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FOOD AND DRINK

During the first half of the nineteenth century, American food was a local affair. Apart from certain imports such as tea, coffee, and spices, Americans tended to eat what was at hand: Marylanders ate their oysters, Hoosiers enjoyed their corn, Plains Indians continued to live off dwindling buffalo herds, southern slaves were kept to a diet of hog and hominy, and western settlers as memorialized in Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902), ate the local dust right along with the victuals: "Colonel Cyrus Jones's eating palace . . . opened up on the world as a stage upon the audience. You sat in Omaha's whole sight and dined, while Omaha's dust came and settled upon the refreshments" (p. 148). Until reliable refrigeration and transportation became widely available, Americans grew, raised, hunted, cooked, preserved, and ate food that was indigenous to their particular region, while food making was a daily, full-time occupation for many.

After the civil war, however, with the completion of railway lines to western territories—and the development of the icebox car—regional food gained a national market: the territories shipped grain to the east; Florida shipped fruit to the north; and Chicago received its first fresh lobster from Boston. Meat, milk, fish, fruits, and vegetables could now be transported from the country to the city, from one state to another, and by 1869, when Chinese laborers drove home the last spike of the transcontinental railroad stretching from New England to California, the very first boxcar of fresh fruit made its way from the West Coast to the East. Thus, an American gastronome could count on variety. In Mark Twain's fictional account of a European

tour, *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), his narrator expresses a distaste for what he deems the "monotonous variety of UNSTRIKING dishes" characteristic of European cookery and yearns for the diverse foodstuff of his native country: soft-shell crabs from the Chesapeake, turtle soup from Philadelphia, broiled Virginia bacon, Baltimore duck, San Francisco mussels, Connecticut shad, Southern-style fried chicken, and all-American (i.e., salted) butter. "A man accustomed to American food and American domestic cookery would not starve to death suddenly in Europe," observes Twain, "but I think he would gradually waste away, and eventually die."

With the advent of a national market and consumer interest in diverse fare, the American food economy shifted from subsistence and local production to profit-driven, mechanical production—from the homemade to the industrial. Although canned fish and vegetables had appeared as early as 1825 (when the first patent was granted for the tin can), the expanding railroad networks made the tinning of salmon, tomatoes, strawberries, and corn a lucrative business. "Canned foods now became status symbols," notes Leslie Brenner in *American Appetite*, "since they meant one could eat things out of season or locale, a luxury previously reserved only for the very wealthy" (p. 16). Condensed milk and baking powder first appeared in 1856, and packaged yeast was introduced in 1868, inaugurating an era of commercially made bread. In essence, then, "American" cuisine quickly became commercial.

"AMERICAN" CUISINE

American cuisine assumed its modern form as Civil War soldiers came home and asked their mothers and spouses to make them the foods they had become accustomed to on the front lines—that is, canned foods. The war had spurred the industrialized North to produce grains, vegetables, fruits, and meat in ever more efficient ways, which led to such technological developments as the mechanical harvester, condensed liquids such as blackberry juice, and tin cans fused not by hand but by machines. "By 1870," explain Waverley Root and Richard de Rochemont, "the nation was consuming thirty million cans of food annually. During the decade which followed, the product of the canneries increased, in terms of value, by 200 percent" (p. 190).

In other words, "American" cuisine became synonymous with mass-produced food that was prepackaged, often precooked, and entirely uniform. Hence the many commercial success stories during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first

decade of the twentieth: John T. Dorrance, a chemist, concentrated canned soups under his partner's name, at the Joseph Campbell Preserve Company; Henry J. Heinz, a salesman, eventually developed fifty-seven varieties of bottled condiments; Gail Borden sold condensed milk to the federal government for consumption by the military; Philip Danforth Armour pushed for refrigerator cars to ship his Chicago beef; and J. H. Kraft packaged cheese wedges in identical foil packets and sold them door-to-door.

Even the kitchen became a site of mass-produced wonder. The wood-burning stove was replaced by gas and then electric ranges; the apple parer became a universal kitchen implement; and, in large part thanks to Fannie Farmer's 1896 *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book*, which published cookbook measurement standards for the first time, measuring cups and bowls became regular kitchen tools. In other words, both food and its preparation became professionalized, with "amateur" homemakers and servants turning to the expertise of cooking schools and the national food industry. As a result, mass-produced food became a symbol of purity, health, consistency, ease, and economy to a consumer group of largely middle- and working-class Americans.

Yet despite Americans' reliance on consistent, commercialized food, homemade fare continued to have appeal, especially if it was feminized and racialized. Even during World War I, when industrialized, sanitized edibles and the high-tech kitchen were marks of America's economic and social progress, Willa Cather romanticized "real" down-home Nebraska meals in her novel *My Antonia* (1918): "On Sundays [grandmother] gave us as much chicken as we could eat, and on other days we had ham or bacon or sausage meat. She baked either pies or cake for us every day, unless, for a change, she made my favourite pudding, striped with currants and boiled in a bag" (p. 45). The emphasis here on maternal abundance, especially in meats and the extravagance of sweets baked every day, marks a fundamental contradiction in the American food culture of the period—between nostalgia for the homemade food of the past and a glorification of the standardized, nutritious, and hygienic food of the present. This contradiction became part of the mythos of modern-day American food as well, where food preparation by women and nonprofessionals is often attributed to industrialized foods to make them appear "authentic."

In turn, after the Civil War, as more white, upper- and middle-class households employed servants, the black female domestic, known as the "Mammy," was increasingly exalted for her cooking—a cookery that

was depicted as handed down from generation to generation, improvised, never written down, and almost mythic. As the nation moved from Reconstruction to the Jim Crow era, the figure of the Mammy served to bridge the cultural gap between the plantation South and the highly industrialized North, especially as American consumerism became molded by national advertising. "Advertisers of certain processed foods engaged in commodity fetishism," writes Alice A. Deck, "whereby the black cook's face appeared on the box of pancake flour to suggest that she would be going home with the consumer as a spiritual guide during the cooking process" (p. 70). Thus companies that made processed foods such as Aunt Jemima Pancake Flour for consumption by middle-class housewives appropriated femininity and blackness to sell their products—qualities antithetical to an industry modeled on white, masculine entrepreneurship and professionalism.

FOOD REFORMERS

Thanks to the proliferation of new food technologies and food availability in the second half of the nineteenth century, gastronomic reformers abounded. After Louis Pasteur's discovery of disease-causing bacteria in cows and chickens in the mid-1870s, America experienced its first nationwide "health craze." Of course, food reformers had been preaching their doctrines in antebellum America as well, but with the discovery of food-borne bacteria in tandem with new mass media that enabled writers and orators access to a wider audience, health food enthusiasts such as Dr. John Harvey Kellogg (1852–1943) gained a national following. At Kellogg's Battle Creek Sanatorium for the dyspeptic in Michigan, Kellogg touted the restorative qualities of natural foods, particularly bran, believing that if people chewed tough, dry cereal, they would keep their teeth strong, their bowels healthy, and their systems free from the bacteria that, Kellogg believed, lived in the colon of anyone who consumed meat. His 1877 grain mix called Granose was in essence the first Kellogg cereal, and a patient of his, Charles Post (1854–1914), soon after developed Grape-Nuts (first called "Elijah's Manna"). Post went on to invent Post Toasties, Kellogg his famous Toasted Corn Flakes, and the notion of selling good health via commercialized foods was born.

In the two decades following the initial successes of Kellogg and Post, the Department of Agriculture published specific data gathered by the chemist Wilbur Olin Atwater (1844–1907) on the nutritive value of food, thereby originating terms now taken for granted, such as "calories," "dietary fat," and "carbohydrates." Food historian Harvey Levenstein explains



Advertisement for Kellogg's Corn Flakes, 1907. GETTY IMAGES

that from 1880 to 1930, the American middle class turned to such scientists as Atwater who first created and then propagated the principles of what came to be called the "New Nutrition." "These taught that all foods could be broken down into proteins, carbohydrates, and fats, and that one should eat only as much of each of them as the body required. The idea that the body's energy needs could be measured in calories took hold, along with the notion that one would gain weight if one ingested more of these than the body burned" (p. 9). This development, in conjunction with the vegetable diet and temperance movements, led to the establishment of domestic science at the turn of the century. (The modern-day legacy of this movement is the home economics class.) Self-made nutritionists such as Sarah Rorer (1849–1937), the 1890s "Queen of the Kitchen," jumped on the domestic science bandwagon and founded a century-long obsession with weight. Rorer, for instance, believed each unnecessary pound was a pound of disease and argued that a person's stomach mucus accumulated each night, leading to obesity if combined with a breakfast of eggs, cheese, and bacon; thus, Rorer insisted that fruit and cereal were the only digestible morning fare. Thus, the regulation of food and the body converged with pseudoscientific

discourse, which led to a widespread reformist impulse to manage lower-class bodies, diseased bodies, sexualized bodies, raced bodies, women's bodies, infants' bodies, and soldiers' bodies via the "scientific" control of food in industry, cookbooks, schools, and welfare programs.

Throughout this period, high on the list of those in need of reform were citizens who imbibed too much alcohol—who were "intemperate." With the formation in 1895 of the Anti-Saloon League and similar organizations, particularly the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (1874), the campaign to prohibit alcohol went national. Popular authors and religious advocates linked alcohol to the working class and moral laxity. For instance, the novelist Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1844–1911), interviewed for *Our Famous Women* in 1884, adopted the temperance movement as one of her pet reforms, part and parcel with her overall interest in "uplifting" her readers, especially young women who might persuade their husbands to stop drinking. "[Phelps] saw how intemperance on Eastern Point added a cruel weight to the hard lot of fishermen's families," explains the interviewer, Elizabeth Spring, "and through her efforts a Reform Club of sixty-five members was sustained there. A club-room had been otherwise secured; it was brightened with pictures and music; addresses were delivered and sermons preached to the men; but her personal work was of a deeper and more wearing sort. . . . They came to her house with their hopes and despair, their temptations and troubles" (pp. 576–577). Thus, "improving" the body came with the promise that, if certain populations could control their desire for alcohol, they could acquire the "deeper" and "more wearing" morality of a reader, of someone (like Phelps) who had already learned how to improve the mind and heart via reading. In this way, the culture of letters was directly linked to the cult of the American body.

EATING OUT AND EATING IN

Charles Dickens, in his 1842 travelogue *American Notes*, writes that he "never could find out any difference between a [dinner] party at Boston and a party in London, saving that at the former place all assemblies are held at more rational hours; that the conversation may possibly be a little louder and more cheerful; and a guest is usually expected to ascend to the very top of the house to take his cloak off; that he is certain to see, at every dinner, an unusual amount of poultry on the table; and at every supper, at least two mighty bowls of hot stewed oysters, in any one of which a half-grown Duke of Clarence might be smothered easily" (p. 60). Indeed, from mid-century on, abundant oysters were

not only swallowed at posh oyster parties, they were sold by street peddlers, carried by oyster express wagons, and served in oyster houses in Baltimore, New York, and Boston. Thus oysters crossed class boundaries: one could down them with the lawyer and legislator Abraham Lincoln in Illinois, yet one could also buy and eat them right off the street.

There were foods specifically attached to haute cuisine, however, especially as upscale restaurants became fashionable after the Civil War. The two gastronomic centers on the East Coast were Boston and New York. Boston was touted for upscale New England cooking, New York for its enduring dedication to French cuisine. During the rise of rampant restaurantism, certain hotels were known for their divine (if expensive) fare. In Boston, the Parker House was extolled for its rolls and filet mignon, while the Winter Place Hotel (which eventually became the Locke-Ober) developed a "cross" menu that was both French and thoroughly Bostonian (including a dressed-up clam chowder). In New York, one needed a top hat and tails to eat at the Ritz-Carlton, but the finest restaurant—and the one that became a fixture of New York cuisine for 150 years—was the French Delmonico's, which opened in 1832. Delmonico's made pretension fashionable by printing its menus in French, listing the names of diners in newspaper society columns, providing live music and fresh flowers, and serving such exotic vegetables as eggplant. Even Dickens was moved to sing America's praises in 1868 after eating Delmonico's *petites timbales à la Dickens*.

Haute cuisine was not limited to restaurants, however. Famous literati, from Harriet Beecher Stowe to John Greenleaf Whittier, were feted at swank birthday dinners (Mark Twain himself gave Whittier a famous birthday dinner in 1877). In turn, depictions of domestic food within the pages of American literature ranged from the countrified nostalgic (as in *My Antonia*) to middle-class lunches (the title dentist in the novel *McTeague* (1899), by Frank Norris, is served "sausages, . . . with mashed potatoes . . . ; chocolate, which Trina adored; and a side dish or two—a salted herring or a couple of artichokes or a salad" [p. 142]) to the private tables of the urban elite, often representative of Americans' apparent need to simulate British foodways to gain cultural credibility. *The Age of Innocence* (1920), by Edith Wharton, is replete with lavish gastronomic descriptions that reveal the aridness of New York society throughout the 1870s:

A big dinner, with a hired *chef* and two borrowed footmen, with Roman punch, roses from Henderson's, and *menus* on gilt-edged cards, was . . .

not to be lightly undertaken. . . . The Roman punch made all the difference; not in itself but by its manifold implications—since it signified either canvas-backs or terrapin, two soups, a hot and a cold sweet, full *décolletage* with short sleeves, and guests of a proportionate importance. (P. 327)

This paradox of spiritual famine within somatic plenty is perhaps best rendered by William Dean Howells in his novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), in which Lapham, a new city professional from the Vermont countryside, must negotiate the rituals of a Boston dinner party.

It was not an elaborate dinner; but Lapham was used to having everything on the table at once, and this succession of dishes bewildered him; he was afraid perhaps he was eating too much. He now no longer made any pretense of not drinking his wine, for he was thirsty, and there was no more water, and he hated to ask for any. (P. 199)

Thus food, especially as presented in the home, was a potent symbol for American writers: simultaneously, it bespoke an ethos of plenty—a nation with grandmothers who could make more chicken than children could eat—as well as a contradiction between the pastoral values inherent in amber waves of grain and the "bankrupt" values of Roman punch and wine for water.

Anglo-American cuisine had carried the symbolic weight of class, race, gender, religion, and region ever since 1630, when William Bradford and his Puritan settlers arrived at Plymouth and began appropriating Native American foodways. But the extensive industrialization and rise of mass transportation and advertising that occurred between 1870 and 1920 meant that North American food came to symbolize national values, not just regional identity. In essence, then, what is now called "American" cuisine originated with the technological, industrial, and economic shifts that occurred just after the outbreak of the Civil War—and that continue today in the forms of fast food, chain restaurants, the microwave, the frozen dinner, the boxed cake mix, and—paradoxically—Julia Child, Martha Stewart, Emeril Lagasse, and the Frugal Gourmet.

See also Domestic and Sentimental Fiction; Health and Medicine; Temperance

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FOREIGN VISITORS

When Americans of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries traveled abroad, their reason was painfully self-evident: as citizens of a somewhat provincial and isolated nation, they wished to broaden their limited perspective. Typically, a wealthy young American of the period toured "the continent" (there was only one, really, to see) or sometimes traveled around the

globe to seek greater sophistication and variety. But what could motivate travelers from foreign cultures to visit the United States, when it was still an emerging nation?

Some visitors, such as Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) in 1882 and Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) the same year, came to the United States as cultural ambassadors, seeking to bring the secret of life (which secret, Wilde finally revealed, was beauty) or sweetness and light (which, Arnold felt, embodied culture) to their English-speaking but otherwise benighted cousins across the Atlantic. Of course, Wilde and Arnold, and other such ambassadors, were also drawn by money—each of their lecture tours spanned months, many dozens of speaking engagements, and thousands of miles of travel, for which they had arranged to be very handsomely compensated, a prerequisite for either gentleman even to consider the arduous trip to the United States, much less the more arduous task of touring it from end to end.

Other visitors came to study America's ongoing political experiment: the practice of running a post-colonial democratic republic. A typical visitor of this stripe might be Domingo Sarmiento (1811-1888), the young Argentinean who would soon serve as president of his country, or Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929), who first visited the United States as a young man, returning to his native France in 1870. After serving as his nation's prime minister during World War I, Clemenceau paid a final visit fifty-two years after leaving the United States. Similarly, James Bryce (1838-1922) visited America close to the beginning and ending points of the 1870 to 1920 period. A student of American political economy who arrived in New York in 1870 at the age of thirty-two, Bryce wrote the classic *American Commonwealth* in 1888, and in his later years served as Britain's Ambassador to the United States from 1907 through 1913. All such observers could return home with a wealth of first-hand experience with the ways American government functioned.

Not all such observers, however, felt that the American government functioned very well at all. Even those who were impressed with American ideals saw the sordidness and the casual disregard for dignity in electoral politics. Both Bryce and Clemenceau noted that political life in Europe was far more professional and decorous than in the United States. Clemenceau was fascinated and appalled by the holiday-like atmosphere of political rallies, writing that campaigns that "should be a serious and considered act" (Pachter and Wein, p. 173) were anything but sober. Bryce contrasted America's easy mixing of its social classes with

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