

THE PATH TO THE TABLE: COOKING IN POSTWAR AMERICAN SUBURBS

BY

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# The Path to the Table: Cooking in Postwar American Suburbs

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the summer of 1956, food writer Clementine Paddleford took a trip. Based in New York City, she was one of the most popular food writers of the postwar era. In addition to writing a daily column for *The New York Herald Tribune* she also wrote a weekly column for *This Week*, a Sunday newspaper supplement. Her readership was in the millions, and she received tens of thousands of letters from readers every year.

Traveling was nothing new to Paddleford. Her Sunday newspaper column usually featured the favorite dishes of people from around the country, and she took pains to get out and meet these people (for most of its run the column was called “How America Eats,” a reflection of its focus). The column might feature a chowder recipe from a Maine fisherman one week, a rice dish from a housewife in New Mexico the next, and the favorite food of a Florida senator the following week.

On this particular trip Paddleford traveled through five western states, including California, which had experienced a population boom during World War II, and Wyoming, which was becoming a popular tourist destination because of Yellowstone National Park. Paddleford was a workaholic, and during the three week trip she wrote or gathered material for 27 articles. She also kept notes of what she heard and saw as she talked to people, walked through their houses, and flipped through their recipe collections.

A memo Paddleford prepared after she returned from the trip outlines many of her observations. The memo describes the changes occurring in American kitchens and dining rooms in the mid-50s, changes influenced by other developments in American culture.

Most homes she visited had the latest appliances: “wash machine, ironer, dishwasher, blender, vacuum cleaner with all the gadgets. I have no statistics, but this was so in almost all the homes visited.” Rising incomes for most Americans after World War II and high savings rates during the war made all of these devices affordable for many people. Conspicuous consumption made the gadgets attractive, too, at a time when many of the new suburban houses had cookie-cutter exteriors and floor plans.

Gender expectations related to cooking and working outside the home seemed to be blurring. “More and more I notice husband [sic] helping with daily home cooking, especially in the big cities, or in homes of working women. In the smaller towns fewer homes [sic] women work than during the Depression and later war years. They run their homes, do their own work and save on maid and baby nurse fees.”

New ways of cooking and eating were becoming popular. “Everywhere the Barbecue. No longer a new thing, once a fad, now a ‘solid’ in the way of entertaining. I doubt if ever again fried meats will be in the running.” Grilling combined conspicuous consumption (in the purchase and display of the grill and grilling utensils) with a topsy-turvy kind of cooking (dad is in charge of the meal, everyone eats outside, with their hands). It also affected house design, as Paddleford

noted that “Almost every western home has an outdoor barbecue and usually a second built into the kitchen for cold weather use.”<sup>1</sup>

As an experienced writer Clementine Paddleford was a shrewd observer of both people and trends. The things she saw on her western trip--the appliances that were beginning to fill peoples’ homes, the willingness of men to help out with cooking, the love of grilling--were signs of larger trends in American culture. Rising affluence, the growing numbers of women who moved into the workforce (especially as the children of the Baby Boom began attending school), the popularity of the countryside and the outdoors (seen in both the move to the suburbs and in the mushrooming numbers of visitors to national parks): all of these trends affected the foods Americans purchased and the way those foods were prepared and consumed.

### *Postwar American Cooking and Postwar American Society*

The present work is concerned both with postwar foods (from 1946 to about 1965) and the larger trends in American culture. As such, it has two different purposes. The first purpose is, simply, to explain why postwar foods were the way they were. Paging through a copy of *Better Homes and Gardens* from 1955, or leafing through the ever-popular *Betty Crocker’s Picture Cook Book* (originally published in 1950) reveals dishes that are exotically strange. Rose-colored pancakes (made with strawberry milk), cakes smothered in frosting with inches of icing

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<sup>1</sup> Untitled memo, August 29, 1956, folder 1, box 82, Clementine Paddleford Collection, University Archives and Manuscripts, Richard L.D. and Marjorie J. Morse Department of Special Collections, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas (hereafter cited as "Paddleford Collection").

between layers, hams coated in a thick gelatin on which a flower has been drawn-- these were some of the foods offered in the postwar era. There were other foods that were more straightforward, and that are still popular today: frozen foods, canned foods, convenience foods of all sorts. Thousands of new foods appeared on supermarket shelves every year in the postwar era compared with only hundreds before World War II. One of the purposes of this study is to explain why that was.

To tell that story, though, one has to step back and take a broader view of American society. The choices people make about food (or any part of their lives) are not made in a vacuum. Other considerations intrude: ideas about class, gender, and race and ethnicity influence food choices. Capitalism has affected the availability of different types of foods. Major social trends affect the foods people choose to eat, where they eat them, and why they eat them. This is the second purpose of this study: to trace changes in the foods people ate not only to direct causes but to larger trends in society. A direct cause for why a housewife purchased a Kraft Spaghetti Dinner may be that the local supermarket began carrying the product, but her purchasing the dinner also tied in to larger trends of both the popularity of processed foods and shifting ideas about Italian foods.

Food is at once very specific and very vague, a key that fits almost any lock. It is not necessarily political but it can be, if the abundance of supermarket shelves are cited as an example of the bounty inherent in a capitalist system. It is not necessarily racial or ethnic but it can be, if spaghetti is cited as an example of the foods the unwashed, illiterate masses of new immigrants ate in the early twentieth century. It is

not necessarily gendered but it can be if, on a first date, a young man orders a steak to show his masculinity (it's red meat!) while a young woman orders a small salad to show her femininity (she eats like a bird!). Patterns of food consumption can change rapidly (frozen orange juice, introduced in the postwar era, very quickly became a breakfast staple) and they can linger on for years (breakfast cereals, introduced in the late nineteenth century, still sit alongside orange juice on many breakfast tables). The ubiquity of food is an asset in this kind of study.

The postwar years are the focus for this study. Many types of new foods were introduced in the period between 1946 and about 1965; American society greatly changed as well. Salaries rose across the board, further firing demand for consumer goods that had been unavailable during World War II. New houses were not only wanted but needed as millions of families exited the war living with families or friends, and builders like William Levitt produced houses to meet the need, sometimes cranking out dozens of homes a day. Events throughout the South caused newspaper and magazine writers to spend hundreds of column inches speculating on just what African American activists wanted; those same writers pondered the mass exodus of women from the workforce in the mid 1940s, and their steady movement back into the workforce in the late 50s and 60s. Contrary to the idea of a quiet time of country living on tree-lined streets, the postwar years were a time of change for Americans both in terms of food and the larger society.

One group that saw a considerable amount of change during that time was the middle class, especially those members of the middle class who moved to the



suburbs. Rising wages put many people into this group who formerly would have been below it. The suburbs were the destination for millions of middle-class families, and the move to the suburbs included many new things: a new house, new appliances, new friends, a new way of living. This study focuses on the group that moved to the suburbs because they were affected by so many of the major trends of the postwar era. The definition of middle class used in this study is somewhat loose. On the one hand, the group can be strictly defined by income: between \$4,000 and \$7,500 per year, in 1953 dollars, which is how *Fortune* magazine defined the middle class in a series of articles in the mid-1950s. But the group can also be defined by its actions. As *Fortune* pointed out, \$4,000 marked the point above which, instead of just subsisting, families began having choices in what they bought, and they did indeed exercise their options.<sup>2</sup> They bought processed foods, outdoor grills--and houses. To a large extent, this is the group that moved to the suburbs, which is another of their actions that has an impact on this study. Thus, the definition of the middle class is not hard and fast. In the context of this study, the middle class was not just those people who made between \$4,000 and \$7,500 per year, it was those people who used their money to move to the suburbs and then to buy things that went beyond simple subsistence living.

This study, then, is about the foods eaten by postwar suburbanites, and how those foods were affected by larger trends in society. The largest of those trends, in terms of the impact on foods, was the growing importance of food corporations. This

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<sup>2</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, *The Changing American Market* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1953), 53-54.

mirrors the growing importance of corporations in general in America. In an age when (according to the adage) what was good for General Motors was good for America, it appeared to many that what was good for food corporations was good for all consumers. These food corporations included not just food manufacturers, like General Mills or Carnation, but the grocery chains which saw a flurry of mergers in the late 1950s and the food wholesalers and distributors that grew during this time as well.

A number of other trends had a smaller but still significant impact on the foods of the time. The growing number of women working outside the home affected the influence of convenience foods. Outdoor grilling was a popular way for suburban men to both show off their cooking skills and show off an expensive new grill to family and friends, and so differentiate themselves from other men who lived in similar houses. The foods of eastern and southern Europeans (Italians, Czechs, Russians, etc.), which had been disparaged by white Americans a few generations earlier, were considered exotic, interesting, and safe to be prepared by white suburbanites while the descendants of those same immigrants were included in definitions of whiteness by many Americans, and they were allowed to move into the suburbs. Issues of gender, suburbanization, and race and ethnicity were reflected throughout suburban culture, affecting not just attitudes and ideas but the foods people purchased, prepared, and consumed.

This study covers a broad swath of suburban society and uses a variety of sources. Many different types of cookbooks are used, ranging from those produced

by corporations (like the Betty Crocker line of books, produced by General Mills) to those produced by churches and other charitable groups. Women's magazines were popular during this period, the most well-read reaching millions of women every month, and both advertisements and food columns from these magazines have yielded information on food company promotions and the messages food writers offered. One important source of information is the Clementine Paddleford Collection at Kansas State University, in Manhattan, Kansas. Paddleford was something of a pack rat and the collection of her papers runs to over 300 boxes of material, including her published writing, notes for articles and books, and letters from readers. The collection was opened in 2006 and has not been deeply mined for information by other researchers; this study represents one of the first surveys of the material. The J. Walter Thompson Collection at Duke University is also a valuable resource as JWT was one of the largest advertising agencies in the world, and in the postwar period handled accounts for Quaker Oats (owner of Aunt Jemima), Standard Brands (owners of Fleischmann Yeast and Yuban Coffee), and other food companies. At the time JWT was known for its reliance on market surveys, and these surveys provide some hard numbers for the ideas in this study.

The value of this study lies in its examination of how large trends affected the daily lives of a certain set of Americans. How, beyond having a brand new house in a brand new subdivision, did the move to the suburbs affect the middle class? How, apart from a fear of blacks moving into the suburbs, did the marginalization of African Americans affect suburbanites (and to talk about suburbanites in this period is

to talk about whites--the 1950 census revealed that only 5 percent of the suburban population was black, and many black suburbanites lived in all-black suburbs)? How did the growing numbers of married women in the labor force affect their families? How did consumerism affect women, and how did they negotiate between the demands of the marketplace and the demands of their families (and their own wants and needs)?

This study answers these questions, but it answers them only as they pertain to food production, purchasing, preparation, and consumption--a more wide-ranging set of answers could easily run to thousands of pages. The answers here are specific: the small houses of the suburbs led, for example, to the popularity of cocktail parties, where hosts did not have to provide large meals for guests, but instead offered a series of hors d'oeuvres and mixed drinks. The marginalization of African Americans meant that suburbanites were generally uninterested in black foods, unless they were classified as Southern foods, in which case suburbanites were quite interested. Women in the workforce often meant men in the stores, shopping for food.

Clementine Paddleford appears quite frequently in this study. She was a New York based food writer who, throughout the postwar era, wrote a daily article for the New York *Herald Tribune*, a weekly article for a syndicated Sunday supplement, and (for twelve years) a monthly article for *Gourmet* magazine. She was immensely popular in the postwar years, and, while she wrote about food, she usually used food as a way to write about people. The fact that she was not overly concerned with food *per se* came out in a recipe she published for "Great Grandma Joan Hunting's Soft

Molasses Cookies” which, by mistake, left the molasses out of the ingredient list. “I didn't miss the 'lasses;” she wrote to the woman who gave her the recipe, “a few ingredients mean little to me. What I watch for is if the copy reads pretty.”<sup>3</sup>

Paddleford is useful for this study because, to a large part, she did not have an agenda that comes out in her writing. She was not trying to get Americans to eat healthier foods; she did not care if they used fresh tomatoes or popped open the nearest can of Del Monte canned tomatoes. She was much more interested in writing about what people were cooking and how they cooked it, so men and women, whites and blacks, city dwellers, suburbanites and country people pass through her articles. Women are most often the cooks in her columns, and they show up as such even if the focus is on a male cook or if the woman has an important government job. Whites are most often featured while blacks appear in the background and in the shadows, just like in the larger culture. The many ways that her writing reflected white middle class culture makes her columns useful for examples and illustrations.

Paddleford is also useful because of her intimate connection to the food corporations which, as stated above, had a considerable impact on the foods



Figure 1.1. Clementine Paddleford. Note the black ribbon around her neck, which hid a permanent hole from an earlier surgery.

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<sup>3</sup> Mrs. J. Rattray to Clementine Paddleford, September 12, 1949, folder 20, box 67, Paddleford Collection.

suburbanites ate. Paddleford's writing reached millions of readers every week, and she was on the mailing list of every major food manufacturer, advertiser, and public relations company. When she published a cookbook she received letters of congratulations from managers at Campbell Soup and Nabisco; she frequently featured new products in her columns, especially in her column for *Gourmet* magazine, which was essentially a collection of marketing releases from various food companies.<sup>4</sup> Both her articles and correspondence with food manufacturers form a valuable set of resources for this study, and they illustrate just how tightly food writers and marketers worked together. At a time when millions of dollars were spent on researching, producing, and launching a single food product, the importance of food writers to the success of the food business cannot be understated. The work of Clementine Paddleford, then, helps to illustrate the main points of this study.

This is not the only work to look at the postwar years in America, of course, nor is it the only work to look at food during that time period. Laura Shapiro's *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America* also looks at the major influences on postwar foods.<sup>5</sup> Shapiro is a journalist who has written for *Newsweek*, among other periodicals, and her book is aimed at a popular audience, although it does include notes and a bibliography. Shapiro's thesis is that postwar foods were primarily influenced by two groups, food companies and food writers. The influence of food companies came from the fact that they were, to a large extent,

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<sup>4</sup> For the letter from Campbell Soup, see folder 33, box 12, Paddleford Collection, and for the Nabisco letter, see folder 95, box 11, Paddleford Collection.

<sup>5</sup> Laura Shapiro, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

revolutionizing the foods available to Americans, especially regarding convenience foods. Canned foods had been available for over a century by this point while frozen foods were becoming immensely popular. According to Shapiro, the new foods offered by food manufacturers constituted a new way of eating. The influence of food writers, she writes, was due to the insecurity of American women in the kitchen. After decades of being told by cookbook writers and food columnists that American women could barely cook, these women had taken that message to heart and turned, ironically, to the same women who had told them they could not cook, the food writers. Women dashed off frantic letters to advice columnists when their roasts burned and their cakes fell, tearfully asking the columnists for help. The writers' power, then, came from the fact that these women followed their advice as closely as possible.

While the book is well-written and well-researched, it suffers from two flaws. First, the focus of the book is very narrow, which may reflect the fact that it was written to appeal to a popular audience. While it is true that food companies and food writers did have a strong influence on postwar foods, there were other influences as well. Affluence, gender, and race and ethnicity also affected the foods people chose to eat at the time. While the present work does look at food manufacturers of the period, it also looks at other influences on food.

The second flaw in Shapiro's book is that it gives almost no agency to the women of the period, and the picture it paints of them is often not a positive one. Much of this stems from a fundamental problem in Shapiro's analysis. A major

source for Shapiro's book is letters to the food editor of the *Boston Globe*, which can be a useful source. Unfortunately, although Shapiro acknowledges that the letters are from a self-selected group of women, she treats the letters as a representative sampling of the problems women across America were facing and often takes the letters at face value. From this Shapiro overstates the importance of food writers in general and understates the competency of women in the kitchen. Certainly, food writers were a source of information and food advice, but women had many sources of food advice, from mothers to friends to magazines, newspapers, radio, and television. Women also had their own experience to help them in the kitchen, hundreds or thousands of past meals, each of which helped a woman to become more competent in cooking. This study assumes that women had both agency and competence when it came to cooking (and, quite often, so did men).

The only other book that is like the present work in terms of approach is Harvey Levenstein's *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*.<sup>6</sup> The work concerns itself with a variety of paradoxes that revolve around the fact that although Americans have access to an abundance of food, their relationship to food is one marked by anxiety instead of gratitude or relief. In tracing this idea, the book functions as an overview of the major events in the American food landscape between the onset of the Great Depression and the mid-1990s. Unlike Shapiro's book, Levenstein's book is clearly written for academics. The work is well-researched, and very, very broad: the book feels ready to burst from the relatively

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<sup>6</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, revised ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).



short 267 pages of its main text. Because of this, the book's strength--its breadth--sometimes works as a weakness as Levenstein moves quickly from topic to topic.

Beyond these two books, the rest of the volumes that deal with the topics in the present work can be divided into two groups, those which deal explicitly with food issues and those that deal with other topics of postwar America. All of these works are scholarly works, with one important exception which will be noted below. Looking at the food-centered books, Sherrie Inness's *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* is concerned with the construction of gender, specifically how the kitchen and cooking were gendered throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and as such is a major source for this study's chapter on gender.<sup>7</sup> Inness uses media sources like cookbooks and women's magazines, and proves her point, that gender profoundly affected cooking in the first half of the twentieth century, fairly well. The problem with the book is that it is exclusively focused on media sources and never addresses the question of how women interpreted those sources and what impact the sources ultimately had on women. As Joke Hermes points out in her excellent *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use*, reading a source is very different from being affected by it.<sup>8</sup> Hermes interviewed a number of women (and men) on their experiences in reading women's magazines and found that for readers, especially those with young children who may be able to read only during a few minutes of quiet, the information in the magazine rarely registered deeply in the

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<sup>7</sup> Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Joke Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

reader's mind. With this in mind it is difficult to know to what extent these magazines and other media affected women's reality.

There are other food books that have this same problem. Katherine Parkin's *Food Is Love* is a well-researched book that ultimately damns food advertisers for using a small set of messages throughout the twentieth century that prey on women's hopes and fears relating to cooking for their families.<sup>9</sup> As she points out, even today food advertisers appeal almost exclusively to women and portray them as the only logical cooks in a family.

There are many books that look at changes in ethnic foods over time, but the vast majority of them look at ethnic foods from the point of view of the ethnic groups. This study, however, looks at the acceptance of ethnic foods by the white middle class. Hasia Diner's *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* was valuable for its examination of ethnic foods.<sup>10</sup> In the book Diner examines Italian, Irish and Jewish foods in sets of two chapters each, the first looking at those foods in the original country and the second describing changes after the move to America. Diner concludes that the mass acceptance or rejection of ethnic foods has much more to do with the originating culture and with large-scale societal trends in America than the foods themselves. Donna Gabaccia's *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* outlines the history of ethnic foods in

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<sup>9</sup> Katherine J. Parkin, *Food Is Love: Food Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Diner, Hasia R., *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

America beginning with European rejection of many Native American foods.<sup>11</sup> The book is valuable because it traces how ethnic foods made their way into the larger American culture and highlights the influence of food companies in popularizing ethnic foods.

There are many books that inform this study that have nothing to do with food. Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumer's Republic* connects the rise of postwar consumerism to ideas of citizenship, concluding that in the years after World War II the act of buying a toaster, air conditioner, or house was just as important a role of citizenship as voting.<sup>12</sup> The government became more involved in helping business as a result of consumerism's new importance, and this assistance extended to food producers and manufacturers just as it did to General Motors or AT&T. As such, the postwar prosperity described in Chapter 2 of this work was considered to be as important to the United States as the war effort had been in the first half of the 1940s.

The role of the government is a central point in Kenneth Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier*, which examines the development of suburbanization in the United States.<sup>13</sup> While the book traces suburbanization all the way back to the early nineteenth century, the chapters on postwar development are particularly useful for this study. Jackson outlines the physical development of the suburbs, their positions on the edges of cities and the building techniques that made them possible. He also looks at

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<sup>11</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

political developments such as low-interest loans made possible by the GI Bill and the Fair Housing Administration and changes in tax codes that made interest paid on a mortgage deductible while rent paid on an apartment was not. Rather than presenting the development of postwar suburbs as a random event, Jackson describes the various forces, including government involvement, that contributed to their development.

Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound* also looks at postwar American homes, but in the twin contexts of the explosive growth in the number of families in this country and the development of the Cold War.<sup>14</sup> "Containment" was a doctrine used to hold Communism within a certain set of geopolitical boundaries, and May argues that containment can also be used to explain changes in American families in the postwar period. The home shifted from being a retreat from society (the place father came back to after a long day at work) to being the focus of society. It was a location that was secure and easily controlled, a place where hopes and dreams could and should come true (women were told to use housework as an outlet for creativity, men could always work on the lawn if they were frustrated with their jobs), and a site that would reduce the problems of this country (rising wages and cheap housing, it was hoped, would lead to wider home ownership, which was considered to be a good thing for everyone). While containment is a useful way of thinking about the construction of postwar families and suburbs, it is possible that May takes the concept to the extreme. If containment was the overriding theme of postwar houses and families, one would expect that postwar houses would look like small compounds,

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<sup>14</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1988).

walled structures that were physical reflections of a psychological mindset. Instead, the ranch house, the epitome of postwar housing, used large picture windows, patios, and breezeways to open up the house and minimize the divisions between indoor and outdoor space. Containment is a useful concept, but it is not the only one that influenced postwar family development.

There are two works that are useful for looking at whiteness and ethnic foods. The first is Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color*.<sup>15</sup> Jacobson outlines three eras in American history, each of which was characterized by differing ideas about race and ethnicity. The transition between eras was marked by changes in immigration and citizenship laws. The first era began in 1790 with a law that limited citizenship to "free white people," which had the effect of making whiteness and blackness the overriding division between Americans. The second era began in the 1840s with the mass migration of the Irish and, to a lesser extent, the Germans. This continued through the 1920s and included the second wave of immigration when millions of southern and eastern Europeans immigrated to America. The time was marked by complicated ideas about whiteness and nonwhiteness, often bolstered by the claims of scientific racism. The transition to the third era began with the ending of immigration in the 1920s and the decline of scientific racism, which was especially effected by World War II and the Nazi's Final Solution, which in some ways was the logical extension of scientific racism. Ideas about race became simpler in the third age as race became dependent on skin color and, to a lesser extent, other physical

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

features. Those who were not classified as black, Asian, Hispanic, or Native American became, simply, white. Jacobson's ideas provide a good framework for understanding changing definitions of race and whiteness in the postwar years.

The second work used in the chapter on ethnic foods is Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *Invention of Tradition*, which outlines an anthropological concept of the same name.<sup>16</sup> This essentially says that many traditions, such as Thanksgiving or throwing rice at a wedding, which practitioners believe can be traced back decades or even centuries, are in reality relatively new practices. As such these traditions say much less about people in the past than about the people who practice them today. This idea is quite useful in analyzing ethnic foods in which conceptions of "tradition" held by white Americans affect the acceptance of those ethnic foods. Additionally, Chapter 6 of this work develops the idea that knowledge of and adherence to these "traditions" help to make ethnic foods "safe" for white Americans.

The conception of women in the postwar years is informed by a few books on feminist studies. Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* was released toward the end of the period the present study is concerned with and, as such, was affected by the attitudes of this time period.<sup>17</sup> Friedan had extensive experience as a journalist and her skill in writing is evident throughout the book, which was aimed squarely at a popular audience. While the book is well-researched and well thought out, it was also written to provoke a debate on women's roles in the postwar era. For example,

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<sup>16</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

Friedan is generally dismissive of the women's magazines of the time, charging that they existed to promote an ideology of domesticity. Several decades later Joanne Meyerowitz, in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, looked at the same women's magazines and took a much different position when she argued that, rather than promoting a single unified view of domesticity, women's magazines presented a variety of viewpoints by printing articles on everything from traditional housewives to career women to interviews with leading political figures.<sup>18</sup> While this is technically correct, Meyerowitz focused on nonfiction articles in her survey. If one looks specifically at food-related advertising and copy in women's magazines, though, one does find ideas about domesticity prominently displayed, and the general assumption is that women are the main cooks of society, while men are more or less bumbler in the kitchen.

Many of the examples in this work, especially those that introduce the main concepts in each chapter, are taken from the work of Clementine Paddleford. While she was one of the major food writers of the postwar period her work scarcely stands up to the work of many of her peers, including writers like M.F.K. Fisher, James Beard, and Julia Child. Unlike Paddleford's writing, Fisher's work was deeply personal and sensual, the sort of work whose popularity has little to do with the fact that it centers on food. It is impossible to separate the writings of Beard and Child from the foods they wrote about: French foods, fresh foods, gourmet foods. In short, although these three writers wrote during the postwar years, their work transcended

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<sup>18</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

the attitudes of the times, either looking ahead to future trends (Beard and Child) or at universal ideas (Fisher). Paddleford neither looked ahead nor focused on more universal ideas. She did not transcend her time period; rather, she epitomized it. As such, her writing is tremendously useful for this study.

It may not be entirely correct to say that Paddleford has no agenda that she pushes in her writing. It is probably closer to the truth to say that the agenda Paddleford pushes is precisely the same as almost every other food writer of the time period, and the themes that come up in her writing are the major themes of American culture in general. If Paddleford's fame has almost completely faded since her death in 1967, it is not because she was not popular to begin with. Rather, it is because society, and food, have moved on since then.

Paddleford herself was a study in contrasts. She was born in 1900 on a farm near Manhattan, Kansas, and came to fame in Manhattan, New York. Her job writing for both the *New York Herald Tribune* and a Sunday newspaper supplement required her to talk with people she had never met before and get to know them quickly. But she had a hole in her throat she needed to plug when she spoke (in a raspy voice), the result of an operation to remove part of her larynx and vocal cords (she had been a heavy smoker). During her eleven-year marriage she never lived with her husband (at the time she lived in Chicago, he in Houston), and during her years of fame she was essentially a single woman writing for and about married women.

She wrote about food because she was interested in it, but also because it was an acceptable topic for a female journalist to cover. She was probably more



interested in writing about people than food, and this comes across in her approach to cooking. She was purely interested in writing about what women across the country were doing in the kitchen; the specific types of foods they cooked was a secondary matter. By 1953 she was making around \$30,000 a year, a large sum that gave her financial independence.<sup>19</sup>

This independence is useful for this study. Unlike many other female food writers, Paddleford was not beholden to food companies, which were a source of both money and influence for women of the time. Every major food company had a home economics group that was composed exclusively of women (at the time a home economics degree was a ticket to a business career, but one that came equipped with a glass ceiling), and most food writers worked for magazines and newspapers that relied on advertising dollars from companies. Although Paddleford worked closely with food companies, sometimes helping with testing, often helping with marketing new products, there is no indication that she accepted money or other considerations from food companies. Rather, she seemed to see working with food companies as a part of her job.

Looking at Paddleford's articles and personal papers gives a view of the machinations of the food industry. There are many instances where Paddleford received a press release and recipe from a marketer and then recycled that press release into an article. For example, in late 1955 Paddleford received a recipe for "Pacific Isle Pork Chops" from the consumer service department at Armour, a major

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<sup>19</sup> "The Press," *Time*, December 28, 1953, 45.

meat processing company.<sup>20</sup> A few months later she published the recipe as “Sweet-and-Sour Pork Chops” without mentioning Armour (she usually could not mention specific companies in her newspaper articles).<sup>21</sup> However, as one of the major pork producers in this country, Armour still stood to gain from having the recipe published, even if it was not mentioned by name. Similarly, in early 1956 Paddleford received a recipe from the Tuna Research Foundation, and a few months later it showed up in her column as “Hawaiian Pineapple-Tuna Salad.”<sup>22</sup> For a number of years Paddleford wrote a column for *Gourmet* magazine on new foods where she essentially rewrote press releases from companies. Writers of the time (and, one suspects, today) worked closely with food companies in their jobs.

As the example at the beginning of this chapter shows, Paddleford traveled the country talking with people about the foods they cooked, and both her articles and personal papers are a rich vein of material that illustrates many of the themes in this work. One undated letter sent to Paddleford, probably in the mid-1960s, is from a mother submitting a recipe for a contest. "While sitting here in the kitchen with the 'doubled' recipes baking away on the stove, a washer and dryer going and two different TV stations on entertaining 5 small children (ages 11-1) plus 1 who is practicing her music lesson, I decided to send in my recipes for the Cook Young

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<sup>20</sup> References to Paddleford being given the recipe are in a letter from Rosella McKinley to Paddleford, January 31, 1956, folder 9, box 82, Paddleford Collection.

<sup>21</sup> Clementine Paddleford, "How America Eats," January 29, 1956, folder 8, box 82, Paddleford Collection.

<sup>22</sup> The recipe is included in a letter from Gloria Marshall to Paddleford, February 6, 1956, while the recipe was printed in "How America Eats," April 29, 1956. Both documents are in folder 33, box 82, Paddleford Collection.

[contest],” she wrote. “This will take me approximately 3 days and will have to be completed during the intermissions of interruptions, which are many in this blest house of 5 little girls and 1 boy.”<sup>23</sup> The letter shows a busy mother in the midst of work that ran from morning until night, a far different sort of existence than that described in another letter, this time from the wife of a Kansas State University professor. “Sometimes I wonder if the new packaged mixes, with their deadly uniformity of flavor and texture, will merely free women for more time fillers,” she wrote. “Have you noticed that the woman who thinks its too much trouble to bake bread or make her own pie crust will spend two hours on hors douevers [sic] tray?”<sup>24</sup>

Most of the people in Paddleford's articles are white. Only a few are black, and they are often at the edges of the story, reflecting a pre-Civil Rights Era mentality. In 1958 Paddleford wrote about food on the *Delta Queen*, a Mississippi River riverboat, and an accompanying photo shows four white people sitting at a table while a black waiter looks on. The photo's caption reads “Dinner down river: Guests enjoy eating in the romantic Pre-Civil War atmosphere.”<sup>25</sup> There is no explanation of what the “Pre-Civil War atmosphere” entailed, but black servitude was presumably a large part of it. This fits in with ideas that are developed in Chapter 6 of this work.

The Clementine Paddleford archive at Kansas State University opened in late 2006 and has, so far, not been used in any longer-form academic studies. A

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<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Robert C. Hellrung to Paddleford, not dated, folder 21, box 8, Paddleford Collection.

<sup>24</sup> Darlene Conover to Paddleford, March 17, 1952, folder 29, box 73, Paddleford Collection.

<sup>25</sup> Clementine Paddleford, "Good Eating on the Mississippi," August 31, 1958, folder 25, box 89, Paddleford Collection.

biography of Clementine Paddleford is scheduled to be published in late 2008, but a problem with writing about Paddleford is that, while her work papers are voluminous and accessible to the public, her personal life is not nearly as well documented. Her personal papers are held closely by her adopted daughter. One of the writers of the forthcoming biography, who indexed Paddleford's work papers, has described the biography as something of a fishing expedition being published in the hope that friends and acquaintances of Paddleford will come forward with more information. At present Paddleford's writings work well as illustrations of trends in the food industry and American culture; in the future her full life story may also help to tell a story of women in the first half of the twentieth century.

While examples from Paddleford's work appear in each chapter of this work, the overall approach here is thematic, which means that the main trends of the time--suburbanization and affluence, gender, the influence of the food industry, and race and ethnicity--are split into separate chapters. A drawback of this approach, of course, is the possible Balkanization of the trends, ignoring, for example, how gender influenced ideas about ethnicity. However, the approach makes each topic more manageable, and the interconnectedness of the themes is dealt with at different points in the work.

To briefly outline the remainder of this work, the next chapter, Chapter 2, looks at how rising prosperity and the move to the suburbs affected the foods suburbanites purchased, prepared and consumed. Both World War II and the postwar economy changed the distribution of income in America, lifting more people toward

the middle income group as it pulled control of some of the income out of the hands of the richest people in this country. The prosperity helped to fuel a construction boom (which was also helped by new government policies and a general lack of housing) which moved millions of people into new houses in the suburbs. These houses were filled with new appliances but they were also smaller than prewar homes, and these factors influenced how the new homeowners lived. In terms of food, cocktail parties became popular as a way to entertain even in houses with small (or nonexistent) dining rooms. The outdoors was a popular destination in the postwar years as millions of families traveled to national parks, and the enjoyment of the outdoors, combined with the fact that suburban houses often had large picture windows and patios, made outdoor grilling a popular activity. Both of these trends, though, are less important overall than the fact that Americans' diets shifted significantly from what they had been before the war. Consumption of carbohydrates dropped while proteins rose, and overall Americans spent more money on foods than they had previously. Much of this is because they were willing to spend more for processed foods. The processed foods saved time, and they were sometimes a better bargain than fresh foods, as some frozen foods, like vegetables, had already been chopped and inedible parts of the plant had been discarded. The most important change in the foods postwar Americans consumed was due to the rise of food manufacturers, and this chapter explores how prosperity and the move to the suburbs contributed to that.

Chapter 3 examines the effects of gender on the foods suburbanites ate. Several approaches to this topic are used. One approach examines how gender roles in the home affected consumers and influenced how foods were purchased, prepared and consumed. Through the 1950s and 1960s, the most important influence on gender roles was the fact that women moved steadily into the workforce. As women had less time for shopping, there are indications that men helped out with shopping for food. Cooking was usually a woman's job, except in the case of outdoor grilling, when the preparation of the entree was a man's job, although the other food-related jobs (including making other foods and cleaning up) were relegated to women. Women were responsible for most cleanup tasks except for dish drying, which was often a man's job. In addition to examining gender roles in the home the chapter also looks at how foods were gendered, with two opposites being steak (considered to be very masculine) and cake (very feminine). Finally, gendered ideas coming from food manufacturers are examined, and the manufacturers often presented a feminine face in what are called corporate characters, such as Betty Crocker, the corporate character for General Mills. In the postwar years these characters appeared on their own radio and television shows, answered fan mail, wrote cookbooks, and were often as "real" to consumers as celebrities like Cary Grant or Rock Hudson. While gender did affect postwar cooking, it did not contribute to large-scale changes in the same way that prosperity and the growth of the food industry did.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine the effect of changes in the food industry. Chapter 4 focuses solely on the industry. The food industry can be pictured as an hourglass

made up of, at the top, thousands of farmers. They sell their products to a much smaller number of food manufacturers that make up the middle of the hourglass. The role of these manufacturers is to take the food and in some way change its essence by cooking, freezing, combining, or otherwise working on the food to produce a new product. This product is sold to a larger number of wholesalers and distributors, then shipped to a large number of grocery stores around the country. Finally, at the bottom of the hourglass, are the millions of consumers. Throughout the entire process of making food the government affected the process in many different ways, although not in any sort of unified way. It affected farmers through subsidies and by developing new techniques for growing cash crops; it affected supermarkets by investigating mergers. The food industry changed tremendously after World War II, and the chapter also outlines this. For manufacturers, the business became bigger and more lucrative, and market share was gained by introducing new products. A new food could cost well over a million dollars to develop and market, and many products succeeded wildly, like frozen orange juice, instant mashed potatoes, and nutritional cold cereals. Consequently, the number of new products introduced every year after the war reached into the thousands, where it had been in the hundreds before the war. The growth of supermarkets influenced this as well, as the average number of products on a supermarket shelf was about 6,000, compared with a few hundred in turn of the century grocery stores.

Chapter 5 looks at how the changes in food manufacturers, supermarkets, and advertisers affected the foods that showed up on American tables. Supermarkets

acted as the conduit for products moving from food manufacturers to consumers. The supermarket, with its emphasis on self-service, low prices, and large selection, represented a new opportunity for suburban women and was much different from smaller grocery stores that gave more personalized service but much less anonymity. Advertising became much more important for food manufacturers and represented the primary way manufacturers communicated ideas to consumers. Food writers communicated ideas as well and many of these writers were quite close to the food manufacturers whose products they wrote about. While marketers presented certain ideas to consumers, the consumers interpreted the messages in various ways and often completely ignored messages, as evidenced by the fact that the failure rate for new products was high. Consumers, as the ultimate preparers of food, have a considerable amount of latitude in their use of food. If they do purchase a given item they can use the item as it is, change it as it is intended by the manufacturer (i.e., follow the instructions on the package), or make changes to it. Although convenience foods like cake mixes were sold with a definite set of instructions on the package, women often made their own changes to the food. Cake mixes were combined with pudding mixes and manufacturers' recipes that called for one kind of condensed soup might be exchanged for another type of soup. Although postwar suburban women largely conformed to the kind of cooking manufacturers desired--there was, for example, no large-scale return to home baking--the negotiations they made with their cooking showed that they had agency in a situation where they could easily have simply followed the instructions they were given.



Chapter 6, the last main chapter of the book, looks at how ideas about ethnicity and whiteness affected suburban foods. By the postwar period race was largely determined by skin color, and this shift in definitions affected ethnic foods of the time<sup>26</sup>. Italian, Chinese, and African American/Southern foods were popular in various contexts. Although both Italians and their foods had been shunned in the early twentieth century, by the postwar years Italian foods were regularly eaten by many suburbanites. The change was due to Americans traveling to Europe (including American GIs serving in Italy during the war), the familiarity between Italian Americans and other Americans, and new ideas about whiteness. By the postwar years Italian Americans were considered white, and their foods were regularly eaten both in the home and at restaurants, even as Italian Americans were allowed to buy suburban houses. Chinese Americans were not considered to be white because of their physical features and because of Orientalist ideas, but their small population meant that whites did not consider them to be a threat. Chinese Americans could not buy into the suburbs, but suburbanites enjoyed making a few Chinese dishes at home and also eating at Chinese restaurants. In the era of Civil Rights, African Americans were considered to be a threat, and there is almost no evidence that suburbanites had

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<sup>26</sup> Again, the analysis of race and ethnicity in this dissertation is based on Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color*. In the early twentieth century most Americans believed there were many different races, usually based on country of origin, at least when it came to European Americans (African and Asian Americans tended to be lumped together as two different races). The closing of immigration in the 1920s, the decline of scientific racism (i.e. IQ tests that "proved" the existence of many different races), and the Nazis' embrace of scientific racism led to a reduction in the perceived number of races. By the postwar era, definitions of race tended to rely on obvious physical differences, the most prominent being skin color.

any interest in black foods when they were identified as such. However, when those same foods were identified as being Southern, there was tremendous interest among whites. Black servitude was a part of the southern dining experience, and in this way white fears of black independence played out in ideas relating to foods. Some southern restaurants employed black waitresses dressed as mammies and Southern cookbooks routinely mentioned black cooks and servants, especially when the books discussed the antebellum era. Blacks were not generally allowed into suburbs, except as cooks and hired help.

The last chapter of this work, Chapter 7, sums up its major points. It also looks ahead to the events and ideas that changed American foods in the 1960s and 1970s. The popularity of Julia Child and French cooking opened a new realm of possibilities for American cooks, reminding them of the importance of using fresh foods. *Silent Spring* and the modern environmental movement caused Americans to ponder the real price of using so many colorings, flavorings, and preservatives in their foods. *The Feminine Mystique* and the modern feminist movement caused millions of women to question, if they had not already, why they were expected to spend so much time in the kitchen. The children of the Baby Boom went "back to nature" in the late 1960s and 1970s and many rejected food made by food corporations entirely. The postwar era can be seen as the last time Americans truly trusted food corporations and the foods they produced.

### *The Questions in a Recipe*

In the mid-1960s Clementine Paddleford had a recipe contest. Her previous cookbook, *How America Eats*, was a collection of recipes from her articles. Her new cookbook, *Cook Young*, was to feature “shortcut recipes” (those incorporating some sort of convenience food) submitted by readers. Within a few weeks of the contest’s announcement she had received thousands of recipes.

Sharon Lou Clark, of Kansas City, Missouri, submitted a recipe that is representative of a certain type of recipe Paddleford received from her readers. “I created this from a combined types [sic] of food my husband likes,” Clark wrote, “cream cheese, butterscotch, pineapple, etc. The cashews are my favorite nut, but some people might like walnut or pecans instead.” The recipe is simple: a butterscotch cake mix, two eggs, some water, a can of crushed pineapple, and a cup of chopped cashews. Clark mentioned that she and her husband would be celebrating their second anniversary that June.

In the simple recipe, and the accompanying letter, can be seen some of the food trends of the period. The recipe uses only two fresh foods (water and eggs), a cake mix, and two canned foods, highlighting the importance of convenience foods. Gender plays a role as well, as Clark, in her role of cook, created the dish from foods her husband liked, and she downplayed her own preferences in the letter by stating that, while she preferred cashews, “some people might like walnut or pecans instead.”<sup>27</sup> But the overriding sense one gets from the recipe is that, by the postwar

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<sup>27</sup> Sharon Lou Clark to Paddleford, not dated, folder 68, box 8, Paddleford Collection.

period, something important about food had changed to the point where even food's component parts had been abstracted. This is not a dish made from flour, sugar, nuts that had to be cracked, and a large, thorny plant imported from Central America. It is a dish made from two eggs, water, something in a bag and two things in cans. Clark felt that she could mix these things safely and experiment without too much fear of failure, and she felt comfortable in working with materials like these rather than the sorts of raw ingredients her grandmother may have cooked with. Food like this needs an explanation.

## Chapter 2: Cocktail Parties, Processed Foods, and the Move to the Suburbs

Johnson County, Kansas, is a highly suburbanized area lying south of Kansas City, Missouri. The Johnson County Museum exists to tell the story of the county, and has a considerable story to tell. The area was settled by Native Americans millennia ago, and they were subsequently pushed out by white settlers. Westport, a suburb of Kansas City which is not in Johnson County, was a jumping-off point for the Oregon, California and Santa Fe Trails. The Santa Fe Trail passed through Johnson County, and is today marked by signs along city streets. Decades after the last wagon train left Westport, Kansas City became a city (rather than a town named by hopeful developers) with the immense stockyards that grew up along the city's rail yards. Cattle flowed in from the west and awaited processing before being sent to cities in the east.

The story the Johnson County Museum tells, though, is light on most of these developments. Johnson County lies about 10 miles south of downtown Kansas City and remained a relatively rural area until about the 1920s. After that point the museum picks up the real story of Johnson County: suburbanization. Streetcar lines spread south from Kansas City in the early part of the twentieth century and many people bought houses near streetcar stops, desiring a more bucolic life in the country. The twin crises of the Great Depression and World War II halted much of the house building in the county, but the years after the war's end saw an explosion of

residential construction in Johnson County. Inexpensive, easy-to-get loans helped postwar construction, as did the advent of Interstate 35, which runs generally north-south through the county, and Interstate 435, which rings the Kansas City metropolitan area and cuts through Johnson County.

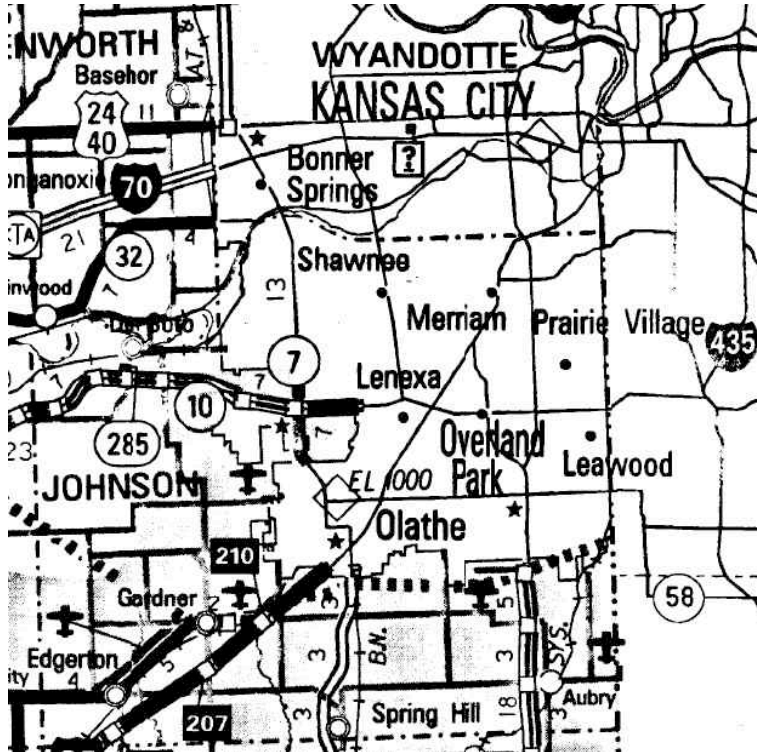


Figure 2.1. Johnson County fills the lower left of this map and extends just north of Shawnee (where the Johnson County Museum is located) and just east of Leawood. After World War II the county saw suburban growth from former residents of Kansas City, Missouri (in the top right of the map) as well as from rural residents of Kansas. The source for is a 1996 auto map.

The museum tells the story of the county's suburbanization in two ways. First, it has the exhibits one would expect from a museum, with photos, paintings, and recordings for visitors to experience as they wind their way through the building.

Second, it has a particular example of the postwar housing boom: The 1950's All-Electric House.

The All-Electric House is not a replica of a house from the time period. It actually was built in 1954, in the Indian Fields subdivision in Johnson County, and moved to the museum grounds fifty years later. The house was a show place for the Kansas City Power & Light Company to display the wonders of electric power.<sup>1</sup>

Today it is a show place for the museum, a way for visitors to experience the past rather than just reading about it. True to the time, the house is a ranch house with a patio in back (although other house styles, such as the Cape Cod, were popular in the postwar years, the ranch house was one of the most popular styles and came to epitomize the postwar suburban house). Baby Boomers and others may experience a shock of recognition in touring the house, a remembrance of forgotten details: a mint green bathroom with a toothbrush holder that rotates to disappear into a wall; a pink kitchen with a curving table for both children and parents to sit at; bedroom windows set high in the wall to let light in and keep prying eyes out. The house has been fitted with either originals or copies of the furniture featured at the house's opening in 1954. For instance, the master bedroom features two twin beds instead of a single queen or king-sized bed, a reflection of the public modesty of the time.

Being a show house, though, the 1950s All-Electric House has a number of amenities that were unusual for 1954. One of the first things visitors notice is what appears to be natural light filtering into the ceiling of the foyer, even on cloudy or

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<sup>1</sup> Information about the house comes from a visit to the Johnson County Museum by the author, July 28, 2007.

stormy days. It is a clever combination of fluorescent lights and a thick sheet of translucent plastic. Hallways in the house have both ceiling lights and smaller bulbs near the floor that light the way at night. All the lights in the house are controlled by a set of dials in the master bedroom so that, if one wakes up at night and remembers that the kitchen light is still on, the switch is nearby.



Figure 2.2. A ranch house advertised in *Better Homes and Gardens* in 1955. Although the design is typical of ranch houses, with large bay and picture windows and a low profile, the construction material is atypical. As the advertisement reads, "You'll have the loveliest home on the block when it's a concrete house."

Other aspects of the house illustrate the trends of the time. A television is not immediately visible in the living room until a switch is flipped, when the picture above the fireplace slides to one side and reveals a built-in TV. The TV has a remote control but, this being 1954, the remote is relatively large and connected to the wall



by a wire, and only controls the on-off switch and sliding the picture which hides the TV. The house has a combination living room and dining room, a typical setup for the time that made cocktail parties popular, where guests could spill into the living room or, during the summer, into the backyard. The picture window of the house faces the back, not the front, making the back yard and the patio the focus of the house, not the front street and the wider world. The positioning of the window makes it so one can watch television while sitting on the patio, and one can hear the television through speakers built into the overhanging eaves outside. The kitchen window faces the front, the better for mother to watch for children coming home from school while baking up, say, a batch of cookies.

The All-Electric House is an example of the millions of houses built in American suburbs after World War II. These houses were usually smaller than prewar houses and were made much more inexpensively, but to their owners they represented a home on a piece of land outside of the city. They also represented newness: a new house, new appliances, and new neighbors (who often became new friends).

Five years after the All-Electric House was built, and a half a world away, two of the most powerful men on earth had a discussion that centered on these new houses. "Discussion" may be too polite a word for the talk, though. It is usually referred to as the "Kitchen Debate," but "brawl," at least with words, might be a better description of the exchange.

It occurred at a trade show in Moscow in 1959. The show featured replicas of American homes filled with American-made consumer goods, and over seven tons of processed foods, including cake mixes and frozen fruits and vegetables, had been shipped in. Russians were not allowed to eat any of the food (their government forbade it), but they did watch cooking demonstrations from home economists from General Mills, General Foods, and other food companies. These demonstrations were often quite well-attended, with viewers sometimes watching entire cake-making demonstrations, which could take a few hours.<sup>2</sup>

During the show Nikita Khrushchev, the head of the Soviet Union, and Richard Nixon, then the vice-president of the United States, held a discussion that began in a model kitchen but wandered from there, both literally and figuratively, as the two leaders walked through the trade show. Nixon began by showing Khrushchev the model kitchen, pointing out that its modernity made "life easier for women." Khrushchev replied that Nixon's "capitalistic attitude toward women does not occur under Communism." Nixon countered by asserting that the attitude was universal, and he then explained that most American veterans and working-class people (like steel workers) could afford the house. Khrushchev said that peasants and steel workers in the Soviet Union could also afford a house like that, but unlike in the United States, where "houses are built to last only 20 years so builders could sell new houses," the Soviets built houses to last. "We build for our children and grandchildren," he said. Nixon then said that American houses last for more than

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Marks, *Finding Betty Crocker: The Secret Life of American's First Lady of Food* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 198.

twenty years, but he did admit there was some truth in the assertion that American houses might become obsolete. "[A]fter twenty years, many Americans want a new house or a new kitchen. Their kitchen is obsolete by that time....The American system is designed to take advantage of new inventions and new techniques."<sup>3</sup>

Their conversation shifted topics after this, moving to questions of whether either leader's words would be publicized in the other's country and whether the trade show was effective. Throughout the discussion, though, a few things come through quite clearly. First, despite the changing topics of the discussion, and issues of cultural differences and language interpretation (as seen Khrushchev's comment of "You're a lawyer of Capitalism, I'm a lawyer for Communism. Let's kiss."), the exchange is really a debate about the merits of capitalism and communism. Secondly, the men are not arguing those merits based on military strength, or scientific prowess, or even the numbers of countries or people around the world who live under capitalism or communism. Rather, the debate centers around standards of living. Nixon talks about the appliances that make life easier for women and the inexpensive houses that working-class people can afford, while Khrushchev counters that the Soviets do not believe women need appliances to make their lives easier, and besides, workers in the Soviet Union can afford these houses too. Later in the discussion Khrushchev additionally pointed out that everyone in his country is entitled to housing, unlike in America.

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<sup>3</sup> The full text of the debate can be found online at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=176> (accessed March 15, 2008).

The Kitchen Debate was not an isolated incident. The Cold War was fought on many fronts, including the relative standard of living of both the US and the USSR. For many, the prosperity of Americans in the postwar years was an example of the merits of both capitalism and democracy (the opposite held true as well-- whenever American politicians trumpeted the wonders of American prosperity, Russian politicians pointed to the poverty and disenfranchisement of southern blacks as the other side of the capitalist coin). American prosperity included new cars and new houses, and it also included new refrigerators, new outdoor grills, and thousands of new foods at supermarkets.

Suburbanization and prosperity were connected trends which had different effects on suburban foods. The physical change of the move to the suburbs, and the new houses that were there, affected suburbanites in many ways. The houses in the new suburbs were different from older houses in America. Their size was different, their layouts were different, and the attitudes of their owners were different.

Prosperity also affected the foods eaten, but in a different way. Engel's Law, an economic principle which says that as income rises the percentage of income spent on food falls, did not function in the early years of the postwar era. People spent a greater portion of their income on foods than they had before the Great Depression even as their income increased. It is impossible to fully explain this increase in spending without looking at Americans' higher standard of living.

This chapter examines the effects of suburbanization on the foods suburbanites ate. The suburbs have been written about by historians like Kenneth

Jackson in *Crabgrass Frontier* and Zane Miller in *Suburb*, and these two books take very different approaches to the subject. Jackson writes about the history of American suburbs in general, paying close attention to the factors that made them possible (including government policies). Miller traces the history of Forest Park, Ohio, which lies on the outskirts of Cincinnati, and he is interested in how the idea of community has changed over the years for developers, politicians, and residents of the suburb.

The present study is concerned with the day-to-day activities of suburbanites, and, as such, books such as Jackson's and Miller's are useful for background information and provide more of a jumping-off point than a template for analysis. However, there is also another set of ideas about the suburbs presented by a different group of writers: the social critics of the postwar period. As Zane Miller writes, these people "characterized suburbia as a place of homogeneous settlements populated by rootless individuals with loose morals and hyperactive if shallow social lives who lived in a poorly planned and often squalidly designed and disorderly milieu."<sup>4</sup> Usually, these critics viewed the suburbs from afar, and so their critiques were based more on abstract ideas about what suburbia represented than what suburbia actually was. Often, suburbia represented the polar opposite of the inner cities, which were perceived to be places with diverse populations and well-established social structures (such as churches and other organizations) which had existed for decades. When researchers actually entered the suburbs and spent time living there (such as Herbert

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<sup>4</sup> Zane L. Miller, *Suburb: Neighborhood and Community in Forest Park, Ohio, 1935-1976* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981), xix.

Gans did), they found that suburbs were diverse places with people living many different sorts of lives. With this in mind, the present study conceives the suburbs as places of diversity within a certain amount of uniformity. Suburbanites purchased Cape Cod and ranch houses with preset floor plans, but they were free to decorate the houses however they wanted and they frequently expanded the house's livable space by converting the attic into one or two bedrooms. Most suburbs were whites-only, but (as will be explored in Chapter 6) changing ideas about ethnicity and race meant that second and third generation Italian and Polish Americans lived beside people who could trace their ancestry in America back for many generations. In terms of cooking, women cooked a variety of meals, some from scratch, others using processed foods, and on the occasional evening, men cooked some of the meal as well.

#### *Postwar Prosperity and the Suburbs*

Reading through the newspapers and magazines of the postwar years one gets the sense that, rather than being a time of prosperity, the economy was on a continual series of skids and downturns. Recessions in 1953-4, 1957-8, and 1960-61 unnerved businesspeople, and in every economic dip the specter of the Great Depression, of millions of unemployed people and shuttered factories, haunted Americans. Inflation was rampant, especially regarding food. A series of Gallup Polls tracked the rise in average expenditures on food. In 1946, the first year after the war, the median family

expenditure was \$17 per week.<sup>5</sup> Two years later it had jumped to \$25.<sup>6</sup> In 1951, 60 percent of respondents reported that they were annoyed by the high price of meat, and 20 percent of those asked replied that they thought meat should be rationed.<sup>7</sup> By 1959 the median amount spent on food per week had risen to \$29 (this poll, unlike the others, does not include farm families).<sup>8</sup> That same year, presented with a list of options, 41 percent of respondents said that they were most irritated by their high food bills.<sup>9</sup>

And yet, after each economic setback, Americans were generally better off. Wages rose even as inflation depressed the value of a dollar. Changes in financing options put houses within the reach of millions of Americans who had never had them before. Car ownership widened considerably. The fact is that by the mid-1960s, most Americans were much better off than they had been before the war.

There were many causes for the prosperity, but one of the central causes was a shift from wartime defense production to peacetime consumer production, and a corresponding change in mindset of consumers. The war had soaked up both unemployment and slack production, and the millions of uniforms, guns, bullets, and other necessities of war shipped to Europe and Asia wound domestic production up to a terrific rate. After the war this defense production was changed over to consumer

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<sup>5</sup> George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Vol. 1* (New York: Random House, 1972), 561.

<sup>6</sup> Gallup, 748.

<sup>7</sup> George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Vol. 2* (New York: Random House, 1972), 993

<sup>8</sup> George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Vol. 3* (New York: Random House, 1972), 1633.

<sup>9</sup> Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Vol. 3*, 1619.

production as, for example, General Motors moved from producing jeeps and tanks to Cadillacs and Buicks. It was generally known that citizens' savings rate had been high during the war (it was, in fact, three times what it was before or after the war), and wartime rationing had made it impossible to buy many things that consumers would have otherwise purchased.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the economic boom in the late 1940s was expected by many as people bought cars, houses, refrigerators, and other items that were widely available, and affordable, for the first time in years.

At the time many also expected a severe downturn as Americans had their needs and wants satiated. Overproduction, it was believed, would lead to overstocked car lots, appliance stores overflowing with too many washing machines, and department stores with piles of unsold stock in their back rooms. Industry would grind to a halt. It would be a buyer's market, the Great Depression all over again.

Some market analysts, though, realized that the situation in the late 1940s was very different than the situation had been in the late 1920s. For example, in 1948 a researcher for advertising giant J Walter Thompson argued in the *Harvard Business Review* that major shifts in the American economy had occurred since 1940. For one thing, there were far more people in the country than twenty years before, and the makeup of the population was very different. The Baby Boom was adding 225,000 people a month to the population, "which is like adding to our market every month a

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<sup>10</sup> Regarding the savings rate, see Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 28.



city the size of Richmond, Virginia; Omaha, Nebraska; or Syracuse, New York.”<sup>11</sup>

The population was far more urban than it had been—1920 was the first US census which showed more urban than rural Americans, and the shift had continued over the intervening years. There were many more families in the population, and the average wage workers brought home was much higher in terms of real income than it had been.

A year later the same researcher prepared a report on the marketing possibilities of 1949. He presented many facts and figures in this report to argue, again, that the economic landscape in America had changed drastically since the onset of the Great Depression. A single example from that report can illuminate the depth of that change.

In 1940, the year before America entered the war, personal income for Americans after taxes stood at \$75.7 billion. This is income before taking out living costs such as rent or mortgage, food costs, and other necessary expenses. In 1947, two years after the war ended, that number had climbed to \$173.6 billion, a rise of about \$100 billion and not entirely surprising for a growing economy. What is surprising, though, is the 1947 number, after subtracting out living costs, was \$88.2 billion. That is, Americans’ discretionary income, the dollars they could spend on anything they wanted, was \$12.5 billion higher in 1947 than the *total* income for

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<sup>11</sup> Arno H. Johnson, "Market Potentials, 1948," *Harvard Business Review* 26 (January 1948): 22.

Americans in 1940.<sup>12</sup> The postwar years saw a shift to a buyer's market, and those buyers had a great deal of money.

In the early 1950s *Fortune* magazine ran a series of articles examining the changes in depth, and in 1953 published the series as a book, *The Changing American Market*. Again, a single example from the book illustrates the shift between the pre-Depression years and the postwar years. Converting the 1929 economy into 1953 dollars, and only looking at after tax income, the makeup of the economy on the eve of the Great Depression (after a decade of prosperity) looked like this: a very small strata at the very top, 3 percent of the family units (which includes both families and unattached people) which controlled about 20 percent of the cash. *Fortune* split this group out at the \$10,000 per year and above mark. Just below this was about half a million family units (1.5 percent of the population) making between \$7,500 and \$10,000 annually and controlling about 9 percent of the cash. The next group was larger, 5.5 million family units or 15 percent of the population, making \$4,000-\$7,500 per year and controlling about \$30 billion, or a quarter, of the total income. The rest of the population existed making \$4,000 or less per year, a vast mass of 29 million family units (80 percent of the total) controlling about 46 percent of the total income.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Arno H. Johnson, *Consumer Purchasing Power 1949*, undated, unnumbered page. Box DG11, Publications 1887-2005, J. Walter Thompson Company Archives, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University (hereafter the archives will be cited as "JWT Archives").

<sup>13</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, *The Changing American Market* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1953), 15.

By 1953 the situation had changed drastically, shifting both families and incomes toward the middle. The total number of family units in the country had risen 42 percent, but total income had jumped 87 percent. The group in the lower middle, who made \$4,000 to \$7,500 per year (and keep in mind that these are all 1953 dollars

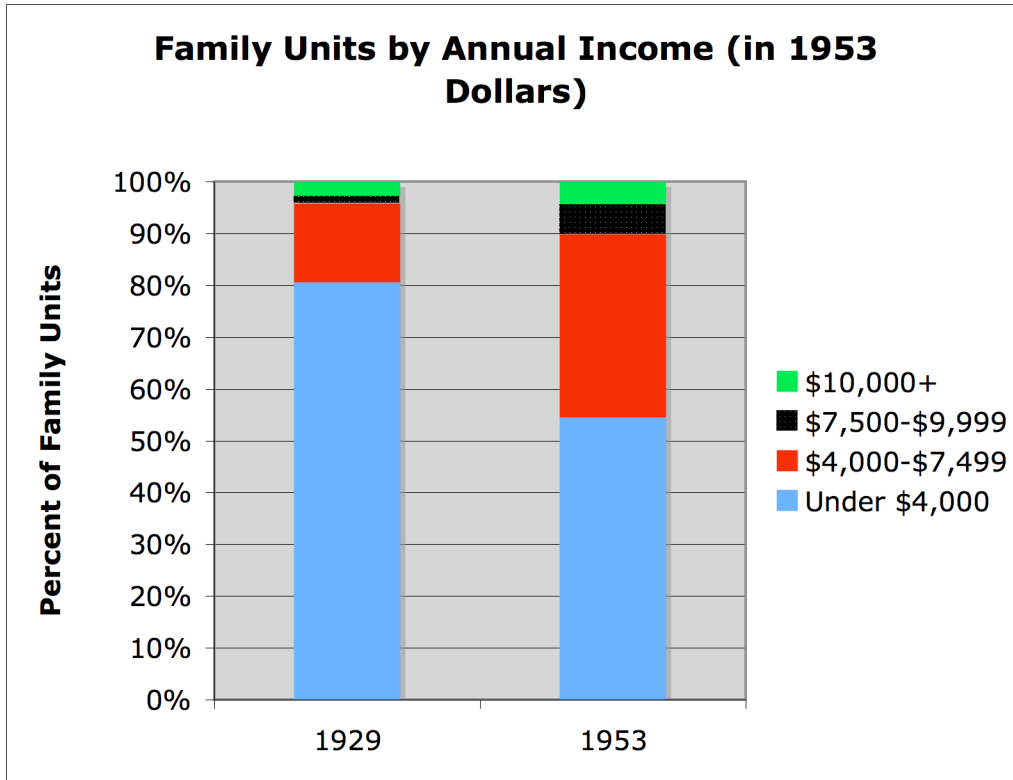


Figure 2.3. Rising wages pushed millions of family units from the lowest bracket into a higher bracket.

after taxes, including the 1929 illustration) had grown from 5.5 million to 18 million family units, and the income they controlled had risen from \$30 billion to \$93 billion dollars—35 percent and 42 percent of the total, respectively, and over three times the amounts they were back in 1929. This growth was mostly recent growth, as *Fortune* estimated that the number of family units in this group had only grown by 13 percent

between 1929 and 1947, but then leaped by 40 percent between 1947 and 1953.<sup>14</sup> Not only had the changing economy brought many people to higher income levels, it also pulled some of the highest downward, mostly because of higher taxes. In 1929 the richest 1 percent of the population controlled 19 percent of its income, but by 1953 that 1 percent controlled only 8 percent of the total income.<sup>15</sup> There were forces at work that pulled some people up and some down, moving both sets toward the bulging middle of the new American economy.

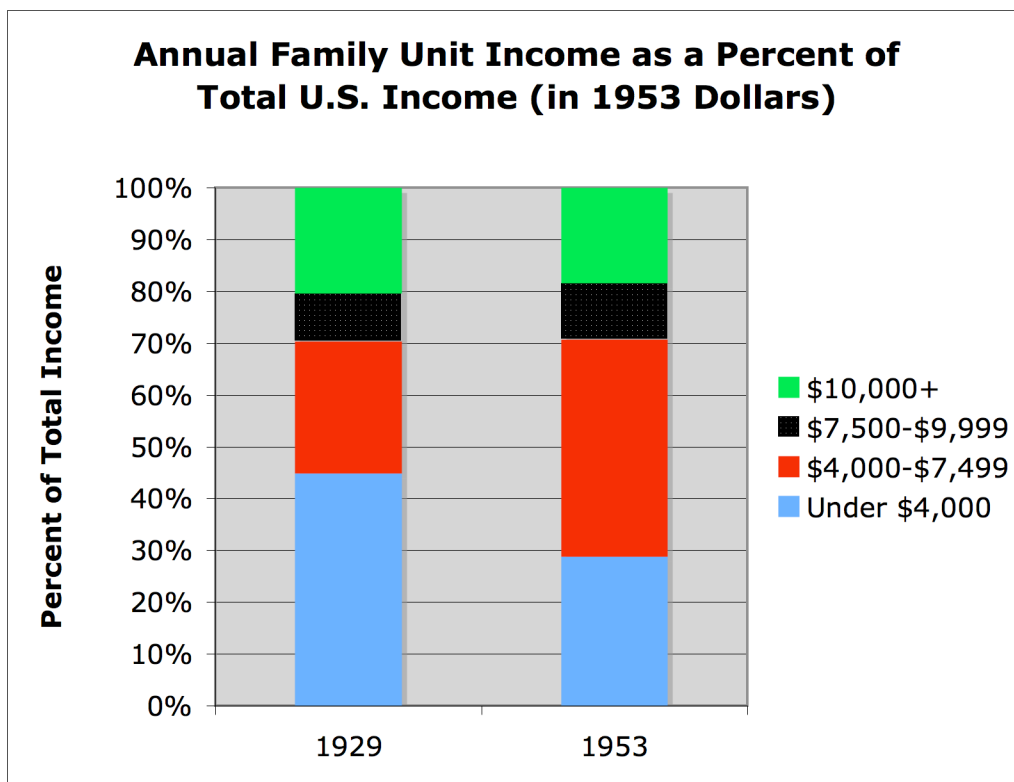


Figure 2.4. In 1929, family units making between \$4,000 and \$7,499 per year controlled about 25 percent of the US economy. By 1953, they controlled over 40 percent of an economy that was much, much bigger than before.

<sup>14</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 17.

This new mass market, with its focus on the middle class, was a very attractive one for marketers. As *Fortune* pointed out, its epicenter was the suburbs. It was there, among the new houses and miniature trees (smaller varieties were planted so they did not tower over the one-story ranch houses), that the styles for the country were being set. By 1955 the editors of *Fortune* could rattle off a list of trends that started there: "children, hard-tops, culottes, dungarees, vodka martinis, outdoor barbecues, functional furniture, picture windows, and costume jewelry."<sup>16</sup>

The postwar housing boom, much of which took place in the suburbs, is one of the major events of the time period. The construction boom was certainly needed as the lack of construction before and during the war meant that by 1947 six million American families were doubling up with friends or relatives, and another half million were living in temporary housing such as Quonset huts.<sup>17</sup>

The explosion in suburban residential construction is often perceived to be a development peculiar to the postwar years, but when placed in the context of housing trends throughout the twentieth century the boom becomes more understandable. By 1929, the eve of the Great Depression, the move to the suburbs had been going on for decades. In the 1920s and before suburban development usually took place along streetcar lines, spurred both by the idea of combining small town living with city working and by heavy marketing from streetcar line owners. These owners stood to gain from both increased ridership and the sale of land they had bought cheap while

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<sup>16</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 232.

the rail line was being developed. Mass production techniques revolutionized factories during this time, but they scarcely touched residential construction. Houses in these streetcar suburbs were built slowly and individually, and they generally did not have the cookie cutter sameness the postwar suburbs had. Home ownership increased as the years went on, rising from 37 percent of the population in 1890 to 46 percent in 1930.<sup>18</sup>

Had the Great Depression never happened, it is reasonable to expect that more and more people would have moved to the suburbs through the 1930s. As it was, though, the Depression killed the construction industry as it did so many others. There were 937,000 housing starts in 1925, and only 93,000 in 1933, three years into the Depression, an all-time low. That same year, 1.5 million homeowners either defaulted on their mortgage or had their houses foreclosed upon.<sup>19</sup> The government was forced to step in, and its actions over the next few decades had profound effects on the postwar housing boom.

One of the most influential government programs was the Federal Housing Administration, set up in 1934. Rather than directly lending to potential homeowners the FHA insured approved loans given by other lenders. The FHA, obviously, had the full backing of the federal government, so if a homeowner defaulted on his or her loan the lender could recoup a significant percentage of the loan from the government. This meant that potential homeowners could take out loans for a larger

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<sup>18</sup> Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., *The American Family Home, 1800-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 194.

<sup>19</sup> Clark, 194.

percentage of the house's value than previously—up to 93 percent of the house's value, compared with 50 percent previously. The FHA standardized loan terms, requiring loans to be 25 to 30 years in length, fully amortized (previously mortgages had been for only a few years, and the homeowner would have to take out a new loan at the end of the term for the remaining amount, which might not be possible during a recession or depression). The interest rate for home loans dropped as the government's backing meant that banks lost very little money on home loans. And, the FHA required inspections during and after construction, which standardized construction methods across the country.<sup>20</sup>

The FHA helped the construction market considerably. As mentioned above, in 1933, the year before the creation of the FHA, there were 93,000 housing starts; by 1937 they had risen to 332,000 and stood at 530,000 in 1940.<sup>21</sup> In 1941 the United States entered World War II, and for the next four years many of the raw materials for building houses were directed toward building war-related machinery. There was a housing shortage during the war, especially as large numbers of Americans moved around the country to locations that had defense jobs but lacked housing for those workers. World War II only deferred Americans' desires for their own houses, it did not kill them.

With the end of the war, the floodgates opened on home construction. There were only 114,000 houses started in 1944, the year before the war ended, but the year after it ended housing starts leapt to 937,000 houses. The number kept climbing

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<sup>20</sup> Jackson, 204-205.

<sup>21</sup> Jackson, 205.

through the end of the decade, reaching 1.183 million in 1948 and topping off at 1.692 million in 1950, an all-time high.<sup>22</sup>

There were numerous reasons for the boom in construction. As Kenneth Jackson outlines in *Crabgrass Frontier*, government programs like the FHA and the GI Bill (which insured mortgages for returning veterans) had a profound effect. Other government policies affected home ownership as well, such as tax laws that allowed interest on a mortgage to be deducted but which did not allow rent paid to be deducted. Home builders, also, had a large effect. During the Great Depression those that had stayed in business learned to trim expenses whenever possible, using newly developed products like latex glues, plywood and drywall.<sup>23</sup> After the war builders were able to implement an assembly line process in home construction. Perhaps the epitome of this was William Levitt, whose Levittown development on Long Island eventually grew to 17,400 homes and 82,000 residents. Levitt had built houses before the war and, while in the armed forces in the Pacific, received more experience in constructing housing as quickly as possible. After the war he used this experience to transform the construction process into an assembly line task with 27 separate steps, each crew of men performing a different, discrete job. In the Long Island development one crew poured concrete slabs while another came along a few days later and dropped off all the supplies the succeeding crews would need to assemble the houses. As much construction was done off-site as possible, at a central location, because it was cheaper. Levitt's organization was vertically integrated: he owned a

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<sup>22</sup> Jackson, 233.

<sup>23</sup> Clark, 194.



lumber mill, a cement plant, and a wholesale appliance business. His crews built dozens of houses a week. And, he sold them. The process for buying a Levitt house was as streamlined as the construction process and only required two half-hour sessions with a representative. The demand for housing was such that hundreds of people showed up when Levittown opened for sales.<sup>24</sup>

Homes were not the only commodity sold in great numbers after World War II. Car ownership increased as well. In 1925 there had been about 17.4 million cars registered in this country. That climbed to 22.5 million in 1935, and nearly 25.8 million in 1945 (when there were no civilian vehicles being produced). By 1955, though, registrations leapt to over 52 million, nearly double the number ten years previously.<sup>25</sup> Car ownership was almost required for suburban living, as the suburbs were usually sited near large roadways, but far from rail lines (and by this time the vast majority of earlier commuter rail companies had gone bankrupt, the railcars and tracks sold for scrap, victims of the popularity of the automobile). One study from 1954 indicated that the car market had nowhere to go but up: about nineteen million families still had no car, and eleven million needed a second car.<sup>26</sup>

The rising incomes of the time were very good for most American businesses, but not for all. Makers of household tools found that, between 1947 and 1953, the value of their market went from less than \$50 million to over \$200 million. Makers

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<sup>24</sup> Jackson, 234-235.

<sup>25</sup> Jackson, 162.

<sup>26</sup> Arno H. Johnson, "What's Ahead for Business in 1955?", text of speech for the Fall Conference of the Bank of Virginia. Box DG11, Publications 1887-2005, JWT Archives.

of games, bicycles, and cameras also saw their markets surge. But in the same time period ticket sales for baseball and hockey games fell off by 25 percent, theater and concert attendance dropped 2 percent, and admissions to all spectator sports and amusements fell by an eighth.<sup>27</sup>

The editors of *Fortune* magazine explained this by saying that, essentially, Americans were becoming more active. Sitting in the stands of a baseball game was too passive; people would rather be playing ball themselves (and the sale of baseballs, gloves, and bats was another growth industry). Although they finally had houses of their own, Americans did not seem to want to stay in them. They wanted to be outdoors, doing something (to a certain extent. Televisions still sold like hot cakes).

The fascination with the outdoors was a major theme of the time. All those new cars and all those roads seemed irresistible to Americans (the Highway Act of 1956 would add 41,000 miles of road). National parks saw record attendance. Holiday Inn was the first hotel chain to capitalize on the trend, opening its first hotel in Memphis in 1952. The company's popularity was due to the fact that, no matter the location, all Holiday Inns were essentially the same, and the green and white sign was a hallmark of dependability in the years when the quality of roadside motels varied widely. McDonald's took the same concept and applied it to food, opening its first outlet in suburban Des Plaines, Illinois, in 1955.

The fascination with the outdoors did not just extend to driving trips. The outdoors was also incorporated in home designs of the time. The most popular design

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<sup>27</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 202-203.

was the ranch-style house, which implicitly incorporated the outdoors through its use of sliding glass doors and large picture windows. As one writer put it, a ranch house “angles all over the lot sunning itself and exposing its rooms to the breeze on two or three sides each.”<sup>28</sup> Ranch houses were one story, and the lack of steps leading to doors caused one commentator to note that ranch houses had “a sense of continuity between the indoors and outdoors.”<sup>29</sup> The houses had originally been popular in the southwest and western United States, areas known for their wide-open spaces. The ranch house’s low, wide profile emphasized its informality, which was another hallmark of a time known for being child-centered.

Ranch houses were popular because of their association with the outdoors and their informality. They were also popular because their design was, at heart, a realistic response to problems facing postwar homeowners. On the one hand potential homeowners wanted a house, but on the other hand they did not want to, or could not, spend a lot of money on a house.

One of the primary issues facing homeowners was that of space. To keep houses inexpensive, builders constructed smaller houses after the war than before. Between 1940 and 1950, average floor space for new houses shrank by 12 percent. For one story houses the loss was only 7 percent, but for split levels it was an 18 percent loss.<sup>30</sup> By 1950 average square footage was slowly growing again, but space

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<sup>28</sup> Walter Adams, “What America Wants to Build: With Comments by Architects.” *Better Homes and Gardens* 24 (June 1946): 25.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Clark, 212.

<sup>30</sup> Edward T. Paxton, *What People Want When They Buy a House* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1955), 21.

was still an issue for buyers.<sup>31</sup> The ranch house's open design, its large windows and its back patio were all attempts to mitigate the relatively small floor space.

House designers had to be clever in their designs. The interior of the house was opened up and an older conception of space based on rooms was replaced by one based on zones. One zone was for housework, one for general living activities, and a third zone was for private activities. The bedrooms and bathroom were in the third zone, obviously, but the reality was that because of the openness and smallness of the house the zones for housework and living activities were somewhat mixed.<sup>32</sup>

The concept of zones had a major impact on the kitchen. For much of the nineteenth century the kitchen, if a house had one, had been set apart from the rest of the house, usually in the back (and some houses had a summer kitchen in an outbuilding because of the heat from activities like canning). At the end of that century the kitchen had been remade as an antiseptic center for cooking full of white enameled sinks and cabinets that emphasized its cleanliness. In the postwar era the kitchen changed again. Now it became a space for the whole family to occupy, a center for cooking and other tasks that came equipped with a low counter for the family to sit at while they interacted. Its location moved from the back of the house to the front, and it was often situated just off the garage, a convenient stopping point for carrying groceries in from the car. As one historian writes, "New tile and linoleum designs, pastel colors for stoves and refrigerators, and the use of brick walls and natural-wood cabinets all helped to soften the austere lines inherited from the

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<sup>31</sup> Paxton, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Clark, 213.

turn-of-the-century room."<sup>33</sup> The editors of *House and Garden* commented that "instead of looking like a clinic, the kitchen is now a friendly, congenial common room."<sup>34</sup> The kitchen's centrality in the new homes matched the new centrality of the woman who was in charge of the kitchen. Instead of working in a room at the back of the house, the woman of the house could now cook a meal while watching the children play in the front yard, or finish a dish while talking with guests lounging in the kitchen. The architectural change gave the woman a higher status by making the kitchen more central, but it also made it more difficult for her to escape from the kitchen--she could now run the house from the kitchen.

One survey from 1955 of about a thousand families showed that the kitchen was a central area for many people. While three-quarters of families used the kitchen only for cooking, cleaning dishes, eating, and washing clothes (for those without a laundry room or basement), the rest used the kitchen for a variety of tasks. Entertaining, playing with children, listening to the radio, and reading were all about equal in terms of popularity.<sup>35</sup> The same survey revealed that about 15 percent of families used the dining room for entertaining or playing cards, 12 percent used it for writing or paperwork, and sewing and reading also occurred in many dining rooms across the country.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Clark, 213.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Clark, 213.

<sup>35</sup> Paxton, 39.

<sup>36</sup> Paxton, 38.

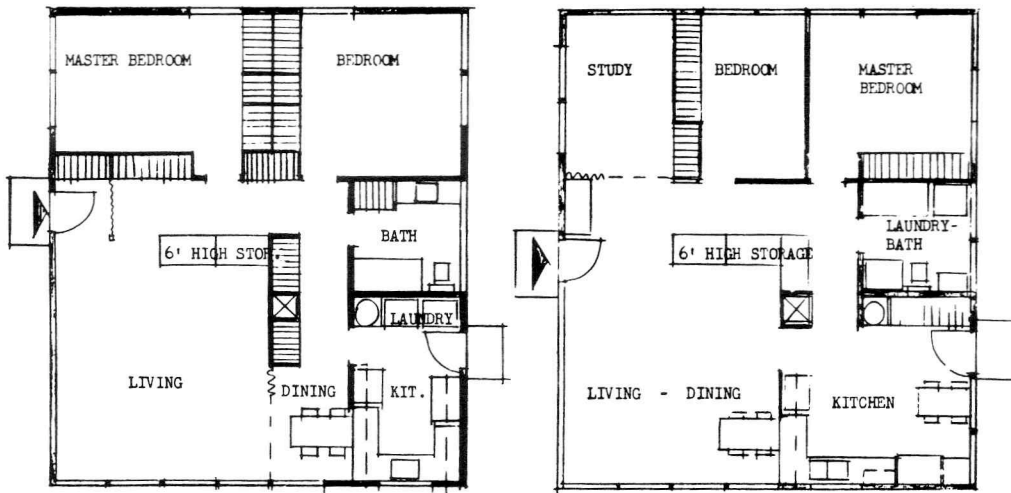


Figure 2.5. Postwar architects offered variations on their designs, and the variations extended to the layout and location of the dining area. From Clark's *American Family Home*.

However, the American dining room was in danger. The small postwar houses led many architects to advocate a combined dining-living room, although at least one felt that the combination was not a good one: “the dining room is more than show, as you soon find out in a combination room when somebody spills milk and jam all over the living-room rug.”<sup>37</sup> Separate dining rooms were highly desired, and one study of families who had taken definite steps toward building a house showed that, even in the group who planned to spend less than \$5,000 on their house (which was toward the low end), more than half of them wanted a separate dining room. At the same time, though, those respondents showed the fickleness that American consumers are known for, as 90 percent of them were planning on eating breakfast and lunch, and sometimes dinner, in the kitchen.<sup>38</sup> Essentially, they wanted a dining

<sup>37</sup> Adams, 96.

<sup>38</sup> Adams, 96.

room for formal meals, and the kitchen for less formal dining. One survey revealed what was probably apparent to many people who were looking for a house: to get a dining room, most people had to settle for a prewar house rather than a brand new home.<sup>39</sup>

### *Cooking in the Suburbs*

The move to the suburbs and everything that went along with it changed the foods suburbanites ate. There are two major food trends from the postwar era that are a direct result of the new physical circumstances of the suburbs, and a few other, smaller trends that resulted from the move.

One of the major trends was the popularity of cocktail parties. The suburbs were social communities, but the limitations of suburban houses made entertaining difficult. As Sloan Wilson wrote in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, a novel that was critical of the yes-man corporate mentality of the time, “The kitchens were small, dining rooms were almost nonexistent, and after the women had put the children to bed, they were in no mood to fix company meals.” Cocktail parties were a response to these limitations, but they also created some problems. The parties in the book began at 7:30 PM, “when the men came home from New York,” and they continued until the early morning hours. “Somewhere around nine-thirty in the evening, Martinis and Manhattans would give way to highballs, but the formality of eating

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<sup>39</sup> Paxton, 36.

anything but hors d'oeuvres in between had been entirely omitted."<sup>40</sup> The hors d'oeuvres, scarcely larger than bites of food, were convenient because they could be put on small plates so guests could sit on chairs, couches, or just stand while they juggled their cocktail glass and plate during the evening.

Cocktail parties were, in large part, a fad. The second major food-related trend that came from the suburbs became popular and never subsided. That trend is outdoor grilling (which is also referred to as “barbecuing” in many parts of the country, but because that term can also refer to a specific style of cooking, that term will be avoided altogether here).

The popularity of outdoor grilling can be traced to the popularity of the outdoors, the small houses of the suburbs, and the new love of informality. As the author of one cookbook announced, “All out for a barbecue. This is easygoing, hi-everybody sort of fun. Poke up a fire and relax while supper grills to a turn!”<sup>41</sup> Grilling pushed the act of cooking outside the kitchen, which freed up some space, and it also pushed it outside the house, into the great outdoors. It was the rare cooking activity that was seen as being masculine rather than feminine. Outdoor grilling will be explored again in the next chapter, which looks at gender and cooking, but long before grilling became popular many men already had experience in cooking during camping trips and other outdoor activities, and the main focus of grilling, the

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<sup>40</sup> Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955), 108-109.

<sup>41</sup> *Better Homes & Gardens Barbecue Book* (Des Moines: Meredith Publishing Company, 1959), 5.



meat, was already seen as being a masculine food (especially if it was steak, which some researchers considered to be the most masculine of all foods).<sup>42</sup>

Grilling over an open fire provided a way for the family to get outdoors, but the setting was a topsy-turvy one where dad cooked and everyone was supposed to eat with their hands. Even the instruments used for grilling were unusual. An enormous spatula and foot-long tongs hung by the side of many grills, tools that were deliberately oversized to keep the cook away from the heat. They were also made overly large so there could be no confusion between the masculine grilling tools and the more feminine kitchen utensils they resembled.

The popularity of a new kind of cooking, for which some equipment was needed, spurred the sales of different kinds of products. Makers of grills, charcoal, and grill-cleaning utensils benefited, as did makers of other products. In 1959 the Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation issued a pamphlet titled "How to Become a Cookout Champion." The pamphlet was filled with recipes for outdoor cooking, and was itself bound with a material that appeared to be aluminum foil, a graphic example of how the cook could use aluminum foil to protect grilled foods.<sup>43</sup> Both US Steel and the American Can Company also capitalized on the popularity of outdoor cooking by advertising the convenience of canned products. US Steel, in one full-page advertisement, urged readers to "Have a Quicknic" by serving franks and beans and other picnic foods that came in convenient cans.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Gendered foods will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>43</sup> *How to Become a Cookout Champion* (Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corp., 1959)

<sup>44</sup> *McCall's*, July 1955, 81.

Suburbanites could purchase grills from many different sources, or they could build their own. The July 1955 issue of *McCall's* featured a how-to article titled "\$50.13 for an Outdoor Grill," which instructed the reader on how to build a cinderblock grill.<sup>45</sup> *The Complete Book of Outdoor Cookery*, co-authored by James Beard, endorsed the do-it-yourself attitude by commenting that "an elaborately engineered grill is not necessary to enjoy this newest form of recreation." It went on to say that "Your broiling facilities may be a piece of gridded iron, salvaged from an old stove and propped up on a pile of rocks, or it may be a gorgeous stainless steel cookery unit, complete with an adjustable firebox, an electric spit, and other such luxurious accouterments."<sup>46</sup> Note the quote's reference to outdoor grilling as a form of recreation rather than a form of cooking. Part of the popularity of grilling was in the unusual tasks required, including lighting the fire. In what may be interpreted as an example of the different times those suburbanites lived in, the authors of the book recommended using paint thinner to start the fire, which could be bought "by the gallon at any paint or hardware store."<sup>47</sup>

Many new suburban home owners bought or made their own grills; there were also appliances to buy as well (although the houses in some suburbs, like Levittown, came furnished with brand-new appliances). Postwar women's magazines are filled with advertisements for appliances. Frigidaire promoted its "Thrift-30" oven, with which the user could "Roast a 30-pound turkey with room to spare! Bake six pies, or

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<sup>45</sup> "\$50.13 for an Outdoor Grill," *McCall's*, July 1955, 102-104.

<sup>46</sup> Helen Evans Brown and James A. Beard, *The Complete Book of Outdoor Cookery* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, 22.

ten loaves of bread, all at once.”<sup>48</sup> Hotpoint advertised an electric range, with a built-in deep fryer, by showing Ozzie, not Harriet, Nelson frying a batch of doughnuts for their boys.<sup>49</sup> For a time Hotpoint also sold a range that played “Tenderly” when the meat was done (which was matched by a Westinghouse dryer that played “How Dry I Am” when it was finished with the clothes).<sup>50</sup>

More specifically geared toward food storage, Kelvinator promoted its “Fabulous Foodarama” in the mid-1950s, a unit with a freezer in the left hand door and a refrigerator behind the right hand door.<sup>51</sup> Philco promised “a super market of your own in the space of a standard refrigerator!” in their Super Marketer refrigerator.<sup>52</sup> Possibilities along these lines were outlined in an article in *McCall's* from mid-1955 titled, “Supermarket at Home.” “More than nine American families out of ten own a refrigerator,” the article reads. “Yet four million new ones will be sold in 1955 in the United States.” The pictures that accompany the text show a series of delivery men standing in front of an open refrigerator door. First in line is a milkman, who is placing bottles of milk in the door, and behind him is what appears to be a grocery delivery boy with a shopping cart full of canned and packaged foods, while third in line is another man with a wooden bushel basket full of vegetables.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *McCall's*, October 1954, 7.

<sup>49</sup> *McCall's*, October 1953, 105.

<sup>50</sup> Janet Wolff, *What Makes Women Buy: A Guide to Understanding and Influencing the New Woman of Today* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1958), 192.

<sup>51</sup> *McCall's*, April 1956, 11.

<sup>52</sup> *McCall's*, April 1956, 21.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Sweeney Herbert, “Supermarket at Home,” *McCall's*, July 1955, 88-90.

The article points out that combination refrigerator-freezers accounted for 12 percent of sales in 1954. The growth of the frozen food industry, which was a postwar phenomenon, combined with the sale of either refrigerator-freezers or standalone freezers to create what appeared to be a promising new industry: the sale of bulk frozen foods from specialty clubs. *Fortune* reported in 1955 that 300,000 people nationwide had joined groups that sold bulk frozen foods. Members selected items from a catalog, phoned in their orders, and then stored the foods in their freezers, using them as needed.<sup>54</sup> Bulk frozen foods became so popular that hardware stores sold a special knife to cut through a block of frozen fruits or vegetables so consumers could thaw only what they needed.<sup>55</sup>

The growth of freezer sales points to a major difference between frozen foods and other types of convenience foods: the need for additional appliances and equipment throughout the entire distribution chain, including at the consumer's place of residence. Canned foods had been popular for over a century, largely because they required almost nothing extra to use except for a can opener. Frozen foods, though, required both the consumer and grocer to have a freezer, and the distributor needed a freezer truck to distribute the products. The frozen foods industry traces its origins to Clarence Birdseye's attempts in the early twentieth century to reliably freeze foods, but the fact is that the industry had to wait to take off until after the war, when grocers

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<sup>54</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 150.

<sup>55</sup> The Women of General Foods Kitchens, *The General Foods Kitchen Cookbook* (New York: Random House, 1959), 82.

could cheaply purchase freezers and the combination refrigerator-freezer became a standard consumer purchase.

Once this happened, consumers bought frozen foods at remarkable rates, although, as in everything else, there were successes and failures. Frozen orange juice was a success story, frozen milk and frozen tomato juice were failures. The editors of *Fortune* magazine noted a correlation between income and frozen food usage: consumption rose as income rose. They noted a similar correlation in canned food usage, up to incomes of \$4,000 per year (at which consumers began to have more choices in what they could eat), when canned food usage tapered off.<sup>56</sup> Both frozen foods and canned foods gave consumers more choice in what they could eat.

### *Children and the Suburbs*

The Baby Boom was, in many ways, connected to the general prosperity of Americans. It also involved the move to the suburbs. By 1950, 21.6 percent of the population of metropolitan areas was under the age of fourteen, but when one looked at suburban areas, the number jumped to 27 percent.<sup>57</sup> One suburban mother recalled the suburbs being "a warm, boring, completely child-centered little culture. We sat around in each others' kitchens and backyards and drank a lot of coffee and smoked a million cigarettes and talked about our children."<sup>58</sup> Children seemed to be everywhere. William Dobriner, describing a Levittown street in 1950, wrote about

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<sup>56</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 143.

<sup>57</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 80.

<sup>58</sup> Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 116.

the "Noise, bikes, wagons and baby carriages. Knots of housewives sitting on lawns, next to busy playpens. Gangs of three- and four-year-olds shriek and giggle in and out of houses."<sup>59</sup>

The suburban life was child-centered. Meals might occasionally be eaten in the dining room, but more often they would be taken in the kitchen, or on the couch in front of the TV. There was a boom in cookbooks for children, which was somewhat ironic. There is no real difference between a child's cookbook and an adult cookbook, and if children needed to learn to cook, it was much more likely that they would learn from an adult rather than turn to a book for cooking knowledge. The Baby Boom spurred the introduction of many child-related new food products. Sales of baby food climbed throughout the period, rising from 13 pounds per capita in 1941 to almost 55 pounds per capita in 1953 for those under three years old.<sup>60</sup> In 1947 it appeared that cold cereal sales per capita had plateaued until Post Cereals introduced Sugar Crisp, the first presweetened cereal. The coating of sugar proved very popular with consumers, many of whom were children, and by 1964 there were at least twenty other presweetened cereals on the market, accounting for about 26 percent of retail sales.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Harvey, 109.

<sup>60</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 144.

<sup>61</sup> Robert D. Buzzell and Robert E. M. Nourse, *Product Innovation in Food Processing, 1954-1964* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1967), 36.

### *The Political Side of Prosperity*

The rise in Americans' wages after World War II led to a general increase in the standard of living in America. While this affected the day-to-day lives of many Americans, the increase had a political element as well, as illustrated in the Kitchen Debate between Nixon and Khrushchev. The fight between capitalism and communism was fought in all parts of American society, and consumerism was one part of the fight. In 1948 homebuilder William Levitt made an explicit connection between Communism and home ownership, and he also commented on the demands of home ownership, when he said that "No man who owns his own house and lot can be a Communist. He has too much to do."<sup>62</sup> The United States Brewers Foundation ran a series of ads in the 1950s that connected the themes of freedom and consumerism. One ad showed people arriving at a cocktail party with the caption "In this friendly, freedom-loving land of ours...Beer Belongs--Enjoy It!"<sup>63</sup>

Americans' rising prosperity was used as fodder by politicians, but the prosperity was also political in the context of postwar shortages in Europe. The year after World War II ended one survey showed that 65 percent of Americans were willing to go back to rationing "to send food to people in other nations."<sup>64</sup> Although that number dropped to 22 percent a year later, it shows that many Americans thought

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Jackson, 231.

<sup>63</sup> *McCall's*, October 1954, 115.

<sup>64</sup> Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Vol. 1*, 582.

of their food in a global context (which, after years of wartime rationing to save food for the troops overseas, should not be too surprising).<sup>65</sup>

By 1955 government surpluses were the subject of another survey. With millions of pounds of wheat and butter about to rot in storage, Americans were asked what should happen to the food. Over three quarters of those surveyed responded that the food should be given away, and while more than half of those people said it should be given away to Americans, one in seven said it should go to “any country that needs it.” When asked, 30 percent of those surveyed said it should be given to the Russians as a “goodwill gesture,” while 46 percent said it should be sold to the Russians.<sup>66</sup> There was a political aspect to all of the consumer items Americans had access to, including all the food they could buy. Americans, at some level, understood this, even if they may not have grasped that washing machines and frozen strawberries spoke more loudly of the benefits of capitalism and democracy than copies of the Bill of Rights or the speeches of leaders in Washington.

#### *Better, More Expensive, and More Heavily Processed Foods*

The move to the suburbs had a specific effect on what suburbanites ate. The smaller houses led to the popularity of outdoor grilling and cocktail parties, and the new appliances gave suburbanites room to store frozen foods. A much larger influence on what suburbanites consumed, and a factor that had a much more dispersed effect, was the general prosperity suburbanites enjoyed. With more money

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<sup>65</sup> Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Vol. 1*, 681-2.

<sup>66</sup> Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Vol. 2*, 1358-9..



in their pockets, suburbanites chose to buy different foods than they had before the war.

This does not mean they ate entirely different meals, though. A survey from 1947 of Americans' "perfect meal" revealed that it would include steak, mashed or fried potatoes, apple pie, and coffee.<sup>67</sup> This is not much different than the foods many Americans, given the chance, would have chosen during the Great Depression. Neither did Americans eat more food. In 1909, per capita food consumption was 1,612 pounds of food; by 1953 that had declined 5 percent to 1,533 pounds.<sup>68</sup>

The type of food Americans consumed, though, had changed. Between 1941 and 1955 per capita consumption of potatoes and sweet potatoes dropped 23 percent while consumption of flour and grain products fell by 19 percent. These drops were offset by gains in per capita dairy consumption (excluding butter, which was then in heated competition with margarine), which rose 8 percent, meat consumption (including fish and poultry), which climbed by 14 percent, and egg consumption, which was up by 30 percent. By 1955 Americans purchased enough food for 3,210 calories per day.<sup>69</sup>

This shift in the types of foods purchased had started during the war. Although many foods were rationed they were still available for purchase, unlike many luxury items, so as civilians' wages rose during the war (and as many formerly unemployed people adjusted to a weekly check) people were willing to pay for better

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<sup>67</sup> Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Vol. 1*, 637.

<sup>68</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 133.

<sup>69</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 134.

food. After the war the willingness to pay for better foods contributed to inflation in the price of food.

As the income of many Americans rose in the postwar period economists noticed that the percentage of income spent on food rose as well. This directly contradicted Engel's Law, named after a nineteenth century statistician who noted that as a family's income rose, the percentage of income spent on food dropped. By the 1950s the law was established enough that a corollary of it was often applied to an entire nation to test its maturity: "the smaller the percentage [of income spent on food], the more advanced the nation."<sup>70</sup>

After the war, though, as Americans' wages rose, so also rose the percentage of their incomes spent on food. If one looked at American wages as a cross-section, this was not the case. In 1953, families making less than \$1,000 per year spent 60 to 90 percent of it on food. The percentage dropped as one climbed the income ladder, reaching about 15 percent of income at the \$10,000 and over group.<sup>71</sup> However, if one tracks all of the families across time, from 1946 through 1960, the percentage does rise as income rises.

The reason for the rise is due to several factors. One factor is the simple fact that food became more expensive, even ignoring inflation. The postwar period saw major changes in food distribution as supermarket chains sprang up throughout the country, wholesale companies handled more and more varieties of foods, and food

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<sup>70</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 133.

<sup>71</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 133.

manufacturers spent more money on research and marketing. The cost of all of these changes was, ultimately, passed on to the consumer in the form of higher food bills.

A second factor is one that still affects the foods Americans eat: the willingness of Americans to pay for more processing in their foods. As the editors of *Fortune* magazine wrote, "Instead of buying a chicken and going to work on it, [consumers] are apt to demand frozen chicken livers, canned breast of chicken, and dehydrated chicken soup. They want not only good food, but convenience built into the food as well; and they're prepared to pay for whatever services the food industry can provide."<sup>72</sup> The food industry had been moving in this direction for decades. Canned foods were a product of the mid-nineteenth century, Campbell's made the first condensed soups at around the turn of the century, and flavored gelatin was a popular dessert in the early twentieth century. The commodity food business, whether it produces bags of flour or pouches of yeast, can be a cut-rate business that rewards the company that produces the cheapest product. By adding some processing a company could make a product that was different from its competitors, had more value in the consumer's eyes (which meant a higher profit margin), and was new (a plus for marketing). As will be further discussed in a later chapter, after the war the food products with the highest sales were not the old, steady sellers like Gold Medal Flour or Cream of Wheat, they were products that were new, and by this time "new" had become another word for "processed."

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<sup>72</sup> The Editors of *Fortune*, 141.

From the consumer's point of view these new products often seemed like a godsend. This was a time that was only a few decades removed from charcoal stoves and gas lamps, and for many people the new suburban home meant, for the first time, that they did not have to deal with the ice delivery man or empty the water pan in the icebox. If people today think of the postwar suburbs as a white bread sort of place, it is partially because the idea of white bread today is one of flavorless homogeneity, while white bread to those suburbanites represented a dependable, standardized product that one could purchase at the store rather than make at home.

Processed foods appealed to people because of their newness and their ease of use. Busy women, especially those with jobs, used convenience foods to make time for themselves, for example by buying a boxed Kraft Macaroni Dinner instead of preparing macaroni and cheese from scratch. This was a time when, to many people, preparing a meal by opening a number of cans and mixing them together was viewed positively.

Many of the processed foods were higher in calories but to many people this was not a problem. Although diet foods did sell well during this time, the thinking of many researchers was that Americans were still in danger of not getting enough to eat, rather than eating too much. Food historian Harvey Levenstein has outlined three sets of ideas about nutrition in the twentieth century, moving from the New Nutrition (based on the discovery that foods can be categorized as proteins, carbohydrates and fats), to the Newer Nutrition (based on ideas about vitamins and minerals) to the Negative Nutrition (based on the idea that there are certain foods that are bad to eat).

The postwar years, ending in the mid-60s, mark the sunset years of the Newer Nutrition, just before the Negative Nutrition took hold.<sup>73</sup> The general thinking of the time can be seen in a wartime poster promoting the "Basic 7," a precursor to today's food pyramid. As the name indicates, foods were divided into seven groups, such as green and yellow vegetables, milk products, and meat, poultry, fish and eggs. At the bottom of the poster are the words "In addition to the Basic 7...eat any other foods you want."<sup>74</sup> Processed foods may have added calories to Americans' diets, but the many health problems this caused would not become apparent for years to come.

### *Conclusion*

The combination of suburbanization and prosperity affected the foods suburbanites ate. As outlined above, the changes came about in several ways. For one thing, suburban houses were smaller than prewar houses, and so their layout was more open and put the kitchen toward the front of the house instead of the back. The new layout reduced the space for a dining room, sometimes merging it with the living room, sometimes putting the dining space in the kitchen. The smaller dining space, in turn, meant that hosts needed to be creative when having guests over. Cocktail parties became popular since guests did not have to sit at a table and could instead range around the house. Outdoor grilling was also popular as a way to move the

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<sup>73</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, revised ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), vii.

<sup>74</sup> Mary Drake McFeely, "The War in the Kitchen," in *Produce and Conserve, Share and Play Square: The Grocer and the Consumer on the Home-Front Battlefield During World War II*, ed. Barbara McLean Ward (Portsmouth, NH: Strawberry Banke Museum, 1994), 115.

party outside to the patio, and grilling further played into the general popularity of the outdoors in the postwar years.

General prosperity also affected the foods suburbanites ate. They spent more money on processed foods, choosing to pay a higher price for food that could be prepared quickly. The popularity of frozen foods relied on the consumer to own a freezer where the foods could be stored, and prosperity helped consumers to be able to afford new appliances like freezers and dishwashers. Prosperity helped Americans to increase their standard of living, and one way they did so was through buying what they thought of as better food.

Prosperity and suburbanization affected Americans in many different ways. Most obviously, it put more money in their wallets and placed them in houses on the edge of cities. But it also affected them in a myriad of smaller, but still important, ways as well. Prosperity and suburbanization were important trends in postwar America, and they were not important only because they brought more money to people and shifted the places they lived. They were important trends because their effects rippled throughout American society, shifting patterns of behavior in people's lives. The foods people eat often seem disconnected from the rest of their lives, but in the case of postwar suburbanites, the foods they ate, and how they went about preparing those foods, were directly affected by the events in their lives. In this chapter the events focused upon were rising prosperity and the move to the suburbs; in the next chapter the focus is on gender and how it affected the purchasing, preparation, and consumption of foods.

### Chapter 3: Steak, Salad, and the Influence of Gendered Ideas on Foods

In the summer of 1958, Clementine Paddleford wrote an article about a boat race. Or, to be more specific, she wrote an article about cooking for a boat race. The race was an annual Newport to Bermuda competition, a trip that took several days. The specific boat she focused on was the *Figaro III*, owned by William T. Snaith, president of the Raymond Loewy Corporation, a large and influential industrial design company. Snaith and his crew of sailors were confident they could win the race, especially with the gourmet foods they would be eating on board. Vichyssoise and a green salad, rock cornish hen and other upscale foods were on the menu for the race, all of which were to be provided by the boat's cook. The cook was a friend of Snaith's, and another corporate executive: Bill Burnham, a vice-president at Transfilm, Inc. This was to be Burnham's fourth time cooking for the crew.

Burnham obviously knew his way around a boat. He had recently helped with renovating the boat and introduced a few new space-saving ideas in the galley, including a table on gimbals "so it seeks its own level no matter how the boat rolls." The table would be quite helpful when cooking on a boat that would roll continuously throughout the race.

In looking at the article today, what is striking is both Burnham's attitude toward his role as cook and the addition of another, unofficial member of the racing team: boat owner Snaith's wife Betty. While Betty was not going to be on board during the race, she appears throughout the article. When Paddleford asked Burnham

how he planned what to serve on board, his response was, "I work it out with Betty." Burnham contributed space-saving ideas to the renovation of the interior of the boat, but Betty was responsible for decorating it. One of the three photos accompanying the story shows Betty serving hors d'oeuvres to Snaith and Burnham. Burnham defers to Betty throughout the article, an indication not only of his reduced status in comparison with the boat-owner's wife, but also of the fact that he was taking on a role largely allocated specifically to women: that of cook. Although Bill Burnham was a successful business executive, he had moved out of the area men were supposed to inhabit.<sup>1</sup>

During the postwar era, though, gender roles in the kitchen became less clearly defined than before the war. While the boat race was an atypical event, men did help out with cooking and with buying food. Outdoor grilling was a popular activity in suburbs across the nation and one which featured men making at least part of the meal. Many men helped out in the kitchen both because women who worked outside the home had less time for preparing food and also because the nature of the foods Americans ate was changing to the point where it was easier for men to help out. Convenience foods such as mixes and frozen foods were manufactured to be quick and simple to make, and this enabled men, or anyone else in the family, to help out in the kitchen.

At the same time, though, men certainly did not do even close to half of the cooking in most households, and their assistance sometimes received more positive

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<sup>1</sup> Clementine Paddleford, "Chow Time in the Big Race," June 15, 1958, folder 5, box 89, Paddleford Collection.



attention than it warranted. A series of internal memos in Paddleford's files shows a dismissive attitude toward males in the kitchen. The first memo is a summary of a meeting Paddleford was involved with on the topic of ideas for future articles. The first idea on the list was "Men in the Kitchen...in which you air your views on the whole subject of men cooks. It will have a light, humorous style and be designed to provoke comment and controversy." The idea itself apparently provoked controversy within the newsroom. A later memo contains a number of comments from different staff members who are clearly responding to the first memo. One comment reads "As far as men cooks go (and I have seen some) they leave me shuddering. With exception of a few...they are one-dish specialists and like to compare themselves with a wife who has to turn out a complete dinner every night. Few even wash up their own pots and pans." Another person wrote "Men cooks leaves [sic] me pretty cold..."<sup>2</sup>

To many people in the postwar period, cooking was a woman's job. It was a task that women were responsible for, along with other household chores such as cleaning, running errands, and taking care of the children. For many families in the suburbs, these tasks kept women focused on maintaining the family's residence and children and out of the paid work force. This situation signaled the family's status: they were so well-off that only the man of the house needed to work, and they were so focused on their children that the woman of the house avoided paid labor.

However, throughout the period men did venture into the kitchen to prepare foods,

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<sup>2</sup> William I. Nichols, December 6, 1950, memo. "Dod," not dated, memo. Both memos in folder 28, box 5, Paddleford Collection.

and they helped out with shopping. Although the popular memory of the postwar suburbs is of a place where father commuted and worked in the city while mother stayed home with the children, the fact is that more and more suburban women obtained jobs as the years went on, especially once their children were in school. This created a tension between the idea of what many believed should be happening--women living their lives in the home--and the reality of women working.

This tension will be explored in this chapter, along with the varying ways gender affected food in the postwar suburbs. The chapter is divided into three parts, each part looking at the effects of gender in a different way. The first part examines gender roles among consumers and the day-to-day reality of cooking, outlining first the recent history of gender roles and then looking at who was involved with buying, cooking, and cleaning up after meals. The second part considers gendered foods to see what can be divined from the period's analysis of steak as masculine food, cake as feminine food. Finally, the third part considers gendered ideas coming from food companies, advertisers, and writers, examining, for example, the ever-youthful and feminine Betty Crocker and her line of popular cookbooks. Gender was important in the postwar era, and an analysis of its importance needs to go beyond the obvious conception of women as preparers of food, men as consumers (which is close to the mirror image of the conception of men as producers, women as consumers, in the larger postwar society).

*Women, Cooking, and Housework Through the End of World War II*

Glance through almost any postwar woman's magazine and it becomes quite apparent that, as the adage says, a woman's place is in the home. Certainly, as Joanne Meyerowitz has pointed out, there are many nonfiction articles that discuss women in business, or in politics, but the full-page advertisements show women in the home. They effortlessly cook meals, vacuum rugs, and watch children, often while dressed in their finest dress and pearls. One ad for Chi-Net paper plates took this idea to the extreme, showing a man and woman on a life raft. He is bare-chested, his shirt used for a sail, his pants ripped near the knees. She wears a black cocktail dress and heels.<sup>3</sup>

The advertisements' portrayal of women in the home is obviously at odds with reality (who does housework in their pearls?) but they do get one point right: housework, including cooking, was considered to be women's work. It had been for a long time, but the years of the Great Depression and World War II had the effect of weakening that idea.

The idea of a woman's place being in the home had been weakened during the Great Depression if for no other reason than the scarcity of jobs. If a married woman found a job, any job, then it could help her family get through a difficult time. While many married men felt some shame in their wives working while they were unemployed, the times were such that any job was a good job, no matter which member of the family had the job.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ladies' Home Journal*, August 1957, 103.

In 1930, the first year of the Depression, almost 20 percent of clerical workers were married women.<sup>4</sup> These types of jobs were examples of the sorts of “pink collar” jobs that women often held, along with shop clerks, secretaries, or typists. The pink collar jobs frequently proved to be more depression-proof than the blue collar jobs men held. General Motors may shut down a plant and lay off its factory workers, but it would still have papers that needed to be typed up and memos that needed to be sent.

There was, at the same time, a reaction against married women working. Most of the New Deal jobs, such as those administered by the Works Progress Administration (like road building or constructing buildings) or the Civilian Conservation Corps (the same, but in national parks and other rural locations) were geared toward finding work for men, not women. The idea was that a paycheck for the head of the family, the male, would help all members of the family (aid specifically directed toward women tended to be direct aid to single mothers and widows and required no labor). To ensure aid was reaching as many families as possible the federal government passed a temporary law stating that only one member of a family could be employed by the federal government. Since most jobs were for men, this effectively ruled out married women taking the few federal jobs open to them.

The stigma attached to working mothers in the 1930s had a direct effect on the young mothers of the postwar years. They themselves had been children during the

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<sup>4</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 158.

Depression and had seen either their mothers or friends' mothers working, and the negative attitudes they had as grownups caused many of them, at least early in their marriage, to forgo paid labor. As one historian has commented, these women connected the employment of married women "with economic hardship and family failure. They looked forward to establishing a different pattern in their own marriages."<sup>5</sup> As will be discussed below, after the war, and after the advent of their marriage, married women left the working world in droves.

The effects of World War II on women's employment are complicated. Many women went into paid labor because of the war, but at the same time the federal government issued a series of conflicting messages on the connection between work and what it meant to be a woman.

The war pulled millions of (mostly white) men out of the workforce while creating millions of jobs in America. Employers had to accept employees they would not have taken before the war--specifically, women and minorities. The female labor force jumped 50 percent between 1940 and 1945, and three quarters of those new workers were married.<sup>6</sup> While the government had implemented laws during the Depression that discouraged women from working, during the war the government actively encouraged them to find jobs through posters and advertisements. Many of these advertisements came with a catch, though. Women were desperately needed to work in industry, but only "for the duration," or "until he comes home." The list of temporary measures the war created included the rationing of sugar, rubber and

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<sup>5</sup> Coontz, 159.

<sup>6</sup> Coontz, 159.

gasoline; the dousing of night-time lights along the coasts; and women working at jobs that were intended for men.

At the same time the government provided a rhetorical basis for women to have jobs outside of the home it also reinforced the traditional idea of woman as a worker in the home. Able-bodied men fought the war in Africa, Europe, and Asia; women fought the war in their kitchens. They were expected, as the title of one book about the home front experience puts it, to “produce and conserve, share and play square.” Through the proper use of ration points, the recycling of items like rubber and cooking fat (used for ammunition), and the latest research on foods (most vitamins were discovered in the interwar years), women could have an effect on the war effort. Something as simple as cooking breakfast was portrayed in the context of the war, as seen in a 1943 article by Clementine Paddleford titled, "Wartime Duty: A Good Breakfast." Readers were exhorted to eat whole-grain cereals for good health and energy, especially since other energy-boosters, like sugar and fats, were being rationed. This health and energy, it was expected, would be useful for those working in wartime industries.<sup>7</sup>

It has been a matter of debate among historians as to the ultimate effect of the war on gender roles. Some have argued that the impact was great, while others, including Elaine Tyler May, have argued that the war changed little, and still others have gone a middle route by arguing that the war changed some gender roles while maintaining others. In any case, the end of the war had an immediate effect on

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<sup>7</sup> Clementine Paddleford, "Wartime Duty: A Good Breakfast," June 20, 1943, folder 56, box 64, Paddleford Collection.

women's employment: many women left paid employment. In 1944, 36.5 percent of the U.S. work force was female. Three years later, that percentage had dropped to 30.8 percent.<sup>8</sup>

There are several reasons for the drop. One reason is that fifteen million soldiers (the vast bulk of them male) returned from overseas and went back into civilian employment. Many women were let go from their jobs in preference for a male worker. There was also the fact that many women simply quit their jobs to take care of their families. The end of the war marked a return to older ideas about domesticity, and, as Elaine Tyler May has written in *Homeward Bound*, the new postwar families, with both parents filling their respective gender roles while taking care of the children, served as a bulwark against the communism and chaos of the outside world.<sup>9</sup> Especially at the beginning of the postwar period, many women took quite seriously the idea that their role was in the home, taking care of the children and doing housework.

For those women who left the workforce (and for those who did not), there was work to be done around the house. The first half of the twentieth century had seen something of a revolution in housework as the paid servants common in many middle class houses were replaced by the woman of the house doing all of her own work. This transition was accompanied by the introduction of many new appliances and tools such as clothes washers and vacuum cleaners. However, these time- and labor-

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<sup>8</sup> Coontz, 159.

<sup>9</sup> See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 9-11.

saving appliances did not seem to have much effect on how much time women spent doing work. One survey of how women spent their days calculated that they averaged 28 hours per week doing housework and 26.5 hours per week taking care of children for a total of a 54 hour work week. Surprisingly, this was almost in line with the times similar researchers had found back in 1912.<sup>10</sup> Was the new technology having no effect whatsoever?

As historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan has pointed out, technology had a tremendous impact on women's work, but often in unexpected ways. In her analysis of women's work in the twentieth century, Cowan divides the work women did into eight interlocking systems. Three of the systems, those that supply a family with food, clothing, and health care, were generally moved outside of the home as women bought bread and clothing instead of making it themselves, and turned to professional doctors and hospitals.<sup>11</sup> The movement of these systems outside of the house gave women more time. However, some of the other systems Cowan identifies, especially transportation, moved into the household during the twentieth century. In the carriage age, driving a horse-drawn vehicle was a man's job. In the automobile age, though, driving a car is gender neutral, and many of the tasks associated with transportation, including picking children up from school or taking them to activities, quickly

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<sup>10</sup> Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 199.

<sup>11</sup> Cowan, 71.



became associated with mothers (the “soccer mom” being the latest iteration of this association).<sup>12</sup>

Cowan also describes how other new technologies brought more work for women. The advent of indoor plumbing in the late nineteenth century added another room to the house--the bathroom--and so another room to keep clean. Washing machines allowed women to do their own laundry instead of sending it out, as was common among middle-class women, so washing clothes was another task that technology added to the responsibilities of middle-class women. As new technology made it easier to clean things, expectations of cleanliness rose as well.<sup>13</sup> Thus, although some types of work, like preparing food, took much less time by the postwar era than they had half a century before, other types of work took much longer, resulting in a 54 hour work week similar to that observed in 1912.

This was 54 hours of work at home or in its vicinity. Throughout the postwar period, though, more and more women took jobs outside the home, continuing an overall trend in that century. By 1950, 21 percent of all married white women had a job, and the number shifts to 23 percent when one only looks at urban married white women.<sup>14</sup> Between 1940, the year before America entered World War II, and 1950, there was a 29 percent growth overall in the number of women in the labor force.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cowan, 79.

<sup>13</sup> Cowan, 88.

<sup>14</sup> Coontz, 160.

<sup>15</sup> Coontz, 163.

The growth was such that in 1952 there were two million more married women working than during the war.<sup>16</sup>

Stephanie Coontz, writing in *The Way We Never Were*, describes some of the reasons why women went to work outside the home. The GI Bill, which sent millions of veterans to college, paid only a small stipend for living expenses, meaning many women worked while their husbands attended classes. The types of jobs women often took--as nurses, teachers, secretaries, and typists--proliferated during the postwar years, forcing employers to accommodate married women and thereby making these jobs more attractive. After their children were school age many married women took a job for extra money or to help pay bills. In 1950 the average age of a woman at her last birth was 30, which meant that many women had extra time on their hands and, literally, decades before retirement. Finally, women who had worked during World War II often had good memories of the job or, at least, a good memory of the paycheck. This also helped to pull women into the paid workforce.<sup>17</sup>

There were reasons, too, for women to stay home. For families with children, it often made economic sense for the mother to stay at home with the children rather than work at a job that paid the same or less than daycare would cost. There was a certain amount of prestige associated with families where only the father worked as this signified that he earned enough to care for his entire family. These families could also be seen as being more child-centered since they cared enough for the mother to stay at home with the children rather than sending them off for the day with a stranger

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<sup>16</sup> Coontz, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Coontz, 161.

or a more distant relative. In this way continuing existing gender roles could add to a family's status among their peers.

### *Gender Roles and the Cooking Process*

There were, essentially, three steps to the process of making a meal: procuring the food, preparing the food, and then cleaning up after the meal. While all parts were generally held to be women's responsibility, some of this was changing.

By this time buying food usually meant going to a supermarket. While there was some argument during this period as to exactly what a supermarket consisted of, it was usually a place with separate departments for produce, meat, etc., and it emphasized self-service and clearly marked prices. Supermarkets stood in contrast to older, usually family-owned grocery stores that could still be found in urban neighborhoods. The number of these older stores was declining slowly while the number of supermarkets was growing strongly, especially in suburban areas.

Food shopping was a different experience in the 1950s than it had been decades before. Before World War II, about half of women visiting a grocery store either walked or took a streetcar. By the late 1950s, about two thirds of them drove.<sup>18</sup> Owning a car meant that a woman could drive farther to the store than before, and it also meant that she could buy more groceries. One study from 1955 found that the average shopper left the store with 12.7 items, as opposed to 8.6 items in 1949.<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>18</sup>Janet Wolff, *What Makes Women Buy: A Guide to Understanding and Influencing the New Woman of Today* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1958) , 226.

<sup>19</sup> Wolff, 225.

daily shopper was becoming a thing of the past. By 1958 most women took three trips to the grocery store per week, although this was affected by income: those with more income took fewer trips to the store, probably because of a greater tendency to own a car.<sup>20</sup> The car, and the larger families of the time, also affected foods by contributing to the popularity of “family size” products, which were cans and bags of food measured by the pound, not by the ounce. Finally, the car affected the shopping experience by contributing to the decline of home delivery of groceries, which in turn affected the popularity of the older grocery stores. Home delivery was a type of personal service these stores could use to set themselves apart since the “supers” by and large did not want to deal with the added expense involved with home delivery. However, so many families owned cars in the postwar era that home delivery slowly declined in popularity.

As will be discussed further in Chapter 5, one of the most important ways postwar shopping was different from prewar shopping was in the number of products available. By the 1950s the average supermarket offered about 6,000 products, and thousands more were introduced every year.<sup>21</sup> The sheer amount of choice available to consumers could result in indecision and confusion for shoppers. In the early 1960s the Raymond Loewy Corporation (the same design firm that employed the boat owner at the beginning of this chapter) issued a definition of a supermarket that mentioned the numbers of choices available to consumers. The definition assumed

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<sup>20</sup> Wolff 225. Richard H. Holton, *The Supply and Demand Structure of Food Retailing Services: A Case Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 44.

<sup>21</sup> Raymond W. Hoecker and Dale Anderson, "The Modern Supermarket--America's Trademark," *Agricultural Marketing*, May 1963, 47.

that supermarket shoppers were female, which is not too surprising. What is surprising, though, is the extent to which the Raymond Loewy Corporation conceived of women as having a sort of specialized consumer ability. Women, the corporation believed, “enjoy shopping more when the husband is with them, although at times he will 'run crazy' and ruin the family budget.”<sup>22</sup> As historian Lizabeth Cohen has explained, in the postwar era consumerism became just as important a part of citizenship as voting or serving on a jury, and the consumerism was specifically focused on women. The statement by the Raymond Loewy Corporation shows a belief that women could handle the thousands of products available to them in a modern supermarket while men might run willy-nilly through the store.

Studies showed that the supermarket aisles were not filled by women shopping by themselves. In the postwar period up to two-thirds of shoppers were women shopping with someone else.<sup>23</sup> One survey reported that nearly 20 percent of shoppers were couples, and about another 20 percent were men shopping by themselves.<sup>24</sup> While many of these males were certainly single men, a good portion of them were likely married men helping out with the household chores. Male involvement in shopping came from two main areas. First, the idea of “togetherness” was promoted by *McCall's* magazine, and this concept pushed couples to spend more time together in daily activities, including shopping. Even though these men may not

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<sup>22</sup> "Super Market Industry Celebrates Its Silver Anniversary," not dated. Folder 4, box 305, Paddleford Collection.

<sup>23</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 279.

<sup>24</sup> Katherine J. Parkin, *Food Is Love: Food Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 153.

have been in charge of the shopping it still promoted their involvement. Second, there was the simple fact that more and more women were working outside the home but the daily household chores still needed to be done. Unlike cooking, shopping required no specialized skills and, for those men who loved efficiency, could be done relatively quickly.

After the food was brought home and stowed away in the cupboards, refrigerator and pantry, the next step in the cooking process was preparing and cooking the food. This was largely a woman's job, and one which had changed over the years. Canned foods, dehydrated mixes, and stoves and ovens which kept a regulated temperature had made cooking a much easier task, as had running water and electricity. Still, it was a set of tasks that needed to be done. One periodical from 1955 estimated that the typical housewife prepared more than 57,000 meals in her lifetime and washed 26,200 dishes a year.<sup>25</sup>

Women sometimes put pressures on themselves relating to cooking, and the pressures could come from various sources. The approval of others was one type of pressure. Dinner parties and other social occasions gave women the chance to observe each other's cooking and do some comparisons. Another source of approval was mentioned in one advertiser's internal report: "A woman may dress for other women, but her reason for cooking, and her reward, is her man's approval. His approval will put the dish on her regular list. His disapproval will discourage her

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<sup>25</sup> Wolff, 212.

even if she likes it herself.”<sup>26</sup> The approval, or disapproval, of her children could also make a dish a winner or result in it being banished from the table forever.

The amount of time women had for cooking a meal varied tremendously by the specific woman’s situation. Women with a handful of children all under the age of six might have small blocks of time throughout the day to use in planning meals and cooking. Women with no children and no paid employment might have much more time for making meals and other tasks. For women with hours to fill in the day, a specific kind of dish appeared. The hallmark of this sort of dish was that it either looked nothing like the materials it was made from, or it looked *exactly* like the materials it was made from, only after much processing. One recipe required the cook to puree carrots, press the gelatinous mass into the shape of whole carrots, fry them in oil, and serve with sprigs of parsley laying where the carrot greens would originally have been. Mock dishes were popular in the postwar era, such as one recipe for Mock Duck, which uses lamb shoulder instead of duck.<sup>27</sup> One housewife who had “determined to make homemaking represent a good job” by doing things such as making both her and her daughters’ clothes years later recalled this type of food and the reason why she spent time making it. “I actually remember a recipe which called for making flowers out of mashed potatoes molded into Bartlett pears, with cloves for the stems, and glazed with egg whites,” she said. “Well, you know, anything is a challenge until you’ve done it once...I kind of liked creating something

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<sup>26</sup> Parkin, 142-144.

<sup>27</sup> The recipes for carrots and Mock Duck are discussed in Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 173.

special--up to a point. A lot of it was simple boredom. I needed something to do."<sup>28</sup>

The boredom of the suburbs could lead to other problems, as another housewife recalled that she "decided to teach myself to cook and would spend hours poring over cookbooks, making these elaborate dishes like coq au vin and boeuf bourguignon-- and sipping away on the cooking wine, of course." She went on to develop a drinking problem.<sup>29</sup>

Women were usually responsible for the bulk of the cooking, so in most houses it was an everyday occurrence when their meals graced the table. In contrast, it was a special occasion when the man of the house cooked. There was one cooking situation in which men reigned supreme: outdoor grilling. Grilling tapped in to existing ideas about outdoor cooking, which was assumed to be a man's responsibility, whether it was frying a freshly caught trout during a fishing trip or making pancakes for breakfast during a scout troop outing. Outdoor grilling also tapped in to the popularity of both the outdoors and informal living, and, with the necessity of a plot of land to put the grill on, it was an idea that very much came from the suburbs.

Two examples from the *Better Homes & Gardens Barbecue Book*, from 1959, illustrate some of the ironies involved with outdoor grilling in postwar America. The first example is from the introduction to the Meats section. "This is Dad's domain. Sit back, Mom; admire Chef. He has the fascinating how-to on big steaks, [and] other juicy meats that take to charcoal. There's rotisserie roasting, cooking on skewers,

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<sup>28</sup> Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 117.

<sup>29</sup> Harvey, 125.



grilling whole meals in foil; plus how-to-talk-knowingly with the meatman."<sup>30</sup> The quote explicitly announces that outdoor grilling "is Dad's domain," presumably because of an essential connection between masculinity and the outdoors, and that he should be admired either for the connection or because of his vast knowledge of outdoor cooking. If this were true, though, one would not expect that a man would need a cookbook (especially one produced by one of the leading women's magazines) either to find out about how to cook meats or "how-to-talk-knowingly with the meatman."

A second irony is illustrated in the book's introduction, which promises an "easygoing, hi-everybody sort of fun. Poke up a fire and relax while supper grills to a turn!" According to the introduction, different members of the family would get different things from the cookbook. Dad gets "all the how-to for thick, charcoal-broiled steaks, plump barbecued chickens, and juicy rotisserie roasts." The kids also get information on how to grill meats: "Frankfurters, do-your-own kabobs, giant hamburgers--and what's smackin' best to smear on 'em." Mom, however, gets a much longer list of recipe ideas and the assumption that she would be annoyed if she was not involved: "To keep Mom happy: Ideas for specially wonderful salads, vegetables, beverages, and easy top-it-all-off desserts."<sup>31</sup> When people in the postwar years talked about how outdoor grilling was a man's job, they meant that, literally, only the grilling was the man's job. The woman was still responsible for "salads, vegetables,

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<sup>30</sup> *Better Homes & Gardens Barbecue Book*, (Des Moines, Meredith Publishing Company, 1959), 25.

<sup>31</sup> *Better Homes & Gardens Barbecue Book*, 5.

beverages, and...desserts.” Grilling took some of the weight of cooking off a woman’s shoulders, but certainly not all of it. Of course, she could certainly get around cooking by buying potato salad, baked beans, or other outdoor foods that were available at most supermarkets for picnickers to pick up on their way to an outdoor gathering.

Making pancakes, especially on weekend mornings, seems to have been another occasion for men to work in the kitchen. A 1956 survey of the pancakes habits of 2,700 families showed that in 19 percent of the households men at least sometimes made pancakes.<sup>32</sup> By this point pancake mixes had been on the market for over 60 years and were fully accepted by most people as a legitimate option for making pancakes. They required the addition of only a few ingredients, could be mixed quickly (indeed, pancake batter should not be overmixed), and the act of making pancakes did not require much skill in cooking. Pancakes were a good option for men who wanted to help out in some way without getting too involved in the kitchen.

It is extremely difficult to determine at this point in time just how often men helped out in the kitchen. Some men genuinely enjoyed it as an activity. For example, Dwight Eisenhower liked to cook. In *At Ease*, an autobiography, he relates how he learned outdoor cooking as a young man while on fishing trips. He was interested enough that, after one trip with some high school friends, he asked his mother for help, and she taught him how to "bake and boil potatoes, handle

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<sup>32</sup> *Aunt Jemima Fact Book*, November 1965, unnumbered page. Box QO3, Account Files, 1885-2004, JWT Archives.

steaks...and even to produce a satisfactory peach, apple or cherry pie."<sup>33</sup> His interest continued throughout his life, and when he was president of Columbia University in the late 1940s his recipe for chicken soup was published. The recipe is a scratch recipe and requires making broth from chicken and beef bones, boiling some barley in a separate pan, and adding different vegetables to the pot at different points in the process. The recipe and accompanying text take up a full two pages in the book and are written by someone who clearly has years of experience in making the dish.<sup>34</sup> Eisenhower himself recognized that his cooking interests inspired a considerable amount of interest from the press. He noted that the chicken soup recipe "got as much attention and space in the press as any statement I made as University President." He attributed that attention to the fact that the recipe required nasturtium stems, which are a very atypical ingredient for any dish, but it is very likely that the attention also came from the fact that soup was not the sort of food men usually specialized in. He gives an example of the sorts of foods usually associated with men when he writes, with irritation, that he hadn't "the slightest idea how many miles of film have been wasted in photographing me as I broiled fish or steaks over a fire."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, an article from *McCall's* from 1954 titled "The Dinner I'd Love to Come Home To" featured the favorite meals of several famous men including Eisenhower. While his favorite included steak, baked potatoes and apple pie with a slice of cheese,

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<sup>33</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *At Ease* (New York: Avon Books, 1967), 95.

<sup>34</sup> Eisenhower, 362-363.

<sup>35</sup> Eisenhower, 96.

there was no indication in the article that he could cook it all himself (and the title of the article indicated that someone else would be cooking it for him).<sup>36</sup>

Many of the dishes men specialized in such as grilling or making pancakes did not require too much involvement in the kitchen, and neither did men's typical after-meal cleanup job. As women were responsible for most of the cooking, so they were also responsible for most of the cleaning up afterwards. The one way that many men helped out was through drying dishes, a simple job that did not require men either literally or figuratively to get their hands dirty in the kitchen.

Throughout the postwar period the activities that surrounded cooking were gendered activities. However, some activities became less strongly gendered. Although cooking was generally seen as something women were responsible for, some aspects of the cooking process, like shopping or making foods from mixes, became less strongly identified with women. Other activities, especially outdoor grilling, stayed very gendered, but at the same time opened the cooking process up to men. Men who grilled could be responsible for a part of the cooking process without fear of their masculinity being questioned. The shift in ideas did not mean any sort of parity in kitchen work, but it did introduce some ambiguity into the cooking process. As more and more women moved into the workforce during the 1950s and 1960s this sharing of work in the kitchen helped many families adjust to the change. Convenience foods, many of which took little cooking experience to prepare, helped

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<sup>36</sup> Helen McCully, "The Dinner I'd Love to Come Home To," *McCall's*, October 1953, 44.

as well since anyone in the family, from the mother to the father to a teenage child, could open a can of spaghetti and warm it on the stove.

### *Gendered Foods*

Gendered ideas about roles in the kitchen affected postwar suburbanites. Those same people had ideas not only about the roles men and women should fulfill in the kitchen, but they also had ideas about the food itself. Some foods were considered to be inherently masculine while others were inherently feminine, as researchers like Ernest Dichter discovered.

Dichter was a psychologist who consulted with food companies on Americans' ideas about foods throughout this time period. His training as a psychologist served him well in his research. For example, in the late 1950s he gave a speech at the Eastern Frosted Foods Association Meeting (frosted foods being what are now called frozen foods), advising the group that consumer acceptance would be held back so long as frosted foods were referred to as such. "Food is full of emotional associations," he said, "it is warm, flavorful, it is active and alive and you have surrounded it with a dead name." He urged members of the industry to "to find ways by which the frozen products can be thawed out and emotions brought back into the picture."<sup>37</sup>

Dichter researched the characteristics consumers attributed to foods, including ideas about gender. The foods considered to be masculine, he found out, were often

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<sup>37</sup> Parkin, 32.

protein-rich and heavy: steak, coffee, and potatoes were all believed to be masculine foods. Feminine foods, on the other hand, were lighter, such as cake (the most feminine of all foods), tea, and rice. Rice producers took Dichter seriously, and in the mid-1960s they began an advertising campaign to get women to switch their main side dish from potatoes to rice. Rice advertisements were often blatantly sexual and attempted to confuse consumers' gendered ideas about rice and potatoes.<sup>38</sup>

Diet foods also tended to be considered feminine foods. Part of this was the fact that they were often presented as being lighter than other foods, and part was also the fact that in the postwar era it was women, as opposed to men, who were more concerned about their weight. There was certainly no shortage of diet foods for women to choose from, and the gamut ran from regular foods with relatively low calories to foods that were specifically intended to help the consumer reduce. A Pepsi ad from early 1956 announced that "Today's pace is for the Slender," emphasizing the fact that Pepsi had reduced the calories in its drink.<sup>39</sup> In mid-1961 Wesson Oil let women know that they could use the oil and "Eat gloriously without [becoming] overweight!"<sup>40</sup> Readers of that ad could also pick up *The Cook Book of Glorious Eating for Weight Watchers* from the company that produced Wesson oil. Moving toward the low-calorie side of things, D-Zerta, from the makers of Jell-O, promised three flavors of pudding at 54 calories per serving and six flavors of gelatin

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<sup>38</sup> Parkin, 187.

<sup>39</sup> *Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1956, 23.

<sup>40</sup> *Ladies' Home Journal*, June 1961, 19.

at only twelve calories a serving.<sup>41</sup> Appliance manufacturers got into the act as well, as Waring (maker of the Waring “Blendor”) advertised a presumably liquid “hi-protein, hi-vitamin diet” to take the pounds off.<sup>42</sup> Low calorie soft drinks (sweetened with saccharin) took off with sales going from 50,000 cases in 1952 to fifteen million cases three years later. Cottage cheese production also soared, tripling between 1946 and 1956.<sup>43</sup> The diet craze, of course, has continued since then, and Americans’ apparent inability to eat less is one of the paradoxes historian Harvey Levenstein focuses on in his *Paradox of Plenty*--although, in the midst of a culture of abundance, the difficulty in eating less may not be so hard to fathom.

#### *Food Companies, Advertisers, Food Writers, and Gender Roles*

To suburbanites, food was gendered, as were the roles surrounding food. There is still one more source of gendered ideas that needs to be examined to fully understand food and gender in the postwar period: the ideas which came from food companies, food advertising, and food writers. The three groups were connected but autonomous, and each group promoted its own ideas about gender.

Food companies did not just promote ideas about gender through advertising, they also presented gendered ideas through spokeswomen like Betty Crocker, Ann Pillsbury, and Kay Kellogg. These corporate characters were fictional, but the fiction had a purpose. "Experience has shown that a corporate personality makes friends for

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<sup>41</sup> *Ladies' Home Journal*, August 1957, 88.

<sup>42</sup> *McCall's*, November 1953, 104.

<sup>43</sup> Wolff, 168.

the company, gives it a greater degree of humanness, and frequently increases the readership and response to advertisements and recipes,” one industry executive wrote, “because Mrs. Consumer feels more confidence in recipes which have been tested and approved by another woman.”<sup>44</sup>

Corporate characters gave the consumer someone to relate to, and as such were designed to appeal to as many people as possible. One trade publication commented that “Ideally, the corporate character is a woman, between the ages of 32 and 40, attractive, but not competitively so, mature but youthful looking, competent yet warm, understanding but not sentimental, interested in the consumer but not involved with her.”<sup>45</sup> Above all, the corporate character was designed to occupy the middle ground between the faceless corporation and the female consumer.

Almost every food company had a corporate character with an “attractive, but not competitively so” face and a WASP-y name. Mary Alden worked for Quaker Enriched Flour, Nancy Haven for Western Beet Sugar, and Mary Lynn Woods for Fleishmann’s Yeast. Some characters changed their names over time. Anne Marshall was replaced by Carolyn Campbell at Campbell Soup, Mary Ellis Ames by Ann Pillsbury at Pillsbury.<sup>46</sup> Even nonfood companies had corporate characters, like Mary Gordon, who advised passengers on how to get ready to fly to Europe on TWA,

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<sup>44</sup> Marie Sellers, “Product Insurance for the Homemaker,” in *Food Marketing*, ed. Paul Sayres (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1950), 247.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Parkin, 57.

<sup>46</sup> Susan Marks, *Finding Betty Crocker: The Secret Life of American's First Lady of Food* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 111.



and Aunt Sammy, host of the *U.S. Department of Agriculture's Housekeeper's Chats* on radio.<sup>47</sup>

The extent of use of the corporate characters varied tremendously. Betty Crocker, whose name and face appeared on products, cookbooks, radio, and television, was one of the most-used characters. At the other end of the spectrum, some characters only appeared as a signature on correspondence to consumers.

In the postwar era Betty Crocker was the most popular corporate character. One survey of "The Most Helpful Home Economics Personality" from 1949 put Betty Crocker far ahead of her competition with 44.3 percent of women answering that she was the most helpful. Aunt Jenny, the Spry Shortening corporate character, was the second most helpful, receiving 5.6 percent of the responses, and Ann Pillsbury received 2.7 percent of the responses. Ann Batchelder of the *Ladies' Home Journal* received 4.1 percent of the votes, and one wonders what Ms Batchelder, who was a food writer and a real live person, thought about placing third in the survey.<sup>48</sup>

Corporate characters were different from brand characters like Aunt Jemima or Speedee, the Alka-Seltzer brand character. Brand characters were primarily used in advertising and marketing a specific product while corporate characters were used for more general corporate communications. There are several origination stories for Betty Crocker but the most plausible relates to letters between the corporation and consumers. In the early twentieth century the Washburn Crosby Company, the forerunner of General Mills, routinely received letters from women on food-related

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<sup>47</sup> *McCall's*, April 1954, 15. Marks, 31.

<sup>48</sup> Marks, 114.

matters, such as asking for advice or recipes. The letters were addressed to the advertising department (because that was the address used for advertising promotions and giveaways), and the letters were forwarded to the home economics department for answering. The male head of that department did not want to sign his own name to the letters so he came up with “Betty Crocker” as the name to be signed: Betty because it sounded nice, and Crocker after William G. Crocker, a former director of Washburn Crosby. A secretary at the company won a contest for Betty’s signature, a variation of which is still used.<sup>49</sup>

The 1930s to the 1960s were Betty Crocker’s golden years. In 1945 *Fortune* magazine reported that Betty Crocker was worth a million dollars on General Mills’ corporate books.<sup>50</sup> In the 1920s Washburn Crosby had purchased a radio station and put Crocker on the air, and this added immensely to her popularity (the 1945 *Fortune* article had said that radio did for Betty’s “career in commerce what it did for Franklin D. Roosevelt’s in politics”).<sup>51</sup> Late in World War II the Office of War Information enlisted Crocker to host *Our Nation’s Rations* daily on NBC to talk about war bonds, blood drives, and other home front matters.<sup>52</sup>

Betty Crocker offered a very direct way for women to approach food corporations. They could write letters to her and receive a typed response, hand-signed from her. The illusion of Betty’s reality was as complete as the food companies could manage. Some copies of the first edition of *Betty Crocker’s Picture*

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<sup>49</sup> Marks, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Marks, 116.

<sup>51</sup> Marks, 30.

<sup>52</sup> Marks, 107.

*Cook Book*, published in 1950, have the following printed on the flyleaf at the beginning of the book: "This Copy of/The Limited Special Edition of/Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book/is Presented to \_\_\_\_\_/With the Warm Good Wishes of/General Mills/\_\_\_\_\_ " In a copy this author examined, the first blank is filled with "Sallie Hill" and the second blank is filled with "Betty Crocker," both in blue pencil. The Betty Crocker signature, while not an exact copy, is very similar to the Betty Crocker signature printed in the book's introduction.<sup>53</sup> Betty Crocker was so real to many women that receptionists at General Mills, where tours were offered, kept tissues at their desks for visitors who were shocked by the news that Betty was not a real person (which they heard on the tour rather than, say, being shown an empty office and told that Betty was away on business).<sup>54</sup>

General Mills presented Betty Crocker as a real person and much of the public understood her in this context. This sometimes worked against the company. In the 1930s a worker in the General Mills home economics department married a man she had met through a letter he wrote to Betty Crocker. News of that marriage spread to the press but was changed so that it became Betty herself who had married the letter-writing bachelor. The expectation of many who read the news story, then, was that Betty would soon be retiring from her job to spend time at home with her family, as was deemed appropriate following the gender roles of the time. General Mills quickly worked to dispel the rumor, and the actress who portrayed Betty announced

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<sup>53</sup> Betty Crocker, *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book*, (Minneapolis: General Mills, 1950), unnumbered page.

<sup>54</sup> Marks, 181.

on her radio show that "That was all a mistake. The girl who was married was a former member of our staff, but Betty Crocker is right here as usual."<sup>55</sup>

In the postwar era Betty Crocker, and the other corporate characters, affected gender ideas by putting a white, female face on food corporations. At the same time, though, this was a time of transition for the characters as television, and the impossibility of having an actress who never aged, was making clear the fact that Betty Crocker and the others were not real people. Moreover, for Betty Crocker, especially, the postwar era was a complicated time for a character who had been synonymous with home baking and Gold Medal Flour, but whose company was transitioning to packaged mixes and processed foods. The corporate characters were a useful tool for food manufacturers for handling consumers, but with the growing importance of new foods and the money that went behind marketing them, corporate characters were losing their importance to a different way of approaching the consumer: advertising.

Postwar food companies spent millions of dollar on advertising. A single new product launch could cost well over a million dollars with advertisements running in newspapers and magazines, radio and television. While the basic message of every advertisement was the same--"Buy this product"--there were other messages that came through in the advertising as well, including ideas about gender.

As historian Katherine Parkin explains in *Food Is Love*, her exploration of the messages in food advertising, one of the primary messages advertisers used was that

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<sup>55</sup> Marks, 71.

women should solely be responsible for feeding their families. At the same time other industries, such as automobile or credit card companies, were expanding their markets by appealing to women, food manufacturers continually defined their market as female, even when surveys showed that was not always the case. Women, whether in television commercials or magazine advertisements, were the ones shown working at the stove or serving in the kitchen, usually in their best clothes. In the very few food advertisements that featured men, males were often the object of (at best) lighthearted ribbing or (at worst) ridicule, the main message of the advertisement being that if he can cook the dish *anyone* can.

As Parkin outlines, there were a host of other messages that went along with the central idea of women being exclusively responsible for cooking. Women were told that they were responsible for their family's health (through serving vitamin enriched foods) and happiness (by giving them foods that show love, like cookies). They should keep up with new trends and use food as a tool to show their family's status. And, above all, their own desires were subservient to those of their children and their husband.<sup>56</sup>

A look through some women's magazines of the time confirms these messages. Many ads contained wording indicating that the product would be one "your family will love." A butter ad from 1952 (when butter producers were in a bitter competition with margarine producers) declares that "In this land of milk and honey every man deserves butter on his bread," and shows a woman's hands spreading butter on a slice

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<sup>56</sup> Parkin, 8-11.

on bread, apparently ignoring the fact that a man could spread butter on his own bread (and ignoring the fact that the woman might prefer margarine).<sup>57</sup> An advertisement for Hellmann's mayonnaise shows a plate of cold salmon garnished with dollops of mayonnaise in the foreground, while in the background well-dressed guests arrive for a party. Across the top of the picture are the words, "This is no place for 'second best,'" showing that Hellmann's could be served at parties and so used to impress.<sup>58</sup>

Vitamins had been discovered by scientists in the interwar years, and their existence in or addition to foods was a major selling point for many products. Royal Gelatin Dessert let readers know that it contained vitamin C.<sup>59</sup> Nucoa Margarine let mothers know that "Just 2 ounces of enriched Nucoa gives your child 62% of his daily need for Vitamins A and D. Essential to good vision and health!" The ad furthered the product's health claims by adding that "Nucoa's golden Vitamin A color comes from carrots."<sup>60</sup> The makers of Velveeta promoted its nutrition for children, letting mothers know that two ounces of the "pasteurized process cheese spread" in a sandwich gave their child "more milk protein, more calcium, more phosphorous, as much riboflavin and more vitamin A than he gets in a big 8-ounce glass of fresh, whole milk."<sup>61</sup> Crisco, which did not offer much in the way of nutrition, still played up its benefits by declaring that "Crisco-fried foods are so digestible you can eat them

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<sup>57</sup> *Good Housekeeping*, February 1952, 150.

<sup>58</sup> *Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1957, 143.

<sup>59</sup> *McCall's*, April 1956, 79.

<sup>60</sup> *McCall's*, October 1954, 105.

<sup>61</sup> *Good Housekeeping*, January 1958, 11.

7 days a week!”<sup>62</sup> By using health as a selling point food advertisers reinforced the idea that women were responsible for their family’s health (or, conversely, for their family’s ill health).

One ad for California prunes illustrates how the same advertisement could promote a variety of messages. Beneath a picture of a girl eating a breakfast of prunes and waffles is the sentence, “Plenty of all-day energy in this breakfast.” In the photo a woman’s hand scoops more prunes from a jar while the girl, spoonful of prunes half raised to her mouth, gazes lovingly at what a reader would assume is her mother, out of the picture. California prunes could apparently not only provide energy for the day, they could also make a child adore a mother even more than she already presumably did.<sup>63</sup>

The advertising directed at women did not just happen; the industry spent a considerable amount of time and money not only trying to find out how best to get their ideas across but who they should advertise to. In this they were helped by Ernest Dichter, the psychologist who did research into ideas about gendered foods. In 1955, as the movement of women into the paid workforce became an unavoidable fact, Dichter reviewed over 500 studies conducted over the course of two decades to determine who the food companies should be targeting with their advertising. He came up with the idea that there were three kinds of women: the true housewife, the career woman, and the modern or “balanced” woman (the word likely refers to the balance between work and home life, but its usage is also an implicit judgement). It

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<sup>62</sup> *McCall's*, November 1954, 150.

<sup>63</sup> *Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1959, 122.

was the balanced woman, Dichter believed, that advertisers should target as she could "accept convenience products...without competing with them or worrying about their replacing her."<sup>64</sup> Advertisers of convenience foods had to walk a narrow path. They had to show women that the foods were quick and easy to prepare, but at the same time they had to refrain from suggesting that women could just be replaced in the kitchen.

Thus, in promoting convenience foods advertisers reinforced traditional ideas about gender roles rather than suggesting the obvious: that the new foods were so easy to make that anyone, even someone with no experience in the kitchen, could make them. While advertisers did occasionally make this sort of appeal to the consumer, much more often they used a message that reinforced existing gender ideas by proclaiming, for example, that the new product was "just like mom used to make." This message was intended to reassure consumers that the new product would be just like older products, but it also had the effect of reminding consumers what the supposed norms of society were. Advertisements of this sort were often accompanied by a picture of an older woman engaged in cooking. The main message to the consumer was that the new product was in no way a break from tradition, and neither should the gender roles involved with preparing it.

Food advertisers generally reinforced existing gender roles with their advertising. While they were responding to an existing situation, they also purposely ignored signs of shifting gender roles. Postwar advertising campaigns were created

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<sup>64</sup> Parkin, 187.



using surveys and market research, and this research showed that men were doing some of the buying and some of the cooking in suburban households. However, all of the advertisers' previous experience was in selling food to women. Men represented completely uncharted territory to the food advertiser. In the face of change, advertisers chose to ignore the situation. They continued to create advertisements as if men were completely uninvolved with the cooking process and so targeted their messages strictly at women. These advertisements continued to show women cooking and women in the grocery store as if nothing had changed. In this way advertisers ignored reality and instead perpetuated strict gender roles.

Advertisers were not the only group in the food industry putting out gendered ideas. As discussed above, food companies also put out gendered ideas through their corporate characters. There is still a third group that worked with the food industry and presented a unique set of messages to consumers: food writers.

Food writers filled columns in women's magazines and newspapers, and they also authored cookbooks. As such they had their own messages to give to consumers. Their primary message was one of helpfulness, that the food column or cookbook could be used as a resource. Oddly, there does not seem to be any panic on the food writers' part regarding the increasing use of convenience foods and the possibility of moving to the point where cookbooks and food columns would be rendered useless. Rather, many food writers embraced convenience foods and used them as shortcuts in recipes (which they still printed--there is no evidence of a food writer who, when asked for a good cake recipe, simply replied "Just buy a Betty Crocker cake mix").

At the same time, food writers knew their market, and it was women. By the postwar period it might take less time to make a meal than previously but the assumption was still that it would be a woman who made the meal. A letter to the reader at the beginning of 1950's *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book* encapsulated many of the ideas discussed above relating to advertising messages. The book was dedicated "to all of you who like to minister to your dear ones by serving them good food. That's the age-old way to express love and concern for their welfare. And it's just as important today when we make use of the latest short cuts, equipment and prepared foods as it was when women made their own bread, butter, cheese, --all the foods their families ate."<sup>65</sup> Even with the newest equipment, women were expected to still show their love by making food, and they, not their husbands, should be the ones who prepared that food, just like their mothers and grandmothers had done generations before.

This connection between the complex yet tasty meals of the past and the simple yet perhaps not as good meals of the present sometimes made for dicey cookbook writing. The authors of *The General Foods Kitchens Cookbook* let women know that, certainly, they *could* make more traditional recipes, but they probably did not have time for it: "You'll probably never want to attempt some of the classic masterpieces you've read about--the kind that take two or three days to prepare, and require you to hover over a hot stove, browning and braising and glazing and sipping and stirring and peeking, for hours on end." The book continues, "Not that you couldn't, because

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<sup>65</sup> Crocker, 5.

you could!--but the modern housewife is far too busy, what with jobs, housework, babies, community work, and social obligations."<sup>66</sup> It is unclear as to whether the list of responsibilities at the end of the quote is things a woman probably *was* doing or things she *should* be doing. In either case, it is worth noting that paid labor is absent from the list, replaced by the much more proper volunteer opportunities that middle class women (the target audience for cookbooks) presumably spent their time in.

One cultural trend of the postwar years was the importance placed upon advice from professional experts, as illustrated by the success of Dr. Spock, a child care expert who sold millions of books advising women how to raise their children. A reliance on experts can be seen in food writing as well. *McCall's* ran a regular column from "Fredrick J. Stare, MD, and Julia Shea, MS," two experts from the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health. The column advised women on topics such as "The Case for the Good Breakfast" and avoiding quack doctors. While the column was written by both a man and a woman, the photo accompanying the columns was of the male Dr. Stare, sitting at a desk, chin in hand, facing the camera. The exclusion of Ms Shea reinforced the idea that, like Dr. Spock, the well-educated experts who had careers were men, not women.<sup>67</sup>

Even when food writing featured women with careers their home life was often focused on to the exclusion of their professional life. In 1958 Clementine Paddleford wrote an article about Ivy Baker Priest, the US Treasurer at that time, who had been

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<sup>66</sup> The Women of General Foods Kitchens, *The General Foods Kitchens Cookbook* (New York: Random House, 1959), 3.

<sup>67</sup> Two examples can be seen in *McCall's*, February 1955, 89 and *McCall's*, July 1955, 82.

the hostess of the first "All-American Senate Salad Party." In the area of housework Priest's family was refreshingly gender-neutral: "I cook weekends, Mr. Priest and the children manage the house," Ms. Priest said. "We eat out of the freezer, out of cans, out of ready-mix packages. Any one of us--and that goes for my husband, too--can get a meal on the table in the shake of a lamb's tail." In spite of this, Paddleford still focused on Ms. Priest in the context of the house, not her career, describing her as "something great as a home manager. She's been managing families since she finished high school....[the] oldest of seven children, she learned early to shoulder responsibility."<sup>68</sup> This focus on Priest's home achievements served to support the idea that the primary place of women's achievements was the home, not the professional workplace.

Cookbooks offered different messages to women of varying ages. *The New Cook's Cookbook*, published by the Edison Electric Institute, provided a host of messages to young women who read the book. The book opened with a bit of doggerel that made an explicit connection between good looks and good cooking: "Today a woman can look like a cream confection, but she's got/to know how to make one, too. Popularity in our modern times, is/reserved for those who are good cooks as well as those with good looks!"<sup>69</sup> A few pages later the author again made the same connection, but in a much more direct way: "The very first test your cooking meets is its looks. Food--like a person--is judged first by appearance. And a dish--or

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<sup>68</sup> Clementine Paddleford, "The Whole Family Cooks!" June 22, 1958. Folder 7, box 89, Paddleford Collection.

<sup>69</sup> *The New Cook's Cookbook* (Edison Electric Institute, 1953), unnumbered page.

a dame--that's 'plain Jane' deserves nothing better than a cold stare. It takes such a little doing to make either attractive!" If the reader forgot who she was ultimately cooking for, the author advised the reader to "Just remember simple garnishes, like soft music, are best to woo man's spirit."<sup>70</sup> The name of the book indicated that its target audience would likely have been younger women, and the author was repeating common advice for the era: an attractive face can attract a man, and so can a good meal. This connection can also be seen in the name of a recipe that won \$2,000 in the 1954 Pillsbury Bake Off: "Blueberry Boy-Bait."<sup>71</sup>

Children's cookbooks were popular in the postwar era and they presented gendered ideas of their own. The front and back covers of *Betty Crocker's Cook Book for Boys & Girls* provide an illustration of expected gender roles. The cover shows a mother mixing something in a bowl with two children in attendance. A little girl beside her is mixing something with egg beaters, the same smiling expression on her face as the adult woman. Behind the two, at a counter, a little boy tastes something from a pot. The message in the picture is that women are in charge of making food, men are in charge of eating it. The back cover shows the mother and daughter at a birthday party. The daughter sits at a table surrounded by sandwiches, cupcakes, and glasses. The mother is in the act of bringing the cake to the table. There are no males in the picture. The reader is left to assume that party planning, along with cooking,

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<sup>70</sup> *The New Cook's Cookbook*, 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Pillsbury's Fifth Recipe & Baking Contest*, 1954, 47.

are women's jobs.<sup>72</sup> The interior of the book has quotes from boys (as well as girls) on the cooking they've done, but the illustrations often show gendered relationships. A picture at the beginning of the "Extra Special" section shows two girls, both in aprons and one holding a mixing spoon, giving a birthday cake to a boy who is wearing a suit.<sup>73</sup> The illustrations in the "Campfire Cooking" section show only boys working at building fires and cooking foods outdoors, and this was considered by many to be masculine work.<sup>74</sup> Other pictures in the book show either boys or girls cooking, but there are very few pictures that show boys and girls working together at cooking.

Something children's cookbooks taught that was similar to adult cookbooks was that one did not need to cook from scratch to make a meal. Because many children do not have the patience or experience to make complicated dishes, convenience foods can help. Still, *Betty Crocker's Cook Book for Boys & Girls* sometimes took this idea to an extreme, advising children to use convenience foods, especially those produced by General Mills (which put together the cookbook), whenever possible. The recipe for Grandma's Chocolate Layer Cake was from scratch, but accompanying text let children know that it was just as good, and easier to make, if one used a Betty Crocker cake mix.<sup>75</sup> The instructions for the Eskimo Igloo Cake told bakers to make two round layers from Betty Crocker cake mixes, cut the layers in half, place the

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<sup>72</sup> Betty Crocker, *Betty Crocker's Cook Book for Boys & Girls* (New York: Golden Press, 1957)

<sup>73</sup> Betty Crocker, *Betty Crocker's Cook Book for Boys & Girls*, 6.

<sup>74</sup> Betty Crocker, *Betty Crocker's Cook Book for Boys & Girls*, 64-72.

<sup>75</sup> Betty Crocker, *Betty Crocker's Cook Book for Boys & Girls*, 10-11.

layers cut side down and frost over everything.<sup>76</sup> The recipe is really more of a construction project than a cooking recipe, and the result was more of a Quonset hut than an igloo.

While there were cookbooks directed at men they were in the definite minority. Outdoor grilling was one of the few genres of men's cookbooks that were popular and those books, also, provided ideas about gender roles. The authors of *The Complete Book of Outdoor Cookery* suggested a strategy for busy women while outlining their belief that outdoor grilling "is primarily a man's job and that a woman, if she's smart, will keep it that way." As stated above, outdoor grilling did not free the woman of the house from every chore involved with outdoor cooking. "The ladies can do the planning and the marketing, the preparation and the hostessing," the authors declared, "but the man will do the actual cooking over the coals."

When food writers moved away from outdoor grilling, they often seemed at a loss to know exactly how to write cooking literature for men. There seems to have been a common belief expressed in cooking literature that, far from being ignorant in the kitchen, men were actually quite creative in their cooking while women were the ones who doggedly stuck to tried and true recipes (some of this may be because professional chefs were strictly male while the female professionals of the food world, the home economists, had been the ones to standardize recipes and other aspects of the kitchen).<sup>77</sup> Because of this, cookbook writers who wrote for men were

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<sup>76</sup> Betty Crocker, *Betty Crocker's Cook Book for Boys & Girls*, 14-15.

<sup>77</sup> Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 31.

in an delicate position: they could not assume their audience was ignorant, but at the same time they knew their audience did not know much. This resulted in some awkward food writing. For example, in 1956 *Ladies' Home Journal* offered an article titled "Papa Does the Cooking," which offered five recipes for men who "aren't sure what to do" in the kitchen. The article would presumably have been clipped and saved by female readers in case they had to be away from the house for a significant period of time (the article appears just after a story about a man taking care of the house and three children while his wife was in the hospital having their fourth child). While the intent of the article is to be helpful, the recipes themselves are somewhat puzzling in that they are not for simple dishes. Recipes for veal cutlets in Spanish sauce, stuffed pork chops, and haddock á la rarebit are all included, and they are all complicated, the last requiring a cheese sauce. The introduction to the article mentions that "A husbandly talent...to be encouraged, is cooking," but it would seem that inexperienced male cooks may have been served better by simpler recipes (and experienced male cooks could presumably have gotten their recipes from cookbooks, magazines, and other sources of recipes of the time).

Another example of this awkwardness in writing men's cooking literature appears in the 1950 cookbook *Wolf in Chef's Clothing*. In some ways this book is the other side of the coin from the cookbook described above that targeted young women, as this book includes, among other things, four menu options depending on the type of woman one is trying to attract: athletic, indoor, intellectual, or "3-B" ("brains,



bonds, and beauty--don't believe it--but it's fun pretending").<sup>78</sup> The book is for men, and one way it appeals to men who are inexperienced in the kitchen is by illustrating each recipe rather than describing it. Each page is split into four panels and each panel shows a step in the cooking process. Again, this approach gives an awkward feeling to the reader. The pictorial approach emphasizes the simplicity of the recipes, but it includes recipes that are too complicated to describe in this way. The recipe for Mignon et Béarnaise, which is a broiled steak with a sort of savory custard sauce on top, is extremely complicated, requiring the cook to heat egg yolks in a double boiler while stirring "until smooth," then add canned consommé, butter, parsley, salt and pepper, and keep stirring until the sauce is again smooth. No information is given on how long to cook the sauce.<sup>79</sup>

*Wolf in Chef's Clothing* is a good example of what historian Sherrie Inness has outlined as the male cooking mystique. As she describes it, if men choose to cook (and for them, cooking is an option, as opposed to women) "they must make sure that their masculinity is not diminished" by grilling outdoors or making dishes that are either meat-oriented, greasy, or contain alcohol (*Wolf in Chef's Clothing* contains many drink recipes). Women should pay attention to men's tastes in foods, but the opposite is not true, and when men cook it is an event, but a rare one (the cookbook's emphasis on cooking to find a mate makes it clear that once one is found one can drop the cooking). Finally, men's and women's tastes in foods are antithetical, and the

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<sup>78</sup> Robert H. Loeb, Jr., *Wolf in Chef's Clothing* (Chicago, Wilcox & Follett, 1950), 35.

<sup>79</sup> Loeb, 42-43.

cookbook includes plenty of women's foods to impress a potential mate, including crepes, canapés, stuffed eggs, and Roquefort salad.<sup>80</sup>

Ultimately, the messages most postwar food writing presented to readers was based on existing gender expectations: women should do most of the cooking, while men should only cook in special circumstances. The extent to which postwar cookbooks reinforced traditional gender roles can best be seen in one of the most popular cookbooks of the time, and one which expressed in its title what millions of women felt: Peg Bracken's *The I Hate to Cook Book*.

Bracken's book was published in 1960, and the idea for it was sold to the publisher based on the title alone. In the introduction, Bracken does not step away from her central idea: that hers was a "book is for those of us who hate to, who have learned, through hard experience, that some activities become no less painful through repetition: childbearing, paying taxes, cooking. This book is for those of us who want to fold our big dishwater hands around a dry Martini instead of a wet flounder, come the end of a long day."<sup>81</sup> The tone of the book is confidential, amusing and direct, offering advice from a woman who's bluffed and shortcutted her way through thousands of family meals and still hates every minute of it. At one point she describes how to fool a husband into thinking store-bought rolls are homemade: after tasting a biscuit during the meal, the cook should comment that she just can't make good homemade rolls, to which the husband hopefully responds that her homemade

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<sup>80</sup> Inness, 18.

<sup>81</sup> Peg Bracken, *The I Hate to Cook Book* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Crest, 1960), vii.

rolls taste just fine.<sup>82</sup> While Bracken expresses dissatisfaction with cooking, the options she offers do not truly challenge gender roles, but instead reinforce them. While she may complain, she never challenges the idea that women should be the ones preparing each meal. In fact, under the guise of male expectations she presses for more scratch cooking. As she puts it, a husband "wants to see you knead that bread and tote that bale, before you go down to the cellar to make the soap. This is known as Woman's Burden."<sup>83</sup> A true critique of expectations of women would have to wait a few more years for the *Feminine Mystique*.

It is difficult to know just how the gendered messages food writers, advertisers, and manufacturers put forward affected consumers. Regarding the general messages in women's magazines, researcher Joke Hermes examined the usage of women's magazines in England by conducting a number of in-depth interviews with readers. She found that readers considered them to be essentially disposable media, magazines that were not read deeply, especially by those with small children who only had time to read a few pages at a time.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, though, in-depth interviews showed that women did use the magazines as resources. One woman who went through marital problems during the postwar period scanned the magazines for stories of other women in the same position as herself.<sup>85</sup> Another essentially became a

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<sup>82</sup> Bracken, 24.

<sup>83</sup> Bracken, 24.

<sup>84</sup> Joke Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>85</sup> Hermes, 74.

hypochondriac, believing she had each disease she saw mentioned in women's magazines until her doctor told her not to "read that rubbish."<sup>86</sup>

Gendered ideas did not only come from food writers and manufacturers, of course; the ideas came from a wide spectrum of American culture. The general idea regarding men's and women's roles was that men should work at paid employment outside the house while women worked at unpaid labor in the home. This division of labor often resulted in a higher status for a family as they were evidently secure enough financially for only the father to work. However, as time passed and the children of the Baby Boom began attending school, more and more women entered the workforce. They may not have had careers, but the part-time jobs they worked gave them a sense of financial independence (and/or a sense of contributing monetarily to the family good) and a connection to the outside world. The jobs also made their time more valuable, and those women frequently chose to trade money for time in the form of convenience foods, which were usually more expensive than their raw equivalents but could be prepared quicker. The ease with which convenience foods could be prepared meant that less experience was needed for cooking, which opened cooking up to anyone in the family. The gender expectations that existed in American society in general, and that existed within families themselves, usually meant that women did the bulk of the cooking. However, the prominence of outdoor grilling shifted at least some cooking responsibility onto men's shoulders, and the wide availability of convenience foods sometimes resulted in men cooking other

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<sup>86</sup> Hermes, 50.

foods such as pancakes, which could easily be made from a mix. In the postwar years gender roles in the kitchen began to shift and while they did not resolve themselves into a definite pattern whereby men did all the cooking, or even a definite half, the shift was such that (along with the availability of a wide range of convenience foods) the stage was set for more and more women to move into the workplace and to work full-time rather than part-time jobs, as would become common in the 1970s and 1980s.

#### Chapter 4: New Foods, Cold Cash, and the Distant Voice of the Consumer

On the night of April 13, 1954, Ezra Taft Benson, the secretary of agriculture, stepped to a podium at the Statler Hotel in Washington, D. C. He was the main speaker at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the frozen food industry, an industry which, in its short existence, had created over 150,000 jobs, remade food production and distribution networks, and would allow (Benson believed) consumers to buy more than four billion pounds of frozen food that year.<sup>1</sup>

As he talked, Benson recounted the history of the industry, briefly touching on industry founder Clarence Birdseye's quest to produce and sell frozen foods, then spending more time on the government's involvement with the industry. Although individual manufacturing firms were becoming rich from the frozen food revolution, they had not created that revolution by themselves: the government, especially the Department of Agriculture (USDA), had been there almost every step along the way, providing technical and research help to the food industry. An example of this, Benson noted, could be seen in the relatively new product of frozen orange juice, created in 1944 by cooperation between industry, the USDA, and the Florida Citrus Commission. In 1946 there had been a quarter-million gallons of frozen orange juice produced. The 1953-54 season was estimated to bring 61 million gallons of frozen orange juice to store shelves.

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<sup>1</sup> "Address by Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson at a dinner in honor of the 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Founding of the Frozen Food Industry," Ezra Taft Benson, April 13, 1954, folder 15, box 277, Paddleford Collection.

While frozen orange juice was a standout star in the postwar food industry, it was by no means alone. Frozen strawberries and peas were popular, and relatively new, food items for postwar shoppers. Presweetened breakfast cereals revitalized the cereal industry in 1949, and nutritional cereals (with added vitamins) became popular after their introduction in 1955. Precooked rice, nonfat dry milk, and improved dehydrated potatoes also date from this period.<sup>2</sup>

Along with new products, the period between the end of World War II and the early 1960s saw major changes in food distribution. Popular before the war, supermarkets solidified their hold on the grocery industry at the expense of smaller stores, and the supermarkets' greatly increased shelf space had a considerable impact on the numbers of new products introduced during this time. While independent supermarkets generally held their own against chain supermarkets in the postwar years, consolidation in the industry meant that the top fifteen chains took in thirty cents of every food dollar spent by 1956.<sup>3</sup> These chains exerted their own influence on the food industry.

As Secretary Benson noted, the U.S. government was also a major player in the postwar food industry. Through its various branches, the government provided money and advice to farmers on what crops they should plant, regulated the foods manufactured and sold in this country, and provided research experience for new foods.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert D. Buzzell, *Product Innovation in Food Processing, 1954-1964*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1967), 79.

<sup>3</sup> "Food-chain Mergers Forecast Problems in Advertising and Marketing Methods," *Printers' Ink*, August 24, 1956, 21-23.

Secretary Benson's speech to food industry leaders is notable both for the major players it mentions--the government and food processors--and for the group it ignores: the consumer. The consumer-producer relationship was a perverse one. It was both simple--the consumer consumed what the producer produced--and at the same time endlessly complex. In the postwar years producers offered hundreds of new products every year but consumers did not always buy them. By the late 1950s, while supermarkets added, on average, almost seven new products to their stock every week, they also dropped four existing ones.<sup>4</sup> Consumers consumed, sometimes, but they also rejected. Producers spent millions of dollars on market research trying to figure out what the average homemaker wanted.

However, producers in the postwar era clearly were the ones setting the terms of the relationship. Especially in the suburbs, food came from the grocery store--there were no other options of places to buy food, unless one wanted to eat every meal at a restaurant, and few people in the suburbs had gardens. One did have the option to make every meal from scratch, but the only people advocating this were either the crowd who read and wrote for *Gourmet* magazine or people who had a family history of making their own foods from scratch. The *Gourmet* group was the only one participating in a larger, nationwide discourse on the topic, and the kind of cooking they advocated--French, high-class cuisine--was not the kind of cooking a suburban family would rely on at every meal. The dominant discourse on cooking in the postwar era, that promulgated in women's magazines and the most popular

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<sup>4</sup> "Food Retailing in the 1960's," *Progressive Grocer*, December 1959, 52+.



cookbooks, centered on using processed foods and convenience foods to speed cooking time and make meal preparation easier. The natural foods movement, the slow foods movement, the idea that dishes made from fresh ingredients would inherently taste better--these things simply did not exist in the postwar period, and when ideas similar to these showed up in cooking literature, the message was undermined by the idea that faster and easier was always better. A recipe for pasta sauce that called for simmering a dozen ingredients for hours might appear in a women's magazine, but across from the recipe, which may have taken a few column inches, would be a full page four color ad for Chef Boy-Ar-Dee canned pasta sauce, available in a new three-pound size.

Convenience food was the only game in town, and to a large part suburban women accepted this. The current chapter describes the postwar food industry and how changes in that industry affected the foods on suburban tables while the next chapter explores women's responses to those foods and how they modified even processed foods that were not intended to be changed. To put it more directly, this chapter explores the foods that appeared on supermarket shelves; the next chapter explores the foods that showed up on suburban tables. There was a difference between the two. Although the food industry was responsible for the largest changes in the foods eaten in the suburbs, they were not the only group responsible for the change, and although they were the dominant entity in the producer-consumer relationship, the consumers had some ideas as well.

## *Food Companies Through World War II*

By the early 1950s, the American food industry was big business. In 1952 grocery stores alone accounted for about a quarter of the retail sales in this country, sending nearly \$40 billion worth of products through their checkout stands.<sup>5</sup> Food manufacturers like General Mills, Nestle, or Armour were huge, powerful companies which measured their annual revenues in the hundreds of millions of dollars. The largest of them produced many, many products: when Armour redesigned its product packaging in the late 1940s, the new packaging applied to around 500 products, ranging from canned meats to dairy products to margarine to lard.<sup>6</sup> While food manufacturers produced many different types of products, their basic task was to take a raw, perishable commodity and change its color, shape, size, taste--its very essence--and then sell it to a consumer a hundred or a thousand miles away.

It had not always been that way. Before the Civil War, most food manufacturers were small organizations, companies that did relatively simple things like mill grain into flour or can peas or tomatoes. Most Americans lived outside of cities, producing much of their own foods themselves, and there was little need for heavily processed food aside from preserved food like salt pork. Distribution systems were primitive even by the standards of the late nineteenth century, generally consisting of wagons or steamboats, except in the East, where railroads stretched from New York to Chicago by the eve of the Civil War. Raw materials were supplied

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<sup>5</sup> "Food Stores Led All Other Retailers in 1952 Sales Gains," *Progressive Grocer*, March 1953, 36-37.

<sup>6</sup> Egmont Arens, "Packaging for the Mass Market," in *Food Marketing*, ed. Paul Sayres (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1952), 235.

to manufacturers by local producers, and unless the resulting food was canned or otherwise preserved, it was destined for local consumers. Those companies that sold a popular product found various additional hindrances to growth in the business world. It was legally very difficult to become a corporation, and both capital and credit were much harder to come by before the Civil War than after.

After the Civil War companies grew larger than ever before through easier access to credit and capital, larger distribution networks (made possible by the railroad, which was stretching its way across the country), and a new emphasis on efficiency and standardization. Many companies were also helped by technological innovations. The Campbell Soup Company, for example, had been around in one form or another since 1860, and in its early years had concentrated on canning vegetables, soups, jams, and jellies. In the last few years of the century it had expanded into canned ketchups, fruits, and meats as well, and hired a chemical engineer to do research on new products. By 1899 the engineer had developed a way of canning condensed soup and this new type of product, which could be put into smaller, cheaper cans, and could be shipped for less money than noncondensed soup, enabled Campbell's to sell its product for a third the price of its competitors.<sup>7</sup>

Nabisco is another company that was helped by an emphasis on standardization and new business practices. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a series of mass mergers in different industries as local or regional companies combined to form nationwide concerns. The National Biscuit Company

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<sup>7</sup> Lisa Mirabile, ed., *International Directory of Company Histories* (Chicago: St. James Press, 1990), 479.

(of which "Nabisco" is a shortened name) was the end result of decades of mergers in the baking industry. The N.B.C was formed in 1898 and was made up of 114 bakeries, mostly located in the East and Midwest. The company's first chairman, and the man behind the 1898 merger, was Chicago lawyer and businessman Adolphus Green. Green realized quickly that product standardization was key to getting the 114 bakeries to function as if they belonged to a single company. All products were made from standardized recipes and to uniform standards of production, and all merchandise was marked with an oval topped with a cross with two horizontal bars. Product freshness was further standardized by shipping N.B.C.'s first new product, ordinary soda crackers, in small cardboard containers with a patented "In-er-Seal" of waxed paper lining. This new packaging eliminated the cracker barrel that customers had previously purchased the product from, and the soggiess or staleness that went with the bulk selling of crackers. The new packages, containing a limited number of servings for individual consumers, looked forward to the revolution in grocery packaging that allowed grocery stores to move from bulk sales where a clerk waited on each customer to self-service stores where customers chose their own foods.<sup>8</sup>

Gustavus Swift's meatpacking company is an example of a corporation that quickly rose to national dominance through technological innovation and centralization. By the early 1870s cattle from western states like Texas and Kansas was shipped live, via railroad, to major metropolitan areas in the East like Boston or New York City, where they were slaughtered by local butchers. The cattle lost a

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<sup>8</sup> Mirabile, 542.

significant amount of weight on the trip, but in the days before refrigeration, shipping beef "on the hoof" was the only feasible way of transporting it. Swift's innovation was to aggressively find ways to introduce refrigeration into the process, and then to centralize the cattle slaughter. He introduced refrigeration by building insulated rail cars, and he then established ice stations along a Chicago to New York rail line where melting ice in the cars was replaced by blocks of fresh ice. By the 1880s meat from Swift's Chicago slaughterhouses was being sold throughout the East, and by the 1890s the price of beef in the East, because of centralization and economies of scale, had dropped to what it had been fifty years previously. Just after the turn of the twentieth century Swift and five other meatpacking firms controlled 90 percent of the inspected cattle slaughter in the U.S.<sup>9</sup>

The market dominance and national reach of many of the food manufacturers of the early twentieth century would have been unthinkable in the mid-nineteenth century. Technological innovation, centralization, efficiency, and standardization had helped many of them rise to the top--as had being in the right place at the right time. The 1910s and 1920s were a time of intense competition that saw many companies either go under or be swallowed up by other, larger companies. General Foods was a larger company that purchased smaller competitors. It had begun as Postum Cereal Company, maker of the popular Grape-Nuts and Post Toasties cold cereals. In the 1920s it went on an acquisition spree, buying Jell-O in 1925, Swan's Down Cake Flour and Minute Tapioca in 1926, Maxwell House Coffee in 1928, and a controlling

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<sup>9</sup> Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 26-31.

interest in the much smaller General Foods Company, owned by Clarence Birdseye, in 1929 (it bought the remaining interest in 1932). In 1932, after the start of the Great Depression, it went on to buy the Sanka Coffee Corporation.<sup>10</sup> The new General Foods was heavily diversified, at least in terms of producing many different kinds of foods, and was a model for the new kinds of food corporations extending their reach across the country in the first half of the twentieth century.

The consolidation of the 1910s and 1920s helped many food companies weather the Great Depression. The larger companies were more diverse in terms of the products offered, had more resources, and reached a larger proportion of the United States. The companies that lasted to World War II found a national government ready to work with the largest of the food companies, and those large companies grew even larger during the war.

Part of this had to do with government contracts. The armed forces needed food, lots of it, and the government granted contracts to large companies which could provide rations by the millions. Wrigley's chewing gum, Hershey's candy bars, Coca Cola, and Hormel's Spam were all supplied to soldiers during the war through multi-year government contracts.

Government research also helped food companies by assisting in developing new products. For example, during the war the government had a standing order of 500,000 pounds of dried orange juice from any company that could produce it cheaply and in quantity. The company that won the contract did so by modifying a

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<sup>10</sup> Mirabile, 530-531.

recently developed high vacuum process for producing penicillin. It was then discovered that instead of taking the process all the way through the dehydrating phase one could stop at merely concentrating the juice, add a bit of fresh juice to improve the flavor, and freeze the result. The result was good-tasting and kept for months, which meant that the orange industry finally had a good way of dealing with surplus fruit. Instead of selling it cheap or letting it rot it could convert it into frozen orange juice, store it, and sell it to consumers months after the crop had come in. In the post-war years frozen orange juice became one of the most popular of the new frozen foods.<sup>11</sup>

Many food staples, like meat, sugar, and fats, were rationed during the war, and this rationing helped some types of food companies. The point of rationing was to have enough food to be able to supply the armed forces with what they needed while also allowing consumers to continue eating the same basic foods they had before the war started. However, choices had to be made regarding how much food went to the various sectors of the civilian economy, and sometimes these choices had unintended, long-term effects. For example, sugar was rationed to consumers at around 50 percent of the prewar consumption levels, about 24 pounds per person per year (this is the actual sugar ration and does not include sugar in candy bars, soda, etc.).<sup>12</sup> Pillsbury, maker of Gold Medal Flour, protested the amount of the civilian sugar ration, reasoning that home bakers would be shorted the sugar they needed for baking

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<sup>11</sup> Buzzell, 49-50.

<sup>12</sup> Buzzell, 102.

(and flour sales would thereby suffer).<sup>13</sup> The ration for commercial bakeries, in contrast to the civilian ration, started at about 70 percent of prewar levels and was raised to 80 percent in 1944, and bakeries occasionally received extra allotments of sugar to soak up excess egg production. The Office of Price Administration (OPA), the government group in charge of rationing, explained, somewhat unconvincingly, that this was because commercial bakeries wasted far less sugar than home bakers. The OPA also said the disparity was because more women were working outside the house and had less time to bake. While this may have been true, the short sugar rations women received had the effect of accelerating the trend away from home baking. Between 1943 and 1944, while consumers were on short sugar rations, the number of commercial bakeries in the US increased by 27 percent.<sup>14</sup> While home baking had already been in decline before the war, the government's sugar rationing policy certainly accelerated its decline to the detriment of companies that sold raw materials for baking, and to the benefit of companies which sold finished baking products.

The war also helped food manufacturers by raising the general prosperity of Americans, moving millions of people to an income level where they could chose to spend more of their money on processed food. The Baby Boom, which began during the war, created millions of children who would grow up to be consumers of products the food companies offered. These trends contributed to the explosive growth the food industry saw after World War II.

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<sup>13</sup> Buzzell, 17-18.

<sup>14</sup> Buzzell, 107-108.



The federal government, through various policies, helped the food industry grow. At a national level, food was a political issue. The years after World War II saw food shortages around the world, but Americans did not suffer much from them, although rationing continued for a few years after the war and during part of the Korean War. American farmers had endured a decade of drought during the Great Depression but the return of the rains in 1941 meant prosperity to those who grew crops and raised livestock. Part of the federal response to the Dust Bowl had been policies to restrict extensive farming, but these policies gradually fell away as unfettered capitalism returned to the America. The economic prosperity of America, and the survival of many people around the world, depended on high agricultural production in America. Extensive food production, and the choices it resulted in at the market, also helped illustrate the benefits of capitalism to a worldwide audience during the Cold War.

At the same time, food was big business, and the postwar years were good for American businesses. Many smaller companies that did not have the resources to enter into wartime government contracts and who could not obtain raw materials because of rationing had gone out of business during the war, and in this way government policies had helped larger businesses.

The federal government sometimes pushed in opposite directions when it came to handling the food industry. In the late 1950s there was a rash of supermarket mergers--one source counted 200 mergers between 1955 and 1959 involving about

2,300 stores and \$3 billion in retail volume.<sup>15</sup> The scale of the mergers resulted in an investigation by the Federal Trade Commission, although the FTC ultimately did not stop the mergers. At the same time the FTC was investigating the mergers, though, the Food and Drug Administration was taking a more lax approach toward its responsibilities. In the early 1950s the Food and Drug Administration wanted to play a more active role in regulating the food additives such as preservatives and flavorings which were showing up in more and more foods Americans were eating. In early 1953, however, Dwight Eisenhower took office. Because his administration was sympathetic to businesses, the FDA shifted from a primary role of enforcing regulations to one of reassuring the public that American foods were safe while doing little to advance its regulatory role.<sup>16</sup>

Kenneth Jackson and others have argued that government policies facilitated the growth of suburbs after World War II. A central part of this argument is that this growth was an unintended result of those policies. For example, low-interest government-backed loans were not intended specifically for suburban homes, but since the outskirts of cities were places where builders could buy large tracts of land cheaply, the outskirts were where the houses were constructed and where those loans were used. Government policies also helped the food industry grow large, but to a large part that was the intention of those policies. Abundant food was good for

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<sup>15</sup> "The New Revolution in Distribution and its Significance for National Advertisers," March 1961, internal study produced by the J Walter Thompson Marketing Department. Box DG15, Publications 1887-2005, JWT Archives.

<sup>16</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, revised ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 113.

everyone except farmers, since abundance brought low prices, but subsidies meant that farmers, too, were taken care of in surplus years (although it should be pointed out that subsidies only applied to a few standard crops like wheat and corn--there was no subsidy for, say, grape growers). The Eisenhower administration, which was in office from 1953 through 1961, was sympathetic to business and generally saw no problem with large food companies growing larger except in the case of mass mergers.

*The Food Hourglass: Farmers to Manufacturers*

The American food industry by midcentury looked in some ways like an hourglass. At the top of the hourglass were millions of farmers producing the raw materials that became American food. These raw materials--grain, beef, nuts, fruit, and hundreds of other products--were sent to a much smaller number of food processors who, in some way, changed the nature of the food. They milled the flour, converted the corn into corn syrup, peeled and sliced and canned the mandarin oranges. They combined raw materials to make cookies, cold cereal, or cola. From the processors the food moved to a larger number of regional wholesale distributors, and from there to hundreds of thousands of grocery stores across the country to be purchased by consumers.

While farmers were at the top of the hourglass and produced the raw materials for the rest of the food industry, they tended to have the least effect on the midcentury food industry. Much of this was because of the large number of farmers, each,

essentially, going their own direction in terms of production. Farmers keep an ear tuned to market prices and will plant or raise whatever they believe will bring a good price, and this frequently means changing crops from one year to the next. Even a farmer whose land consists exclusively of pastureland, good only for raising cattle, will cut the number of cattle over time in years when cattle prices are low. An orange grower is committed to oranges so long as he has orange trees on his property, but older trees or a damaging storm could mean an opportunity to replace orange trees with a few lemon or grapefruit trees.

The government affected food production in several ways, the largest being subsidies to farmers for growing (or not growing) certain crops on their land. Farm subsidies kept the market price for certain crops high and made those crops desirable to farmers while at the same time making other crops less desirable. The government affected food production by also providing a considerable amount of free research to farmers. The USDA maintains research stations across the country, each working on projects that benefit farmers of that particular region. Many of these projects involve finding or creating varieties of crops that can grow in a particular region. For example, in 1943 the Oregon Agricultural Experiment Station produced the Willamette red raspberry, which grew especially well in the Pacific Northwest's rainy conditions. The Cheyenne Horticultural Field Station, in Wyoming, had worked on a variety of strawberry that was frost tolerant and resistant to winter cold. Between 1940 and 1950 USDA research stations introduced over 180 varieties of fruit. The types of fruit varieties introduced during that decade reflect the fact that these

research stations were largely market-oriented, and also the fact that some types of fruit were more amendable to creating new varieties than others. There were 54 types of peaches introduced, 36 types of strawberries, 22 types of grapes, and 14 types of apples.<sup>17</sup> In terms of research, the USDA did much more than just develop or adapt new varieties of crops; it also did a considerable amount of work on new farming methods. Information about USDA research, and the research done at the state agricultural universities, was distributed to farmers by extension agents working at the local level.

Individual farmers usually had very little effect on the midcentury food industry, but groups of farmers did have an effect when they worked together to push a certain product that the market was ready for. For example, frozen orange juice was one of the big success stories in the food industry after the war. This created a reliable market for any surplus farmers had, and so they ramped up orange production throughout the 1950s. The development of the frozen orange juice industry relied on technological innovations such as new distribution networks and the process to make frozen orange juice, but growers influenced the industry by ensuring a constant supply of fruit which kept the price of oranges relatively low (although the government investigated the industry in the late 1950s for price fixing).<sup>18</sup> Of course, frozen orange juice replaced fresh orange juice because the beverage was already

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<sup>17</sup> Press release from USDA Agricultural Research Administration, Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils and Agricultural Engineering, dated 18 July 1950. Folder 11, box 277, Paddleford Collection.

<sup>18</sup> Shane Hamilton, "Cold Capitalism: The Political Ecology of Frozen Concentrated Orange Juice," *Agricultural History* 77 (2003): 572-3.

familiar to consumers. California avocado growers had a much more difficult time with their product. Avocados are a fruit that is not sweet, can not be baked, cooked or stewed, and is high in fat. Many avocado growers got into the business because of land speculation in the early twentieth century, and in spite of high production and an inexpensive product, it took much of the century to push the avocado beyond its early success as a salad ingredient.<sup>19</sup>

Farmers created the raw materials used in the foods Americans ate. Except in the case of fresh vegetables or fruits, the foods that left the farm were not the same foods that Americans saw in the grocery store or enjoyed on their table; the foods were modified by food processors in some way. They were chopped, blended, fortified, preserved, colored, and packaged by Carnation, General Foods, General Mills, Nestle, or one (or several) of the many other food processors operating in America. If the farmers had relatively little impact on the direction of the food industry and what foods were available for American consumers to purchase, the food processors had a tremendous impact on the available foods.

There were several reasons for the food processors' power. One reason was their size: by the postwar era the largest food processors employed hundreds of thousands of people, had annual budgets in the millions of dollars, and operated as nationwide concerns. The food processors had teams of salesmen and used advertising extensively, which increased their reach into American grocery stores and

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<sup>19</sup> See Jeffrey Charles, "Searching for Gold in Guacamole: California Growers Market the Avocado, 1910-1994," *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002).

homes. Ultimately, the processors' effect on the food industry came down to the simple fact that it was they, instead of the farmers, who truly created the products Americans purchased. Consumers did not purchase flour grown by a certain farmer on a farm a hundred miles south of Minneapolis, they purchased flour ground by General Mills, and, more specifically, they purchased Gold Medal Flour.

Both consumers and food processors thought in terms of brand name products, and there were lots of products out there. A turn of the century grocery store might have stocked 500 products; a supermarket of the early 1960s could easily stock over 6,000 products (a number which included both new products and new sizes and flavors of an existing product), with more being introduced every day.<sup>20</sup>

There was an explosion not just in the number of products being sold but also in the number of types of foods available to consumers. Corn oil margarines, soft margarines, and synthetic non-dairy creamers date from the late 1950s and early to mid 1960s.<sup>21</sup> Sugar Crisp, the first presweetened breakfast cereal, was introduced in 1949, when it appeared that breakfast cereal sales were plateauing, and the presweetened cereals were so popular that fifteen years later at least twenty-one presweetened cereals were available, accounting for over a quarter of total breakfast cereal sales. Special K, the first nutritional cereal (one which touted its added vitamins and minerals), appeared in 1955, and nutritional cereals soon afterwards

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<sup>20</sup> "The Modern Supermarket--America's Trademark," *Agricultural Marketing*, May 1963, 54-60.

<sup>21</sup> Buzzell, 79.

grew to be a significant percentage of the market.<sup>22</sup> Cake mixes, dehydrated potatoes, and instant coffee had all been introduced before the war, but postwar technological advances made these types of products taste better, and they became more popular.

One of the big successes in the midcentury food industry was frozen foods. Although there were numerous people who had experimented with selling frozen foods in the early twentieth century, the frozen food industry, then and now, traces its roots back to Clarence Birdseye's work. Birdseye had spent time in Labrador, in northeast Canada, where he saw how fish, frozen quickly in the icy Canadian weather soon after being caught, had neither the freezer burn nor poor texture that most Americans associated with frozen foods. In 1917 he returned to the U.S., spent a few years experimenting with flash freezing foods, and then moved to Gloucester, Massachusetts, to start the General Seafoods Company in a location close to the seafood industry. Birdseye developed a process for quickly freezing foods but few grocery stores and even fewer consumers had freezers large enough to stock frozen food. The company floundered for a number of years until a chance encounter with Marjorie Post, daughter of the founder of the Postum company. While Post's yacht was docked in Gloucester her cook bought a Birdseye frozen duck, and Post was so impressed with the quality of the bird that she sent her husband to talk with Birdseye

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<sup>22</sup> Buzzell, 36.



about it. Three years later Postum bought General Seafoods for \$22 million and changed the resulting company's name to General Foods Company.<sup>23</sup>

Birdseye's company benefited from the cash reserves Postum brought with it, as well as a national distribution system, but there was more to the story of frozen foods, much more than can be recounted here. For any given fruit or vegetable, research was done to find the best variety to be frozen; for example, 105 varieties of peas were tested before producers decided on two strains to use.<sup>24</sup> For the quality of frozen food to be high the foods need to be frozen very soon after being harvested, which meant a tremendous investment by food producers. Grocers needed to buy display freezers, which weren't available in bulk until after World War II. For best results customers needed freezers with enough space to store the frozen food until use, which again had to wait until the postwar economic boom. Unlike presweetened breakfast cereals, frozen foods required a tremendous investment on the part of food producers, distributors, and consumers.

The success of different types of frozen food was hit and miss. The industry experienced a short-term bust in the late 1940s as companies pushed too many types of frozen food to market too quickly, often ignoring questions of quality or taste. Products like frozen tomato juice and frozen milk languished while frozen orange juice was a success. Other early successes were frozen strawberries (which had never

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<sup>23</sup> Sue Shephard, *Pickled, Potted and Canned: How the Art and Science of Food Preserving Changed the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 303.

<sup>24</sup> George L. Mentley, "Frozen Foods: A Marketing Case History," *Food Marketing*, ed. Paul Sayres (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1952), 287.

been successfully canned and were very seasonal) and frozen peas (which usually had an off taste when canned).<sup>25</sup>

Awake, introduced by General Foods in 1963, shows just how much the food industry, and the foods offered to Americans, were changing. Awake was the first synthetic frozen orange concentrate, a product which contained no fruit juice. As such its appeal to General Foods lay in the fact that the cost of producing the product was not tied to the cost of oranges, so a frost in Florida did not mean reduced profits to General Foods. Awake was essentially chemicals and filler and tasted sweeter than orange juice, which is emblematic of processed foods in general. Processing reduces and confuses a food's taste so the dominant tastes in American foods as the twentieth century wore on were either sweet or salty, since sweeteners and salt were added to mask other less desirable flavors. Indeed, the taste of Awake, a synthetic product, affected the taste of real orange juice, since Florida growers were so shaken by Awake's success that in Florida laws were changed to allow the addition of sugar to orange juice. Historian Harvey Levenstein has described the postwar era as "a kind of Golden Age for American food chemistry" as over 400 new additives were developed between 1949 and 1959.<sup>26</sup> Some of this growth was necessary. One General Foods scientist commented at the time that there just were not enough strawberries in the world to supply the strawberry flavoring the company needed.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mentley, 288-289.

<sup>26</sup> Levenstein, 109.

<sup>27</sup> Levenstein, 109.

But the explosion of food additives was also due to the requirements of processed foods which, without the additives, just do not taste very good.

Awake is also a good example of the importance of advertising to the food industry. General Foods introduced Awake with a \$5 million advertising campaign, notable because it was half a million dollars more than the entire orange juice industry was spending at the time. The orange juice industry was composed of several juice companies and hundreds of growers; General Foods was a single, albeit very large, company. Within two years Awake accounted for 14 percent of the orange juice business.<sup>28</sup>

Awake was notable for being an entirely new class of product that emulated an existing product. Many genuinely new food products were introduced during the twentieth century but most of these products were raw fruits and vegetables that producers had no choice but to introduce in that form, and many were flatly rejected by consumers. Food manufacturers, on the other hand, could create new products that looked like almost anything they wanted, and the easiest way to ensure a product's sales was to make it like an existing product (or to take an existing product and change it slightly). In this way food manufacturers really were more like manufacturers than simple processors. Many new lines of products introduced or made popular in the postwar era were really just variations on existing products, like nondairy creamer, instant coffee, dehydrated potatoes, cake mixes, instant rice, or

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<sup>28</sup> Buzzell, 50.

frozen orange juice. That is, the end result of using the product was similar to the end result of making something from scratch.

The big change, from both the consumer's and the producer's point of view, was that convenience products made food more abstract. This abstraction was not a postwar phenomena; it had been going on for at least a century. Canned foods, introduced in the nineteenth century, represented an abstraction in food purchasing, as did cleaned fruits and vegetables sitting on a grocer's table. Meat processing was abstracted as well, the dirty work of killing being done at a slaughterhouse hundreds or thousands of miles away, the clean and bloodless cuts of meat wrapped in cellophane packages bearing no resemblance to the animal they came from. However, in the postwar years this process of abstraction intensified. Not only did a cake mix mean a faster cake, it also meant that a cake devolved into three ingredients: an egg, oil, and the mix. The flavoring was in the mix, the leavening (which makes a cake rise) was in the mix, and everything else was there as well. In some ways women perceived mixes as ingredients in and of themselves.

The use of processed foods also represented a reduction in possibilities for women. A pile of raw potatoes can be turned into scalloped potatoes, baked potatoes or mashed potatoes, but a box of dehydrated potatoes can only be turned into mashed potatoes. The ingredients for a cake are basically the same as those for cookies, but a cake mix cannot be used to make cookies. In a way, postwar cooking became more specialized because of convenience foods.

The process of creating new processed foods favored large food manufacturers over small. Large companies could afford to pay for the marketing and research and design for new products, and the costs involved were becoming quite high. One study of the expenses involved with bringing a new product to market showed that the average cost of introducing 111 new products between 1954 and 1964 was \$94,000 per product for research and design (R&D) and marketing research (this does not include distribution costs or marketing costs after introduction). Twenty-one cold breakfast cereals introduced during that time averaged \$182,000 each in R&D and marketing research expenses, while nine frozen dinners averaged only \$23,000 to bring to market. The study only includes data from large manufacturers. While the authors of the study had approached smaller food companies, those companies replied that they either did not introduce new products or had no way of tracking the costs associated with the few new products they did bring to market.<sup>29</sup> The organizational structure of the larger companies, which included accounting processes that allowed them to track expenses associated with new projects, gave them a competitive advantage in being able to compare new product sales against the costs associated with introducing those new products.

Large companies had another advantage in that they could more easily accept the risk involved with bringing a new product to market. They could also more easily exploit the results of R&D through their access to various national markets. They had an easier time with shouldering the costs associated with introducing a new product,

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<sup>29</sup> Buzzell, 111.

as well as the continuing marketing costs for that product, which, one study found, averaged \$1.4 million for the first year of marketing a distinctly new product (i.e., the first product in a new product category). The authors of the study reported that smaller companies' inability to afford that kind of expense was "undoubtedly a more significant disadvantage for the smaller firm than any lack of technical resources for new product development."<sup>30</sup>

The explosion of new products meant significant gains, and significant risks, to food companies. It also meant confusion for the consumer. The dazzling array of choices consumers had at the supermarket was not always a positive thing. For example, frozen foods were more expensive than their fresh alternative, but (as frozen food manufacturers were quick to point out) they included less wasted material. Frozen peas came already shelled, so a pound of frozen peas might equal a pound and a half of fresh peas. This meant they were quicker to prepare, as well. And they had more vitamins--the industry had spent two years studying frozen peas' vitamin content before concluding that, since vitamin C begins breaking down soon after picking, quick-frozen peas were actually healthier than fresh peas.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, though, fresh, in-season peas tasted better. Fresher, healthier, faster, less waste, better tasting, cheaper: each type of food came with a few of these attributes but not all of them, and consumers had to weigh the importance of each in their minds. The midcentury supermarket was becoming a source of confusion for many consumers.

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<sup>30</sup> Buzzell, 166.

<sup>31</sup> Mentley, 287.

Information between food manufacturers and consumers traveled several routes. The most common route information from manufacturers traveled was through advertising, and so advertisers acted as mediators for this information. Manufacturers often found out what consumers were thinking through market research, and advertisers frequently supplied this as well. Of course, the most direct way to tell what consumers were thinking was to look at sales numbers, but manufacturers needed more real information to make good decisions.

Advertisers helped define a product in a consumer's mind and so change it from something indefinite sitting on a store shelf into something the consumer wanted. The thousands of items on supermarket shelves, with more appearing daily, meant that advertising was absolutely necessary for a product to succeed. The possibilities for advertising grew in the postwar era to encompass newspapers and magazines, radio, and television. In the time of live broadcasts, food companies did not just air commercials during programs, they had programs named after them: in late 1957 viewers could watch both the Kraft Theater Wednesday evenings at 9:00 and the Schlitz Playhouse Friday nights at 9:30.<sup>32</sup>

The work advertisers did, then, had grown considerably since the industry's early years of simply writing print advertising copy in the late nineteenth century. J. Walter Thompson, one of the largest postwar companies, had branch offices in South America, Australia, and Europe. In the United States it contracted out the production of various television programs sponsored by its clients, approving both scripts and the

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<sup>32</sup> *J. Walter Thompson Company News*, September 16, 1957, unnumbered page. Box MN11, Newsletters 1910-2005, JWT Archives.

actors who appeared in the programs (and disapproving actors blacklisted because of connections to communism). It handled the rollout of new products, like in the early 1960s when it handled the introduction of two new pancake mixes from Aunt Jemima. The corn and apple mixes were tested for a year in Detroit and Cleveland, then rolled out on a national level using insights gained from the year's testing.<sup>33</sup> J. Walter Thompson also handled more traditional duties like creating advertising campaigns, placing advertising, and performing research studies on the effectiveness of campaigns.

The ability to use a resource like J. Walter Thompson was a tremendous aid for food manufacturers. The agency handled advertising accounts from a variety of nonfood companies and organizations (such as Kodak, Ford, and the 1964 New York World's Fair), and the breadth of its experience meant that food manufacturers could concentrate on developing new products rather than selling those products. Of course, the expense involved with hiring an agency like J. Walter Thompson, which was known for its reliance on market surveys and other sorts of research, may have been beyond the reach of smaller food companies. Access to better advertising companies was another difference between the smaller and larger food companies of the postwar period.

### *Distributors and Grocers*

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<sup>33</sup> *Aunt Jemima Apple and Corn Pancake Mixes, Plan Year II*, July 1961. Box QO1, Account Files 1885-2004, JWT Archives.



Food manufacturers sold their products to distributors, who passed them on to grocers. By the postwar years most distributors in this country acted simply as middlemen working between food manufacturers and grocery stores. The rise of grocery chains before the war spurred independent grocers to band together into "voluntaries," groups of stores that pooled their orders to get the cheapest price possible (they acted as cooperatives to the point where the head of one voluntary had to defend against being branded a "socialist group," writing that the voluntaries' members were "rugged individualists" committed to the free-enterprise system).<sup>34</sup> All distributors, whether voluntaries or tied to a given grocery chain, had years before gotten the message that low prices and volume selling, the mantra of the supermarket, was the way of the future.

Which is not to say that independent grocery stores did not still exist by midcentury. They did, and they even did better than chain stores during World War II. Part of this was because wartime price controls allowed a better profit margin for small stores than chain stores, and also because wholesale distributors, tired of the low-price demands of chain stores who shopped among a number of distributors, favored the smaller independents who had been loyal to them before the war.

By the end of World War II American grocery stores existed along a continuum defined by the services offered and (to a lesser extent) the size of the store. On the one side of the continuum were the "mom and pop" stores that tended to be small operations with a limited number of items for sale. Owners of these shops

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<sup>34</sup> Campbell Stewart, "Retailer-owned Wholesalers Thrive," *Food Marketing*, ed. Paul Sayres (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1952), 61.

usually knew exactly who their customers were and knew both their names and shopping habits. This sort of personalized knowledge allowed them to offer credit to their customers, and they also offered home delivery. One study of a Massachusetts town that was rapidly becoming suburbanized noted that these smaller stores were able to survive because the employees were often the owner and his family, the store was owned outright, and delivery was via the owner's family car. Additionally, owners of these stores often continued in the trade because they could not afford to get into another line of business.<sup>35</sup>

At the other end of the continuum were the supermarkets. The definition of a supermarket at midcentury varied widely. *Progressive Grocer*, one of the leading magazines of the industry, defined it as "Any store, chain or independent doing \$375,000 or more a year." *Food Topics*, another periodical, put the bar at \$500,000 a year. The Super Market Institute (even the spelling of "supermarket" was contested) had a more functional definition: "A complete departmentalized food store with a minimum sales volume of one million dollars a year and at least the grocery department fully self-service."<sup>36</sup> Departmentalization of the store was a hallmark of supermarket: they had grown so large that meat, dairy, produce, etc., each occupied its own area. Self-service, too, was important to a supermarket, and a vital way to keep costs down, although this was something of a fight for store owners. The

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<sup>35</sup> Richard H. Holton, *The Supply and Demand Structure of Food Retailing Services: A Case Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 56.

<sup>36</sup> "Super Market Industry Celebrates Its Silver Anniversary," press release from Edward Gottlieb & Assoc, not dated but probably early 1962, folder 4, Box 305, Paddleford Collection.

general grocery area could be entirely self-service, but customers frequently wanted specialized cuts of meat hand cut by an employee in the meat department, and there were always questions to be asked about the quality of vegetables in the produce section.

Postwar grocery stores ran the gamut from small "mom and pop" stores to 20,000 square foot supermarkets selling thousands of items. As time went on, the smaller stores were squeezed out by the "supers." *Progressive Grocer* reported in December 1959 that the number of grocery stores in America had declined from 400,000 in 1950 to 285,000 in 1959, and it anticipated that number to shrink to 250,000 by 1965.<sup>37</sup>

The newer, larger supermarkets had much more selling space than the older stores. That additional selling space was vital to food manufacturers who were introducing thousands of new products every year: one chain owner estimated that his buyer was "offered 150 to 200 new items every week."<sup>38</sup> It represented a point of tension between manufacturers and store owners, a point brought out in a cartoon in *Progressive Grocer*. In it, a salesman with a briefcase lies on the ground, looking aghast at a number of jars lying beneath a display rack. Above him a store manager says, "I said I'd stock your brand, but I didn't say where..."<sup>39</sup>

Supermarkets had a considerable amount of power in the food industry because they were the ones that sold products to consumers. For a product to

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<sup>37</sup> "Food Retailing in the 1960s," 52.

<sup>38</sup> "New Lines Make Carnation More Contented," *Business Week*, February 22, 1958, 106-112.

<sup>39</sup> *Progressive Grocer*, November 1959, 142.

succeed, it had to be on store shelves, and store owners expected not only a good wholesale price for the product, but also that the manufacturing company help with selling the product. Advertising campaigns were appreciated by grocers, as were other types of marketing, especially marketing which helped to sell several different products. Nabisco produced floor displays for grocery stores that featured not only Nabisco crackers but also photos of soup. In one store with a display, the store went through two cycles of soup stock and three cycles of cracker stock in 30 days, selling \$62.40 worth of products that cost the store \$18.54. The displays were available in sizes that occupied from two square feet of floor space all the way up to 240 square feet of space.<sup>40</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The food industry at midcentury was changing. Large food manufacturers reaped the profits (and the losses) of thousands of new product introductions every year. The marketing and research and design expenses associated with these products--and the advertising expenses associated with keeping existing products in the public's consciousness--meant that smaller manufacturers were being marginalized. Likewise, the new supermarkets, with thousands of square feet of selling space, were pushing smaller stores out of the grocery business. Food

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<sup>40</sup> J. Sidney Johnson, "How Today's Food Manufacturer Sells His Goods," *Food Marketing*, ed. Paul Sayres (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1952), 181.

manufacturers were the entities that made the foods consumers bought, and the stores acted as gatekeepers to those foods.

From the point of view of the industry, the consumer was a distant, unfocused entity that existed in the aggregate. Certainly, supermarket owners came in daily contact with their shoppers, but they came in contact with dozens or hundreds of them daily. Shopper's voices might be loud, frantic, appealing or hushed, but at the end of the week they were a confusion of voices to the supermarket owner. To food processors, the consumer's voice was distant, heard second-hand through marketing or sales reports. While consumers might suggest a new product (and one study of new products showed that 34 percent of new products came from, among other things, direct contact with consumers), there was always a risk involved with bringing out a new product, a time where the (male) product manager had to guess exactly what the (female) consumer wanted. As Ezra Taft Benson gave the speech that opened this chapter on that spring night in 1954, he mentioned the word "consumer" only a few times, only in passing. His voice was that of the secretary of agriculture, speaking to the men of the frozen food industry. The consumers that food was meant for were far outside the hall, clearing half-eaten meals from their dining room tables, washing the dishes, putting the plates back in the cupboard.

And planning the next meal.

Chapter 5: A Silk Purse from a Sow's Ear, or a Chocolate Layer Cake  
from a Caramel Cake Mix

Imagine a suburban woman of the mid-1950s, sitting at the table of her lime-green kitchen, planning that evening's meal. She has a number of resources for planning a meal. There are recipe books sitting on a cabinet shelf, their pages dog-eared or stained from batters and sauces. There is a recipe box filled with handwritten recipes gathered from her mother, aunts, sisters, or friends. There may even be a pile of recipes ripped from the ever-popular women's magazines, either from a regular feature (letting her know how to prepare, say, Dwight D. Eisenhower's favorite meal) or from an advertisement ("The Complete Steps for Betty Crocker's Best Ever Cake!").

Along with these printed materials, evidence of the previous hundred years' fetish with standardization and the printed word, she also has a lifetime of experience with cooking. She knows what foods she, her husband, and her children like (and abhor). She knows what she feels comfortable cooking and which foods she is not quite ready for (soufflés may not be her cup of tea). She knows, roughly, what foods are in the pantry and refrigerator. Whether she loves cooking or hates it, whether she grew up learning cooking from her mother or had to learn it quickly after she got married, she has a knowledge of cooking that was learned on the job and is used on the job. She may not be an expert on the subject but she makes up the evening's

menu, and her shopping list, using both the recipes she has gathered and the knowledge and expertise she has accumulated through the years.

When she takes her shopping list to the store she takes that experience with her. Her original plan for dinner may have featured a roast, but if the store is running a sale on ribs she may change her plan. A change in meat would mean a change in other things she needs to buy so her previous knowledge of what side dishes go with ribs would be useful. The meat counter may also have helpfully laid out a stack of recipe cards with suggested side dishes, as grocery store owners were fully aware that their customers sometimes based their meals on what foods caught their eye--impulse buying was alive and well in the middle of the twentieth century. As this shopper goes about her task, checking off items on her list as she places them in her cart, she uses her competence in cooking, buying, and budgeting while she negotiates between her prewritten list of things to buy and both the items the store has on sale and the items that look appealing. The items she takes through the checkout counter represent an interaction between (among many other things) the recipes she has looked at, the products she found at the store, and her own knowledge about cooking.

### *Neighborhood Grocery Stores to Supermarkets*

The supermarkets of the 1950s represented a very different shopping experience from that seen fifty years previously. At the turn of the twentieth century small neighborhood stores predominated in this country. Shop owners knew their customers by name and knew exactly how many customers they had. As the son of a

Chicago grocer remembered, "If my dad had 50 customers, that's all he had, 50. If he got 51 one day, it would be an odd thing. Somebody from the next block was passing by or got mad at his butcher that day."<sup>1</sup> This knowledge of their customers allowed owners to extend credit to customers and to give them personalized service. A customer entering the store presented her shopping list to an employee, who suggested brands of foods to purchase. The process was labor-intensive for clerks, as most of the store's stock was either behind the counter or in a back room. Many, if not most, items were in bulk, meaning that if a customer wanted a pint of molasses the clerk had to fetch a container for the molasses, draw it out of the molasses barrel, clean the container and barrel, and then move on to the next item on the customer's list. When the clerk had assembled the foods the customer wanted, and after she approved them, negotiations began on the price and method of payment. Prices were not openly listed and were, to a certain extent, negotiable, as was the amount of credit offered to a customer.

As historian Tracey Deutsch pointed out in a study of neighborhood grocery stores in Chicago in the 1920s, there were many issues with shopping at this type of store. Store owners frequently overextended credit to their customers and suffered financial problems when customers did not (or could not) pay their bills. Women resented having to deal with male clerks who watched their every move. In ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Tracey Deutsch, "Untangling Alliances: Social Tensions Surrounding Independent Grocery Stores and the Rise of Mass Retailing," *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 158-159.



neighborhoods, local newspapers exhorted women to shop only at stores owned by people of their own ethnicity, limiting the store selection for women.<sup>2</sup>

It was into this environment that the precursors to supermarkets appeared. Large warehouse stores opened in California in the 1910s, places operating on a high volume/low margin concept where consumers shopped among stacks of goods with clearly marked prices. The stores were self-service, labor being an expense store owners wanted to avoid.<sup>3</sup>

The first Piggly Wiggly store opened in Memphis in 1916. This was another precursor to the supermarket, which operated on a self-service concept with a turnstile at the front door to reduce theft. The founder of the chain once commented on the lack of clerks being a positive thing to many women: "A woman does not like to run a gauntlet of clerks looking her over when she enters a store. This is sometimes the case in stores where clerks are not busy and loll over the counter sizing up the ladies." He went on to add that "in Piggly Wiggly stores, this cannot happen for no one but the checker is in front and his back is usually to the door."<sup>4</sup>

Store owners in the 1920s and 1930s continually refined the idea of what they felt a grocery store should offer. The growth of chains during this time put pressure on local food sellers to cut costs while keeping customers. The advancement of credit, which often helped customers while hurting store owners, was reduced or unavailable in new stores. Chain stores especially shied away from offering credit

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<sup>2</sup> Deutsch, 534.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond W. Hoecker, "The Modern Supermarket--America's Trademark," *Agricultural Marketing*, May 1963.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Deutsch, 166.

because to do so meant a grocer had to have intimate knowledge of a customer's finances and buying habits, knowledge that chain store managers just did not have (decades later, this problem led to the growth of credit rating services). Other services such as home delivery were also absent from newer stores. As the average floor space of new grocery stores increased, the interior of the store was divided into departments by type of food, and many stores had produce and meat departments.

By the early 1960s the Supermarket Institute, the industry's trade association, reported that there were 25,000 supermarkets in the country. As reported in the previous chapter there were differing definitions of exactly what constituted a supermarket, usually based on the amount of sales in a given year. The Raymond Loewy Corporation, a leader in midcentury advertising, had a more ephemeral definition, but one which was much more considered:

A super market is not a grocery store; it is a place where housewives may buy food, plan meals and make important decisions about their budgets and about pleasing their families. It is also a place where, when properly designed, consumers can enjoy a change of pace from the drudgery of housework and the routine of taking care of children. Consumers actually enjoy wandering about the store looking for new things with which to please the family. They even enjoy shopping more when the husband is with them, although at times he will 'run crazy' and ruin the family budget.<sup>5</sup>

The Raymond Loewy Corporation did not define a supermarket in terms of sales, store layout, or services offered; it defined a supermarket as an active entity that affected its customers in positive ways. Women did not just shop at a supermarket,

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<sup>5</sup> "Super Market Industry Celebrates Its Silver Anniversary," press release from Edward Gottlieb & Assoc., not dated but probably early 1962, folder 4, box 305, Paddleford Collection.

they strolled the aisles, looking for new goods with which to "please the family," and they wandered the aisles of a location that was definitively their own. While husbands might add to the shopping experience, there was always the chance that they might lose control and "ruin the family budget." Supermarkets, in the Raymond Loewy Corporation's view, were places that had such a powerful hold on consumers that women, who were often defined as the family's consumers (as opposed to the male role of generating the money), were the only ones who could show enough restraint to be allowed to responsibly shop at a supermarket.

The reality of the supermarket may not have been as rosy as the picture painted above, but it was still one that women liked. Supermarkets offered more variety and lower prices than neighborhood markets, and all prices were clearly marked. While they did not offer credit to their customers, supermarket owners also did not keep tabs on what individual customers were buying. Self-service meant no more nosy questions about having friends over for dinner when a woman bought more meat than usual.

The fact that supermarket customers picked their own products meant less expense to store owners, but shoppers were not always entirely happy with the self-service functionality of supermarkets. A newspaper article from 1962 about the annual loss of 20,000 butcher positions in supermarkets reported consumers' unhappiness with the situation. Many stores that had eliminated butcher positions had installed a buzzer women could push if they had any questions about the prepackaged meat available to them. "When you go up and ring that bell, other

women look at you like you're some kind of a troublemaker or believe you're special," one woman said. Another reported that "The way some of them [the other shoppers] sniff when you do it, you'd think you had a crush on the butcher." A third woman commented on the relative importance of her role as a consumer and a store employee's job as a producer: "I don't like to ring the bell because I'm afraid I'm taking the man away from his work."<sup>6</sup> While store owners would have liked the entire grocery store to be self-service, discontent from consumers kept them from doing so.

Self-service meant that food manufacturers lost a vital sales resource in grocery clerks. In the old system, clerks recommended specific brands to shoppers, while in the supermarkets all products were on display for customers to freely choose from. This meant that advertising became much, much more important to food manufacturers than it had been before. The food manufacturers, not store clerks, were now responsible for informing customers about the qualities of their products.

Food companies tried to influence consumers with advertising both outside and inside the store. Fifty years previously, the job of food company salesmen had been generally limited to taking orders from stores and, as one old-time salesman wrote, placing "posters beyond the easy reach of store clerks, where they would stay up a long time!"<sup>7</sup> By the 1950s, self-service stores and competition among food companies meant that salesmen were taking orders, building and setting up store

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<sup>6</sup> "Old-Time Butchers Are Thumbed Out of Trade," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 April 1962.

<sup>7</sup> J. Sidney Johnson, "How Today's Food Manufacturer Sells His Goods," *Food Marketing*, ed. Paul Sayres (McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1950), 176.

displays, and placing increasingly sophisticated in-store advertising. Product labels were even changed to facilitate in-store marketing: at one point Bisquick had six different labels for its main product to show the various dishes that could be made using Bisquick, and the packages were meant to be stacked high, the various labels hopefully catching the shopper's eye.<sup>8</sup>

This advertising was obviously meant to influence consumers to buy the food that was advertised. While women often did buy the new products that were introduced, they also rejected a large number of new products. For example, the number of cake mixes one food wholesaler offered to grocery stores went from 39 items in 1954 to 108 in 1964, an increase of 69 items. What is not reflected in those simple numbers, however, is the fact that the wholesaler actually added 207 cake mixes during the ten-year period and dropped 138 items.<sup>9</sup> Cake mixes were popular in the 1950s, but even this food category was not without its rejected products. When it came to actually buying a product, women consistently made up their own minds about whether or not they purchased new or existing items.

As women made their way through the supermarkets at midcentury they faced the task of selecting from among thousands of food products, the majority of which had been introduced within the previous few decades. Comparisons between products were often very difficult; a shopper frequently had to rely on previous experience to decide which item to buy among a number of competing products.

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<sup>8</sup> Egmont Arens, "Packaging for the Mass Market," in *Food Marketing*, ed. Paul Sayres (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1950), 235.

<sup>9</sup> Robert D. Buzzell and Robert E. M. Nourse, *Product Innovation in Food Processing, 1954-1964*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1967), 40.

Store owners and salesmen placed advertising displays throughout the store and stacked products in eye-catching ways to get customers to buy their products. Those customers, however, had their own ideas about what foods were good for their families to eat. Even as hundreds of new products were offered to shoppers every year, many of those products, and many older products, were dropped from store shelves. Postwar women were offered consumer choice and they used it, both to the pleasure and pain of postwar food companies.

This chapter began with the image of a woman sitting at a kitchen table writing out her grocery list. She may have later come through the checkout lane of a nearby grocery store with a cart full of only the products on her list, but she probably would not have. Sales, store displays, and free samples all attested to the power and immediacy of being in a grocery store and being able to see, touch, and smell food products. As she loaded the brown paper sacks full of products into the trunk of her car (or let a helpful clerk do that) her eye may have caught a recipe on the back of a box that instructed her just how to make Bisquick pancakes, or Duncan Hines chocolate cake, or Nestle Toll House cookies. The recipes were created by trained home economists, they were tested to be absolutely fool-proof, and they were made to be as simple as possible. The intention was for any woman, no matter what her skill level, to be able to follow the instructions outlined in the recipe and make the product the food company intended her to make.

The problem was that those women had their own ideas about what to do with the products they bought.

### *Food Advertising and Food Writers*

Midcentury food advertising was not limited to cardboard displays in grocery stores; it appeared on television, radio, in newspapers and magazines. The women's magazines of the day were immensely popular, and the five most popular (*Ladies' Home Journal*, *Redbook*, *McCall's*, *Woman's Home Companion*, and *Good Housekeeping*) sold between two and eight million copies every month<sup>10</sup>. The periodicals, often several hundred pages long, were thick with features and regular columns, and with advertising: as far back as 1931 an advertising industry publication noted that the magazines regularly had more than two pages of advertising for every page of editorial copy.<sup>11</sup>

Women's magazines offer an ideal way to look at the food advertising of midcentury. The periodicals were widely read, especially by women in the suburbs, and they featured a considerable amount of food-related advertising. Unlike with television or radio programming, women could peruse the magazines at their leisure, pausing over an interesting recipe or a promising new product. Even members of the advertising industry preferred print advertising to radio or television for selling food, as one adman in 1961 praised the fact that print was "bright, impressive, merchandisable, and has always been a prime food medium and source of new

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<sup>10</sup> Nancy A. Walker, "Introduction: Women's Magazines and Women's Roles," in *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, ed. Nancy A. Walker (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998), 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Katherine J. Parkin, *Food Is Love: Food Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2006), 7.

ideas."<sup>12</sup> As will be discussed below, the articles and features relating to food that appeared in magazines at midcentury also give some insight into the advertising of the period, since there was often a tight connection between food advertisers and the magazine writers in the food section, much tighter than one would find between, for example, advertisers and magazine writers focusing on current events.

The magazine advertisements of the day featured colorful photos (sometimes to the point of garishness) with, usually, a few lines of copy about the food. One older adman remembered the magazine advertisements of the 1920s, when four-color printing began, as the day of "the lush brush and the still more lush phrase," when ad copy was often quite lengthy and very, very descriptive.<sup>13</sup> Glorified illustrations gave way to realistic photography as the amount of copy in an advertisement dropped, and by the postwar years one or two large illustrations in a full-page ad were preferred to a number of smaller pictures.

Flipping through women's magazines of the time one can see ads for many familiar products.<sup>14</sup> Dole spent much of the 1950s promoting its canned pineapple, and the April 1954 *McCall's* contains a full-page ad of a Hawaiian family, in "native" dress, eating pineapple from palm leaves while sitting on the ground.<sup>15</sup> A few pages later Del Monte promoted its cream-style corn, "grown from special seed we

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<sup>12</sup> "Aunt Jemima Apple and Corn Pancake Mixes, Plan Year II," July 1961, 6. Box QO1, Account Files 1885-2004, JWT Archives.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Weir, "Advertising Tells the Story," in *Food Marketing*, ed. Paul Sayres (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1950), 212.

<sup>14</sup> For the purpose of research the author looked through about five years' worth of *McCall's*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Ladies' Home Journal* each from various times throughout the postwar period.

<sup>15</sup> *McCall's*, April 1954, 65.



developed ourselves," with another full-page ad.<sup>16</sup> The January 1956 *Ladies' Home Journal* features an ad from Pepsi, targeted to the "up-to-date woman, conscious of her waistline, [who] has set the trend to lighter, less filling food and drink. Her wholesome eating habits make her active, keep her slender."<sup>17</sup> A Campbell's Soup ad from that issue contains three "recipes" for new soups which are nothing more than instructions on which two cans of soup to blend together (interestingly, the soup can photos on the page highlight a problem with the iconic Campbell's soup label: since there is no picture of the soup inside the can Campbell's had to append "A Thick Soup" to the title of its Scotch Broth soup).<sup>18</sup>

Of course, magazines featured now-defunct products as well. The April 1956 *McCall's* had a full-page ad for Green Spot Orange Drink, whose distinctive attribute seems to have been its distribution plan: customers could buy it either at their local grocery store or through their local dairy, where it would be delivered by the milkman. The ad was a bit vague on exactly what Green Spot Orange Drink was. The beverage was "made from the juice of choice, sweet tree-ripened oranges," but it was called orange drink, not orange juice, and the ad stressed that it was "not carbonated," which indicated that potential customers might be a bit confused as to the makeup of the drink.<sup>19</sup>

While magazine articles usually reflected some form of reality, there has been a long discussion in academic circles as to advertising's relation to reality. Stephen

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<sup>16</sup> *McCall's*, April 1954, 67.

<sup>17</sup> *Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1956, 23.

<sup>18</sup> *Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1956, 55.

<sup>19</sup> *McCall's*, April 1954, 73.

Fox, writing in *The Mirror Makers* (from 1984), argued that advertising reflected existing values much more than it influenced them: an advertisement that showed a woman baking cookies did so because women baked cookies, not because they were supposed to bake cookies. More recently, in *Fables of Abundance*, Jackson Lears argued that advertisers, especially in the early twentieth century, had a considerable amount of power in creating "knowledge" and in shaping society. According to Lears, those early admen were white Anglo-Saxon Protestants who crafted their advertisements with a particular set of ideas about how the world worked, and those advertisements in turn shaped the world to make it more like their expectations.

Writing specifically about women's magazines, Betty Friedan argued in *The Feminine Mystique* that the periodicals (and their advertising) existed, in part, to keep women in the home and dependent on both men and new products. Analyzing a single issue of *McCall's* from mid-1960 she points out that, at an exciting time of space travel, the Cuban revolution, and new directions in the world of art, the magazine "contained almost no mention of the world beyond the home...women's world was confined to her own body and beauty, the charming of man, the bearing of babies, and the physical care and serving of husband, children, and home."<sup>20</sup> For Friedan, women's magazines reflected a grossly warped version of reality.

Responding to this, Joanne Meyerowitz posits that the glorification of domesticity is only one viewpoint to be seen in midcentury women's magazines. Mass culture, of which women's magazines are a part, "is rife with contradictions,

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<sup>20</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 34.

ambivalence, and competing voices." Historians who share her view "no longer assume that any text has a single, fixed meaning for all readers, and we sometimes find within the mass media subversive, as well as repressive, potential." Meyerowitz looked at nearly 500 nonfiction articles from a variety of postwar mass-circulation magazines and concluded that "domestic ideals coexisted in ongoing tension with an ethos of individual achievement that celebrated nondomestic activity, individual striving, public service, and public success." Stories of women who were happy homemakers shared space with profiles of women in politics, the world of business, or the arts.<sup>21</sup>

Meyerowitz studied nonfiction articles in a variety of magazines, some of which were targeted directly at women and some of which were not. Much more recently, Katherine J. Parkin looked at a century's worth of food-related magazine advertisements and concluded that, when it comes to food advertising, Friedan was closer to the truth than Meyerowitz. In *Food Is Love*, Parkin outlines how food companies consistently advertised solely to women throughout the twentieth century, repeatedly using a small set of themes to do so. The themes included the ideas that women are subservient to men and should cater to their whims, that women are solely responsible for their families' health and happiness (which they can maintain through the use of food), and that women should show their love for their families through

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<sup>21</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," in *Not June Cleaver*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 230-231.

food.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the midcentury automobile or credit card industries which tried to increase their markets by appealing to women, food companies never attempted to either appeal to men or to imagine new roles for women. The role of woman as homemaker worked for food companies, so instead of trying to change societal values food advertisers instead sought to reinforce traditional ideas.

In looking at the breadth of both food-related advertising and editorial copy in women's magazines there are several messages that are apparent. First, women were ultimately responsible for cooking the meal. Men could cook in special circumstances where there was no woman (such as widowhood or a sickness in the family), but they would normally not be expected to cook. Second, there was nothing wrong with processed foods. They could save a cook time and, sometimes, money, and those were good things. There was no discussion of the taste of those foods, or possible dangers from using foods that were high in calories and additives. A third message was that consumption (that is, buying) was a good thing. In addition to foods women's magazines often ran features on cooking utensils and appliances that could be purchased for new kitchens and houses. Advertising was a major source of revenue for magazines, and that fact was effectively incorporated into their message.

Even today the boundary between advertising and editorial content remains slim among food-related content in newspapers, magazines, and television: think of television hosts like Rachel Ray or Emeril Lagasse who have their own lines of food products. Food advertisers expect mentions of their products in magazines beyond

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<sup>22</sup> Parkin, 8-10.

just the advertisements they place. A study of the first fifteen years of *Ms.* magazine (1973-1987) found that there was a negligible amount of food advertising in the magazine in spite of the fact that the periodical obviously appealed to women (although in a later time period than that studied here). The magazine was unwilling to have a "home and foods" section which mentioned the brand names of advertisers, and Gloria Steinem explained that the editors "didn't want to have to supply complementary copy and traditional female products wouldn't come without it."<sup>23</sup>

Food writers themselves were often quite game in working with advertisers. For example, Clementine Paddleford was on the mailing list of every large food company in the country and often recycled press releases from food manufacturers into articles. When her first cookbook was published she received letters of congratulations from managers at Nabisco and Campbell Soup, as well as one particular letter from a public relations group that illustrates the sort of relentless promotion Paddleford was exposed to.<sup>24</sup> The author of the letter stated how much she liked the cookbook, and then continued by writing that "Mabel and I were particularly happy--and so is the California Prune Advisory Board--to see at least two Prune Cakes [in the book].... we were equally pleased at the frequent mentions of apples and apple sauce." The company apparently represented apple canners, not growers, as the letter went on to chide Paddleford for not explicitly recommending canned apple

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<sup>23</sup> Parkin, 77.

<sup>24</sup> For the letter from Campbell Soup, see folder 33, box 12, Paddleford Collection, and for the Nabisco letter, see folder 95, box 11, Paddleford Collection.

products, since "our studies have shown that modern cooks more often than not, simply reach up on the shelf for apple sauce and sliced apples!"<sup>25</sup>

Paddleford's column for *Gourmet* magazine, which ran for twelve years, gave her ample opportunity to promote food products. The "Food Flashes" column essentially recycled product announcements the *Gourmet* crowd might be interested in (she started writing it during World War II when, in the midst of rationing and food shortages, filling the column must have been quite a trick). Reading through an example from 1949 is like wandering through a well-stocked European market. "Bellows' Gourmets' Bazaar has a luxury item from France we haven't seen around in eight years, the *coquilles St. Jacques*, a 6 1/2 ounce tin accompanied by 4 scallop shells, price \$2.25 for the set," Paddleford wrote. Readers were informed how they could mail order Amieux brand products (which were celery stalks or sliced tuna in olive oil), five types of honey cakes from Holland (imported by the Stanley Trading Company of New York), Cela Trix and Cara Trix ("twin-sister crackers") from the Devonsheer Melba Corporation, Marguerite de France's lace candies, spiced vinegars from A. M. Richter Sons Company, and the wealth of products offered by the Arthur Bauer Plantation, including artichoke relish, apricot-pineapple marmalade, peach preserve, and sea food and game sauce.<sup>26</sup> Paddleford's column was probably useful for *Gourmet* magazine for several reasons. It connected readers with products they may be interested in, it filled space in the magazine, it gave what equated to free ad

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<sup>25</sup> Letter from Sally Woodward to Clementine Paddleford, January 12, 1961, folder 29, box 12, Paddleford Collection.

<sup>26</sup> Paddleford Clementine, "Food Flashes," *Gourmet*, May 1949, 53+.

space to companies who might advertise in the future, and, with the mostly Euro-centered product announcements, it made the magazine more upscale (this column is one instance where the large food manufacturers who targeted the middle-class were ignored, but *Gourmet* was more than happy to take those companies' advertising dollars for ads elsewhere in the magazine).

While there is no evidence that Paddleford received payment from food companies for mentions in her writing, companies sometimes sent sample products to show their gratitude. In 1934, after Paddleford had written a *Ladies' Home Journal* article about gadgets for outdoor cooking, a manager at the Michigan Wire Goods Company sent a letter of appreciation for "the nice things you said about our Red Hot Roasters and HamburGrills in your article." In addition to the letter he enclosed "for your personal use - two of [the Roasters and HamburGrills], together with two of our Slydforks. Please accept these with our compliments."<sup>27</sup>

Paddleford was helpful to food companies who asked for advice and was frequently prepared to go well beyond just giving advice, as illustrated by a series of letters from 1959 between Paddleford and William Free, the president of the Hungerford Packing Company of Hungerford, Pennsylvania. In May of that year Free sent a letter to Paddleford reminding her that she had visited the company two years previously and had enjoyed the Pennsylvania Dutch "Schnitz" pie his wife had served (Paddleford had even written column about it). The company had spent the time since then working on turning the homemade pie filling into a packaged pie

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<sup>27</sup> Letter from Ben H. Smith to Clementine Paddleford, May 14, 1934, file 51, box 6, Paddleford Collection.

filling, and he wondered if Paddleford would test the result. At the bottom of the letter she wrote "Our tasting staff vote excellent for the Schnitz Pie filling." A second letter from Free, written in July, is a reply to a letter from Paddleford which gave a positive report on the filling. "The product is not yet on the market," Free wrote. "We are endeavoring to evolve a plan of merchandising it. I was pleased with your question, 'Is it being sold mail order?', since we had this method in mind in our overall plan of sale." One can take this chain of events--Paddleford, a nationally syndicated columnist who frequently mentioned food products, testing a product which it just happens will be sold through the mail--as a happy coincidence, but it is much more probable that the original letter, asking Paddleford to test the filling, was a prelude to asking for free publicity for the product. At any rate, on August 17 Paddleford responded by asking about prices and product sizes, and four days later she had a letter from Free with that information, a few extra can labels, and the assertion that he was "pleased" that Paddleford's cookbook, *How America Eats*, was forthcoming.<sup>28</sup>

Another revealing set of letters shows the extent to which Paddleford's columns worked as free advertising for the food industry. In 1958 Paddleford wrote a Sunday column titled, "Lemons for Zest!" It was a short piece which featured a recipe for tartar sauce (the recipe came from Sunkist Growers, although the article did not note that fact). The column began with the sentence, "Drink your lemonade!" and

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<sup>28</sup> Letters from William A. Free to Clementine Paddleford, May 7, 1959, July 3, 1959, and August 21, 1959; letter from Paddleford to Free, August 17, 1959. All are in folder 63, box 11, Paddleford Collection.



then went on to list some of the many uses for lemon juice in cooking: mixed with melted butter on new cabbage, in a sauce with beets, to flavor bread and biscuit doughs, or as a seasoning with vegetables. The article does not seem to be much more than advertising for the lemon industry, and letters from that industry to the West Coast editor for the Sunday supplement Paddleford wrote for clearly perceived it as such. A week and a half after the column appeared the editor forwarded a note from an executive at Sunkist which read, "I imagine that Foote, Cone & Belding [their advertising agency] wishes they could get as much sell concerning lemons into a 1/2 page [sic] as you were able to do in this article." A few days previously someone from Foote, Cone & Belding had sent a memo to the editor essentially confirming this suspicion. The article "was exceptionally well-handled editorially," the memo read, its author adding, "With this kind of editorial support one hardly needs to advertise, does one?"<sup>29</sup>

The food industry frequently did more than just suggest stories. On one West Coast trip Paddleford, who expended considerable effort in meeting and writing about "everyday" women, met with employees of food company Carnation and their advertising agency to talk about possible articles featuring Carnation products. She did not think much of any of the ideas offered by Carnation, but they did suggest she stop in Denver to talk to the wife of a Carnation manager who might be a good person to feature in an article. After interviewing the woman Paddleford noted, "Just an

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<sup>29</sup> Clementine Paddleford, "Lemons for Zest!", August 3, 1958, folder 17, box 89, Paddleford Collection; letter from Lou Scott to Clementine Paddleford, August 7, 1958, and letter from Mac Morris to Clementine Paddleford, September 17, 1958, folder 18, box 89, Paddleford Collection.

average cook, but as I said, she is my 'Carnation' tip and by golly I'll make this a sound story, but likely not inspired except with imagination of which it will take plenty."<sup>30</sup> Paddleford was game to play along with Carnation's story suggestions, even though it meant using a considerable amount of imagination.

However, not everyone in the publishing industry agreed with Paddleford's helpfulness to the food industry. Back in the 1930s Paddleford had sent a letter outlining a possible Christmastime article to an editor at *The American Home* magazine. The response to the query illustrates the occasional antagonism between food manufacturers and food writers. "I got quite excited over 'peacocks to turkeys' and want an article as good as your outline!" the editor replied. "But please do not bring modern comparisons. We give free publicity eleven months a year to callous, ungrateful food trusts -- at Christmas, at least we are entitled to be pure of heart and duty-free to our dear advertising fraternity."<sup>31</sup>

#### *Advertising Recipes and Women's Responses*

Paddleford's columns featured recipes from around the country. Women who read the columns were curious to see what other women were cooking, and they were also looking for new recipes and ideas for their families. Advertisers had been aware of the popularity of recipes since the rise of reader surveys in the 1930s, and recipes were regularly included with magazine ads by the postwar years. In looking through

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<sup>30</sup> Untitled memo, 29 August 1956, folder 1, box 82, Paddleford Collection.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Mrs. Jean Austin to Clementine Paddleford, July 30, 1934, folder 6, box 6, Paddleford Collection.

quarter-page or larger ads from the April 1954 *McCall's*, just over half of the food advertisements were accompanied by recipes. A similar percentage can be seen in the *Ladies Home Journal* from December 1960, and in the June 1948 *Good Housekeeping* just under one half of the ads included recipes. Recipes, the food industry clearly believed, helped to sell products.

The number of recipes in women's magazines, in newspapers across the country, and on boxes and packages of food show that, while the food industry would have been more than happy for women to purchase fully prepared meals from them that required no cooking whatsoever, food manufacturers were under no illusion that that day was coming any time soon (although they were endlessly optimistic that it would, inevitably, come). The existence of all those recipes coming from the food industry points to an essential tension between the industry's goals and how it went about meeting those goals. Food manufacturers, like all companies, wanted to maximize profits and control as much of the market as possible. Convenience foods offered a way to accomplish both of those goals. Convenience foods, which required processing on the manufacturer's part, resulted in higher profits because manufacturers could charge more for that processing, and consumers certainly showed they were not averse to paying more money for more processing. Companies found that new products required a considerable amount of advertising, but at the same time the "new and improved" stamp on a product became a way to draw attention to a product. The vast majority of the new products introduced after the war were convenience foods. Convenience foods inevitably moved work from the

consumer to the manufacturer, resulting in products like cold cereal, which only required milk, or cake mixes, which required an egg and oil. It should be noted that this movement toward convenience happened at all levels of the food industry. General Mills, which watched sales of its Gold Medal Flour decline for most of the twentieth century and whose *Betty Crocker's Picture Cook Book* focused on baking, moved into convenience foods heavily with its Betty Crocker line of cake mixes. Similarly, the popularity of canned and frozen foods meant that both fruits and vegetables could be bought in processed forms as well.

Even so, women were still using their kitchens to chop, measure, mix, and bake rather than just thaw and reheat, and the food industry was still supplying raw ingredients to those women. The industry was in something of a bind: some parts of the industry wanted women to give up the whole cooking process and just buy processed foods while other parts wanted women to continue at least some scratch cooking. At a company like General Mills, which had divisions that produced both materials for scratch cooking and highly processed convenience foods, the tension could run quite high.

The result was a cuisine with something of a split personality that swung wildly between complicated scratch recipes and simple recipes using convenience foods. For example, the November 1954 issue of *McCall's* shows advertisements from the R.T. French company on two facing pages. On the right page is an ad for French's mustard, a convenience food available to American consumers for decades, and the recipe in the advertisement is for Hot Dog Toasties. It calls for five

ingredients, including toothpicks, and the instructions are essentially to warm the franks, spread some bread with butter and mustard, wrap the bread around the hot dogs and broil them until browned. It is a simple recipe based on convenience foods. The left page of the magazine shows an advertisement for French's Spices and Extracts and includes a recipe for Marbapple Ginger Cake, which won "Junior First Prize in Pillsbury's Fifth Grand National Contest." The recipe calls for making the cake from scratch and includes French's cinnamon, ginger, cloves & nutmeg (and Pillsbury flour).<sup>32</sup> On the one page, R. T. French promoted scratch cooking while on the facing page French promoted cooking based on convenience foods. In either case, the company promoted cooking of one sort or another--it did not promote merely going to the store and buying some sort of frozen hot dogs pre-wrapped in a bun with ketchup and mustard already applied which the consumer could just place in the oven and warm up.

In this way food companies continued to promote the idea that, to make food, one needed to cook by using a recipe. Certainly, there were many advertisements that did not include recipes, or that advocated simply using prepared foods, but the idea of recipes was promoted by the food industry throughout the postwar era. Recipes showed up even in situations where one would not expect to see them. One ad for Franco-American spaghetti, which came prepared in a can and only needed reheating,

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<sup>32</sup> *McCall's*, November 1954, 84-85.

included two recipes that used the spaghetti as an ingredient rather than a finished product and which featured suggestions for more dishes using the canned spaghetti.<sup>33</sup>

In situations like that advertisers helped to change ideas about what a recipe should contain and blurred the line between scratch cooking and convenience foods. There was not much discussion in popular culture regarding the importance of using fresh foods in cooking, or of the relationship between fresh ingredients and the taste of the resulting dish. At the same time, American cooks generally had less experience in making dishes from scratch than their mothers or grandmothers had. This lack of experience combined with the possibilities offered by convenience foods resulted in a conception of cooking that often focused on using convenience foods as building blocks in a dish, rather than using raw ingredients or seeing convenience foods as finished products.

An example of this sort of thinking comes from Clementine Paddleford's files. In early 1965 she announced that readers should send in their recipes for a new cookbook. Rather than focus on scratch cooking, it would feature recipes that involved some shortcut--packaged mixes, frozen foods, instant soups--which would be a help for busy women. Submitters were told to specify brand names in their recipe. If a recipe was chosen for the book, the author would receive \$10 and her name beside her recipe.

The announcement resulted in a deluge of mail. Within a few weeks an assistant to Paddleford estimated that they had received 12,000 to 14,000 letters

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<sup>33</sup> *McCall's*, April 1954, 79.

(about half with multiple submissions), and the mail continued to come. It took several months to go through most of the letters.

Two memos summarizing the submissions exist in the Paddleford archives (the submissions themselves were pulped decades ago), and they contain a considerable amount of insight into the types of recipes women considered to be of a high enough quality to win \$10 and a place in the cookbook. The first memo was written by an assistant who had gone through about 900 letters. Roughly half of those recipes were unacceptable because they did not contain any shortcut. Another 40 percent were taken straight from recipes in advertising, as evidenced by an estimated 75 recipes for a string bean dish using the same three branded items. Of the 100 or so remaining recipes, many of those were also recipes from advertisements, but with a small change. "In order to be left with something from which to choose we shall have to use these 'personalized' ad recipes," the assistant wrote.<sup>34</sup>

The fact that so many women submitted recipes from advertisements meant that one could determine which advertising recipes, and which brands, were popular with women. Campbell's condensed soups, introduced sixty years earlier, were especially popular. "American cooking would founder without Campbell's cream soups," the assistant wrote. "It is simpler to say that perhaps eight casserole recipes did NOT contain one or more Campbell's soups." Duncan Hines was the most popular packaged cake brand, "BUT on the merit of one ad only. The ladies have dubbed it the 'Jello [sic] Cake' and every woman in the country must have tried it."

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<sup>34</sup> Untitled memo from Anna Marie Doherty, February 22, 1965, folder 57, box 8, Paddleford Collection.

After describing the recipe, which consisted of the cake mix, a package of Jell-O, and a few other ingredients, the assistant wrote "There is just enough work to make a woman feel self-satisfied. And she enjoys the business of stabbing the cake with a fork before pouring on the glaze. It's intriguing."

A second memo was dated a few months later, after a majority of the submissions had been sifted through. The author of this memo (different from the other memo) was intrigued by how many of the women, when writing about the source of their recipe, said they had gotten the original recipe from somewhere else (a friend, a magazine, etc.), but that they "often added 'changed it so much I now consider it mine,' even though the change might not have been more than using cream of celery soup instead of mushroom, sour cream instead of milk, dream whip instead of whipped cream, another flavor jello with another set of canned frozen fruits." In spite of the change the memo noted that "it was still a box top recipe."

The memo goes on to observe that, as cake mix manufacturers had realized years before, women wanted convenience foods, but they also wanted something they could add a "touch of their own" to. "They love a sort of 'kick-off' idea that can be repeated in what they called 'endless variety' such as substituting flavors of canned soups, or mixing various flavor cake mixes with various flavored jellos and instant puddings." But, the writer of the memo cautioned, women "need to be shown how to do these things, to be given a bit of a push." Campbell's with their soups, and Duncan Hines with their cake mixes, had opened a "Pandora's box of concoctions" that women had apparently taken too far. Duncan Hines had recipes that urged women to



add either gelatin or pudding to the cake mix, but the author of the memo declared that "Some women have gone so far as to mix pudding with gelatine [sic], and leave out the cake."

The memo finishes with an appropriate conclusion:

Be all of this as it may, the outstanding conclusion one can draw from all of these thousands of letters is that American women may be unsophisticated cooks, but they are looking for ideas, and short cuts, and those ideas and short cuts seem to come right out of the ads, off the boxes, and from the can labels. They grow to love these recipes so that they will tell you with a straight face that it is their own, original idea--and they are delighted to share it with you.<sup>35</sup>

Food advertisers' recipes affected on the foods women were cooking. The women sending recipes were a self-selected group that was responding to a contest with a cash reward and a list of requirements regarding the recipes (they had to have some kind of "shortcut"). The recipes submitted were the ones women thought most apt to win a prize. At the same time, though, the author of the second memo clearly believed that these were among the women's favorite recipes, and it is not hard to imagine that they were. It is unlikely that so many women would copy a recipe from an advertisement or box top, change an ingredient or two and try to pass it off as their own original dish just for the \$10 prize.

The fact that so many women changed an ingredient or two in a manufacturer's recipe and then considered it to be their own says something, but exactly what it says is open to interpretation. It could easily be taken as a sign of the poor state of American cooking, the replacement of real creativity with a preset list of

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<sup>35</sup> Untitled memo, April 15, 1965, folder 64, box 8, Paddleford Collection.

purchased options, cooking via can opener and blender. At the same time, though, these were women cooking decades before the slow foods movement, women under real pressures from their families and from lack of time who had to make a meal that was quick and nutritious and enjoyable to their family. If their mothers and grandmothers had made the beef stews and cherry pies their husbands still harkened back to, the women of the 1950s enjoyed a time when the beef stew came from Dinty Moore and the cherry pie came frozen from the supermarket. If the meal didn't taste quite as good as grandmother made it, the food could be prepared with a few flicks of a can opener, a twist of the oven dial and twenty minutes in the oven. Suburban affluence had its positive side; many women chose to trade money for time and experiential knowledge.

There were very few sources during this time that were telling suburban women there was any other legitimate way to cook, or that this type of cooking could be a problem. The popular cooking literature tended to take any recipe and turn it into a "shortcut" recipe. Boeuf Bourguignon, a dish which was popular in postwar America, was featured in *Gourmet* in 1941, where it was a complex dish that took three to four hours to simmer and used both red wine and Madeira. By 1951 it showed up in the ninth edition of the Fannie Farmer cookbook as essentially an Irish stew with some alcohol thrown in. Community cookbooks had recipes for Boeuf Bourguignon that were much simpler.<sup>36</sup> In this environment of devolution modifying

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<sup>36</sup> For more on this see Mary Drake McFeely, *Can She Bake a Cherry Pie? American Women and the Kitchen in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 117-119.

a recipe by exchanging one convenience food for another was an act of creativity, not one of surrender.

One of the most interesting parts of the second memo discussed above is the complaint that "Some women have gone so far as to mix pudding with gelatine, and leave out the cake." Food advertisers and manufacturers had indeed opened a "Pandora's box" when they showed women that the recipes printed on box tops and advertisements were open to interpretation rather than instructions handed down from on high. If one could use pudding mix in a Duncan Hines cake, what other mixes or ingredients could one use? What would happen if one added nuts to the chocolate chip cookie recipe printed on the back of the chocolate chip bag? Or almond flavoring? Or oatmeal? One can interpret women's wholesale adoption of advertisers' recipes as a sign of the food industry's control of women, but it can also be seen as the nature of cooking at midcentury. Women used the recipes that were offered to them, and they changed them as they used them. They experimented. They did not just passively cook the recipes offered to them (and if they had, a single issue of *Ladies Home Journal* would have kept the average cook busy cooking for months). They picked and chose the recipes they thought best for them and their families. Those recipes were modified by their users, sometimes to the horror of advertisers. After all, mixing pudding with gelatin and leaving out the cake mix is the last thing a cake mix manufacturer wanted.

*Conclusion*

The previous chapter began with the image of Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson speaking to a gathering of food industry executives. He spoke in Washington, D.C., the seat of political power in this country, and he spoke to the men who represented power in the food industry. Those men had power and influence in Washington and on consumers across the country. In terms of changes in the foods Americans (and especially suburbanites) ate during the postwar years, those men exercised the most influence on those foods. Suburbanites ate more processed foods in the postwar years than they, or their parents, had eaten in the years before World War II. There were thousands more processed foods on store shelves, ranging from frozen foods to canned foods to mixes and other foods that required little preparation. Even raw foods were made more convenient, such as cuts of meat prewrapped in cellophane. The men who filled that hall in Washington made those foods available to consumers in an effort to increase revenues for their companies.

As they did so those men who worked in business, and the people they worked with in government, changed American society. As Lizabeth Cohen has outlined in *A Consumers' Republic*, postwar America embraced not only consumerism in the marketplace but also in government and in the private lives of Americans. Polling and market research became standard tools not just in introducing a new breakfast cereal but in introducing a candidate such as John F Kennedy for president. The popularity of convenience foods was an extension of this consumerism into private life. Rather than purchasing the basic building blocks for making meals--flour, salt, sugar--consumers chose to purchase foods that were easier

to prepare but which had restricted uses. In this way Americans chose to bring consumer culture a little farther into their lives. Kitchen designs of the time played into this as well, as one popular countertop layout was in a horseshoe shape where the family could sit around the outside of the horseshoe while mother served food from inside the horseshoe. The design bore more than a passing resemblance to that seen in drugstore diners across the country.

Consumers accepted the marketers' promises and manufacturers' inventions by purchasing the foods they offered. Rising wages gave consumers the money to afford convenience foods. The many women who worked outside the home had a further reason to buy foods that took less time to prepare. Consumers not only accepted the manufacturers' new foods, they also accepted the ideas that went along with convenience foods. In particular, many accepted the idea that convenience foods were generally as good as scratch cooking. This gave the food manufacturers more influence than they would have had otherwise. In the early twenty-first century there are many more types of convenience foods available, but there are two differences between then and now that work to minimize the influence of convenience foods. First, there are a number of discourses in the media of how to cook a meal. Television commercials and magazine advertisements from food manufacturers promote the use of convenience foods, but they share space with articles on the importance of using fresh ingredients for scratch cooking, and there are nationwide movements that promote ideas like slow cooking or the use of locally grown

ingredients. Unlike in the postwar years, the discourse on cooking is not focused on the use of convenience foods.

The second difference between then and now is an awareness of the unhealthy aspects of convenience foods, many of which are heavily processed and are high in cholesterol and calories. The list of health problems that stem from convenience foods includes obesity, diabetes, heart problems, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. An awareness of the health problems convenience foods can cause affects the influence of convenience foods today.

Both of these things were largely absent in the postwar years. Because of this, the group that had the largest influence on the foods suburbanites ate was food manufacturers. They produced convenience foods for the public, and by and large suburbanites accepted both those foods and the idea that convenience foods were a fine substitute for scratch cooking. Women influenced the foods that showed up on their dining room or kitchen tables as well, of course, but their influence was limited mainly because of the decline of scratch cooking. While the speed with which a cake mix could produce a cake gave the baker more time in her day, it also restricted the number of things that could be produced from the flour, sugar, salt, and other ingredients in the cake mix. Women had agency in their cooking, but often that agency was restricted by what was offered by food manufacturers. That restriction, in turn, came from the choice to use convenience foods to begin with.

## Chapter 6

Lasagna, Collard Greens, and Chop Suey: The Yes, No, and Maybe So of

Postwar Ethnic Foods

On February 5, 1956, Clementine Paddleford, who once left the molasses out of a published molasses cookie recipe, made another mistake.

The error was in an article in her "How America Eats" series, distributed in millions of Sunday newspapers across the country. In this particular story Paddleford profiled a Hungarian American church in Elyria, Ohio, that had put together a cookbook as a fund raiser. Far from offering bland, Americanized versions of Hungarian dishes, the cookbook seemed to present authentic recipes from the old country. "No festival or holiday is complete without the traditional dishes," Paddleford wrote. "These women wanted their daughters, who were beginning to be real American girls, to inherit their own talent as cooks. So it was that whenever a community supper or picnic was in the making, the foods were prepared the Hungarian way."<sup>1</sup>

Paddleford mentioned numerous dishes in the article. A poppy-seed cake, egg dumplings called *nokedli*, chicken paprika, *palacsinta* ("a huge rolled pancake filled with cottage cheese and sauced with sour cream"), and stuffed cabbage were all included in the book, which was, according to Paddleford, created so the women of

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<sup>1</sup> Clementine Paddleford, "Hungarian Church Dinner," *How America Eats*, 5 February 1956, folder 11, box 82, Paddleford Collection.

the church could pass the recipes on to their daughters. "Now in its ninth printing, it sells for \$1.00 plus 25 cents postage," she added.

Unfortunately, she forgot to list the address where her readers could send their money.

Paddleford was immediately deluged by mail. Some readers sent letters asking where they could get the cookbook, others just assumed that the \$1.00 plus 25 cents postage should be sent directly to Paddleford, or their local newspaper. *This Week*, the supplement her column appeared in, had to hire extra help to respond to all the mail. The newspaper quickly passed a rule that "in the future we will either tell people where to write, when we make such a mention, or will not use the mention, one way or the other!"<sup>2</sup> *This Week* eventually received over a thousand letters from readers, and within a few weeks the women at the Hungarian church had over 7,000 orders in hand from every state in America, plus Hawaii and Cuba.<sup>3</sup> Although 7,000 orders was just a drop in the bucket of the millions of readers of Paddleford's column, the idea of owning a Hungarian cookbook with traditional recipes clearly appealed to many women in America.

This episode is significant because of its positive portrayal of ethnicity. The Hungarians at the church are portrayed as being relatively recent immigrants to the United States, even though the move must have occurred at least thirty years previously, since immigration to the U.S. was effectively shut down after the mid-

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<sup>2</sup> Memo from R. S. Dodson, Jr. of *This Week*, not dated, folder 11, box 82, Paddleford Collection.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Irene Novak to Clementine Paddleford, February 19, 1956, folder 11, box 82, Paddleford Collection.



1920s. While the daughters in the church were "beginning to be real American girls," their mothers still wanted them to cook the traditional foods, an attitude Paddleford clearly approved of. Indeed, having this particular article appear in a column named "How America Eats" indicated that to Paddleford these Hungarian dishes were now, in some way, American dishes, eaten by real Americans.

Interestingly, a close reading of the longer quote above reveals the attitude that it is apparently impossible to have talent as a cook by cooking American foods; a young Hungarian American woman can only be a good cook if she learns cooking using Hungarian recipes. There is a further inconsistency in the text between Paddleford's stated purpose behind the cookbook ("to pass [the recipes] on to their daughters"), the fact that the book was then in its ninth printing (just how many daughters did they have?), and the women's apparent inability to pass on their traditional recipes using the way they themselves likely learned them, through the oral tradition.

At any rate, food writers such as Paddleford clearly perceived that some ethnic foods had positive attributes by the middle of the 1950s. Unlike in the early twentieth century, immigrants were not expected to give up the foods of their homelands in favor of cornbread or baked beans. Rather, there was value in celebrating those foods and passing them on to a new generation. At least that was the case for some types of ethnic foods. A different attitude toward another type of ethnic food can be seen in a Clementine Paddleford column from 1951, five years before the Hungarian article.

In "Sea Island Picnic" Paddleford traveled to Sea Island, Georgia, a corporate-owned vacation spot just off the coast. She set the stage for an outdoor meal with her typically breathless, romanticized prose:

The moon held a semi-tropical beauty to make the heart ache for things gone by. I remembered what I'd read about the history of this place. Here on the islands during Colonial days flourished a luxurious and colorful life. The islanders formed an aristocracy of wealth and power and dwelt each to himself, confessing allegiance only to King Cotton of whom they held their domains in fief. Gone! All is gone. But the legends remain.<sup>4</sup>

As she contemplates the lost past the night becomes chill. She hurries back to the camaraderie of the campfire, where there is singing. "The Four Souls Quartet was warming to moonlight, to fireshine, to beer--'Put on my shoes, walk all over God's Hebben.'"

But Paddleford is not there for the moonlight, fireshine, or beer; she is there for the food--barbecue, done by Ben McIntosh, "a dark shadow tending the chicken over a pit of red-eyed coals." McIntosh is the only man who knows the sauce recipe of John Life, a man who "for half a century wore the island's crown of barbecue king." McIntosh worked with Life for thirty years.

Paddleford is introduced to McIntosh, who is asked to give up the recipe to Paddleford. McIntosh does not directly refuse, but even Paddleford realizes that he does not want to divulge his secret. "I takes some vinegar, I takes some ketchup," he says, and complains that he never measures ingredients. Luckily for Paddleford the

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<sup>4</sup> Clementine Paddleford, "Sea Island Picnic," *How America Eats*, 11 March 1951, folder 17, box 71, Paddleford Collection.

chef at the only restaurant on the island knows the recipe. "I've seen that sauce made hundreds of time," he says. "Do it this way." And then Paddleford prints the recipe.

Ben McIntosh was probably a black man. The article never explicitly says what race or ethnicity he was, but it is full of coded messages. The first time Paddleford sees him he is a "dark shadow." He, unlike anyone else quoted in the article (except for the black singing quartet, which is pictured along with the article), talks in colloquialisms like "Yassir." He is a cook who knows a secret recipe, a situation which should give him some degree of power, but the power is quickly taken away from him. He is essentially told to give the recipe to Paddleford (the actual phrasing is "Tell her how you do that sauce, won't you, Ben?"), and when he refuses, someone else gives the recipe away.

This episode is an example of how postwar cooking literature portrayed blacks, as opposed to how the literature portrayed white ethnics. Most often filling the role of servant or cook, blacks were almost always portrayed as working for whites. In this context, Ben McIntosh is unique: a black man who is recognized for his expertise. However, Paddleford minimized his uniqueness, first by taking away the color of his skin, then by taking his secret recipe. Foods that came from black communities were rarely mentioned as being such when portrayed in the white media. While black foods were a forbidden topic, Southern white cooking was often mentioned in a positive way (along with the sort of "moonlight and magnolias" nostalgia of the South that Paddleford uses above). Of course, the irony is that much

of Southern white cooking has roots in the foods black slaves brought with them from Africa.

Race and ethnicity had an effect on postwar suburbs. People considered to be nonwhite were kept out of suburbs through denial of credit and insurance, contract language that forbade the reselling of a house to certain ethnic groups, and the simple tactic of refusing to show or sell a house. Race and ethnicity also affected the foods eaten in postwar suburbs. Inhabitants of the all-white suburbs often had little problem with trying the foods of European immigrants but they routinely shunned any foods considered to be black. If ethnic foods, to white suburbanites, existed along a sort of continuum of acceptability, foods defined as coming from black culture were at one end of the continuum, European ethnic foods were at the other, and foods from certain other groups, like Chinese or Mexican, were somewhere in the middle. The acceptability of those foods, to a large part, was a function not just of how those foods tasted but also of how acceptable people of those ethnicities were in society, and how close to being "white" people of different ethnicities were considered to be.

The postwar suburbs were made up of whites who were members of the middle class, a group that had grown tremendously since before the war. Advertisers tailored their messages for this group while the mass media in general was directed toward them. Moreover, this group represented a limited cross-section of America. They were not nonwhite, they were neither poor nor extremely rich, but otherwise the suburban population came from both urban and rural areas, and suburbs sprouted up in cities across America. Most of the examples in this chapter come from the national

media and are not derived specifically from suburban examples. However, the evidence cited applies to the suburban experience insofar as suburban attitudes about race and ethnicity matched the attitudes of the larger white American population. To be white and middle class meant the opportunity to move to the suburbs, and while not everyone who could move did, those who did move were not significantly different from those who chose not to.

### *The Importance of Authenticity*

In discussing ethnic foods the subject of authenticity often comes up. When visiting a Chinatown in an American city, one may talk about wanting to visit an "authentic" Chinese restaurant. Advertisements often either specifically mention authenticity or allude to it: a frozen pizza may be "Italian-style," a canned spaghetti sauce may be "just like Momma used to make" (Momma being assumed to be a first- or second-generation immigrant). Authenticity is a powerful idea (or, rather, set of ideas) that affects how people perceive reality, and it can also affect the acceptance of a certain food, or a restaurant, or even a group of people.

The idea of authenticity can be tied to the concept of the invention of tradition, first advanced by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Hobsbawm's definition of invented traditions contains three parts. First, the practices have rules that are "overtly or tacitly accepted" by the practitioners, and the practices themselves are ritualistic or in some way symbolic, such as placing one's hand over one's heart while the national anthem is sung. Second, through repetition the traditions "seek to

inculcate certain values and norms of behavior," such as patriotism or allegiance to a group. Finally, the traditions imply some sort of "continuity with the past"; they are referred to, after all, as traditions.<sup>5</sup> Numerous examples of modern invented traditions are given throughout the book, including the pageantry of the British monarchy and national flags and anthems.

Hobsbawm further outlines three types of invented tradition. The first is "those [traditions] establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups," and many of the trappings of nationalism fit into this group, such as a national flag. The second type includes traditions "establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority." Having members of the military or quasi-military groups like the police carry the American flag at the head of parades is an example. The third type of tradition is those "whose main purpose is socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior." Schoolchildren reciting the pledge of allegiance while facing the flag is an example of this last type of tradition, as it teaches them respect for the flag while they ritualistically recite a list of values.<sup>6</sup>

While there are traditions that fit into more than one of the categories listed above, the idea of authenticity, as it applies to ethnic restaurants, fits in the second category. Authenticity serves to legitimize ethnic restaurants by giving patrons an "authentic" experience, and those restaurants that do not give an authentic experience

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<sup>5</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Hobsbawm, 9.

are held to be illegitimate. Authenticity also serves to legitimize the authority patrons feel they have as it is they who feel that they can determine what a legitimate ethnic restaurant is. Keeping all of this in mind, there are five concepts surrounding authenticity that need to be more fully outlined.

First, it is important to realize that ideas about authenticity often have little to do with historical reality. A good example of this comes not from the world of ethnic foods but from Scottish history; specifically, the history of the Scottish kilt. The kilt is venerated by people, particularly Scots Americans, who are interested in their Scots ancestry. The kilt is believed to be of ancient heritage, part of a tradition carried on even through the most brutal English repression. Each family group has its own pattern of plaid the kilt is made from. Wearing a kilt, therefore, symbolizes not only a connection to the Scots past (one that was defiant in the midst of English repression) but also a link to a certain Scots family group.

As historian Hugh Trevor-Roper has pointed out, the actual history of the kilt is quite different from what is believed. The kilt does not have roots going into its ancient past; it was invented in the late 1720s or early 1730s by, of all people, an English factory owner living in Scotland. Scots families did not originally have their own patterns of plaid, a fact Trevor-Roper verifies by looking at portraits from a number of families soon after the kilt became popular. The concept of family patterns came from cloth factories attempting to sell different patterns of cloth. A generation after its introduction pseudo-historians and writers seized upon the kilt as

an "authentic" piece of Scots clothing, a way to popularize and celebrate a Scots culture in danger of being completely subsumed by English culture.<sup>7</sup>

Beliefs about the kilt are at odds with the kilt's historical reality. The same is true with many types of ethnic foods. Spaghetti and meatballs, chop suey, and the fortune cookie, which are all associated with different ethnic traditions, were invented on American soil. Furthermore, ideas about "authentic" ethnic foods usually imply a sort of historical stasis. Although authentic Italian foods may encompass a wide variety of dishes, for most people that variety would not include a hamburger and French fries, even though McDonalds operates restaurants in large Italian cities, and hamburgers and French fries may be made at home by Italians.

Another important concept surrounding authenticity is that ideas about authenticity usually exist as a cluster of ideas that involve the food, but are not exclusively about it. A good example of this is a Midwesterner's idea of an authentic Chinese restaurant at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The experience begins with the name of the restaurant, usually a two word name that marks it distinctly as a Chinese restaurant. The first word is often a noun with Oriental overtones like "jade" or "panda"; the second is often a place name with additional Oriental overtones such as "garden," "temple," or "palace." The Chinese restaurant experience includes the ethnicity of the waitstaff (Asian), the decorations on the wall (vaguely Asian paintings of snowbirds or mountains), and the menu itself (entrees

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<sup>7</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 15-42.



should be both named and numbered). Of course, the restaurant serves Chinese food, and this is an important part of being an "authentic" Chinese restaurant--but it is certainly not the only thing that makes it authentic, and it is often not even the most important consideration.

A third point about authenticity is that ideas involved with it can survive in spite of the fact that they violate accepted wisdom and reality. For example, "Don't drink the water" is advice that American travelers to Mexico read in travel books and may even hear from friends and family if they announce an intention to travel there. It is well understood that untreated water in Mexico contains microbes that can make travelers sick. In spite of this, the experience of eating in a Mexican restaurant in America--of having an "authentic" experience--is not expected to include a bout of diarrhea because the diner drank a glass of tap water. The authentic experience should include only positive attributes, not negative ones, even if the diner does things (like drink tap water) he or she wouldn't dream of doing at a real Mexican restaurant (that is, one located in Mexico).

The ideas surrounding authenticity are transmitted through many channels including experience and mass culture but they are not codified and are often quite vague. A person who has never visited a Chinese restaurant may closely observe the place upon his first visit; after going to one or two others he will have a set of expectations of what makes an "authentic" Chinese restaurant. While these expectations will exist, they will likely not be precisely delineated in his mind. Rather, he will have a sense of "rightness" in visiting a Chinese restaurant that

corresponds to his vague expectations, and a corresponding sense of "wrongness" in visiting a place that does not agree with his expectations, even if he can't quite put his finger on what is wrong. This vagueness does not, in any way, detract from that person's certainty that authenticity is a very real and almost concrete thing that should be applied in judging ethnic restaurants.

A final point about authenticity is that it is a way of knowing something, and as such, it is a way of making that thing safe. When applied to ethnic foods, authenticity makes both those foods safe and, to an extent, the ethnic group the foods are attached to. To call something "authentic" is to give it a positive label, a nod that it is correct and appropriate. By the postwar years, the mass media portrayed the foods of many ethnic groups, especially those made up of European immigrants, as having "authentic" attributes. Whites considered those groups to be "safe" enough that not only could their foods be made by white suburbanites, but they themselves could buy houses in the newly built suburbs. Other groups, including Asians and Hispanics, had foods that had been made safe enough to eat at home, but people of those ethnic groups were largely kept out of the suburbs. Finally, the foods of a last group--African Americans--were considered to be so unsafe that their foods were rarely mentioned in the mass media, unless they were labeled as Southern foods. When Southern foods were portrayed, blacks were shown cooking and serving food to the point that the "authentic" Southern experience almost *required* blacks to fill that role. In the area of food, whites attempted to contain blacks by consistently portraying them as working in the service of whites, never as working independently

for themselves. The question of African Americans' appropriate place in society was one of the most explosive topics of the time—it is no wonder that containment extended beyond legal or governmental issues to the foods that ended up on a suburban family's kitchen table.

Authenticity was not the only factor affecting acceptance of ethnic foods. Historical trends and events as varied as World War II, the wave of immigration to America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the growth of postwar suburban enclaves all affected perceptions of various types of ethnic foods. Of course, changing ideas about what the concepts of "race" and "ethnicity" included also affected perceptions of ethnic foods. Matthew Frye Jacobson's idea of three broad eras of racial conceptions is useful in this study. According to Jacobson, ideas about race and ethnicity roughly paralleled changes in immigration and citizenship laws and mass immigration to America. The first set of laws, enacted in 1790, made citizenship available to "free white people," setting up an idea of race based on the difference between free whites and enslaved blacks. The advent of mass immigration from Ireland in the 1840s, and the waves of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe who came toward the end of the nineteenth century, marked a shift to the second era where the idea of "race" became highly complex, at least when applied to people with European ancestry. Italians, Irish, Russians, Poles, and Germans were all of different "races" that were subtly different from the "white" race, which consisted mainly of people of English ancestry. The flawed intelligence tests of the time supported these ideas. A final shift in ideas about race began in the 1920s with the

closing of immigration to America and continued with better analysis of intelligence tests and the connection between the eugenics movement and the Nazi's Final Solution. In this third era race was differentiated by skin color and other physical features and essentially simplified into only a handful of races. There was still a dichotomy between black and white, but those with European ancestry became simply "white."<sup>8</sup>

To further examine white suburbanites' attitudes toward ethnic foods and the ways those attitudes played out in the larger society, the rest of this chapter will look at three sets of ethnic foods-- Italian, Oriental/Chinese, and black/Southern foods-- plus what one may term the "base" set of foods considered to be American. The discussion of each set of food will include a brief history of that type of food in the larger white culture and an analysis of how each type of food was portrayed in the postwar period.

### *White/American foods*

While the first cookbook printed in America was published in 1742, and the first cookbook that identified itself as using American foods was dated 1796, cookbooks were printed only sporadically through most of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>9</sup> The 1742 book was a pirated copy of Eliza Smith's popular *The Compleat Housewife*, then in its tenth edition; Amelia Simmons's *American Cookery* is usually considered to be the first cookbook with recipes based on American ingredients. Betty Fussell, *I Hear America Cooking: The Cooks and Recipes of American Regional Cuisine* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 223.

Most women still learned cooking as children, at their mother's knee, so cookbooks were of only limited value (to say nothing of the fact that illiteracy made printed matter worthless to many people). The cookbooks of the time assumed the reader had a considerable amount of cooking experience already. Recipes called for "a lump of butter the size of a walnut" or "the size of an egg" (which was somewhat vague as chicken's eggs come in many different sizes) or "a teacup full of milk." Baking was done in a "quick" oven (very hot) or a "slow" oven (cooler), relative temperatures that took years of experience to gauge. These imprecise instructions were common in the years before standardized measurements.

The movement toward standardization that took place in the late nineteenth century affected cooking just as it did steel working or the railroads. Cookbooks began presenting ingredients in an orderly list before the instructions for making a dish; those ingredients used standardized measurements that were based on man-made items (a cup, a tablespoon) rather than naturally occurring items like eggs or walnuts. Self-regulating ovens meant that temperatures could be expressed in precise numbers rather than relative terms, and the baking time could be more precise as well.

This standardization in the late nineteenth century made it not only easier to cook: it also made it easier to learn how to cook. The change happened at an opportune time for white women of the growing middle class since they were in the midst of a major predicament: they were having a servant problem.

Complaints about servants in America go back to Colonial times, and most of those complaints were along the lines of the servants' irritating (to their employers)

streak of independence and their willingness to quit when unhappy with a job. After the Revolutionary War this independent streak only increased, and as the number of factory jobs available to lower-class women increased the pool of available servants decreased. By the late nineteenth century many women of means had a difficult time finding suitable servants who would work for the pay those women had to offer.

While middle-class women may have been able to afford to keep a maid for a few hours a day, many were unable to pay someone to cook three meals a day for their family. Middle-class women, therefore, were learning how to cook. They had to.

The rise of home economics, the growth of cookbooks, the standardization of cooking, and the servant problem were all linked in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Boston Cooking School, which published one of the most popular cookbooks of the day (and would later be a major factor in the home economics movement), was originally started as a school for lower-class women to learn how to cook the foods that potential employers wanted. Essentially, it was to be a school for prospective servants. A central assumption, therefore, was that these students did not know how to cook the foods of the upper and middle classes. They were immigrant women who knew their own traditions, not the traditions of their (potential) American employers. The foods the Boston Cooking School taught, therefore, were the foods of those employers who were, by and large, old stock New Englanders. Chowders, baked beans, and cornbreads figured heavily in their traditions.

The founders of the Boston Cooking School (who were, as may be guessed, upper-class women worried about the servant problem) miscalculated the market for their cooking school. Early classes were composed largely of lower-class women looking for a job, but succeeding classes of students were composed of middle-class women who could not afford a cook but who did not know how to cook for themselves and their families. That is, the idea of learning to cook appealed far more to women of the middle class, who would be cooking for their own families, than it did to servants of the lower class, who would be cooking for someone else.

The dichotomy between the idea of teaching lower-class immigrants about "American" food and the reality of middle-class women's desire to learn cooking fueled cookbook writing and selling. The Boston Cooking School cookbook was a best-seller around the turn of the century, and Fannie Farmer, who was head of the cooking school for a time, went on to author her own cookbook and start her own cooking school which was designed from the start to appeal to middle-class women. Those women, after all, had both the thirst for knowledge and the disposable income that made publishing cookbooks commercially viable.

Most of the cookbooks produced between the 1880s and the late 1920s assumed a white, middle-class audience. The kinds of foods presented as being American were often the bland, comforting foods of New England, a result of the early popularity of cookbooks like those from the Boston Cooking School. If foreign foods were mentioned at all it was usually French foods (which were considered to be sophisticated). A few stray Italian dishes made their way into the 1896 edition of the

*Boston Cooking School Cookbook*, and their titles were not Americanized. Both macaroni a l'Italienne and macaroni a la Milanaise appear, for example.<sup>10</sup> But, as food historian Sherri Inness points out, "The depiction of foreign food, particularly Italian, Chinese, and Mexican food, provided the media with a way to indoctrinate women readers with the belief that the ideal American woman was white and middle class." As will be discussed below, cookbooks often included stereotypical caricatures of foreigners alongside recipes from other countries or introduced recipes in dialect. Inness goes on to write that while cookbooks did not entirely omit foreign foods, "they were often included with the clear understanding, whether implicit or explicit, that they were inferior to American foods with a northern European background."<sup>11</sup>

There was another (fairly small) strain of cookbooks from this time period, though, that assumed a lower-class audience composed of recent immigrants. These were the cookbooks produced by Progressives worried about the plight of inner city women and their families. These cookbooks offered recipes for meals that could be produced cheaply and relatively quickly by busy women on a limited budget. A central assumption of these books was that the foods produced by lower-class, usually immigrant, women were in some way inferior to other foods. Rather than giving women tips on how to procure ingredients for their current foods more cheaply, or giving them recipes for more inexpensive versions of their current foods, these cookbooks offered inexpensive versions of many of the same recipes which appeared

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<sup>10</sup> Fannie Farmer, *The Boston Cooking School Cook Book* (1896; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997)

<sup>11</sup> Sherri A. Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 89.



in cookbooks aimed at the middle class. In this way both cookbooks aimed at the middle class and those aimed at the lower class had a normalizing affect on popular notions of what foods were American and (through leaving many potential recipes out) which foods were not.

By the 1920s and 1930s, then, most cookbooks were aimed at a white, middle-class audience. The fear of foreign influences that closed American borders in the mid-1920s meant that these cookbooks pointedly assumed that their readers had little knowledge of any sort of ethnic cooking, and little desire to learn. While there have always been a small number of cookbooks aimed squarely at people who want to learn to cook ethnic foods, by and large the most popular cookbooks of that time steered clear of including ethnic foods. The only major exception to this was French foods, which had an air of sophistication.

In the postwar period, though, things changed. Some ethnic foods that had been unpopular, if not almost taboo, in prewar years, suddenly became trendy. Part of this was due to World War II, part of this may have been due to the Cold War, and part of it had to do with things that had no connection to reality.

### *Italian Foods*

Italian immigrants were major participants in the second great wave of immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Millions of them came to America, some to live permanently, others to work, save money, and then move back to Italy. Italian society had a very small upper class (and a small merchant

class), and the rich had little reason to leave their situations in Italy to come to America. Therefore, the immigrants of the time tended to be from the lower classes.

Conditions in Italy at that time were not good. Economically the country was in ruins and jobs were scarce. Most Italians survived on a monotonous diet that focused on polenta. As a type of cornmeal it was filling, but it was dangerous as a long-term staple: corn, unlike wheat, lacks niacin, and over reliance on it leads to pellagra, a niacin-deficiency disease (Native Americans avoided this problem by processing their corn with ashes, which adds niacin to the finished food). Most Italians ate meat only at religious festivals, where they could also interact with the upper class and see the foods their social betters ate.

Immigrants to America have often commented on the abundance of food that was (and still is) available, and Italian immigrants of the time were no exception. They marveled at racks of fresh meat displayed in butchers' windows, neighborhood grocery stores stocked with foodstuffs, and vegetable and fruit sellers hawking their produce in city streets. They purchased the foods they either couldn't afford in Italy, or which were unavailable for any price. As food historian Hasia R. Diner points out, the immigrants took their foods to festivals and other social gatherings here in America where they tasted dishes from different parts of Italy, as well as the foods of the Italian upper class.<sup>12</sup> Factory workers in America ate as well as factory owners back in Italy, and they ate many of the same dishes. Italian immigrants to America might not have owned palazzos or country palaces but they could eat gnocchi in

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<sup>12</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 54.

cream sauce or pasta in tomato sauce any time they wanted. In this context it is no wonder that spaghetti and meatballs was invented in America instead of Italy, where meat was too expensive for most people to eat on a regular basis. The dish so impressed one Italian visitor that he remarked, "I think someone in Italy should invent them for the Italians over there."<sup>13</sup>

Many Italian immigrants went into business, and some of them set up grocery stores where they sold foods imported directly from Italy to other immigrants. These imported foods were important to the immigrants, who placed a high value on the foods from Italy, especially olive oil. This fondness for more expensive imported foods frustrated Progressives who were trying to help Italian immigrants. From the point of view of many Progressive reformers, the fact that Italians not only held onto the culinary traditions from the old country but actively embraced them signified an unwillingness to become a true American. As one contemporary social worker wrote of an Italian immigrant, "Still eating spaghetti, not yet assimilated."<sup>14</sup>

In the years leading up to World War I, Italian foods were, in the white public's mind, generally connected to the Italian immigrants who were eating those foods. The fear and distaste of foreigners kept most ethnic foods, especially those of the southern and eastern Europeans who made up most of the second wave of immigration, out of cookbooks and magazine articles. However, pasta dishes did make occasional appearances in the mass media, and pasta had one major attribute that may have eased its acceptance in the new century: it could be canned. Franco-

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Diner, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Erik Amfitheatrof, *Children of Columbus* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 237.

American, the food company founded in 1887 by a French immigrant, began its life focusing on canned French foods but soon expanded to include variations of spaghetti and other pasta products. The company was successful on a regional basis but only became a nationwide concern after a younger brother of a founder of the Campbell's Soup Company bought a controlling interest in the 1910s.<sup>15</sup> Another immigrant, Hector Boiardi (who came from Italy), started his Chef Boiardi Food Products Company in the 1920s, which later changed its name to Boyardee for easier pronunciation by non-Italians. The company originally focused on canning Boiardi's spaghetti sauce, which he served at his Cleveland restaurant, but soon included other sauces and spaghetti as well.<sup>16</sup> Both companies were major vendors of canned Italian foods.

World War I was a turning point for attitudes about Italian foods for two reasons. First, Italy was an ally in the war, and so the foods and traditions of Italy were portrayed in a positive light in the media (and Italian foods became not so much associated with the millions of poor immigrants in America's cities as they were associated with the people of Italy who were fighting alongside America in the war). Secondly, pasta was an inexpensive, filling food to make during a time when many kinds of foodstuffs, including meat, were difficult to obtain. Pasta's popularity continued to rise during the 1930s and 1940s, again because it was cheap (especially

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<sup>15</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 159.

<sup>16</sup> Gabaccia, 150.

important during the Great Depression) and easy to prepare (important to war workers with little time).

The postwar years saw Italian foods become more mainstream as attitudes about Italy and Italian Americans also became more positive. Many American men had spent time in Italy during the war, and even though Italy began the war as an opponent, the Mussolini government collapsed soon after the allies invaded the Italian mainland. Most of the time the Americans spent in Italy was thus spent fighting against Germans, not Italians, and this may have affected GI's views of Italians as well. Also, by the postwar years Italian Americans were moving to the suburbs along with other whites. In New York City, Italian Americans moved out of East Harlem to Yonkers and Long Island, where Levittown was located. One historian noted that the movement from the city to the suburbs "represented almost as great a break with the past, psychologically, as the crossing over from Italy." The turn of the century immigrants had, in the urban neighborhoods, "re-created a semblance of Italian village life" where men sat outside reading newspapers and music wafted from open windows. "The suburbs [midcentury Italian Americans moved to] would not look, sound, or feel like that."<sup>17</sup>

Food companies advertised Italian foods extensively in the 1950s and early 1960s. In 1958 Chef Boy-Ar-Dee took out a full-page ad in each issue of *Progressive Grocer*, a monthly periodical for grocers. In February the company informed readers about six "Lenten mealmakers" available during the meatless days leading up to

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<sup>17</sup> Amfitheatrof, 247-248.

Easter, which consisted of various types of pizza, ravioli, and spaghetti sauce.<sup>18</sup> In June the company told grocers about the "Italian Food Festival" promotion it would soon be running which was an opportunity to sell quantities of sardines, olives, anchovies, and, of course, "Chef Boy-Ar-Dee products for real Italian-style meals that are ready to heat and eat."<sup>19</sup>

The fact that Chef Boy-Ar-Dee advertised its products as "real Italian-style meals" signifies that, by the postwar period, Italian cooking was seen in a positive light. The affirmative attitudes about Italian cooking extended both to the country of Italy and to its people. For example, a full page advertisement for Chef Boy-Ar-Dee ravioli from a 1957 edition of *Ladies' Home Journal* is dominated by a photo of a bowl of ravioli across the top of the page, while a smaller photo of diners in front of the Roman Coliseum at night occupies the bottom of the page. The copy accompanying the photos reads, "You can serve a real Italian meal right in your home with Chef Boy-Ar-Dee Italian-style Ravioli! It may not have the atmosphere of the Coliseum by moonlight...but it will have all the savory, satisfying flavor of this famous Italian dish." The ad goes on to describe the "miniature macaroni pies...filled with juicy beef...then simmered slowly in a rich tomato sauce that's full of meat...spiced to perfection the true Italian way."<sup>20</sup>

The advertisement appeals to the idea of Italian authenticity, an idea which, as previously discussed, exists much more in the mind of the reader than in historical

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<sup>18</sup> *Progressive Grocer*, February 1958, 16.

<sup>19</sup> *Progressive Grocer*, June 1958, 98-99.

<sup>20</sup> *Ladies' Home Journal*, August 1957, 75.

reality. The ad features a photo of people dining in front of a ruined coliseum, which connects with ideas of tourism and the faded glory of Italy. It has nothing to do with the problems Italy was going through, such as rebuilding in the aftermath of a devastating war. In emphasizing the meat-rich sauce it was also out of touch with postwar food shortages in Italy. In short, the advertisement, like many advertisements for ethnic foods, reveals a gap between reality and ideas about ethnic foods.

However, it does certainly portray Italy in a positive light. Other advertisements of the time showed Italians, and Italian Americans, in positive, if stereotypical, ways. A full-page ad for Hunt's Tomato Paste from 1955 shows a heavy-set Italian woman leaning forward and presenting a tray of ravioli atop tomato sauce. The wording across the top of the ad reads "Oh, Mamma Mia!...wait till you taste RAVIOLI...made with Hunt's Tomato Paste." The Italian woman cooked not only for herself, but also for her family: "Mamma Mia!" the ad continues, "My whole family agrees--ravioli sauce made with Hunt's Tomato Paste is simply wonderful!"<sup>21</sup> Far from assuming that Italian immigrants spread dangerous ideas like Communism or anarchy (as early twentieth-century Americans might have), the ad associates Italian ethnicity with home cooking and traditional sex roles. Ethnicity, in the case of Italians, had become safe for the rest of America.

Americans did not just turn to Italian food when they wanted a canned food that could be made quickly. The November 1954 issue of *McCall's* magazine, for

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<sup>21</sup> *McCall's*, September 1955, 93.

example, contains a recipe for spaghetti and meatballs which requires 27 different ingredients.<sup>22</sup> "Frankly, we were surprised at the number of letters received from readers asking us to republish this recipe," the introduction to the recipe states. "We knew it made the best spaghetti we ever tasted, but we also knew it took a lot of time and an assortment of ingredients. Without a doubt, Mrs. Rossi, our Best Cook who sent us the recipe, really knows her spaghetti." The meatballs require fifteen ingredients, including veal, beef, and pork, while the spaghetti sauce uses twelve ingredients. While the copy with the recipe says nothing more about who Mrs. Rossi was, a reader would likely assume she was a housewife of Italian descent who knew more than a little about making spaghetti and meatballs. A recipe for lasagna printed just over a year later in *McCall's* uses 18 ingredients and was "from the chef of a renowned New York restaurant."<sup>23</sup>

Two more examples show just how mainstream Italian cooking had become by midcentury. First, research done during the 1950s showed a trend troubling to companies that made Italian foods: consumers were developing extremely negative attitudes toward canned spaghetti. Research revealed the change in attitudes had nothing to do with the fact that the foods were Italian; rather, it was the fact that canned spaghetti was so easy to make. "I'd really feel like a lazy slob to serve *canned* spaghetti," one survey respondent reported (italics in the original). "The kind of woman that uses it lays around in a housecoat all day, or the kind of person that doesn't care about their home at all, or someone who knows or cares nothing about

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<sup>22</sup> "A Very Special *McCall's* Recipe," *McCall's*, November 1954, 72.

<sup>23</sup> "A Very Special *McCall's* Recipe," *McCall's*, July 1955, 80.



food....The woman who serves canned spaghetti for lunch to her kids I get the feeling that the kids aren't the least bit important to her. There's no feeling of family."<sup>24</sup>

A second example of how mainstream Italian foods had become comes from the Italian government's efforts in the 1950s to assist Italian food companies in selling to Americans. As might be guessed, food promotions by Italian companies trumpeted the foods' authenticity and the fact that they were made in Italy, and advertisements actively used the Italian flag and phrases of Italian language. Unfortunately for the Italian companies, these were marketing techniques that American companies had been using for years. The promotion failed to gain traction as Italian food companies publicized the authenticity of their products alongside American food companies who also publicized the authenticity of *their* products, and in promotions both groups used many of the same signifiers (like the advertisements mentioned above which used the Roman Coliseum and comments like "Mamma Mia"). The quality of being "authentically Italian" had taken on such value by the postwar period that American-made products could take on the real thing based solely on marketing the products' authenticity.<sup>25</sup> In fact, by the late 1950s some manufacturers were moving away from using motifs that implied Italian ethnicity. One advertiser's internal newsletter proclaimed that a new Kraft campaign was "distinctive in avoiding that much-used

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Katherine J. Parkin, *Food Is Love: Food Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 122.

<sup>25</sup> Parkin, 121.

Italian atmosphere and applying instead simple, dominant product illustrations and large easy-to-read type."<sup>26</sup>

By then, being Italian (as it related to food) was perceived as a virtue. If being Italian, or of Italian ancestry, was not a virtue as it applied to people, it at least was no longer perceived to be a failing. A swarthy complexion and a first name of Mario or Jenò did not keep people out of the suburbs of the 1950s, and many young Italian Americans left the old neighborhoods for the quickly built houses of the suburbs. If they modulated their cooking when they got there, making the pasta sauce less spicy, leaving the Italian sausage behind, trying hard to fit in among a group that was obsessed with fitting in, they also had the option of no longer cooking Italian food for the sake of being Italian. Making a Greek dish like moussaka while living in an Italian neighborhood that butted up against a Greek neighborhood could be unwise; making moussaka while living in the suburbs was just being adventurous. This adventureousness could also be a sign of whiteness. By midcentury, Italian Americans were white.

### *Chinese food, Orientalism, and the exotic East*

The history of Chinese food in America is considerably different from that of Italian food. The lack of a large Chinese American population in the U.S. and a virtual ban on Chinese immigration in the late nineteenth century affected other Americans' perceptions of Chinese food, as did events in China, especially American

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<sup>26</sup> *J. Walter Company News*, December 2, 1959, unnumbered page, box DO15, Newsletters 1910-2005, Domestic--Other Newsletters, JWT Archive.

imperialism in the late nineteenth century. By the 1950s Chinese dishes regularly appeared in cookbooks and in magazine columns, but descriptions of those recipes usually included elements of the exotic and the unusual. In this way white America kept Chinese food at arm's length and, by extension, Chinese Americans themselves.

During the mid-nineteenth century thousands of Chinese, mostly males, came to America to make their fortune. Like the Italians, some came with the intention to stay and start a new life, some came to make money and then return to China, and some came to carve out a life where they could later bring over wives, children, parents, or other family members.

Many Chinese men found work in western mining camps, staking a claim with a group of other Chinese and working the mine until it tapped out. While mining was a popular occupation, another option for an enterprising Chinese man was to go into the restaurant business. Chinese restaurants (which, in the transitory atmosphere of the mining camps, often consisted of a few tables and chairs under a sheet of canvas) were popular with white miners. As mining historian Joseph R. Conlin has written, many miners spent their days soberly working their claims and their evenings eating and drinking with comrades, paying for their meals with some of the day's takings. Chinese foods, especially the spicier varieties, were favored by men who spent the day tasting dust and chemicals from blasting and ore processing.<sup>27</sup>

As the mines gradually tapped out, and as the Chinese were pushed out of the business by racist mining laws, thousands of Chinese went to work building the

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph R. Conlin, *Bacon, Beans, and Galantines* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1986). See chapter 8 (and much of the rest of the book) for this subject.

western railroads. By this time Chinese restaurants had established a toe-hold in western cities and were spreading east. The main factors that helped Chinese restaurants become an accepted part of many western cities, then, were the number of Chinese living in the West and the fact that the restaurant business represented a real opportunity for Chinese workers. There were two other factors, though, that worked to keep Chinese cuisine on the fringe of white American consciousness and away from becoming truly mainstream.

The first of these factors is the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This law, renewed in 1892 and made permanent in 1902, barred entry to Chinese immigrants who did not already have close family in America. The act was passed in the midst of fears of Chinese immigrants (especially on the West Coast) as intense as the fears of European foreigners decades later. While the act did not immediately shrink the numbers of Chinese in this country, it effectively did so over time relative to the number of non-Chinese in America; by the eve of World War II the number of Chinese Americans numbered only in the tens of thousands. The Chinese Exclusion Act affected perceptions of Chinese foods by severely limiting the number of Chinese Americans in this country and by essentially freezing the main population centers at what they were in the 1880s (i.e., mostly western cities). Unlike the millions of Italian Americans who came in daily contact with other Americans after immigration was shut down in the early 1920s, and so were able to show that racist ideas about Italians were incorrect, the smaller Chinese American population (which often centered around various Chinatowns) had contact with only a relatively small number

of other Americans. Many non-Chinese continued to have racist ideas about Chinese Americans in part because they had no significant contact with them. Often this contact was limited to eating in a Chinese restaurant.

A larger Chinese American population would likely have lessened the impact of the most important factor that influenced perceptions of Chinese in this country: that set of attitudes and ideas that Edward Said termed "Orientalism" in his 1978 book of the same name.<sup>28</sup> Said used the term to refer to several interdependent things, including the academic study of Asia and the Middle East and the idea that the Orient, or the East, stands separately from the West (and so is different from the West, but all the countries of the East are similar to each other). Said points out that "the Orient" exists both as a real place and a constructed idea, but it is the construction he is concerned with. Said's book is critical of institutions, including academic institutions, for continuing to use the Orient as a topic of study. Many of Said's critics, in turn, responded that by the late 1970s the Orient as a topic of study was already being phased out in favor of a more realistic focus on countries or groups of people as topics of study. However, during the time period examined here, from the late nineteenth century through the 1960s, the idea of the Orient certainly existed and was influential. The Orient was a vaguely defined area that started somewhere in the Mideast and ran eastward to the Pacific Ocean, and it held a considerable amount of fascination to Americans of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Part of the attraction of the Orient was that it included so many countries and so many ideas.

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<sup>28</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978)

Said provided a laundry list of things Orientalism included: "the whole of India and the Levant, the Biblical texts and the Biblical lands, the spice trade, colonial armies...a complex array of 'Oriental' ideas (Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality)...the list can be extended more or less indefinitely."<sup>29</sup> America's actual experience in the area was minimal, but American influence was slowly extending in that direction. Hawaii, an important shipping port, became an American territory in the 1890s, and the U.S. took the Philippines during the Spanish-American War of 1898. U.S. troops, working with European soldiers, were involved with putting down the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900. American imperialism was stretching its way toward China even as American laws kept Chinese from coming to this country.

Orientalism combined bits and pieces of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures while missing any sort of larger picture; it also became immensely popular in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A fashionable room in a house might contain a japanned room divider featuring Asian dragons in flight alongside both an oil painting portraying nude Reubenesque women gathered at a Turkish bath and a rice paper scroll artfully decorated with Chinese calligraphy. Mahjong, a game imported from China, became a trendy pastime for middle and upper class women of the early twentieth century, and one was even trendier if one wore a Japanese kimono while playing. Ideas about authenticity entered into all of this as well, as familiarity with Oriental ideas replaced real knowledge of Asian and

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<sup>29</sup> Said, 4.

Middle Eastern cultures. Orientalism flattened perceptions of Asian cultures by disregarding essential differences between those cultures. India, China, and Japan have very different histories and contain people who have lived very different lives from each other, but under Orientalism the people of those countries are assumed to have similar attributes. Orientals are clever without being intelligent, childlike (in being quick to display emotions) and feminine (in their passivity) without being masculine, warlike without being strong (they may fight, but they do not fight fair). The view of the East which Orientalism holds is, in large part, the opposite of the view Westerners held of themselves. Orientalism is a mirror which shows the reverse of the original.

Orientalist ideas were reflected in U.S. propaganda from World War II. The US government, fighting against Japan but fighting alongside China, neatly sidestepped the idea that all Orientals are essentially the same by associating positive Oriental attributes with China while heaping the negative attributes upon Japan. The Chinese were thoughtful and clever and came from an ancient and wise civilization; the Japanese were cruel, cunning, and barbarous. Propaganda posters showed Chinese with round faces that emphasized their humanity. Illustrations of Japanese were often caricatures that emphasized their inhumanness, their faces reduced to simple masks, their bodies ape-like or parodies of stinging insects.

Orientalism strongly affected ideas surrounding Chinese foods in America; by the postwar era these ideas were still in place. Unlike Italian foods, which received a significant boost from the fact that many GIs served in Italy and came to like both the

land and its food, ideas about Chinese food were unchanged by the realities of the war. Although mainland China was a major center of fighting during the war few Americans served there and so few had a chance to eat real Chinese food. Wartime propaganda used ideas about Orientals which were already well-known, and they used an existing paradigm.

The Orientalist paradigm which affected Asian foods can be seen in many different sorts of postwar sources, from magazine articles to cookbooks to restaurant menus. For example, the January 1956 *Ladies' Home Journal* had a column named "Line a Day," with a separate recipe or tidbit for each day of the month. The entry for January 7 reads, "Subtlety is the secret of a Near Eastern soup called Supe Ves Limua, beloved by travelers to antique lands." The recipe that followed was simply a can of chicken soup with rice combined with an egg and the juice of half a lemon (a Google search for that recipe name turned up no results). The entry for January 15 reads, "From the land of Aladdin, a gourmet conjures up the following dressing," which was followed by the directions to add salad oil, lemon juice, allspice, salt, and pepper to greens. "Proportions? They are up to you."<sup>30</sup> Vague mentions of exotic lands functioned as window dressing for simple recipes that had little to do with either the Near or Far East.

A postwar menu from the Chun King Riksha Inn in Winter Park, Florida, shows how restaurant menus contained Orientalist ideas. The restaurant was owned by the same Chun King company that supplied canned and dried Chinese ingredients

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<sup>30</sup> "Line a Day," *Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1956, 54.



to grocery stores across the country (and which was, intriguingly, started by an Italian immigrant who later created the Jenò's Pizza brand of frozen pizzas)<sup>31</sup>. The front of the menu features two Chinese characters, one at the top and one at the bottom of the page, with the words "Chun King" spelled out in faux hand brushed writing (the kind that makes a capital A, for example, look like it was made from two long diagonal triangles and one short horizontal one). Inside the menu, along with listings of items like egg foo young, oriental ribs, and fried rice, is a drawing of what one assumes to be a Chinatown scene: a dragon float cavorts along a street festooned with Chinese signs, the float's segments held up by Chinese hiding inside it, while onlookers point and long strings of fireworks explode. Unlike the ads which equated Italian foods with Italian locations such as the Coliseum or Roman cafes, illustrations associated with postwar Chinese foods were just as likely to show a street scene in a generic urban area as they were to refer to a specific Chinese site. American knowledge of Chinese geography was sketchy at best, and beyond the Great Wall Americans would have been (and likely still would be) hard-pressed to name specific locations in China.<sup>32</sup>

A menu for Lee's Chinese Restaurant, located in New York City's Chinatown, probably from the 1940s or 1950s, also has numerous Oriental design motifs. The front of the menu is red with Asian dragons along each side and large Chinese characters across the top. English text informs the reader that Lee's supplies "real Chinese dishes in the heart of Chinatown." The first part of the menu lists dishes

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<sup>31</sup> Gabaccia, 167.

<sup>32</sup> Folder 18, box 176, Paddleford Collection.

typically available in American Chinese restaurants, including many variations of chow mein and chop suey. It also includes a selection of sandwiches for patrons who do not want Chinese food. What is different about this menu, and what reflects its location in a major Chinese American population center, is the second half of the menu, which lists "Special Chinese Dishes." A few paragraphs introducing this section announce that "Only those who have tasted the real Chinese cooking are cognizant of the fact that the so-called 'real Chinese food' generally are in reality simple Americanized Chinese dishes. That is, dishes prepared purely to the American taste, and are quite foreign in China." The introduction goes on to say that Lee's offers "only the highest type of Cantonese cooking," made by chefs "who are trained by experts over [on] the other side." It adds that the list of special dishes is only a part of what the cooks can make (leading one to conclude that there are many off-menu dishes that can be ordered by someone with the appropriate knowledge), and the dishes prepared "are identically the same kind of dishes you would be served if you were ordering in China." This is a type of authenticity that goes beyond Orientalist expectations of restaurants having pictures of dragons on the wall and bad English translations in the menu. Not only are the chefs trained in China and brought here to cook the same foods they were trained to make, their list of dishes is presumably so rarified that only a true initiate into Chinese culture can order the items that are not listed in the menu.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Folder 9, box 178, Paddleford Collection.

While many postwar cookbooks also used Orientalist ideas, not every one did. Many cookbooks simply included Chinese recipes with no introduction and assumed that readers were familiar enough with the dishes that no further comment need be made. *The New Cook's Cookbook*, published by the Edison Electric Institute, had a short section for one dish meals. Of the five recipes that were included (all without comment), three of them could be considered ethnic foods: quick spaghetti, Mexican luncheon dish, and casserole of chow mein.<sup>34</sup>

In the previous example it is significant that chow mein was considered mainstream enough that it was married to one of the trends of the 1950s, the casserole. Indeed, some Chinese dishes were familiar enough to other Americans that bastardized versions of recipes showed up in postwar advertising. One Heinz advertisement featured a recipe for "Suey Supreme" which was essentially a soup containing a mish-mash of ingredients including round steak, Heinz cream of mushroom soup, celery, spinach, and bean sprouts. It was to be served "with crisp noodles."<sup>35</sup> While Chinese cooking was popular in the postwar years, American knowledge of it was not very deep and often ended at (and began with) chow mein or egg foo young.

Some books were written with the express idea of dispelling Oriental attitudes and teaching readers about Chinese culture. Doreen Yen Hung Feng's *The Joy of Chinese Cooking* (the title of which was a nod to Irma Rombauer's perennial classic)

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<sup>34</sup> Home Service Committee, *The New Cook's Cookbook* (Edison Electric Institute, 1953), 48-49.

<sup>35</sup> *Good Housekeeping*, February 1960, 37.

provided a considerable amount of information along with each recipe. A short chapter on Chinese teas, for example, explained the various types of teas, outlined the occasions when tea would be served, and described how to do so. Far more space is devoted in the chapter to information about tea than recipes for making tea.<sup>36</sup> Feng was clearly writing for an audience that knew little about Chinese cooking but was eager to learn. These people existed, but most cookbook publishers and magazine writers assumed that the Oriental paradigm, where Asians were exotic and different, was satisfactory for most readers.

With this in mind, many cookbooks accompanied Chinese and other ethnic recipes with stereotypical caricatures. A fundraising cookbook published by the Overland Park Presbyterian Church of Overland Park, Kansas, in 1947, contains numerous examples of this. The recipe for chop suey shows a child with slanted eyes and a checked coat poling a boat. Araby spice cake is accompanied by an illustration of a man with a stick walking behind a loaded camel. The illustration alongside the recipe for ham rice casserole shows a shirtless man in a coolie hat carrying two wide, low dishes of something, presumably rice.<sup>37</sup> At the other end of the publishing spectrum, the *General Foods Kitchens Cookbook* uses the same sort of stereotypical illustrations to accompany its recipes. In a section on "Around the World Cooking," the recipes for a "Middle East shish kebab supper" are accompanied by a drawing of an Arab in striped robe, holding a crook, standing beside a sheep. The "Japanese

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<sup>36</sup> Doreen Yen Hung Feng, *The Joy of Chinese Cooking* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1955), 105-108.

<sup>37</sup> Women's Council of the Overland Park Presbyterian Church, *The Sampler* (No location: no publisher listed, 1947), 50, 253, 29.

sukiyaki affair" shows a woman seated at a low table, playing a long stringed instrument. Recipes for an Indian meal show both a belly dancer surrounded by dishes and a group of people riding an elephant.<sup>38</sup> While the pictures may be amusing, they also emphasize the differences between the (presumed) white middle class cookbook reader and these people from foreign lands. The recipes seem to open a window on another culture, but it is a view that is known in advance (and therefore made safe) through the paradigm of Orientalism. The copy that accompanies the recipes for a Japanese meal, for example, lists contemporary stereotypes about the Japanese: "their brilliant industrial achievements, their movie palaces, and their passion for baseball."<sup>39</sup> Both in illustrations and accompanying text, existing stereotypes about Orientals were reinforced in many cookbooks, magazine articles, and restaurant menus.

Orientalism, then, was the largest factor influencing ideas about Chinese foods in America. Unlike the situation with Italian Americans, the Chinese American population was small and generally confined to urban Chinatown areas. This meant that the interactions with other Americans which could moderate the effects of Orientalism were rare, and the interactions which did take place were often in the context of Chinese restaurants, which were already ruled by an Orientalist paradigm. Although China fought on the Allied side in World War II very few American servicemen served in China and so did not exit the war with the positive associations

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<sup>38</sup> The Women of General Foods Kitchens, *The General Foods Kitchens Cookbook* (New York: Random House, 1959), 148, 151, 153, 154.

<sup>39</sup> The Women of General Foods Kitchen, 151

the GIs who fought in Europe had of Italy. Time and experience therefore had little effect on perceptions of Chinese foods in at least the first half of the twentieth century. Questions of whiteness regarding Chinese in America were nonexistent: not only were Chinese not white, the larger culture did not even consider the question of whether they were or not. The small size of the Chinese American population meant that, seventy years after the first Chinese Exclusion Acts had been passed, Chinese Americans were not considered to be a threat to whites (at least in terms of the larger culture--there are certainly examples of localized violence against Chinese Americans across America throughout the first half of the twentieth century). Orientalism kept Chinese Americans exotic, semi-foreign, and safe. They could not live in an all-white suburb, but their foods, especially if purchased from a restaurant or deli counter at a grocery store, were welcomed.

### *Blacks, Southern Foods, and Perceptions of the South*

In the fall of 1889 Chris Rutt, a newspaperman-turned-flour mill owner, had a problem. He and his business partner, Charles Underwood, had recently bought a mill in Missouri and decided to sell a brand new product, self rising flour for pancakes. They had supplies, they had a distribution network, they knew their market--but they didn't have a name for their product. So Rutt took a walk one afternoon through the streets of St. Joseph, Missouri, and bought a ticket to a traveling minstrel show. Minstrel shows, a form of popular entertainment, featured white men in blackface, portraying both slaves and free blacks. The entertainers

danced, sang and otherwise cavorted across the stage while performing various skits and songs as if they were stereotypical blacks. On this particular day the performance ended with a white man not just in blackface but also in drag: he wore a dress and had his hair pulled under a bandanna, pretending to be a black cook, or Mammy. He sang:

The monkey dressed in soldier clothes  
Old Aunt Jemima, oh! oh! oh!  
Went out in the woods to drill some crows  
Old Aunt Jemima, oh! oh! oh!  
The jay bird hung on the swinging limb  
Old Aunt Jemima, oh! oh! oh!  
I up with a stone and hit him on the shin  
Old Aunt Jemima, oh! oh! oh!

Aunt Jemima was a stock mammy character, a female slave dedicated to cooking and cleaning for her white owners, and so Chris Rutt obeyed an important rule of advertising: he grafted a generic, unvalued product (self-rising pancake flour) onto an idea that was full of meaning for both white and black Americans. Aunt Jemima pancake flour was born.<sup>40</sup>

Aunt Jemima was just one of a number of African American corporate characters that existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries whose personalities harkened back to slave archetypes (two others still in use are Uncle Ben, associated with the rice product, and Rastus, the man pictured on Cream of Wheat packages). Those characters' existence and continuing popularity show that these characters appealed to a large segment of the American population (mostly to whites-

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<sup>40</sup> M.M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 60-61.

-surveys throughout the twentieth century showed that blacks despised them)<sup>41</sup>. By the postwar era, most whites only accepted African American foods if the foods themselves were not identified as such (i.e. if they were "Southern" foods, or foods produced by a corporation) and if the foods were offered with a spirit of servility. Otherwise, most white Americans were uninterested in African American foods.

The irony, of course, is that the history of Southern foods (which are perennially popular in this country) is intimately tied up with the history of African Americans; specifically, the history of slavery. In the areas of antebellum America that became what Ira Berlin has referred to as "slave societies"--those areas that saw slave labor as being the most legitimate form of labor--the preferred cook was not a white female matriarch but a black female slave. Blacks profoundly affected Southern foodways by bringing not just foods like rice, beans, sesame, watermelons, and yams with them from Africa but also bringing cooking techniques as well. Central American foods like peppers and peanuts were also spread to the American south via slave ships from Africa.<sup>42</sup> The absence of white women in many kitchens meant that black traditions spread quickly to white families. Even though white Southerners may have wanted to deny it, the role of blacks in preparing a meal went far beyond a rote combination of ingredients: they were active in a form of creation, and had been (by the years just before the Civil War), for centuries. Of course, this act of creation held the possibility of a considerable amount of danger for whites.

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<sup>41</sup> See Manring, chapter 6, for an extended discussion of blacks' reactions to Aunt Jemima and similar corporate characters throughout the twentieth century.

<sup>42</sup> Gabaccia, 18, 30-31.



The antebellum South was rife with rumors of black cooks preparing poisoned meals for their ill-fated masters.

The end of the Civil War in 1865 meant the end of slavery and the horrors that went along with it. Life in the South changed drastically during Reconstruction and afterward as people struggled to recreate Southern society. In spite of the profound changes, there was a way of thinking about the South and its history that hardly changed at all during that time period. It was the "moonlight and magnolias" view of the South, a historical fantasy based on unreal ideas of white supremacy and black servitude. This way of thinking dates back to the time of slavery, but by the early twentieth century, when the last slaves had been freed decades previously and old slave cabins had either been rehabilitated, torn down, or left to rot, there was little immediate evidence to argue against this view of the south. The idea of the "glory" of the South, of aristocratic white planters and their pretty daughters attending cotillions in whitewashed mansions while loyal slaves attended to their every whim, was fully alive in the early twentieth century. It continued into the postwar era, as seen at the beginning of this chapter in the article Clementine Paddleford wrote about her visit to the Georgia island. Throughout that time it was useful for white Southerners in conceptualizing the South, and it was extremely useful for capitalists like Chris Rutt when creating a character like Aunt Jemima.

An example of these ideas of the South can be seen in a postwar menu from the Old South Tea Room in Vickburg, Mississippi. On the front of the menu a fat mammy smiles broadly, her hair tucked in a handkerchief, a frying pan with three

eggs being offered to the reader. Inside the menu, the list of dishes includes "Mammy's fried chicken," "Old southern baked ham" ("Recipe Over 100 Yrs. Old"), a creole shrimp gumbo, and chicken pie. The back of the menu explains that the owner of the Tea Room collected recipes from, among other sources, "old family servants, whose instinct for seasoning was acquired direct from slave ancestors who had served in ante-bellum kitchens famed all over the South." This text goes on to comment on the decor of the Tea Room:

You'll recall pleasantly the colorful paintings of river life and characteristic Southern scenes on the walls, the gleam of the ancient polished mahogany, and the sparkle of antique glass and crystal. Colored waitresses in bright 'Mammy' costumes, bandannas and hoop earrings, bring you steaming shrimp gumbo with crisp corn sticks, tempting salads, Southern stuffed ham for which Vicksburg is famous, and above all else--piping hot biscuits!<sup>43</sup>

The "paintings of river life" and other scenes on the wall, the mention of the "ancient" mahogany and "antique glass and crystal," the black waitresses in stereotypical Mammy garb--all of this existed to evoke associations with the idea of the Old South, an association the owner of the restaurant hoped would be financially lucrative.

Most white Americans had no problem with blacks acting in the role of cook or servant. Black women were reputed to be excellent cooks, as evidenced by Aunt Jemima, who magically gave her ability to any woman who purchased her pancake flour.

However, there was a constant underlying message that blacks needed to be controlled, in some way, by whites. In the example of the Old South Tea Room, black labor, in the form of the waitresses in Mammy outfits, is controlled by the

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<sup>43</sup> Menu for the Southern Tea Room. Paddleford Collection, Box 178, File 39.

(assumedly) white owner. In postwar advertisements Aunt Jemima was still portrayed as being the loyal servant to a Colonel Higbee, her mythical antebellum owner. There was a further message that although African Americans were good cooks, their cooking skills and knowledge could be easily taken from them by whites—blacks had no more ownership of those things than slaves owned personal property. In the example that began this chapter, where Clementine Paddleford traveled to a Georgia sea island, the knowledge of how to make the local barbecue sauce is taken from the black expert by a (presumably) white hotel cook. The owner of the Old South Tea Room obtained her recipes from, among other sources, former family servants.

In the corporate world there is a series of origination stories where whites obtain recipes from unnamed nonwhites. Bisquick, for example, supposedly came about because a traveling salesman from General Mills asked a black railroad cook for some biscuits. The biscuits were served only a few minutes later, and the surprised salesman asked how it was possible to make them so quickly. The cook responded that he had a homemade premade mix that drastically shortened the cooking time. The salesman obtained some of the mix, shipped it back to General Mills corporate headquarters, and after company chemists analyzed the mix and identified its components the company had a new product to offer the public.<sup>44</sup> It is interesting that the black cook did not just give the recipe to the salesman. Is it because he supposedly mixed it by eyeing the ingredients, drawing on a belief that

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<sup>44</sup> Gabaccia, 160.

black cooking was so nonrational that blacks could not produce a standardized recipe of their cooking? Or is it because, as the following stories show, these types of recipes were either stolen or sold, but apparently never given? (The cook may not have wanted to give the recipe, but if this was the case, why give a sample of the mix?) Similarly, Fritos Corn Chips supposedly came from a batch of corn chips purchased in San Antonio in 1932 by Elmer Doolin from an unnamed Hispanic food vendor. Doolin was so impressed with the chips that he bought the recipe for \$100, which he borrowed from his mother, who had pawned her wedding ring. After years of selling his product directly to stores he met up with Herman W. Lay, already a big name in the business. Lay agreed to distribute Fritos on a national scale.<sup>45</sup>

Whether those stories are true or not is, to some extent, immaterial. What is important is that they convey the idea of persons of nonwhite status conferring upon whites both a recipe and a sort of authenticity that only comes from the cooking of nonwhites. Biscuits, as a Southern food (they were mentioned earlier in the Old South Tea Room menu as an essential part of a Southern meal), were closely associated with blacks, and so the fact that the recipe for Bisquick supposedly came from a black cook could help its appeal. Similarly, Fritos Corn Chips, through advertising from Frito-Lay, were becoming associated with Hispanics, and so the idea of the recipe coming from a Hispanic would lend the chips a sort of authenticity (in 1968 Frito-Lay introduced a corporate character identified as being Hispanic, but the

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<sup>45</sup> Gabaccia, 165.

Frito Bandito, with his poorly spoken English and lack of respect for the law, was so offensive to Hispanics that he was "retired" only a few years later).<sup>46</sup>

The origination story that trumped both of these stories, and actually contains elements of both, is that of Aunt Jemima, which was repeated in company advertising from the early twentieth century through the postwar era. As M.M. Manring explains in *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*, Aunt Jemima's origination story (the one the company repeatedly told the public, not the one featuring a white man attending a minstrel show) was a blend of truth and fiction so skillfully told it even fooled a postwar actress hired to portray Aunt Jemima, who over a decade after losing the job argued that the Aunt Jemima character was not racist because she was based on a real person.<sup>47</sup>

The basic story went like this: during the Civil War Northern soldiers invaded a Colonel Higbee's plantation and threatened to rip his mustache off. Aunt Jemima, Higbee's faithful cook, intervened and offered the soldiers her famous pancakes. The pancakes were so delicious the soldiers relented and went on their way. After the war those same Northern soldiers set themselves up in the flour business and, while mulling over potential products, remembered Aunt Jemima's pancakes. The ex-soldiers went south and found Aunt Jemima still at the same plantation, still faithfully cooking for Higbee. They enticed her to come north and give them the recipe, first by offering cash, which she declined, and then by offering gold, which she accepted (and which is similar to the Frito story in which the recipe is purchased with cash gotten

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<sup>46</sup> Parkin, 118-119.

<sup>47</sup> Manring, 170.

from the sale of a wedding ring). Although it took some time for the mill owners to convert Aunt Jemima's recipe to a form suitable for mass production, they were able to do it by using science and technology (as General Mills scientists were able to do with the sample of the pre-mixed biscuits forwarded to them from the traveling salesman).<sup>48</sup>

The Aunt Jemima story changed as time went on. By the postwar era parts of it had been altered and bits of reality added to the mix. The back cover of a menu from Aunt Jemima's Kitchen (located "in a gracious Old South setting in Disneyland") shows how marketers had changed the story.<sup>49</sup> "The Story of Aunt Jemima" is told with text accompanying a series of eight pictures, with an additional drawing of the mammy in a rocking chair, holding a sleeping child, surrounded by five other children (all white) in their pajamas, presumably telling the children her story. Gone from the story are the marauding Northern soldiers; they are replaced by survivors of a steamboat accident who took refuge at Higbee's plantation. "Aunt Jemima's cheering words and stacks of her famous pancakes revived their spirits as they enjoyed true Southern hospitality." She no longer sells her recipe for gold, but instead takes the "opportunity to make so many families happy with the ease and satisfaction of serving her mouth-watering pancakes." An additional piece of the legend mixes fact with fiction: "Aunt Jemima made the first of her public appearances at the Columbian Exposition," the copy reads, with an accompanying illustration of Aunt Jemima mixing a bowl of pancake mix before a large crowd. The company that

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<sup>48</sup> Manring, 76.

<sup>49</sup> Folder 27, box 175, Paddleford Collection.

made Aunt Jemima pancake mix did indeed have a booth at that fair, but the woman who mixed the pancakes was a spokesperson hired by the company, not Aunt Jemima herself.<sup>50</sup>

The company that made Aunt Jemima products sought to portray her as the ideal servant: she was an excellent cook, intensely loyal, and devoted to making people happy (which, in the later story, is apparently the reason she left Colonel Higbee--the opportunity to make many people happy with her cooking trumped her loyalty to her former owner). By buying her products, other women could absorb and use her characteristics--the title of M.M. Manring's study of Aunt Jemima, *Slave in a Box*, is entirely appropriate. As it was, though, there was a marked difference between characterizations of Italian women (who were also considered to be good cooks) and black women in postwar advertising and cookbooks. Postwar women could use products and recipes to cook like an Italian woman, and so become somewhat like her (and identify with her), but advertisements using black characters emphasized how the products could be used as a servant would be used, without actually becoming *like* the black character.

For example, a full-page advertisement for Hunt's Tomato Paste from 1960 showed a matronly Italian woman leaning forward, holding a large platter of food.<sup>51</sup> The words "Mamma Mia!...wait till you taste Chicken Cacciatore...made with Hunt's Tomato Paste" appear in a circle near her head. The reader's point of view is that of sitting at the table, which is set for dinner. The household looks middle class, with an

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<sup>50</sup> Manring, 75.

<sup>51</sup> *Good Housekeeping*, April 1960, 117.

end table behind the woman, a chair and curtain visible, flowered wallpaper on the wall. The reader could interpret the ad as meaning that using the tomato paste in the accompanying recipe would help the user cook better, i.e., that the tomato paste is a useful tool. A reader could also interpret the ad as meaning that using the tomato paste would, in some way, make the user more like the woman in the picture, at least in terms of making food. By the postwar years Italian women had a reputation for being good cooks since, after all, they cooked Italian foods.

Portrayals of Aunt Jemima, who was *the* major black female image in food advertisements, stressed the use of Aunt Jemima products as tools and did not try to get the reader to identify with Aunt Jemima. In a publication targeting grocers, an ad for Aunt Jemima Coffee Cake Easy Mix emphasized the fact that it came "Complete with mixing bag, cinnamon topping, and baking pan," essentially all the tools one needed to make the coffee cake.<sup>52</sup> A two-page ad in *Ladies' Home Journal* promoted Aunt Jemima Party Pancakes, which used regular Aunt Jemima pancake mix with chocolate or strawberry milk or eggnog added.<sup>53</sup> While Aunt Jemima's picture is prominent in both of these ads, there is no reason for the reader to identify with her. Her mixes are tools that can help the cook but not, in the process, make the user more like Aunt Jemima. Aunt Jemima was a good cook, but as a Mammy figure, she was also many things women of the 1950s did not want to be: childless, husbandless, working as a slave (literally or figuratively) for someone else.

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<sup>52</sup> *Progressive Grocer*, April 1958, 23.

<sup>53</sup> *Ladies' Home Journal*, February 1956, 30-31.



Blacks were marginalized in cookbooks, and this marginalization also made it difficult, if not impossible, for nonblack readers to identify with black women in the same way they could identify with Italian women. For example, the Junior League of Charleston, South Carolina, put out a cookbook titled *Charleston Receipts* in 1950. Each chapter of the book opened with a short quote, usually some sort of rustic observation, presumably from a black speaker since the quote was always in dialect (dialect was generally reserved only for Southern blacks, not Southern whites, whose speech was usually converted to standard English). A section on canapés opens with "Young married 'ooman een dis day she nebbuh sattify wid old time dish; dey always want fuh mek some kine ob new mixture."<sup>54</sup> Putting the quote in dialect reminded readers where many of the recipes came from; it also implicitly reminded them of the differences between whites (who spoke standard English and who wrote the cookbook) and blacks (who spoke in a thick, nearly unreadable accent). *Dixie Dishes*, published in 1941, discusses the lean years after the Civil War and at the same time reminds readers who the typical Southern housewives supposedly were: "A tradition of fine living had been established and was continued in spite of reverses. And this was achieved by the Southern housewife and her faithful colored helper, who employed imagination in cooking--plus good management!" The writer went on to explain how some lower-class foods supposedly became proper foods to Southern whites during those times: "The poverty stricken aristocracy sat down to many a dinner of corn bread and collard greens (previously considered fit fare for the slaves,

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<sup>54</sup> The Junior League of Charleston, *Charleston Receipts* (Charleston, SC: Walker, Evans & Cogswell Co, 1950), 21.

but not for the masters). Grits were pressed into service too, as were rice and white beans."<sup>55</sup>

This last set of quotes neatly illustrates the hierarchy of Southern groups in the "moonlight and magnolias" idea of the south. The only two groups that exist are positioned at opposite ends of society: the white aristocracy and the black slaves who served them (free blacks and poor whites are conveniently forgotten). Given the two extremes, any reader of the text, including many blacks, would naturally identify with the white aristocrats instead of the black servants. This marginalizes blacks in the eyes of the reader. They are further marginalized in that the foods that are identified in the text as coming from black culture move to the aristocratic white culture, and so become acceptable Southern foods instead of staying unacceptable black foods (the cookbook does indeed include recipes for collard greens and corn bread). Blacks may have developed the recipes but the foods can be eaten only because they are no longer black foods; they are also eaten by Southern whites.

Of course, this marginalization of blacks extended to much more than cooking. Blacks were marginalized in almost all aspects of postwar society, especially in the south. They were kept from voting, they were denied financial credit, they were forced to use public facilities marked as "colored only." The mindset that kept blacks on the edge of society was real and powerful, and, as has been shown, came through in texts relating to cooking. Just as in society in general, African Americans were acceptable in cooking texts only if they were working in a

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<sup>55</sup> Marion W. Flexner, *Dixie Dishes* (Boston: Hale, Cushman & Flint, 1941), xi.

subservient position to whites, and their foods were acceptable only if the foods were also eaten by whites. In terms of the suburbs, blacks were welcomed if working as a servant to a suburban family, feared and disliked if they attempted to purchase property and move into a suburb (there were riots when the first black family moved into Levittown in 1956). Cookbooks and food advertisements from the period show that whites were not prepared to accept blacks as anything close to equals. In the early twentieth century, blacks and Italians were on roughly equal footing in the eyes of many Americans. By the postwar years, the status of Italian Americans had changed considerably while the status of African Americans had changed very little.

### *Conclusion*

Ethnic foods became more and more popular as the 1950s became the 1960s. Foods from around the world, from places like Indonesia or Syria (which most Americans could probably not find on a map) were featured in many magazine articles. There was a craze for Tahitian foods and, especially, Tahitian-inspired drinks at the numerous Tiki bars that sprouted up across the country. One publication for the spice industry noted that postwar supermarkets carried about 31 types of spices while prewar markets had averaged only 11, a change the author partially attributed to more foreign cooking.<sup>56</sup> While Americans still favored older classics like meatloaf or pot roast, there was a new willingness to try unfamiliar foods.

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<sup>56</sup> Stewart P. Wands, "Postwar Trends in Spices," reprinted from *The Flavor Field*. Paddleford Collection, Box 305, File 1.

There are many reasons for this. Soldiers' service during the war, civilian travel after it, and the worldwide scope of the conflict opened many Americans' eyes to the variety of cultures that existed outside of America. The uncontested whiteness of the suburbs made it safer to try foods that, in other locations, may have opened a cook up to challenges regarding her whiteness. The suburbanites' quest for distinction in a world of sameness may also have contributed to the taste for new foods--what better way to show status than by cooking up a trendy new dish for dinner (and then telling one's friends about it)?

In spite of all the new recipes being used, older attitudes about ethnic foods and about people of different races and ethnicities still existed and profoundly affected the foods eaten in suburbs. The attitudes toward the foods, and the attitudes toward the people the ethnic foods were derived from, were directly connected and strongly influenced each other. Rising attitudes about Italians after World War II made Italian food more attractive, but at the same time the popularity of Italian food also helped the popularity of things connected with Italy in general. However, in many instances other attitudes intruded on this relationship. The popularity of Southern foods, which were strongly connected to an idea of blacks cooking for whites, did not help whites to accept blacks on equal footing; rather, it contributed to the idea that the proper place for blacks was one of servitude. Of course, the reality of postwar suburban life also influenced attitudes. The movement of people of southern and eastern European descent into the suburbs enabled other whites to see that these immigrant groups were similar to themselves; the civil rights movement,

displayed on nightly news broadcasts, would have cast blacks as being very different from the white suburbanites.

The attitudes white suburbanites had about people of different ethnicities and races was reflected in their attitudes about ethnic foods, if somewhat imperfectly at times. The study of these foods, and the attitudes suburbanites had about them, shows how ideas about ethnicity and race played out in reality and in one aspect of how Americans lived their lives: specifically, how they ate. When suburbanites ate Chef Boy-Ar-Dee spaghetti they participated in a conversation about Italian Americans; when they marveled at the ease of using Aunt Jemima pancake mix they implicitly commented on the perceived abilities of African Americans. These two examples are utterly mundane, but that was a part of their power: in making decisions about ethnic foods, millions of people also made millions of small decisions about race and ethnicity every day, usually without even thinking about them.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

In early 1965 Clementine Paddleford announced in her nationally syndicated column that she would be publishing a new cookbook. The “hook” of the book was that it would contain “shortcut” recipes, those that included some sort of convenience or prepackaged food. Another twist was that, unlike her earlier cookbook, this book would not be based on previously published recipes. Rather, it would be made up of recipes submitted by her readers. In the article she printed the address her readers were to submit their recipes to. Authors of published recipes would receive a check for ten dollars.

Within the next three months Paddleford received over 50,000 recipes from 35,000 readers.<sup>1</sup> Most of the submissions, an internal memo about the contest surmised, were junk. Submitters missed the point of the contest and sent in any old recipe or copied it verbatim from a cookbook or food package. It was difficult for the staff assigned to go through the mail to find recipes that were good enough to include in the book.

The author of the same memo, in describing the sorts of recipes they were receiving, compared this batch of recipes to a similar contest they held in 1952. “Most of those letters were from elderly women,” the memo read. “The recipes were very poorly constructed and many were illegible.” The new recipes were coming from a very different group of people, though. “We are hearing from lots of young people

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<sup>1</sup> Undated press release from Pocket Books, publishers of Clementine Paddleford's Cook Young Cookbook, folder 1, box 29, Paddleford Collection.

(they still live on snacks...), and from working wives and energetic young-in-heart grandmothers who don't want to spend their lives in the kitchen.”<sup>2</sup>

By 1965 change was in the air. The women who submitted recipes may have read *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, which introduced Julia Child to the public. They may have seen Child’s cooking show on public television, which also promoted the idea of cooking French foods with the best fresh ingredients. They may have read *The Feminine Mystique* and wondered why they had to spend their lives in the kitchen when there were so many other things to do, and they could have read *Silent Spring* and wondered just what sorts of chemicals were hiding in their cupboards and refrigerators. By the mid 1960s new trends were affecting what, and how, Americans cooked.

### *Cooking in the Suburbs*

The food eaten in postwar American suburbs was different than the food eaten before the war. There was much more processed food being eaten, whether it was frozen, canned, or dehydrated. Even if it was fresh, it might look different to consumers when it came home from the store. Meat, for example, may come home neatly wrapped in a cellophane container instead of wrapped in paper, the difference between pre-cut meat purchased at the supermarket and butcher-cut meat bought from a meat locker.

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<sup>2</sup> Memo from Anna Marie Doherty to Clementine Paddleford, February 22, 1965, folder 57, box 8, Paddleford Collection.

The largest factor involved in this change is the growth of the food industry after the war. Large corporations such as General Mills and Carnation introduced thousands of new products every year, and many of those products were types of food that had not existed before the war, such as sugar-coated or nutritional cereals, or they were products which had been improved in some way. New products could often be sold on their newness alone, and this helped to establish them in a marketplace that was rapidly becoming crowded. Most of these products were processed foods that took some of the work away from the consumer, such as frozen peas that were already shelled or canned spaghetti and meatballs that only required heating in a pan.

Food companies received assistance from both the federal government and advertising agencies. The government's role was complex and involved aid at many different levels. Aid for farmers consisted of both financial aid in the form of subsidies and research aid from USDA research stations across the country that studied the most effective way to grow crops. For food manufacturers the federal government, under the Eisenhower administration, suppressed inquiry into the effects of food additives while allowing the largest food corporations to grow larger. Advertisers helped food manufacturers by using sophisticated advertising and marketing techniques to help sell food products and the largest advertising companies were as large, in terms of national reach, as the food companies they represented.

Processed foods the advertising companies helped sell were usually more expensive than their unprocessed equivalents, but postwar consumers were willing to pay extra for the time and energy savings. This willingness can be traced to two other



trends in postwar America. The first is the general prosperity that many Americans, including most suburbanites, experienced as wages increased throughout the period. Consumers had more discretionary income and they spent it on more heavily processed food as well as cars, houses, and home furnishings. The second trend that caused Americans to choose to buy processed foods was the movement of women into the workforce. Traditionally, women were the cooks of the family, and the fact that many of them were working at least part-time meant that they had less time for cooking. Although cooking in the postwar years generally took much less time than it had fifty years previously, it still took some amount of time, and the use of processed foods could cut that time down even further.

There were other changes in suburban cooking as well. Cocktail parties were briefly in vogue as small suburban kitchens and dining rooms made large dinner parties impossible. Outdoor grilling saw a surge in popularity as suburban families took to the outdoors to both cook and eat dinner. This was the rare chance for the man of the house to be involved in cooking, although his role extended only to the cooking on the grill, not to the cooking of side dishes or cleanup. Some types of ethnic foods became more popular in the postwar era as ideas about race and ethnicity continued to change. The foods of European Americans, including Italians, Czechs, and Poles were acceptable to white suburbanites while people of those ethnicities were allowed to move into the suburbs. Chinese foods and the foods of other people considered to be "Oriental" were popular as well, partially because they were exotic, but Asians were still considered to be nonwhite and not allowed to move into the

suburbs. Most suburbanites were not interested in the foods of African Americans unless those foods were portrayed as Southern, in which case there was a considerable amount of interest. Ideas about what made Southern foods "authentic" included portrayals of black servility, and the control of blacks inherent in these portrayals was a reflection of white society's general fear of blacks being out of control. African Americans could not purchase houses in all-white suburbs but they were allowed into the suburbs as workers.

The foods laid out on postwar suburban tables were a reflection of the preferences of the family that was to eat the food, but they were also a reflection of important trends in postwar society. Prosperity, suburbanization, the growth of food companies, changing ideas about race and ethnicity, the movement of women into the workforce--all of those trends can be seen in the foods postwar suburbanites purchased, prepared, and consumed. Large-scale trends do not just affect a society through newspaper headlines and obvious changes. Trends have a ripple effect through all parts of a society, effecting even the most common of items, including the foods people put in their mouths.

### *The Years After*

Clementine Paddleford died in 1967, the year after her second cookbook was published. By this time Americans' attitudes toward food were changing, spurred on by a number of events.

One of those events was the popularity of Julia Child. In 1961 she coauthored a cookbook on French cooking, and a few years later her cooking show debuted on PBS. The tall, boisterous cook was popular among viewers for a number of reasons. She made mistakes on air, she was clearly passionate about her food, and, strangest of all, she made cooking French food look like something any cook could do. The crowd that read and wrote for *Gourmet* magazine had been espousing French cooking since the magazine's founding during World War II, but they portrayed French cooking as something mysterious and complex, something too difficult for the normal cook. They saw French cooking as an art, something that could not be learned, while Child saw it as a craft, something that could and should be learned. With Child's popularity came a newfound appreciation for fresh foods among many people. Convenience had its value, but too often convenience foods were either bland or salty, side effects of all that processing. Even if only a small percentage of women actually tried the French cooking they saw on Child's program, her popularity made cooking with fresh foods a popular option that countered the relentless advertising of the food manufacturers who were focused on selling processed foods.

Another event that changed American attitudes toward food was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963. The book was widely read because of its urgent and direct writing and also because it put into words what so many women were going through. "As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night--she was

afraid to ask even of herself the silent question--'Is this all?'"<sup>3</sup> Two of the six tasks Friedan mentions in the quote are food-related, a testimony to the centrality of food preparation in many women's lives. The feminist movement brought many changes to women's lives in the 1960s and 1970s, a fact historian Brett Harvey commented on in the introduction to her oral history of the 1950s. The women she spoke with "had a hard time sticking to the subject of the fifties. They kept hurtling forward to the sixties and seventies because that's when they changed their lives."<sup>4</sup> Friedan's book, and the modern feminist movement she helped create, caused women to question many of the central assumption of their lives, including why cooking was supposed to be solely their job.

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, started the modern environmental movement in the same way that Friedan's book started the modern feminist movement. The questions that *Silent Spring* and other books like it raised, though, were directed much more at the foods Americans ate. Postwar foods were filled with chemicals of various sorts, including additives and preservatives. Insecticides and pesticides sometimes showed up as well, such as shortly before Thanksgiving 1959, when it was found that a cancer-causing weed killer was in that season's cranberry harvest. The food industry tried to argue that a person would have to eat over seven tons of cranberries to be affected, but the public was unconvinced. Shortly after newspapers reported that one of the main hormones used in raising

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<sup>3</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), xx.

chickens gave cancer to other animals.<sup>5</sup> *Silent Spring* focused on DDT, which had been thought to be perfectly safe to humans. *Silent Spring* and the environmental movement showed Americans that the same foods that could make someone live longer by giving them vitamins and minerals could also kill them.

The civil rights movement and the other movements it influenced, such as those among Native Americans and Hispanics, changed perceptions about foods as well, especially ethnic foods. The range of ethnic foods experienced by white Americans broadened. Mexican foods were no longer just tacos and burritos, they now included a wider range of foods. The popularity of “soul food” meant that African American foods were enjoyed specifically because of their connection to black culture, not in spite of it. Minorities who were involved in these movements were nothing if not assertive, and this assertiveness carried through to representations of their foods as well. Rather than just let food corporations sell ethnic foods, minorities entered the food business and sold their own foods through restaurants and food companies which supplied grocery stores.

By the late 1960s attitudes toward food were changing; the suburbs were changing as well. For one thing, the civil rights movement, much of which had been focused on cities, was broadening its focus to include the suburbs. African Americans began moving into the formerly all-white suburbs. Black activists decried redlining, which was the process the federal government used to rate the creditworthiness of different areas of a city. The presence of even a single black

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<sup>5</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, revised ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 134.

family was enough to put a neighborhood into the lowest category, colored red on maps, which made it very difficult to obtain a loan to buy a house in those areas, which in turn meant families who were already there could not move away. In the mid-1960s the government changed its policy on redlining, making it easier for black families to sell their houses and move into the suburbs.

As historian Zane Miller has pointed out, the mid-1960s marked a shift in perceptions as to what the suburbs represented. Previously the suburbs had been conceived as being subunits of the larger city, areas with some autonomy but which were connected to the whole. The new thinking reduced considerations of civic responsibility and conceived the suburbs as being much more independent of the city than before. The populations of suburbs were becoming more heterogeneous and less connected to each other in terms of social and civic activities.<sup>6</sup>

All of these changes, both in terms of attitudes toward food and the changes in the suburbs, resulted in a different landscape than was seen in the twenty or so years after World War II. Then, rising prosperity had resulted in a population that was eager to buy foods that were a little more expensive but which were easier to prepare. In spite of the threat of nuclear war and the spread of communism, the new foods were emblematic of much of the “new and improved” American culture, which included new houses and new cars. The specific set of circumstances that affected postwar suburbanites has changed drastically since then, but an examination of how those circumstances affected the foods suburbanites purchased, prepared, and

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<sup>6</sup> Zane L. Miller, *Suburb: Neighborhood and Community in Forest Park, Ohio, 1935-1976* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981), xxiv-xxvi.

consumed can shed light on the larger connections between large-scale trends in a society and the everyday activities that people in that society go about doing on a daily basis.

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