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Recipes for an Instant American—Just Add a Side of Victory Cabbage and Jell-O: The Americanization of the United States through Cookbooks

Colleen Zellitti

Introduction

Glancing down any city block, there are bound to be numerous restaurants and eateries. Intricately intertwined with daily life, food is something that many Americans do not even give a second thought. Upon closer examination it can be noted that whether it is a small town or big city, variety pervades. Thai, Korean, Mexican, Chinese, Brazilian, French, Italian and fusion are just some of the options available to the everyday diner. Add the countless food blogs and foodies of the Internet, and it is evident that Americans place a heavy emphasis on food. The United States built itself using foreign foundations and American identity has taken cues from a large amount of cultures, traditions and ethnicities. Throughout the waves of immigration social reformers realized an important fact—“the absence of a widely accepted national cuisine.”¹ As Donna Gabaccia revealed, “the United States had become an independent nation without creating a national cuisine that matched its sense of uniqueness.”² It can be discerned that even before the immi-

¹ Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 125.

² Ibid.

grants flooded the country there was no true American diet, a realization that became further pronounced during the Cold War.

During these times no one could confidently state a meal that was accepted nationwide, because our “eating habits were firmly regional.”³ What resulted was an era of cultured frenzy, a frantic attempt to reclassify what it meant to be an American in terms of food and eating habits. Through the use of cookbooks and home magazines, Americans of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries projected what it meant to be an American to both incoming immigrants and already established Americans. While promoting an ideal of American identity towards new immigrants, American society was at the same time constructing an ideal image of themselves, which would be reinforced especially during the ideological battlefront of the Cold War.

American cuisine is something commonly referenced, but rarely concretely defined. Due in part to the fact that America has the reputation of being a melting pot of cultures, food has not escaped this phenomenon. With each new wave of immigration came a new set of recipes, ingredients and meals. Ethnic food became labeled as inferior, not through any specific evidence, but because it was different, new and consumed by peasants. By the beginning of the Cold War, however, the United States scrambled to create a uniquely American image of what it meant to be American, including what to eat. In turn, from the early entry of immigrants to the present day, Americans have sculpted the image that is projected to the

³ Ibid.

rest of the world, one that is comprised of an array of cultures and traditions, but molded to fit an idealized image.

Historians and scholars, past and present, have studied ethnic foods in relation to American diets. Authors Jennifer Jensen Wallach and Donna Gabaccia are known as the forerunners of food history, and their respective books, *We Are What We Eat* and *How America Eats*, examine the United States' relationship to food beginning with the early colonists.⁴ Wallach argues that, "by studying what Americans have eaten...we are further enlightened to the conflicting ways in which Americans have chosen to define themselves, their culture, their beliefs, and the changes those definitions have undergone over time."⁵

Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking by Jessamyn Neuhaus carefully studies the era of frozen and convenience foods, making Betty Crocker the star of her book. Exploring the time when Americans became fascinated by casseroles and visually imaginative dishes, Neuhaus argues that cookbooks provide valuable insight about national opinions and sentiments during the era. In a similar fashion, Sherrie Inness is known for her extensive research on gender roles in the kitchen and reinforces the stereotypes of cooking literature through satirization such as, "Of Casseroles and Canned Foods: Building the Happy Housewife in the Fifties," reinforcing the idea of

⁴ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*; Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *How America Eats: A Social History of U.S. Food and Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2013).

⁵ Wallach, *How America Eats: A Social History of U.S. Food and Culture*, Introduction.

female-dominated kitchens and the reliance on women to create impeccable households.⁶

Other historians have focused solely on immigrant food history, as Jane Ziegler highlighted in *97 Orchard: An Edible History of Five Immigrant Families in One New York Tenement*.⁷ She provided a unique collection of immigrant families living in a New York tenement house, their stories relayed through a series of accounts alongside contemporary research, showing the difficulties immigrants faced in maintaining cultural ties through food while trying to assimilate as Americans.

The *Settlement House Cookbook, New Discoveries*, and a series of cookbooks from the Culinary Institute provided suggestions and recipes exactly how Americans received them.⁸ Without any modern insight or edits, the books remain as they were, filled with recipes, instructions and plenty of less-than-politically correct language that was standard of the times. *Life Magazine* and early editions of *Ladies' Home Journal* provided recipes, advertisements, and articles that help to develop a picture of everyday food culture and "American-ness" during this period.

The cookbooks and food advertisements during the

⁶ Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), Table of Contents.

⁷ Jane Ziegler, *97 Orchard: An Edible History of Five Immigrant Families in One New York Tenement* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2011).

⁸ Mrs. Simon Kander and Mrs. Henry Schoenfeld, *The Way to a Man's Heart: The Settlement Cook Book* (Bedford: Applewood Books, 1903); Sidney Morse, *New Household Discoveries: An Encyclopedia of Recipes and Processes* (Petersburg, NY: Success Company's Branch Office, 1917).

wave of immigration and the Cold War remain crucial documents in terms of American identity. While it can be argued that America today is a melting pot of cultures, it is worthwhile to examine how food customs have reflected this ideal. Following the research of food ritual in a social history context, alongside the push for immigrant assimilation and the ideal nuclear family, this paper aims to present cooking literature as the most followed and universal form of Americanization. Becoming and staying American began in the kitchen.

Seeking the American Dream...With Provisions

Seeking a chance for better jobs, housing and food, individuals and families flocked to the United States for a chance at the famed American Dream. Upon arrival immigrants learned that in order to have a chance at success, conformity was essential. Facing prejudice and discrimination, immigrants were expected to leave behind foreign customs and culture. They had to learn English, understand social norms, change their clothes and, most notably, alter their diets. Some immigrant groups found assimilation more challenging than others, and as Jane Ziegleman noted, “native foods provided them with the comfort of the familiar in an alien environment, a form of emotional ballast for the uprooted.”⁹ Already forced to give up their homes and all things familiar, immigrants to the United States were also expected to leave behind the last taste of home and eat a diet that was approved by Americans. As the United States was entering an era

⁹ Ziegleman, *97 Orchard: An Edible History of Five Immigrant Families in One New York Tenement*, XII.

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of reforms and new ideas, it became important to create a universal standard for all Americans. A push to adhere to developing American values forced individuals to come face to face with these new ideals.

To better ease the process of assimilation, Americans supplied immigrants with a variety of books that would guide them in the right direction. Instructing that, “the immigrant must find himself in an American environment, must attach himself to American institutions, must contribute his gifts to their support and to their further development,” the *Second Book in English For Coming Citizens* aimed to teach language to immigrants.¹⁰ Published in 1921, the *Second Book* presented English in the context of a story, presumably to make more sense than rote repetition. In the name of Americanization, the story follows one immigrant, Anton Bodnar, who begins as a young student in rural Poland. By the end of the book Anton became, “a fellow citizen,” fully knowledgeable of American history, rights and customs. Each chapter concludes with a series of questions that ensured the reader not only understood the overall story but also the corresponding etiquette. Following the chapter “The School Party,” the reader is asked the following: “Tell how the party was arranged. Why was the party a failure at the beginning? Name the different nationalities at the party,” among several other questions.¹¹ It is evident that the authors of the guidebooks wanted immigrants to thoroughly understand American culture and language beyond repetition of words and phrases.

¹⁰ Henry H. Goldberger, *Second Book in English for Coming Citizens* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921), V.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

There was a desire to teach lessons that an immigrant could face on a daily basis and to convey how Americans acted. In the introduction, H.H. Goldberger stated, “educators are agreed today that Americanization is a dual and reciprocal process, requiring the active participation of the foreign as well as of the native born,” showing that in order to better Americanize the immigrants, Americans themselves had to present an image they wanted replicated.¹²

Despite the suggestion that assimilation was a collaborative effort, there was still a sense of American superiority, as one passage indicates:

. . . a fat Russian danced with a tall, thin Polish girl. Anton found his arms around a stout, middle-aged Jewish woman. John was dancing with a pretty American girl whom he had been admiring all evening. Alexander...was stepping on the feet of a pretty little Italian lady...¹³

The Russian, Jewish, and Italian immigrants are given less-favorable adjectives, while the young American girl is simply deemed “pretty.” Thus began the first indication that ultimately, it is more attractive to be American. In order to attain the American ideal immigrants turned to the numerous books published by Americans, some of them of immigrant stock themselves, which focused on the heart of the home—the kitchen.

The Excitement of Household Discoveries

¹² Ibid, V.

¹³ Ibid, 116.

Extensive household manuals were published to further educate immigrants and ensure their proper transformation to become Americans. *New Household Discoveries*, by Sidney Morse, offers over eight hundred pages of household hints, ranging from “the art of correct table service” to “stale bread and how to utilize it.”¹⁴ The preface reminds Americans, primarily women, that it is patriotic and essentially their duty as citizens to run an efficient household, ideas that resurface throughout the coming decades. Quoting President Wilson, the book opens with the idea that, “every housewife who practices strict economy puts herself in the ranks of those who serve the nation.”¹⁵ The author notes that the “object of this book...[is] to show American housekeepers [tips and tricks]” and by deliberately addressing the readers as American, he suggests that anyone who follows the instructions would properly conform.¹⁶ By referring to the homemakers as American, there is no attempt to incorporate immigrants or acknowledge their presence. Rather, it is assumed that the immigrants are American, having successfully assimilated into a new life. In turn, the *New Household Discoveries* can also be viewed as a resource that immigrants referenced in hopes that it would make them the perfect model citizens, the ideal American homemakers, capable of setting perfect dinner tables and mastering the art of soup-making.

Labeling immigration as a “trauma,” many families

¹⁴ Morse, *New Household Discoveries: An Encyclopedia of Recipes and Processes*, index.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, *Publisher’s Note*.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, Introduction.

were reluctant to adapt to new ways. “No matter their ethnicity, immigrant wives, mothers, and grandmothers of nearly every nationality shared a common role in America. They were the “culture bearers,” charged with preserving the ethnic, religious, and cultural memories of their families. This usually meant creating “proper” homes and cooking “beloved foods of memory.”¹⁷ When examining the pages of such household manuals and cookbooks, it quickly became evident that if they were to successfully Americanize, it was necessary for immigrants, and especially women, to leave behind the past. Viewed as the dominant culture bearers and expected to produce the next generation of citizens, women were given little choice to Americanize. Cookbooks, magazines, and advertisements primarily targeted females to become model American housewives, starting in the kitchen.

A chapter on “Menus and Menu Making” opens with a variety of weekly menu options before introducing subcategories, one being a specific section for “Entertainers.” Differentiating the ordinary meal planner from that of the entertainer, the guide reminds that, “there is no way in which a woman can entertain her friends more satisfactorily than by giving a well-prepared luncheon or dinner, or an attractive tea or reception.”¹⁸ Suggesting that the best way of gaining accolades and recognition is through a flawless banquet spread, the *New Household Discoveries* creates an idealized picture of an American woman, one that

¹⁷ Laura Schenone, *A Thousand Years Over a Hot Stove: A History of American Women Told Through Food, Recipes, and Remembrances* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 212.

¹⁸ Morse, *New Household Discoveries*, 62.

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remains organized, proper, and capable of running everything from an afternoon luncheon to a sophisticated five course dinner. According to the *New Household Discoveries*, the American woman succeeds in these tasks, as they are cost effective and efficient. In order to achieve this status, immigrants needed to understand and possess the ability to follow the rules that were projected on all Americans.

Revealing that “much of the comfort, cheerfulness, and refinement of family life depends upon proper table service,” the *New Household Discoveries* states the importance of a perfectly set table.¹⁹ Similarly, in the *Settlement Cookbook: The Way to a Man’s Heart*, immigrant women were instructed to “have a table with square ends [and]...place the center of the tablecloth in the center of the table, smooth it into place, and have the folds straight with the edge of the table.”²⁰ Compiled by Lizzie Black Kander of the Abraham Lincoln Settlement House in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the *Way to a Man’s Heart* is one of numerous examples of cookbooks that were published by women for women. The intention of such cookbooks was to instruct immigrants to cook meals that incorporated ethnic food alongside ingredients that would be accepted by all cooks in the region.

The Women of America Will Show You How to Be American

Throughout the 1900s, American progressives worked diligently to implement reforms and create a

¹⁹ Ibid, 72.

²⁰ Kander and Schoenfeld, *The Way to a Man’s Heart: The Settlement Cook Book*, 2.

hygienic standard of living that also accorded with social norms of cleanliness. With an increase in population and thus an increase in women keeping house, cookbooks were “intended for poor and immigrant women.”²¹ It was through recipes that women were able to learn what should and should not be done in the proper American household. Organizing a place where young immigrant women could learn necessary household skills, Kander founded the Abraham Lincoln Settlement House in Milwaukee during the early 1900s. Various ethnicities, primarily Jewish and Italian, gathered at the center to, “adjust to their new land.”²² A successfully assimilated immigrant, Kander centered her efforts on Americanizing the new wave of immigrants. Her work in Milwaukee proved to be lucrative, as her cookbook sold out in the first year.²³ Kander’s settlement house offered a community where immigrants were able to access necessary accommodations such as bathing and lessons on cleanliness. The primary focus of Kander’s Americanization efforts were found in the kitchen, as “multiple generations of Jewish immigrants had learned to abandon their traditional cooking practices, and adapt and assimilate to middle-class customs and values.”²⁴ Believing that

²¹ Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom’s Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America*, 17.

²² Roberta Saltzman, “From Sanitary Fairs to “The Settlement:” Early Charity Cookbooks,” New York Public Library.

²³ Since the original publication, the Settlement House Cookbook has sold 1.5 million copies under forty different editions.

²⁴ Angela Fritz, “Lizzie Black Kander & Culinary Reform in Milwaukee: 1880-1920,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (Spring 2004), 36

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the ultimate status of assimilation was through food customs, Kander published the first edition of her cookbook in 1903.

Kander's recipes proved to be successful in educating immigrants in the kitchen. Divided into clear sections, such as Canning Fruit and Fried Cakes, the cookbook also included many new ingredients of the time, including Mixtures with Baking Powder. The recipes aided immigrants in the Americanization process because they were exposed to new ingredients and utensils that were quickly becoming popular among Americans. In this sense, the cooks were placed on a level playing field, no one having a distinct advantage over another. Another unique aspect of *The Settlement Cook Book* can be found in the "Course of Instruction." Kander offered cooking classes at the Settlement because she believed that, "the immigrant mother had to be recruited to adopt 'American' standards as her own," something that Kander felt qualified to aide.²⁵ In order to keep attendance at the classes, Kander modified many ethnic dishes that immigrants cherished and made them acceptable in American standards, such as *kuchen* and matzos pudding.

In turn, *The Settlement Cook Book* contains "Course of Instruction: As Given By 'The Settlement' Cooking Classes," ensuring that women would have access to specific techniques and directions, even outside of the classroom. With a heavy Jewish and Germanic influence, Kander's recipes include Matzos Balls and Cabbage Salad but even Spaghetti Italiane, presumably borrowed from the Italian immigrants who found

²⁵ Ibid, 41.

themselves at the Settlement. Furthermore, Kander utilized the value of Americanizing food through her cooking classes where she instructed immigrants that while keeping a pristine house was important, it was more important to do so as an American: “the goal in Milwaukee was not to catch a man, but to become an American.”²⁶ By cooking a Potato and Meat Pie or learning to poach a perfect egg, a young woman was instructed to successfully navigate the kitchen, no matter her nationality and matrimony.

Organizations, such as churches and clubs and volunteer groups, such as the Junior League utilized the demands for cookbooks to raise money, and by 1915 six thousand different charity cookbooks had been published.²⁷ Highlighting regional recipes and customs, the charity cookbooks reveal how different areas accepted immigrants in America. The *Blue Grass Cookbook* from Kentucky included foods that were, “fried, after Southern style, half submerged in a rich cream of gravy,” while the Friday Club of Yarmouth Massachusetts supplied recipes for pot roast and date and walnut sandwiches in its *Cape Cod Cookbook*.²⁸ While some books focus solely on “whiteness,” others include a variety of tastes and traditions, such as the *Settlement Cookbook*. While many immigrants utilized programs such as those offered by Kander, some groups were able to find success and acceptance much easier than others. Upon arrival to their new homes,

²⁶ Ibid, 36.

²⁷ Michelle, Green, "A League of Their Own: Community Cookbooks," *Food and Wine*.

²⁸ Minnie C. Fox, *The Blue Grass Cook Book* (New York: Fox, Duffield & Company, 1904) VIII.

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immigrants quickly realized that, “old world foods carried foreignness,” and in order to remove the damaging stigma, changes had to be made quickly.²⁹ One ethnicity in particular, Germans, had a unique experience with the Americanization process, one that left lasting impressions on the country.

Bratwurst, Beer, and Baseball

Making their way from the German countryside to the bustle of American cities, German immigrants found a niche for employment but difficulties in leaving behind the food of their ancestors. Deemed the, “model immigrant,” Germans found success in tailoring and other professional endeavors, and were accepted by many Americans.³⁰ Although Americans rejected many foreign aspects, German food items endured a noticeable give-and-take platform. With each new point of contact, an exchange of ideas occurred. Upon arrival the immigrants encountered a housing shortage as the construction of new living spaces lagged behind the influx of residents. Tenement houses became the standard home for immigrants and the subpar conditions forced creativity in meal planning, such as one-pot meals and careful use of water.³¹ Southern Germans relied on a diet heavy on “flour foods,” such as dumplings and noodles, while those in the North ate potatoes, beans, and lentils.³² Once in America, a blending of German foods occurred, so much so that Americans adopted many items and

²⁹ Kander and Schoenfeld, *The Way to a Man’s Heart: The Settlement Cook Book*, XIII.

³⁰ Ziegleman, *97 Orchard*, 37; 4.

³¹ *Ibid*, 8.

³² *Ibid*, 22.

incorporated them into their own diet, despite the initial rejection of such dietary standards.

A significant indicator of German assimilation in America can be found in the cookbook *Praktisches Kochbuch*. Published for several years in Germany, author Henriette Davidis provided German families with the ins and outs of German cuisine. In 1879, the cookbook was published once again, this time in Milwaukee. Translated into English as the *Practical Cookbook for Germans in America*, the recipes allowed Germans to maintain ties with their home but, more importantly, gave non-Germans access to foreign foods that were common in many immigrant households. Changing only the measurements to American units, Davidis' German cookbook remained authentic with recipes for meats (*fleisch*) and potatoes (*kartoffeln*).³³ Reversing the roles and placing the American as foreigner, the publisher noted that, "the German (metrical) weights and measures have been changed to conform to those in vogue and best understood in this country."³⁴ With a table of contents listing entries such as salads, sauces, and desserts, *Germans in America* appeared similar to any other American cookbook, except for a translation index in the back and a variety of sauerkraut dishes. The mutual exchange of ideas can be seen in *Germans in American*, evidenced by a section entitled "Soufflés: And Various Dishes Made of Macaroni and Noodles," highlighting the melding of

³³ Roberta Saltzman, "From Sanitary Fairs to "The Settlement: Early Charity Cookbooks," New York Public Library.

³⁴ Henriette Davidis, *Pickled Herring and Pumpkin Pie: A Nineteenth-Century Cookbook for German Immigrants to America* (1911; repr. Madison: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, 2003), VI.

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ethnic foods that could be enjoyed by many cultures.³⁵

An 1889 advertisement in *Ladies' Home Journal* reminded readers that there was no substitute for Fleischmann's yeast. Proving to be a name-specified ingredient in many recipes, the yeast monopolized the market and made other brands less favorable through marketing campaigns and advertisements. As it turns out, Fleischmann, an immigrant from Germany, had stepped out of the stereotypical lederhosen and into the pockets of American women's aprons. Even cooking and baking ingredients took on an ethnic flavor, as Americans willingly believed the tagline, "Fleischmann's Yeast Has No Equal," suggesting a dependence on the product.³⁶

In her dissertation, *From Stew to Melting Pot: Immigrant Women and the Cookbooks They Wrote in the Age of Immigration, 1873-1916*, Jill Schaarschmidt Nussel, discussed the idea of "white food" asserting her idea that the plethora of white sauces found in cookbooks during this time acted as a, "mask of smoothness...[and a] harmony in a world of disorder."³⁷ Whether or not cookbook authors intentionally included chapters devoted to "white sauces" instead of other colored sauces, or it just so happened that most sauces were cream based, Nussel's observation is noteworthy because it raises the idea that through cooking specific foods and coating them in rich sauces, immigrants were able to Americanize themselves, even

³⁵ Davidis, *Pickled Herring and Pumpkin Pie*, 250.

³⁶ Fleischmann's Yeast, "No Equal," Advertisement, *Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1889, 132.

³⁷ Jill Schaarschmidt Nussel, *From Stew to Melting Pot: Immigrant Women and Cookbooks They Wrote in the Age of Immigration, 1873-1916* (Toledo: University of Toledo), 2006, 74.

if it remained only on the surface. Forced to come to terms with exactly what it meant to be an American, cooks attempted to define culture through what was served for dinner.

Studying the New Americans...and the Old Ones

In 1922 the Carnegie Corporation launched a project titled the Americanization Study to, “explore educational opportunities for adults, primarily new immigrants.”³⁸ One of the biggest opportunities for education came in the form of dietary health and standards. Claiming that the diet of a typical American was better for overall health than foreign foods, author Bertha M. Wood carefully categorized each immigrant culture alongside the flaws of their diet. For instance, those coming from Mexico ate, “beans, rice, potatoes, peas, chili peppers, and less meat,” which caused stomach problems and an imbalanced diet.³⁹ The Portuguese were at risk for hypertension because of the salted fish and spices they consumed. Referring to traditionally heavy Italian dishes, food scientists noted a, “a real tax on digestion.”⁴⁰ A social worker further commented, “still eating spaghetti, not yet assimilated,” suggesting that an immigrant only became American when all traces of cultural food disinte-

³⁸ Carnegie Corporation of New York, "Founding and Early Years."

³⁹ Michael M. Davis, forward to *Foods of the Foreign Born in Relation to Health* by Bertha M. Wood (Boston: Whitecomb and Barrows, 1922), 250.

⁴⁰ Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformations of the American Diet* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 104.

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grated, or transformed into an accepted version.⁴¹ Reflecting on the notion of family affection, Italians confused American food scientists because, “despite their legendary frugality, [Italian] immigrants imported vast amounts of pasta, olive oil, and cheese from Italy, fearing that to use American substitutes would be regarded as a sign of not caring for the family.”⁴² With a primary concern of Americanization directed towards money management, immigrants who did not adjust were viewed as “financially irresponsible.”⁴³ Ultimately, it became evident that food rituals for immigrants were a source of family love and acceptance. Steeped in rich tradition and filled with special meanings, many ethnic foods carried special connotations to immigrant families.

Of special concern to many researchers were the diets of immigrant children. Heavily promoting milk as essential for children’s health, scientists were shocked when one mother of a sick baby revealed she gave it, “soup and buttermilk” in her home country, but with a limited income in America, the child was given “beer and coffee.”⁴⁴ Suggesting that children eat, “a diet of milk, strained cereal, and fruit juices,” Americans were dissatisfied to learn that Italian children were, “put on the adults’ diet as soon as they [were] out of swaddling clothes,” and preached that a child could be the epitome of health if the diet was “readjusted,” meaning

⁴¹ Ibid, 105.

⁴² Ibid, 108.

⁴³ Wood and Davis, *Foods of the Foreign Born in Relation to Health*, III.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 250.

conformed to American standards.⁴⁵

Beyond the surface of Wood’s cultural generalizations, some positive attributes can be found in the cookbook. The scientists concluded that, “knowledge of the foods of the foreign born and of their native dietaries is the foundation of all success in this endeavor,” alluding to a willingness to better understand immigrants food customs.⁴⁶ Food clinics with trained nurses and skilled dietitians were suggested as remedies for immigrants struggling to adopt an American diet. Even though the overarching goal was to thoroughly Americanize the immigrants, a realization that the challenge of “attaining a satisfactory diet, particularly when the income is small,” existed, but the task at hand remained important—to be accepted meant subscribing to the American standards, no matter the cost.⁴⁷

Forming A Common Identity

As the country continued to progress and undergo a series of reforms, immigrants who did not follow suit fell behind and became alienated. By maintaining the foreign label and rejecting habits that would make them American, immigrants who held firmly to their birth culture found it difficult to survive. Laura Shehone notes that, “In America, a chasm lay between past and future: between cooking rice perfectly and going to school, between ritual Sabbath dinners and

45

Ibid, 255.

46

Ibid, 275.

47

Ibid, 274.

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middle-class mobility, between the old mamma in the kitchen and the 'New Woman' of the 1920s who motored about in cars."⁴⁸ Because the idea had been previously unchallenged, little to no thought was placed on the notion of a uniquely American diet. Upon the arrival of massive waves of immigrants, though, it became a common belief that how and what Americans ate was superior to that of other countries. Thus, the cookbooks and magazines published during this time presented an idealized image of American cuisine, one that did not yet fully exist. The publication of such cookbooks remained active, but following World War II and the United States entry into the Cold War years, the push to be an American became a primary concern, this time leaving no ambiguity where dinner and identity were concerned.

War, Recovery, and a New America

Throughout the war years and the Depression, Americans were faced with strict rationing and limited food access. Proving their worth as selfless citizens for a country that was not even their own, immigrant families sacrificed for the war efforts just as American servicemen did. The idea of Americanizing the immigrant population was placed on the backburner and a point of cultural exchange occurred. Although Italian-Americans were deemed financially wasteful for importing goods, and thought to eat too much pasta,

48

48 Schenone, *A Thousand Years Over a Hot Stove: A History of American Women Told Through Food, Recipes, and Remembrances*, 229.

by the 1920s Italian food became a norm in American households. Spaghetti became a regular school night dinner, although the addition of meatballs gave it a unique American twist.

In the same process, German foods became synonymous with American tradition. Hot dogs, hamburgers and beer define baseball culture, but years before, the Germans had been ridiculed and asked, “how could you be so mean to grind up all those doggies in your hot dog machine,”⁴⁹ referring to the suspicion towards immigrant practices. During World War I, cookbooks encouraged families to eat patriotically, and so ethnic foods such as German sauerkraut were given patriotic monikers like Victory Cabbage.⁵⁰ It became a citizen’s duty to proudly represent America, and, in order to do so, foreign items underwent transformations to easily slide into American households.

Following the devastation of World Wars I and II, the United States embarked on a mission of recovery. The country itself escaped harm, but the mindset of the American public weighed heavy with many years of wartime chaos. The dropping of the atomic bomb signaled the end of World War II, and while the war was over, a new fear loomed—the nuclear threat. Fear, paranoia, and extreme caution marked the mid-century for Americans. In order to fight communism and present itself as a strong unified front, the United States deployed its most accessible weapon—the family. A mother, father, and two children living in a

⁴⁹ Wallach, *How America Eats: A Social History of U.S. Food and Culture*, 170.

⁵⁰ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, 123.

single family home marked with a green lawn and shiny new car in the driveway embodied the American Dream. It became a patriotic duty to produce a nuclear family and to conform to this new notion. To widely circulate these ideals, publishers reached the household in the same way as before, through cookbooks and magazines. Just as the immigrants learned to be American through such books, it was now the turn of Americans to demonstrate that they could be the perfect images of democracy.

When immigrants first arrived to the United States, they were instructed how to speak, dress, and act if they were to successfully assimilate into American culture. These expectations could be found in guidebooks and cookbooks because the pages were filled with projections of what Americans were. Sherrie A. Inness notes that cookbooks throughout the twentieth century, “attempted to inculcate its readers with upper- and middle-class ideals...women learned as much about being ladies through reading a cookbook as they learned about how to decorate tea sandwiches.”⁵¹ Similarly, in the post-war era, an ideal and uniformed idea was projected about what it meant to be a welcomed citizen in society. In a time filled with political scrutiny and paranoia, along with overwhelming mass markets for consumption, the United States was changing, and in order to succeed it was vital to keep up.

With food rations lifted and the economy thriving, the dream of gaining an education, owning a home, and having new appliances became easily accessible to

⁵¹ Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 13.

many Americans. People in the United States were judged by possessions, as the famous Kitchen Debate between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev memorably showcased. The cookbooks published during the 1950s highlighted the newfound consumer culture and suggested another important revelation. As *Publisher's Weekly* noted in 1947, "America in the postwar years experienced 'a cook book boom,'" further showing the dedication people had in not only spending in the "era of abundance," but the desire to achieve the ideal life and casserole.⁵² Craving a sense of normalcy following the Depression and tumultuous war years, Americans happily purchased the colorful cookbooks with glossy pictures and newfound ingredients. During the same time, the process of canning and freezing foods became well regimented and corresponding cookbooks highlighted new conveniences, including frozen desserts and prepackaged ingredients, such as cooked noodles. In turn, cookbooks appeared different than those of the past because they emphasized such products as canned soup and boxed cake mixes. Often times, individual brands published cookbooks to further promote their products. The recipes included in the cookbooks remain important because, for the first time, Americans had a unique cuisine that was different than any other, even if the main ingredients were marshmallows and canned foods.

Although immigrant food had been accepted at times, if a family had not successfully assimilated into American culture by the 1950s, it proved to be a challenging time to be different. American cuisine

⁵² Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America*, 164.

became centered on the white, middle-class nuclear family. This was the family everyone wanted to be, the image they worked for and, most obviously, the one who received the most attention. Cookbooks followed suit, displaying one “American” dish after another. Ingredients such as marshmallows, Jell-O, and items that could be fashioned into a casserole became intimately connected to the American kitchen. Any food item that had not been adopted by white Americans remained foreign, or “exotic,” making it seemingly out of reach in the standard kitchen.⁵³ As a result, many “exotic” foods became lesser versions of the original, reworked in order for the nuclear mother to wow her guests with Chinese egg foo yung. By the mid-century, previously rejected foods graced the shelves of supermarkets, resting quietly next to American goods. It was noted that, “near the cans of Boston baked beans and codfish cakes stood cans of spaghetti and chop suey,” signifying the unification of ethnicity and modern convenience.⁵⁴

Dinner is Ready- It’s in the Cupboard...and the Bomb Shelter

A woman standing over the stove with a young boy tugging at her apron is bombarded with questions from every direction: “Where’s my sweater, Mom? Mom! The light bulb’s burned out! Mary, is my suit back from the cleaner’s?” Mother is expected to answer all the questions and have a solution for every prob-

⁵³ Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture*, 40.

⁵⁴ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, 122.

lem, but breakfast must be made, too. Ralston Hot Cereal knew how to attract the attention of busy mothers and rave, “Delicious hot wheat cereal cooks in just 10 seconds!”⁵⁵ With the demands of keeping the ideal nuclear family running smoothly, many families embraced and heavily supported the convenience food craze of the decade. There were advertisements for Campbell’s Canned Soup, Nabisco packaged cookies and crackers, Libby’s canned sliced pineapples, Bisquick “quickest nut bread ever,” Pillsbury Pie Crust and Comstock pre-sliced canned apples. Even Puss ‘n Boots cat food became canned. The entire dining sphere became something neatly sealed, packaged, and canned, perfect for placing in the pantry or nuclear bomb shelter, further reflecting the Cold War mentality.

In examining similar advertisements from decades before, it can be discerned that the emphasis shifted from what was right to what was easy. A Ralston Cereal advertisement from 1901 shows a young child in a mother’s lap. Gripping the box of cereal, the caption reads, “I Love Ralston Breakfast Food as Good as Mama!”⁵⁶ Advertised by Purina as the “most healthful cereal you can eat,” Purina Flour claims the cereal is healthy and good for children. A 1905 advertisement claims that Ralston was, “food not medicine” and “a little care in the diet will keep children well and happy.”⁵⁷ Contrasting with other advertisements of the

⁵⁵ Ralston Cereal, “Busy Mom,” Advertisement, *Life*, Dec. 1, 1952, 140.

⁵⁶ Ralston Cereal, “As Good as Mama,” Advertisement, *Munsey’s Magazine*, Mar. 1901, Advertising Section, 4.

⁵⁷ Ralston Cereal, “Food Not Medicine,” Advertisement, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, April 1905, 130.

1950s, Ralston continued to state its nutritional values, but with the added convenience of being fully and abundantly prepared in ten seconds, it was a clear reflection of the economy of the time. In the October 13, 1952 issue of *Life* magazine, a mother can again be seen at the stove top overwhelmed by multiple voice bubbles: “honey, have you seen the keys, Jake should be calling, mom what’s for dinner?”⁵⁸ Realizing that this is a typical daily scenario for most, Ralston reveals that its product is, “wonderful news for busy mothers.”⁵⁹ While health was still a concern, the main issue at hand for Americans was time. By appealing to the plight of the mother, initially with health concerns and then moving to time limitations, Ralston advertisements provide a glimpse into the changing priorities in the American kitchen, transitioning from home grown products to quick and easy staples.

Short on Time, Mom? Not to Worry- We Even Have Variety!

Americans, women in particular, were told that in order to be the ideal homemaker, each and every meal had to be prepared properly and on time. With the countless other responsibilities at hand, processed foods became heavily relied upon, especially because value was placed on domestic abilities in the kitchen. There was clear demand for quick and easy food products, and companies felt obliged to come to the scene of the busy mother. A burnt roast or ruined dish

⁵⁸ Ralston Cereal, “Instant Wheat Cereal,” Advertisement, *Life*, Oct. 13, 1952, 10.

⁵⁹ Ralston Cereal, “Busy Mom,” Advertisement, *Life*, Dec. 1, 1952, 140.

jeopardized a woman's position as the perfect wife and American. Magazines and cookbooks instructed women that they had to be flawless in appearance and ability, and many achieved this through the help of premade food items. Schlitz Beer produced a series of advertisements throughout the decade that depicted a young wife, presumably a newlywed, learning not only how to cook but how to keep her husband happy. Crying in the arms of her husband with a ruined supper sitting on the counter, the wife is soothed by her spouse, "at least you didn't burn the Schlitz."⁶⁰ Readers would view such portrayals and understand that Americans had perfect kitchens and good food, and if the food failed there was always something to remedy the problem. In the case of Schlitz, it was beer, but often times the solution could be pulled out of the cupboard or freezer.

When it came to preparing food the daunting task fell to the hands of the mother. Whether it was one small child's lunch or a gourmet meal for twenty, women were expected to whip up culinary masterpieces that were not only appetizing, but looked equally delectable. Campbell's Soup proved to be a popular product, with advertisements for the "hot meal" featured in nearly every issue of *Life* during 1952. Be it the perfect meal to celebrate "family cheer" and the "day baby joins the family in enjoying [Campbell's] Soup," or (suggested to the babysitter) "when mother's away she remembers to say: give him soup for lunch," Campbell's monopolized the market when

⁶⁰ Schlitz Beer, "Burned Supper," Advertisement, *Life*, Mar. 31, 1952, 77.

it came to convenient and hot meals.⁶¹ Hunt's canned tomatoes came to the rescue when it was time to feed dad: "Goulash- the way a man likes it!"⁶² Opposed to a more feminine goulash recipe, it was hinted that the robust tomatoes from Hunt's would make any simple dinner an incredible meal fit for hearty men. Processed food advertisements show that alongside soup and Jell-O molds, even ethnic foods entered the repertoire of the pantry. Hormel chili was the perfect solution for "mom's night off" because "it's fun...and so easy that even dad can do it."⁶³ A menu dish that had been deemed insufficient in The Americanization Study, chili was conveniently found in a can and became an established essential for busy nights. In a 1956 advertisement, Heinz showcased a "Thrifty Tetrizzini," with the main ingredient being canned spaghetti in tomato sauce with cheese.⁶⁴ The starchy noodles and heavy cheese that previously deemed Italian immigrants as unassimilated became the key ingredient in an American created dish, as Tetrizzini essentially combined leftovers with spaghetti. Similarly, Chun King enticed cooks with the following tagline, "When guests drop in, serve 'em Chun King Chow Mein and Chop Suey."⁶⁵ Ready in ten minutes and featured in a new three pound can, Chop Suey exemplifies another American-

⁶¹ Campbell's Soup. "Hot Meal," Advertisements, *Life*, Jan. 21, 1952, 29; Nov. 3, 1952, 37; Nov. 10, 1952, 49.

⁶² Hunt's. "Canned Tomatoes," Advertisement, *Life*, Aug. 4, 1952, 42.

⁶³ Hormel. "Chili," Advertisement, *Life*, Mar. 24, 1952, 103.

⁶⁴ Heinz, "Thrifty Tetrizzini," Advertisement, *Chatelaine Magazine*, April 1956, 22.

⁶⁵ Chun King, Chow Mein and Chop Suey, Advertisement, *Life*, Feb. 16, 1953, 133.

ized ethnic dish. With no concrete origins to Chinese cooking, but rather the borrowing of staple elements, in this case, chow mein noodles, cooks successfully incorporated elements of foreign food into a unique creation. It was now poured from a can and figured into the pages of American cookbooks.

Christopher Holmes Smith states, “the object of frozen foods proponents...revolved around teaching women how to use the new products to convince them that they were gaining ground in American society, even as they appeared to be losing it.”⁶⁶ The immigrant women of the 1900s believed that by following the instructions in cookbooks they would be better accepted and assimilated more easily. The early years of the Cold War reignited these familiar sentiments, with families all across America striving to fit in and become thoroughly Americanized. Noting that “the convenience foods make it possible for inexperienced cooks, career women, and busy mothers to serve their families treats such as the perfect fluffy cakes, luscious desserts, hot breads, [and] vegetables,” anyone was capable of creating the perfect meal and becoming the perfect wife and mother, despite any preconceived notions.⁶⁷ Food became something that was no longer tied to specific cultures, but was rather judged in an entirely new way because in order to align with American values, it needed to be jellied, rolled, and fluffed. The influx of recipes that catered to packaged food items and the demand for perfection aligned with the

⁶⁶ Sherrie A. Inness, *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender, and Class at the Dinner Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 21.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

vision of Americanization in the 1950s, a world centered on consumerism, uniformity and the appearance of affluence.

500 Tasty Ways to Succeed and Deceive Your Guests

Cookbooks in earlier decades instructed individuals how to create complete meals for families. Recipes for hearty entrée dishes and traditional soup and salad recipes could be found on page after the page. With the rise of convenience foods, however, cookbooks shifted focus to more creative endeavors with entire books devoted to sauces, eggs, and candies. Glazed to perfection and glistening with ornamentation, menu items easily tricked the eye of the eater, often times being vastly different than what was believed. Dishes were no longer straightforward, but instead were crafted into elaborate displays of layers and dimensions, appearing much more appealing than they actually were, a reflection of the Cold War façade.

Because of the ease of the ready-made entrée, energy could be dispensed on side dishes, desserts, and most importantly, snacks. Published in 1950 as part of Culinary Arts Institute series (One of America's foremost organizations devoted to the science of Better Cookery), the *500 Snacks- Ideas for Entertaining* book opens with the concept of the Smorgasbord, noting that, "an old Scandinavian custom, has grown strong deep roots in our national affections until now we feel that it belongs to us."⁶⁸ Containing instructions on

⁶⁸ Ruth Berolzheimer, ed. *500 Tasty Snacks: Ideas For Entertaining* (Chicago: Consolidated Book Publishers, 1950), Introduction.

how to create the perfect buffet spread (“cold and jellied salads may not be warmed by hot dishes”), *500 Tasty Snacks* included an extensive selection from Macaroni Salad to Chicken Curry.⁶⁹ The recipes are listed side-by-side, with no distinction in regard to cultural origins. In past cookbooks, recipes with ingredients borrowed from another culture included origins (i.e. “German”), but now certain elements were incorporated into America’s smorgasbord of food. In *500 Delicious Dishes from Leftovers*, Macaroni Salad and Spaghetti Creole were labeled as such, without the ethnic label, “Italian.” Sauerkraut Viennese, Sauerbraten, and Hassenpeffer appeared next to Bran Muffins and Strawberry Jam Cupcakes, again omitting any ethnic identity. A distinction did occur, however, when certain ethnic foods maintained original ties in order to appear fancy and gourmet. Foreign food labels were assigned to certain menu items to appeal to the connoisseur, to the cook who sought the distinction of mastering “Crepes Suzette,” or “Swedish, Dutch, and Polish Pancakes.”⁷⁰ The recipes listed in *300 Ways to Serve Eggs* were given cultural titles, but with ingredients consisting of flour, salt, milk, sugar, and butter, no trace of authenticity could be found, because the pancakes were created for Americans to suit the proper ideals of utilizing ingredients that were conveniently found. In turn, foreign labels did not mean what they had in the past, and referred instead to a posh recipe that, similar to other foods, was only intriguing on the surface. Rarely did these recipes have any connection to the original. Americanization was no

⁶⁹ Ibid, Introduction.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 14.

longer something reserved just for the immigrant population. What emerged, however, was a uniquely American diet that valued ease and accessibility, one that the previously mentioned Carnegie Institute's "Americanization Study" would hardly recognize.

Reminiscent of Nessel's suggestion that immigrants subconsciously coated most foods in a white sauce, the French philosopher Roland Barthes states that there was an "obvious endeavor to glaze surfaces, round them off, to bury the food under the even sediment of sauces, creams, icing, and jellies" when asked about the common 1950s trend of decorating food and making it appear something it was not.⁷¹ A common trend in Cold War American cookbooks involved the almost mocking appearance of food, reflecting the mentality that appearance was more important than reality. Fish dishes became adorned and decorated, while recipes for ground beef recommended fashioning the beef to appear as a luscious T-bone steak. There appeared to be little effort in hiding the concept of sculpting food, as many recipes were blunt, such as Mock Chicken Legs. By mixing pork and veal and "shap[ing] it around skewers, along with canned pineapple," a hostess was able to serve her guests chicken legs that were far from it.⁷² Chicken in Nest - made from fat, flour, salt, pepper, chicken stock and diced cooked chicken - becomes complete by "serv[ing] in a macaroni ring."⁷³ To "set off" the chicken nest, the cook could add "full length green beans

⁷¹ Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking*, 172.

⁷² Ruth Berolzheimer, ed. *250 Ways to Prepare Poultry and Game Birds* (Chicago: Consolidated Books Publishers, 1951), 32.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 17.

bound with pimento,” creating a uniquely American presentation of dinner.⁷⁴ *Recipes for Delectable Dishes of Every Vegetables from Artichokes to Zucchini: 250 Ways to Serve Fresh Vegetables* begins with the section “Vegetables as Garnish,” including vegetable flowers, baskets, and cups. Cooks were able to create an Easter Lily and Shasta Daisies from white turnips, a basket from eggplant, and cups from beets and carrots. Stating that the, “blossoms are ingeniously carved,” Americans became accustomed to presenting foods as something they were not, but rather, items that were transformed and made better, a direct reflection of their societal desires.⁷⁵ Food became something that was manipulated, molded, deceptive and, arguably, comical in the same sense that suburban neighborhoods and Cold War uniformity dominated the United States. If a given food could be rolled up and garnished it became an instant success. The preoccupation with appearance touched every facet of American life, whether it was the choice of appliances or the believability of a duck dish.

From Immigrants to Nuclear Families

As an American, it was important to follow the expected norms, especially during the Cold War era. During the waves of immigration throughout the early twentieth century, many ideas and opinions surrounded diet and nutrition. Immigrants were told that an Americanized diet was superior to other customs and it was important that food was properly eaten and

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ruth Berolzheimer, ed. *250 Ways to Serve Fresh Vegetables* (Chicago: Consolidated Books Publishers, 1951) 8.

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distributed. Food science and nutrition continued to flourish, especially with the rise of home economics classes during the war years. The 1951 copy of *2000 Useful Facts About Food* reminds that:

‘It’s all in knowing how’ [was] the way our grandmother phrased it as she passed her kitchen and marketing lore on to her daughter. But grand-daughter has an opportunity to acquire this information from more accurate if less colorful sources. Food laboratories, chemical laboratories...as well as great testing kitchens both commercial and governmental—all these and more put their findings at her disposal.⁷⁶

Insinuating that past ideas both about food and the kitchen were outdated and “colorful,” the cookbook attempted to convey a message of modern superiority to the reader. No longer was the immigrant the only holder of incorrect dietary knowledge: Every person who continued to follow the advice of the past was deemed inferior.

Conclusion

Today a wide variety of food is easily found in the United States. Julia Child cemented the idea that French cuisine was *très chic*, while food personalities such as the Frugal Gourmet insisted that even the

⁷⁶ Ruth Berolzheimer, ed. *2000 Useful Facts About Food: Labor, Time, and Money-Saving Hints, Advice, and Suggestions* (Chicago: Consolidated Book Publishers, 1951), Introduction.

most novice cook could prepare meals of their ancestors. Cooking shows with ethnic origins have proliferated in the media, including those with PBS stars Lidia Bastianich and Ming Tsai. It is apparent that the reintroduction of ethnic cooking has contributed to their acceptance as part of American cuisine. What was once viewed as unacceptable and dangerous has been embraced and craved, even if today's version appears much different than that of the past. From its inception, the United States has borrowed and incorporated values, traditions and ideas from other cultures. The arrival of foreign immigrants challenged the way Americans thought about identity because it was never truly addressed previously. Food habits that were initially shunned became essential aspects of the American diet by the Cold War. Nuclear fears again confronted ideas of American identity, this time forcing the country to recognize that it was no longer a homogenous race of people, but rather, a diverse one that united under one common image. Every characteristic that formed America emerged on a give-and-take platform from several cultures and customs. Despite the early efforts of reformers who intended to Americanize the immigrants, it became evident that diversity is what made Americans, and their cuisine, unique.

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