-born housewives offered newspaper reporters an attractive array of dishes they had prepared. A press release from Constance Gurd Rykert of the Common Council for American Unity emphasized that "European housewives had had to use meat substitutes or meat stretchers . . . Age-long shortages have conditioned them to rationing long before it became a war-time rule here in America, and they have evolved succulent dishes, rich in nutrition and low in point values." She appended to her release a recipe for eggplant "parmeciana," contributed by Miss Angela M. Carozzi.<sup>83</sup>

The Council also sponsored a series of radio broadcasts as part of its Food Fights For Freedoms programming. Radio segments, and a special cookbook, encouraged the organization of "What's Cooking in Your American Neighbor's Pot" parties. One broadcast focused on "What Americans Can Learn from the Greek American Housewife"; it emphasized her thrifty ways and the value of putting several ingredients into one dish to eliminate waste. Other lessons from the Greek community included the use of cereals in meals other than breakfast, the use of low-point rationed meats, especially lamb, and the use of fermented milk (presumably yogurt) as a substitute for cream. A Council brochure called "War-Time Recipes Used by Our Foreign Origin Americans" included Czech lentil chowder, Italian pasta e fagioli, Norwegian smorre brod, and Polish "golarki" and "pierozki." The Council's cookbook listed the ingredients used by Greeks, Scandinavians, Western Mediterraneans, "Orientals," and Slavs to fulfill daily requirements for the seven food groups; it also

suggested that local organizations sponsor an American regional party, with foods from New England (brown bread), the South (black-eyed peas), and the Southwest (hot tamales).<sup>84</sup>

With a diverse multi-ethnic food marketplace beneath their noses, New York's food columnists became especially enthusiastic about ethnic solutions to wartime problems. In 1942 New York's *PM* ran a week-long series focusing on Mrs. Daly (an active clubwoman in the Bronx Auxiliary of the American Legion who prepared "medium-price" wartime menus) and Mrs. Lederman (who lived in a federal housing project with her husband, an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers union and prepared "low-price" meals). Charlotte Adams, the author, noted that "we shall learn more from Mrs. Lederman than she can possibly learn from us" because "she's fond of what might seem to some of us strange foods," a trait attributed to her Hungarian mother. Including a recipe for "tzibla kirchluch" (onion cookies), Mrs. Lederman easily convinced Adams that these were "perfectly delicious and most easy to make."<sup>85</sup> The same series suggested that readers try dandelion greens fried with bacon, or broccoli, or pumpernickel bread. Meanwhile, at *The Times*, Jane Holt praised the greens readily available at any springtime Italian market—dandelions, mustard greens, sorrel grass, field salad, artichokes, broccoli rabe, spinach.<sup>86</sup> (Dandelions could even be purchased "in the grocery department of a dignified city store, neatly packaged in tins that bear the label of a distinguished Back Bay Boston firm of gentlemen grocers.")<sup>87</sup> Holt also touted a sugar substitute—the molasses of "the Deep South of long ago."<sup>88</sup>

With all their enthusiasm for culturally diverse patriotic eating, the reformers and food columnists of the 1940s nevertheless described ethnic foods as a new means to fulfilling old values. The cuisine they recommended was more inclusive, but the values remained those of New England's Puritans. Thus recipes for Spanish rice, Brazilian cabbage salad, and Norwegian Prune pudding ("a sugar saver") appeared as part of a "war on waste."<sup>89</sup> Simple, homemade, and thrifty meals using native American ingredients still drew the highest praise. When the West Side Children's Aid Center sponsored a competition won by Anna Abbattista, her meal (a fairly mundane but Italianate luncheon of vegetables, bread and butter, milk, and sliced bananas costing mere cents) earned praise while the more commercial American meal of her sister, who had prepared a home-eco-

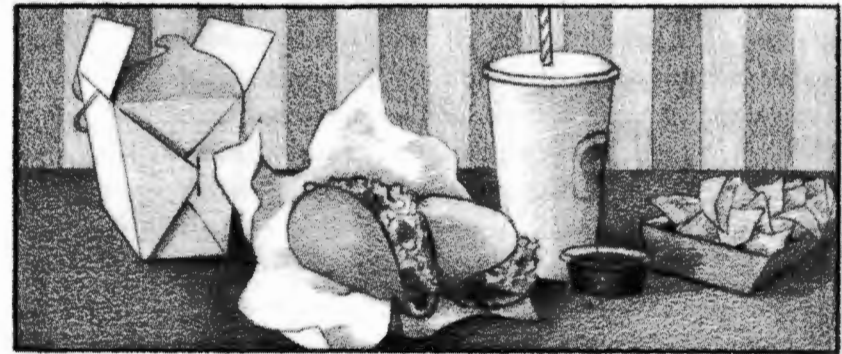
nomics text menu of creamed chipped beef and crushed pineapple with whole-wheat toast and milk, fell by the wayside as too expensive—at 18.5 cents.<sup>90</sup> Across town at the Madison Square Boys Club, Albert Hines declared the empanadas that his Colombian students prepared by blending meat, eggs, and corn far superior to his own expensive steaks. Foreign recipes thus "glamorized money-saving."<sup>91</sup> With a war on, one food writer insisted, "Every consumer must learn to exercise a kind of patriotic self-restraint in every act of buying and using."<sup>92</sup> Offal meats provided a particularly telling exercise in restraint and self-denial, carrying readers far from Puritan tastes, but not from Puritan values. In one article, Mrs. David Dubinsky, wife of the president of the ILGWU, shared her recipe for a Russian dish of mushrooms and chopped calf's lung, liver, and heart on a dough made with chicken fat.<sup>93</sup>

Food experts of the 1940s also kept consumers well informed about the use of new processed foods, relaxing their earlier objections to corporate products. By the 1940s nutritionists had agreed that citrus fruits, transported from far-off Florida or California, should be part of a healthy eater's daily diet. Even canned novelties could find acceptance if they perked up war-stressed appetites. Meat shortages created a temporary enthusiasm for soy bean products, both those familiar in Asian import stores and new corporate products like a spaghetti manufactured from soy flour in Chicago. Overall, food writers suggested that housewives, who might be returning home from wartime jobs, should feel patriotic—and efficient—when they opened cans of the baked beans, spaghetti, and chop suey (or was it chow mein?) that they found side by side on grocery shelves.

Thus, after fifty years of intermittent battling, American intellectuals decided that Uncle Sam could swallow immigrant and regional specialties and processed foods and actually grow stronger in the act. While still loathe to reject moderation and self-denial as key American values, or to embrace the hedonism of uncritical consumerism, even in the food marketplace, they now saw ethnic and corporate foods as alternative routes to old cultural ends. Efficiency, restraint, and moderation meant tolerating diversity and multi-ethnic marketplace exchanges. It meant welcoming, as well, the convenience of standardized processed foods. As the United States rejected isolation and rose to global power, it also accepted a peculiarly American, and fundamentally commercial, culinary

cosmopolitanism. Corporate production and curiosity about “what’s cooking in your neighbor’s pot” now defined what was American about how Americans ate.

In the postwar years the two found even more common ground. Sometimes remembered as the decades of Jell-O and Twinkies, the postwar years instead saw ethnicity “go corporate” and become American in a newly tolerant culture, where eating had finally and truly become big business.



## The Big Business of Eating

What better symbolized corporate food and American eating in the postwar period than the TV dinner? Standardized, quick-cooking, convenient, and marketed initially in a novel cardboard box that looked like a TV, the same TV dinner sold coast to coast. It was mass produced for mass markets, and it is one of several 1950s corporate novelties that continues to sell well, although in somewhat new evolutions, down to the present.

Swanson’s, the inventor of TV dinners, was founded by a Swedish immigrant, Carl Swanson, who had arrived in the United States in 1896. He moved from an early job as a grocery clerk to success first as a wholesale grocer and then as the largest processor of turkeys in the United States. With the development of freezing technologies and the spread of community freezer lockers and then home freezers after World War II, Swanson’s sons began manufacturing frozen potpies, hoping to extend sales of turkey beyond the holidays. In 1954 they marketed their first frozen TV dinner of turkey with dressing, green peas, and mashed potatoes.<sup>1</sup>

It is unlikely that anyone anywhere in the United States thought of Swanson’s TV dinners as Swedish. Swanson’s was not an enclave business, marketing to persons of Scandinavian descent. Nor was it interested in cross-over marketing of Swedish-inspired dishes to the multi-ethnic consumers of the Midwest. Swanson’s sons made no effort to market their dinners as ethnic fare; they did not care about the ethnic ties of their