

Summer 8-1-2018

Consuming Victory: American Women and the Politics of Food Rationing During World War II

Kelly Cantrell
University of Southern Mississippi

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Consuming Victory:
American Women and the Politics of Food Rationing During World War II

by

Kelly Elizabeth Cantrell

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Letters
and the Department of History
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by:

Dr. Andrew P. Haley, Committee Chair

Dr. Allison Abra

Dr. Heather M. Stur

Dr. Andrew A. Wiest

Dr. Kyle F. Zelner

Dr. Andrew P. Haley
Committee Chair

Dr. Kyle F. Zelner
Department Chair

Dr. Karen S. Coats
Dean of the Graduate School

August 2018

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2018

Published by the Graduate School



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ABSTRACT

Life on the home front formed the most ubiquitous American experience during World War II. Americans in the early 1940s found themselves caught in a rapidly evolving world, which wrought changes both great and small on their daily lives. This project explores women's responses to some of that change. The federal government created wartime agencies to control and direct most elements of daily life from public opinion, to factory production, to employment practices, to family food procurement. The Office of Price Administration was charged with creating a food rationing program to insure steady availability of foodstuffs at home while supplying the allies and military with the surplus. American women encountered this agency most frequently. Therefore, women's responses to the wartime government and its programs are best seen by examining this relationship.

American women used food as a method of expressing deeply held beliefs and through food worked to preserve their own versions of American culture. The Office of Price Administration struggled to force compliance with food-rationing programs largely due to their inability to understand and exploit women's sentiments. As a result, black market activities proliferated throughout the war years. Women viewed these occasional illegal purchases and household hoarding as somewhat acceptable and necessary in their quest to guard the cornerstones of American culture. The Office of Price Administration's refusal to energetically seek out female black marketers and sternly punish those found guilty only helped to create a general tone of acceptance. In short, women cheated food rationing programs because they didn't fear detection and they saw these actions as serving their greater goal of maintaining the home in the face of the

changes created by World War II. Women's magazines and cookbooks supported these actions in a myriad of articles, menus, and recipes which encouraged women to cook without regards to the limits set by the OPA. Women on the home front forged a path that neither strictly followed government food dictates nor completely ignored rationing. For women the discussion never was about rationing anyway: it was about the home and maintaining stability in a world beset by change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My interest in women's use of food during wartime emerged during my time as a graduate student at The University of Southern Mississippi. I owe much to the leadership, scholarship and kind advice offered by the faculty of the history department at USM. I appreciate the guidance and input of the entire dissertation committee as this project moved toward completion. I would like to recognize Dr. Michael Neiberg for his guidance during his tenure as the director of graduate studies in the USM history department. It was during one of his classes on war and society that I first considered food as a lens for studies of war and society. I owe special thanks to Dr. Kyle Zelner. Dr. Zelner first introduced me to the profession of history and the many paths a historian might tread in a career. He also taught me how to conduct myself as both a historian and a professional lecturer. Finally, I owe a deep debt to my dissertation director Dr. Andrew Haley. Dr. Haley possesses the most remarkable ability to think through ideas and build stronger arguments. I must also thank him for being ever-ready to edit and suggest changes to the body of this work. His contribution in time and attention are substantial and enabled me to complete this project. Although I have benefitted greatly from the advice and assistance from the entire dissertation committee, I am sure some mistakes remain in this finished document. These inaccuracies and oversights are completely due to my own lapses and hubris.

In the process of writing this dissertation I had the opportunity to work with and befriend many great instructors and professors. At East Mississippi Community College I have benefitted from the persistent encouragement of Cindy Buob, Scott Baine, Marc

Harris, and Gina Thompson. I have also received professional support and counsel from Dr. Thomas Velek at the Mississippi University for Women.

Finally, I must also acknowledge the patience and love I have received from my family. This project took over ten years to complete. In those years, I asked quite a bit from those closest to me. I hope that one day I can repay them in kind for all their steadfast affection. My mother worked diligently to insure I attended the best primary and secondary schools. She has championed any and all my causes for my entire life. I am eternally grateful. My husband has stood by my side and endured every upswing and downturn that this project and life in general has created. You make my life better and I fall in love with you every single day.

DEDICATION

This effort is dedicated to each and every woman who dealt with the hassles of food rationing, the annoying deprivations of wartime, and yet continued to cook and preserve American culture with each meal. These remarkable women simultaneously cooked and held fast to their values even through a world war. I further dedicate this dissertation to my grandmothers, Bobbie Nell Sullivan Grey and Margie Lorene Wade Cantrell. Sadly, both passed away before I could complete this project and graduate. Although neither of them had the opportunity for more than high school educations, they were would be thrilled to know that I will complete a doctoral degree. They would also be delighted that their lemon pie recipe inspired the entire project.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>OPA</i>	The Office of Price Administration
<i>OWI</i>	The Office of War Information
<i>WWI</i>	World War I
<i>WWII</i>	World War II

INTRODUCTION

What do they defend? What do they defend when they defend America, the hard-shouldered young men of our land, whose khaki suits are weathered by wind and sun and rain? Ask them- and they can give you no answer in words. America is all their lives been, all the things they have known and want to know again. It is a thing too big for words that they are defending; but in their hearts you will find the answer.¹

When Hazel Parker wrote “What do they defend” in February of 1942, she sought to communicate a uniquely female version of wartime patriotism. As an author in a magazine which targeted female homemakers, her target audience wasn’t men nor was her purpose military recruiting. She sought to delineate and give shape to an unspoken form of home front patriotism which women of this country both respected and abided by during the war years. Although Parker references “hard-shouldered young men”, the article hardly attempts to expound upon masculine motivations for fighting. Instead this article, written by a woman for consumption by housewives, endeavors to inspire women. Parker’s “they” in the title addressed women on the home front, and the impetuses behind housewives’ patriotic actions. The language even moves the reader away from ideas of actual combat by using the term “defend”; a verb more suited to the conditions of the home front.

During World War II, America sent thousands overseas in order to end threats to democracy and protect home front values. Parker doesn’t push women to fight on the fields of Europe or the beaches of the South Pacific, but rather hones in on the predominant belief that housewives should actively preserve and secure the traditions and

¹ Hazel Parker, “What do they defend?,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (February 1942): 4.

culture that form American society. They protected and defended these deeply held values. Women's vital and most patriotic wartime deeds centered upon the family and home. The article refers to America as the location for their lives, culture and desires, but repeatedly evokes nostalgic imagery of the home. Parker introduces reasons for defending and preserving American culture using three archetypes meant to cover the breadth and depth of the American experience. The city dweller fights "to keep unchanged the sounds and common sights of this city," the farmer "a village where bells call field hands home for dinner," and the immigrant "out of gratitude for hospitality offered in warm kitchens."² Parker informs her readers that they must work diligently to preserve life and culture in the face of war. The straightforward and repeated mention of food and kitchens reminds home front women of the powerful and persuasive weapons they wielded: domesticity and cuisine. Finally, Parker recognizes the inarticulate yet powerful nature of women's patriotic devices. She tells her readers "there are no answers in words...but in their hearts you will find the answer."³ American women on the home front internalized these sentiments and expressed their own unspoken political reactions through their responses to government rationing programs.

This project seeks to contribute in a meaningful way to the bountiful historiography surrounding women's actions during World War II. Choosing to research women in World War II doesn't set this project apart from hundreds of other monographs, but rather enters it into a much larger discussion on the impacts of the war on American society. Women undertook both military and civilian roles as a part of the

² Parker, "What do they defend?," 4.

³ Parker, "What do they defend?," 4.

national effort to arrest the spread of fascism. Studies of civilian responsibilities often divide women into two camps: workers and volunteers. This study looks at home front society and particularly focuses on women's experiences during the war. However, studies of women in wartime using social history as a framework also abound and their arguments remain repetitive, entrenched, and a bit stale. William Chafe, Susan Hartmann, D'Ann Campbell, and Mary Martha Thomas contributed to this discussion. These authors all explore the impact the war years made on American women's position within the larger society. This debate concluded that the war years formed a transformative experience, but the authors disagreed over the long-term effects of the war on women's roles within society.

This study agrees that the war transformed women, but to a degree this transformation stemmed from the actions of women who embraced domesticity and used the home and kitchen to engage in patriotic action. Earlier works tended toward looking almost exclusively at women who entered the workforce during the war. While histories of Rosie the Riveter have a place in the literature, they also ignore the vast majority of women who either never worked or simultaneously served as housewives. These Rosie histories narrow their focus too severely and miss the longer standing trend toward defending the home as a cornerstone of American culture.

Earlier studies of women's wartime roles, with all their emphasis on women's labor, need to be reframed and their conclusions reassessed. Food history provides a near perfect lens for better viewing the American home front during World War II and showing the political basis for women's food decisions. Everyone eats, and under Office of Price Administration's wartime controls all Americans also rationed food. Americans

also continued constructing personal and community identity, expressing political ideals and defining culture using food in spite of and alongside the national emergency. Women on the American home front advanced their own unspoken political goals through their interactions with food, rationing programs, and their willingness to participate in illegal black markets in order to maintain their own cultural norms and definitions of patriotic action. This study coalesces a variety of resources from oral histories, to contemporary magazine articles, to OPA enforcement division reports, in order to highlight the myriad of ways in which women molded and directed a political response to wartime demands placed upon the home front. It argues that women formed their own definition of proper patriotic action which incorporated their desire to preserve rituals of American culture, defend female authority over the domestic sphere, and individually support military servicemen in training and fighting overseas. Women followed and undermined OPA food rationing rules in equal measure. Their actions, when examined as a part of a larger goal of sustaining female authority and influencing society through cultural expression, shed a long held patina of capriciousness and clearly emerge as intentional, if less than organized. Thus decisions about menus and recipe choices for family dinners form an important bridge in our understanding of women's history in America. Women of the early 1940s used food to share and give evidence of political awareness which connects their actions to the stirrings of radical feminine power embedded in postwar political consensus.

No study of women on the home front during World War II could be complete without acknowledging the contributions to this topic from the field of women's history. Many of these historians wrote with the goal of placing women's actions in World War II

into a larger discourse of women's impacts and roles in American society throughout the twentieth century. For these historians, World War II formed a bridge to the political mechanisms inherent in the postwar era. In *The American Woman: Her Changing Social Economic and Political Roles, 1920-1970*, William Henry Chafe argues that World War II drastically restructured American women's lives.⁴ Although roundly criticized for not fully supporting his assertion that the war shifted the course of women's roles in society, the work received plenty of attention. The overarching argument of this book holds that women's historic experiences evidence horrible inequality, but that at moments of national necessity women's roles bend to accommodate the needs of the nation and that these shifts create greater gender equality. Chafe's next two works sought to provide further context for his contention that the war years altered the pattern of women's lives.⁵ Chafe's thesis elicited a forceful response from the historical community. Women's historians sought a historical basis for the women's liberation movement and feminism that developed during the 1960s. Most preferred to explain women's desire for equality in the same manner as Betty Friedan, as a phenomenon that grew out of the discontent and disappointment 1950s women felt typified their lives. Chafe's insistence that the real tipping point for American women occurred during the 1940s seemed unfounded since countless women left the workplace to live the suburban dream after the war. This project recognizes the importance of the war years, as they reflect a long standing response to government where women used traditional feminine roles as justification for

⁴ William Henry Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social Economic and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

⁵ William Henry Chafe, *Women and Equality: Changing Patterns in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); William Henry Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

political action. Women responded in like ways for each armed conflict the United States faced, and this response constituted a longitudinal and successful bid for political prominence.

Both Susan Hartmann's first work and my own argument acknowledge this continuity of domesticity-infused political action. Susan Hartmann's *The Home Front and Beyond*, argues that World War II did little to change the long-term situation nor did it alleviate domestic responsibilities for American women.⁶ Hartmann saw the political and social gains experienced during the war to be an aberration caused by the national emergency and temporary. D'Ann Campbell argues that the imposition of traditional roles checked this progress towards sexual equality in the United States during World War II.⁷ It is in this arena that Campbell's work contrasts with my thesis: women fell back on traditional roles as a proven avenue to greater political equality. For Campbell, World War II created temporary changes for women, which were limited by traditional roles. This project sees the use of traditional roles as the main component in a long journey toward equality. However, Campbell uncovers a multitude of pertinent information to this study. *Women at War with America* carefully picked apart government appeals to the home front and discovered the most effective used traditional family values and gender roles. The majority of women did not flock to wartime industrial plants in massive numbers, but they did ration their family's food. Campbell argues that the reason for this picking and choosing was associated with the way women saw themselves

⁶ Susan Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982).

⁷ D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

in society. Women understood their position in society to be that of a mother or a caregiver; roles better expressed through food than outside employment. Campbell's study also shows a slow progression toward a gendered thinking about rationing. Whereas Chafe and Hartmann only mention rationing and housewifery in passing; Campbell devotes a considerable amount of space in her work to the home front warrior. The chapters "Heroines on the Home Front" and "Volunteer, Worker, or Housewife?" both address the topic of rationing and the subtle ways that women's housework became symbolic during the war.⁸

In the same vein as Campbell, a study about Southern women's jobs and roles during World War II came out in 1987. Although Mary Martha Thomas owes much to Campbell's study, Thomas pushed the historiography closer to addressing the significance of rationing on women's lives. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie* contains an in-depth discussion of women's labor, both within and outside of the home.⁹ Martha Thomas looks at the everyday conditions of women living in the war industry boom towns of Alabama, with particular attention to the scarcity that huge population booms around industrial centers caused during the war years. Thomas argues that location, race, and class structured women's wartime lives. The one unifying affair all women dealt with was rationing, and as a group women disliked the deprivations of the ration. Throughout the work Thomas stresses that any gains made for women were temporary, and that traditional gender roles remained central for women.

⁸ Campbell, *Women at War with America*, x.

⁹ Mary Martha Thomas, *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie: Alabama Women and the Second World War* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1987).

As historians found value in the stories and experiences of ever expanding and increasingly diverse groups of peoples through social history, they also developed interest in cataloging the intangible concepts and ideologies associated with American culture. The study of the unwritten, or even unspoken, and yet expressed ideology which motivated and drove Americans serves as an insightful tool to better understand home front women during World War II. Food and human interaction with food teases out previously unexplored notions about traditional topics, such as women's roles and domesticity, which allows this study to shift the historical focus toward appreciating long-range expressions of American women's political voice in the twentieth century. Food as a tool of historical analysis creates a means to discuss power, race and ethnicity, gender, class, immigration, empire, industrialization, and labor.¹⁰ Food history also introduces interdisciplinary thought and merges both popular culture and academia.

For food to be a useful tool in this study, it is imperative that the study reflect the current trends within the field. A small smattering of recent articles summarizes these trends and highlights the manner in which this project meets the challenges of food history. Matt Garcia's article "Setting the Table," traces the evolution of food historians' focus on three related subjects: production of food at farms and in industry, consumption which includes discussion on diet and food scarcity, and distribution or the way humans trade foodstuffs.¹¹ My own research centers on women's efforts to maintain socially constructed holidays and traditional meals in the face of government limitations on food

¹⁰ Mark Padoongpatt, "Sitting at the Table: Food History as American History," *Journal of American History* 103, no. 3 (December 2016): 686-689.

¹¹ Matt Garcia, "Setting the Table: Historians, Popular Writers and Food History," *Journal of American History* 103, no. 3 (December 2016): 656-678.

procurement under the Office of Price Administration's food rationing program and falls largely into the last arena. Jeffrey Pilcher's response to "Setting the Table" outlines three strengths of food studies: the gendering of food, its embodied experiences, and the ways that feeding others creates social and cultural meanings.¹² Within the historian's craft, many fields have begun to reanalyze the value of gendered constructions in the past decade. Early women's history recognized the importance of commonplace actions within the home, but gender history has moved past those simplistic constructions. Food history can assist in deepening our understanding of the negotiations and nuanced experiences of both women and men. Pilcher also argues taste, though ethereal, matters.¹³ The third avenue for historical examination, culinary infrastructure, tells the tale of the ways organizations commodified and created cultural meanings for foodstuffs. Pilcher cites the cultural connotations and memories assembled around the production of beet and cane sugar as his example of the ways in which we endow meaning upon foods. The historical connection between cane sugar production and racially based, often forced, labor soured cane sugar's flavor. Beet sugar, without the same connotations and moral stains, tasted sweeter to both the consumer's tongue and mind. Mark Padoongpatt poses some difficult questions for food historians in "Sitting at the Table."¹⁴ He states that food

¹²Jeffrey Pilcher, "The Whole Enchilada: A Full Plate of Food History," *Journal of American History* 103, no. 3 (December 2016): 694-696.

¹³ Pilcher wrote another article for the *American Historical Review* "The Embodied Imagination in Recent Writings on Food History" which discusses his idea that taste and food are filtered through memory and an embodied imagination stored in the brain. It is clear from these two articles that Pilcher sees the future of food studies moving in a different direction than Garcia. Garcia seeks to ground food studies by using more conventional methods of investigation, while Pilcher sees doubt as to the validity of the field and its methodologies as a test faced by other fields (such as women's history) in the past. Jeffrey Pilcher, "The Embodied Imagination in Recent Writings on Food History," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 3 (June 2016): 861-887.

¹⁴ Padoongpatt, "Sitting at the Table: Food History as American History," 686-689.

is central to many fields in American history, but asks about the relative value of using food as a lens into other cultural events. While obvious disagreements exist between these historians, they point to some similar signposts within the historical study of food. A final article, “The Nation before Taste,” predates this roundtable but encapsulates these ideas into three simple lessons.¹⁵ Haley argues that food history must recognize that taste is constructed and temporal, utilize diverse pedagogies and honestly admit the astounding complexities fostered by sustenance. The understanding that time, place, gender, and class deeply mark our comprehension of cuisine remains the strongest argument for food history as an autonomous and totally independent historical field. As Haley points out, one cannot simply recreate a historical dish. There are a myriad of potholes and detours which make such a task impossible and largely silly. Food invokes nostalgia but it shouldn’t be treated as such. When the connections a people share with a dish are fully explored a startlingly clear portrait appears. The headache (and sometimes heartache) of food history are those unforeseen connections, but that is also the strength of this field. Food history uncovers consumers and producers deepest held thoughts and attitudes toward the world around them. These are untouchable and fleeting perceptions. Mathematics and the sciences work to accurately describe unseen and often only imagined concepts- so does food history.

Garcia, Padoongpatt, Pilcher, and Haley urge more complex treatments of food. They also highlight the ability of food history to use local subjects to remark on larger trends. Food history can vividly illuminate a moment and the world that constructed that

¹⁵Andrew Haley, “A Nation Before Taste: The Challenges of American Culinary History,” *The Public Historian* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 53-78.

moment in history. My research sets out to show the ways that black and white women negotiated food rationing while remaining true to deeply held beliefs about the intrinsic value of their cooking. While individual recipes and menus varied across the nation, my studies show that women's ideals about why they cooked remain unchanged. In the end, I agree with Jeffrey Pilcher: mundane acts of cooking and consuming generate rich social and cultural meanings for each generation of Americans.¹⁶ Americans use taste, alongside the social and cultural constructions that filter flavors through our beings, to communicate values. Housewives during World War II understood that a Thanksgiving turkey served to the family did more than stuff stomachs with protein; it filled the mind with ideology and communicated shared values far beyond the dinner table.

American food history investigates the connections between food and the establishment of culture. Jennifer Wallach's *How America Eats* races through American history from the colonial era to the first Obama administration. Wallach believes food history deserves a place at the table for itself; she treats her topic as more than just a lens or methodology for entrée into established fields of history. Her chapters discuss the evolution of American cookery styles, the infancy of the ideology of "American" food and meals, impacts of industrialization on food and consumers, gender and ethnicity's place in eating. In her chapter entitled "The Pious or Patriotic Stomach" Wallach argues that Americans utilize food as a means of constructing symbolic relationships with social norms. For example, she shows John Harvey Kellogg's dietary experimentation at Battle Creek Michigan stemmed from his deeply-held belief that morality and religious piety were linked to food choices and the manner in which a body consumed those items. My

¹⁶ Pilcher, "The Whole Enchilada," 694-696.

research agrees with her idea that Americans consume in part as a way to communicate a complex set of values to other family members and society at large. When addressing food choices during wartime, Wallach argues that avoidance of rationed or foods in short supply demonstrated patriotism. At the same time, participation in wartime black markets meant “alienation from the broader populace.”¹⁷

Wallach’s overview of American eating over the span of four centuries necessitates certain generalizations. However, her good versus bad construction must be abandoned when discussing food policy in World War II. Housewives cooked and procured food for their families, but their actions fell squarely into the grey area between Wallach’s black and white evaluations. At the core of my own thesis stands the belief that American women chose to participate in the wartime rationing program out of a sense of patriotism and as a means of expressing a generalized identity as home front guardians of American culture. Housewives also participated in and supported black markets for the same reasons. Black market accomplices weren’t a group of non-patriotic Americans plotting the downfall of the American way of life. Men and women involved in the black market generally followed rationing orders: surrendering points and stamps when those actions best supported their own understanding of patriotic action. They are the same group. Black market activities spread so far and wide that jokes about the everyday nature of our illegal trade were commonplace. If one accepts the concept that patriotism directed many food choices during wartime, then we must explore the black market purchases of steak and sugar through a similar lens. I argue that black markets

¹⁷ Jennifer Wallach, *How America Eats: A Social History of U.S. Food and Culture* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), xiv.

centered on providing a selection of foodstuffs, such as sugar and meats, which Americans imbued with so much patriotic meaning that forswearing these goods regularly as a result of rationing became an unpatriotic act. Overall I agree with Wallach's basic tenet that "food choices are an important way to demonstrate a belief system."¹⁸ Defining those belief systems and gauging the influence of the government on both women's ideology and the domestic sphere allows for a more in depth and nuanced portrait of the housewife and home front.

Katharina Vester's *A Taste of Power* uses a concrete methodological backbone to discuss food as a means of illustrating unspoken identity.¹⁹ Vester employs the philosophies of Michel Foucault, Norbert Elias, and Pierre Bourdieu to explain the ways American culture uses food to distinguish these power relationships. Her study spans the nineteenth through twentieth centuries in American history and finds that the characteristic functions of food build social and cultural group identities which individuals then embrace or resist. Her introduction illustrates the inherent power discussion that she believes surrounds all food by scrutinizing a recipe. Recipes are written in the imperative tense and summon the reader to not just action but also a relationship with both the food and writer. The recipe creates a conversation between two women, which reflected and guided wartime housewives relationships with both the OPA and food in general. Vester's work specifically examines the gender dynamics of power relationships oft ignored by philosophers such as Foucault. She finds that food production and consumption formed normative behaviors within American society and therefore

¹⁸Wallach, *How America Eats*, 167.

¹⁹Katharina Vester, *A Taste of Power: Food and American Identities* (Oakland, Ca: University of California Press, 2015).

reflected social understandings of power. Understanding and acceptance of these normative activities played a crucial role during World War II as the Office of Price Administration sought to use food to enforce their own economically motivated ideals on the country's consumers and producers. Women both embraced and rejected the OPA's regulations in their efforts to communicate their patriotic goals and their belief in the home as a cornerstone of American culture.

Another recent work which emphasizes the myriad ways food choice marked political and patriotic action comes from Helen Zoe Veit. *Modern Food, Moral Food* outlines the Progressive underpinnings of the World War I voluntary food conservation programs.²⁰ Veit views the first two decades of the twentieth century as ideally situated for governmental control due to changes in food production, consumption, and most importantly, nutritional knowledge. Governmental agencies and health improvement campaigns mixed an intoxicating elixir whereas denying oneself the pleasures of certain foods needed for shipment to the Allies in turn came to symbolize not just patriotic duty but also smart health decisions. Progressive reformers sought to shape a rational American diet which reflected their own moral codes of self-control and order.²¹ Veit's work also speaks to new horizons within the field of food history; she tackles her topic with an interdisciplinary approach, accepts the complexity of her story, and incorporates many different racial and ethnic viewpoints.

Veit's proposition that the turn of the century produced cataclysmic changes in American society which allowed for a reevaluation of food and nutrition seems a solid

²⁰ Helen Zoe Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

²¹ Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 8.

argument. Her desire to date government involvement in the home and on the table from the Progressive Era and her insistence that self-control and denial became cornerstones of American food thought appear more precarious. Other authors argue that the government sought to influence the home and family dinner even table earlier. Marcie Cohen Ferris hints at political involvement in Southern cuisine and kitchens as early as the Reconstruction Era.²² These arguments surrounding the naissence of government control over the hearth and by extension American's stomachs matter little. The beginning of these actions can be dated to various periods and individual impacts appear largely regional. Viet's argument that the government began a focused and generalized national campaign to control social morality and used food as a tool to illicit permanent change stands as much more central. However, the short lived nature of most Progressive reforms proves a limiting factor for her argument. The ideal that self-denial stood as a long-term symbol of patriotism falls a bit short in light of the exuberant celebratory tone of the 1920s and the repeal of the eighteenth amendment in 1933. While previous generations of Americans had seen specific sectors of the government become more involved in their homes, World War II signaled the most complete government effort to influence all levels and aspects of American life. Previously unheard of government control of American life became one of the characteristics of World War II. The Progressive Era's true contribution to the American cultural landscape might stem from their desire to connect the moral high-ground to the family table. The OPA exploited this concept in several propaganda campaigns, with varying degrees of efficacy. However, the

²²Marcie Cohen Ferris, *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

idea that women also seized upon this perception provides context for my own thesis. Women used progressive ideals to abut their own assertions of authority on the home front. They used this ideal to give credence to their claims of expertise in not only their own homes but as home front guardians of American culture.

Efforts to acknowledge and construct identity utilizing food as a benchmark began with Amy Bentley's seminal work *Eating for Victory*, which introduced food historians to the concept that food items could be packed with so much cultural meaning that they come to symbolize a group. Bentley's *Eating for Victory* squarely addressed not only the rationing program and its successes or failures, or the question of the impact of war on women, but explored both these topics and rendered a gender driven construction of the topic. Bentley argues that American consumption under rationing regulations reflected ideas of gender, political power, and race. Bentley found that one way the country was convinced to support the war effort whole heartedly was through communal visions of America. In short, the wartime propaganda machine needed to find a method of uniting a racially-ethnically-politically- and economically-divided America. The answer to this conundrum became food, the one item which brought Americans together. The government then set out to infuse certain foods and rationed goods with political meaning. In the simplest terms, Bentley found World War II era Americans equated meat with masculinity and sugar with the feminine sphere.²³ In supporting her thesis, Bentley weaves a narrative of women's home front experiences into the book. By uncovering the politicized nature of food during the war, and revealing the pressures on wartime women

²³Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1998).

to embrace gendered roles, the continued responsibilities of homemakers for the welfare of the family, and by extension, the country becomes increasingly clear.

Marcie Ferris Cohen's *The Edible South* also delves into the power relations inherent in food ways. *The Edible South* moves from the colonial to modern periods and finds that along the way Southerners developed food ways which reflected their own concepts of power and cultural status. For Cohen, the divide between the wealthy and politically important and those who are poor and underrepresented begins at the table. She points to the plantation house diet and the foods consumed by slaves, then to the divergence between landowner's and sharecropper's foods. She doesn't merely prove that these two groups ate differently; household finances would assure this difference. She proves that these differences also bred divergent cultural identities and folklore for foods. Salt pork in collard greens and pigs feet meant something more in the South than just dinner. It delineated the consumer's status as poor, uneducated, and probably African-American. These lines and constructs became so strong and influential that Southerners wishing to show wealth and status avoided those items for fear of reducing their prominence by publicly consuming lower status foods. Grocery stores that cater to white populaces in the South still don't usually carry pickled pig parts. Food's ability to transmit and confirm power in the South is deeply entrenched in Southern identity. For Cohen, food shows both the richness of Southern culture and uncovers racial and class trauma that haunt the region.²⁴ Cohen also confirms the early role of government in the Southern diet due in part to fears of malnutrition caused by the poverty-stricken diet

²⁴Jana Hoops, "The Edible South: Marie Ferris Discusses Latest Book," *The Clarion Ledger*, December 13, 2014.

based primarily upon corn and salt pork.²⁵ Thus by the 1940s, Southerners were well versed in and accepting of the government as an authoritative voice in the field of nutrition, if not social and cultural mores. The unwavering meanings and language of food, and what eating certain things can say about a person fed into many of the issues faced by the Office of Price Administrations' food-rationing programs during World War II. While the OPA begged Americans to buy and eat lesser cuts of meat such as offal (intestines, for example) those foods already held meaning for Southerners. Chitterlings, while edible and nutritious, meant one was poor, powerless, and/or black in the South. While the South showed remarkable openness to some government programs and initiatives meant to direct food choices, many cultural constructions proved too strong for mere government regulations to overcome. It is through those cultural expressions, symbolic meanings of foods, and long held traditions that housewives communicated their values and redefined patriotic action during World War II.

A final work to address consumption and the values it communicates is Tracey Deutsch's detailed study of grocery stores in Chicago from the 1910s to the post World War II era.²⁶ *Building a Housewife's Paradise* argues that the grocery store itself became a political arena where identity was formed and communicated. The strength of this work lays in its ability to show the intersection of all sorts of power relations which women navigated while making food choices they understood to be chock full of identity

²⁵ Harvey Levenstein's *Fear of Food* and Marion Nestle's *Food Politics* both produced volumes which speak to the diverse organizations and governmental agencies that have shaped the how and what of the American diet. They also study the ability of these "experts" to create paranoia and panic in order to force compliance with their nutritional opinions or fads. Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Harvey Levenstein, *Fear of Food: A History of Why We Worry about What We Eat* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

²⁶Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010).

building cultural connotations. Deutsch believes that wartime constraints and food rationing conferred political power upon women as consumers, which frightened the Office of Price Administration. Therefore, the OPA undermined women's burgeoning political capital by dealing directly with larger chain grocers. After the war, Deutsch believes, these women embodied passivity.²⁷ My research sees this as a constant struggle, which the government never fully won since black markets flourished until all price controls were lifted from the economy. Housewives didn't passively accept government rules during the war, nor did they placidly totter toward a future of consensus politics. Instead women made a series of political statements with their shopping and cooking which manifested their identities and political goals.

The most frightening aspect of researching a dissertation topic comes from the desire to accurately portray your subject while making an original contribution to the academic discourse. Food studies in the past decade have moved toward a holistic viewpoint which validates the stories and experiences of many diverse participants. Meanwhile food transcends its ingredients and constructs compelling arguments about identity, power, and cultural responses to both. Research and study on women's relationship with food policy during World War II outgrew its own foundation by utilizing food as a tool. The goal became to better define the participants and actors; not just women but black and white middle-class women. Thus the central argument for this project evolved. Women chose to accept and reject elements of the food rationing

²⁷ This aligns her work with an earlier historiography at sees the postwar era of consensus politics as a time for little individual upheaval. Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008) shows that American Society was politically active and reactive to the threats of their era.

program as a means of communicating and fully illuminating a shared identity as patriotic guardians of American culture. Their responses to food rationing exposed their own cultural identities and the deeply held understandings of the meaning of certain foods. Food rationing also uncovered the intricate relationship and boundaries between women, the home kitchen, and government agencies. By broadening the project's definition of contributors to include racial differences, and entering into the debate surrounding cultural identity this realigns it with some of the components necessary to make a valid and current contribution of food history.

This project seeks to explore the nuances of home front women's guiding principles when making food decisions for their entire family during World War II. Each chapter follows an actor in the drama that became food procurement, home preparation, and food advice under the auspices of the Office of Price Administration's food-rationing programs between 1942 and 1945. Women stand at the heart of this study and the first chapter better defines this amorphous group and their motivations. The chapter outlines both stressors and coping mechanisms in the lives of female consumers during the early 1940s. The widespread introduction of nutrition standards and the importance placed upon healthful eating as a contributing factor to raising a strong generation of patriots compounded women's domestic food responsibilities in the face of government mandated food rationing. Housewives met the challenge of food rationing by drawing upon the shared experiences and domestic knowledge gained as a result of voluntary rationing in World War I and the prolonged hardships of the Great Depression. The chapter then delves deeper into the impetus behind women's somewhat erratic relationship with food rationing. Housewives' valued their own construction of patriotic action and acted to

uphold their authority within the home and kitchen. Their definition of patriotism, with its emphasis on using food to construct identity, allowed for the simultaneous existence of pious rationing and black market buying in the same home.

The second chapter focuses on the Office of Price Administration, the group responsible for the rules and policies housewives negotiated as a part of food rationing. The foundational history and theoretical underpinnings of the OPA directed the organization as they built the nation's food-rationing programs. The chapter examines the details and practical application of both coupon and points rationing, as well as the deployment of the programs across the country. The OPA repeatedly missed opportunities to effectively engage with housewives' motivations and thus spoiled their own attempts at inspiring fervent adherence to food rationing rules. A review of OPA and OPA-sponsored food related propaganda uncovers this failure to connect with housewives. The greatest disappointment of OPA outreach through posters stems from their inability to align their propaganda with the desires and goals of the American housewife. By not communicating directly to housewives' underlying desires, the propaganda established a permissive tone which practically promoted illegal food purchases.

The final two chapters expound upon the limitations of housewives' adherence to OPA food rationing regulations. A lively and massive black market evolved during the war years in order to fulfill housewives' desires to preserve tradition and cultural expressions of identity. Women willingly approached illegal purchases at the expense of rationing whilst viewing their actions as patriotic and supportive of the war effort. The third chapter explores this paradox, finding housewives' actions reflective of their

understanding of patriotic action and supportive of their own goals. This chapter examines the types and settings for black market purchases along with both threats and actions undertaken by the OPA's enforcement division. The concluding chapter delves into the world of popular media; specifically the cookbooks and women's magazines which provided housewives food rationing direction and advice. The cookbooks and magazines formed avenues for women to share the subtext of female patriotism and home front heroism with the nation as a whole. The final chapter also scrutinizes recipes, articles, introductions, and menu planning guides which highlight women's commitment to their own patriotic action and home front goals. Both surreptitious hints at ignoring ration rules and outright overt declarations that women should serve rationed foods on holiday tables abound between the pages of cookbooks and women's magazines. The OPA's enforcement division's reluctance to prosecute housewives along with the authoritative voices of cookbook authors and lifestyle magazine mavens who suggested rationing cheats created a permissive and accommodating atmosphere where housewives boldly followed their own objectives at the expense of food rationing program rules.

CHAPTER I –THE WOMEN AND THEIR WORLD

World War II stands as a watershed in both American history and the history of American women. Americans nostalgically recall the wartime efforts of Rosie the Riveter and brave women who volunteered on the fighting fronts in a variety of roles. Historians explore these women's stories and their important impacts upon the American society for justifiable reasons. During World War II the female labor force grew by six and a half million women, which represented a 50 percent growth in women's labor.²⁸ Women undertook jobs once reserved for men, faced sexism and racism, and may have contributed more significantly to the winning of the war than other home front groups. However, not all home front women worked in factories or volunteered with the Red Cross. The American government and the Office of Price Administration expected each and every American family to participate in a much more widespread wartime effort: food rationing. American housewives rationed, gardened, preserved, and assisted the home front war effort in a myriad of ways. These women did not follow government dictates blindly; instead, they reshaped the discussion and embedded their own meaning and values in their actions in relation to food rationing and food production on the home front.

Defining Housewives

This work seeks to uncover the nuances of the wartime housewife's kitchen, and by extension, her world. These women related to the wartime government and its

²⁸ Doris Weatherford. *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 139-141. Similar statistics are available in the following article: Susan E. Shank, "Women and the Labor Market: The Link Grows Stronger," *Monthly Labor Review* (March 1988) online publication accessed at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1988/03/art1full.pdf>.

programs in a distinctive manner which highlighted their own political beliefs and desires. Before delving into activities and motivations, a simple discussion of subject seems prudent. The scope of this study includes mostly middle-class housewives, both white and black. However, a discussion on language must precede the argument. In this study the term housewife encompasses and includes a much more wide scope than the term might imply. This work focuses on the larger connotations of “housewife” by referring to any person who interacted with the domestic sphere, bought food, produced recipes, fashioned holiday meals, and accomplished these tasks utilizing Office of Price Administration food rationing points and coupons. A housewife can refer to a woman married and happily staying at home with growing children while her husband worked outside the home. However, World War II created challenges to that ideal, and this study means to include as many of the women responsible for the formation and defense of traditional culture and identity as possible. For example, the United States faced a severe housing shortage that made independent living impossible for many young or newlywed couples. Many Americans lived in communal arrangements, rented rooms or lived with family because of the lack of housing in many areas of the country.²⁹ Audrey Davis wrote to her husband of the difficulty in finding housing over the course of three months in 1945. First she lived in a noisy boarding house, but after changing jobs she was able to find a room to rent in an apartment with two other women. She found the apartment through an ad in a military base newspaper and recalled, “I didn’t want to live with a

²⁹ Mary Martha Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie: Alabama Women and the Second World War* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1987), 104.

stranger, then, on second thought I decided it wouldn't do any harm."³⁰ A housewife's living situation mattered little as they would all relate to OPA food rules in the same general manner. The war also meant that drafted husbands might be forced to live across the country during periods of training, and many women followed behind their husbands as long as possible before they were eventually separated by oceans and war. Especially as the war years wore on, many women found themselves widowed and unexpectedly single. Yet these women too continued to negotiate food rationing. Other women undertook labor outside the home, either in response to the war or as a necessity induced by poverty.

Therefore, instead of clinging to a limited dictionary definition of housewife, this study uses the term to refer to any woman that participated in the domestic sphere and domestic chores during the war. These women traveled to grocery stores, sought out ingredients for recipes found in magazines, haggled with store owners over the quality and price of meats, applied to local rationing boards for extra sugar to can produce grown in their yards, cooked meals, and somehow managed to maintain their own values and understanding of the elements that made their America worth preserving. The housewife in this study might not possess either a house or a husband, but these women aspired to maintain domestic authority and balance through their own activities in the kitchen and grocery stores. They used the home, and specifically the kitchen, as a means of defining and then defending a patriotic national identity. These women shopped, cooked, baked, and fulfilled traditional domestic responsibilities. They might also be employed in war

³⁰Judy Barrett Litoff, and David C. Smith, *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women on the Home Front* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 169.

industry or pining for a loved serviceman, but first and foremost they participated in the domestic sphere. The domestic sphere became the realm through which women stated their primary values and expressed patriotism, often challenging the national government sponsored rhetoric on patriotism and moral action. They lived in an era, constantly beset by advice and rules for home kitchen food production. Housewives filtered these demands down to a set of ideals which celebrated the ability of the individual to determine and define patriotic cooking and conserving.

Women in the 1940s lived in an America whose society strove to maintain traditional gender roles, even as war conditions introduced new opportunities for some women. In a time where cataclysmic social change remained possible women undertaking domestic roles spelled stability. Many wartime governmental organizations sought to convince women of the need to call upon domestic skills as a framework for female patriotic efforts. The Office of War Information, the group charged with coordinating America's propaganda, unleashed campaigns to maintain traditional gender roles with women conserving food, serving family meals, and promoting rationing as their most important war work.³¹ American society during war years and wartime propaganda celebrated women who fulfilled their civic and patriotic duties from within the home. Patriotic action thus meant an extension of women's gendered familial obligations.³² The state of Louisiana even embraced a vocational education program meant to reinforce the importance of domestic values for school aged girls. Four of the

³¹ Amy Bentley. *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1998), 18.

³² Meghan K. Winchell. *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses During World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 12-13.

five thousand workers in the National Youth Administration in 1939-1940 enrolled in courses to learn to teach home economics to the state's children.³³ Housewives embraced these roles, and used domesticity to extend their influence and forward their interpretation of proper patriotic action. In a letter to her husband at the end of the war, Marjorie Elizabeth Larson wrote about her understanding of why American soldier fought in World War II. She said "they were fighting for their wives, homes, and families."³⁴ Her response indicates that the domestic sphere and traditional gendered constructions dominated her understanding of both the reason to fight and the manner women could best support the war effort. Mrs. J. T. Leggett expressed a more direct and unabashedly domestic understanding of the reasons Americans fought. She undertook a project to send small soil samples, taken from the grounds of 48 state capital buildings, overseas. She asked General Douglas McArthur to insure that the bags of soil were buried under each flagpole erected in the Pacific to fly the flag. She labeled each bag "For this We Fight."³⁵ For Mrs. Leggett and many others they fought overseas and struggled with the many inconveniences of wartime for the idea of the American home. She sent dirt as a literal reminder that the armies fought for home. The home and domestic roles clearly served as a central focus for women's contributions to the war.

Housewives come to this story from a vast array of backgrounds and experiences. Some held factory jobs, some brought up children during the war, some married sweethearts or buried servicemen. They come from affluent homes and the low rent side

³³ Jerry Purvis Sanson, *Louisiana During World War II: Politics and Society 1939-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 177.

³⁴ Litoff and Smith, ed. *Since You Went Away*, 278.

³⁵ Litoff and Smith, ed. *Since You Went Away*, 204.

of the railroad tracks. These women make up the fabric of America and deeply believed in their own important role as a guardian of the American way of life. Delving into these women's involvement, feelings, and the fluid construction of American identity proves daunting due to the individual yet universal nature of their experiences. The kitchen and food, as a result of the repetitious nature of providing sustenance for themselves and family members, opens a unique window on a mostly hidden response to government during World War II. The kitchen, shopping, nutrition, and food became housewives universal and shared experience.

Shaping their World

The first half of the twentieth century saw momentous and calamitous change in American society. Housewives either suffered through or heard about the hardships of international conflict during World War I. This generation of housewives lived through the excitement of the 1920s and the deprivations of the Great Depression. They benefitted both directly and indirectly from the programs of the New Deal. Together Americans helped forge a new prototype for government influence on the average citizen's life during the 1930s. In short, the years before the United States became involved in World War II drastically altered some long held principles and philosophies in American society. Each of these unsettling events affected the behaviors and customs of women in World War II. Housewives developed their own values during World War II, and supported these ideals through kitchen action, but the events of the thirty years leading up to the war shaped these tenets in both subtle and obvious ways. These events also contributed to the development of the Office of Price Administration's rationing rules, and the attitudes displayed by both cookbooks and leading popular magazines.

American women's first experience with total war came during World War I. Even before the United States entered into the conflict, American businesses made substantial profits selling both war materials and food to the combatants.³⁶ Social reformers also became involved in humanitarian efforts to secure food sources for those affected by the war. No single American deserves more attention for alleviating the starvation cause by World War I than Herbert Hoover. As early as August of 1914 Hoover began organizing volunteers at the Savoy Hotel in London to assist stranded Americans.³⁷ Hoover replicated his first success with the Commission for the Relief of Belgium and the European Children's Fund. Both agencies ran utilizing a combination of volunteer donations and government subsidies, which eventually fed tens of millions of adults and children. By the time the United States government declared war upon the Central Powers in the spring of 1917, President Woodrow Wilson had already contacted Hoover about heading the U.S. Food Administration.³⁸ Hoover's plan for this fledgling organization called for central planning and decentralized execution. He also formed Price Interpreting Boards to bring producers, retailers, and consumers together at a local level to control commodities pricing. He prevented shortages by creating cooperatives that bought entire stocks of staple commodities. For example, the Sugar Equalization Board purchased an entire crop of Cuban sugar one year.³⁹ Propaganda made up the final piece of Hoover's wartime plan for Americans. This propaganda inspired

³⁶ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 38.

³⁷ "The Hoover Story," *The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum*, (website) accessed May 6, 2013, www.hoover.archives.gov/hooverstory/gallery02/index.html.

³⁸ "The Hoover Story," *The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum*.

³⁹ "The Hoover Story," *The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum*.

Americans to grow gardens in their backyards, taught school children songs about patriotic potatoes, and asked families to observe “Wheatless Wednesday” and “Meatless Monday.”⁴⁰ In a statement before the senate Committee on Agriculture Herbert Hoover summarized the tasks of the Food Administration. According to Hoover’s speech, the Food Administration undertook four challenges: the control of food exports, the regulation of trade to the exclusion of speculation, the mobilization of citizen members of the Food Administration to carry out advice and directions toward the establishment of a national conservation program, and the formation in every state of some form of the Food Administration.⁴¹ Plainly, Hoover’s plan called for involvement from every part and portion of the citizenry. He also calculated that producers and consumers needed to feel like a part of a team during the decision making process in order to assure full cooperation between business, citizens and the Food Administration.

Within a year Hoover doubled U.S. food shipments to the starving allies without the need for a formalized rationing program.⁴² Hoover’s actions fed some of the starving in war torn Europe, and created a level of food security in the United States. However, the reach of his program into the home front remains debatable, as many Americans ignored the US Food Administration’s impassioned pleas to conserve and share available stocks of food. Hoarding and shortages became hallmarks of the American World War I home front experience. For American women and their daughters, who would face mandatory food rationing during World War II, fear of shortages remained a menacing

⁴⁰ William Clinton Mullendore, *History of the United States Food Administration 1917-1919* (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1941), 59.

⁴¹ Mullendore, *History of the United States Food Administration 1917-1919*, 59.

⁴² “The Hoover Story,” *The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum*.

specter from the past. Housewives in the crisis of the 1940s sought to preserve the American lifestyle through their kitchens, but they would need food to accomplish this task. Food shortages, such as those experienced and imagined during World War I combined with the desire to maintain normalcy through cooking, created the impetus for stockpiling or hoarding of highly valued food stocks. The memory of hardships under the control of the U.S. Food Administration partially fed women's willingness to hoard and seek out illegal means of food procurement in the Second World War. The U.S. Food Administration also chose to ignore all but the most blatant home kitchen rule breakers and instead directed enforcement energies against food suppliers or businesses. The official history of the Food Administration touts the fact that "very little control was based directly on the Penal Provisions of the (Food Control) Act" and that "in only two or three cases were any persons arrested for violation of the Food Control Act during the war."⁴³ The official history of the Food Administration conceded that while many penalties for improper licensing existed the initially prescribed penalties were lightened through practical application.⁴⁴

Some of the corruption within the Food Administration came from the lack of formalized organization and departmentalization which the group shunned, as a part of their own principles and guiding philosophy, throughout the war. The other major critique of the U.S. Food Administration stems from the use of the term "voluntary" in conjunction with their conservation program. Although food rationing for the average American citizen remained voluntary, the government vested the organization with the

⁴³ Mullendore, *History of the United States Food Administration 1917-1919*, 60-61.

⁴⁴ Mullendore, *History of the United States Food Administration 1917-1919*, 63.

ability to influence agribusiness, grocers, and food distributors. The U.S. Food Administration was created with broad powers that allowed it to influence food stuff production and distribution throughout the nation. From a business or farm viewpoint, failure to join or assist the Food Administration could prove ruinous. Hoover pushed government purchasing agencies to inflate agricultural prices to cajole American farmers into greater production for selected food stocks, such as wheat.⁴⁵ Therefore those who cooperated with Hoover and the Food Administration stood a better chance of profiting from farming than those farmers who opted to ignore the organization.

This disconnect between the Food Administration's power to influence commercial business and their lack of grassroots enforcement bred opportunities for women in World War I to fashion their own notion of patriotic food use during wartime. Conservation formed one of the main aims of the U.S. Food Administration's citizen outreach programs. The goal of this sector was to encourage directed consumerism through propagandistic methods such as posters, radio shows and slogans. The average consuming citizen experienced considerable peer pressure to conform to the U.S. Food Administration's conservation policies, while never actually being forced to take part in the program. Hoover admitted in testimony to Congress that the Food Administration "proposes to mobilize the spirit of self-denial and self-sacrifice."⁴⁶ Therefore much of the propaganda produced to support the Food Administration's programs highlighted the patriotic value inherent in a housewife's avoidance of sugar or wheat or meat since it contributed to supplies for overseas allies and armies and by extension the success of the

⁴⁵ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 119.

⁴⁶ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 118.

Allied forces. Food Administration propaganda made a woman's decision to deny her family an in-demand food stuff a patriotic and uniquely feminine sacrifice. One of the lasting legacies Hoover and the Food Administration bequeathed future generations was a connection between food consumption and patriotic action in the minds of many Americans. The U.S. Food Administration and Hoover's efforts in World War I fostered the understanding that housewives possessed the ability, through food and the kitchen, to support national patriotic actions. Women's reactions to this experiment in government price and food controls stemmed from its voluntary nature, and the lack of enforcement which followed, as well as the propaganda campaign it fostered. In World War I women's ideas about their contribution to war evolved, but their reactions remained practical and focused on the household. The major contribution of World War I food controls and rationing to housewives' understanding and interpretation of World War II rationing comes from this connection of patriotism to kitchen production. World War I helped establish women as the front line of patriotic duty because of their relationship with food. Women constituted the primary shoppers, purchasers, and began to carve out a niche as the authoritative voice in food production. The U.S. Food Administration allowed women the opportunity to utilize food and conservation as an arena to showcase patriotic sentiment. Inversely, women built the idea that any disagreement with patriotic themes or political activity could also be safely expressed through food and the kitchen. World War I added to women's authority as kitchen consumers by building a framework which placed their everyday actions in a patriotic structure and assured them of their ability to influence not just home front but also war front.

The failures and critiques of the voluntary rationing plan lay in this inequality: producers were forced to supply, most of the program was directed by the states creating unbalanced implementation from region to region, and consumers need not buy the most plentiful goods. In the real world application, often farmers undermined the price of their own crops on the advice of the government.⁴⁷ Some areas and neighborhoods never felt food shortages while others rarely saw valuable food stuffs as a result of the voluntary program. Hoover's desire for cooperation apparently only extended so far and its application emerged as uneven at best. In World War II, the Office of Price Administration's organizational structure and guiding philosophies sought to resolve many of the shortcomings of the Food Administration. However, the concept that American woman possessed the ability to choose their own individual patriotic action outlived World War I and eventually contributed to the undermining of the OPA's goals for food rationing. Finally, Hoover's Food Administration was a product of its time; it professed a deep progressive belief in the ability of the state and federal government to uplift and improve the lives of both Americans and those peoples of war torn Europe. This progressive zeal continued to subtly guide and sway government action through the next challenge to American society, the Great Depression and New Deal.

The years of the Great Depression serve as the second most important event to shape American food policy and the civilian response to these acts during World War II. The Great Depression fostered two important processes within the American populace: necessity and nutrition. The worlds of food science and nutrition were just beginning to expand in the 1930s. Some of the first solid studies of vitamins, minerals, and food as

⁴⁷ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 243-245.

fuel were published during this decade.⁴⁸ On the other hand the loss of jobs, homes, and investments also pushed a different type of learning in the majority of American families. Perhaps never had the saying “necessity is the mother of all invention” been truer than in these trying years of scarcity and deprivation. Financial difficulties pressured women to find creative and cheap methods of providing meals for their families. The combination of these two factors taught middle-class America the importance of conservation and home economics. In her famous treatises on food during wartime, MFK Fisher wrote:

When rationing of sugar and butter had been in effect just long enough to throw housewives into a proper tizzy, my grandmother sat knitting and listening to a small excited group of them discuss their various ways of making cake economically. Each felt her own discovery was best...Finally grandmother said, Your conversation is entertaining indeed, it interests me especially, my dears, because after listening I see that ever since I was married, well over fifty years ago, I have been living on a wartime budget without realizing it!⁴⁹

Fisher made a valid point that cannot be ignored in this study. Generations of women made do without food stuffs or stretched their supplies out of simple necessity. However, as Fisher also points out, “not all women are sensible until they have to be” especially in the case of emergencies.⁵⁰

For the majority of American women there were two great national emergencies back to back that deeply affected the course of their lives; the depression and World War II. Therefore, many of the coping strategies women learned during the Great Depression were also utilized when faced with the shortages cause by wartime rationing and OPA control of the food supply. Women without financial means learned to use sugar

⁴⁸Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1998), 67.

⁴⁹ M. F. K. Fisher, *How to Cook a Wolf* (New York: North Point Press, 1942), 10-11.

⁵⁰ M. F. K. Fisher, *How to Cook a Wolf*, 11.

substitutes and grain fillers in the place of meat in recipes during the Great Depression.⁵¹ However, all of this substitution and practicality did nothing to change the status associated with high cost foods and recipes. The crux of the depression years was that many people used food saving strategies and cost cutting measures in the grocery out of financial necessity. Once returned to financial stability, those people would prefer to purchase the foods and quantities of foods they used before the emergency. These higher status and higher cost foods carried cultural meaning that women used to reflect their own identity. During the war women would employ the same tricks they learned during the depression, but this time with the wartime economic boom in their pocketbooks, their actions would be a political and patriotic statement instead of solely a mathematical equation.

The Great Depression drastically altered the normative patterns and understandings of American life. During the worst months of the depression years, the country suffered with over twenty-five percent unemployment. Just before Franklin Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933 almost half of the nation's homes faced foreclosure. Those Americans, who made up the lower classes in the previous decade, continued to suffer malnutrition and poverty. The Great Depression forced many middle-class Americans to join their ranks during the 1930s. These middle-class and white-collar workers experienced considerable shame and despair at the thought of asking for food assistance.⁵² Women, particularly those of the middle-classes, often simply allowed

⁵¹ Jennifer Wallach, *How America Eats: A Social History of U.S. Food and Culture* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 155 and 159.

⁵² Jane Ziegelman and Andrew Coe, *A Square Meal: A Culinary History of the Great Depression* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2016), 68.

themselves to fall into malnutrition and slow starvation rather than face the humiliation of breadlines and handouts.⁵³ In addition to the psychological challenges of attracting the middle-class to welfare programs, byzantine political affiliations and philosophies stood in the path of effective reform.

The Progressive urges of many of President Roosevelt's New Deal advisors often muddied and further complicated programs to feed the starving and provide humanitarian aid. Infighting between different camps of advisors, who all held their own beliefs and political agendas, built silly solutions which did little to improve the food situation in many areas. For example, one "solution" emerged at the behest of politicians tied to the nation's agricultural interests. This program bought only those foods produced in large surplus by the nation's farmers for food relief programs, with little attention to the needs of those poor and starving that eventually received the food stuff.⁵⁴ Gargantuan breadlines in large cities such as Chicago and New York persisted throughout the decade. Those living in rural communities also screamed for food aid from organizations like the Red Cross and riots occasionally occurred in communities across the country.⁵⁵ Many New Deal solutions to the problem of widespread suffering and hunger highlighted the inefficiencies of blanket programs that ignored regional variety.

During the Great Depression, need and poverty crossed gender, racial, and ethnic lines. Humanitarian and food aid rarely managed to spread equally to all groups, or fill all needs due largely to local prejudice. In all official correspondence and orders, the government clearly opened avenues to aid for all Americans in need. However, in

⁵³ Ziegelman and Coe, *A Square Meal*, 68.

⁵⁴ Ziegelman and Coe, *A Square Meal*, 238.

⁵⁵ Ziegelman and Coe, *A Square Meal*, 59-68, 104-108.

practice racism often trumped humanitarian ideals and strangled some of the democratic underpinnings of the New Deal. In many southern states African Americans found themselves forced to perform tasks or menial labor before receiving the same aid freely offered to white citizens.⁵⁶ Sharecroppers that fought for equality in these programs encountered beatings or white program administrators simply refused to supply them with food as punishment for their protests. Those responsible for these incongruences even defended their actions saying that the work formed a needed component to prevent sharecroppers and African Americans from indulging in slothful behavior.⁵⁷ Racism within progressive reform and racialization of food played a prominent role in the early twentieth century. Progressive reform movements often sought to educate and uplift supposedly wasteful or nonsensical African Americans. However, as is so often true about racism, these tactics fell noticeably short and only reinforced white Americans' beliefs whilst failing to address the actual needs of this group.

African American women carried many of these lessons forward into World War II, and also realized that this racism could be utilized to create opportunities for noncompliance with program rules. The early twentieth century saw many white middle-class women hire African American domestic help, which helped spread the kitchen authority of African American women. White society, and especially Southern society, acquiesced to the concept that African American women possessed authority over food in spite of their lack of influence over other areas of life.⁵⁸ These domestic workers

⁵⁶Ziegelman and Coe, *A Square Meal*, 106.

⁵⁷Ziegelman and Coe, *A Square Meal*, 101,114.

⁵⁸ Helen Zoe Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 118.

usually cooked through instinct and memory instead relying upon cook books as was more normative for white women. They possessed considerable experience wading through the rough seas poverty produced in the kitchen. They also possessed a nuanced understanding of the ability of food to advertise identity due to their position in both the white home and African American communities. Cornbread and collard greens meant something more than just a meatless meal, and those social distinctions became more obvious in Southern communities.⁵⁹ One example comes from 1930s nutritional advice which painted corn as a meagre and unnourishing food which heavy consumption of led to the risk of pellagra. Yet the Bureau of Home Economics recommended a corn-based diet for poor, and disproportionately African American, sharecropping families in the South.⁶⁰ African American women ascertained that those racist views inherent in many New Deal and progressive programs provided opportunities to express political leanings as well as patriotism. Many of those programs began with the idea that African American women needed simpler explanations and lacked the intellect to comprehend the intricacies of reform and aid. African American women intentionally misunderstood so as to benefit themselves, their families, and their neighborhoods.

Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, while providing some badly needed assistance, changed the role of the government in American's daily lives. The New Deal significantly extended the power of the federal government over issues once considered private. The old idea that the government should not support the people fell to the wayside in the face of the Great Depression.⁶¹ The New Deal's reforms and their

⁵⁹ Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 116-117.

⁶⁰Ziegelman and Coe, *A Square Meal*, 193.

⁶¹ Ziegelman and Coe, *A Square Meal*, 103.

influence over food and the American psyche cannot be understated. During the worst months of the depression the American people turned to the government, as an agent of change, for assistance and in many cases for survival. In exchange these citizens would invite the federal government into the intimate and personal parts of their lives as never before. Nutrition and cooking became arenas where the government and New Deal programs intruded on individual's lives. The New Deal, with a mandate to improve the lives of Americans, sought to increase nutritional knowledge and imprint their ideals on "good eating" across the nation. Home economists and food scientist redoubled efforts to educate and spread nutritional knowledge as a result.

Two of the most important holdovers from the New Deal reforms which came to impact the housewife's willingness to accept World War II food rationing come from the development of nutritional standards and the creation of a national Food stamp program. The first food stamp program in American began as a direct result of the continued hunger and poverty all across the nation caused by the Great Depression. The Federal Surplus Commodities Commission, as a subsector of Henry Wallace's Department of Agriculture, began the fledgling program in New York in May of 1939 with a total of fifteen hundred unemployed participants. The Federal Surplus Commodities Commission worked with grocers, farmers and consumers to construct a program that allowed the poor to trade in some of their monthly aid money for food stamps. The initial program allowed for dollar matching with stamps, with the opportunity to earn additional funds through blue stamps that would allow for the purchase of national surplus crops such as wheat or butter. Eventually the program covered over four million Americans and provided around

six dollars a month in food assistance.⁶² The first food-stamp program, although somewhat limited, provided a much needed buffer between the nation's hungry and illness or death caused by their malnutrition. The program also forced many women, municipalities, and local grocers to become familiar with a program that required them to be aware of different stamps and each stamp's buying power.

These lessons proved helpful at the start of the Office of Price Administrations food rationing program, which also included two types of stamps and directed food choice based on the color and value of each stamp. Not only did the food stamp program initiate housewives to the basic framework which would influence World War II food rationing, it also added a measure of dignity and practicality into aid programs. Every local neighborhood grocer could participate in the program, allowing those using the stamps the ability to choose where to redeem stamps. It also taught many women which grocers and stores would be willing to allow deception within the program, which helped breed black markets during the war years.

The second element that provided concrete impacts upon food rationing and women's responses to OPA rationing programs comes from nutrition efforts. The nearness of starvation to many American families offered great impetus for housewives to learn frugality, and the need to draw out as many nutrients from meals as possible on a limited budget. The war years, while providing an economic boom, severely limited the ingredients and foods available which in turn forced women to rely upon nutrition information and savvy cooking to insure the family's continued health.

⁶² Ziegelman and Coe, *A Square Meal*, 243-244.

Nutrition, Home Economics and the Housewife

Between 1894 and 1940 advances in science led to the discovery of vitamins as important to a balanced healthful diet in addition to the accepted proteins, fats, and carbohydrates already present in the American diet and vocabulary.⁶³ These discoveries and the publication of these elements as vital to human health also contributed to a bit of paranoia as women struggled to understand and provide nutrition on the family table. The acceptance and dissemination of nutritional information proved a long and challenging path in the United States. The League of Nations' Health Commission became one of the earliest international groups to look at the effect of nutrition on a nation. During the interwar years this organization focused their attention on the effects of the worldwide economic depression on the health and well-being of citizens. Their discussions led to dietary recommendations, increased nutritional surveillance and reporting, and the start of sensible nutrition education.⁶⁴ By 1933, with the United States plunged into the depths of the Great Depression, New Deal planners turned considerable attention to the possible health implications of a poor economy. The same year Hazel Stiebling published an American set of dietary requirements for calcium, phosphorus, iron, and vitamins A and C.⁶⁵ Stiebling's report reflected the depression era's scarcity by dividing the food plans by cost levels. The food plans suggested 12 food groups and serving sizes which provided enough nutrition for a week. The food plans also accepted that some families simply could not afford food and suggested a near starvation, but extremely thrifty diet

⁶³ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 67.

⁶⁴ AE Harper, "Origin of Recommended Dietary Allowances- An Historic Overview," *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 41 (January 1885), 142.

⁶⁵ Harper, "Origin of Recommended Dietary Allowances," 142-143.

based on bread and milk, as a short term solution to meeting nutritional needs while living in extreme poverty.⁶⁶ The acceptance that some groups of Americans would fall into malnutrition and starvation forms one of the most marked factors of Stiebling's report and most Depression-era food and nutrition recommendations.⁶⁷ Although the federal government attempted food aid and farm aid during the 1930s they had limited effectiveness combatting the widespread humanitarian crisis.

With the onset of violence in Europe, the threat of war and wartime controls over food and production in America spurred the creation of the Committee on Food and Nutrition. This group worked as a wing of the National Academy of Sciences and primarily concerned itself with preparing a set of dietary standards and recommended daily allowances of known vitamins and minerals.⁶⁸ As the nation began preparing for war, and the arduous process of drafting men the military quickly discovered the long term effects of malnutrition from the depression on Americans. In one survey of a half a million men registering for military service, 43 percent failed to meet physical requirements due to poor health or low body weight.⁶⁹ Plainly nutrition needed to become a driving force within American homes and that duty fell on the shoulders of women as they traditionally bore the domestic responsibilities for buying and cooking meals. Several government agencies and organizations sought to educate housewives and guide food choices for the entire family. The National Nutrition Conference for Defense in 1941 released the first set of Recommended Dietary Allowances and addressed the need

⁶⁶ Carol Davis and Etta Saltos, "Dietary Recommendations and How They Have Changed Over Time," *Recommendations Over Time* USDA/ERS pub AIB-750, 35.

⁶⁷Ziegelman and Coe, *A Square Meal*, 193.

⁶⁸ Harper, "Origin of Recommended Dietary Allowances,"145-146.

⁶⁹ Ziegelman and Coe, *A Square Meal*, 246.

for a public nutrition education program.⁷⁰ Although social workers, home economists, and food scientists labored to convince Americans of healthy eating habits, they met staunch resistance. Much of this resistance dealt with the affront of officials pushing into the domestic realm and pushing nutrition ideas that sometimes ran counter to ethnic or traditional modes of eating. Nonetheless, through persistence and by coopting housewives as the family authority on nutrition, nutrition eventually became a relatively uncontested topic. A desire for public education in nutrition came to fruition in 1943 with the release of a guide to daily eating and nutrition called the Basic Seven. The original food groups in the Basic Seven included:

1. Green and yellow vegetables
2. Oranges, tomatoes, grapefruit or raw cabbage and salad greens,
3. Potatoes and other vegetables and fruits
4. Milk and milk products
5. Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, or dried beans, peas, nuts, or peanut butter
6. Bread, flour, and cereals
7. Butter and fortified margarine.⁷¹

The Basic Seven also suggested caloric intake for different levels of activity.⁷² The Basic Seven did not establish the size of a serving for most foods, nor did it intend to dictate the entire diet of an American since it assumed other foods would also be consumed.⁷³ These two concessions allowed housewives to still direct their individual responses and diets within their own homes. Consumers saw the Basic Seven plastered throughout magazines and grocers displayed these guidelines to insure that American consumers gained familiarity with this important program.

⁷⁰ Davis and Saltos, "Dietary Recommendations and How They Have Changed Over Time," 35-36.

⁷¹ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 68.

⁷² Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 67-69.

⁷³ Davis and Saltos, "Dietary Recommendations and How They Have Changed Over Time," 38-39.

These concepts and guiding nutritional standards became incorporated into school lunch programs and taught to a wide audience.⁷⁴ However, simply suggesting eating patterns did not fully address the need for nutritional education. The United States' Department of Agriculture isolated 10 characteristics of a truly effective nutrition education program. According to the USDA and the National Nutrition Conference for Defense, a nutrition education program:

Reaches the whole population—all groups, all races, both sexes, all creeds, all ages. Recognizes motives for action and includes suggestions on what to do and how to do it. Develops qualified leadership. Drives home the same ideas many times and in many ways. Employs every suitable education tool available. Adapts these tools to the many and varied groups to be reached and uses them with intelligence and skill. Considers all phases of individual, family, and group situations that have a bearing upon ability to produce, buy, prepare, conserve, and consume food. Affords opportunity for participation in making, putting into effect, and evaluating local nutrition programs. Enlists the fullest participation of all citizens and works through every possible channel to reach the people.
Is adequately financed.⁷⁵

Thus the emphasis of the nutrition program created during World War II centered on reaching all Americans and educating them in the ways most likely to result in their acceptance of nutritional eating. These standards improved upon New Deal-era ideals by utilizing a grassroots approach to education while still acknowledging the cultural and economic needs of different groups of Americans. The wartime nutrition campaign carefully balanced the urgent pressure caused by need to cultivate healthy wartime labor with the idea that women on a local and individual level should direct nutritious eating within the home. As Leland Gordon pointed out in *Consumers in Wartime*, “habit, like

⁷⁴ Davis and Saltos, “Dietary Recommendations and How They Have Changed Over Time,” 39-40.

⁷⁵ Davis and Saltos, “Dietary Recommendations and How They Have Changed Over Time,” 40.

custom, is an important determinate of what we eat.”⁷⁶ Therefore the deeper challenge for any nutrition program during the war lay in convincing Americans to change their eating habits, while they also followed the food rationing program. However, American women sought to use the daily chore of meal preparation and food procurement to better communicate the values which they sought to support. The relative success of nutritional advice and the Basic Seven during the 1940s stemmed from its ability to blend these values with common sense guidance that preserved the authority of housewives in the kitchen and home.

Acceptance of the Basic Seven and the nutrition advice provided for wartime cooks presented immediate difficulties. The American people simply did not understand the basics of nutrition and food science. In a Gallup Poll taken at the end of 1941, 84% of housewives could not differentiate between a vitamin and a calorie. The same poll asked which vitamins the public heard about in the preceding months: 46% responded they had not heard of any vitamins and 25% thought vitamins were a passing fad.⁷⁷ These polls showed that nutrition education during the war years would be a battle. While the government strove to introduce consumers to healthier eating practices, the public seemed uninterested in embracing the underlying science of nutrition. When faced with this disinterest, home economists and nutrition experts chose a different tactic that gave women both authority and influence over health while emphasizing the importance of their role as food providers within the home kitchen.

⁷⁶ Leland Gordon, *Consumers in Wartime: A Guide to Family Economy in the Emergency* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1943), 43.

⁷⁷ George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971*, Vol 1 (New York: Random House, 1972), 310.

In response to this initially sluggish interest, the government sponsored program shifted to emphasize the effects of good nutrition on both the body and the war effort. Food, and moreover nutritious food, became the food to fuel both the war and the expansion of democracy and the American way of life. It would be this message which called to women's position as home authority and allowed them the opportunity to choose diets to strengthen the home front. The concept that nutrition led to stronger individuals, coupled with the rebounding American wartime economy meant not only could women afford to feed their families well but they also began to embrace the concept that this duty appended to their traditional home front role. Nutrition education developed into a pathway toward better lifestyles and, for housewives, a method for expressing their own primacy within the home front.

In 1941 Hazel Stiebling wrote a short pamphlet entitled "Are We Well Fed", which sought to draw correlations between nutritious eating and preserving the American way of life while at war. On the first page of her booklet Stiebling proclaimed "The Nation's Families need good diets to safeguard their own health and to strengthen the defenses of the country."⁷⁸ Government publications repeatedly stressed that housewives held the responsibility for insuring the health and fitness of their families. Early nutrition education connected the role of housewives with the ability to insure home front safety and prosperity for the entire country through their food choices in the local marketplace.

Since home economists long recognized the importance of locality on consumption patterns, or more accurately malnutrition during the Great Depression, neighborhoods and the local community formed the locus of their education programs. In

⁷⁸ Hazel Stiebling, *Are We Well Fed?* (Washington; United States Department of Agriculture, 1941), 1.

late 1940 the Committee on Food Habits (CFH), a group of nutritionists and social scientists, formed in order to provide best practices to federal agencies in the areas of nutrition education, civilian morale, and international food policy. Eventually the CFH's recommendations resulted in the formation of a program to disseminate nutritional knowledge to housewives. The block-leader plan called for a representative woman from each block to attend CFH meetings and training sessions. That information would then be taken door-to-door to other neighborhood housewives.⁷⁹ These plans for local control and propagation of information relied heavily upon word of mouth endorsements of the information and women's informal friendship and kinship networks. The CFH's predisposition to this block-leader plan stemmed from the supposedly democratic nature of the plan; each neighborhood elected a woman who in turn shared her knowledge in an unthreatening egalitarian manner. CFH's members called this "democratic social engineering", and believed this program would push women to reach their own democratic solutions to problems.⁸⁰ The program and block leader dissemination of nutritional information reflected understanding that American housewives wanted to play active roles within the formation of policy to effect the home, but also reinforced the underlying message that women choose, through food, to create and expand ideals of democracy. Although implementation of these ideals fell noticeably short in many communities, the original ideals espoused by the planners prove revealing. Nutritionists and social scientists joined President Franklin Roosevelt in rhetoric which connected the war effort, food, and democracy. The combination of these three elements squarely

⁷⁹ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 24-28.

⁸⁰ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 27.

placed prominence of women's accepted roles as home front preservers and expanded their ability to influence political outcomes by assisting the war effort through OPA food rationing and spreading democracy. President Franklin Roosevelt specifically mentioned the "freedom from want" in his famous speech on the four freedoms. Most Americans, with the help of a Norman Rockwell painting, associated this "freedom" with food and domestic stereotypes.⁸¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt may have meant to refer to international economic security, but an American people just emerging from the hardships of the Great Depression saw a turkey dinner and heard a rallying cry to fight for the continued existence of the American culture and traditional expressions of that identity. The family table meant more than just a place to share food; it transformed into a location for expressing political ideals. For home front housewives providing nutritious meals came to symbolize a real contribution to both the war effort and the preservation of the American way of life.

In 1941 the Family Economics Division of the Bureau of Home Economics found that 35% of poor families suffered from poor diets regardless of race or geographical location. They also found that larger families struggled to provide adequate nutrition, and living on a farm usually insured a better diet than city life.⁸² These sobering statistics reflected the gargantuan odds faced by the wartime nutrition campaign. However, the same study pointed to the homemaker's knowledge of nutrition and meal planning as the fulcrum point between a good diet and a poor diet.⁸³ The CFH's ambitious program to educate women on the basics of nutrition, one city block at a time, served as a response to

⁸¹ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 469-470.

⁸² Stiebling, *Are We Well Fed?*, 7-25.

⁸³ Stiebling, *Are We Well Fed?*, 16.

this knowledge. The Baltimore Block Brigade, probably the most successful in the national program, relayed information to housewives on a variety of topics including nutrition, rationing, Victory gardening, canning, and resisting the black market.⁸⁴

Nationwide, secondary schools and colleges continued to offer home economics classes to endow young unmarried women with nutritional information.⁸⁵ Government agencies published dozens of pamphlets to educate the home front about proper nutrition and eating. Magazines and advertisements included nutritional advice and meal planning charts throughout the war. At the heart of these efforts to educate women in nutrition lay the understanding that meals, and the hands which prepared those foods, communicated the ideals of democracy and form a basis for the elements of American culture.

Wartime statistics lend credence to the idea that housewives learned and embraced nutritional standards during the years of the conflict. However, regional and local differences guided the spread of nutritional programs. Racism and classism earmarked the nutrition campaigns during both the 1930s and 1940s. The rollout of neighborhood campaigns fell noticeably short in both rural and poorer sectors of the country.⁸⁶ In general, food choices and the meaning endued into those foods remained the same through the war. Nutrition campaigns helped encourage greater consumption of meat and milk, but the definition of each of those words remained tied to one's location, regional food traditions, race and socioeconomic status. For example, pig's feet and chitterlings formed good meat sources for poor African Americans in the South while

⁸⁴ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 46-47.

⁸⁵ Over 1.5 million secondary age girls and almost 43,000 college age women attended classes in home economics during the 1930s and the trend continued throughout the war years. Gordon, *Consumers in Wartime*, 45.

⁸⁶ Stiebling, *Are We Well Fed?*, 18.

those foodstuffs remained a disgusting mystery to many Southern whites and those of various races living with higher economic status outside of the South. Those living in ethnic enclaves within industrial cities also continued to define and associate the same status with meals. Lox and bagels, or smoked herring still marked the diets of many immigrant families and still retained all the prejudice and cultural meanings normally associated with those foods before the war. Ground beef, considered the lowest and meanest of all cuts of red meat, due to OPA rationing program rules, premiered on many family tables but retained its underprivileged status. It technically filled the requirements of meat, but most Americans preferred to avoid it due to the cultural meanings attached to ground beef.⁸⁷ All of America held onto the cultural meanings associated with foodstuffs in spite of nutritionist's efforts to improve diets. This clinging to cultural understanding of food, and traditional uses of food to express emotion and identity, meant that wartime housewives simply tapped into their own long held definitions of American culture while increasing consumption of familiar foods deemed healthy. While many of the foods and meanings remained, some adjustment in the amount of different types of food did occur due to the combination of food rationing and nutrition programs during the war years.

Although the nutrition campaign had more arms than an amoeba, and to some extent lacked coordination, in the end Americans learned how to eat slightly healthier meals. A study completed by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics compared wartime food purchases from 1942 to those made during 1944. The study found that in 1944 the lowest income group bought more meat, milk, sugar, and flour than they purchased in 1942. The middle-class and the wealthy also bought and ate healthier foods

⁸⁷ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 98-99.

in 1944. Unfortunately, this increase in nutritive diets meant that every socioeconomic segment also experienced an increase in food expenditure over the same time period, with the poor spending a whopping 20% more of their income on food than they had in 1942.⁸⁸ Although higher expenditures seems like a negative for low income families, a Gallup Poll taken in 1941 showed that 57% of low income families believed spending more money on food insured better health. They also responded that they would buy more meat, vegetables, dairy products, and fruit if financially capable, which corresponds in part with the Bureau of Labor Statistics' findings.⁸⁹ Housewives proved willing to make sacrifices in other areas of the family budget so that they could spend more on food because they connected food and nutrients with pathways toward fully expressing the American way of life. Americans, when asked about their daily food intake, overwhelmingly ate more bread, fruit, and meat in surveys taken during both early 1943 and late 1944. However, the 1944 survey also found that 46% did not eat enough citrus fruits, tomatoes or raw greens to meet daily dietary recommendations, 32% of Americans did not consume enough milk, and 40% lacked sufficient intake of eggs.⁹⁰ Americans experienced a slight increase in the health of their diets during the war years as a result of the nutrition campaign and higher wartime wages. Nonetheless, their overall health and nutrition improvements came through increased consumption of sugar, wheat and meat. All three of these groups of foodstuffs carried cultural meanings which an orange or tomato juice lacked. In short, housewives chose to buy more of the foods that carried cultural consonance than just those which contributed healthful vitamins and minerals.

⁸⁸ Lenore A. Epstein, "Wartime Food Purchases" United States Department of Labor bulletin no. 838, 1-4.

⁸⁹ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 310.

⁹⁰ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 368, 488.

The acceptance of the Basic Seven campaign and nutritional advice during the war points to a deep interest in preserving health, which many connected to ideals of the American way of life and culture in general. Women served healthier meals because they believed health was an important component of what made-up America, the land of plenty and home of democracy. When asked about New Year's resolutions, women responded that in the future they hope to improve their health in both 1944 and 1946.⁹¹ These straw poll result show the concrete success the nutrition program had in taking a citizenry from not caring or understanding vitamins to being more health conscious and willing to consume goods which reflected cherished values. The most interesting aspect of this decision-making process for American housewives stems from their desire to pick and choose the foods they consumed for patriotic reasons, even when the government rationed items they deemed valuable.

Values

As the 1940s dawned, American housewives faced the looming threat of World War II with warfare and food shortages spreading throughout the European continent. These women, and the country as a whole, moved forward into the fray carrying a complex and often contradictory understanding of the foundations of their identity and American life in the 1940s. These women already survived the cataclysmic changes wrought on early 20th century American and held tight to lessons and ideals learned from those events. The results, and memories of those events, combined with shared values to create a political drama which played out in kitchens and shopping carts across the nation. A large part of this study hinges on awareness and sympathy of those values.

⁹¹ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 368, 479, 615.

Through careful appreciation of housewives' underlying, and most often unspoken principles, the driving force behind their political choice to support portions of food rationing while nourishing black market activities become clear and their actions emerge as both rational and purposeful.

The idea that World War II made the once completely private and somewhat hidden world of the kitchen a public arena hardly challenges conventional thought or history. Many historians agree that the Office of Price Administration along with the federal government's decision to tie together food and wartime patriotic action under a compulsory program blurred the lines of the private and public spheres. However, most studies focus on the direct and obvious political actions that some women undertook outside of the home in order to better direct long term kitchen and nutrition policy.⁹² These works find that the opportunities women possessed during the war years to assert themselves in policy making remained distinctly limited. Women's ability to change food policy and devise laws for future generations, while promising and well supported, remained mostly unfulfilled at the end of the war years. The push for quality grading and labeling stands as an example of but one housewife led crusade which gained steam during the war and yet failed to flourish. Although women and some political pressure groups, such as the American Home Economics Association and the General Federation of Women's Clubs, advocated food labeling laws, no lasting mandates for quality labeling were implemented during the war.⁹³

⁹² For example, Amy Bentley's discussion of women's activities as a part of the Committee on Food Habits in efforts to enforce standardization and grading for canned foods.

⁹³ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 6, 51.

This study does not challenge these assertions, but rather sees another avenue for defining successful political action. World War II and the agencies birthed by the federal government in those years created a world in flux. This transition and transformation led to a time of unparalleled negotiation on the home front. The war forced the government to beg women to enter traditionally male employment while simultaneously crafting a controlled economy. The national emergency of war forced both the government and average citizens to rethink and renegotiate roles and capacities. In this time of transformation, women seized the opportunity to push not just their public authority, but to expand upon their use of private kitchen authority to influence the political realm.

This study, unlike many others, sees housewives as expressing their most successful examples of political agency through their actions within the home, instead of the domestic causes they advocated outside the home. This reliance upon traditional roles and the familiarly female voice of authority over the dinner table allowed women more latitude in making political statements through the foods they bought and allowed their family to consume. Unfortunately, these political actions and realities are muted by time and by the intensely individual nature of food as a basis for political engagement. Each housewife in America during World War II chose, at various occasions and at innumerable places, to both adhere to and to ignore the Office of Price Administration's food rationing policies. While oral histories help to recover those individual moments of agency, the motivation for action remains much trickier to pinpoint. Housewives chose to obey and defy food rationing laws due to their interpretation of patriotic action. When the federal government tied food rationing to patriotic action and the eventual goal of preserving democracy, they unintentionally provided a rich proving ground for women.

Food rationing developed into the perfect platform for women to assert their domestic authority while shaping and broadcasting definitions of democracy and American culture. This study doesn't mean to imply or communicate a full understanding of those two terms. Likewise, neither did housewives of the early 1940s seek to define those ideals on a national level. One of the greatest strengths of America remains our diversity and yet our ability to unite despite inherent and often contradictory differences within our society. Each community and individual family established their own unique response and flavor of American culture. However, housewives during World War II made rational choices based upon some general cultural values which they held in esteem and prioritized above other government promoted ideals.

Patriotism forms the single most important underlying value and primary motivator used by the federal government during World War II. The federal government produced countless pieces of sentimental propaganda aimed at connecting a whole host of programs to patriotic action. The story of women's ability to create a middle ground for reinforcing their voice as domestic authorities begins with the federal government's desire to couch forced programs in the rhetoric of patriotic deeds. By framing food choices as an extension of military engagement, the OPA could depict the entire home front population as being directly involved in the war. The OPA and the War Information Bureau stressed that women could most successfully express their patriotism by cooperating with food rationing programs.⁹⁴ Patriotism and consumerism latched deep into the American psyche and heart. The federal government's definition of patriotism

⁹⁴ Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *How America Eats: A Social History of U.S. Food and Culture* (Lanham, Ma: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 162-163.

meant simply following the orders of a vast array of agencies and accepting the possibility of sacrifice or hardships as a result of the war effort. For the federal government, selecting a wide-ranging and all-purpose definition of patriotism meant that more Americans might associate with the idea. The government hoped to create a utilitarian motivator for home front contributions to the war effort. Their success in creating public support for this generalized sentiment showed in the proliferation of cocky patriotic advertisements, fighting slogans and innumerable window displays of service flags.⁹⁵ Patriotism provided a perfect opportunity for all Americans to unify under a single goal and allowed the government enough leeway so as to be able to propose a dizzying array of programs without outright rejection or public opposition. The government by extension built a mindset where any contrary actions appeared unpatriotic and disloyal.

Government efforts to situate home front conditions into a larger discussion of the virtues of domesticity fed a long existing and accepted version of female social roles. World War II housewives committed to traditional values as an effective means of discourse with both the government and American society as a whole. As the government sought to meld patriotism to domesticity, housewives defended their ability to define and identify domesticity. Domesticity, as a feminine ideal in the 1940s, stands in stark contrast to the prevalent female archetype of the Depression-era. Women's magazines advised women to follow their own ambitions at the cost of happy marriage in the

⁹⁵Richard R. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On? The American Home Front 1941-1945*. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 71-73.

1930s.⁹⁶ The demands of the war worked to highlight the importance of the home and women's roles within the home. One year into the war, a Gallup Opinion Poll asked Americans "is there anything about Mrs. Roosevelt of which you especially disapprove?" The most frequent criticism was "she is too much in the public eye...she ought to stay at home, where a wife belongs."⁹⁷ The lessons of scarcity and the importance of homemaking learned by many women during the Great Depression easily morphed into domestic wartime contributions.⁹⁸ The wartime housewife's duty was to create a haven in which to provide nourishment, love and security. Women sought to balance the government's call to participate in rationing for the greater good, with a heightened concern for the well-being of their immediate families.⁹⁹ Domesticity and women's work within the home became a powerfully patriotic statement which housewives used to communicate their own goals and values. Mildred Lager echoed these sentiments writing, "One blessing that has come out of the war is the awakening to the fact that what we eat does make a difference."¹⁰⁰ Housewives embraced traditional domestic chores as both a patriotic duty and a statement of the primacy of their roles within society.

Much government propaganda devoted itself to encouraging those happily rationing individuals to feel morally superior to those who helped Hitler by taking more than their fair share of food stuffs. Fictional characters in pamphlets and movie shorts, such as Mrs. George Grabwell and Ms. Miranda Glucose, both portrayed as hoarders,

⁹⁶Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 57.

⁹⁷Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 310.

⁹⁸May, *Homeward Bound*, 63.

⁹⁹Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 39.

¹⁰⁰Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 39.

allowed conscientious and patriotic housewives who strictly followed rationing orders to self-congratulate.¹⁰¹ However, this psychological propaganda didn't fully succeed. A lively and exuberant black market existed alongside women's publications which espoused the use of rationed ingredients. Although the federal government meant to create a social taboo around violation of codes and program norms by tying their programs to the concept of patriotism, they generated enough laxity that housewives felt entitled to ignore the rules in certain circumstances. This conundrum comes down to the way housewives defined patriotism. Women altered the government's basic definition and added nuances which preserved their roles as home front authorities.

Patriotism took many different forms during World War II, but in general most housewives equated patriotic action with responsibility for supporting the war's primary aims. When Franklin Roosevelt delivered his famous Four Freedoms speech to Congress in January of 1941, almost a full year before American entry into the war, the major idea that America intended to preserve liberty, freedom and democracy became the touchstones of the nation's understanding of the war's aims. Roosevelt argued that all humanity deserved the opportunity to experience the liberties enjoyed by American citizens: freedom of speech, the freedom of worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear.¹⁰² Eventually these ideals formed the foundation for international discussion and understandings of human rights after the war years. American housewives responded to these rousing words and the government's encouragement to participate in patriotic action by merging these concepts. Patriotism for many women

¹⁰¹ Wallach, *How America Eats*, 161.

¹⁰²Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "The Four Freedoms," State of the Union Address, January 6, 1941, from the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, www.FDRLibrary.org/fourfreedoms.

during the war meant conserving rationed foods, avoiding hoarding, and denouncing black market activities. Patriotism also meant serving ritualized and traditional meals; such as roasted turkey for Thanksgiving. These actions didn't seem contradictory, but defied the OPA. Housewives placed primacy on the concept of preserving the American home front and its accompanying family rituals, traditions and overall aura during World War II. So they cheated the food rationing program, when possible and when deemed important to the fabric of life, in order to provide and preserve the stable home environment that Roosevelt spoke of in 1941. Housewives violated rationing with the purpose of maintaining normalcy and the elements of American culture they felt defined the country. For instance, hoarding sugar to bake cookies destined for mailing to servicemen in the family or buying steak on the black market to celebrate a birthday did more to sustain patriotism than obeying food rationing rules ever could.¹⁰³ Groups of women volunteered to send 1.4 million food packages for POWs and innumerable care packages with goodies to soldiers at home and abroad.¹⁰⁴ Their definition of patriotism meant sustaining not just healthy families, but also the bits of normalcy that food rationing usually precluded.¹⁰⁵ As over a million men and women traveled overseas to fight the enemies of freedom and democracy, housewives determined their chore entailed upholding the social and cultural norms that characterized America at the time.

To fully comprehend the nuances of housewives' definition of patriotic action one must first embrace two ideas which directed their actions; first that their cheats had very

¹⁰³Litoff and Smith, *Since You Went Away*, 169.

¹⁰⁴Emily Yellin, *Our Mother's War: American Women at Home and At the Front During World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 168.

¹⁰⁵Wallach, *How America Eats*, 163.

little overarching effect on the war effort and secondly that all food communicates deep meanings to consumers. Food rationing propaganda sought to make American consumers believe that all good citizens experienced the same restrictions and same allowances throughout the entire nation. More so than most other government programs and propaganda, food rationing sought to emphasize a communal mentality.¹⁰⁶ A principal thread in many OPA and OWL propaganda campaigns emphasized the democratic nature of federal programs. Therefore, reinforcing the message that rationing amounted to both an expression of patriotism but also the program itself reflected the ambitions of the war effort. However, it created a different message entirely for many women. In the mind of an individual housewife one small cheat or limited participation in black market activities couldn't disrupt the program or derail the good actions of millions of other morally upright citizens. Surely, one tiny illegally attained piece of high quality beef or extra pound of sugar couldn't crumble the patriotic foundation of the United States.

This study doesn't focus on the small segment of the population of housewives that regularly cheated the system or spent years trading exclusively on the black market. Those individuals existed, and their motivations for black market activity seem somewhat transparent. This study, instead, seeks out the motivations and negotiations that pushed the vast majority of housewives to seek out illegal food purchases on a limited basis. Those occasionally illicit housewives usually described themselves as part of the moral majority and considered their wartime actions quite patriotic. Patriotic symbolism and propaganda touched a stronghold within their minds and these housewives saw their entire wartime activities as generally supportive of both the OPA and federal

¹⁰⁶Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 3.

government's agendas. Women rationalized their actions and undertook them as a means, not of subverting the goals of the federal wartime administrations, but rather as a helpful supplement to patriotic expression on the home front. They cheated the food rationing program, but did so with limited and purpose-driven objectives meant to speak to their understanding of patriotic action instead of subversion.

The second underlying issue to consider surrounding housewives' participation in OPA food rationing programs stems from the cultural meanings and social expressions that humans bestow upon different foodstuffs. Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's famous maxim "tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are" hints at the connection between food and identity. Identity emerges as a result of both the types of foods one consumes and the thought behind the action of consumption. The differences between the edible and the inedible (or even the taboo) are constructed by culturally contingent discourses.¹⁰⁷ Simply put, food carries immense meaning and those meanings build culture and social status within any community. The foods housewives' chose to consume and those they sought out illegally held meanings for them and their families. Beyond mere personal tastes and preferences, food choices disclose an individual's station in society; food is given significance by how it is narratively framed and by its significance within the community or nation.¹⁰⁸ The surplus and readily available foods which the OPA attempted to make enticing to female consumers through ration points incentives also carried important connotations and denotations within the communities being asked to consume those foods. These meanings, and the women's understanding of

¹⁰⁷Katharina Vester, *A Taste of Power: Food and American Identities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 1.

¹⁰⁸Vester. *A Taste of Power*, 2.

the way food meanings transmit social messages, form the basis for housewives expression of patriotism. Housewives used food as a language to both support and alter the food rationing program and by extension sharpen home front perceptions of patriotic action.

Some of the cornerstones of American eating became scarce due to rationing and government efforts to ship some of these goods overseas to supply the fighting forces. Sugar and red meat served as linchpins of American identity and held distinct meanings for consumers in the 1940s. Amy Bentley's *Eating for Victory* succinctly argues that wartime Americans held engendered views of these two items. The culturally feminized sugar meant limits on purchase amounts, and home front baking and preserving, challenged housewives' ability to maintain the prewar standard of a full cookie jar. In a modern sense, cutting sugar intake seems prudent. However, in the 1940s sugar was regarded as an important energy-giving substance and even nutrition experts agreed with widespread consumption. On a practical level, wartime women saw sugar as healthful for the family and as a reflection of feminine power within the home. The cultural identity and meanings that surrounded sugar also played a significant role as it underscored the connection between baking, female nurturing, and maternal authority within the home.¹⁰⁹ Likewise red meat, considered the penultimate in healthful eating during the 1940s, also held strong connotations. Red meat conjured masculine discourse which meant many felt it vital for those actively fighting or producing for the war. A Committee on Food Habits member's thoughts illustrates the deep held cultural beliefs surrounding red meat. He wrote, "Probably more than and other food meat combines the idea of self-preservation,

¹⁰⁹As quoted in Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 105-106.

strength, racial preservation through a strong belief that meat and virility are connected and growth, with the demands of taste and appetite.”¹¹⁰ Thus, the desire of the government to supply fighting forces with copious amounts of meat seems a tactic acceptance of the generalized ideal of the place and meaning of meat within American society. Most American consumers sought out red meat and deeply felt its absence, not due to actual nutritional needs, but because they used meat to reinforce social beliefs about masculinity and vitality. Many other protein substitutes such as beans and eggs remained readily available throughout the war years. However, these items didn’t carry the same cultural importance nor did they speak to housewives’ kitchen rhetoric of patriotic action. For American women dealing with food rationing the inability to properly supply the family with items like sugar and red meat highlighted the struggle to maintain the home front and whole reason Americans chose to fight the war in the first place.

As American women sought to negotiate the strictures of the OPA food rationing program while remaining true to their commitment as preservers of American culture, some inventive efforts aimed at redefining cultural meanings so as to make unappealing items more acceptable occurred. Perhaps the best example of the transmutation of food meanings on the home front comes from the journey of ethnic foods into the mainstream diet. Many cookbooks and women’s magazines pushed the housewife to attempt feeding the family with exotic ethnic cuisine during the war because these ingredients were often more available and ration friendly. While these newly discovered foods didn’t necessarily appeal to the American palate in their most authentic forms, recipes underwent some

¹¹⁰As quoted in Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 90.

alteration with respect to taste and meaning. Foods once considered true expressions of immigrant culture that carried negative connotations were reborn as patriotic experiments from the kitchen. Eating broccoli rabe, mustard greens, or tzbla kirchluch (onion cookies) gained value as they all avoided scarce tightly rationed ingredients and thus meant more patriotic support for the war effort.¹¹¹ One interesting item, molasses, became fodder for patriotic cooking. Molasses gained widespread acceptance and even started a miniature craze over spice and molasses cookies during the war. Many Americans saw molasses as an ethnic food from the American South, but embraced it's strangeness as it allowed women to bake without the use of sugar.¹¹² The stabilizing effect of a full cookie jar for the family and society outranked any discrimination against use of a humble ingredient. Molasses became a respectable ingredient, like many other ethnic foods, not because its inherent meaning changed but because it allowed for the expression of other closely held patriotic values.

With government agencies such as the Office of Price Administration, radio and print propaganda materials and even President Franklin Roosevelt asking the American public to support wartime programs out of a sense of patriotism, American housewives used their established position as household authority to distinguish their definition of patriotic action. This position harkened back to the post-Revolutionary War icon of the Republican mother. Women in wartime and peace accepted the duty of raising the next

¹¹¹Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 146.

¹¹² In a survey of *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, from 1941-1946, more molasses advertisements appear and include recipes for sweets. Before the OPA rationed sugar, molasses companies did not advertise regularly in the magazine. However, after sugar was rationed not only did the number and frequency of advertisements increase the magazine's Good Housekeeping Institute began featuring recipes (especially holiday cookie recipes) that called for molasses.

generation of citizens, while simultaneously communicating the most important elements of American culture to their progeny. Quite a bit of latitude existed in the exact jobs and lessons American women should impart upon children, but over generations and through several other national crises women maintained their position as cornerstones of home front culture. World War II government messages invited women to once again use the home as an arena to support political action. The OWI and OPA called upon women's patriotic proclivities, and women answered the call. However, women altered the original message to reflect their own values. Food became a tool for fighting the war and defending American culture. American women choices and consumer patterns during the conflict show a distinct support of several general tenets. Housewives acted in support of the values of home and hearth. Home stood as a symbol of safety, continuity and stability in the turbulent and often frightening war. Housewives acted repeatedly in both opposition and support of OPA food rationing when motivated by the thought that their actions helped to preserve the permanency of the American home and lifestyle. Much in the same way Thomas Jefferson's political decisions in the early 19th century seem erratic until one considers his underlying commitment to a farming republic so too do housewives in the 1940s. On the surface, women displayed a dizzying array of decisions to support and undermine OPA food rationing. However, when the lens of American cultural identity and specifically the desire to reinforce the primacy of the home in American life is applied their actions align. Personal taste or greediness does not explain their choices; housewives followed a discrete agenda that reinforced their authority within American society.

The secondary value to which these women responded comes from a long held history of patriotic or puritanical self-denial and self-sacrifice. A long tradition of patriotic sacrifice exists within American society, and the OPA tapped into that vein with some of their propaganda. In America the philosophical connection between moral righteousness and self-sacrifice date to the Puritan era, but Progressives in the early 20th century revived this fad.¹¹³ This value showed the desire for a closer connection between the home front and the front lines. Each saved morsel of food served to feed both allies and family fighting the nation's enemies overseas. Wartime experts on food rationing knew that housewives would need to feel that sacrificing their high status foods was for the good of the entire country.¹¹⁴ Interestingly, this value seems ancillary to the concept of preserving the stability of home rituals. Even though most citizen wanted to believe that their self-sacrifice directly benefited the war effort, limits existed. Housewives willingly substituted non-rationed items and cheerfully attempted ration friendly recipes, until those actions might endanger their individual expression of American culture and family identity. Self-sacrifice, or more precisely a housewife's willingness to enforce pious eating, died at the moment that rationing food threatened a family's traditions and ritual manifestations of social identity.¹¹⁵

The final value which housewives worked to preserve comes from capitalism and democracy. A great many propaganda campaigns during World War II focused on democracy as one of the major reasons for American involvement in the war. Food rationing promised each household not only enough food to survive, but also that all food

¹¹³Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 25.

¹¹⁴Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 95.

¹¹⁵Wallach, *How America Eats*, 163.

supplies would be equally distributed in a democratic manner. Oddly enough, while the OPA pointed fingers at black marketers for being undemocratic, the failure of food rationing to supply a newly more financially solvent populace with high status foods encouraged many women to occasionally participate in illegal food deals. Democracy held out that all people get a fair share, but capitalism preached that those with funds deserved the freedom to buy goods. The upswing in many families' finances due to wartime employment meant that more housewives possessed the ability to participate in consumer society. Private print media, such as ladies magazines, glutted with advertisements reinforced this commitment to consumerism and capitalism as simply another form of patriotic expression. Women linked democracy to capitalism and sought out opportunities to spread all of these during the war by buying the foods that they felt broadcast their definition of patriotism.

During World War II, the government isolated women as the most important segment of the populace in determining the success of food rationing programs and placed responsibility for winning the war through food in their hands. Women pulled upon their kitchen knowledge, experiences in both the last war and Great Depression, and their own power as consumers to meet this challenge. They forged a new, shared, understanding of patriotic action and American cultural identity through their uses of food on the home front.

CHAPTER II – THE OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION STRUCTURE AND PROPAGANDA

“As men do not live by bread alone, they do not fight by armaments alone. Those who man our defenses, and those behind them who build our defenses, must have the stamina and the courage which come from unshakable belief in the manner of life which they are defending. The mighty action that we are calling for cannot be based on a disregard of all things worth fighting for.”¹¹⁶

Throughout World War II the American government repeatedly referred to those “things worth fighting for.” However, this study posits that housewives defined those “things” in a myriad of different ways which directly influenced the outcomes of the war years. Perhaps the president and wartime government organizations purposefully declined to better define that statement in hopes that the very vagueness would encourage activism within the war effort’s programs. If that were the desire, then one must claim success. The home front in World War II took an active, if somewhat disorganized and very much individualized, role in defending the American way of life. Women often took a place at the heart of these efforts, and spread the message that action on the home front helped to preserve the cherished ideals and rituals of Americana.

In order to better direct the enthusiasm of the American people in the arena of food preservation, Franklin Roosevelt created the Office of Price Administration on April 11th, 1941. The Office of Price Administration’s chief function was to stabilize the economy and prevent commodity shortages in the face of possible involvement in World War II. The birth of the Office of Price Administration followed several other presidential decrees, which taken as a whole, indicated the government’s willingness to prepare for an

¹¹⁶ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “The Four Freedoms,” State of the Union Address, January 6, 1941, from the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, www.FDRLibrary.org/fourfreedoms.

operational role in World War II. Housewives formed the key element in the federal government's wartime food planning, and as such, several government organizations became dedicated to encouraging their participation and adherence to various wartime programs.

At every opportunity organizations such as the Office of Price Administration and the Office of War Information targeted women as the key to success in food rationing and the OPA planned organizational structures to emphasize local control and the value of citizens' voices within rationing programs. The Office of Price Administration hoped to enlist women's participation through consumerism and cooking in order to distribute food stuffs evenly and democratically throughout the country. OPA plans focused on the importance of local rationing boards and the community leaders involved with the program. The OPA hoped the emphasis on local control and their targeted approach to integrating housewives in the program would result in minimal disruptions of home front food supplies during the war years. Much of the rhetoric surrounding the public facade of the OPA reflected this mission: providing for the needs of American citizens while supplying the military and allied demands for food stuffs overseas. To that end, food and rationing focused propaganda produced during the war highlighted the role of the female consumer and her home food choices as crucial to the war effort.

The greatest irony of the OPA's structure and propaganda campaigns lies in their failure to speak to the inarticulate yearnings of the housewives they targeted. These housewives situated themselves in a wartime role that preserved the elements and rituals of American culture through the language of food. The OPA's organizational structure and propaganda largely overlooked housewives desire to express household authority and

their interpretation of patriotic action. Structurally, the OPA was supposedly designed to inspire local activism with dozens of local ration boards taking the lead in food rationing implementation. In actuality, the bureaucracy spawned by the OPA placed virtually all power for food decisions and alterations to rationing programs at the regional and federal levels. This preponderance of power at the upper levels starved the individual housewife of tangible authority. Housewives who complained to local boards often found them entirely incapable of making adjustments to rations and often unresponsive to the practical needs of the community. Congressional hearings on some of the most troubled war-boom cities uncovered a plethora of complaints surrounding arbitrary decisions, and bureaucratic disorganization which meant some applications passes through as many as 30 desks before approval by an authority often far removed, both ideologically and geographically from the local board.¹¹⁷ Many infamous incidents during the war years involved tire and gasoline rationing. OPA press and public relations promised that local boards would possess the authority to respond to community needs, but often national conditions and shortages prevented satisfaction on the local level. In Louisiana, parish (local) ration boards refused to issue certificates allowing drivers to purchase new tires until the used set were inspected and deemed both unsafe and beyond repair. Then the beleaguered citizen could begin searching for tires, although stocks of tires were not guaranteed even to certificate holders. The state, with over 100,000 vehicles registered, earned a tiny 1,282 tire allotment from the federal offices for January of 1943.¹¹⁸ As the

¹¹⁷Janann Sherman, "The Vice Admiral: Margaret Chase Smith and the Investigation of Congested Areas in Wartime" *The Home-Front War: World War II and American Society* eds., Kenneth Paul O'Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 125.

¹¹⁸Jerry Purvis Sanson, *Louisiana During World War II: Politics and Society 1939-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 256.

war wore onward, the limited authority held by local ration boards and the citizens they served became obvious. One of the most frustrating problems housewives faced stemmed from local boards issuing incomplete ration books. One woman from Spartanburg complained to the national OPA that the local boards in South Carolina were too “busy drinking Coca Cola and talking to their friends” to replace her lost coupons and she wanted someone “with the authority to do something” to look into her situation.¹¹⁹ Whatever efforts for the regional, district and federal offices made toward keeping open communication and possibly creating a responsive system of supply and demand rationing soured quickly. Many local rationing boards simply quit filing required paperwork and ignored requests for reports in reaction to the OPA’s reluctance to share decision making powers with the local boards.¹²⁰ This breakdown of communication all but crippled the organization’s ability to effectively manage the vast rationing programs.

Not only did the structure of the OPA lend itself to miscommunication and stagnation, so too did their public propaganda posters. These posters and propaganda messages targeted women, but often utilized language and imagery that ignored housewives’ deep motivations for food rationing. The posters and propaganda also only targeted a single, idealized segment of the American populace. In many cases, the OPA’s own propaganda led to the creation of loopholes and misdirected information that created an almost permissive attitude toward black market activities. The OPA directed a majority of its public relations campaigns and rhetoric toward the vital role individual

¹¹⁹Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1998), 18.

¹²⁰George D. Patterson, Letter to All District Enforcement Attorneys Region IV “Monthly Price Panel Statistical Report Region IV,” November 5, 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, Ga.

activity played in the success of rationing. These efforts sought to build local support for their food rationing program, but their inability to establish the promised ultra-responsive and locally directed program created a somewhat of a disconnected between the agency and the consuming public. Local officials found federal agencies- especially the Office of Price Administration- more often than not the chief obstructionists to solutions. Local officials, testifying in front of a subcommittee to the House Committee for Naval Affairs, told of countless instances of their pleas for assistance falling on deaf ears in Washington.¹²¹ This chapter seeks to discuss the composition of the Office of Price administration in an effort to uncover this lopsided power arrangement which ultimately choked out local effectiveness and allowed for cheating within the food rationing program. However, the disappointments inherent in the formation and configuration of the OPA only aggravated the tenuous relationship the group possessed with American women. The second portion of this chapter outlines the incomplete messages and inconstancy within the OPA's media campaigns. The propagandistic posters and media manufactured by the OPA and Office of War Information further distanced the organization from its goal of engaging women to resolutely follow food rationing rules.¹²² The OPA's inability to regularly evoke the desires and speak to the emotions of the American housewife through propaganda form the underlying catastrophe which contributed to the permissive environment surrounding black market activities.

¹²¹Sherman, "The Vice Admiral: Margaret Chase Smith and the Investigation of Congested Areas in Wartime," 125.

¹²² This brings to mind the experiences of the Revolutionary War generation and their efforts to boycott and ban the usage of British goods. They too struggled to form a widespread organization which evoked emotional responses toward liberty and citizenship through the rejection of certain products. For an excellent discussion of this topic see T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Office of Price Administration Structure and Food-Rationing Programs

As the United States' government looked forward at the possibility of involvement in World War II they observed a plethora of food rationing programs from other countries and from our own history. Each rationing program meant to avoid widespread starvation and the possibility of political turmoil caused by food shortages. Food rationing programs in the home fronts of both the Allies and the Axis Powers contributed valuable, if incomplete lessons to the American thought process concerning food security in the 1940s. From our own involvement in World War I, Herbert Hoover's voluntary rationing program may have failed to insure equal access to food supplies, but it initiated new ways to use propaganda to influence American public opinion and sway actions. Hoover's plan pioneered the practice of using propaganda to sway public routines for patriotic causes, which would become a cornerstone of the World War II rationing program. The vestiges of World War I programs also plagued the food planners in Europe and Japan. Each of our allies or enemies took their own observations of the Great War and created a new set of food policies to guide them through World War II. Although Soviet communism seemed the most likely political system to easily deal with the problems of food supply, the war found the Soviet Union unprepared and as a result they struggled with extreme food scarcity and small scale food riots throughout the course of the war.¹²³ The Soviet experience of the war cautioned the American government to carefully prepare their rationing program and that total government

¹²³Rodic Braithewaite, *Moscow 1941: A City and Its People at War* (London: Profile Books, 2009), 333.

control over the economy did not necessarily ensure success.¹²⁴ As our closest ally and fellow capitalist, the United Kingdom's response to rationing attracted much attention in Washington. Unlike the British, the United States did not import the lion share of its staple diet and consequently American supplies would be steadier in wartime regardless of food rationing. The Office of Price Administration liberally sampled the United Kingdom's early implementation of a food program and their reliance on a point system to insure equal access to foods.¹²⁵ The physical structure of the British Food Ministry also served as a loose template for the Office of Price Administration. The early planning and involvement of both the German and Japanese governments in food rationing also proved instructive to the United States. Nazi Germany's expansive use of propaganda in conjunction with their food rationing program proved the strength of that practice. Meanwhile the Japanese government's emphasis on distribution control and coupon-based rationing would also be rolled into the dictates of the Office of Price Administration. The Japanese government recognized the need to promote food production, stabilize food imports, and control both food distribution and prices. They also understood that if they failed they risked inflation, inefficient production, and most seriously a loss of morale.¹²⁶ Taken together these combatant nations provided case studies for the nascent American food program and some of the elements of those

¹²⁴John Barber and Mark Harrison. *The Soviet Home Front, 1941-1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (London: Longman, 1991), 80-82.

¹²⁵Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 14.

¹²⁶B.F Johnston, *Japanese Food Management in World War II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953), 165.

overseas programs found their way into the ideology and planning of the Office of Price Administration.

Over a year before the Japanese bombing of the naval base at Pearl Harbor the American government began preparing for possible involvement in the Second World War. Efforts to control the U.S. economy and prevent inflation and other negative aspects of wartime on the home front constituted a long process. Many phases and organizations marked the eventual rise of the Office of Price Administration. The National Defense Advisory Committee served as the first entity to regulate the American economy during the global financial crisis caused by the start of hostilities. This organization consisted of three parts: the Price Stabilization Division under Leon Henderson, The Consumer Division under Harriet Elliot, and the Agricultural Division under the leadership of Chester Davis. This organization possessed no authority to set prices, but operated under left-over powers from World War I that allowed persuasion, agreements, and price schedules.¹²⁷ By April of 1941 executive order 8734 created the Office of Price Administration and Civilian Supply (OPACS) and at least two durables a month fell under price schedules. For the first months of its existence OPACS closely resembled organization of the National Defense Advisory Committee. Then in August of 1941, executive order 8875 created the Office of Price Administration amidst a cloud of inflation on the home front.¹²⁸ Although the early establishment of these organizations proves interest and concern over the economic stability of the U.S. economy in the possible event of war, early groups lacked real power and acted in a tentative manner as a

¹²⁷ Laurence Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration January 1941- November 1946* (Washington, DC.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), January 1941.

¹²⁸ Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration*, January 1941.

result. The birth of the OPA was a direct result of the inability of its predecessor agency to fully regulate the inflationary response to the European war. By August of 1941 the Consumer Price Index had already risen six points and continued to rise until the issuance of the Emergency Price Control Act of 1942. The Emergency Price Control Act of 1942 allowed OPA administrators to establish maximum prices on most commodities and residential rents.¹²⁹

The Emergency Price Control Act of 1942 revealed another weakness in the evolution of the OPA. Throughout World War II, the Office of Price Administration failed to gain total control over several sectors of the economy. Under the Emergency Price Control Act, the OPA administrator could set ceilings on agricultural products, but those prices needed approval by the Secretary of Agriculture and could not undercut prevailing farm prices for those goods.¹³⁰ These concessions were meant to protect American farmers who struggled through the catastrophes of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, but unintentionally fostered tension between these two governmental organizations and led to complications in the operation of OPA programs. The Act also established a special court, the Emergency Court of Appeals, with the goal of reviewing OPA regulations.¹³¹ The act, which endowed the OPA with concrete powers to influence the economy, simultaneously fostered OPA dependence upon other groups for parts of its authority.

¹²⁹ Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration*, January 1941- January 1942.

¹³⁰ Laurence Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration January 1941- November 1946* (Washington, DC.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), January 1942.

¹³¹ Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration*, January 1942.

The long time gap between the establishment of the OPA and the enactment of the organization's powers also shows the divided nature of both congressional and public opinion. Although the actions taken in nations already involved in the war served as strong examples for the creation of an American program, many pacifists and isolationist feared taking this first step toward eventual involvement in the war. American industrialists also worried over the possible loss of free capitalism, which they observed in other countries under similar controlled economic schemes. In sum total the OPA's reliance upon other agencies and inability to freely direct the economy reflected the lack of popular support for the idea of the agency and fear over the power the OPA could wield. As a result of the OPA's decentralized power structure and inability to quickly shift policy in response to market changes the entire organization suffered. In some cases the OPA never had full authority over the American economy.

The organization of the OPA shifted through three distinct phases between its creation and the fall of 1942. The most notable difference between the models is the addition and deletion of state-level authority. In the final model, the Federal level officers were above the regional level offices, which in turn oversaw the District offices. At the bottom of this chart were the local war price and rationing boards, where the actual implementation of regional and federal policy took place. This organization, while linear and simple, skewed authority away from the individual and community while ignoring the structures common in related organizations such as the Department of Agriculture. This originality meant that many businesses and individuals, accustomed to dealing with commodities issues, were forced to learn to deal with a new power structure while simultaneously bearing the pressures caused by economic regulation.

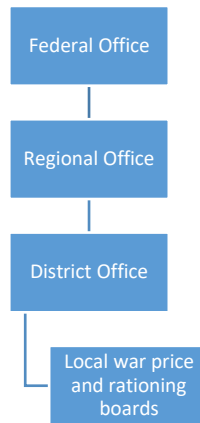


Figure 1. Federal level-departments

The leadership of the Office of Price Administration, instead of helping to integrate the organization better into the wartime political environment, struggled to control the widespread interests which sought influence on the organization. Leon Henderson served as the first head administrator for the Office of Price Administration. His term of service at the OPA lasted between 1941 and the winter of 1942. He stood as an obvious choice for this position as he had been involved in the management of the OPA's predecessor organizations. His previous career working in the Securities and Exchange Commission and a host of other New Deal agencies further qualified him for this position while marking him as a political insider within the Roosevelt administration.¹³² Henderson could access political clout and understood how to run a

¹³² Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration*, January 1942.

large government agency under the Roosevelt administration. Unfortunately, due to stiff opposition to a managed economy and some internal bungling, Henderson's tenure at the OPA was a disaster. Henderson's poor management meant that he eventually took some of the blame for the Democratic Party losses in the elections of 1942.

Former congressman, Senator, and lawyer, Prentiss Marsh Brown ran the agency through 1943. Brown's administration, while more successful than Henderson's administration, still struggled to harness the influence of the OPA.¹³³ The final and arguably most successful administrator of the OPA was Leon Chester Bowles who served from 1943 through the decommissioning of the agency in the fall of 1946. Before the war, Bowles had been an advertising executive and those skills came to benefit the food rationing program. Bowles used his charismatic personality to convince consumers to support the rationing program. He also implemented an expanded propaganda program through the use of nationally distributed radio scripts and official addresses. However, Bowles' administration still suffered due to mistrust from food suppliers.¹³⁴

Other OPA offices initially formed within the Federal level of authority included the associate administrator, deputy administrator, industrial consultant, consultant on consumer credit, management consultant, export-import consultant, legal division, and price division.¹³⁵ By the end of the war years the Office of Price Administration expanded to encompass more divisions and dozens of offices. The four main divisions included the accounting, enforcement, price, and rationing departments. Under each of these departments fell between five and eleven other subordinate offices. Each lower

¹³³ Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration*, January 1942.

¹³⁴ Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration*, January 1942.

¹³⁵ Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration*, August 1941.

office received reports from their counterparts at the regional and district levels. The OPA required every office at all levels of authority to file a monthly report. Compliance with requirements for monthly reports varied, but the general trend showed that the local levels filed the fewest reports while the higher levels of authority filed more reports. Communication between the different levels of authority within the OPA organization remained the single most essential tool toward remaining in control of this huge and far reaching economic and consumer program. The trickle of reports coming from the local level of authority within the OPA indicate the breakdown of communication despite rhetoric that claimed community involvement was a cornerstone of the program. Federal efforts to improve communication and increase the flow of local reports into higher offices mostly failed due to the largely volunteer nature of the local board membership and their growing disillusionment with the unresponsive bureaucracy. Many local OPA volunteers, after “clumsy handling” and a lack of appreciation simply quit.¹³⁶ Local ration boards also became increasingly disillusioned by the lack of action taken by district and regional administrators in response to their local concerns.¹³⁷ This breakdown in communication limited the precision of many district and regional reports and slowed critical federal responses to problems on the community level of authority. Wartime population booms caused by the growth of industries created unimaginable food shortages as their rationing allocations were based on prewar population figures. Grocery stores in Virginia sold out of goods within an hour of opening, while over half of the

¹³⁶ Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 232.

¹³⁷ OPA Region IV, Reports from the District Officers Concerning Price Panels Covering the Period from April 1 through April 30, 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 234, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, Ga.

grocers in Bremerton, Washington closed for lack of food.¹³⁸ Finally, the lack of communication meant local boards appeared isolated and unimportant in the larger scheme.

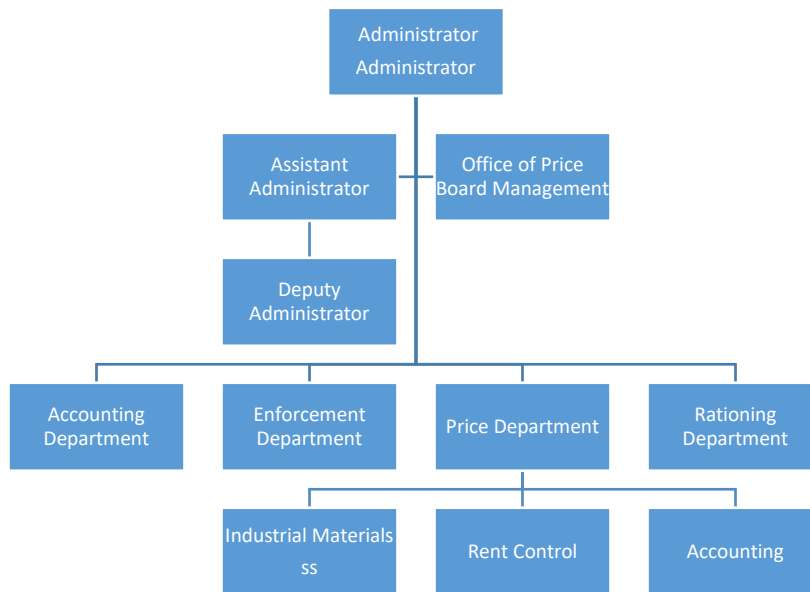


Figure 2. Regional and District Office Structure

Below the Federal Offices of the Office of Price Administration sat the Regional and District Offices. The OPA divided the nation into nine regions. Region I headquartered in Boston oversaw Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Region II based in New York City oversaw Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. Region III included Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and West Virginia. Headquartered in Atlanta, region IV served Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia. Region V based Dallas included Arkansas, Kansas,

¹³⁸ Sherman, “The Vice Admiral: Margaret Chase Smith and the Investigation of Congested Areas in Wartime,” 125.

Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas. Region VI in Chicago oversaw Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Region VII headquartered in Denver included the states of Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. Headquartered in San Francisco, region VIII served the states of Arizona, California, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington. The final region with offices in Washington D.C. oversaw the territories of Alaska, Hawaii, the Panama Canal Zone, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Each of the regional offices also had accounting, enforcement, information, price, and rationing departments.¹³⁹ These regional offices would receive reports from the district or state level, disseminate information from the federal offices, and help coordinate rationing practices throughout several states.

The district offices closely mirrored the structure and organization of the regional offices in an effort to provide clear lines of authority and limit redundancy.¹⁴⁰ Originally the district offices were imagined as a cousin to a state office, but for the majority of the war the district office stood as the quasi-state level of authority. For most of the war years during which the ninety-three district offices operated they remained a crucial for OPA communication much more so than the local boards. While the district offices demonstrated federal interest in disbursing power their inability to fully trust female authority appears throughout the local model.¹⁴¹ Local boards were overwhelmingly dominated by males throughout the war, and at least initially barred housewives from

¹³⁹ Records of the Office of Price Administration, Record Group 188. List of available documents and locations available at <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/188.html#top> accessed on July 13, 2013.

¹⁴⁰ There is at least one example in each region of misconduct being charged by one group against the other. Occasionally these charges resulted in entire offices being fired. These sort of cases are found most often in the executive records for each region, but claims also surface in the enforcement records.

¹⁴¹ Emmette Redford, *Field Administration of Wartime Rationing* The Office of Price Administration (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office), 22.

sitting on the boards.¹⁴²The OPA's ability to create one or two district offices in each state assisted them in disseminating both information and power, and formed the regional cornerstone for OPA relationships with industry and businesses throughout the war. The regional model might have facilitated better distribution of food items in order to prevent scarcity. It also meant that less attention and authority were housed at the local level. The OPA struggled to provide a steady stream of all items to all areas, which highlighted their sluggish responses to local needs. The OPA's model intended to create tighter controls on large companies and hoped to foster organized and efficient business regulations through this model. The advantage of focusing most of the regulation on business meant that individual consumers were rarely criminalized or prosecuted for violations of the OPA's dictates. Instead the OPA preferred to prosecute single cases against those who supplied consumers with larger quantities of goods or substandard goods instead of targeting individuals for prosecution. While the regional offices supposedly had a supervisory role, and the district offices a more operational role, those lines often blurred.¹⁴³ Although animosity existed between the regional and district offices most of the time these relationships were collegial.

The importance of the local offices, as exemplified by OPA rhetoric, amplified some of the tension between district and regional offices. The organizational model for the OPA rested upon the broad base of community involvement and local support for rationing programs. Local offices were supposed to report everything to the district

¹⁴² Redford, *Field Administration of Wartime Rationing*, 24.

¹⁴³ In many regions, and particularly in Region IV, the district offices oversaw large territories which often necessitated on the ground and timely decision making. The breakdown in interoffice communication often meant that Regional officials were only later made aware of actions and informal ad hoc policies often developed.

office, but most chose to forward their accounts or complaints to the regional office and circumnavigate the district offices. From its earliest days, the OPA leadership acknowledged the impact that local agreement with rationing could have on the success of the national program. Although the local board's power was limited to reporting to the district or regional office and disseminating ration books, these groups of volunteers were the figureheads of the program. The local offices became the face of the OPA, and the portion of the larger organization that most Americans would have a direct relationship with during the war years. The choice to heavily slant OPA rhetoric and propaganda toward local boards was based upon the idea that acceptance of this alien program with its complex regulations needed a democratic imprint to ease reservations within the citizenry.¹⁴⁴ The decision to use a local model of control gave the impression of more consumer control and called upon community leaders to explicitly approve of the program.

In 1942 when the OPA began to ration consumer goods, the country lacked the fundamental framework necessary for a nationwide grassroots rationing campaign to succeed. The OPA needed extensive national, state, and local participation in order to even initiate the rationing program. Sugar rationing alone required that all Americans register for coupons, industries and institutions register their sugar needs, and that all sugar retailers report their production abilities.¹⁴⁵ Plainly, the OPA needed assistance. They called on state and local government to help organize the framework and gather

¹⁴⁴ Redford, *Field Administration of Wartime Rationing*, 24.

¹⁴⁵ Lester Chandler and Donald Wallace. *Economic Mobilization and Stabilization: Selected Materials on the Economics of War and Defense* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951), 474.

volunteer groups that were supposed to provide in-the-field reports on the program for the remainder of the war.

Most of the membership of the local boards volunteered to serve their communities without pay. Some local board members did receive compensation, but these individuals earned a salary due largely to their respected position within their local community. As the need for rationing grew in the first months of US participation in World War II, so too did the local boards. Federal offices wished to involve more citizens and wanted the boards to resemble the communities they represented. Originally the boards consisted of three men and a small group of clerks. The federal government, although convinced of the need for community involvement, stopped short of allowing ration boards to fully represent the people by promoting only males to premier positions of power within the organization. With the need for sugar rationing and the expanded bureaucracy that required, the local boards were forced to expand and rent larger offices and seek more volunteers. This expansion allowed women and minorities some representation within the local rationing board, although positions of ultimate power remained male and largely white throughout the war.¹⁴⁶ Regardless of the OPA's utopian ideal of each board ethnically and culturally representing their own community, the original board members and board chairmen often fought efforts to include African Americans or Latino Americans on the leadership of the local board.¹⁴⁷ These groups would be utilized as emissaries in the community, but were denied access to power on the actual board.

¹⁴⁶ Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 214.

¹⁴⁷ Redford, *Field Administration of Wartime Rationing*, 24.

Each community warranted a local rationing board whose chief responsibility was the registration of citizens for ration coupons, and the equitable distribution of those coupon books. Initially men constituted the majority of the membership of most local ration boards, but after the rationing program became more settled, many women joined this group as the work became more clerical and therefore more feminized.¹⁴⁸ Local rationing boards combined paid workers with volunteers in order to accomplish their tasks. Whether paid or volunteer, the membership of the local boards were recognized community leaders in order to reassure the consuming public. By December of 1943 the OPA counted 76,321 local board members who worked alongside 91,000 volunteers in communities throughout the nation.¹⁴⁹ These citizens educated the public on the various rationing schemes controlled by the OPA, awarded extra coupons to those deemed in desperate need, helped set ceiling prices for their region, and even reclaimed coupon books after the death of community members.

The OPA, always mindful that citizen participation cooled complaints, held a three-day educational canvass during the summer of 1942 at the beginning of the rationing program to educate almost half a million retailers on the new maximum price regulations. To accomplish the feat, the OPA called upon those local volunteers again, and 50,000 women in five states diligently spread their knowledge of the program to their local businesses.¹⁵⁰ The local boards of the OPA were intended to provide a necessary means of communication between the federal organization and the citizens expected to live under rationing. The existence of community organizations led to the belief that not

¹⁴⁸ Weatherford, *American Women and World War II*, 214

¹⁴⁹ Chester Bowles, "Rationing and Price Control," *Life*, December 13, 1943, 432

¹⁵⁰ Weatherford, *American Women and World War II*, 232.

only could the OPA adjust to local situations, but that it also maintained a commitment to local oversight and adjustments. This level of supposed interest encouraged volunteerism and fed wary acceptance of untested OPA dictates in the initial year of rationing, which would deeply effect the American family and their stomachs for the duration of the war.

The OPA sought to control food scarcity through a coupon-based rationing program. This program allowed the OPA, through the local boards, to issue an appropriate number of sequentially numbered coupons to each registered person. Then, throughout the year, and according to amount of the rationed commodity available for public consumption, the OPA announced the numbers associated with the sets of coupon consumers could present in exchange for their groceries. The program allotted adults and those employed in laborious professions more coupons, while children received significantly more slender coupon books. The coupons reflected the prominence placed upon male wartime labor and relatively new nutritive information on caloric consumption.¹⁵¹ Men working in war industries often earned more coupons than those employed in other industries, and certainly garnered more coupons than women employed in any profession.

The coupon program also allowed for the local board to provide more coupons for those with special nutritive needs or for children. For example, children often received more coupons for canned milk since nutritionist and mothers believed that consuming milk with most meals sustained growing children. On the other hand, those suffering with chronic maladies could see local boards cut the number of their ration coupons due to their supposedly indolent lifestyle and lower caloric needs. This arrangement allowed

¹⁵¹ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 17.

for certain groups of people to receive fewer or no coupons for some tightly rationed commodities. For example, children under the age of fifteen did not receive an allotment of coffee, while miners and those with strenuous jobs received extra allotments of red meat.¹⁵² These adjustments reflected both the local hierarchy of labor and practical understandings of nutrition in American society at the time. Unfortunately, these adjustments often didn't take into account minority or religious or ethnic groups which held to unique food ways and traditions. Often the OPA officials struggled to assign reasonable points values to foods because they were unfamiliar with certain groups' food customs.¹⁵³ The OPA relied on coupon rationing for the control of a few foods, most notably sugar, but most foods fell under the more complicated points rationing system which was introduced later.

Regardless of the complications inherent in the OPA's programs, the country experienced food rationing throughout most of the war. American's first encounter with a mandatory food rationing program began in 1942 with the coupon rationing of the staple products sugar and coffee. The country began experiencing shortages of sugar immediately after Congress declared war as thousands of housewives rushed to grocers in order to stock-up on sugar, remembering the shortages encountered during the last European war. Yearly sugar consumption during 1942 stood at about 74 pounds per person or about 23 ounces per week; once rationed, consumers only received 12 ounces a week.¹⁵⁴ During the same year coffee also came under the same rationing scheme as a response to a similar situation; women began hoarding coffee in anticipation of wartime

¹⁵² Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 16.

¹⁵³ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 16-17.

¹⁵⁴ Weatherford. *American Women and World War II*, 202.

shortages. Later, in the spring of 1943, the OPA introduced points rationing. Under this scheme processed canned foods, oils, and meats entered the world of rationing. Many processed foods joined the ration due to military conversion of some producers and the uncertain ability to import foods such as tropical fruits due to Nazi submarine attacks on commodities shipping. A lack of steel and other metals on the home front became one of the underlying reasons many canned goods were rationed. Other foods required rationing because of a lack of packaging or distribution challenges. Canned vegetables and baby foods both suffered this fate as cans were needed to fill overseas requirements. Soldier's field rations came in tin cans as did food relief to our allied nations, which caused a shortage in this important packaging material at home. The OPA rationed all canned goods, some milk products, cheeses, and most varieties of meats. A few staple foods avoided being rationed and those included poultry, eggs, fresh milk, and some organ meats. A variety of processed foods even became rationed due to shortages as the war years wore onward.

In addition to the amount of a coupon-rationed food a housewife could purchase, there were stamps controlling the both quality and quantity of point rationed foods. Points rationing controlled the amount of meats, oils and processed foods a housewife could obtain from her grocer. To establish the correct point value for foodstuffs the OPA charged a group of twenty-five hundred housewives with keeping an accurate diary of their food purchases.¹⁵⁵ Then the OPA computed the relative value placed on different foods based on the frequency of purchase from those supposedly representative diaries and the availability of that commodity. In the end, this system assigned each different

¹⁵⁵ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 16.

food item with a point value. The OPA bragged that this process allowed the organization to set and hold prices to 1942 levels, although in reality price setting was an almost never-ending job. The OPA local board, once they established ceiling prices and available supplies, then issued citizens both blue and red point stamps once a month.¹⁵⁶

Another complication faced by the OPA stemmed from a shortage of paper and a wish to avoid loose stamps which made black market transactions more feasible and tempting to the consuming public. Since the OPA promised each citizen a set number of stamps each month, the task became to conserve paper while enabling the home consumer to access their fair share of goods. The solution became to print stamps in denominations of 8, 5, 2, and 1 point. Each month a stamp book then contained a value of 48 points by printing three of each denomination.¹⁵⁷ The larger denomination stamps meant that fewer stamps were in circulation, and provided less opportunity for cheating and counterfeiting. By using rationing system based on points the OPA gained stable control over household consumption of rationed goods. The adjustment of points also allowed the OPA to steer the consuming public away from limited supplies of goods in favor of more plentiful foodstuffs. For instance a shortage of canned peaches meant that the point value of canned peaches increased while the OPA decreased the point value of plentiful cherries. At least in theory, by utilizing this scheme, the OPA encouraged consumers to buy less of a scarce item.

For this system to experience success, consumers needed to view point rationing as logical and necessary. Each processed food required the housewife to surrender blue

¹⁵⁶ OPA, "The Mechanics of Consumer Rationing", April 15, 1944, RG 188, box 659, File: Education, NA.

¹⁵⁷ Chandler and Wallace. *Economic Mobilization and Stabilization*, 483.

stamps, while the red stamps bought meat. Under the points rationing system canned pineapple and canned soup would logically be worth different numbers of points since those were totally different foods. Likewise, a large can of green beans would command more points than a small can of the same product. Blue point rationing made sense to most consumers after a brief adjustment period. However, red points rationing was harder for the public to embrace since red meat played such an important role in the American diet and cultural psyche. Rationing meat required another level of differentiation since a general product like beef covered cuts from prime rib to ground chuck. In response to this unique situation the OPA mandated that the existing USDA quality grading system be applied to meats sold to consumers. Thus a point value could be attached to a specific quality of meat, and consumers easily equated the increased point requirement with an increase in the value of a cut of meat. The OPA undertook this action to reassure the consuming public that their dollars and points bought the appropriate quality. Soon grocers began displaying USDA grade stamps on their fresh meats. The USDA awarded eight different classifications; Prime, Choice, Select, Standard, Commercial, Utility, Cutter, and Canner.¹⁵⁸ Usually only the first six designations appeared before consumers, and Americans recognized these grades as “A” through “F.” Under the points rationing system, USDA grade “A” Prime meat required the most points while utility meat required no points. The OPA, therefore, could control access to the most valuable meats, which became scarce due to military needs, while steering consumers toward less desirable and more plentiful meats or cuts of meat.

¹⁵⁸ United States Department of Agriculture, *United States Standards for Grades of Slaughter Cattle*, July 1, 1996.

The government also set price ceilings on some foods, in order to discourage price gouging and black market activities. During the summer of 1943 the OPA announced a program to implement ceiling prices for all staple foods to counteract previous schemes that resulted in unwarranted price increases. Once again local authority would direct an OPA program. OPA district offices calculated ceiling prices for each community based on a formula: wholesale grocer's cost added to a standard percentage markup.¹⁵⁹ Grocers then posted lists of ceiling prices in stores and promised that their customers would only pay those set prices for consumables. In order to provide a clear and effective program the OPA relied on a dollars- and-cents pricing technique to regulate foodstuffs. Consumers easily understood the concept of ceiling prices under this system, but regional food districts and differences in grade or variety complicated the scheme.¹⁶⁰ So too did regional and community understandings of the meanings some foods conveyed. Not only did the actual value of a food vary from one state to another, so did the cultural significance of that item. The OPA's entire idea circled around the ability of district boards to determine set prices as well as the geographical area where a set price would remain feasible for both producers and consumers. The path taken to establish the price of meat and fresh vegetables illustrates the vastly different business and supply conditions encountered during this endeavor. The Washington office of the OPA directly handled the establishment of ceiling prices for most cuts of meat since very little regional fluctuation in the cost of that commodity existed. However, even meat prices organized in a regional pattern could lead to shortages. Fresh produce also gained ceiling

¹⁵⁹ Chandler and Wallace, *Economic Mobilization and Stabilization*, 414.

¹⁶⁰ Chandler and Wallace, *Economic Mobilization and Stabilization*, 401.

prices as a part of the food rationing program. Growing seasons, weather patterns, commodity supply, and consumer demand all required that ceiling prices for fresh vegetables be determined almost weekly. These are just two challenges experienced throughout the nation. The task of setting ceiling prices often became more convoluted and complex on the local level once cultural meanings attached to foodstuffs.

Local authority played a pivotal role in assuring the accuracy of ceiling prices, however, district boards made mistakes. Local boards were expected to provide timely reports to district officials who would then make decisions about updating ceiling prices. One issue stemmed from the racial make-up of most OPA local boards: 59 members out of every 60 were white.¹⁶¹ As a result, in the rural South, the ceiling price of traditionally African- American staples, such as chitterlings, were set too high since the board had never cooked this dish and did not realize that considerable volume is lost during the preparation process. However, by the spring of 1943, 85% of Americans thought rationing was necessary, and the vast majority of women understood how the points rationing system worked.¹⁶² This does not mean that a housewife relished the active role OPA dictates played in her life, but the program met with acceptance and a basic understanding of this patriotic duty.

These two qualities would be tested throughout the war as the rationing system never ran smoothly. The endless complexity of points rationing, combined with the inconvenience of limited quantities of staple foods, explains why many consumers

¹⁶¹ D'Anne Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 69.

¹⁶² George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971*, Vol 1. (New York: Random House, 1972), 371.

experienced difficulties with rationing. In practical terms, a woman at the grocery store not only needed to budget family funds, but budget coupons, remember the set prices of food staples, and quest for difficult to find items all over town. On top of everything else a wartime woman had to keep in mind, ration points expired after a certain number of days!

A short timeline of the items rationed under the OPA's food programs delineates the furor and speed in which the government expected housewives to embrace the controlled economy and the radical changes wrought on their kitchen supplies. In April of 1942 sugar rationing began in the United States. Teachers and school systems helped issue the first ration book the next month, and the first amendment to rationing was also made in that month. The OPA eventually amended sugar rationing to allow women to apply for extra sugar for home canning. Housewives clamored for these extra allotments in light of the government's victory garden campaign which created an excess of home produce. On November 20th 1942, coffee joined sugar on the list of rationed foods.¹⁶³ By February of 1943 the OPA announced plans to further expand food rationing and issued Ration Book 2 through schools in order to ration more foodstuffs.¹⁶⁴ Processed foods, meats, fats, butter, cheese, and canned fish were added to the food ration in March of 1943. In April of 1943, the OPA issued the first points charts to help educate the public on points rationing.¹⁶⁵ No new foodstuffs joined the list of rationed goods, since the program in 1943 included almost all categories of food under either coupon or points rationing.

¹⁶³ Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration*, November 1942.

¹⁶⁴ Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration*, February 1943.

¹⁶⁵ Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration*, April 1943.

Not all OPA rationing updates depressed the home front consumer, since occasionally citizens were offered more coupons for excess food supplies. As stocks of goods increased the number of coupons or points needed for purchase of the item were temporarily reduced. For example, in November 1943 pork product rationing relaxed since most farmers slaughtered pigs in the winter and grocery supplies increased. Better than expected crops or natural market fluctuations changed the strictures of food rationing, but so too did promising reports from the front lines. The food rationing program relaxed at the end of 1944 in the expectation that the war would end quickly. The successes of the D-Day invasion and several effective campaigns in the Pacific Theatre of war resulted in more territory in Allied control and increased optimistic hopes that the need for wartime controls would end entirely within months. However, by late spring of 1945 rationing tightened again as the war continued against the Japanese government, seemingly without end in sight.¹⁶⁶ Food rationing, and the reasons behind individual foods or food items joining the program, remained a complex science and art. The OPA and federal government sought balance and control of this crucial element of the American economy under the guise of expanded democratic ideals, but in reality the inherent food identities and cultural meanings of food for Americans meant food rationing remained in constant flux.

Throughout the war years the federal OPA offices attempted to alter the food rationing program in response to changing food supplies and conditions. They hoped to prevent widespread inflation while democratically providing a fair share of the nation's

¹⁶⁶ Laurence Tilley, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration January 1941- November 1946* (Washington, DC.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), December 1944.

food supplies to each citizen. Their success in meeting the needs of local communities depended upon their ability to quickly respond to market and supply changes. They also depended heavily upon a complicated private food distribution process, which didn't necessarily align with OPA regional distribution needs. As a result the OPA often lagged behind actual conditions because of slow communication between the offices within the OPA organization or due to poor communication with private businesses. Nonetheless, the OPA's program prevented widespread food scarcity and commodities shortages that had been seen in other wartime countries. Their actions also fostered home front morale and participation in the war effort under the guise of patriotism. Housewives, in turn, then reshaped this idea of patriotic self-sacrifice through rationing to strengthen domestic values. However, program implementation remained rocky and did little to prevent widespread black market activities. The inconsistencies within the OPA food rationing program allowed housewives to negotiate food rationing and utilize this program as a means of communicating the intersection of household authority and their own roles as patriotic defenders of the home front.

Wartime Posters and Propaganda

The federal government inundated the home front with media aimed at supporting the Allied war efforts both overseas and at home. A housewife in the early 1940s would have encountered a dizzying array of propaganda from both the government and commercial businesses. President Roosevelt and his wartime administrators aspired to avoid overt censorship of war information and instead orchestrated a flood of war propaganda. The Office of Price Administration worked closely with several other government organizations to publicize food rationing programs and reach out to

America's consuming public. While the OPA produced an independent series of posters in support of food rationing, the Office of War Information and Bureau of Home Economics also supplemented their propaganda messages regarding food rationing. These three organizations all produced propaganda posters directed at influencing housewives to ration food in accordance with the OPA program.¹⁶⁷ The general goal of this propaganda remained the same throughout the war: convince housewives to cheerfully adhere to the food rationing program by using patriotic and democratic imagery. However, the Office of Price Administration, Office of War Information, and Bureau of Home Economics poster and propaganda campaigns failed to fully stamp out illegal food purchasing which proves that their rhetoric didn't fully persuade women to follow rationing rules. The propaganda missed many opportunities to speak to the deeper patriotic feelings of American women and acknowledge the household authority of these women. Housewives might have found certain images and expressions in these propaganda posters easier to disregard since those representations didn't address their own constructions of their role and position in both society and the home. Some of the propaganda also created loopholes that allowed some groups of women to ignore the government's message. Further the imagery, since it addressed only one group of Americans, white women, created opportunities for minority women to form their own understanding of the food rationing program. This inattention to some groups allowed

¹⁶⁷ The Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services also produced a series of propaganda posters aimed at educating women on the importance of nutrition during war time. This emphasis on nutrition and healthy eating plainly shaped the American psyche during the war. However, the very basic and straightforward tone of these posters coupled with the sole focus on nutrition instead of food rationing makes these posters beyond the scope of this study.

these women to undermine food rationing and impart their own meanings into the act of rationing foodstuffs.

In a larger sense the American home front, and especially housewives, never fully trusted the OPA. The inability of OPA propaganda to consistently inspire women stands as a testament to a larger mistrust of the organization's functionality and leadership. Roger Field, a teenager during the war, recalled that many people in his community "were questioning whether or not we really needed to ration."¹⁶⁸ Public opinion polls also found that many Americans doubted the leadership of the OPA. A poll in August of 1942 found 16% of those surveyed thought Leon Henderson did a poor job as the head of the Office of Price Administration. Another 30% declined to comment on his effectiveness in the position.¹⁶⁹ C. A. Williams complained of OPA bungling in the campaign to provide extra canning sugar. She wrote, "if Mr. Leon Henderson will correct some of his own mistakes, there would be no excuse for rationing gasoline in Indiana."¹⁷⁰ The leadership of the OPA also came under the sharp criticism of Washington DC's best known political cartoonist Clifford K. Berryman.¹⁷¹ Between December 1941 and October 1943, Berryman illustrated over a dozen political cartoons that featured denunciations of Leon Henderson's leadership and the OPA's rationing programs. Berryman's cartoons reflected the American public's dislike and general distrust of OPA leadership. In October of 1943, he drew a cartoon entitled "Hello Prentiss, pull up that chair and tell me

¹⁶⁸ Roger Field, Interviewed by Kevin McCranie, May 21, 2001, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection (Box 37) Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

¹⁶⁹ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971*, Question 11a Survey 273-K August 12, 1942.

¹⁷⁰ Alan F. Pater, ed. *The Yearbook of Public Opinion for 1943* (New York: The Paebar Company, 1943), 294.

¹⁷¹ National Archives, "Clifford K. Berryman Political Cartoon Collection," website cataloging the collection of political cartoons held by the Library of Congress accessed on April 19, 2018, <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/research/special-collections/berryman>

all about it” depicting the battered first two leaders of the OPA, Leon Henderson and Prentiss Brown.¹⁷² Throughout the war years polls showed that about a third of the American populace who believed they had made real sacrifices during the war mentioned that their sacrifices involved family members, finances, or rationing.¹⁷³ With a good portion of the country believing that rationing was a substantial sacrifice, a poll the next year found that 46% of Americans believed that OPA control of prices was the most important problem facing the country.¹⁷⁴ Concerns over the direction of rationing stretched beyond the walls of the OPA and even caused some Americans to question presidential leadership. A poll in November of 1943 asked what those polled disliked the most about the Roosevelt administration’s handling of things. The most frequently mentioned response was “incompetent and dictatorial management of home affairs,” while the fifth most cited complaint was a “bad job of rationing”.¹⁷⁵ Americans didn’t fully believe in the organization’s leaders or its decision making capabilities. Thomas Blanchard, from California, wrote about a rumor that the OPA was going to put a ceiling price on eggs. He said, “fine, but do they know what eggs are?” He recounted a frustrating incident where a buyer called the OPA to inquire about the ceiling price of a particular type of chicken, but first had to explain to the OPA official what a leghorn hen was and was eventually told the OPA didn’t know the ceiling price on those hens.¹⁷⁶ The

¹⁷² Clifford K. Berryman, “Hello Prentiss, pull up that chair and tell me all about it,” (October 23, 1943) The Library of Congress accessed on April 19, 2018 at <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016678571>

¹⁷³ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 488 (Question 8a Survey 339-K February 14, 1945).

¹⁷⁴ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 590 (Question 2a Survey 374-T August 3, 1946).

¹⁷⁵ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 419-420 (Question 3 Survey 306-K November 28, 1943).

¹⁷⁶ Pater, *The Yearbook of Public Opinion for 1944*, 69.

consuming public experienced difficulties placing their trust in an organization which they saw as lacking effective leadership and mishandling portions of the ration programs.

Many of the messages aimed at housewives during the war years failed to fully capture the essence of women's definition of patriotism and their devotion to preserving the home front. These failures probably stemmed from a generalized distrust of the OPA and its leadership during the war. However, three propaganda poster campaigns emerge as great successes amongst the sea of disappointments. Before exploring the reasons that much of the OPA and OWI propaganda left housewives somewhat cold and unmotivated, examining a few victories allows a bolder affirmation of the images and ideals that formed housewives' core motivators. These campaigns serve to underline the importance of women's concepts of patriotic action and support for the war effort. These posters accurately gauged the housewives' sentiments and touched upon their three fold desire to preserve rituals of Americana, defend their voice of authority over the domestic sphere, and support those serving on the front lines.

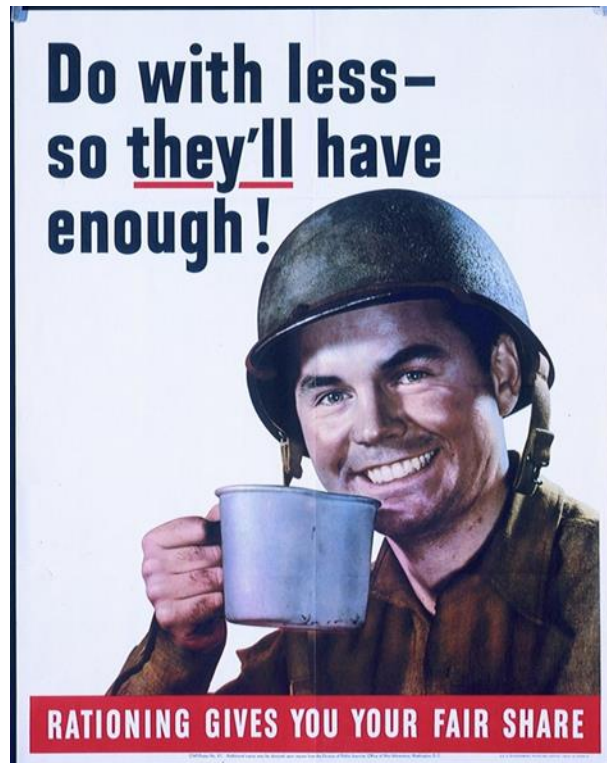


Figure 3. Do with Less- so they'll have enough!¹⁷⁷

In 1943 the Office of War Information published a propaganda poster aimed at convincing housewives to democratically share available foods, especially highly sought after and much hoarded coffee. The poster depicts a young white serviceman wearing a combat helmet, smiling and holding a large tin coffee mug. Not so subtly, the poster presents the viewer with a massive coffee mug, which appears nearly as large as the soldier's head. The overstatement of the mug draws attention to the man's face and accentuates the ideal that these men needed and deserved more than a small cup of coffee to perform their monumental wartime tasks. The taglines on the poster read "Do with less- so they'll have enough!" and proclaims "Rationing gives you your fair share" across

¹⁷⁷ OWI, "Do with Less- so they'll have enough!" no. 37 Library of Congress, Poster 28X22 (1943).

the bottom.¹⁷⁸ Although the poster entered into a long line of other early advertisements for food rationing which emphasized the democratic underpinnings of the OPA program, it became one of the most popular posters of its ilk.¹⁷⁹ The main figure in the poster, Thomas J. Murray, and the tagline combine to create a strong emotional response in housewives because it reaffirms the importance of their decision making and links their actions to individuals on the front lines. Women didn't ration food because they were convinced that the government wanted to insure their fair share of limited supplies. They rationed food with the belief that their grocery store decisions directly contributed to bettering the physical conditions of servicemen fighting overseas. Thomas J. Murray represented all servicemen in this poster, and reminded the consuming public that their sacrifices translated into more coffee for their own brothers, sons, or husbands. The OWI eventually released a second version of this poster due mostly to the emotional response this visual generated for the consuming public.¹⁸⁰

Within weeks of American entry into World War II coffee became the first commodity to disappear from grocers' shelves and tempted many women to hoard coffee as they remembered the drastic shortages endemic to the First World War. The OWI hoped this poster would appeal to the desire for fairness and build trust that the ration meant all Americans might buy coffee throughout the war without fear of shortages. The emotional message, and the ability to tap into women's desire to see direct benefits of

¹⁷⁸ OWI "Do with Less- so they'll have enough!"

¹⁷⁹ *Powers of Persuasion: Poster Art from World War II*. August 1998. National Archives and Records Administration. https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/powers_of_persuasion_intro.htm
1

¹⁸⁰ *Powers of Persuasion: Poster Art from World War II*. August 1998. National Archives and Records Administration. https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/powers_of_persuasion_intro.htm
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their sacrifice, proved a strong motivator alongside fairness for American housewives. The most widely acclaimed advertisements were calculated to make emotional appeals which caught perfectly the amalgam of subconscious idealized emotions Americans had toward their soldiers.¹⁸¹ The poster also aroused the rhetoric and valuation of self-sacrifice which had been preached to home front women since the American Revolution and formed a cornerstone of Progressive Era food advice. The interwar years in America equated self-sacrifice with morality and even good citizenship. Those who successfully denied themselves the pleasures of certain foods built a case for their own ability to control and direct their own lives.¹⁸² Housewives saw an affirmation of their own abilities to govern the domestic sphere in the tagline for this poster.

¹⁸¹Richard R. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On? The American Home Front 1941-1945* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 295-296.

¹⁸²Helen Zoe Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill; University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 36.



Figure 4. Use it Up, Wear it Out, Make it Do!¹⁸³

Another poster tagline which exploited the doctrine of sacrifice also began circulating in 1943. “Use it up, Wear it Out, Make it do, or Do Without!” became one of the favorite bylines of the war era and the housewife’s mantra in the face of rationing in almost all sectors of the economy. It appeared alongside several different versions of the poster and took center stage in many OPA radio announcements and shows.¹⁸⁴ The original poster showed a woman mending a back pocket of a man’s pants as he pulls the torn bit from a lawnmower.¹⁸⁵ While the visual element changed over time, the message persisted because of its ability to speak to the issue of domestic authority and self-

¹⁸³ OWI, “Use it Up, Wear it Out, Make it Do!” no. 39 Poster 29x22 (1943).

¹⁸⁴ OPA sponsored radio programs often added this tagline before discussing local rationing information, reminding consumers when stamps would expire, and as a part of OPA campaigns to convince housewives to buy a surplus food stuff.

¹⁸⁵ OWI, “Use it Up, Wear it Out, Make it Do!”.

sufficiency as a result of self-sacrifice. Women sought out and best responded to propaganda which emphasized their autonomy within the home, while recognizing their sentimental reasons for rationing. Ultimately, women strove to defend their household authority but they also worked to provide for members of that family even if they were temporarily separated by oceans and war.



Figure 5. Make this Pledge¹⁸⁶

Perhaps the most impactful propaganda campaign which addressed some of the ideals shared by American housewives appeared in 1943. The Office of Price Administration sponsored the posters and later radio programming, which featured the home front pledge. The posters depicted a young, white woman with her right hand raised

¹⁸⁶ OPA, “Make this Pledge”.

in salute above the text of the home front pledge.¹⁸⁷ The OPA created and supported an entire media campaign aimed at convincing women and women's groups to say the pledge out loud.¹⁸⁸ The home front pledge urged women to pay no more than top legal prices, while promising to use ration stamps when they purchased rationed goods.¹⁸⁹ Several elements of the poster evoke a military sentiment. The background of the poster is dominated by a line of five-pointed stars, while the housewife raises her hand in an imitation of the swearing in ceremony completed by soldiers joining the military. The housewife stares straightforward with a steady gaze and pursed lips. Appearing in a frilly white apron and contrasting blouse, the housewife is dressed in her version of a uniform. Although the image depicts a youthful white woman, the image is overtly generic and too idealized for real life.

The home-front pledge housewife's generic and perfected image also reminds the viewer of the image used for Betty Crocker by the General Mills Corporation in advertising since 1936, along with a host of other marketing women such as Ann Pillsbury and Aunt Jenny. By 1945, survey's suggested that Betty Crocker's image and name recognition stood second only to Eleanor Roosevelt's name and personality.¹⁹⁰ The idealized imagery used to communicate a message would have been normative to the American housewife long accustomed to seeing advertisements depicting Betty Crocker. Fictional female advertising caricatures often enjoyed more household authority than the

¹⁸⁷ OPA, "Make this Pledge".

¹⁸⁸ OPA radio programs also included the pledge with the admonition that the audience should say the pledge aloud with the narrator.

¹⁸⁹ OPA, "Make this Pledge".

¹⁹⁰ "Betty Crocker Official Portraits," General Mills, accessed June 27, 2017, www.bettycrocker.com/mhplibrary/vintage-betty/the-betty-crocker-portraits.

real home economists behind these corporations. These representative housewives were known as “live trademarks” in the business world and designed to forge a crucial link between corporations and the actual consumer.¹⁹¹ The OPA wisely chose to utilize a quasi “live trademark” to represent their home-front pledge, probably due to the switch in leadership direction at the national level in 1943. Chester Bowles, who came from a Madison Avenue advertising background, took over the OPA’s control that year and utilized his skills to better communicate with his consumers.¹⁹² Much like a large advertising agency would have, the OPA made sure the home-front-pledge housewife conformed to the imagery American housewives expected in these advertisements. “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 not sentimental, interested in the consumer but not involved with her.”¹⁹³ While the image of the home-front-pledge housewife’s careful construction would prove eminently digestible for American women, her message and the implications of these posters proved exciting for women. Much of this poster’s visual power derives from its mimicry of a familiar military scene: this poster adopts a serious tone. The poster, and the several that follow it urging housewives to keep the home front pledge, intentionally connected the housewife’s rationing job to the virtue and honor associated with military service. The deeper connotation of the image equated women’s willing participation in food rationing with military service. Thus, it ratifies women’s authority on the home front

¹⁹¹ Laura Shapiro, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America* (New York: Viking, 2004), 178.

¹⁹² Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 17.

¹⁹³ Shapiro, *Something from the Oven*, 178.

and emphasized her importance in the joint effort to win World War II for the allied forces. Housewives wanted to feel their contributions and sacrifices made immediate and positive differences to those serving abroad. American women wanted to take active roles on the home front, A *Newsweek* article in 1941 complained that “thousands of women have been unable to find constructive ways of aiding in national defense and women’s organizations have been put off.”¹⁹⁴ The OPA sought to make food rationing the root of women’s patriotic contributions to national defense. This poster provided direction to housewives unable or unwilling to participate in other war related work. Housewives’ definition of patriotism also meant that they saw themselves as defending the American way of life. The success of the home front pledge comes as no surprise as it spoke to both of these underlying motivations.

¹⁹⁴ Weatherford, *American Women and World War II*, 229.

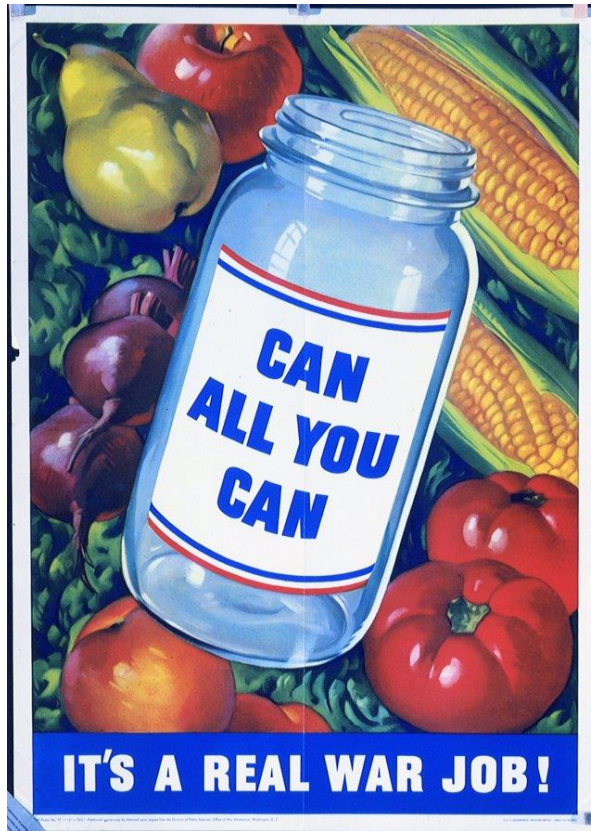


Figure 6. Can all You Can¹⁹⁵

The final, and perhaps most revealing series of OWI food-rationing posters, which met with housewife support, addressed the issue of canning foods and vegetables. Propaganda pushing housewives to can foods instead of buying canned food at the grocery store appealed for two reasons. First, many Americans living in rural areas, and/or the working poor often already planted gardens and preserved foods for future kitchen use. Gardening a portion of one's food supply, either as a part of traditional lifestyles or as a necessity birthed during the Great Depression, remained popular throughout the war years. By 1944 Americans tended over twenty-million individual

¹⁹⁵ OWI, "Can All You Can" No. 77 Poster. 23X16 (1943).

gardens which produced 40% of all vegetables grown in the United States.¹⁹⁶ Secondly, canning and preserving foods remained an almost entirely female pursuit. By canning, women demonstrated their mastery over the domestic sphere and simultaneously insured food stability for the family. Canning and the propaganda posters created to support home canning targeted women and emphasized their ability to provide for the home through their efforts. The message on the poster “Can All You Can” is emblazoned across the label of an empty quart canning jar sitting atop a variety of luscious fresh vegetables. The byline underneath informs housewives that canning constitutes a “real war job.”¹⁹⁷ For a home front woman, this poster not only acknowledges her importance within the domestic sphere, but also aligns her work with the larger war effort and national aims. Thus canning foods, much like nutrition, became an area where women could use the kitchen as a conduit into larger political discussion.

¹⁹⁶ “What was a Victory Garden”, The National World War II Museum. Website accessed on July 5, 2017 at www.nationalww2museum.org/assets/pdfs

¹⁹⁷ OWI, “Can All You Can”.

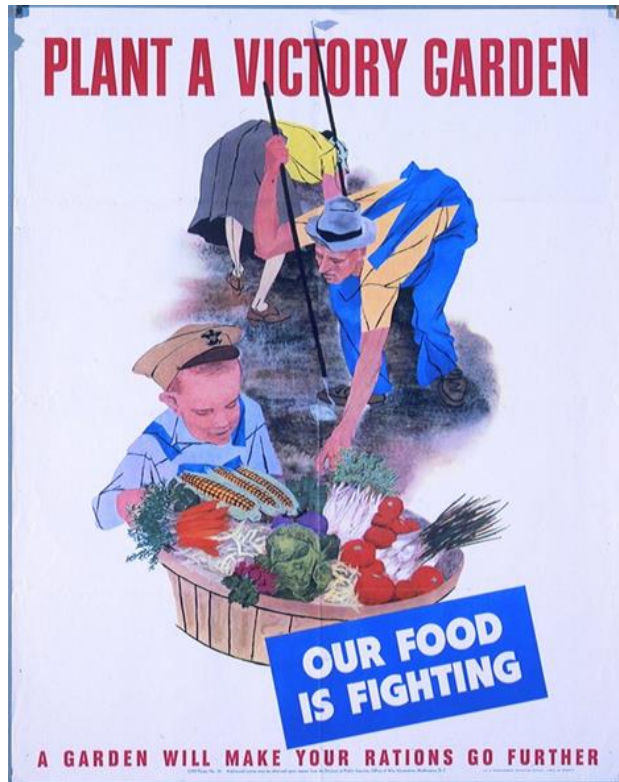


Figure 7. Plant a Victory Garden- Our Food is Fighting¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ OWI, "Plant a Victory Garden-Our Food is Fighting" no. 34 Poster 28X22 (1943).



Figure 8. We'll Have Lots to Eat this Winter, Won't We Mother?¹⁹⁹

Another poster depicting a couple toiling in a garden, with a young boy peering into a full basket of produce, directly connects gardening with food rationing. The poster "Plant a Victory Garden- Our Food Is Fighting" came out as a part of a larger OWI campaign to convince the public of the need to conserve foods and thereby provide surplus grocery stuffs to the front lines.²⁰⁰ This iteration of the campaign actually tells women that gardening "will make your rations go farther." One of the most blissful representations of canning as a part of the food rationing program depicts a mother and daughter working to preserve food together. The daughter asks "We'll have lots to eat this winter, won't we mother?" as the byline demands "Grow your own-Can your own."²⁰¹ The poster shows

¹⁹⁹ OWI, "We'll Have Lots to Eat this Winter, Won't We Mother?" Poster (1943).

²⁰⁰ OWI, "Plant a Victory Garden-Our Food is Fighting" no. 34 Poster 28X22 (1943).

²⁰¹ OWI, "We'll Have Lots to Eat this Winter, Won't We Mother?"

the white and obviously middle-class mother and daughter wearing matching frilly aprons with matching hairstyles. They stand before a shelf packed with gleaming cans of vegetables, as they complete canning jars of fresh peas and green beans. The entire image is meant to suggest that those who do not can their own vegetables risked food insecurity, and it particularly mentions winter as a concerning time for food supplies. The image also places responsibility for protecting the family and particularly children on the housewife. These posters taken together work to impress upon women their ability to shield their families from hunger, provide their own solutions to rationing shortages, and participate directly in war work by continuing to perform domestic tasks. American women responded to these images. In urban centers, where the Department of Agriculture attempted to dissuade the public from growing and preserving their own vegetables, total production exceeded one million tons of vegetables.²⁰² Housewives truly connected with the idea that these domestic tasks fueled and supplemented the battle front. Canning the produce from a victory garden revived the art of canning, while allowing housewives to insure food security and participate in a form of war “work”.²⁰³ Women’s acceptance of the message in these posters is perhaps best seen through their efforts. Mrs. Keith Frazier Somerville wrote a regular article called “Dear Boys” from 1943-1945 recounting the home front happenings in Bolivar County, Mississippi. In April 1943 she wrote about Mrs. Dillon who, although worried about her sons in the military, “did her part at home, for she had a grand Victory Garden and last year put up several hundred jars of fruits and vegetables.” She also mentioned Pearl Kelley, an unmarried woman, who preserved 600

²⁰² Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 251.

²⁰³ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 134.

jars.²⁰⁴ During the summer of 1944, Mrs. Sommerville wrote about “the most patriotic family”, who spent July 4th picking and canning four bushels of green peas.²⁰⁵

Sommerville’s canning updates reveal that women not only preserved copious amounts of produce, but that they also felt it a proper expression of female patriotism. As canning and preserving foods gained immense popularity on the home front, the OWI eventually phased out many of their propaganda posters. However, these posters highlight the rhetoric and ideology which housewives responded to immediately. They also reveal and clarify the motivations women held for rationing food: the desire to preserve traditional practices, defend their authority over the domestic sphere, and support those serving on the front lines.

The success of the imagery in these posters points to a desire to express the primacy and power of the home and domesticity as a part of the wartime experience. These posters communicate the government’s desire to see women protect and defend the both the traditional idea of the home and their role within the home.²⁰⁶ They also highlight the themes and emotional appeals that most resonated with housewives. The imagery of the soldier reminds the home front of servicemen, as well as the sacrifices demanded of all Americans. The home-front-pledge housewife also conjures ideals of virtuous sacrifice for the greater good. Finally the posters related to canning and victory gardens suggest women’s roles as mothers and nurturers in the home. Taken together these images and metaphors all depict the housewife as the knowledgeable, authoritative,

²⁰⁴ Keith Frazier Somerville, *Dear Boys: World War II Letters from a Woman Back Home* Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith eds. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), 89.

²⁰⁵ Somerville, *Dear Boys*, 200.

²⁰⁶ Emily Yellin, *Our Mother’s War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 36.

protector of the family and home. The emotional appeal of these messages and images, if replicated, would have served as a siren's cry to draw more housewives into compliance with OPA food rationing rules.

Thomas Murry's coffee cup, the home-front-pledge housewife, and the plethora of canning posters prove that both the OPA and OWI possessed the ability to tap into housewives motivations to build support for food rationing. However, much of their propaganda regarding food simply failed to address women's reasons for rationing and their understanding of patriotic action. To the OPA and OWI, along with other organizations which produced more limited amounts of food rationing propaganda, food held the secret to engaging women's participation. Roosevelt's wartime government embarked upon more and more efforts to convince women to join wartime industries and enter into male dominated arenas of society. Yet, alongside those efforts stood a well-developed and widespread fear that women would abandon the domestic sphere as a result of their wartime labor. Tensions developed throughout American society which pushed the government to produce more propaganda to glorify the housewife's traditional role, while also insisting upon injecting women into a newly gender neutral workforce.²⁰⁷ Therefore, much of the propaganda first produced in late 1943 began to edge away from directly depicting women at all and instead focused on sketches with vivid graphic layouts.

While the OPA and OWI shied away from entering into the debate over women and gender through their propaganda, their ability to communicate and draw out popular

²⁰⁷Donna B. Knaff, *Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of World War II in American Popular Graphic Art* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 28-29.

support from housewives also waned. By avoiding a strong statement on women's roles that might have acknowledged an expansion of the domestic sphere, the OPA oversimplified their messages and even introduced loopholes that may have encouraged some women to engage in black market activities. Misunderstanding the nuances of housewives' desire to expand their household authority, and fears of changing social norms regarding the role of women during the war, led the OPA to undercut their own burgeoning relationship with housewives through advertising.

Many of the earliest OPA and OWI propaganda posters for the food rationing programs touted the program's democratic nature and ability to provide for all citizen's needs. This line of propaganda aimed at calming fears of food shortages and long lines for meagre supplies. Women worried the country would face a similar fate to the one seen throughout the years of World War I. This led to immediate shortages of foods that had been difficult to obtain because of hoarding and scarceness during World War I. These scarce foodstuffs included daily staples like coffee and sugar. One of the main reasons the OPA chose to ration sugar so quickly in 1942 stemmed from the widespread hoarding and shortages caused by panic in the first weeks of the war. As principle foodstuffs like sugar joined the ever growing list of rationed foods, the unintended consequence became the swift establishment of black markets throughout the country.²⁰⁸ Nonetheless the OPA pushed forward with their campaign to reassure housewives of the soundness of food rationing plans and rationing's ability to democratically provide a fair share of highly sought after goods to each individual. However, many Americans already distrusted the OPA and their claims of rationing program fairness emerged as empty. The

²⁰⁸ Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 240-241, 267.

OPA's wish to frame their programs as democratic failed to inspire the consuming public. A July 1943 Gallup Poll found that 76% of those surveyed wanted an "impartial committee to study and report on the current food problem."²⁰⁹ Clearly, the OPA's claim to be spreading democracy through their programs met with some criticism if the public felt the need for an unbiased and open-minded group to study the problems in the rationing program.

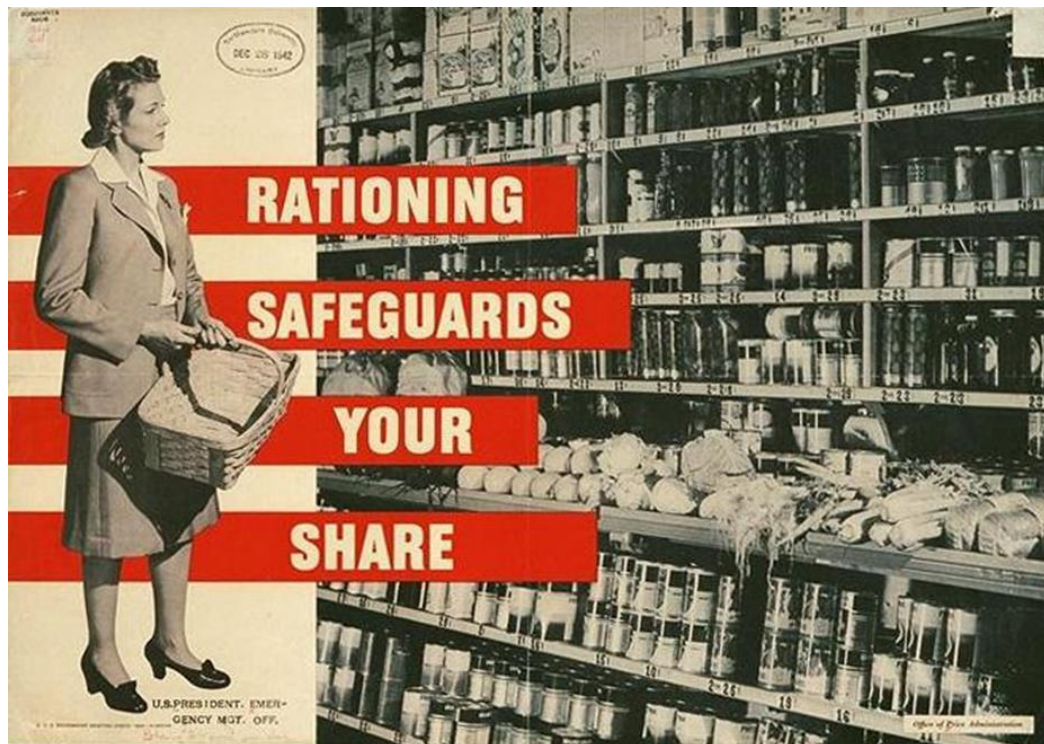


Figure 9. Rationing Safeguards Your Share²¹⁰

This devotion to democratic principles appears in many OPA food rationing posters. The popular tagline mentions the food rationing program provided a "fair share." In 1942 the OPA published a poster showing a well-dressed, youthful, white woman

²⁰⁹ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 394-395 (Question 3 Survey 298-K July 25, 1943).

²¹⁰ OPA, "Rationing Safeguards Your Share" Poster (1942).

gazing quizzically at a photo of fully stocked grocer's shelves.²¹¹ The poster's tagline insists that rationing is a safe-guard and the full shelves enforce the concept that without food controls and the organization of food rationing programs that there wouldn't be enough food for all shoppers. The woman's empty shopping basket in front of the full shelves gives the viewer the impression that she can choose whatever item she might desire. The propaganda aims to reassure the viewer that plenty of food and plenty of choice exists under the food rationing program.



Figure 10. Americans! Share the Meat²¹²

²¹¹ OPA, "Rationing Safeguards Your Share" Poster (1942).

²¹² OWI and War Production Board Food Requirements Committee, "Americans! Share the Meat" Poster (1942).

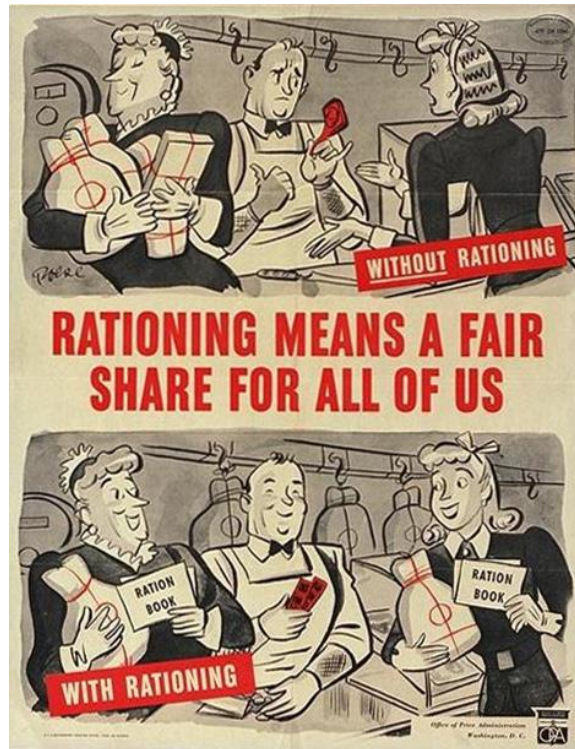


Figure 11. Rationing Means A Fair Share for All of Us²¹³

The emphasis on fairness and democratic principles continued. After the announcement of meat rationing, the OWI and War Production Board Food Requirements Committee produced a joint endeavor that mentioned no less than six times the terms “fair” and “share.” The “Share the Meat” poster not only reiterated the democratic logic of rationing, but went further to provide a chart listing the weekly meat requirements of adults and children to prove the government’s demands fell in line with contemporary nutritional advice. The poster also makes it clear that the government chose to limit civilian consumption of beef, veal, lamb, mutton, and pork so as to better supply the armed forces and allies.²¹⁴ The poster then suggests housewives buy poultry,

²¹³ OPA, “Rationing Means a Fair Share for All of Us” Poster (1943).

²¹⁴ OWI and War Production Board Food Requirements Committee, “Americans! Share the Meat” Poster (1942).

fish, liver, sweetbreads or other organ meats instead of their usual cuts. The poster asked women to limit their family's consumption and substitute less desirable meats in an attempt to connect the request to rhetoric surrounding self-sacrifice. However, the meats listed as rationed and limited held deeper cultural and social meanings that could not be completely overcome through government or organizational pressures.²¹⁵ By 1943 the OPA turned toward less photojournalistic representations and used a cartoon to communicate their fair share message. "Rationing Means a Fair Share for All of Us" contains two versions of the same scene; one with rationing and one without.²¹⁶ In the world without rationing an older woman, wearing pearls and gloves to give the impression of wealth, walks away from a grocer's counter carrying two hams and an armful of other goods. Meanwhile the grocer, whose shelves are bare, helplessly motions to the next customer, a young housewife, that the distinguished older woman bought his last ham. The young housewife's hands beg for a solution, and her expression shows astonishment and frustration. In the lower register of the poster, which depicts the world with food rationing, all the participants are smiling. Both women carry a single ham, alongside their ration books. The grocer smiles as he holds up more money and a full display of hams lines the wall behind his counter. The poster implies that by utilizing the ration, all parties, housewives and grocers are happy. Cheating and hoarding created discontent and only made one group happy. The OPA's wanted to go beyond assuring Americans of their fair share in this 1943 poster. They hoped to show that black market buying harmed all parties involved. Interestingly, they chose to portray the black

²¹⁵ Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 97-98.

²¹⁶ OPA, "Rationing Means a Fair Share for All of Us".

marketer as an older woman thereby equating age with both wealth and a willingness to undermine food rationing rules.

This fixation in both OPA and OWI propaganda posters with portraying the evil doer as older and affluent continued throughout the war years. The “Rationing Means a Fair Share for All of Us” poster combines eye catching graphics with a simple message about rationing benefitting all Americans. Much more entertaining than its mostly educational predecessors from 1942, this poster pushed the ideal that rationing provided evenly for all Americans. Ironically, by showing the world without rationing and hinting that women chose to avoid black market buying, the OPA acknowledges the failure of their own democratic fair share propaganda campaign to completely end black market buying. Black market buying and hoarding of goods became a problem in the first weeks of the program and remained a serious issue throughout the war.²¹⁷ Plainly, American housewives didn’t fully believe in the fair share model and were motivated to seek out extra allotments of certain goods.

Black market purchases were the best way for women to assure that their families received the amount of high value goods they considered, under a capitalist system, to be their share. The goods they chose to illegally pursue tended to be those most valued such as meat and sugar.²¹⁸ While the OPA spread ideals of democracy, women sought to fulfill their self-defined roles as preservers of the nation. By using food as a tool and extension of household authority women meant to maintain rituals and norms for their home and community. Messages meant to inspire the housewife to share food stuffs

²¹⁷ Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 259.

²¹⁸ Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 267.

missed their mark in a world where an Easter ham held the power to symbolize both democracy and the power of capitalism to maintain well-ordered domesticity, an idealized cornerstone of American society. Housewives willingly violated government regulations in order to prepare and share meals which they believed helped preserve American democracy and their culture.

One of the worst miscalculations on the part of the OPA during the war stemmed from housewives reading between the lines of their propaganda campaigns and finding loopholes in the messages. Housewives exploited these ambiguities and gaps in the propaganda in order to avoid the portions of the food rationing program which didn't speak to their desire to preserve home front American culture. In short, the OPA's inability to fully address the diversity characteristic of Americans created enough opacity that women felt little guilt or fear in turning to illegal black market activities. African Americans particularly felt detached and uninspired by wartime propaganda. The mainstream segment of African Americans were overwhelmingly ambivalent to the administration's "idea of the war", and even birthed a subculture openly hostile to what they saw as a "white man's war".²¹⁹ Throughout the war years the African American press repeatedly struggled to arouse passion within their readership to support the war effort, concocted the "Double V" campaign, and generally hoped to turn the negatives of the war into positives for their communities.²²⁰ The most widely received and popular propaganda campaigns overseen by the OPA and OWI clearly targeted young white

²¹⁹Lawrence R. Samuel, *Pledging Allegiance: American Identity and the Bond Drive of World War II* (Washington; Smithsonian Institute Press, 1997), 131.

²²⁰Lee Finkle, *Forum for Protest: The Black Press During World War II* (London: Associated University Presses, 1975), 89-90.

middle-class housewives. Instead of directly advertising to or equally addressing African Americans, the OWI and OPA propaganda sought to maintain racial segregation and uphold social inequalities. Government propagandistic attempts at engaging African Americans in support of war programs worked to emphasize the possibility of true democracy after the war while concealing the realities of inequality during the conflict.²²¹ Although the OWI and OPA never released a national propaganda campaign to directly target African American, they did undertake limited efforts to discourage the use of “mammy” imagery in commercial advertisements and circulated some articles and cartoons that featured slightly darker skinned characters to black presses.²²² The willingness to create propaganda for such a limited release indicates the OPA and OWI’s understanding that African Americans did not feel particularly inspired to national service though the national campaigns.

The posters and OPA largely ignored the experiences of other races, ages, and non-traditional homemakers. The home front pledge features a young white woman dressed in a frilly apron. While some American women directly identified with this image, the vast majority became more vested in the sentiment behind the message than the visual imagery. In the series of posters promoting victory gardens the feature image centers around a young white woman and a child. This and other images so prevalent in much of the wartime propaganda reinforced a middle-class idealized lifestyle. The OPA eschewed the lower classes in their marketing and depicted the upper class as prone to

²²¹ Samuel, *Pledging Allegiance*, 132.

²²² Bentley, *Eating for Victory*, 78-79, 120.

moral weaknesses and cheating the rationing program.²²³ These posters were somewhat ageist, since the home front heroine who occupied her days taking her solemn oath to uphold OPA standards or canning garden fresh vegetables to keep from buying canned goods always looks to be in her twenties. Meanwhile, the characters that inspired less mimicry and served as villains in the home front drama more often than not seemed to be grey haired and less svelte than the home front heroines. After years of exposure to these racist and ageist posters one might forgive African American women, women of different cultural backgrounds, women employed outside the home, or older housewives from beginning to think the OPA's program didn't address their lifestyles or encompass their situations.

²²³ The United States Extension Service published a series of posters that showed actual photographs of lower class families and children in their efforts to spread nutritional knowledge during the war years. Unfortunately, instead of praising this group's aptitude with substituting ingredients and raising their own vegetables and meats the posters typically only showed their poor choices due to financial instability leading toward nutritional deficiencies that they accused weakened the nation as a whole. These posters focused on harried housewives and skinny children to scare the home front into using their nutrition advice. The OPA represented the wealthy in several posters as hoarding goods ("Rationing Means a Fair Share for All of Us") and as corpulent black marketers ("Stamp Out Black Markets").

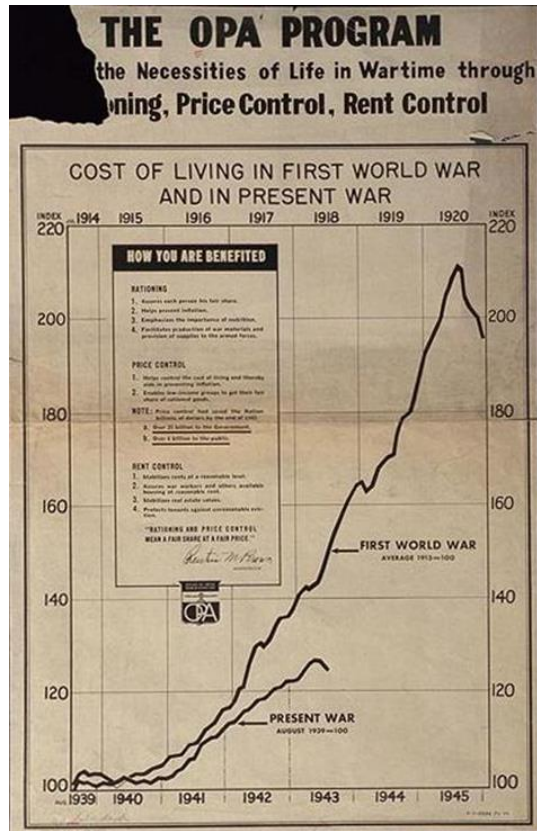


Figure 12. The OPA Program²²⁴

²²⁴ OPA, "The OPA Program" Poster (1942).

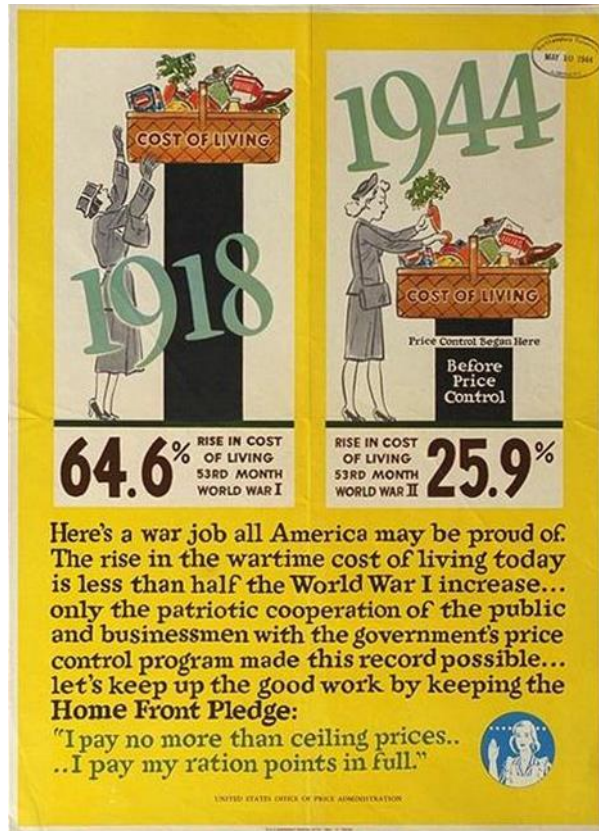


Figure 13. Cost of Living 1918 and 1944²²⁵

To make matters worse the OPA food rationing propaganda moved from their original “fair share” democracy strategy toward a new more self-congratulatory tactic. The first poster of this sort appeared in late 1942 in an effort to show the OPA’s ability to keep basic goods cheaper in wartime than the voluntary World War I program. “The OPA Program” poster grabs attention with a large graph.²²⁶ It charts the index prices for goods in WWI versus those items average cost from 1939 through 1942. The chart appears to show skyrocketing index prices for goods in WWI. Meanwhile the average cost during US involvement in WWII remained below the line for WWI and rose at a

²²⁵ OPA, “Cost of Living 1918 and 1944” Poster (1944).

²²⁶ OPA, “The OPA Program” Poster (1942).

much more moderate pace over time than prices in the previous war. The poster then lists ways the housewife benefitted from price controls, rationing, and rent controls. The posters sought to encourage the home front, yet the graph shows change over time. It misrepresents actual conditions by directly comparing two very different eras in American economic history; before the New Deal and after the introduction of New Deal programs intended to direct and regulate economic change. Overall, this poster joins rhetoric meant to calm home front fears of runaway inflation and shortages, but it also pushes further by congratulating government efforts in WWII. The graph shows an exponential rise in the index cost of goods for the period 1939 through 1940, when Franklin Roosevelt's government began instituting economic controls. The underlying message screams that controls and rationing work and are successful at avoiding the issues faced in World War I. This poster created a foundation that the OPA would return to in early 1945. "Cost of Living 1918 and 1944" poster remobilizes the congratulatory tone seen in "The OPA Program".²²⁷ This poster improves upon the graphic and uses cartoon line characters to emphasize the successes of food rationing programs during WWII. In the first caricature, a woman in 1918 stretches to barely reach a basket of food atop the 64.6% cost of living bar graph. In the second a young woman in 1944 easily picks through the waist-high basket atop a supposedly small 25.9% cost of living increase. The byline below the graphic illustration then congratulates all Americans on the lower cost of living and attributes their successes to patriotic cooperation between the OPA and private sectors. Finally, at the very bottom, the home-front -pledge housewife and a copy of the pledge text appear. Both of these posters set out to congratulate, and

²²⁷ OPA, "Cost of Living 1918 and 1944".

simultaneously reinforce the public's need for OPA food rationing in order to avoid runaway inflation. In essence the posters tell the public that their lives could be much more difficult, and food prices beyond the reach of average middle-class Americans, without the intervention of the OPA. Superficially, this rhetoric seems impossible to argue against, but one must remember that a thriving black market existed from the earliest days of price control and rationing and continued throughout the war years. Instead of simply spreading the good news that OPA food rationing worked and benefitted all Americans, these posters paradoxically created a certain amount of permissiveness for black market activities. The continued presence of the black market in the face of these congratulatory statistics meant that housewives didn't feel incredible pressure to adhere religiously to the food rationing program. Housewives illegally purchased food throughout the war, and the OPA program still survived and benefitted everyone. A wartime Gallup Poll found 25% of respondents willing to admit that they thought occasionally buying food on the black market was acceptable.²²⁸ This survey shows that a large chunk of Americans were willing to stretch the limits of the OPA's food rationing program. The message in these posters, rather than inciting more fervent rationing, encouraged more laxity since they proved the program survived without full-time participation.

²²⁸ Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 270.



Figure 14. Where our Men are Fighting Our Food is Fighting²²⁹

²²⁹ OWI, "Where our Men are Fighting Our Food is Fighting" Poster (1943).



Figure 15. Food is a Weapon—Don't Waste It!²³⁰

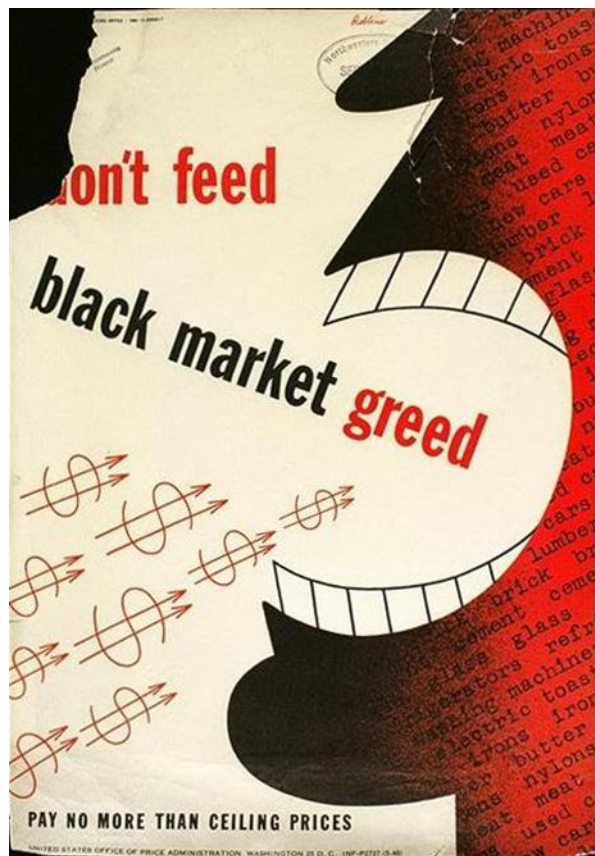
Since the government first introduced wartime economic controls and the food rationing program to the American public, the OPA and other offices sought to connect home front actions to front lines success. In 1943 the OPA and OWI produced a series of three posters which coalesced this thinking into a simple posit: food is a weapon needed to win the war. One poster reads “Where our men are fighting our food is fighting”.²³¹ This announcement is superimposed a graphic of crates being parachute dropped presumably into a war zone. Another depicts an empty glass and fully consumed chicken dinner which declares “Food is a Weapon- Don't Waste It”.²³² Both posters urge consumers to buy wisely, cook carefully, store carefully, and use leftovers. These two

²³⁰ OWI, “Food is a Weapon-- Don't Waste It!” Poster 58X 41cm (1943).

²³¹ OWI, “Where our Men are Fighting Our Food is Fighting” Poster (1943).

²³² OWI, “Food is a Weapon- Don't Waste It!”.

posters were produced at a time when most OPA posters focused on the democratic nature of rationing and fair share rhetoric. They are precursors to the generally dark and forbidding tone which propaganda would take later in the war, and after the conclusion of hostilities, in order to inspire housewives to continue rationing.²³³ These two posters would have appealed to housewives as they acknowledge the importance of domestic tasks in the overall war effort while giving authority over food to women. These posters employ dark colors, stark imagery and create an almost depressing tone. The OWI chose this color palette and imagery to reinforce the serious nature of food rationing and its potential impacts on front lines combatants.



²³³ *Powers of Persuasion: Poster Art from World War II*, August 1998, National Archives and Records Administration. https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/powers_of_persuasion_intro.html

Figure 16. Don't Feed the Black Market²³⁴

The oppressive gloom and somber tone of these OWI posters eventually morphed into outright fear-mongering. The OPA's desire to continue food rationing and their inability to combat the bustling black markets in America's neighborhoods led them to produce very heavy-handed rhetoric. In 1946 the OPA created two posters that address black market activities. "Don't Feed Black Market Greed" returns to the cartoon like depictions seen in earlier OPA posters, but lacks the playful tone. The graphic shows a gaping mouth with large teeth swallowing down dollar signs. The byline encourages housewives to "pay no more than ceiling prices".²³⁵ The posters use blood red, black and white to grab attention and elicit thoughts of anger and agitation, as does a second from the same period. The second poster shows a price tag with an arrow informing consumers to avoid paying above OPA ceiling prices for goods. The tagline for the poster threatens "Any OVERCHARGE comes out of YOUR pocket." With the end of hostilities in both Europe and the Pacific, housewives felt even more unencumbered by the strictures of war time food rationing. As the war ended, so too did housewives' motivation to ration and substitute food stuffs.²³⁶ Their increased interest in black market goods testifies to their efforts to restore normalcy on the home front, and their continued aspiration to shape culture and society through food. These posters taken as a whole prove that housewives continued to utilize black markets in order to supply items for their families, and highlight the OPA's desperation and ineffectiveness in stopping those transactions.

²³⁴ OPA, "Don't Feed the Black Market" Poster (1946).

²³⁵ OPA, "Don't Feed the Black Market."

²³⁶ Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 264.

The OPA, alongside other promotional organizations such as the OWI, sought to engage American women at a local level and involve them in food rationing programs. In the most simplistic terms the OPA succeeded, and food rationing lasted until almost a year after the succession of hostilities in World War II. Women rationed food, they used coupons, and counted point stamps. They also kept a lively and widespread black market fed through their illegal food purchases. Why did this disconnect exist between OPA food rationing and women's participation in the black market? Women's responses to the OPA's structure, rationing program, and even propaganda illustrate that their motivations and loyalty differed from the rationale used to create the rationing rules they were expected to follow. The OPA's structure and rationing programs emphasized local influence and community voice. However, they operated in a linear top-down manner that stifled suggestions and input from the local level in general and women in particular. Housewives navigated the overly complex rationing programs and learned about both coupons and red points while holding family nutrition and well-being in the balance. They chose the items they would ration and when they would cheat in order to preserve American traditions, defend their authority over the domestic sphere, and support those servicing on the front lines. For housewives, propaganda and programs meant to support food rationing gained attention and popularity only if they addressed these deeper motivations. The successes of Thomas Murray's "Do with Less- So They'll Have Enough", the home front pledge and posters aimed at convincing women to can their own victory garden produce all speak to these motivations. Propaganda failures stemmed from the OPA and OWI's inherent racism and ageism, which failed to recognize these groups' efforts while requiring participation. It also failed by inadvertently advertising a

permissive attitude which fed the growth of black market activities. Finally, the OPA, for an organization formed with rhetoric that recognized the power of the average citizen they failed to realize that women possessed individual and distinct goals associated with the war effort which they expressed through food rationing.

CHAPTER III - WHO'S AFRAID OF ENFORCEMENT? BLACK MARKETS DURING WWII

Black markets not only existed in communities throughout the United States during World War II, this illegal trade flourished. By setting limits and controls over certain sectors and items in the American economy, the Office of Price Administration simultaneously birthed black markets. No sooner did the OPA limit consumption of or access to an item than a black market emerged to supply the unmet needs of the consuming populous. The OPA responded to black markets by devoting an entire branch of their organization to enforcing rationing rules and prosecuting violators of those policies. The Enforcement Division of the OPA sought to stop illegal transactions and shut down black market operations. This goal became a long term game of whack-a-mole: American black markets only ceased activities when OPA controls were lifted after the war.

Housewives who bought the occasional piece of ungraded meat for a special meal or illegally pooled and borrowed ration stamps had very little to fear from the enforcement division of the OPA. The preference of district attorneys to avoid individual actions and small-time infractions led women to be bold and allowed them to express their own understanding of patriotic action. While the national OPA officers didn't condone these actions, the sympathies and choices of district attorneys created an environment that tolerated housewives that bought through the black market. However, district enforcement attorneys tirelessly worked to shut down large black market rings, and to punish grocers that violated rationing rules.

Yet they seldom bothered the simple consumer, and women were aware of this permissive milieu. Betty Oliphant, a young housewife during the war recalled her own participation in the black market with a flippant tone. She remembered following her military husband to Fort Bragg, and she recalled the challenge of preparing home cooked meals for him and his Army friends during food rationing. “He was station compliment, so he didn’t get a ration book. But every night, I’d fix something...so it was pretty difficult. My mom kind of subsidized the rationing tickets. Not supposed to be out of the books, but she would send them to me and I found one grocery that would accept them.”²³⁷ Betty Oliphant understood that by removing the food ration stamps from her mother’s book, the duo violated OPA rationing rules. She also recognized that she routinely bought goods illegally from a local grocer. Oliphant acknowledged that she continued to participate in the black market until her husband was shipped overseas and she could no longer preserve a sense of normalcy by making nightly meals. But if Betty Oliphant and her mother’s actions were hardly exceptional, neither was their belief that their tiny forays into illegal purchases were no cause for concern. One-in-five respondents to a 1945 Gallup Poll felt that buying on the black market was sometimes justified.²³⁸ A wartime nurse in Pittsburgh also recalled sharing ration coupons with family. Initially some employers, such as a hospital where meals were available, kept workers ration books. Eventually many of these employers gave ration books back to their individual owners. Clarice McCulloch recalled supplementing her mother’s ration

²³⁷ Betty Oliphant, Interviewed by David Gregory, April 12, 2008, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 56 Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

²³⁸ George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971*, 506 (Question 11B Survey 346-K May 26, 1945).

with her own stamps. "I gave her my ration book: it was difficult for one person, but she got along fine with two ration books."²³⁹ Another Army wife, Eunice Gooding, also spoke of pooling both gas and food ration stamps and borrowing from other wives on post. For Gooding this was the only way they could entertain and socialize with their husbands on base. Later on, after her husband was sent overseas she remembered women pooling ration stamps and food stuffs to send care packages to servicemen.²⁴⁰ Pooling ration stamps, although illegal, became so common place that even schools participated in this black-market activity. William J. Clark remembered farmers in his small town in Ohio assembling their gas ration stamps so that the high school could purchase enough gasoline for their sports team to travel for games.²⁴¹ Ruth Goldberger also found a way around the limitations of gasoline rationing. Her father's congregation often supplied their minister with extra coupons which she illegally used to fuel her carpool business. Farmers could earn coupons for both farm trucks and tractors and "they would share their gas ration with daddy so that he could keep going and preaching. Of course, it wound up in my gas tank."²⁴² These women seemingly expressed little concern over participating in activities they knew were illegal and against OPA rationing rules. They also approached these actions as routine and unimportant; they had no glee in out-foxing OPA enforcement simple because they weren't concerned with detection or prosecution of

²³⁹ Clarice McCulloch, Interviewed by Kristin Collins, February 3, 1999, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 23 Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

²⁴⁰ Eunice Gooding, Interviewed by Joan Denman, June 9, 2004. Transcript. Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 49. Florida State University Special Collections and Archives, Tallahassee, FL.

²⁴¹ William J and Glenda Clark, Interviewed by Robin Sellers, January 18, 2001, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 34 Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

²⁴² Ruth Goldberger, Interviewed by Kevin McCranie, July 16, 2001, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 39 Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

their black market dealings. The focus for both women was providing normalcy through food during the war.

Even our allies, to varying degrees dependent upon American production, acknowledged the widespread and almost synonymous nature of black markets alongside rationing in the United States. American civilian willingness to participate in black-market activities became embarrassingly obvious to any observer during the course of the war. Alastair Cooke, a British journalist touring America in 1941-1942, wrote “the black market in meat was now so expertly organized that it’s profits far outshone the amateur take of the liquor lords of the 20s. The black market was no longer a clandestine factory of protein: it was the normal source of supply.”²⁴³ The visibility of black-market activities, even to outsiders, underscores the prevalence of illegal purchases. The commonness of the black market throughout the country also points to a problem of enforcement; Americans simply didn’t fear punishment for their illegal food purchases.

The enduring, public, and nearly universal qualities of American black markets in the face of OPA Enforcement Division efforts seemed to point to the ineffectiveness of food rationing on the home front. Yet, the OPA, federal government, and civilians all proclaimed rationing a success. This willful blindness toward black markets led to overlooking the principle actors in this drama, the housewives. Black markets are more than just a symptom of OPA failures. In the final analysis, the OPA succeeded in increasing shipments of food to overseas allies and armies while insuring the Americans in the home front had ample access to most foodstuffs. However, these are qualified successes and the OPA along with its’ administrators set out to accomplish more in these

²⁴³ Alastair Cook, *The American Home Front 1941-1942* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 184.

areas. Housewife willingness to turn to the black market limited and curtailed OPA ambitions while shaping the home front experience. The prevalence of black markets helped gauge housewife devotion to their own definitions of patriotic action. Housewives turned to extra-legal procurement when they felt their greater mission of preserving American culture, traditions and domestic authority were threatened by food rationing. Black markets became the conduits of housewife efforts to preserve the home front. Their practical and tangible kitchen decisions upheld the high philosophical reasons Americans fought World War II.

Black markets took many forms and encompassed numerous activities during the war. A black market existed when one acted in a way that violated OPA food rationing regulations. On the American home front these actions divided into two camps: cupboard hoarding and black market purchases. Hoarding, as an action that took place within the family and home, was marked by this domesticity. The OPA blamed and targeted women almost exclusively in anti-hoarding campaigns. OPA propaganda showed women stockpiling goods or jealously guarding excess food supplies. Hoarding usually meant stocking up on soon-to-be rationed goods or buying excessive amounts of goods that might be rationed by the OPA. Hoarding also meant securing extra rationing points or coupons through deceitful means, such as a housewife overstating her fruit crop in order to qualify for more sugar stamps for canning purposes. Hoarding, while a challenge to OPA authority on the home front, wasn't strictly speaking illegal since the definition of this term included everything from buying two cans of green beans to stockpiling 50lb bags of sugar. The OPA instead framed hoarding as a moral issue and hoped to discourage this activity on those grounds. Hoarding, according to OPA propaganda, was

a selfish and greedy offense against the entire community.²⁴⁴ Since the locus of hoarding occurred within the home and away from public eyes, the OPA sought to embarrass housewives and show hoarding as a private perversion of order and democracy. By depicting hoarding as a dishonest and mostly female fraud, the OPA also sought to engage community resistance to these almost untraceable actions. They hoped to inspire communities to self-police and report hoarding to local OPA boards. The local boards then could investigate the incidents and curtail the guilty party's rations.

The exact opposite became true, however; hoarding became the venial and easily excused sin. One joke told of the housewife who went into the attic to stash her hoard and tripped over a lumpy thing in the darkness, a bag of sugar hidden during the First World War. Another told of the young boy who proudly announced to his classmates that his mother had over 100 pounds of sugar saved in the attic.²⁴⁵ Many iterations and versions of this joke exist, all pointing to the prevalence of hoarding on the home front. One woman, a leader in the California State Employees Association, recalled "dealing with one of the stores on the side to accumulate enough (hosiery)" to gift a pair to each of the women who worked under her at Christmas time.²⁴⁶ The OPA's desire to arouse righteous indignation at hoarding fell short and many communities schemed to hoard foods collectively and circumvent the onset of rationing. The OPA froze the prices of butter on the Sunday of the week prior to the official beginning of meat rationing.

²⁴⁴ OPA, "Rationing Means a Fair Share for All of Us" Poster (1943) and OPA, "Rationing Safeguards Your Share" Poster (1942) these posters show the OPA depiction of hoarding and over buying of goods as a moral failing and a harmful to all members of a community dealing with food rationing.

²⁴⁵ Richard R. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On? The American Home Front 1941-1945* (New York; G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 245.

²⁴⁶ Margery Tully, Interviewed by Lisa Craft, February 8, 1999, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 7 Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

Freezing the price of a commodity usually hailed the imminent addition of that item to the growing list of rationed good. Some communities cajoled their storekeepers into the uncustomary practice of opening on a Sunday; those grocers who acquiesced sold out of their stocks of butter in a short time.²⁴⁷ Rema Ratcliff recalled the rush to stock up on items before they joined the ranks of rationed goods. She said, “three days before gas and shoes were rationed I went to Miller’s Bootery and bought three pair of shoes.”²⁴⁸ Americans became so accustomed and inured to hoarding that they publicly laughed at themselves saying, “I’m just stocking up before the hoarders get there.”²⁴⁹

While hoarding occurred throughout the war, most hoarders sought to stockpile items before the start of OPA rationing and thus assuaged many of the fears associated with the questionable legality of their actions. The easiest way for a family to hoard high value items involved buying excessive supplies and not claiming those stores when the item joined the rationed list and they received their first ration coupons for the item.²⁵⁰ Fears spawned by staple food shortages in World War I directly influenced many housewives to amass collections of these same foods in the 1940s. Just after the bombing of Pearl Harbor many rushed to grocery stores to buy 100 pound bags of sugar. As with sugar, coffee also became scarce months before the OPA added it to the list of rationed items.²⁵¹ Housewives imagined war would mean a lack of sugar and coffee, and this fear produced a reflexive buying frenzy that resulted in actual shortages of these two staples.

²⁴⁷ Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 259.

²⁴⁸ Rema Ratcliff, Interviewed by Robin Sellers, May 8, 1998, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 5 Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

²⁴⁹ Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 247.

²⁵⁰ Since the OPA never truly quantified hoarding, this term might refer to buying 100 pound bags of coffee and sugar or even the innocuous practice of buying a single extra can of milk.

²⁵¹ Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 244, 246.

Once the OPA moved to control consumption of sugar and coffee through rationing schemes, individuals were supposed to inventory and report home supplies of these items to their local rationing board. Many lied about the amount of these goods in their kitchens in order to receive their full allotment of sugar or coffee stamps, insuring their own family needs would be met. Jokes and hoarding anecdotes abounded on the home front indicating a need for guilty-laughter and possibly secret-sympathy with hoarding housewives.²⁵²

The other side of illegal food procurement during the war falls more classically into the definition of the black market. These actions routinely occurred outside of the domestic sphere, took on a more masculine bent, and garnered the utmost attention from the OPA's Enforcement Division. Classic black market behaviors involved buying goods without using the required rationing coupons or points, buying goods for more than the government controlled ceiling prices, or purchasing foods directly from suppliers without any regard to either points or ceiling prices. These sort of illegal purchases were more masculine because they occurred within the public sphere and involved unscrupulous, mostly male merchants or producers. It was these sorts of illegal actions; the type that could strangle national supplies of sugar and meat that constituted immoral and socially abhorrent black marketing. These actions couldn't be laughed off like a ditsy housewife forgetting to claim her sugar store; these actions carried the taint of dishonest and criminal associations. One of the main purposes of points or coupon rationing was to limit the amount of a desirable foodstuff any one family could purchase each week or

²⁵² Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 244.

month, allowing inventory to be divided between Americans on the home front and allies and soldiers overseas.

The goal, for the OPA, on the home front was to permit equal access to culturally valued goods such as meats, sugar, and coffee. The OPA saw this division as both patriotic duty and the embodiment of democratic action. For consumers it was inconvenient. According to one housewife, Ruth Goldberg, living with the rules and limitations of rationing “was aggravating.”²⁵³ Many grocers and food suppliers sought to help customers avoid these limitations by selling foods without taking the appropriate amount of points or coupons at the cash register. So too might a grocer allow women to buy meats or sugar for a higher cost than the ceiling price if she couldn’t surrender enough coupons or points for the food item. Some grocers attempted to operate without using government ceiling prices, and in true capitalist fashion preferred allowing supply and demand to dictate pricing.²⁵⁴ The Enforcement Division hope to avoid this as it would allow those with more money more access to the reduced quantities of highly desired goods. Pat Calderoni understood this method of black market activity and knew it was prevalent in her hometown of Tampa, Florida. Even though she was only in primary school, she was aware that goods could be bought on the black market, “if you knew somebody” and were willing to pay more money.²⁵⁵ Some inventive folks even began counterfeiting coupons and ration books so as to have access to more foods.²⁵⁶ Through

²⁵³ Ruth Goldberger, Interview July 16, 2001, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 39

²⁵⁴ Office of Price Administration, “Prices Unlimited- 1944” Youtube video, 10:13, posted by Jeff Quitney, June 19, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7D8sRGzegag>.

²⁵⁵Pat Calderoni, Interviewed by Stacy Tanner, December 27, 2004, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 58 Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

²⁵⁶ Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 242.

careful investigation, checking inventories, and counting the merchant's collection of coupons or points, the Enforcement Division and local ration boards could isolate merchants that undertook these criminal actions and provided opportunities for housewives to participate in the black market. These activities and occasional moments, while serious, were trackable. Margery Tully recalled their local gas station informed them she and her husband had unknowingly used counterfeit stamps, but "we didn't get in trouble."²⁵⁷ The OPA trusted that these events would be rather exceptional and could be controlled through a combination of housewives reporting gossip to the local ration board, local board inquiries, and enforcement division investigations. Many times violators escaped prosecution and instead suffered through mild public shaming. William Stafford, a child during World War II, even recalled those the community suspected of violating rationing rules were looked down upon, but "not quite traitors."²⁵⁸ Even a child's recollection of community based shame emphasized the reduced importance of rationing violations in comparison to other disloyal acts. Those who participated in black-market activities rarely experienced serious consequences or legal punishments for their occasional moral lapses.

The final type of illegal food procurement during food rationing proved the most devastating to the OPA program as it was the most difficult to discover and track. Farmers and food producers, like butchers, provided a stealthy and steady stream of illegal foods into black markets and American kitchens. These black market sales relied on falsified or completely absent reporting. Farmers might choose not to count and

²⁵⁷ Margery Tully, Interview February 8, 1999, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 7.

²⁵⁸ William H. Stafford, Jr. Interviewed by Delphene Strickland, October 26, 1999, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 21 Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

accurately report all their livestock to the government. They sold the surplus and unaccounted for animals either directly to individuals or to slaughterhouses. These slaughterhouses would then process the meat and it would enter the market illegally. Margery Tully admitted to her husband being involved in one of these schemes that “was illegal from the first.” Her husband represented a small meat packing business and according to OPA regulations he was only supposed to buy one cow at a time from local ranchers. The ranchers insisted on selling three cows to the slaughterhouse at a time, so her husband bought three cows. Meat from two of the three cows entered the black market.²⁵⁹ This sort of black market supply chain induced fear for the OPA and its enforcement investigators since these type schemes were difficult to catch and even more difficult to prove in a courtroom.

Companies permitted to receive extra allotments of tightly rationed commodities also could participate in a related type of fraud: ration points overdraft. A case from Georgia illustrates this complicated rationing crime. The crime started with Mitchell Feed and Flour company, who were never granted an extra allotment but mysteriously began buying and selling sugar in thirty, sixty and fifty thousand pound lots. In order to sell large supplies of sugar, all businesses were required to keep a bank account proving the amount sold, the buyer, price, and that the proper numbers of ration stamps were collected. Mitchell’s ration sheets contained stamps but no report on who bought the sugar. Eventually enforcement investigators discovered that Americus Bottling Company was selling large numbers of used stamps to Mitchell. Mitchell then deposited the used stamps in his account and used them to make large purchases of sugar which instead of

²⁵⁹ Margery Tully, Interview February 8, 1999, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 7.

being sold to retail outlets directly entered into the black market trade.²⁶⁰ Mitchell's illegal scheme hurt consumers by misdirecting limited supplies of sugar away from retailers.

The Enforcement Division of the OPA faced some expected challenges. On its surface, this branch of the OPA held a straightforward charge: investigate and prosecute those who violate OPA dictates and rationing laws. Initially the Enforcement Division complained of being terribly understaffed and cited the need for both more lawyers and investigators. A few dozen lawyers in each OPA region, coupled with a few investigators per district, were expected to keep track of hundreds of cases spread over large geographic areas.²⁶¹ The scope of their assignment and the overwhelming number of violations and violators became a constant, if less emergent, concern over time.

The regional Enforcement Division's most dire and constant worries came from being undermined by the larger OPA organization and from complications arising out of the OPA's structural issues with communication. As late as November of 1944, the Atlanta Regional Enforcement Executive complained that region-wide reports were delayed due to the failure of several of the district offices to send in monthly statistical reports in a timely manner.²⁶² Communication between the district and regional offices remained sporadic and occasionally belligerent throughout the war years. On a national

²⁶⁰ John Mosby, Letter to John E. Foster. "Weekly Report- April 1947" April 4, 1947. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁶¹ George Kaulbach, Letter to Alexander Harris. "Summary- Enforcement Table No. 1 for December" January 25, 1946. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 234, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁶² George D. Patterson, Letter to All District Enforcement Attorneys Region IV "Monthly Price Panel Statistical Report Region IV". November 5, 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

level OPA administrators fought repeatedly to defend the necessity of both price controls and the rationing program. The top regional administrator worried lobbyists for the nation's farmers might force drastic changes to the entire program that would alter the enforcement of rationing laws.²⁶³ By 1945 the district and regional Enforcement offices had well established complaints about the lack of staffing as well as their concurrent conviction that this exonerated them from criticisms related to their failure to pursue more cases.

Throughout the Enforcement Division's life cycle they continually sought to validate and defend their own existence in the face of both internal and external pressures. They perpetually justified their existence and the importance of their contributions in letters to administrators in Washington.²⁶⁴ One might assume they would be under pressure to undertake more cases or provide more follow-up on resolved cases. The Enforcement Division attempted to convince the OPA they were earnestly working and that they should be allowed to continue to litigate and prosecute in their chosen manner.

Enforcing food rationing policies created backlash and generated ill will from citizens, business, and other branches of federal organizations.²⁶⁵ This criticism and hostility, particularly directed toward the Enforcement Division, subtly shaped their prosecutions. In the court of public opinion, the Enforcement Division sought to avoid public condemnation and thus largely avoided persecutions of individual consumers. The

²⁶³ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 640-641.

²⁶⁴ A series of letters between enforcement division regional officials exist and are discussed in detail on the next pages.

²⁶⁵ Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 269.

last thing the OPA wanted to do was incite public ire through energetic prosecution of otherwise patriotic housewives. Over time, their willingness to investigate food crimes decreased. They also altered how and what they would go to court to prosecute. This finally resulted in transforming their emphasis areas. Initially they investigated and prosecuted mostly food, gas, and tire rationing violations. By the end of OPA control over the economy, the Enforcement Division focused mostly on gas and tire violations and investigations of food violations tapered off.²⁶⁶

The Office of Price Administration organized its' management and delegated authority through the use of a regional model. Each region possessed a regional administrator who reported and answered directly to the federal office. Underneath the authority of the regional administrator fell the regional division executives. The division executives reported to the regional administrator and oversaw the operations of their area in a series of geographic districts. Each office, regional or district, was located in a municipality of local importance. Therefore the OPA Region IV offices housing both the Regional Enforcement Division Executive and the Regional Administrator occupied an office building in downtown Atlanta, Georgia. This locale was fitting since that city boasted the largest population in Region IV. District offices followed suit. In Region IV, district offices were established in the cities of Atlanta, Birmingham, Richmond, Raleigh, Miami, Nashville, Jackson, Memphis, Jacksonville, and Columbia.²⁶⁷ From these district

²⁶⁶ Region IV Enforcement Division, Selected Statistics on Case Investigations and Dispositions- All Commodities. January-June 1946. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁶⁷ Due to continued calls for better organization and clearer lines of communication, Region IV redrew and reimagined their districts in 1944. They streamlined their organization and ousted 4 district offices from their original tally of fourteen. These ten remaining cities hosted district offices throughout the war years.

offices, enforcement division employees and investigators spread out in a thin net to monitor and scrutinize the rationing practices of thousands of small towns and communities. The success or failure of the enforcement division depended upon engaging enough labor to undertake this monumental task, keeping communication clear and timely, and finally on maintaining the morale of both lawyers and investigators.

In light of the large number of food producers, suppliers, grocers, and consumers living in each district, it comes as little surprise that the Enforcement Division constantly complained of being over worked and spread thin. By the end of 1945, after years of begging for more lawyers, Region IV employed an average of only five lawyers per district office.²⁶⁸ Their regional and district contingents of attorneys had been a sore point for the first two years of the OPA rationing program, but in 1944 they were given permission by the federal office to hire a few more lawyers in order to quiet protests and increase prosecutions.²⁶⁹ They also suffered from almost continual fluctuations in the number of investigators in each district. Between November and December of 1945 the enforcement division of Region IV lost a total of 16 investigators and as a result saw an 11% drop in investigative man hours.²⁷⁰ After these dismal numbers reached the desk of the Region IV Administrator, Alexander Harris, the highest Enforcement Division authority in the region, John Mosby, sent out a plea to all of the district directors in

²⁶⁸ John Mosby, Letter to Alexander Harris, January 11, 1946 RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁶⁹ George D. Patterson, Jr. Letter to All District Enforcement Attorneys "Litigation" August 21, 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁷⁰ George Kaulbach, "Summary- Enforcement Table No. 1 for December" January 25, 1946. RG 188, Box 234, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

Region IV which summarized the situation in his eyes. He said, "I feel that the Enforcement Division in each office is earnestly working to better our Enforcement record but they need all the assistance that you in the regional office can give them. I shall appreciate any help that you can give the district enforcement attorneys."²⁷¹ Mosby pled with the other branches of the regional apparatus to assist his attorneys, whom he considered to be working diligently.

The regional office viewed these district attorneys falling behind the productivity seen in other regions. Nationally each district Enforcement Division attorney filed an average of 6 litigations each month, yet Mosby's lawyers filed an average of only 2 cases per month. Some of those attorneys filed less than 1 case per month on average.²⁷² The obvious shortfall of cases and prosecutions between the national average and Region IV provided an opportunity for the Enforcement Executive Mr. Mosby and district enforcement offices to further their argument for quality. They believed that Region IV ought to engage in only the highest quality of cases that would result in courtroom success for the enforcement division.

Repeatedly in correspondence between the Enforcement Division and the Regional Administrator the dichotomy between quantity of prosecutions and quality of prosecutions arose. The federal offices of the OPA wanted to see complete and equal implementation of rationing rules throughout the country. Regional Administrators, such

²⁷¹ John D. Mosby, Letter to All District Directors in Region IV "Summary Table 1- Enforcement Department Operating Statistics for December" March 22, 1946. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 234, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁷² John D. Mosby, Letter to Alexander Harris, January 11, 1946 RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

as Alexander Harris, were tasked with insuring that their Enforcement Division executives and district offices kept pace with all other regions in the country. Enforcement Division executives recurrently bemoaned and nagged their district offices and attorneys to produce more litigation and cases so as to remain competitive with national standards. In 1944, the Enforcement Division executive George Patterson Jr. wrote an open letter to his attorneys reprimanding them for the lack of litigation in general and their lack of proceedings “spread over as wide a commodity coverage as a well-developed enforcement program requires.”²⁷³ As though to stave off complaints about the uniqueness of the situation in Region IV, Patterson also introduced comparisons between his region and the Region V offices headquartered in Dallas, Texas. According to Patterson this comparison worked well because the Dallas region had approximately the same number of attorneys and investigators, the judges were the same general temperament, the industrial and commercial activities were similar, and the regions shared comparable populations.²⁷⁴ OPA regional officials compared the Atlanta and Dallas regions in a variety of areas throughout most of the war. Patterson’s comparison looked at the type of cases enforcement lawyers filed in July 1944. He found his own region filed more criminal cases and held more administrative hearings than the Dallas region. Yet, Patterson stated “I am not proud of this comparison- I am sure you are

²⁷³ George D. Patterson Jr., “Litigation” August 21, 1944. RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records, Atlanta, GA.

²⁷⁴ George D. Patterson Jr., “Litigation” August 21, 1944. RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records, Atlanta, GA.

not proud of it.”²⁷⁵ The OPA pushed for ever greater enforcement of their rationing rules and as a result more cases and litigation seems logical.

However, in Patterson’s comparison his own region led Dallas in all areas except civil case filings. Patterson’s shame came not from the dearth of litigation but from deficiency and laxness in filing one specific type of case. The differences in enforcement between Atlanta and Dallas become clearer as Patterson turned his comparison to a commodity breakdown. Dallas reported a total of 365 cases; 161 in food, 50 in apparel and industrial materials, 78 in fuel, and 76 in rent and services. Atlanta registered only 168 total cases; 33 in food, 6 in apparel and industrial materials, 116 in fuel, and 13 in rent and services. Of those total cases, Atlanta had 130 criminal prosecutions versus only 66 in Dallas.²⁷⁶ From Patterson’s comparison charts the picture of enforcement in the Atlanta region begins to emerge as purposeful. The attorneys and investigators in Atlanta avoided filing civil cases, but they specifically filed 5 times fewer cases in the food division than seen in Dallas. The Atlanta region also sought out and litigated more criminal cases across the rationed commodities and in general than the Dallas region. This points to a willingness to punish large schemes, companies, and collusions for rationing violations. Inversely, it reveals a reluctance to bring litigation against small time or single instance violations in civil court. Food violators, many of whom would have been housewives, largely avoided prosecution in Atlanta and those enforcement attorneys only pursued the most egregious criminal cases in food. Patterson’s own comparison

²⁷⁵ George D. Patterson Jr., “Litigation” August 21, 1944. RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records, Atlanta, GA.

²⁷⁶ George D. Patterson Jr., “Litigation” August 21, 1944. RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records, Atlanta, GA.

supports this ideal as it points out that 40 out of the 44 criminal cases from the Birmingham district office involved rings violators dealing stolen or counterfeit coupons.²⁷⁷ The Atlanta region attorneys unmistakably sought to avoid prosecuting trifling or one-time violations. Patterson's letter, sent out to all his district enforcement attorneys, sought to shame them into greater action against the housewives. Repeatedly the regional officials pushed for a greater quantity of cases and prosecutions from the enforcement division and its attorneys.

About four months after Patterson sent his fiery call to action, one of his district attorneys penned a revealing response to the letter. Edward Vaden was an enforcement division litigation attorney in Memphis, Tennessee. In his response he defends the Region IV attorneys saying they "are not loafers" and that the investigators "have been well trained."²⁷⁸ Vaden writes "I do not think our people in Tennessee are more patriotic than those in Arkansas but apparently one of two things is true; we are either not getting strong enough investigations to base this volume on, or compliance in other districts must be very bad."²⁷⁹ Vaden framed his understanding of the goals of the enforcement division within a discussion of patriotic action. For Vaden carrying out OPA rationing laws as well as the act of rationing becomes patriotic. He also inversely hints that the lack of enforcement litigation in Memphis shows a more patriotic populace. This is noteworthy as Vaden also openly admits in the first paragraph of his letter that he is concerned with

²⁷⁷ George D. Patterson Jr., "Litigation" August 21, 1944. RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records, Atlanta, GA.

²⁷⁸ Edward N. Vaden, Letter to George Patterson Jr., "Litigation" January 20, 1945. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁷⁹ Edward N. Vaden, "Litigation" January 20, 1945. RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

the lack of litigation in his district, while the body of the letter defends his own district's activities. Patterson demanded his district attorneys stop allowing housewives to slide on their occasional black-market activities, yet his calls not only failed to produce immediate results but fed a discussion of patriotic action. Vaden feels Memphis behaves patriotically in relation to rationing, avoids direct discussion of targeting food enforcement, and furthermore deems Memphis without guile in their patriotic undertaking of rationing efforts. In an opaque manner Vaden defends those small food related black market actions. He should, according to his regional OPA administrator, prosecute these violations but instead Vaden sees his community as undertaking patriotic action even though it breached rationing rules. The relatively small numbers of black market dealing meant his people exhibited much more patriotism than other districts.

Throughout the war enforcement division attorneys defended their efforts, or lack thereof, by citing the quality of the cases they took in front of judges. Their argument stemmed from the idea that while their gross number of cases remained low, that reduced number reflected both their unwillingness to forge ahead with poorly investigated cases and the greater compliance of the citizens within Region IV. James Flemister, the chief attorney of the food enforcement section of the Enforcement Division in Region IV echoed these sentiments in his September 1944 response to Patterson's letter. Flemister's position at the head of food enforcement placed him at the center of this discussion of the need for more litigation since food enforcement particularly lagged behind the Dallas region. Flemister explored the question of whether the volume of litigation directly reflected the level of compliance found in Atlanta and Dallas. After an exhaustive search, Flemister shared his results with all food enforcement attorneys in Region IV. According

to his data, Dallas experienced food overcharges of 16% compared to the 13% seen in the Atlanta region during August of 1944.²⁸⁰ He then congratulated his attorneys and pointed out that “it seems that the better place in which to buy food is the Atlanta Region.”²⁸¹ He attributed their success in keeping over charging down to preventative measures and their willingness to settle cases through monetary payments without going before the courts. Flemister’s letter, sent not in reply to Patterson, but directly to his attorneys ignores his superior and invites his department to ignore parts of the Regional IV administrator’s call to action. Patterson’s goal was to inspire the lawyers to take up more civil cases and crack down on the everyday tiny cheats most often perpetrated by the end consumers like housewives. Flemister discounts that part of Patterson’s charge. Flemister’s data reflects large price changing schemes that would have involved grocery stores and points of sale instead of the individual. Data results showing less overcharging probably reflect grocer and food supplier’s fears of the robust criminal prosecutions common in Region IV more than any success in preventative measures undertaken by the enforcement division. Flemister also seems aware of the thinness of his defense as he ends the letter by urging his attorneys to more speedily and efficiently process a greater number of civil cases.²⁸²

The Enforcement Division could bring several different sort of actions against those citizens who disobeyed the OPA rationing regulations. After a thorough exploration of a citizen’s possibly illegal actions by enforcement investigators, all data and evidence

²⁸⁰ James L. Flemister, Letter to All Food Enforcement Attorneys Region IV “Litigation”. September 20, 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁸¹ James L. Flemister, “Litigation”. September 20, 1944. RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁸² James L. Flemister, “Litigation”. September 20, 1944. RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

would be turned over to attorneys in each district. At that stage, attorneys would decide the legal questions of the case as they reviewed the investigation. Many investigations in Region IV never proceeded past this point. After notifying the offender that the attorneys were reviewing their legal options, many individuals settled their claims outside of the court. If an attorney felt the injustice merited the court's attention, he would determine the type of case and proper jurisdiction. The most basic division of cases came from the sort of court that would hear the case: attorneys could file either civil suits or criminal cases in response to rationing violations or suggest an OPA administrator's hearing of the case. If they didn't believe enough evidence existed to win a case, enforcement attorneys could allow either a settlement or refer it to the administrator for further investigation and another sort of monetary settlement known as a treble damage settlement.²⁸³ In Region IV, the guilty parties often chose the option of an out of court settlement to avoid court and the possible suspension of their ability to use or accept ration coupons. Usually Region IV attorneys filed charges in cases involving larger schemes and prolonged or chronic black market actions. However, violation of most of the OPA rationing rules didn't result in criminal or felony punishments and many regions filed a slew of civil proceedings.

One of the most important changes to enforcement policy during the war came early in 1944. A series of letters between the Honorable B. H. Thomas, Charles Rouse the Assistant Attorney General, and Harry McMullan the Attorney General of the United

²⁸³ Region IV Enforcement Division, Selected Statistics on Case Investigations and Dispositions- All Commodities. January-June 1946. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

States discussed the issue and implications of counterfeit ration coupons.²⁸⁴ At the start of the war, instances where individuals counterfeited ration coupons were prosecuted as civil cases and punishment amounted to little more than a short suspension. All of that changed in 1944 as these actions were reclassified as a felony. The general consensus and case history discussed between the judge and attorneys supported the prosecution of counterfeiting cases as a form of larceny and punishable under state criminal codes.²⁸⁵ This decision criminalized a set of relatively innocuous actions ranging from printing of fake rationing coupons, to possession of counterfeit coupons, to using a family members coupons, to presenting imitation coupons at the grocery store. Instead of rejoicing at the opportunity to draw more criminal indictments and prosecutions, the underlying permissiveness of the enforcement division emerges in their response to this change. The Atlanta region attorneys asked permission to “draw indictments in the more serious counterfeit cases” and simultaneously offered that “in the minor cases we would continue to charge simply a violation of the ration regulations.”²⁸⁶ Even as the federal government redefined ration book counterfeit into a felony crime, the attorneys in Region IV sought to maintain their ability to avoid felony prosecution based upon their understanding of the severity of the ration violation. This action allowed them to ignore and avoid prosecution of individuals, and housewives, only seldom involved in the black market.

²⁸⁴ Harry McMullen, Letter to Honorable B. H. Thomas “Criminal Law, Larceny, and Ration Books”. January 28, 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 233, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁸⁵ The decision was based upon the idea that ration books were a form of property since they carried value. In order for a case to meet the standard for larceny an item must be regarded as having value. Ration books, although distributed freely to citizens without cost, met this standard since the coupons held intrinsic value and were exchanged for goods.

²⁸⁶ Norman G. Shepard, Letter to Charles F. Rouse. March 24, 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 233, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

In effect, enforcement agents in the Atlanta region believed that minor or one time infractions should avoid criminal prosecution. The undocumented belief that small violations of food rationing rules prevailed in the Atlanta region persisted and garnered ire as the food enforcement division's inactivity impacted the ability of other branches of the OPA to function. John Moore served as the Region IV currency control officer and wrote to George Patterson, the regional enforcement executive, on the matter of overdrafts of ration bank accounts. Moore's principle goal in writing the memo was to draw Patterson's attention to what he called the "acute problem in sugar" and to forward three suggested solutions to the overdraft issues in the region.²⁸⁷ Moore's note included a copy these suggestions from one of his own district currency control officers and a chart documenting the increase in overdrafts in ration banking.²⁸⁸ Of the three suggestions formulated by the currency control division, the last and least favored, involved the enforcement division. The currency control district officer wrote "frankly referring overdrafts to enforcement doesn't work out."²⁸⁹ He continued saying "enforcement is either too busy with other matters or writes another letter to the offender who ignores it as

²⁸⁷ John W. Moore, Letter to George Patterson. October 11, 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁸⁸ This chart listed the overdrafts for meat, processed foods, sugar, shoes and gasoline in each of the Region IV districts for the month of October 1944. Although Mr. Moore showed deep concern over the increase in sugar overdrafts, his own chart pointed out a much larger problem in meat overdrafts. Almost five times the amount of sugar was overdraft in meat. Part of this was caused by the greater value of meat, but it also shows less attention to this one area of black-market activities. The currency officials complained about sugar while ignoring meat, which in itself shows some acceptance of black-market activities in that sector. The chart also shows that only about half of the Region IV district banks fully reported these overdraft numbers. Compliance with submitting these reports only ran an average of 95%, with one district's compliance a dismal 68%.

²⁸⁹ N. M. Huckabee, Letter to John Moore. October 5, 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

he does ours and the overdraft remains or grows larger.”²⁹⁰ The regional enforcement attorneys’ opinion and mindset that only the most severe violators should be prosecuted arises again in this letter. The regional currency officers complain that “we have referred our worst cases to enforcement” and a miniscule “one or two were closed by informal adjustment.”²⁹¹ This letter highlights the enforcement attorney’s willingness to overlook and forgive what they considered small infractions of rationing rules. Enforcement attorneys would rather pursue tightly investigated cases where it was clear that the offenders harmed not only the OPA rationing program, but the nation as a whole through their actions.

For obvious reasons, attorneys preferred cases where guilt could be substantiated through a mountain of evidence and the resolution of the case benefitted their communities as a whole. Yet, repeatedly throughout the war years, the Enforcement Division defended their decision to ignore certain types of cases or to settle cases outside of the courtroom. While the Atlanta division prosecuted more criminal cases than any other region, they also continually worked on far fewer civil cases than other regions. The attorneys cited their preference for taking only the highest quality investigations to court and thus their better than average prosecution results. In essence, enforcement attorneys argued that they chose cases for court based on their quality and likelihood to produce positive results for the Enforcement Division and region as a whole. The archives of the Enforcement Division detail most of their cases and specify the course of action taken in

²⁹⁰ N. M. Huckabee, Letter to John Moore. October 5, 1944. RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁹¹ N. M. Huckabee, Letter to John Moore. October 5, 1944. RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

those cases. A survey of those cases show that these attorneys pursued only specific types of cases in relation to food rationing and tended to only punish the most dedicated offenders.

District enforcement attorneys utilized two sources in order to gather information to build their cases; the enforcement investigators and the local price panel boards. Cases referred from the price panel boards could be resolved in a number of ways, each increasing in the level of seriousness. The district officers might dismiss the case, issue a warning letter, hold a district office conference with the offender, allow accused offenders to make a voluntary contribution at the district office, hold administrative hearings, give out statutory warning notices, level injunctions against offenders, or proceed with criminal prosecutions.²⁹² As helpful a reporting tool as the local price panel boards were intended to be, the enforcement attorneys didn't pursue many of these cases. In April of 1944, the district officers dismissed anywhere from a low of 6% in Raleigh and Roanoke to a high of 100% of cases in Savannah of all price panel referred cases.²⁹³ The trend toward dismissal of these cases seems widespread, and would have been common knowledge with citizens thereby reducing fear of prosecution for ration violations. The district offices also unanimously reported that they had informed the local price panels of the outcome of 100% of those referred cases.²⁹⁴ Housewives realized the limited likelihood that they would be targeted for minor food rationing violations, and

²⁹² OPA Region IV, Reports from the District Officers Concerning Price Panels Covering the Period from April 1 through April 30, 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 234, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁹³ OPA Region IV, Reports from the District Officers Concerning Price Panels Covering the Period from April 1 through April 30, 1944. RG 188, Box 234, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁹⁴ OPA Region IV, Reports from the District Officers Concerning Price Panels Covering the Period from April 1 through April 30, 1944. RG 188, Box 234, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

stories illustrating this principle abounded. One Wilmington North Carolina paper printed a grocer's tale, which demonstrates the brazen actions of some housewives. According to the grocer a woman purchased three pounds of ration-free lard, returned to purchase an additional three pounds of lard, and returned a third time later in the afternoon to turn in six pounds of salvaged fats which she exchanged for cash and 12 red ration tokens.²⁹⁵ Bobbie Sickler remembered shoe rationing "driving her mother to distraction" so that to buy Bobbie shoes she would "go down the street and trade sugar stamps for shoe ration stamps."²⁹⁶ Sickler's mother broadcasted her willingness to subvert the rationing system to her entire neighborhood.

The majority of the cases enforcement attorneys entertained were produced by the investigative efforts of the enforcement detectives. Investigators' labor produced the majority of the cases district enforcement attorneys followed up on so the number of investigative man hours correlated with the most prevalent sort of cases. In the Atlanta Region, almost a third of all investigator hours were spent following up on rationing violations and counterfeit operations. In a month about 5% of investigator time was spent on meat, dairy, poultry and fish, another 5.6% on fresh groceries, and 16.3% on other commodities including sugar investigations.²⁹⁷ This translates to around 10 days of investigation each month devoted entirely to food rationing violations, with an average of between 30-50 cases presented to enforcement attorneys that resulted in action of some

²⁹⁵ Wilber D. Jones, Jr., *The Journey Continues: The World War II Home Front* (Shippensburg, PA; White Mane Books, 2005), 176.

²⁹⁶ Bobbie Sickler. Interviewed by Robin Sellers, February 2, 2000, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 24 Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

²⁹⁷ Region IV Enforcement Division, Comparative Information on Investigative Man Days- Food. August 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

sort each month. For comparison, the fuel violations received another third of investigator's time and yet those hours produced about three times as many cases.²⁹⁸ Clearly the food section of enforcement efforts operated with much less efficiency than other sections. They spent more man hours and produced fewer cases and litigations than any other department of the enforcement division. Nonetheless, food administrators celebrated their low number of civil cases as a sign of patriotism and better than average compliance in the region. The better compliance argument probably falls short, since so many of the criminal cases in the region evolved out of food violations. It is much more probable that enforcement attorneys ignored and avoided prosecution of each individual tiny food violation in favor of the larger more malignant criminal cases.

The types of resolutions available in food cases and enforcement in general varied, but a hallmark of this institutional response was to have several layers of trivial punishment precede any long term suspensions or criminal trials. Enforcement authorities possessed the ability to revoke a dealer's authorization, suspend their authorization, order damage payments, or even turn the cases over to the mercies of judges in a variety of lawsuits and criminal prosecutions.²⁹⁹ Revocation or suspension of a license meant that a business was prohibited from performing their occupation or service, and could result in the closure of the company for the length of the suspension. For example, if convicted of selling C ration coupons, used for extra allotments of gasoline, a service station might receive a suspension order that could shut down their ability to sell all gasoline for a set

²⁹⁸ Region IV Enforcement Division, Comparative Information on Investigative Man Days- Food. August 1944. RG 188, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

²⁹⁹Region IV Enforcement Division, Selected Statistics on Case Investigations and Dispositions- All Commodities. January-June 1946. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

time period. If district attorney's thought a case heinous enough they could also forward cases to the regional administrator and seek treble damages. Treble damages allowed the OPA attorneys to request up to three times the amount of damages because the evidence showed the defendant willfully participated in black-market activities. As serious and frightening as some of these civil punishments seem, few housewives drew the ire of enforcement attorneys. The food section of the enforcement division carefully shaped their prosecutions and probes so as to continually avoid punishing the housewife guilty of a single black market activity or a business guilty of a single infraction. Instead most of their cases targeted large businesses or food distributors guilty of obvious crimes.

In a review of cases presented to the courts by enforcement attorneys in Region IV, several patterns in the prosecution of food violations become immediately obvious. Sugar caused major problems and resulted in the majority of enforcement activities and litigation during the war. A report on the actions of all enforcement attorneys in Region IV during the summer of 1944 revealed the number of food violations to total violations and the role sugar played in those cases. Out of 196 cases attorneys concluded that summer, 27 involved food violations and of those cases 15 resulted from abuses of sugar rationing rules. The sugar cases resulted from violations of rationing order number 3 and attorneys charged violators with either the unlawful purchase and sale of sugar or a shortage of sugar on inventory.³⁰⁰ Region IV attorneys preferred criminal charges in sugar cases where they could prove black market sales without a doubt. In the cases concluded over the summer of 1944, those criminal prosecutions for illegal purchase and

³⁰⁰ Norman Shepard, Memorandum to All District Officers and All Local War Price and Rationing Boards. "Enforcement Activities" July 1, 1944. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

sale of sugar all resulted in convictions with punishments ranging from fines and suspensions to 6 months of jail for offenders.³⁰¹ Yet, in cases where uncertainty existed the lesser charge of having a shortage of sugar on inventory sufficed with its ubiquitous and relatively minor suspension of license serving as punishment for stores suspected of black market sales of sugar. Year after year, food enforcement and in particular sugar cases made up the majority of the criminal cases pursued by attorneys in the Atlanta region. After the fall 1945 district court meetings in Mississippi, another enforcement attorney reported eerily similar statistics. For the first three quarters of 1945, Mississippi enforcement attorneys were actively working on over 49 cases with 15 concerning food violations. Yet again, the majority of food violations related to sugar rationing. Seventy-five percent of the criminal cases presented to the Northern and Southern district courts in Mississippi involved sugar rationing.³⁰² The same year the Birmingham district submitted a summary report of litigation and sanctions instituted which detailed 57 food cases in the total of 64 for the first half of 1945. In Birmingham over 37 of those food cases rested on charges related to the violation of rationing order 3, which required the rationing of sugar on the home front.³⁰³ Even though the enforcement division practiced rigorous selectivity (or outright laziness according to complaints by other OPA branches) in the cases they presented to the court system their statistics show that they had steady numbers of food, and especially sugar violations. Many of those cases emanated from sugar rationing

³⁰¹ Norman Shepard, "Enforcement Activities" July 1, 1944. RG 188, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

³⁰² W. A. Byrd, Report to Stewart C. Broom. "OPA District Cases Pending" September 16, 1945. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

³⁰³ Birmingham District, "Sanctions Instituted" April 1945. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

violations which plagued OPA enforcement until the rationing order was eventually lifted after the war.

Sugar, and the cultural construction of the meanings of sugar for the nation at the time, emphasized ideals of femininity and the home. Therefore the urge to cheat OPA rationing rules and participate in black market sales of this good isn't terribly surprising for a home front intrigued by preserving these ideals. However, a closer look at the sort and type of defendants in these criminal prosecutions of sugar violation reveals very few women ever faced prosecution for black market sugar purchases. The low number of women compared to men charged with these sort of crimes belays enforcement division claims that they focused their efforts almost exclusively on the most easily defensible evidence and largely unassailable investigations. Since rationing rules established the maximum amount of sugar available to each household, door-to-door investigation should have revealed plenty of housewives with more than their fair share of sugar. These sort of cases would have been almost impossible for defendants to refute and low hanging fruit for enforcement attorneys. However, enforcement attorneys in the region also complained regularly of the time investment needed for a successful prosecution of both criminal and civil cases. C. H. Litchlitter, a food department enforcement attorney, complained that preparation of two civil cases would require "substantial time expenditures" and a criminal case would "demand practically the undivided attention of the food enforcement attorney."³⁰⁴ The food enforcement attorneys specifically stressed the hours and effort associated with their efforts as a means of explaining their reluctance

³⁰⁴ C. H. Litchlitter, Memorandum to Richard Cotton. "Pending and Contemplated Litigation in Food Section" September 4, 1945. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

to push more civil cases and thus avoidance of consumer cases. Lichliter also discussed a case against Suwanee Steamship Corporation in Jacksonville Florida, based upon an investigation that showed overcharges in the sale of bananas resulting in a claim of \$330,000 in treble damages. Lichliter once again mentioned that adequate preparation for the case and prosecution of the suit “would under normal working conditions involve the exclusive time of an attorney for a considerable period.” He argued that the case should be dismissed due in part to time constraints and to the defendant’s willingness to file protests with the regional administrator and in the court of appeals.³⁰⁵ Food enforcement attorneys tended to avoid the drawn out, difficult, and publicly embarrassing cases in favor of those that might be settled quickly and without complications. These attorneys also understood that cases and litigation against businesses and the organizers of black-market activities would net greater financial and public relations returns to the OPA. Prosecuting the individual housewife guilty of hoarding sugar or buying an ungraded black market beef roast for Sunday dinner seemed mean and petty in comparison to cases against war profiteers.

Most prosecution and litigation stemmed from infractions at grocery stores or through the collusion of several individuals working in a black market ring. While the majority of black-market activities probably occurred at the consumer level, enforcement attorneys almost exclusively targeted companies and bands of black marketers in their litigation. Case number 4-189 in the Jacksonville district illustrates cases that drew enforcement attention and action. In the Spring of 1974, the Florida State Beverage

³⁰⁵ C. H. Litchliter, “Pending and Contemplated Litigation in Food Section” September 4, 1945. RG 188, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

Department apprehended Richard H. Roberts while driving a pickup truck loaded with thirty 100 pound bags of sugar. Robert's inability to explain his transport of such a large amount of rationed sugar inspired the enforcement office to begin an investigation. From old case records, investigators found that the Miami office held a folder describing the actions of the Leon Fruit Juices Company, which was run by Roberts and his brother. They then found information that the Leon Fruit Juices Company had applied for and received two special allotments of sugar amounting to 22,320 pounds during late 1946-1947. They also discovered that Richard Roberts worked as an OPA enforcement investigator for two years prior to his involvement in the Leon Fruit Juices scheme. Roberts eventually confessed to opening a series of fake sugar ration banking accounts, and eventually holding deposits amounting to a total of 169,581 pounds. He operated the scheme by moving deposit checks between three different sugar accounts to avoid detection. Although enforcement investigators pushed Roberts to implicate the buyers of his black market sugar, Roberts would not accuse his co-conspirators. The investigators reported that off the record Roberts admitted to selling 120,610 pounds of sugar to various businesses including the Dr. Pepper Bottling Company, Pepsi Cola Bottling Company, restaurants and drug stores in Tallahassee, and a bakery in Jacksonville.³⁰⁶ The details of the Roberts case clearly illustrate the sort of cases that enforcement investigators and attorneys thought merited their attentions and time. The brazen and unabashed nature of this case, coupled with the corporate offenders and the possibility for treble damages and a criminal prosecution, made it worth prosecuting.

³⁰⁶ John Mosby, Letter to John E. Foster. "Weekly Report- April 1947" April 4, 1947. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

The groups targeted by the food enforcement department were also mostly male with very few prosecutions of women in the case details of the dozens reviewed. Of the few women to face prosecution for food rationing violations, all were entangled in larger schemes or owned businesses. In the survey of enforcement activities for Region IV in early 1944, the case details only listed one female defendant. Mrs. K. N. Tow owned Tow's Grocery store in Fayetteville. Food enforcement attorneys charged Tow's Grocery, and Mrs. Tow, with unlawful sale of meats and processed foods on the black market. The enforcement investigators found enough evidence to pursue two separate cases against the grocery store and eventually the cases resulted in a suspension order.³⁰⁷ The existence of two cases against Tow's Grocery points to blatant noncompliance with rationing violations. In all the other food related cases pursued by enforcement attorneys in Region IV, individual women merited very little attention. Only two other food enforcement cases listed women as defendants. In the first, Louise Coleman was named as a defendant alongside her husband Dave Coleman and two other men. The criminal case involved the illegal sale and possession of sugar and lard. Interestingly, the cases against the men in this example were dismissed by the court, while the case against Louise was continued until the next court meeting to allow for more filings and investigation.³⁰⁸ Louise's case file doesn't list the final outcome, but since the cases against her co-conspirators fell apart it is probable her case met the same fate. The final case involving a woman also involved a group of accomplices. Johnnie Mae Tims and Henry Dock stood accused of

³⁰⁷ Norman Shepard, "Enforcement Activities" July 1, 1944. RG 188, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

³⁰⁸ W. A. Byrd, Report to Stewart C. Broom. "OPA District Cases Pending" September 16, 1945. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

sugar ration violations. Although the case against Dock was indefinitely continued as he was serving in the US Army, the case against Tims was disposed of and she faced no further prosecution.³⁰⁹ Clearly enforcement cases rarely directly involved women and of the few cases naming women as defendants the criminal punishments faced were trivial when compared to men. The few cases which named women amounted to black market cabals where the cases against women were usually dismissed for either lack of evidence or lack of attorney interest and time.

Throughout the time the OPA's rationing programs existed, the enforcement division routinely defended itself against claims of sluggishness and inefficiency. The food division of the enforcement program particularly combatted these accusations by pointing to their high conviction and recovery rates. As a group, enforcement attorneys felt as though pushes for more civil litigation sacrificed the quality of investigations and prosecution. George Kaulbach, in a summary of enforcement activities for December 1945, boasted a significantly higher monthly number of food enforcement case filings. This followed a particularly personal and severe push for higher caseloads by the regional administrator in the preceding few months. Kaulbach simultaneously reported that their percent of "washout" or dismissed cases rose during that period from 42.2% to 63% as a result of the lower quality of cases and the push for a higher quantity of cases in food enforcement.³¹⁰ The district office attorneys sought to mold their cases so as to avoid unsuccessful litigation, but also they avoided prosecutions of women and individual

³⁰⁹ W. A. Byrd, "OPA District Cases Pending" September 16, 1945. RG 188, Box 235, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

³¹⁰ George Kaulbach, Memorandum to Alexander Harris. "Summary- Enforcement Table no.1 for December" January 25, 1946. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 234, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

consumers. Nonetheless, the regional administrator and the OPA as a whole pressed the districts to produce more and more civil cases. Region IV attorneys did boast higher numbers of criminal cases, but perpetually lagged behind other regions and the national average for civil cases. This trend was due to their disinterest in chasing down every small black market action, and their attention to building strong investigations and criminal cases against groups of violators and businesses. The acting chief food enforcement attorney, particularly called for his attorneys to file more civil cases, contempt cases and license suspensions which would have resulted in an offensive against occasional black marketers.³¹¹ The enforcement division also admitted to “spotty performances” from the district food enforcement offices and a “hit or miss method of operation on the part of the district offices which was “further evidence of a too soft sanction policy.”³¹² The continued nature of these complaints from regional offices coupled with the district attorneys vehement defense of their own actions in both letters and statistical reports illustrates the ideological separation between the regional and national levels of OPA operation and the local and district enforcement. The higher tiers of the OPA organization expected all black market actions to be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the laws, while the grassroots attorneys preferred to target only the most flagrant violations of OPA rules.

³¹¹ James F. Bellmare, Letter to all District Food Enforcement Attorneys Region IV. “Monthly Statistical Litigation Report- May 1946 Food Enforcement- Region IV” June 11, 1946. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

³¹² John Mosby, Letter to James L. Flemeister. “Food Enforcement- 1945” January 25, 1946. RG 188 Records of the Enforcement Department of the Office of Price Administration, Box 236, National Archives and Records Service, Atlanta, GA.

The black market took a myriad of different forms but records from the OPA's enforcement division create a clear picture of the response to illegal sales and purchases. Enforcement attorneys avoided prosecutions of homemakers and individuals who hoarded sugar or bought ungraded meat or evaded rationing by using a grocer that didn't collect stamps. Instead their efforts focused upon bringing down large corporate schemes and bent toward criminal prosecutions rather than civil cases. The net result of these decisions meant that housewives involved in the black market didn't fear detection or punishment for buying illegally. Region IV district enforcement attorneys even argued with their higher administrators that their local areas possessed greater patriotism than other areas and thus fewer cases resulted. Enforcement actions and apathy toward minor crimes and civil disobedience in food rationing created the setting for black markets to flourish throughout the war. When housewives turned to popular media they found a world accepting of the necessity of black market buying and a sphere understanding of women's role and unique definition of patriotic action as expressed through the domestic sphere.

CHAPTER IV – RATIONING ADVICE IN COOKBOOKS AND *GOOD
HOUSEKEEPING* MAGAZINE

Eat my words...And live by them.³¹³

In the flurry of activity that marked the beginning of American involvement in World War II, women sought to adhere to their definition of patriotic action while supporting food rationing and providing nutritious meals for their families. With the federal government creating new agencies to oversee the home front at a dizzying pace and new demands being placed on average citizens, housewives needed assistance and turned to women's magazines and cookbooks. Print media geared toward women's interests held quite a bit of sway over household decisions and offered both timely and trusted advice on domestic issues. However, these resources not only spoke directly to women; they also provided women with an opportunity to produce and write cookbooks and articles for magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* or *Ladies Home Journal*. These types of print media not only spoke to women, but also gave voice to women. This interplay encouraged women to use these outlets to better express and publicize their own understandings of their role in the war through food. Cookbooks and magazines provided a forum for housewives to reinforce domestic authority, preserve their individual family traditions and rituals while taking a personal approach to supporting national war aims.

By the 1940s Americans lived in a world dominated by three media outlets: film, radio and print. As the war began, President Franklin Roosevelt's war machine determined that media would play a vital role in both publicizing the war and keeping the

³¹³ Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 280.

home front attitude toward the war positive.³¹⁴ Most every branch of the federal government involved in the war effort turned to film, radio and print to communicate their programs and wartime goals to the American public. These agencies sought to mobilize the hearts and minds of the public through propaganda. While different federal agencies experienced differing degrees of success in their propaganda campaigns, the OPA and the OWI's work on food rationing illustrates fissures in their interactions with American housewives. Women responded to the portions of this propaganda which supported their household authority, evoked strong images of women as home front guardians, and elaborated on their immediate connection to family on the front lines. Throughout the course of the war, the OPA and OWI communicated messages and imagery women responded to, and yet struggled to condense housewives' motivations into a powerful campaign against black markets. As a result, the OPA remained an outside voice. Black markets flourished as women individually reworked food rationing programs so as to align these programs with their own understanding of American wartime priorities on the home front. The organization failed to gain the trust and loyalty, which they sought, to validate their authority on the home front. In the void, housewives turned to women's media for advice just as they had for generations.

Women's media better addressed housewives concerns and leaned upon decades of trust built up with their readers to dispense wartime advice and information. The popular print media also benefitted from its ability to enter into every American household and stay. The OPA, due to internal constraints, did not regularly push its

³¹⁴ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War 1929-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 645.

propaganda posters into the home. The OPA displayed posters only in public areas such as bus stops, town greens, vacant building's windows, post offices or other government buildings.³¹⁵ This limited their ability to directly enter the home and family consciousness in the same ways as other forms of media and propaganda.³¹⁶ The OPA, and a host of other federal agencies, only directly joined family life through radio programming. Radio reigned as the country's principle medium for entertainment throughout the war and took up responsibility for informing Americans on home front issues as well as the realities of battle.³¹⁷ The OPA utilized radio programming and announcements to connect with the American family, but as soon as the show ended and the receiver turned off those messages faded from women's memories. Magazines and cookbooks patiently sat on the kitchen counter or coffee table, fully able to remind women repeatedly of their message and provide guidance on daily domestic affairs.

Women's publications encouraged a communal relationship with food. Women passed good recipes, ideas and information from cookbooks and magazines between themselves and thus exponentially expanded the impact of a single publication far beyond the number of editions sold. Just as the OPA's announcements, radio shows, and posters worked to inspire adherence to food rationing programs, cookbooks and magazines also served a basic purpose. The publishers and writers of women's popular media wanted housewives to buy their publications. To that end some bias existed within cookbooks

³¹⁵ Although the OPA was limited in their placement of propaganda, the OWI did work with the War Advertising Council to have government slogans and ideals replicated in commercial advertisements.

³¹⁶ Amy Bentley. *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity*. (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1998), 33.

³¹⁷Jordan Braverman, *To Hasten the Homecoming: How Americans Fought World War II Through the Media* (Lanham, Md; Madison Books, 1996), 109.

and magazines, but that grew out of the publisher's nuanced understanding of and deep desire to exploit housewives' interests. Cookbooks and magazines accurately gauged the American housewife's motivations for supporting the war effort. Their collections of recipes and feature stories reflected those values and proved supportive of housewives' outlook in order to increase subscriptions and sales.

On the other hand, no publisher fancied federal agencies scrutinizing and prohibiting their publications because they didn't align with federal regulations. Throughout the war publishers navigated a complex web of federal agencies all intent upon using private publications to push their own programs and schemes. The three main organizations overseeing private publications included the War Advertising Council, The Writers' War Board, and the Office of War Information. To assist publishers, advertisers, and writers in aligning their actions with federal regulations, the Office of War Information published a series of guidebooks. From July 1942 through April 1945 they circulated a Magazine War Guide that outlined expectations for everything from articles to encouraging women to volunteer action thru advertising bylines.³¹⁸ Publishers usually acquiesced and increased their patriotic content as they understood that the enforcement divisions of most wartime agencies preferred to punish and reprimand the businesses that violated or skirted government rules rather than target consumers. To balance this complex problem, cookbook writers and especially magazine contributors-included at least some ration-friendly ideas and recipes in each edition. However, when one takes a close look at many of the articles and recipes, they at least partly, and occasionally

³¹⁸ Nancy A. Walker, ed., *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press* (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 1998), 16.

completely, ignore the OPA's food rationing strictures. Cookbook authors and magazine writers appreciated housewives' motivations and subverted the rationing programs in order to better connect with their readers. They then used this connection to sell oodles of books and periodicals to American housewives eager to see their individual beliefs and motivations reinforced in print.

In the 1940s, literally dozens of different types of media focused upon the female consumer from radio soap operas to domestic serial columns in local newspapers. However, cookbooks and magazines for women not only attracted mass attention, but signaled deeper connections since the consumer purchased the publication. Purchase of a book or periodical signified that the housewife ascribed to the majority of ideas contained therein. A radio show transmitted information freely over the airwaves, and listeners tuned in (or out) at their own fancy leaving the historian very little ability to track who listened to what and when. Publications allow better tracking of audience and relative popularity. Particularly in the case of magazine subscriptions, repeated sales showed sustained interest and acceptance of the ideals presented in the magazine.³¹⁹ Several studies also exist on the ways that women have used domestic publications over the last several centuries to communicate political stance, cultural mores, and their own understanding of their position within society.³²⁰

The second reason to utilize cookbooks and magazines comes from their focus on domestic issues; these publications discuss food and repeatedly highlight women's relationship with food rationing during the war years. These works entered into the fray

³¹⁹ Walker, *Women's Magazines 1940-1960*, 2.

³²⁰ One example of such literature is Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*.

of food rationing, not only to provide cooking advice but also to inspire socially accepted behavior patterns for housewives.

Cookbooks have long been a vehicle for women to express their beliefs, culture, and build authority on domestic affairs. As a medium considered entirely female, cookbooks weren't typically shaped by male views during the publication process. Whereas publication and content decisions in magazines often rested on the desk of male editors, cookbook content didn't traverse through the same processes. Because the content of cookbooks were so markedly female, male editors hardly entered into intense line editing of recipes and thus we see a much more unfiltered and female voice emerge from cookbooks. Women use cookbooks to write about their lives, tell their own individual story, share their vision of their community, and articulate their perception of the community and society in which they reside.³²¹ Reading between the lines of a recipe, perusing the organization of a cookbook, and soaking in the impressions gained from an introduction prove fertile ground for gaining insights into women's worlds and their closely held values. Yet, as personal a reflection as a cookbook may be and as much information as can be gleaned about the women who wrote and read the book, cookbooks contain one major downside. Cookbooks can take a long time to compile and publish. Julia Child's first work, *The Art of French Cooking*, famously took over a decade to bring to the American market. In a study of the home front during World War II, a short, five-year span, this drag in publication seems to exclude discussion of cookbooks. Luckily two sorts of cookbooks existed by the early twentieth century: national publications and smaller distribution community cookbooks and special interest cookbooks. Generally

³²¹ Theophano, *Eat My Words*, 2.

national publications took years to complete, but surprisingly these works also made efforts to speak to the domestic crisis food rationing looming over housewives. While many larger national publications, such as the American classic *The Joy of Cooking*, could not totally rearrange and restructure their books to discuss rationing, they did make sizeable efforts to touch upon the issue. These national publications created wartime supplements with advice and supposedly ration-friendly recipes, alongside new introductions which acknowledged both the role of women in the war and the uniquely female understanding of patriotic action popular amongst housewives. Wartime editions of cookbooks highlight the tension, also seen in magazines, between ration-friendly recipes and those that preserve traditional domestic culture. Authors nonchalantly place so-called wartime recipes, many of which ignore the realities of OPA food rationing, alongside resource exhausting recipes seen in pre-war editions. Considering the fact that OPA sugar rationing cut per capita sugar consumption by almost half, entire sections in cookbooks on candy making and jelly preserves fly in the face of ration program realities. These recipes remained within wartime editions for two reasons: publishers wanted to avoid massive rewriting and editing and because women still wanted these recipes. Housewives fancied these recipes because of the cultural meanings they ascribed to the dishes. Their inclusion in wartime cookbooks also served as an indicator of women's willingness to consider illegal purchasing in order to procure these meals for their families.

Perhaps the truest narration on housewives' ideals and beliefs in regards to the war and food rationing comes from the publication of innumerable community or special interest cookbooks during the war. Community cookbooks arose partly out of the custom

of women sharing prized recipes between friends and family. The practice of sharing of recipes often allowed women to cross boundaries of race, class, religion, and age.³²² Gifting a recipe between two women then came to cement both trust and relationships within their community.³²³ The very first cookbooks in American began as simple collections of different recipes which reflected the owner's social ties and family food traditions. Printing those recipes in cookbooks allowed women to extend the boundaries of the domestic sphere and raise a profit. In the process, cookbook authors allowed readers a glimpse into their political views and socio-cultural world through their introductions and instructions.³²⁴ Printed cookery literature provided a vehicle for women to shape and expound upon women's roles, domesticity, demeanor, and even concepts of femininity.³²⁵ Community cookbooks in particular allowed the reader to garner an understanding of the population which produced the book. It is from close study of these cookbook introductions, dedications, prefaces, titles, and recipes that the pattern of women's loyalty to their goals of preserving American culture, and buttressing women's domestic authority is revealed.

The naissance of a community cookbook during the 1940s usually began with a philanthropic endeavor by a distinctive group, and these cookbooks incorporated recipes and the efforts of multiple respected members of that organization. For example, various state women's clubs, Junior Auxiliary groups, and women supporting children's hospitals all produced wartime cookbooks. Community cookbooks often reflect much faster

³²² Theophano, *Eat My Words*, 35.

³²³ Theophano, *Eat My Words*, 41-42.

³²⁴ Pricilla Parkhurst Furguson, *Word of Mouth: What We Talk About When We Talk About Food* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 53.

³²⁵ Theophano, *Eat My Words*, 190.

compilation and publication times than national cookbooks. Due almost entirely to a group's willingness to pay for the publication of these works, and their focus on philanthropy, instead of gain these works reached publication quicker than national cookbooks. However, the lack of professional editing and the open call for submission of recipes also meant these works suffer from slapdash composition. Multiple variations on a single recipe and exact duplications abound in these humble works. Since no professional editing occurred many times recipes weren't even tested before publication, resulting in impossible to recreate recipes. Inaccurate or completely missing measurements or poor instructions could also render a recipe useless. Moreover, many of the recipes included in community cookbooks speak to older traditions of swapping recipes and women tended to submit their most well-known and most often requested recipes instead of their most ration-coupon friendly concoctions. Nonetheless, in a study on women's motivations and deviations from food rationing, these recipes prove enlightening as many are included in spite of their luxurious ingredients or excessive amounts of meat or sugar.

Just as cookbooks served, and continue to hold, a similar place in the American home and women's sphere, so too do magazines. The average women's magazine in the 1940s looked much like its modern progeny; eye grabbing and colorful covers with the promise of articles to solve some of life's most vexing inconveniences. A plethora of titles greeted the housewife at the newsstand: *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *McCall's*, and *Redbook* to name just a few of the most popular magazines during the 1940s. While each publication devoted itself to a specific aspect of women's interests, from fashion to celebrity to intellectual improvement, they

all remained somewhat formulaic. Women's magazines included a mix of fictional stories, poetry, the occasional serial novel, articles on beauty and fashion, and advice on household management. They also might include nonfiction articles on everything from presidential candidates to educational policy to gardening and simple home repair.³²⁶ With so many similarities, each publication gained readership by distinguishing itself from the pack through special interest articles or by targeting the general tastes of a particular population segment. For example, *Harper's Bazaar* drew readers of the upper class due to its emphasis on urbane and cultured lifestyles.³²⁷

This study, with its focus on women's motivations in regards to food rationing, carefully examines a publication with a broad readership that also regularly discussed food. *Good Housekeeping's* concentration on home economics, recipes, and entertaining advice best fit the scope of this study. The magazine boasted a nationwide distribution due to its affiliation with Hearst Publishing and nearly all Americans recognized the brand. Hearst cultivated a general readership for the magazine by expounding upon middle-class ideology and culture during the war. Unlike the OPA which targeted African-American communities in their outreach and education programs but largely ignored this segment in propaganda and publicity, *Good Housekeeping* never intentionally sought a diverse readership. In fact, the management of the magazine instead chose to focus solely on white middle-class women. Herbert Mayes, the editor for *Good Housekeeping* during the 1940s, referred to the assumed readership of the magazine as "middle Americans. Middlebrow. In every way middle."³²⁸ Although the

³²⁶ Walker, *Women's Magazines 1940-1960*, 2.

³²⁷ Walker, *Women's Magazines 1940-1960*, 2-3.

³²⁸ Walker, *Women's Magazines 1940-1960*, 7.

magazine never directly targeted African American readers or showed diversity through its articles, African-American women weren't excluded from the readership of this publication. Since no national African-American women's magazine existed until the publication of *Essence* in 1970, at least a portion of those regularly buying and subscribing to *Good Housekeeping* probably came from diverse backgrounds.

As a magazine that focused so intently upon the middle-class lifestyle, *Good Housekeeping* created an idealized concept of womanhood and homemaking which many diverse groups of Americans might aspire toward even if they weren't a part of the intended target audience. *Good Housekeeping* built its brand image around providing trusted home advice and suggestions for housewives. Of all the magazines available in the 1940s, *Good Housekeeping* stands as the only one to attempt to build consumer loyalty by guaranteeing their domestic suggestions. The Good Housekeeping Institute, an offshoot of *Good Housekeeping* magazine, began in 1909 and sought to expand the magazine's reputation as a consumer advocate and trusted voice in the home. The Good Housekeeping Institute's major function from its formative years through World War II was to provide product testing and guarantee consumer satisfaction with those items granted the prestigious seal. This of course built consumer interest in those products, which brings us to the other major component of all women's magazines in the 1940s: advertisements. As much as magazines intended to entertain, enlighten, and advise women, they overwhelmingly devoted their publication space to advertisements. Those advertisements created so much girth that some magazines boasted over three hundred pages per issue.³²⁹ The practical implication of all those advertisements meant lower

³²⁹ Walker, *Women's Magazines 1940-1960*, 2.

prices as publishers, such as Hearst, subsidized consumer cost with advertising dollars. By 1940, *Good Housekeeping* magazine only cost the consumer twenty-five cents per issue and yet contained trusted advice and cutting edge articles on homemaking that attracted diverse assemblages of American housewives. Thus, *Good Housekeeping* remained financially, intellectually, and geographically accessible for most housewives during the war years. This accessibility lends itself to a study of the ways women used food to forward their own agendas as a part of the war effort.

Another strength of utilizing magazines stems from the constant publication processes which insured monthly issues on the newsstands and in subscriber's mailboxes. Pre-production of most issues of *Good Housekeeping* began between two to four months before the print run of the magazine. This meant that the magazine kept a pulse on trends and reflected the most up-to-date responses to women's mentalities available in media. The monthly issuance of magazines also highlights on the spot responses to traditional celebrations under the strictures of the OPA's food rationing programs. Many months the magazine devoted an entire issue to the discussion of holiday preparations, entertainment, and meal preparation. These issues provide insight into the ways that women dealt with food rationing and yet still celebrated traditions and served ritualized meals. Instead of suggesting meatless Thanksgivings or Christmas without candy as the OPA's strict rules dictated, these magazines forged ahead with plans for grand celebrations with traditional and non-ration-friendly recipes and advice for housewives. The magazines understood that for housewives serving a special meal meant more than a fleeting hoorah; that meal stood as a symbol of the American home front and housewives position within society.

Between the Pages: Cookbooks

These communally crafted cookbooks only occasionally addressed World War II and women's responses to the war effort through food in an upfront manner. In a random sample of 58 cookbooks held by the Library of Congress and published from 1942 through 1945, the overwhelming majority didn't mention the war or food rationing in their titles. Only fourteen cookbook titles devoted their efforts to saving sugar, using less desirable cuts of meat, or shopping under the food rationing system. However, many of these cookbook's introductions addressed food rationing and women's roles through food in the war effort. The war and navigating OPA food rationing hovered over the minds of both cookbook authors and the average housewife.

The lack of outright rationing messages available in many war-era cookbook titles, and yet the frank and sometimes fearful discussion of women's roles in a country at war contained within introductions and prefaces to these same cookbooks, reflect the tension within the country at the time. Most cookbooks took several years to compile and test recipes, and so the glut of cookbooks published in 1943 tells the reader that these works emerged out of the concerns of the first days of wartime and food rationing. They also, by avoiding mention of the war in their titles, communicate a somewhat naïve hope that perhaps the war would have ended by the time their work reached housewives hands. Dorothy Kirk, the editor of the *Woman's Home Companion Cook Book*, encapsulated this idea with the postscript to her 1945 edition. She said "as this edition goes to press our country is still at war."³³⁰ Another outlook emerges from Charlotte Adams' *You'll Eat it*

³³⁰Dorothy Kirk, ed, *Woman's Home Companion Cook Book* (New York: P. F. Collier and Son Corporation, 1945), np.

Up; her first sentence acknowledges the war but her work “is not a war cookbook” and the “fact that it is not is deliberate.”³³¹ Adams felt the cookbook was the wrong vehicle for timely communication and instead views cookbooks as sentimental volumes to be held beyond the limited timeframe of a war. However, a good portion of the low income menus and recipes suggested in *You’ll Eat It Up* brought to mind wartime substitutions and ration-friendly cuts of meat. Even though Adams avoided direct discussion of food rationing, and boldly proclaimed it not within her preview, the savvy housewife could find ration-friendly recipes within the tome. However, most cookbooks displayed exactly the opposite attitude toward the war and food rationing. They openly discussed the impact of war on their writing and food. A quasi-textbook publication, *Food in Health and Disease*, written by a nurse for nurses touched upon the role of food in World War II. The preface begins by defending the decision to produce an edition during war by stating that “the national emergency and the emphasis on sound nutrition as an important part of this country’s defense makes the bringing up-to-date of every treatise on food imperative.”³³² The largest publications, such as the *Good Housekeeping Cookbook*, tended to marginalize their response to food rationing by building war sections or special addendums to their normal cookbook content instead of integrating their advice throughout the cookbook.

Some cookbook authors chose to highlight the war and food rationing through the recipes they published during the war years. In the sample from the Library of Congress

³³¹ Charlotte Adams, *You’ll Eat it Up: A Menu for Every Day and Every Occasion* (New York: M. Barrows and Company, 1943), vii.

³³² Katherine Mitchell, *Food in Health and Disease: Preparation, Physiological Action and Therapeutic Value*. (F. A. Davis Company, 1942), vi.

collection examined by this study, all the works that directly recognize the war or food rationing in their title were published in 1943. 1943 stood as the year where cookbook authors spoke the most directly to the issues caused by OPA food rationing programs and the stresses this created for housewives in the kitchen and grocery store. These authors sought to calm fears and assist women in creating coping mechanisms that allowed them to express their own domestic power while cementing ritual celebrations as the locus for patriotic action within the family. As such, these authors shared basic meal planning and points planning advice. They also all echo varying levels of support for the OPA's food rationing program, mimicking propaganda from the first two years of the war that emphasized the democratic nature of rationing. Marjory Mills' *Cooking on a Ration* brightly proclaims "food is still fun" in the face of rationing and fears of food shortages. Mills begins her cookbook by admonishing her readers to have faith in food rationing and reminding them to stick with the childhood lesson of sharing. She tells her readers, "we're relearning that lesson now where food is concerned, only it's global sharing of the chocolate bar, the juicy steak, the can of soup."³³³ The reminder of sharing as a schoolroom lesson sought to evoke the ideals of democracy and remind the reader how relatively simple rationing could be for housewives. She continues: "Under rationing one can buy only so much in the way of food, which is the democratic and sound solution."³³⁴ Mills' advice in regards to rationing pushed the housewife to "take the changes that come with good cheer" and in both tone and message mirrored OPA and OWI propaganda of the same era.³³⁵

³³³ Marjorie Mills, *Cooking on a Ration: Food is Still Fun* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1943), 20.

³³⁴ Mills, *Cooking on a Ration*, 20.

³³⁵ Mills, *Cooking on a Ration*, 166.

While some cookbook authors saw themselves as filling a public service role by supporting food rationing in their prefaces and introductions, most did not approach the matter with the same zeal as Mills. Gertrude Voellmig's *Wartime Cooking Guide* refers directly to recipes which helped the housewife create "good meals under the wartime conditions of rationing and food shortages."³³⁶ However, she doesn't sugar coat the issue of food rationing and instead refers to it as a simple necessity. The *Wartime Cooking Guide*, like *Cooking on a Ration*, still emphasizes the democratic underpinnings of the program. The cook book declares that "under food rationing all American homemakers have an equal opportunity to feed their families interesting and healthful meals."³³⁷ Gertrude Voellmig's introduction sought to reassure American women of the inherent fairness food rationing imposed upon the economy, but does so with much less enthusiasm than Mills' cookbook. The *Wartime Cooking Guide* approaches food rationing, and the extra effort it required of housewives in the areas of shopping and preparing for meals, with a practical approach and tone. Gone are euphemisms and upbeat cheer; instead she exhibits stoic acceptance and urges the reader to avoid panic. Voellmig counsels her readers "if all foods become rationed, learn to use those with low points values."³³⁸ Voellmig's reassurances and steady tone in the face of mounting fears of the possible expansion of food rationing reinforced her authority and the value of her suggestions. Prudence Penny's *Coupon Cookery* embraced a totally different tactic in her efforts to construct a relationship with her readers and buttress her kitchen authority.³³⁹

³³⁶ Gertrude Voellmig, *Wartime Cooking Guide: Stretching the Points* (Chicago: Reilly and Lee, 1943), 1.

³³⁷ Voellmig, *Wartime Cooking Guide*, 7.

³³⁸ Voellmig, *Wartime Cooking Guide*, 8.

³³⁹ Prudence Penny, *Coupon Cookery* (Hollywood: Murray and Gee, 1943), 9. Mary Pauline Patterson served as Prudence Penny and wrote this cookbook under that pen name.

Prudence Penny unenthusiastically begins her introduction titled “How to S-T-R-E-T-C-H a Point” by intoning “rationing is with us for the duration at least!” with an exasperated and helpless air.³⁴⁰ *Coupon Cookery* makes it clear that no matter how an individual might feel about food rationing, it had become an everyday reality for American housewives during the war. But Penny follows her fellow authors by stressing food rationing “is the only fair way” of dealing with the food situation caused by the war.³⁴¹ All three of these women’s writers included useful information on the basics of dealing with food rationing as a consumer and the complex points system as a part of the household economy.

The most complete advice in regard to navigating points and quality rationing comes unsurprisingly from Marjorie Mills whose enthusiasm for the rationing program pervades the entire cookbook. Mills tallies twenty tips for rationing ranging from the generic to the incredibly specialized. All three put forth the basic advice that women should plan shopping trips, account for all the family’s points, and be aware of current ration point values for conventional grocery goods. Two of the three authors also included charts to assist the housewife in keeping track of points and their expiration dates. Mills’ advice bubbles as she counsels women that milk “should be treated as a food” and “can be an outstanding help in keeping a family well,” while noting they can extend vegetables usefulness by preparing cream soups for invalids and children.³⁴² Veollmig, not to be outdone, prosaically counsels women to cook intelligently and conserve rationed food as often as possible since “meat shrinks...and cheese becomes

³⁴⁰ Penny, *Coupon Cookery*, 9.

³⁴¹ Penny, *Coupon Cookery*, 10.

³⁴² Mills, *Cooking on a Ration*, 165.

inedible and stringy if not handled correctly.”³⁴³ These introductions do not vary wildly from pre or post-war cookbooks; authors sought to promote their own kitchen authority and build trust with readers, while acknowledging any sponsors or themes in their works. The interesting aspect of these introductions comes from their acknowledgement of food rationing, and their comfort in communicating the rules of food rationing to their audiences. All three provided useful tips and educate housewives on how to manage grocery shopping while living with the realities of food rationing. They push housewives to conserve foods, find uses for leftovers, stretch and extend meat with fillers, and save bones to make homemade broths. They also helped women strategize their marketing: Mill’s advises housewives to allot stamps for oils and butter first in the weekly marketing budget as they effected flavor of recipes more than any other rationed good.³⁴⁴ These authors explained ceiling prices in layman’s terms and encouraged housewives to shop around for the lowest prices.

Wartime editions of kitchen standby cookbooks proliferated during the war years. The majority of the content in these works remained the same as their pre-war versions. The introduction, vocabulary and cooking education sections, meal planning guides, recipes and even household advice mirrored earlier issues. However, in light of the war and demands upon housewives in relation to food, many cookbooks included supplemental sections that dealt entirely with the war’s impact on the domestic sphere and particularly food rationing. The 1942 edition of the *Good Housekeeping Cook Book* produced one of these wartime supplement sections as a part of the larger time-tested

³⁴³ Voellmig, *Wartime Cooking Guide*, 9.

³⁴⁴ Mills, *Cooking on a Ration*, 164.

book.³⁴⁵ The reader easily identified the wartime advice as it was printed upon light blue paper in order to differentiate it from the peacetime advice. Other than the supplemental section on the war, the only other modification in the cookbook's content came in the form of two sections on "easy ways to save sugar" and "sugar substitutes."³⁴⁶ The majority of the recipes included in the cookbook didn't pay any heed to the strictures of food rationing, perhaps as a nod to the concept that a cookbook's life hopefully encompassed more years than a war as Marjorie Mills insisted in her introduction. The book's willingness to include two additional chapters on conserving sugar, not as a part of the wartime supplement, but as a bonus section, reflects housewives' interest in the subject and the strain sugar rationing created within American society. The inclusion of these sugar chapters apart from the wartime information also indicates the fear that sugar rationing might continue long after the war years.

The introduction to the wartime supplement section of the *Good Housekeeping Cook Book* begins much like the other cookbooks, by discussing tips and strategies for procuring food, conserving leftovers, and planning healthy meals in the face of government food rationing. However, the *Good Housekeeping Cook Book* placed more emphasis on substituting difficult to obtain canned foods with fresh foodstuffs and the patriotic importance of recycling used cans on the home front. The author also warns housewives that they will begin to see more jars and alternative containers for foods on grocer's shelves.³⁴⁷ These new vessels meant new quantities and further challenged the

³⁴⁵ International Readers League, *The Good Housekeeping Cook Book* (New York: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1942).

³⁴⁶ International Readers League, *The Good Housekeeping Cook Book*, x.

³⁴⁷ International Readers League, "Wartime Supplement" *The Good Housekeeping Cook Book* (New York: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1942), 12.

shopping housewife as these changes altered the value for some tinned foods. Finally, the cookbook addresses working or volunteering women directly with sections on the ways these wartime recipes especially benefit these groups. The cookbook asks women to consult recipes in the regular sections of the book to find solutions for cooking for crowds or time saving recipes for the “business housekeeper” that worked outside her own home, or menus and recipes for preparing box lunches.³⁴⁸ Remarkably, the cookbook took the time to incorporate an entire section with ration-friendly recipes, and yet the author specifically referred war volunteers cooking in canteens to peacetime recipes in the rest of the book. This seems counter-intuitive to the modern reader, who might expect women actively working in feeding others as a part of the war effort to use ration-friendly recipes. However, using peace-time recipes rich in butter, sugar, and meat in order to feed war volunteers and servicemen made perfect sense. Housewives placed a great priority on keeping the traditions of the home front and actively worked to provide normalcy for those fighting. Serving sweet treats and rich hearty meals at USO canteens or military recruitment posts proved women’s devotion to their definition of patriotic action, even when those actions meant foregoing food rationing program rules.

In the end, these cookbook introductions all show intimate knowledge and understanding of the ways the OPA food rationing programs operated on the home front. After reading these introductions one must assume the writers fully comprehend food rationing and gave sympathetic thought to the challenges facing the individual housewife as she forged ahead with her domestic tasks. The most intriguing element of these cookbooks is not their superficial support of OPA food rationing, however, as it was the

³⁴⁸ International Readers League, “Wartime Supplement,” 3.

law, but rather how very shallow their devotion to its tenets. Sugar, coffee, butter, and meat rationing steeply reduced the amount of these foodstuffs available for the average family's table. Moreover, with the government emphasis on wartime nutrition women simultaneously sought out advice on cobbling together healthy and appealing meals. All too often these media sources chose to overlook rationing challenges and instead clung to traditional recipes and familiar foods. Cookbooks and magazines provided options, opinions, and advice on substitutions meant to align food rationing with women's concepts of patriotic action through food.

The Sour Taste of Sugar Rationing

The lack of sugar created perhaps the most dire kitchen situation, and became the most difficult fodder for the wartime housewife to sacrifice in the name of rationing. One woman, Juanita Marotta, recalled her mother frantically contacting her and begging her to send all her sugar stamps back home so she could preserve apples through canning as applesauce for the family.³⁴⁹ Sugar rationing and family shortages of the sweet stuff caused real stress for housewives. A Gallup Poll from 1943 reveals that sugar was ranked as the 4th most difficult rationed good to find.³⁵⁰ Almost two years later another survey found sugar was the hardest rationed good to cut down on or go without. The same survey also discovered that women were more likely to name sugar than men.³⁵¹ Sugar held deep cultural meaning on the home front as did sweet treats and desserts. Americans also associated sugar with femininity and domesticity; a full cookie jar symbolized

³⁴⁹ Juanita Marotta, Interviewed by Suzanne Scott, October 3, 2006, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection Box 54 Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

³⁵⁰ George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971* Vol 1 (New York: Random House, 1972), 310 (Survey 293-K Question 1).

³⁵¹ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 437 (Survey 339-K Question 10).

womanly charm as well as the sense of contentment and that all is well in the home. Interestingly, this emphasis on sugar as female is also reflected in home front responses to sugar rationing. Of all the items rationed by the OPA, sugar seemed the most central and most publicly debated. The OPA's food rationing program planned on cutting per capita consumption of sugar almost in half. Housewives nearly revolted. Women cited the need for sugar in daily life; the use of sugar as a preservative for fruits in jams and jellies, the importance of baking for both health and moral, sugar as an energizing element, and the pressure they felt to have sweets as a part of traditional holiday celebrations (such as candy at Christmas). In the face of this opposition, the OPA bent and proclaimed that women could apply for extra sugar coupons in order to preserve excess fruit and for home canning since store bought tinned foods were not as readily available due to war needs. This hardly meant victory for housewives. Women, because of their devotion to conserving culture and their understanding of their role in the war as a whole, spent the entire war fighting and cheating rationing programs in order to obtain enough sugar. In response, magazines and cookbook authors concocted an outlandish number of sugar substitute ideas. Many of these publications warned the housewife of the limited abilities of some substitutes, and generally espoused the use of as much sugar in each recipe as could be obtained. Other tightly rationed foods also received attention and substitution or stretching recipes but sugar held the most interest and stimulated the most discussion. The symbolic equation of sugar with women, brings up a revealing bit of wartime society. Whereas housewives and female domestic authorities sought out numerous substitutions for sugar, the efforts to substitute meat remained minimal. Meat symbolized the male and masculine energy. Sugar remained central to the home front

experience but the housewife attempted substitutions and found little wrong with attempts to replace this symbolic food with other lower value items. In desserts, the important factor was sweetness and individual ingredient added to generate a saccharine quality mattered far less.

Most cookbooks agreed upon a set of simple solutions to the household sugar shortage caused by reduced allotments from the local rationing boards. Corn syrup became the most common sugar substitute in most cookbooks, although author's disagreed upon the exact amount needed for an equal exchange in recipes. *The Gardeners' Cook Book* argued a proper substitution called for two cups of corn syrup for every single cup of sugar.³⁵² Conversely, the cookbook *Cook's Away*, which targeted those learning culinary arts for the first time or those going without a cook due to labor shifts caused by the war, called for substituting half the sugar in a recipe with corn syrup.³⁵³ Another author advocated an equal swap of syrup for sugar, but cautions "this will not be as sweet".³⁵⁴ These authors also disagreed on the acceptable exchange rate of corn syrup for sugar, and corn syrup's application in recipes. Some thought syrup made excellent cakes, muffins and cookies.³⁵⁵ Others warned corn syrup didn't produce desired results in angel food or sponge cakes.³⁵⁶ Outside of the ubiquitous corn syrup, other popular sugar substitute suggestions emerged in cookbooks. These included honey, molasses, maple syrup, brown sugar, and even sorghum or cane syrup. One of the

³⁵² The Houston Council of Texas Garden Clubs, Mildred Schlumff, Ed, *The Gardeners' Cook Book*. (Houston: Anson Jones Press, 1945), 327.

³⁵³ Elizabeth Case and Martha Wyman, *Cook's Away: A Collection of Simple Rules, Helpful Facts, and Choice Recipes Designed to Make Cooking Easy* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1943), 5.

³⁵⁴ Harriet Hester, *300 Sugar Saving Recipes* (New York: M. Barrows and Company, 1942), 11.

³⁵⁵ Hester, *300 Sugar Saving Recipes*, 11.

³⁵⁶ Case and Wyman, *Cook's Away*, 4.

interesting elements of these suggestions stems from the morose, albeit practical, discussion of substitutes. *Cook's Away* hints at the issue of altering the taste and potentially ruining baked goods by using substitutions. The book advised housewives to avoid using honey as a substitute in recipes for a cake and its icing as it “has a positive flavor which is difficult to disguise.”³⁵⁷ Gertrude Voellmig’s *Wartime Cooking Guide* advises housewives “baking and cooking of other sweets can be managed if sugar substitutes are made to help stretch rations.”³⁵⁸ Yet in the same breath she calls desserts and baked goods critical to the success of a meal. Although sugar substitutions remained hotly debated, and many women had their own concoctions and mathematical equations to make substitutions function, the ability to produce sweets for the family table remained important throughout the war.

Cookbook authors also suggested alternative methods for producing desserts without the use of any sugar at all. Harriet Hester’s book devoted to saving sugar reminded housewives to use fruit juices from canned fruit as a sweetener for gelatin and to cook with dried fruits in order to add sweetness without sugar.³⁵⁹ Others advocated buying premade puddings or cake and pastry mixes³⁶⁰ since these factory produced foods already contained sweeteners without dipping into a housewife’s ration of sugar. The *Good Housekeeping Cook Book* suggested a recipe for a chocolate swirled ice cream that didn’t require any sugar and instead depended upon sweetened condensed milk and semi-

³⁵⁷ Case and Wyman, *Cook's Away*, 6.

³⁵⁸ Voellmig, *Wartime Cooking Guide*, 99.

³⁵⁹ Hester, *300 Sugar Saving Recipes*, 11.

³⁶⁰ Case and Wyman, *Cook's Away*, 99.

sweet chocolate for sweetness.³⁶¹ As improbable as it seems *Burnt Toast*, even conceived of a “velvety chocolate frosting” which called for two eggs, a half cup of butter, and seven ounces of semi-sweet chocolate.³⁶² The relative success in both taste and consistency a home cook might have in attempting these recipes probably varied but they demonstrate how far women went to overcome the challenges of sugar rationing. However, most often these recipes in their herculean efforts to avoid utilizing sugar ended up calling for other difficult to find products such as canned fruits or extra butter. One such pie, suggested by a Mrs. Verne C. Hunt, called for an apple pie filling made with a half cup of corn syrup and a half cup honey dotted “generously” with difficult to obtain butter.³⁶³ Although some of their methods and measurements might raise eyebrows, these recipes reveal the importance of baked goods to housewives and the home front. Housewives sought out sometimes zany substitutions and even attempted to master baking without sugar all in an effort to provide desserts to the family. The simple cookie or slice of homemade cake held meaning for housewives; serving these goods meant they played their part in preserving home front culture.

The Butcher, Red Points and Mystery Meat

With the OPA order to ration meats under the rather complicated red point scheme, housewives found another mealtime and cultural staple threatened. Meat held great cultural currency for wartime families, who had just survived the economic rigors of the Great Depression. Sitting down to a meal built around a juicy steak, pot roast, or

³⁶¹ International Readers League, *The Good Housekeeping Cook Book* (New York: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1942), 13.

³⁶² Women’s Auxiliary of the California Babies and Children’s Hospital, *Burnt Toast: Victory Edition* (Los Angeles; California Babies and Children’s Hospital, 1943), 22.

³⁶³ Women’s Auxiliary of the California Babies and Children’s Hospital, *Burnt Toast*, 24.

baked chicken symbolized a return to normalcy and affluence for the middle class. Even Norman Rockwell's famous painting "freedom from want" depicted the ideal of a roasted turkey on every American table. Nonetheless, when meat became rationed, housewives responded positively and searched out methods for maintaining family standards while contributing to military needs by reserving the abundance of American produced meat for servicemen. Meat rationing intersected two housewife goals during the war. Women wanted to keep a roast on their home tables as a method of insuring the continuance of their culture, but they also aspired to directly influence a positive outcome in the war by helping to send supplies of meat directly to friends and family fighting on the front lines. When Saidee Leach's son wrote her from his Navy ship in the Pacific and expressed his happiness with eating steak in the military mess hall, she optimistically replied "No, I am not envious of your eating steak, for we want you men to have the best." She then continued in her letter to describe her success in wrangling a piece of utility grade meat into an edible dish with the assistance of ketchup.³⁶⁴

Many cookbooks and magazine articles came to their rescue offering dozens of ideas for conserving meat on the home front while still serving appealing meals. Cookery experts came up with three main methods for dealing with small allotments of meats. They offered up ideas for carefully cooking meats to avoid shrinkage, additions to stretch meat supplies or mask less desirable cuts, and eventually meat substitutes. Typical advice centered upon making the most of the meat supplies available to one's household each week. The average person received about two and a half pounds of meat per week, and

³⁶⁴Emily Yellin, *Our Mother's War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 22.

most families received around fifty red and blue points per month. In 1943, a single pound of sirloin steak cost the housewife an astounding nine red points.³⁶⁵ Clearly, the need for thrift and conservation ruled meat rationing. While most cookbook authors understood the allure of high red points valued cuts of beef and pork, they also attempted to assist women in stretching servings through intelligent cooking. For those housewives lucky enough to procure more delicate cuts, they advised roasting or broiling until tender, at a moderate heat of 300 to 350 degrees in order to combat shrinkage or ruined dry meat. The authors also cautioned women to reserve the meat bones and scraps for future recipes.³⁶⁶ Although some women found both legal and illegal ways of affording high value tender cuts of meats for their tables, most resorted to lower points value meats or unrationed, but usually in short supply, meats like chicken or organs. Utility grade meats still needed to stretch in order for a housewife to both afford groceries and wisely use points. Many domestic experts divided over how women should approach meat purchases; one camp counseled the acquisition of a single large cut to be allocated into smaller meals, while another advocated multiple purchases of small amounts of meat each week. Many women decided their outlook based upon practical matters such as geography. One wife wrote her husband that rationing “is a lot worse on people in the country than it is on city folks; they can go out and get some kind of meat every day.”³⁶⁷ The rationing of gasoline limited the mobility of country dwellers that might drive miles to reach grocers, whereas city folks possessed the ability to simply walk to nearby stores

³⁶⁵ Tim O’Neil, “A Look Back: America Rations Food During World War II and Civilians Make Do,” *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, July 20, 2013.

³⁶⁶ Voellmig, *Wartime Cooking Guide*, 44.

³⁶⁷ Yellin, *Our Mother’s War*, 22.

for supplies. Regardless of a housewife's purchase plan for red points, the need to extend supplies pressed upon the family. Cookbooks offered recipes and ideas for extending meat such as adding vegetables, sauces, cereals, noodles, or biscuits and dumplings to complete a main dish.³⁶⁸ Ground beef became perhaps the thriftiest, and yet still acceptable meat choice to emerge during the war. The usually unappetizing meat took center stage and many cookbooks gave attention to recipes utilizing this cut as it could be easily stretched to feed more mouths. In one recipe for beef loaf, Gertrude Voellmig included four variations using different flavorings and meat stretchers. These sort of recipes remained popular as they required only a pound and a quarter or so of ground meat and promised to yield six to eight servings. Voellmig's beef loaf included suggestions for the addition of bread crumbs or oatmeal or cornmeal to the ground meat in order to provide taste and texture variations and allow the housewife to serve this meal repeatedly.³⁶⁹ Likewise, *The Good Housekeeping Cook Book's* recipe for hamburger shortcakes extends one pound of ground beef with two cups of flour, eggs, and onion into a meal for six.³⁷⁰ As multipurpose as ground beef became, women also sought out recipes to mask other even lower value cuts of meat such as utility grade and offal or organ meats. *The Good Housekeeping Cook Book* included recipes for deviled tongue mold and a mock terrapin made with a mix of beef liver and boiled eggs in the wartime supplement.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ Voellmig, *Wartime Cooking Guide*, 43.

³⁶⁹ Voellmig, *Wartime Cooking Guide*, 45.

³⁷⁰ International Readers League, "Wartime Supplement," 9.

³⁷¹ International Readers League. "Wartime Supplement," 10.

The value of organ meats and all sorts of “mock” dishes that employed these homely cuts varied wildly from one community to the next. Jewish communities which followed kosher diets mostly excluded organ meats such as liver and wholly avoided contact with intestines; however, consuming chitterlings or fried pork intestines constituted an important meat source for many poor Southern communities. Boiled pigs ears became a popular lunch counter staple in Jackson, Mississippi, during the 1940s as this meat was not rationed and many folks from the community and of rather humble origins already viewed the dish as an ordinary food.³⁷² One group’s taboo food amounted to a normal staple for another community. These taboos and cultural constructions, especially surrounding meats, often found their foundations in a group’s religious outlook or economic status. The ability of a housewife to adapt and prepare offal meats largely depended upon the existence of or her understanding of the cultural constructions of those meats in the local community. The consistent incorporation of organ or offal meat into a family’s diet thus remained problematic for most housewives. Meat stretchers and lower red point value meat substitute recipes occurred regularly in wartime cookbooks and reflected a genuine effort to attempt to use these methods but organ meat remained a divisive ingredient.

Some cookbook authors harkened back to the shortages and slogans from World War I for ration recipe inspiration in the 1940s. Meatless Mondays reentered the American lexicon during World War II as a solution for housewives unable to restrict family consumption. The meatless solution for family dinners also reinforced women’s

³⁷²Geno Lee, interview by Amy C. Evans. “Big Apple Inn” Southern Foodways Alliance, March 24, 2011, available online at <https://www.southernfoodways.org/interview/big-apple-inn/>.

connection to the patriotic actions of their mother's generation, while simultaneously defending the housewife's authoritative voice in domestic affairs by referencing a time when domestic expertise came from mothers and not nutrition science experts. Ruth Berolzheimer, the director of the Culinary Arts Institute, edited *The American Woman's Meals Without Meat Cook Book*. This cookbook offered suggestions for main courses which featured mostly fish, pasta, or eggs.³⁷³ The cookbook then suggested these central dishes be supplemented with vegetables and savory sauces to create well rounded nutritional meals. While not expressly advising women to use their recipes for meatless meals, *The Good Housekeeping Cook Book* offered up two recipes using nuts after their section on stretching low value ground beef. They expressed the rationale that nuts provide much needed proteins, vitamins, and minerals and clearly meant to compare nuts nutritional value to that of meat.³⁷⁴ Finally, *The Settlement Cook Book* offered five variations on a vegetable plate and a cheese blintz dinner menu for "meatless days."³⁷⁵

Fats, Butter, and Oleo-Margarine

Oils and fats became perhaps the most unexpected food item to join the wartime ranks of rationed foods. In the spring of 1943, about a year after most staple foods came under the supervision of the OPA's food rationing programs, butter and some other cooking oils became scarce. One housewife revealed her frustration with butter rationing in a letter to her husband serving overseas. She complained "when there is a little butter everyone gets a ¼ of a pound. So you can imagine how far a ¼ of a pound goes in this

³⁷³ Ruth Berolzheimer, ed, *The American Woman's Meals Without Meat Cook Book* (Chicago: Consolidated Book Publishers, 1943), 2.

³⁷⁴ International Readers League, "Wartime Supplement," 11.

³⁷⁵ Mrs. Simon Kander, *The Settlement Cook Book* Victory 26th edition, (Milwaukee: The Settlement Cook Book Company, 1944), 621.

family of five adults. And that's supposed to last us for a week!"³⁷⁶ *Good Housekeeping* magazine offered reassurance to housewives caught off balance by the butter shortage and tiny ration allotments. The Good Housekeeping Institute counseled women that they had the same two main options when dealing with butter shortages as they did with meat: substitution and stretching. Cooking fats such as bacon grease or vegetable shortening could be used for sautéing, margarine or vegetable shortening replaced butter in baking, and both still provided the nutrition most housewives attributed to butter consumption.³⁷⁷ Nancy Hawkin's book *Let's Cook* even told women to use lard or suet as acceptable butter substitutes in cooking, provided that those fats had been properly rendered and clarified.³⁷⁸ Many cookbook authors also tackled the tough question of how to extend meager butter rations. The most popular method for stretching butter, as seen repeated in several cookbooks, called for the addition of cream and gelatin to a small amount of butter. Although this might fool taste buds on morning toast, *Cook's Away* cautioned housewives that these sort of recipes "are recommended as spreads but are not adapted to frying, greasing pans, or to recipes."³⁷⁹ Other more adventurous advice utilized everything from mustard to careful portioning strategies to share family butter rations. *Good Housekeeping* magazine suggested housewives try to use other spreads, such as peanut butter, for everything from toast to the foundations of lunchbox sandwiches.³⁸⁰ Eula Bee Corban offered that women should seek out whipped butter, "which has more

³⁷⁶ Emily Yellin, *Our Mother's War*, 22.

³⁷⁷ Dorothy Marsh, "What we have found out you can do about butter" *Good Housekeeping Magazine*. (April 1943), 86.

³⁷⁸ Nancy Hawkins, *Let's Cook: A Cookbook for Beginners of All Ages* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1942), 17.

³⁷⁹ Case and Wyman, *Cook's Away*, 8.

³⁸⁰ Marsh, "What we have found out you can do about butter," 87.

volume per pound than regular butter” and would therefore be the most effective use of ration points.³⁸¹

The shortage of butter on the family table proved most distressing and difficult to stretch through additions or schemes. Rationing of butter immediately and totally changed the kitchen and deeply impacted cooking and eating for the duration of the war. The lack of enough butter to meet most family’s needs overly taxed the creative devices of most housewives. Butter stretching, while possible, simple didn’t satisfy. Most families in the 1940s still relied upon butter as the main cooking and seasoning fat. Although margarine was widely available, Americans overwhelmingly preferred to eat butter at the start of rationing. A young wife, Eunice Gooding, recalled feeling a bit deprived without butter. She said “we always joked about it because margarine was white and we put it on the underside of the toast so we couldn’t see it.”³⁸²

Historically, butter producing farmers worked to keep America eating butter and utilized lobbyists to influence laws that would make margarine a less appealing substitute to the consuming public. Margarine faced stiff competition, a slander campaign and even legislation. Since its invention in the late 19th century margarine was the enemy of butter. Butter producers sponsored anti-margarine propaganda that described the food as everything from a laboratory experiment to unhealthy. Legislation assisted these efforts by making it illegal to sell yellow-colored margarine, and some proposed laws would have forced the naturally white margarine to be garishly colored, red or pink or black.

³⁸¹ Eula Bee Corban, *Eat to Live: The Blue Book of Cooking* (New York: M. S. Mills Company Inc., 1943), 105.

³⁸² Eunice Gooding, Interviewed by Joan Denman, June 9, 2004, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection (Box 49) Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

Clarice McCulloch, a dietician in a Pittsburg hospital, recalled this battle between the dairy industry and the oleo-margarine industry. McCulloch noted that “because oleo was not regarded as a healthy food, but as a substitute for butter, we were not allowed to color the oleo if it was served in public places.”³⁸³ In the end margarine producers found an acceptable loophole; they included capsules of annatto with each purchase for housewives to color margarine a creamy yellow at home.³⁸⁴ The war years and butter shortages would do more to move the country toward eating margarine than any previous event. Cookbooks also sought out ways of incorporating margarine into more recipes so the housewife might reserve butter rations for tabletop consumption. For example, *Eat to Live* offered both a cheese sauce and a mock hollandaise sauce that called for equal portions of either butter or margarine, reinforcing the idea that women could substitute equal parts margarine in almost any recipe which called for butter with good results.³⁸⁵ *Cook's Away* showed the greatest acceptance of margarine as a logical and equivalent butter substitute. Its authors offered “margarine can be substituted for butter in all recipes through the flavor may be slightly different...it is improved by creaming and adding a little salt.”³⁸⁶ As visually unappealing as margarine remained throughout the war years, it earned a spot in the kitchen larder as a result of butter rationing. The struggles and efforts to find substitutions for butter indicate its importance as both a cooking oil and flavoring. However, housewives begrudging willingness to accept margarine as a substitute and

³⁸³ Clarice McCulloch, Interviewed by Kristin Collins, February 3, 1999. Transcript. Reichelt Oral History Collection (Box 23). Florida State University Special Collections and Archives, Tallahassee, FL.

³⁸⁴ Joanne Lamb Hayes, *Grandma's Wartime Kitchen: World War II and the Way We Cooked* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 151.

³⁸⁵ Eula Bee Corban, *Eat to Live*, 106.

³⁸⁶ Case and Wyman, *Cook's Away*, 9.

women's efforts to sell the ability of margarine to approximate the taste of butter reveals something about the position of butter in American culture. Eunice Gooding laughingly remembered that the first food they bought after the end of rationing was butter.³⁸⁷ Keeping bread buttered and vegetables flavorful became a portion of these women's efforts to maintain home front culture and their understanding of the reasons the country fought the war in the first place.

Taken together, these ration conscious recipes for sugar, meat and butter seem to point to a national obsession with adhering to OPA rationing guidelines, but a close look reveals both practicality and frivolity in equal measure. In a practical vein, the shortages and rules inherent in wartime rationing demanded innovative ways to use foods. Most American housewives intended to follow OPA rationing guidelines as long as that action didn't interfere with their ability to preserve their own culture and concept of American ideals. Housewives craved interesting ways to serve hereto unused or unfamiliar foods as a sign of their own patriotic action. Cookbooks provided those recipes and menus. However, at the same time that authors delivered ration-friendly recipes, they also recognized repeatedly in their preparation instructions how boring and bland many of these wartime recipes might become with regular use. Hence they added a multitude of variations for recipes and admonishments for housewives to use different components in the family's dinner to avoid this monotony. While writing to her husband in February of 1943, Renee Young echoed the dangers of mealtime doldrums and the monotonous diet many families experienced during the war. She wrote "yesterday I didn't take any meat, not because we didn't have any but because I'm sick of the same thing...people can't

³⁸⁷ Eunice Gooding, Interviewed, June 9, 2004, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection, Box 49.

keep eating the same thing every day.”³⁸⁸ Cookbook authors also suggested menus that provided tasty meals that included at least one ration-friendly recipe. It is at this point that frivolity and the underlying message that straying from strict rationing emerges in most cookbooks. Respectful, ration-conscious recipes sometimes included instructions for the housewife to refer to the index or content of other recipes which usually didn’t give a single thought to food rationing. Repeatedly, cookbook authors tell housewives to build flavor and interest in their meals by combining a ration-friendly recipe with other foods that are also difficult to obtain or rationed. For instance, *The Settlement Cook Book* suggests women end a meatless vegetable plate dinner with an artfully served frozen can of peaches.³⁸⁹ While this menu respects the need to conserve meat on the home front, it blatantly ignores the shortage of tin and the fact that canned goods cost housewives blue ration points. The menu simply traded one rationed good for another! Many cookbook authors offered recipes for meatless meals augmented by menus requiring canned foods or fresh salads mixed with rationed oils. These suggestions constitute more than simple oversight: cook book authors recognized that their readers would be willing to sacrifice true loyalty to OPA food rationing rules. Prudence Penny’s *Coupon Cookery* summarizes the task of most cookbook authors and their readers. They sought to compose “good meals in spite of it all.”³⁹⁰ Good meals meant food that both physically and psychologically stimulated those who consumed the food. Housewives wanted to prepare food which sustained both the body and the American spirit.

³⁸⁸ Judy Barrett Litoff and David Smith, *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women on the Home Front* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 85.

³⁸⁹ Mrs. Simon Kander, *The Settlement Cook Book*, 621.

³⁹⁰ Penny, *Coupon Cookery*, 22.

Between the Pages: *Good Housekeeping* Magazine

While cookbooks occupied a special and often revered spot within the housewife's kitchen, the regular publication and cheap price of magazines meant a greater number of women read these general interest publications. *Good Housekeeping* magazine, like many others, offered advice on everything from fiction and literature to ways to preserve fabrics in the laundry. However, each issue of *Good Housekeeping* magazine also featured articles on food from the Good Housekeeping Institute, a trusted name in home economics. During World War II, Kathleen Fischer served as the director of the Good Housekeeping Institute and oversaw, at least in theory, all the testing of commercial goods and the publication of many of the food related sections of the magazine. Her femininity built instant credibility with her readership, who sought to reaffirm women's control and authority over domestic decisions for the family. The other main author to contribute articles in the Good Housekeeping Institute section of the magazine also earned her readers respect. Dorothy Marsh's articles and special editorials focused entirely upon food and meal planning, since those areas reflected her recognized expertise. Dorothy Marsh gained popularity amongst housewives as the original editor of the *Good Housekeeping Cook Book* and she steadily contributed to the magazine throughout the war years. Both Fischer and Marsh hoped to use the magazine to simultaneously support the desires of government organizations, commercial advertisers and female readers. To this end, most of the wartime articles which dealt with recipes, menus, and food rationing fully supported OPA rationing rules. The long list of products reviewed and certified by the Good Housekeeping Institute which advertised within the pages of the magazine whole heartedly reinforced food rationing rules. Meat producers

urged women to explore exotic, lower red point, cuts of meat and worked to educate women about red point rationing. Canned goods companies and appliance manufacturers often used their advertising space to depict their less than available products as superior and reminded housewives that the war would end and their products would return to grocery shelves. Often commercial advertisers approached food rationing as a joint effort between their company and the federal government and the consumer. This patriotic devotion to rationing and the “we’re in this together” messages sought mostly to portray the company as supportive of the war, while keeping their products publicized. Commercial advertisers towed the OPA food rationing line because they understood that the OPA and other federal agencies would punish any whiff of libel or disloyal suggestions that originated in a company. So advertisers, which helped pay for the publication of the entire magazine, wanted to see articles and recipes which would avoid government scrutiny and whose message remained above reprimand. Therefore, most of the articles and suggestions published as general advice to housewives in *Good Housekeeping* magazine remained outwardly very supportive of food rationing rules. To that end, in February of 1942, just as the OPA began announcing their expected food rationing programs and adding household staples to the list of difficult to obtain foodstuffs, the editors of *Good Housekeeping* magazine published their own wartime manifesto. They explain to the housewives of America that they had been engaged in preparing for the stresses of war since the 8th of December 1941, the very day Congress declared war on imperial Japan as a result of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. They wrote: “Every item in our apparatus and every operator thereof is at our government’s

command. Cheerfully we set aside our routine duties to undertake emergency tasks.”³⁹¹

The magazine wanted to reassure women that they took an active role in preparing for the war and would support government regulations for patriotic reasons. Their missive echoed the sentiments and letters shared by multitudes of American companies, and perhaps most importantly reiterated the stance taken by *Good Housekeeping* advertisers. A statement of this sort in early 1942 became predictable and mundane. However, the editors also inserted another paragraph claiming that beyond patriotic duty “there is another obligation that we recognize...serving the millions of women who will continue to seek from us the simple intelligent ways of family existence.”³⁹² This short addition relays to the housewife that the editors and women writing articles for the magazine intended to persist in their efforts to speak to the needs and interest of their readers and that they regarded this duty as primary. While this may also seem humdrum, a company vowing to serve its customers, this small additional statement confirmed that the magazine would place women’s agendas before governmental schemes. Overall the magazine would comply with OPA rules, but they expressed their devotion and dedication to their readership’s interests and wellbeing. Women, their domestic world, and their understanding of patriotic action would remain the central focus of the magazine.

Much like the cookbooks, efforts to economize on one ingredient like meat often led the magazine to suggest splurging on another rationed item such as canned goods or sugar. But overall the magazine remained upbeat and mostly published recipes that

³⁹¹ “Good Housekeeping and the War,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (February 1942), 19.

³⁹² “Good Housekeeping and the War,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 19.

worked to avoid outright or obvious violations of the average family's rationed allotment of food. Nonetheless, a savvy reader would have appreciated that most recipes, and by extension menus, violated some parts of the OPA rationing program. The magazine's efforts at preserving traditional meals and rituals through their recipe choices, meal planning, and substitution suggestions trumped government rationing rules. The overall blend of ration-friendly and ration impossible displayed in *Good Housekeeping* recipes must have delighted readers who saw their own personal food and rationing decisions reflected in the pages each month.

The Sour Taste of Sugar Rationing

The magazine routinely highlighted sugar friendly recipes, usually in response to home front fears caused by rationing shortages. For instance, two months after sugar became rationed, *Good Housekeeping* published a feature entitled "Easy ways to Save Sugar", which introduced housewives to alternative sweeteners such as sweetened condensed milk, molasses, and corn syrup and provided suggested recipes.³⁹³ Another contradiction comes from the February 1943 edition article "Little Sugar-Much Dessert". Margaret Ball's article included a wartime special recipe for one-egg jelly cake. This amazing recipe called for a single egg, only a half cup of sugar, and a third a cup of shortening or butter. All of which would have been accessible for a housewife shopping within the confines of ration stamps. However, the cake also calls for one and a half cups of jelly or jam spread between the layers of cake which provided the only true flavoring and sweetness for the entire concoction. Ball goes on to recommend women serve the cake with a broiled shoulder of lamb, which would have been a costly cut due to red point

³⁹³ Julia Hoover, "Easy Ways to Save Sugar," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (April 1942), 98, 102.

rationing.³⁹⁴ So while the original recipe falls well within the strictures of OPA rationing and food availability, the idea for this cake far exceeds the purchasing power of the average family's ration book. The complete concept for this dessert is a jelly filled delicacy served after a fulfilling meal of roasted lamb. If served together these two recipes meant almost no ration stamps for the rest of the week's meals and moreover impelled the housewife to have sugary fruit preserves on hand.

Many housewives wrote to the OPA during the summer months of 1942 and 1943 due to the incongruences of OPA messages. On one hand the government urged women to preserve fruit since the nation's farmers produced a bumper crop, while not appreciably increasing sugar rations across the board. After months of protest and complaint the OPA decided to allow women to apply for extra sugar stamps if they were planning on canning jellies, but the extra allotments, while helpful, still did not allow for considerable canning of jams and fruit surpluses persisted. As if in response to housewives' devil-may-care attitude on the topic of fruit preserves, a 1944 article on marmalades omitted all sugar measurements from the ingredients list.³⁹⁵ The instructions for each individual recipe called for anywhere from two to three cups of sugar; a major splurge which signified an understanding that women turned to black market sugar or hoarding in order to can sweets for their families. Sugar shortages stood as a secondary concern to women determined to inject their own authority on the home front through simple jelly creations.

³⁹⁴ Margaret Ball, "Little Sugar-Much Dessert," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (February 1943), 88-89.

³⁹⁵ Martha L. Luyster, "A Few Glasses of Marmalade," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (November 1944), 87.

Providing sweets and the emotional comfort that desserts offered to their families during the war prevailed over government desires to cut sugar consumption through rationing. Women sought to keep traditional sweets and sugary treats on the table as a part of their commitment to preserving the home front. Cherry pie, a classic and nostalgic piece of American culture, underwent a wartime transformation in *Good Housekeeping* magazine. The magazine suggested housewives reduce added sugar in the pie by using canned cherries due to the packing syrup which the manufacturers incorporated into the filling. Canned goods and the shortening used for the suggested flakey pie crust would have created their own headaches for the ration-conscious shopper. These ingredients highlight the covert efforts of the magazine to assuage advertisers and government censors while still staying true to the messages embraced by housewives.

The Butcher, Red Points, and Mystery Meat

Meat shortages and limited red points meant that most housewives balanced budgets and ration points in order to provide their families with meat-centric “All American” style meals. The inclusion of meat protein held such deep cultural meaning for Americans that very few *Good Housekeeping* articles called for meatless dinners. Instead the magazine hoped to replace difficult-to-obtain cuts of beef with lower, ration-point proteins or even introduce organ meats to the family table. The American Meat Institute, an advertiser in *Good Housekeeping*, began a campaign to make women aware of thriftier cuts of meat in February of 1942 and continued their effort throughout the war. Their advertised suggestions often mirrored the meats discussed within the magazine’s recipe sections. Shank portion hams, pork hocks, salt pork, spare ribs, end

cut pork chops, lamb shanks, lamb necks, ground veal patties, blade bone pot roast, beef flank steak, and ground beef rounded out their list of suggested lower red point meats.³⁹⁶ These thriftier cuts of meat, while cheaper and more point-friendly, also contained remarkably more fat and tended to be the less desirable and tougher portions of meat. Nonetheless, *Good Housekeeping* attempted to educate women on preparation techniques for these less than exciting cuts of meat. In the fall of 1944 Dorothy Marsh wrote an article praising the art of slow braised meats. Each recipe included in the article called for a shoulder roast (beef, pork or lamb) simmered with spices and flavorings ranging from scaloppini in Marsala wine to curry to tomato juice.³⁹⁷ Although each recipe reflected OPA regulations and preferences for meat consumption, these recipes would strain the average housewife's rationing skills. More fatty cuts of meat meant more shrinkage and smaller portions on dinner plates. Wartime rationing and shortages also extended to many other aspects of everyday life and limited cooking fuels. Although the recipes seem ration-friendly, the experienced housewife would recognize the hidden fuel costs of cooking meats anywhere from one hour to over three hours as necessary to tenderize such rough cuts. Another set of recipes encouraging women to shift their meat purchases fails in a much more familiar sense; the author suggests red point rationed pork loin chops and menu planning options that tempt illegal activities. "Two Fine Pork Dishes," by Margaret Ball offers a recipe for curried pork with cubed pork shoulder and another for applesauce braised pork loin chops.³⁹⁸ Both recipes call for pork, a meat that the OPA occasionally

³⁹⁶ American Meat Institute, "The Thriftier Cuts of Meat" advertisement. *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (February 1942), 103.

³⁹⁷ Dorothy Marsh, "When Meat's Not Tender, It's Better if It's Braised," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (October 1944), 81, 94.

³⁹⁸ Margaret Ball, "Two Fine Pork Dishes," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (October 1943), 96.

saw surplus supplies of in the fall and as a result reduced points. However, the OPA didn't guarantee reductions nor did they report an excess in 1943 when this article went to press.³⁹⁹ The article contains one final irony. The curried pork menu suggestion calls for sherbet, cookies and coffee as accompaniments. Coffee and the sugar needed for desserts remained tightly rationed. So for a housewife to dutifully create either menu they would place themselves dangerously close to needing to buy black market goods or risk not having enough points to purchase food for the rest of the week. As if to remind women of this struggle, *Good Housekeeping* included the OPA's advertisement for the home front pledge. On its surface this ad might seem to taunt housewives, but its inclusion was meant to remind women of their own definitions of patriotic action. Instead of standing for the patriotic self-sacrifice and abhorrence of black market purchasing, it subtly reminded women of their role as guardians of American culture. Ball and the magazine seemingly were telling women to serve the coffee and cookies, and buy the good pork chops, because occasionally dishing up those delicious meals meant more to the family and the preservation of core of American values than austere rationed kitchen concoctions.

Good Housekeeping also offered women a huge assortment of painfully creative wartime meat recipes and meals. The most mundane included recipes for ground beef, such as campfire hamburgers. However, in accordance with their efforts to at least publicly support OPA rationing rules, many other more exotic recipes emerged. One menu in an article on thrifty meat dishes suggested deviled tongue mold and another

³⁹⁹ Laurence Tilley, Office of Price Administration, *Chronology of the Office of Price Administration January 1941-November 1946* (Washington, DC.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), January 1942.

expounded upon the virtues of extruded bologna beef loaf sandwiches for lunchboxes. The author proclaimed “morale, stamina, courage and endurance depend to no small degree on proteins” and her recipes for less than desirable meat cuts provided that nutrient plus B vitamins.⁴⁰⁰ Wartime food shortages created a bit of a culinary adventure as recipes attempted to make offal or organ meats desirable. Jane Giesler’s “Don’t Forget These Meats” offered forth recipes for liver, heart, kidneys, tongue, pig’s knuckles, and sweetbreads. The author declares that “your family will agree with our Institute tasting squads that these meats, tastily seasoned or combined with piquante sauce have new textures and flavors.”⁴⁰¹ The average housewife, filled with inspiration to conserve good beef for service men, might have tried these recipes. However, the mixture of lamb’s hearts glazed with apple jelly, mustard, cinnamon and cloves probably didn’t stimulate a repeated attempt. Giesler even admits that women should order these organ meats days in advance as most butchers didn’t carry these sorts due to low demand.⁴⁰² Many of these faddish and frankly unpleasant ration recipes disappeared after the first six months of rationing.⁴⁰³ These recipes stand in a category all to themselves of failed attempts at feeding the American family on the rhetoric of OPA patriotism. After the first fears and fads prompted by OPA food rationing rules subsided, women’s magazines returned to traditional meal suggestions and largely ignored culturally taboo meat sources.

Fats, Butter, and Oleo-Margarine

⁴⁰⁰Roberta Moffitt, “Thrifty Meat Dishes give a Lift to Home and Lunchbox Meals,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (August 1942), 137.

⁴⁰¹Jane Giesler, “Don’t Forget These Meats,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (February 1943), 86-87.

⁴⁰²Giesler, “Don’t Forget These Meats,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 86.

⁴⁰³In a survey of all the food related articles in *Good Housekeeping* between 1942 and the end of 1945, the occurrence of these variety meat recipes dwindles by the end of 1942. The magazine continued to offer meat substitutions, but instead of organ meats they advocated less popular cuts of staple meats.

A good portion of the advertising revenue from food companies in each issue of Good Housekeeping magazine came from businesses selling oils and fats. The eventual rationing of fats and shortages of butter meant the magazine's advice mavens walked a very tight line when providing advice to support housewives. While magazine authors advice evolved throughout the war years when addressing shortages of sugar or meat, the prevailing thought on butter and oils remained the much the same. Authors offered substitutions for butter, suggested stretching mechanisms, and testified to the nutritional value of margarine. Articles focused on butter echoed each other. In April of 1943 Dorothy Marsh wrote that housewives should stretch butter using a gelatin additive, embrace vegetable oil for baking, use fat drippings from meats for flavoring vegetables, and try peanut butter spread on bread.⁴⁰⁴ In January of 1944, the director of the Good Housekeeping Institute chimed in on the subject. Her take on the butter situation promised housewives new ideas. While her article covered more variations of butter substitutes and offered far more detailed instructions on preparing alternative fats for use as butter substitutes, the magazine's core message remained unchanged. Even the ratios in gelatinized butter spread remained the same from the previous year.⁴⁰⁵ As helpful as learning the exact process for rendering leftover animal fats must have been for housewives, the instructions did little to make their inclusion in a cake batter any more palatable. Nonetheless, an article on dessert shortcakes from the summer of 1943 hoped to inspire women to use rendered beef, veal, or lamb fat or skimmed chicken fat as the

⁴⁰⁴ Dorothy Marsh, "What we have found out you can do about Butter," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (April 1943), 86-87.

⁴⁰⁵ Katharine Fischer, "If Butter is Scarce Here are New Ideas for Saving It," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (January 1944), 81-83.

binder for biscuit-style strawberry shortcakes.⁴⁰⁶ Finally in April of 1945 Dorothy Marsh published the last Good Housekeeping article on the issue of butter and shortages. As a bookend to the subject, Marsh offered little new advice and only one new recipe to the discussion. She contributed a recipe for mayonnaise spread that stretched salad oils by adding a gelatin slurry to evaporated milk and then combining a small amount of mayonnaise. Marsh suggested this concoction as a base for any egg, meat, or vegetable salad spread.⁴⁰⁷

One of the most intriguing aspects of this trifecta of boring and stale advice on butter shortages stems from the titles for each of these articles. Marsh and Fischer stood as the heavy weights of home advice and cooking during the war as one led the Good Housekeeping Institute and the other authored the annual *Good Housekeeping Cook Book*. While the advice contained within each article remained largely unchanged throughout the war years, the attitude expressed by the titles reflects housewives emerging efforts to not just preserve the taste of butter on the table, but also their increased willingness to seek out black market butter and oils. In early 1943, just after butter joined the list of OPA rationed foods, the magazine offered an article entitled “what you can do about butter” with the attitude that butter simple joined the ever growing list of problems housewives must solve during their grocery shopping trips.⁴⁰⁸ Not quite a year later the title offers the same advice “if butter is scarce.”⁴⁰⁹ The change in approach probably occurred as a result of a changing mindset amongst housewives, not

⁴⁰⁶ Margaret Ball, “How to make a Shortcake,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (June 1943), 92.

⁴⁰⁷ Dorothy Marsh, “If you must ease up on butter here’s how,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (April 1945), 87-88.

⁴⁰⁸ Marsh, “What we have found out you can do about Butter,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 86-87.

⁴⁰⁹ Fischer, “If Butter is Scarce Here are New Ideas for Saving It,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 81-83.

as a result of increased butter allotments or decreased home front consumption. The second title implies that not all housewives suffered a shortage of butter, which would mean that some women found alternative sources for butter and oil purchases. The last title in this group of articles expressed frustration, not at the OPA rationing rules as one might expect, but rather at housewives who were still attempting to live strictly within the boundaries of the butter rationing scheme. Dorothy Marsh's article provides the same old guidance but offers it only "if you must" continue rationing butter.⁴¹⁰ OPA rationing rules forced all housewives to continue rationing butter and oils until the end of the war, several months after the publication of this article. Technically speaking, at the moment this article was published, all housewives should have still been concerned with butter rationing. The evolution of language surrounding butter rationing clearly shows that women's attitudes and mindsets changed as did the advice dispensed by women's magazines. At the start of the war articles informed and educated women to avoid hysteria. Then, as more and more women began choosing to support their own version of patriotic action, the magazine introduced the idea that butter rationing was conditional. Finally, as adherence to housewives' personal goals reached a crescendo, women's magazines inferred that only the most hare-brained of housewives needed butter stretchers since rationing such a central ingredient went against the grain of normative kitchen and shopping behavior. By the end of the war, housewives adeptly used food and kitchen culture to shape both their patriotic responses and the public dialog on the subject. These responses also appear in the popular media's advice on meal planning.

⁴¹⁰ Marsh, "If you must ease up on butter here's how," *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 87-88.

Good Housekeeping magazine dispensed meal planning advice similar to that seen in popular cookbooks of the era. As a whole both media sources taught housewives that small deviations from the OPA's food regulations meant little to the war effort, would attract no legal attention, and served the higher goal of preserving home front culture. In short, these meals mixed government approved alternative foods and substitutions with recipes than necessitated black market purchases. In addition to this permissive attitude, magazines also used meal planning articles to stress the importance of nutrition. This insistence on nutrition provided women another justification for cheating the food rationing program while planning meals. Katharine Fischer, director of the Good Housekeeping Institute, wrote that "A family fit and well fed forms the first line of defense in the grand strategy of the home front."⁴¹¹ Overtly, this article equates the cooking housewife with a wartime general responsible for the well-being of her charges. The article continues by pushing women to make nutritious meal choices for the family, but insists the housewife must keep her soldiers "fit and well fed." This article overly supports government rhetoric but surreptitiously never connects nutritious ration-friendly foods with a well-fed family. The recipes attached show wartime women a week of sample lunch and dinner menus. Noticeably, the lunch menus adhere almost entirely to ration standards and would have been easy to produce given the average family's weekly ration points. The lunch menus call for molasses sweetened muffins, meatless main courses, and even the humble and unrationed frankfurter. However, the dinner menus incorporated almost as many rationed foods as they highlight ration substitutes. Fischer

⁴¹¹ Katharine Fischer, "March Meals that Fortify the Home Front," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (March 1942), 104-105, 158-159.

chose to use lunchtime as the arena for wartime kitchen concoctions so as to appeal to housewives that viewed the dinner meal as an important family ritual worth preserving. This emphasis on dinner as the primary meal also reflects certain gendered ideals. Luncheon menus could include many ration-friendly recipes because most men would be outside of the home working and thus women consumed the strange concoctions suggested by magazines. Dinner on the other hand, with its implied patriarchy, needed to be more traditional while showing less experimentation and government meddling. Fischer's dinner meals included fish and braised beef liver, but also incorporated less available items. Canned peas, sugary drop cookies and coconut crème pie, seared steaks and steaming coffee all meant high ration points and dollar cost for the housewife making the meals difficult to purchase.

A little over a year later in November of 1943, Fischer once again combined women's unique motivations with menu planning and nutrition. Her article proclaimed that women must conserve so as to provide for "men in our armed services who eat nearly twice as much as they did in civil life."⁴¹² Her assertion blends together women's unique responses to patriotism, food rationing, and nutrition advice. One of the ironies of this article comes from the shopping advice. Fischer tells housewives to carefully plan main dishes and shopping strategies carefully while paying attention to recipes and saving *Good Housekeeping* magazines articles as reference material when they plan shopping trips. However, the article also provides a nutrition chart listing vitamins in different food groups and tells women to bring the list to the market so they can make

⁴¹²Katharine Fischer, "It's Harder to Plan Meals These Times," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (November, 1943), 92-93.

informed choices when their preferred and planned foodstuffs are unavailable due to wartime rationing. The article promises that following this advice will “cure the headache of spur of the moment changes in market lists” and yet simultaneously hints that those last minute meal planning and shopping glitches are unavoidable in wartime.⁴¹³

Shopping and food purchases provided an almost constant challenge to housewives. The struggle to provide both a nutritious meal that supported women’s own understanding of patriotic wartime action proved a momentous task. Women’s media sought to lessen the stress of bridging food ration realities and patriotic aspirations by suggesting meal planning while admitting the difficulty of predicting market conditions. Nowhere in the realm of food and wartime eating was this better seen than in housewives’ responses to holiday cooking. Preparation and planning took on greater urgency in the face of women’s desires to reproduce traditional cultural celebrations which upheld home front moral and therefore stood at the heart of housewives’ wartime mission.

Holidays: The Wartime Edition

Holidays hold special meaning within American society. They serve as a way for women and families to both conform to consensus ideals and express individual cultural longings. While holidays in the 1940s did not evoke the same level of hegemonic consumer-driven extravaganzas seen today, these celebrations still demanded public attention. Food and family meals formed the cornerstone of wartime holidays, a pattern which continues today. Wartime housewives used everyday consumerism and food purchases to express their own version of patriotism and reveal their values. Holidays

⁴¹³ Fischer, “It’s Harder to Plan Meals These Times,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 92-93.

allowed women the opportunity to condense their own patriotic urges and ideals into a single meal and food-focused celebration. Thus the celebration and kitchen execution of holiday meals served as an important venue for women to reinforce their own domestic authority, while sharing their commitment to preserving home front American culture in the face of wartime shortages and government programs.

The diverse backgrounds and religious beliefs in American society created a host of holidays and celebrations on the home front. Women used every opportunity to express their political beliefs through food-centered celebrations. However, as intriguing as these local traditions or religious holidays are, they are often not well addressed in popular women's media. These smaller holidays, and the ritualized preparations for their celebratory meals, reside mostly in family memories or local lore. Thanksgiving and Christmas are the two holidays which women's cookbooks and magazines consistently discussed throughout the war years. While other holidays and their related celebrations no doubt might add more layers and nuance to this story, these two major ritualized holidays earned more attention and probably reflect the same feminine efforts and strategies for pushing their patriotic values often at the expense of government defined patriotic action. These holidays also reflect different quasi political ideals and movements which informed the celebration of many other American events. Christmas, in its modern configuration, has related closely to Christian dogma. In the American cultural representation of Christmas, these religious elements take on a capitalistic patina and reinforce the long held belief in the exceptional nature of the American experience. Christmas also stands as a celebration where Americans advertise their often imagined connections with the past and their own roots through traditional treats and goodies.

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving also holds a unique place in American culture as a truly American holiday where patriotism and food collided. Thanksgiving had been practiced for generations in American homes, but officially became a set national holiday on the fourth Thursday of November during Franklin Roosevelt's administration.⁴¹⁴ This holiday coalesced powerful imagery of American ancestors, religious gratefulness, and patriotic zeal. These celebrations within the yearly calendar provided opportunities for women to publicize their own understanding of patriotic action and the role of the family home within larger social events. Repeatedly during the war years both women's magazines and cook books reflected housewives' patriotism, which aimed at preserving rituals of the home in spite of the war and government efforts to channel their actions into the confines of program and agency food regulations.

Thanksgiving, as a uniquely American holiday, provided a podium for women to make strong statements about both patriotism and primacy of preserving home front rituals as a part of the war effort. Each November between 1942 and 1945 *Good Housekeeping* magazine featured at least one article devoted to planning and preparing a traditional Thanksgiving feast. In 1942 at the start of American involvement in the war, when the country faced so many uncertainties, the magazine reflected housewives' desire to produce Thanksgiving meals. The article loudly declares the importance of this holiday and shows women's willingness to set aside government rationing rules so as to preserve this patriotic expression. The article begins with a question, "Skip Thanksgiving? Surely

⁴¹⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Proclamation 2373—Thanksgiving Day," October 31, 1939, transcript online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15829>.

not now when it takes on a new significance as a symbol of all we are fighting to preserve. Celebrate it as a patriotic rite perpetuating the ideals of freedom and democracy.”⁴¹⁵ For the author, Dorothy Marsh, and her readers, Thanksgiving held special significance as a means of combining patriotic action and preserving women’s ability to direct the household’s efforts to express culture and rituals. The article goes on to tell women that this celebration should be a “day that your soldier or sailor can carry away to the world’s far places as a cherished memory.”⁴¹⁶ Thus, the article reinforced the assertion that housewives kitchen efforts, and their adherence to traditional meals and menus, supported patriotic efforts and communicated democratic ideals far better than a government program.

Good Housekeeping magazine’s yearly tribute to the Thanksgiving meal came in the form of both advice and recipes. The initial assertion that the preparation of a traditional Thanksgiving meal must remain central to the celebration of this holiday continued throughout the war. However, these wartime recipes and articles didn’t entirely ignore the challenges of food rationing for the American housewife. In the 1943 feature Thanksgiving article, Margaret Ball focused upon the need to economize after the holiday meal. She asserted that “food conservation and the need to be miserly with meat rationing stamps means gleaning and using the last edible scrap of your turkey.”⁴¹⁷ Her article proposed the extravagance of a large traditional menu, but to economize contained suggestions for day-after casseroles, cold turkey salads, and turkey bone broth soups. The most interesting part of these recipes and menus stem not from the questionable ration

⁴¹⁵ Dorothy Marsh, “Thanksgiving,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (November 1942), 145-147.

⁴¹⁶ Marsh, “Thanksgiving,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 145.

⁴¹⁷ Margaret Ball, “Stretching the Leftover Turkey,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (November 1943), 83.

values of their components, but from the dogged insistence that housewives not deviate from traditional Thanksgiving meals. The overarching Thanksgiving advice in *Good Housekeeping* magazine pushed women to maintain the traditions and foods associated with the holiday in spite of food rationing woes. Being ration conscious and following government orders regarding food purchases meant little in the larger scheme for housewives who saw preserving culture as the cornerstone of the home front as their main goal. One Rhode Island mother described the stress caused by rationing shortages of the centerpiece meat alongside her devotion to cooking a traditional turkey dinner in a letter to her son serving the Navy. She wrote in November of 1943, “The newspapers doubt that there will be many turkeys in the market locally” but continues that “for the first time in my life I have won an order for one!”⁴¹⁸ Her dedication to serving the family a turkey at Thanksgiving led her to enter into a raffle. It is also telling that she chose to write especially about the lack of turkeys and her luck to her son. The letter is meant to reassure her son that the family tradition of turkey continued during the war. For those not as lucky, the magazine introduced menus for turkey, chicken, goose and duck in 1944.⁴¹⁹ Although these menus suggested alternative meats, the overarching traditional nature of the holiday remained the same. The menu for a duck or roasted goose meal drew upon a much older European tradition, which Americans of all age became acquainted with through Charles Dicken’s *A Christmas Carol*. Even the most ration-friendly of these menus which featured chicken, a bird that never joined the rationed food list during the war, incorporated several nods to traditional meals. These menus hint at

⁴¹⁸ Litoff and Smith, *Since You Went Away*, 187.

⁴¹⁹ “Thanksgiving Menus,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (November 1944), 84.

the importance of the entire meal and not just the meat centerpiece in the effort to preserve the Thanksgiving experience. These menus also featured side dishes to fill in for the missing turkey. Sweet potatoes, rice and sausage stuffing, giblet gravy, cranberry jelly, and pumpkin pie tarts all fill in to help wartime housewives bereft of the traditional turkey pull together meals that embrace the same sentiment and spirit.⁴²⁰ The centrality of a Thanksgiving meal and the lengths to which women would go to maintain this celebration take center stage in 1945's feature spread. *Good Housekeeping* offered up four traditional menus inspired by the different living and cooking conditions housewives might face in wartime during the month of November. The article urges housewives, "Let's celebrate Thanksgiving Day in the old, traditional way, by sharing with family and friends a good home cooked dinner of old favorites and new. You can do it if you are maid-less. You can do it if you must cook your dinner in a kitchenette or a two-burner hot plate."⁴²¹ Clearly, according to Dorothy Marsh and the magazine, no excuse could get in the way of celebrating the traditions of Thanksgiving. The article goes on to detail ideas for holding a cooperative dinner between two or more families, or cooking half a turkey so that two families might share a single bird, or serving a crowd buffet-style, or even cooking without the use of a traditional kitchen.⁴²² Once again, no matter the living situation or meal preparation method selected, each menu included traditional side dishes surrounding a poultry centerpiece. The magazine also underscored the importance of preserving traditional meals and Thanksgiving rituals while connecting those activities to

⁴²⁰ "Thanksgiving Menus," *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 84.

⁴²¹ Dorothy Marsh, "Four Thanksgiving Dinners-For a twosome or a crowd," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (November 1945), 87.

⁴²² Marsh, "Four Thanksgiving Dinners-For a twosome or a crowd," *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 87, 94-95.

the front lines and the larger discussion of national war goals. Dorothy Marsh asserts that for families celebrating with newly furloughed servicemen, housewives must “stick close to the traditional turkey, cranberry and pumpkin pie idea-the dinner he has dreamed of.”⁴²³ The holidays served as a perfect vehicle for expressing women’s wartime goal of upholding home front rituals through kitchen labor. These rituals formed the cornerstone of the reason servicemen fought; they fought for democracy, but they fought for an American democracy shaped by celebrations and holidays.

Cookbooks also gave due attention to the preparation of traditional Thanksgiving meals and many advocated that housewives ignore rationing rules as they prepared for this celebration. Cookbooks and their authors contributed to the establishment and standardization of Thanksgiving menu recipes. Six nationally distributed cookbooks all managed to produce remarkably similar Thanksgiving menus. This serves to highlight and better define the core of a Thanksgiving menu, which *Good Housekeeping* hinted at. The expectation that these cookbooks would remain a part of a housewives’ collection even past the war years meant greater emphasis on passing along this cultural knowledge than seen in the more transient magazine articles. Thus, these six cookbooks point to a national understanding and some level of female agreement as to the components of a Thanksgiving menu even under the duress caused by World War II. These cookbooks include: *The Modern Family Cook Book* by Meta Given, *The New Hood Cookbook* from H. P. Hood and Sons Dairy Products, *Double Quick Cooking for Part Time Homemakers* by Ida Bailey Allen, *The Settlement Cook Book* by Simon Kander, *Everyday Foods* by

⁴²³Marsh, “Four Thanksgiving Dinners-For a twosome or a crowd,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 94.

Jessie Harris and Elisabeth Speer, and *Let's Cook* courtesy of Nancy Hawkins.⁴²⁴ These cookbooks all sought out a distinct and different readership. A couple aim to assist new housewives in learning domestic arts, while one targeted housewives feeding children. Another promised its recipes provided balanced nutrition by following the government's basic seven food groups. Still another was produced by a commercial business seeking to advertise dairy products and recipes. No matter the reason for the creation of the cook book or the intended audience, each of these diverse books agreed upon the basic outlines of the traditional and essential Thanksgiving meal. Surprisingly, the meals created by following these menus do not overwhelmingly resemble the meal consumed at the first Thanksgiving. That meal consisted of fresh game, succotash, and pumpkin leathers.⁴²⁵ If women sought to truly use this meal to celebrate a connection to the founding settlers one might expect to see those foods and recipes. Instead this meal, shaped by generations of women, lauded a mostly fantastic and somewhat creative version of that first Thanksgiving. Rather than focus on historical accuracy, the holiday developed as a means to show patriotic unity through a meal and as such birthed a dialog concerning the proper foods to be consumed at the table. The menus featured in these representative wartime cookbooks reflect that dialog. The creation and continuation of this discourse in spite of food rationing illustrates the importance women placed on expressing these values over

⁴²⁴ Meta Given, *The Modern Family Cook Book* (Chicago: J. G. Ferguson Publishing Company, 1942), 40-41; H. P. Hood and Sons, *The New Hood Cookbook: 1195 Modern Recipes* (Grosset & Dunlap, 1941), 2; Ida Bailey Allen, *Double Quick Cooking For Part-time Homemakers* (New York: M. Barrows and Company, 1943), 150; Mrs. Simon Kander, *The Settlement Cook Book: Victory Edition*. (Milwaukee: The Settlement Cook Book Co, 1944), 617; Jessie Harris and Elisabeth Speer, *Everyday Foods* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1944), 327; Nancy Hawkins, *Let's Cook: A Cook Book for Beginners of All Ages* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1942), 184-185.

⁴²⁵ Keith Stavely and Kathleen Fitzgerald, *America's Founding Food: The Story of New England Cooking* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 166.

adhering to OPA rules. At the center of the Thanksgiving meal menus in these cookbooks, and thus the center of this ritual meal, stands the roasted turkey and gravy. Each menu called for this form of poultry, and a side of meat dripping gravy. Several suggested giblet gravy while others left the components of the gravy to the individual home cook. Slight variances in the type of side dishes appear throughout these menus, but they all adhere to a rather uniform ideal. All but one cookbook called for some flavor of dressing to accompany the turkey. The variety of dressings ranged from sage to chestnut to the ubiquitous and generic “dressing.”⁴²⁶ Mashed potatoes or another seasonal starch such as sweet potatoes or baked winter squash also appear in each menu. All but two menus called for the inclusion of jellied cranberry sauce. With the shortage of tin during the war years, jellied and canned cranberry sauce would have been a challenge for housewives to source for this meal. Nevertheless, the majority of wartime cookbooks insisted on this item as a part of the Thanksgiving meal. Five of the six cookbooks also directed women to prepare either a lettuce salad or cabbage slaw to serve as a vegetable with the meal. Finally, each cookbook ended the meal with pumpkin pie and coffee. A quick survey of these wartime cookbooks allows one to begin to understand the basic components of a traditional Thanksgiving meal and the lengths to which women went to produce these meals in the face of wartime shortages. A turkey, dressing, gravy, mashed

⁴²⁶ *The Settlement Cook Book* offered up the recipes for a traditional “New England Thanksgiving dinner”, which included the chestnut dressing. Oddly enough in *Everyday Food* the menu for “A Home Thanksgiving” called only for generic bread dressing, but the “elaborate hotel Thanksgiving” menu specified the need for chestnuts in the dressing. Perhaps chestnuts held some deeper and less egalitarian meaning to Americans in the 1940s. Connecting the chestnut to New England posits connections to the first celebration of Thanksgiving amongst the puritan settlers. The combination and juxtaposition of chestnuts as both ultimately traditional and yet luxurious seems to point to regional elitism, real or imagined. Mrs. Simon Kander, *The Settlement Cookbook* Victory Edition; Jessie Harris and Elizabeth Speer, *Everyday Foods* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1944).

potatoes, cranberry sauce, salad, and a slice of hearty pumpkin pie served alongside a cup of hot coffee formed the quintessential heart of the Thanksgiving menu and the cornerstone of this food centric American ritual. With sugar, butter, tinned foods, and coffee rationed, producing this meal became a bit tricky for housewives. Still women persisted and found a myriad of means and methods for catering to both this shared cultural norm and their own goal of proving the overarching significance of celebrations to war aims. No matter the cook's background, regional local, religion, or outlook, the Thanksgiving holiday popularized a shared ideal of American culture and women built upon this to express their vital role as home front preservationists. The evidence of this shared understanding of the components of a ritualized meal points not only to women shaping popular media such as cookbooks and magazines, but also to their ability to use this definition to make a statement about values and the role of tradition on the home front.

Christmas

Christmas also inspired home front women to assert their kitchen authority and ignore OPA food rationing rules in a bid to sustain American culture. Unlike the traditional Thanksgiving meal, Christmas lacked uniformity in the expression of holiday. As ubiquitous as Christmas traditions and rituals were to the home front during the war, no true shared understanding of a ritualized meal or singular celebration existed. Margaret Ball perhaps best summarized the phenomenon of and emphasis of wartime Christmas saying, "keep alive the old traditions of Christmas...Christmas cheer, hidden

packages, children's anticipation, and kitchen goodies...against the day when peace on earth and good will to all mankind will ring true again."⁴²⁷

Discussions of Christmas celebrations in magazines centered on baking treats and serving a family meal, although a single definition of that meal didn't exist on the home front. The war and the immutable fact that many servicemen wouldn't be home for Christmas also shaped the home front manifestation of the holiday. Housewives sent packages and parcels of Christmas goodies and cheer to the front lines as part of their goal of preserving traditions while maintaining an authoritative voice over these celebrations.

Christmas meant homemade goodies, candy and treats for many Americans. Wartime strictures meant shortages of the key ingredients, such as sugar and butter, needed to create these symbols of the season. However, housewives persisted in their desire to bake largely unhindered by these limitations. *Good Housekeeping* magazine published December articles devoted to Christmas goodies and all things decadently delicious, which supported housewives in their mission to ignore the gloom of rationing. A review of these yearly articles uncovers a certain obsession with desserts and sweets; these goodies take as central a role in Christmas as did the roasted turkey at Thanksgiving celebrations. The other notable facet of these articles comes from the sort and types of recipes collected. These articles all work very hard to find compromise between sugar and butter shortages and the housewife's urge to produce traditional family favorites. Repeatedly recipes for holiday standbys and unique reformulations of old-fashioned desserts appear in magazine articles. According to Katharine Fischer, these holiday

⁴²⁷ Margaret Ball, "Christmas Cooking This Year," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (December 1943), 88.

goodies “bring back mysterious and lovely memories.”⁴²⁸ It was those very memories and traditions that spoke to housewives and these women responded with great effort to preserve these rituals in the face of war.

In 1943 Margaret Ball suggested an interesting blend of traditional recipes and sugar shortcut recipes. She included a recipe for the perennial holiday centerpiece, fruitcake. However, the wartime version called for only one cup of sugar. The accompanying sugar cookie recipe called for only three-quarters a cup of sugar and used salad oil instead of butter. The article also suggested soft molasses cookies made with a small amount of sugar, molasses, and shortening.⁴²⁹ Although most of the recipes suggested in this article actively attempt to avoid overuse of sugar and butter, the article also included a decadent sugary candy. Martha’s Divinity Rolls called for two cups of sugar, one cup of corn syrup, and one and a half cups of sweetened condensed milk.⁴³⁰ During the war years, women struggled to make homemade candies at Christmas because of sugar rationing.⁴³¹ As a result of the truly massive amount of sugar required in most candy recipes, many housewives began purchasing candies at the grocery store.⁴³² The overwhelming desire to keep Christmas candy as a part of the celebration of the holiday pushed women outside of their homes and further into the mass produced marketplace.

A year later, in 1944, Dorothy Marsh continued to stress the ability of the housewife to produce and procure holiday standbys and thus protect Christmas traditions

⁴²⁸ Katharine Fischer, “Plan Your Holiday Meals this War,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (December 1942), 131.

⁴²⁹ Margaret Ball, “Christmas Cooking This Year,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 88-91.

⁴³⁰ Ball, “Christmas Cooking This Year,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 91.

⁴³¹ Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 202-203.

⁴³² Joanne Lamb Hayes, *Grandma’s Wartime Kitchen: World War II and the Way We Cooked* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 209.

in the face of wartime shortages and rationing. “Serving the Christmas Dessert in Ways Easy for the Hostess” focused on make-ahead sweets which respected the lack of sugar while eliciting the same memories and warm traditions as their namesakes. The title of the article hints at a double entendre; the recipes in this article could mean quick serving times, but also referred to helping the hostess provide traditional desserts in the face of rationing. The old tradition of egg nog and mincemeat pies received a makeover courtesy of the war and OPA rationing rules. Instead of the traditional eggnog beverage recipe, Marsh offers eggnog ice cream made with sweetened condensed milk instead of sugar. Marsh then overcomes the issue of butter rationing by suggesting an oil based pastry for mincemeat hand pies.⁴³³ The flavors and memories of a traditional Christmas held such meaning for wartime housewives that they were willing to restructure their family baking so as to make these treats available during the holiday.

Cookbook authors, like *Good Housekeeping*, encouraged women to bake and share goodies and sweet treats. *Everyday Foods* declares “Candies of all kinds are in high favor, and much is made of them and of fancy cakes and cookies...Candy seems especially to be associated with Christmas. We can all remember finding candies in our Christmas stockings and candy continues to delight us.”⁴³⁴ These sweet treats harkened back to youth and epitomized the Christmas kitchen experience for many Americans. It comes as no surprise that many authors add candies or rich desserts to their traditional Christmas menus. However, in light of the strictures of OPA food rationing and family shortages of butter and sugar many of these recipes would have been a challenge. Unlike

⁴³³Dorothy Marsh, “Serving the Christmas Dessert in Ways Easy for the Hostess,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (December, 1944), 81-83.

⁴³⁴ Harris and Speer, *Everyday Foods*, 329.

the recipes provided by *Good Housekeeping magazine*, cookbooks tended to avoid sugar and fat substitutions in their recipes. In fact, some wrote without any regard to the wartime food situation calling for a variety of difficult to legally obtain ingredients. *Let's Eat* included instructions for a Christmas meal complete with a traditional plum pudding and hard sauce. While the inclusion of such a time-honored and culturally significant dessert doesn't surprise, the preparation method proved shocking. The instructions called for the housewife to steam the tinned plum pudding and make a homemade brandy hard sauce.⁴³⁵ Canned goods became less than common on the home front due to the rationing of tin and as a result cost more blue points. The suggestion that women buy canned desserts, on top of the other rationed items mentioned in the menu, would have meant few points leftover for other meals that week. *The Settlement Cook Book* also called for a plum pudding, but this author included a recipe for the homemade version. The recipe required sugar and molasses, along with raisins and several types of candied fruits.⁴³⁶ The addition of molasses saved on sugar usage in the recipe but the fruits meant this would still be an expensive and not ration-friendly dessert. Another traditional dessert, mincemeat pie, found favor in both the formal Christmas dinner menus and as a part of the limited supper menu. While the pie recipes overwhelmingly called for prepackaged and jarred mincemeat, some recipes did allow for the use of an oil-based pie crust in deference to butter shortages due to rationing. Housewives baked these recipes, complete with their expensive or difficult to obtain ingredients, throughout the war because these

⁴³⁵ Hawkins, *Let's Cook*, 186-187.

⁴³⁶Mrs. Simon Kander, *The Settlement Cookbook* Victory Edition, 358.

goodies and dessert symbolized their connection to the past and the stability of the American home.

Cookie Mail and Gift Boxes

Gift giving formed another important way in which housewives worked to preserve Christmas rituals and advocate for their own version of patriotic action. More specifically, housewives endeavored to send home-baked goods overseas to those on the front lines. Francis Cribbs recalled her mother “would hoard sugar so that she could make brownies and things to send overseas” to Francis’s brothers.⁴³⁷ During the first Christmas the United States was involved in World War II, *Good Housekeeping* magazine published an exhaustive list of instructions on mailing gifts and foods overseas. The Good Housekeeping Institute even tested their packing method by mailing their boxed treats over 2,000 miles. The article “Christmas Boxes for the Folks Away from Home” specifically tells women that boxes to servicemen should have already been sent, that the government discouraged women from sending perishable foods, and that “Uncle Sam is seeing to it that these boys are all healthfully fed.”⁴³⁸ Nonetheless, the first sentence in the article mentions sending treats to men serving overseas. Then it advises women to time the delivery so that packages arrive either just before or just after the holiday for “a boy in camp.” Finally, the article informs housewives that they can purchase special wrappings and packages for boxes bound for service men. Although the article seems disapproving of the practice of sending cookies and treats overseas to servicemen, the

⁴³⁷ Francis Cribbs and MT Cribbs, Interviewed by Katherine F. Levitz, July 31, 1996. Transcript. Reichelt Oral History Collection. Florida State University Special Collections and Archives, Tallahassee, FL.

⁴³⁸ Dorothy Marsh, “Christmas Boxes for the Folks Away from Home,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (December 1942), 140.

main focus of this experiment was clearly to outline the steps and practicalities necessary for mailing holiday goodies to servicemen.

Once again, as with holiday treats for the family at home, these sort of articles also sought to respect the ration but would not budge in their insistence that treats make up the heart of Christmas. And American housewives agreed with the magazine. Caryl Biddle remembered sending small boxes of “cookies and instant chocolate or instant coffee” to her husband serving overseas “as often as we were allowed to send.”⁴³⁹ “Christmas Boxes for the Folks Away from Home” offered a recipes and shipping instructions for candy, cookies and small cakes. The article also encouraged women to work in cooperative associations to produce the bounty needed for these overseas cookie shipments. It advised forming “cookie making clubs with each member making one or more kinds in wholesale lots, then poling and dividing them among the packages.”⁴⁴⁰ In 1944, Jane Giesler’s article informed housewives that few gifts “can convey a Christmas greeting with more warmth and feeling than a gift made in your own kitchen.”⁴⁴¹ This article also directly mentioned sending goodies to those serving or spending the holidays away from home. In this iteration, the same were themes repeated: cookies, candy and small cakes. These treats, meant to remind servicemen of the traditions and happiness of a home front Christmas, contained reworked recipes so as to lessen the use of butter and sugar. Popcorn balls, once made with real burnt-sugar caramel and butter, were

⁴³⁹ Hubert and Caryl Biddle, Interviewed by David Gregory, May 22, 200, transcript, Reichelt Oral History Collection (Box 27) Florida State University Special Collections and Archives. Tallahassee, FL.

⁴⁴⁰ Marsh, “Christmas Boxes for the Folks Away from Home,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* 140.

⁴⁴¹ Jane Giesler, “Gifts from your Kitchen,” *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (December 1944), 87.

transformed to use unrationed corn syrup and molasses. The cakes and cookies also trimmed butter by substituting shortening.⁴⁴²

The overarching message the authors of these Christmastime recipes sought to communicate to housewives consisted of the importance of producing candy, cookies and cakes as a part of preserving the traditions of the holiday and the larger home front. The apparent acceptability of sugar substitutions for Christmas baked goods reiterated the shortages of sugar and butter and yet also underlines the drive housewives felt throughout the war years to create these treats. Housewives' desire to recreate peacetime Christmas goodies served as a statement of women's ability to preserve and replicate cultural ideals. This aspiration forced women to overcome recipe substitutions or reformulations necessitated by OPA rationing rules.

Christmas Dinner

Meal planning for Christmas took many different individualized forms, unlike meal planning for the Thanksgiving meal, which remained remarkably similar regardless of the year or source. Each family and community defined Christmas meals uniquely, but the one constant throughout was the emphasis on home and home cooking the meal. Perhaps due to the localized understanding and definition of Christmas dinner, *Good Housekeeping* magazine only published one article dedicated to the Christmas meal itself during the war years. Katharine Fischer, director of the Good Housekeeping Institute, wrote the article on Christmas meal planning and menus. This article expounded upon the virtues of meal planning, planning grocery trips, and using the Basic Seven to create a

⁴⁴² Giesler, "Gifts from your Kitchen," *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 87.

nutritious Christmas meal.⁴⁴³ The menus suggested by Fischer also called for traditional foods and reminders of home such as roasted goose, almond cookies, molasses cookies, quince-apple pie, steamed Christmas pudding and coffee with each meal.⁴⁴⁴ Housewives prepared these old timey and traditional foods as a part of their efforts to show the importance of the home as a center of American culture. As if to reinforce the importance of home, the magazine juxtaposed a short literary piece next to Fischer's Christmas menus. "There is No Season" explores the sentiment and power of home in the American mind. It connects the home, and the act of returning home, with comfortable familiarity, personal heritage, and peace.⁴⁴⁵ Christmas meant home, and housewives used baking and cooking for this celebration to evoke and advertise their authority and ability to spread ideals related to preserving these traditions.

Cookbooks and magazines both emphasized the importance of Christmas treats as a part of wartime celebrations. They also agreed that Christmas dinner and the cooking associated with that ritual spread over several meals instead of just one meal on the 25th of December. Katharine Fischer's 1942 article in *Good Housekeeping* magazine listed no less than eight different menu plans for eating from Christmas Eve all the way through to past Boxing Day.⁴⁴⁶ At the very least, cookbook authors provided both a Christmas dinner and a Christmas supper menu for housewives. Usually the author allowed for one main large meal and a second buffet or snack-style menu for visiting guests during Christmas. For example, *The Settlement Cookbook* called for an elaborate multiple course

⁴⁴³ Katharine Fischer, "Plan Your Holiday Meals this War," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (December 1942), 132-133.

⁴⁴⁴ Fischer, "Plan Your Holiday Meals this War," *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 132.

⁴⁴⁵ Stuart Kinzie, "There is No Season," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (December 1942), 133.

⁴⁴⁶ Fischer, "Plan Your Holiday Meals this War," *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, 132-133.

Christmas dinner and then a supper consisting of sandwiches and cake or stollen for supper.⁴⁴⁷ The women who wrote these cookbooks also seemed intent upon eliciting concepts of home and tradition with their menus. While the menus do not agree upon any set foods or rituals, they do all show heavy amounts of nostalgia and a bent toward traditional dishes. Each of these cookbooks calls for a main course steeped in history. Roasted goose headlines many menus, complete with a reference to Bob Cratchit's Christmas meal.⁴⁴⁸ *Let's Cook*, a cookbook aimed at inexperienced home cooks, actually called for a main course of roasted beef with Yorkshire puddings.⁴⁴⁹ While the OPA never rationed poultry during the war, there were several holiday-seasons that turkey and goose became unavailable at the grocery store due to nationwide shortages. Gathering enough red points, and finding a grocer with the required meat, would have made a dinner menu of roast beef both a challenge to procure and a rare extravagance during the war. Yet, these cookbooks continued throughout the war to suggest these indulgent menus. Cooking and serving these meals and traditional dishes must have held a greater meaning to housewives and families if they were willing to meet these challenges for a single meal. Housewives and cookbook authors sought to evoke tradition and a strong sense of home and family through their Christmas meals. They were willing to undertake extreme measures to create this Christmas meal and the foods associated with this holiday.

Collectively, women used holidays and traditional meals to make statements about their values, the importance of the home as a part of the American experience, and

⁴⁴⁷ Mrs. Simon Kander, *The Settlement Cookbook* Victory Edition, 617.

⁴⁴⁸ Harris and Speer, *Everyday Foods*, 329.

⁴⁴⁹ Hawkins, *Let's Cook*, 186.

to delineate their versions of patriotic action. Housewives worked both within and outside the confines of OPA food rationing rules in order to undertake the preparation of the meals. They worked in groups to send variety boxes of homemade cookies to servicemen, cooked remarkably similar Thanksgiving meals, and enriched holidays with connections to the past through food. The underlying message of their efforts stemmed from their belief that procuring and preparing these traditional and ritualized foods strengthened not just family morale but their own voice and authority as preservers of American culture. They beat back wartime fears and lived their own definition of patriotic democracy with each ounce of Thanksgiving gravy and every tray of Christmas cookies.

CONCLUSION– HOUSEWIVES AND PATRIOTIC ACTS IN WORLD WAR II

During World War II Americans responded quickly to the government's calls for soldiers and adherence to a host of home front programs established to support the war effort. Food rationing, as one of the first civilian programs established after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, became a central component of the American home-front experience. Women made conscious and sometimes difficult choices to support elements of the government's food rationing program. Yet, women rationed their family's food on their own terms and for their own reasons. Housewives used food as a method of communicating identity, patriotism, and self-sacrifice. In doing so, domesticity formed the framework for their actions. Women's responses emphasized female authority in the home and her expertise when it came to family health, nutrition, and home front stability. Recognition of these values and a nuanced appreciation for the social constructions surrounding food in America clarify the somewhat erratic actions undertaken by housewives. Housewives supported the aspects of food rationing they saw as positive, but simultaneously cheated the program regularly in support of their call to preserve their versions of American culture.

Women did not docilely follow government dictates and their responses to the food rationing program constitute a journey that reveals their logic. Whereas official propaganda urged women to ration through a variety of messages, such as sharing and democracy, women instead responded best to posters which emphasized their importance as protectors of American culture and their emotional connection to the ideal of the nurturing mother. Housewives responded to propaganda that painted them as Republican Mothers and saw themselves as performing time-honored and sacred duties. They were

the protectors of home front morale and American way of life for the duration. The Office of Price Administration rejoiced that women were initially enthusiastic about food rationing. However, housewives soon used this duty as justification for both hoarding and participation in the black market. Women's understanding and expression of patriotic action allowed black market activities to flourish since these actions permitted women to preserve the cultural elements they held as paramount. Without a doubt, women viewed strictly following the food rationing guides as honorable and patriotic, but more often than not women saw preserving their definition of American culture as a greater priority and the more patriotic act. They also experienced little fear of reprisals or punishment from the OPA's enforcement division. In the face of ever growing black-market activities OPA enforcement attorneys routinely avoided prosecutions that might involve large numbers of individual female consumers. Instead they attacked massive and complex black-market schemes or targeted corporate corruption of the rationing program. The enforcement division's refusal to specifically pursue cases against small time black marketers created a permissive environment which allowed women to prepare meals which they infused with deep cultural meaning. Cookbooks and magazines provided a further validation for women's devotion to their version of patriotic action. They offered a forum for housewives which reinforced the concept that their small deviations for food rationing rules served a greater purpose. Housewives created a world that respected their own domestic authority, preserved their individual family traditions and rituals which formed American culture while taking a personal approach to supporting national war aims. In effect, wartime housewives established a middle ground where they chose to act in accordance with their own deeply held beliefs. Additionally, their middle ground

didn't greatly harm or hinder the war effort. Rather their actions proved better for home front moral and by extension the nation as a whole.

As the greatest generation fades and World War II becomes entrenched in the realm of history, we are offered the opportunity to engage new methodologies as we reexamine the world our predecessors believed they knew so well. We also see the strands of larger processes and longer-term impacts emerge from within the tapestry of this war. The miniscule, stubborn, and everyday refusal by women to blindly adhere to the federal government's dictates was a part of a larger tale about the power women found in using domesticity as a means of communicating values. It also hints at a latent grassroots distrust of federal power. Without a power structure, organization, or even a title, these housewives subverted federal power and shaped food-rationing programs during the war.

There is a continuity that flows through women's history and especially women's responses to government. Wartime housewives embraced domesticity in order to style female authority as a vital voice in public discussions of both the home and family. By doing so they took part in the important political debates and negotiations of their day. The activist feminism of the decades before and after the war, seen in hunger strikes for the franchise or marches for equality, was still present even when subverted by national crisis. Women's desires for discourse and representation retreated to the stronghold of the home and family. Their unwillingness to fully submit to food rationing regulations and the power of the OPA, combined with implicit support of this disobedience from women's media, shows efforts to use the domestic sphere to shape government policy.

Housewives' wartime food choices form but a small corner of a larger tapestry depicting women's roles in society. Placing the intensely personal, and thus somewhat veiled, world of family food at the heart of political decisions shows a continued shift in women's authority both within the home and in the wider culture. Wartime women didn't begin this movement, yet they would contribute to the foundations of traditional forms of female activism. Postwar America ushered in an era where women stood at the center of social, political, and cultural debates on domestic issues. Women, and by extension the family, were not anti-government. Instead women moved to insert domestic authority into a myriad of previously public and political debates. Wartime food rationing provided a proving ground for women to assert domestic authority and shape government policies. Motherhood, the family, and nutrition served as the pillars on which female authority grew and shaped the major events of American life in the late twentieth century.

Wartime housewives through their complex relationship with the government during World War II fostered a pattern of traditional conservative action that never necessitated a solid commitment to ideological conservatism. These women adopted traditional feminine roles and responses in a time of war, and as a result their actions extended and merged the politicized movements of previous and future generations. Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound* argued that women in the 1950s participated in consensus politics as a result of Cold War tensions. Wartime tension also shaped women's responses to conflict in the 1940s. This tension between government and women existed before the Cold War, and in many ways the amorphous earth of this relationship during the war came to fruition in the host of approaches women used to define themselves and American culture in the decades that followed. In the end,

historians should care about wartime housewives and their kitchen politics because it helps create a nuanced picture of early 20th century America which illuminates another pathway toward political agency and equality for women.

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