Setting the Table: Historians, Popular Writers, and Food History

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In arguably the most influential treatise on food, *The Physiology of Taste,* the French gastronome and philosopher Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote, "The destiny of a nation depends upon the manner in which they feed themselves." First published in 1826, Brillat-Savarin's observation on how nations produce and consume food has taken on a new urgency over the past twenty years as questions about food sovereignty, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and the health of the planet have been thrust to the fore by popular food writers. Among them is Michael Pollan; his *The Omnivore's Dilemma* quickly became a staple of the new food movement and was regularly assigned by professors who hoped to channel foodie consciousness toward a deeper understanding of U.S. history. Like Brillat-Savarin, Pollan has heightened our awareness of who we are based on what we eat. Citing the transformation of U.S. agriculture since World War II, especially the increased production and consumption of corn, Pollan notes that Americans have wrested the identity "people of corn" from Mexicans, known for their tamales, tortillas, and the many other maize-based dishes foundational to their famous cuisine. Our conversion of corn into syrup and our consumption of the meat from corn-fed livestock has resulted in a massive infusion of the crop into our national diet. Calling us "processed corn, walking," Pollan has used the old aphorism "You are what you eat" as the foundation for a new political movement and the rebirth of food studies in America.[1]

I believe that we historians have reason to appreciate popular food writers, as heretical as that may sound. Few of these writers are professional historians or even members of the academy, yet many have reintroduced the topic of food and politicized it in a way that has activated our students and piqued public interest. Over the last decade, food and its related subjects—fat studies, commodity-chain studies, and environmental studies—have grown apace with an increased public awareness of, and an activism inspired by, these issues. At two separate institutions I have witnessed enthusiasm for these topics among students who have taken my food history courses and embarked on dissertations focused on food. Inevitably, these students come ready to engage Pollan and other popular writers

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[1] Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste; or, Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy* (1825; Adelaide, 2005), https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/brillat/savarin/b85p/part2.html; Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York, 2006), 23, 20.

doi: 10.1093/jahist/jaw328
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such as Eric Schlosser, Mark Kurlansky, and Alice Waters, either because they have been turned on by their work or because they strongly disagree with it.[2]

By examining our diet and tracing its history, popular writers have expanded the audience for traditional fields of study such as agricultural history, business history, and diplomatic history. I recall, for example, organizing sessions on agricultural history for the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians prior to the publication of *Omnivore's Dilemma* and attracting few audience members. At subsequent annual meetings, by simply replacing "agriculture" with "food" in the session title, I attracted many more interested scholars and graduate students. Similarly, for the history of bananas, editors of magazines and newspapers and producers of radio and television programs have hosted Rich Cohen and Dan Koeppel, two popular writers who address the consequences of banana production and the future of the fruit. These authors have drawn public attention to the environmental, diplomatic, and economic consequences of banana agriculture covered in greater detail by scholars such as John Soluri, Jason M. Colby, and Dana Frank.[3]

I realize that my interpretation of the role of popular writers in the development of food studies does not sit well with all academics. In conversations at conferences and even in feedback from an anonymous reviewer of this article, academics have often displayed resentment toward public writers who receive favorable publication advances, greater commercial success, and more invitations to speak on topics that many academics see as their intellectual terrain. In some cases, when the accessible, popular publication succeeds the scholarly one, accusations of plagiarism echo through university halls and in the press. Such extreme conflicts are rare, but a palpable tension exists between popular food writers and food scholars.[4]

The tendency of many popular writers to recommend eating habits for a healthier planet has produced the most heated debates. Pollan, for example, followed his *Omnivore's Dilemma* with increasingly prescriptive tomes, including *Food Rules*—a title that leaves little to the imagination. Such books cater to a generation of Americans whose search for self-help guides—perhaps especially for eating—propels them to seek easy, quick answers to problems associated with weight gain, dietary disorders, and other similar issues. Well-inclined food activists engaged in battles to remove GMOs from our food sources, slow or reverse the replacement of local producers with big corporations, and reduce or eliminate incidents of animal cruelty on farms are often drawn to solution-oriented texts that often confirm their impressions of what must be done. Meanwhile, in academia, the study of food and its place within our world and our bodies has grown increasingly complex. Today, the best academic authors have become more resistant to such simplistic "dos" and

[2] On the relevance of food to environmental history, see Doug Cazaux Sackman, "Food," in *Blackwell Companions to American History: A Companion to American Environmental History,* ed. Douglas Cazaux Sackman (Oxford, 2010), 529–50. Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (Boston, 2001); Mark Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World* (New York, 1997); Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History* (New York, 2002); Alice Waters, *The Art of Simple Food* (New York, 2007).

[3] Rich Cohen, *The Fish That Ate the Whale: The Life and Times of America's Banana King* (New York, 2012); Dan Koeppel, *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit That Changed the World* (New York, 2008). John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States* (Austin, 2005); Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America* (Ithaca, 2011); Dana Frank, *Bananeras: Women Transforming the Banana Unions of Latin America* (New York, 2005).

[4] Julie Guthman, "Commentary on Teaching Food: Why I Am Fed Up with Michael Pollan et al.," *Agriculture and Human Values,* 24 (June 2007), 261–64; Jenny Agnew, "Michael Pollan: Love Him? Hate Him? Both?," *St. Louis Magazine,* May 13, 2013, http://www.stlmag.com/dining/Michael-Pollan-Love-Him-Hate-Him-Both/.

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"don'ts," choosing, instead, to see our food systems as a consequence of new technology, policy choices, and consumer preferences.[5]

In this state-of-the-field essay I wish to explore the relationship between the work of popular food writers and historians of food. As is the case with many articles of this nature, some readers will expect me to roll out a long list of lesser-known academic works and scholarship that predates the popular-writing boom. Such a chicken-and-egg game does not interest me. Rather, I believe it is more productive to delve into recent approaches to food history—both popular and academic—that have fed current consciousness about the origins of our foodways and how those eating habits and culinary practices are shaping our lives. In some cases, as with the story of corn and bananas, the tawdry past and the expansion or imminent demise of a single foodstuff has been the source of compelling history for academics and popular writers alike. I contend that it is more valuable to explore the connections between the two groups rather than to sort out who did what first, recognizing how a shared focus on food pays dividends not just toward our adaptation to current environmental and market challenges but also toward our construction of knowledge.

Given that this is the *Journal of American History* my focus is skewed toward the United States but in a way that appreciates both the transnational turn and the influence of other disciplines. From a production standpoint, the sourcing of the U.S. food supply has long been a transnational project, made more so since the 1970s by free trade. Even when food has been produced within the United States, transnational workers have been critical to its harvest, and, increasingly, to its consumption. In terms of nonhistorical influences, geography, sociology, anthropology, ecology, and the interdisciplinary fields of women's studies, gender studies, American studies, and ethnic studies have been significant contributors, offering new approaches that do not privilege change over time in their analysis, although they do operate within a historical framework. From my perspective, work that embraces multiple methodological approaches has produced the most influential ideas. Similarly, I reject purist interpretations of what constitutes a contribution by requiring an author to pledge his or her allegiance to the field of food studies. The emergence of a new interdisciplinary field often requires boundary creation, revealing more about practitioners' insecurities than about the predatory influence of other disciplines. Food studies should recognize and embrace the benefits derived from scholarship that tangentially touches on food.[6]

My rejection of purity begins with what I consider the subject of this field. Cuisine historians have long determined what constitutes "the history of food," specifically "the mastery and diffusion of new ways of making plants and animals edible," to quote Rachel Laudan. Her *Cuisine and Empire* goes further, discounting agriculture and the processing of "raw materials":

> histories of architecture, dress, or transport do not focus primarily on quarrying, lumbering, sheep herding, cotton farming, or iron mining. Stone, timber, wool, cotton, and iron are important raw materials, necessary for and imposing con-

[5] Michael Pollan, *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual* (New York, 2011).

[6] Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became A Postcolonial Nation* (New York, 2011); Gary Y. Okihiro, *Pineapple Culture: A History of the Tropical and Temperate Zones* (Berkeley, 2010); Rachel Laudan, *Cuisine and Empire: Cooking in World History* (Berkeley, 2013); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865–1920* (Chapel Hill, 2007); Robert R. Alvarez Jr., *Mangos, Chiles, and Truckers: The Business of Transnationalism* (Minneapolis, 2005).

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straints on buildings, costume, and automobiles, but they do not drive or determine the course of their history. Similarly the history of styles of cooking deserves to be treated in its own right, not as an afterthought to agriculture.

Recent histories involving food have included agriculture, mirroring the "field-to-table" consciousness of food activists and a growing number of consumers. For me, the stakes of including agriculture and other food labor are high, especially when we consider what is left out by reducing the definition of *food* to only its finished form. Food studies without the cultivation, harvesting, and preparation of products threatens to neglect the many working-class, enslaved, and immigrant hands through which edibles pass on the way to our tables or our supermarkets. I prefer to define *food* as the geographer Rachel Slocum does: "all the processes that make animal, vegetable or mineral into something to eat and then all that is involved in what happens next to bodies and societies." To do otherwise misses an opportunity to see food as an active agent in history.[7]

As a historian of labor, Mexican American history, and immigration, I would not be considered an authoritative voice in food studies by some, although most of my work has engaged questions of food production. Nevertheless, I welcome my outsider identity and appreciate the opportunity to introduce new works and debates that, from my perspective, are long overdue. I trust that my respondents will round out this dialogue with their insights and particular interests, some coming from the core of what has constituted food studies thus far. In this process, I hope we can move beyond the "who's who" honor rolls or the bibliographic projects that state-of-the-field articles often become; rather, I wish to recognize new areas of inquiry opened up by nonhistorians and examine the productive tension that currently exists within the field of food studies, broadly conceived.

Whether popular or academic, writers of food history have tended to address the subject through three interlocking themes: production, consumption, and distribution. Production is often a study of farming and farmers but has frequently neglected the equally important role of labor. We see this, in particular, in Pollan's work as it follows the food from field to table without considering the people employed to create most of his meals. He is, unfortunately, not alone in this oversight, although there are encouraging corrective trends afoot among food historians. Agricultural policy is far more common in production studies and has animated the field in new and important ways. Consumption is frequently reserved for the study of cuisine and diet but has recently been extended to questions of access—"food justice"—for those who cannot eat a healthy diet. The question of what is healthy has also emerged within this branch of food studies as the problems of obesity and other food-related illnesses have become more prevalent. Finally, authors have explored the question of how food moves between producers and consumers and what happens when these methods of conveyance transcend geopolitical boundaries, such as the U.S.-Mexico border. These approaches have prompted awareness of nations'

[7] Laudan, *Cuisine and Empire,* 4–5. For definitions of food history, see, for example, Reay Tannahill, *Food in History* (New York, 1973); Linda Civitello, *Cuisine and Culture: A History of Food and People* (Hoboken, 2004); Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, *A History of Food,* trans. Anthea Bell (New York, 1992); Kenneth F. Kiple, *A Moveable Feast: Ten Millennia of Food Globalization* (Cambridge, Eng., 2007); Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food* (New York, 2002); and Tom Standage, *An Edible History of Humanity* (New York, 2009). Laudan, *Cuisine and Empire,* 5. Rachel Slocum, "Race in the Study of Food," *Progress in Human Geography,* 35 (June 2011), 303–27, esp. 303. I am grateful to Mark Padoongpatt for sharing Rachel Slocum's article with me.

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"food security" and have generated queries about why some are able to feed their citizens better than others. Such questions are not reserved for nation-states, as racial inequality and segregation have raised awareness of distribution and access for all Americans. As these studies demonstrate, one can be "food insecure" even while living in the world's richest nation. Related to access, food procurement—how one obtains the ingredients either to gain nutrients or cook particular cultural or familial dishes—falls somewhere among production, consumption, and distribution.[8]

Studying food, of course, is not a new practice for historians, although to participate in the conversation they have had to become comfortable with methods outside of their disciplines. In *The Raw and the Cooked* the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss divided human civilizations by food preparation methods. For him, boiling meat represented a "cultural" form of cooking compared to the "natural" approach of roasting or smoking—a method that depends on the more direct application of fire. Such divisions were embraced and employed by anthropologists, ultimately contributing to the formation of foodways: the history of how a group or society feeds itself and what that signals about identity. Although this approach influenced some historians, many struggled with anthropologists' intent to explain why mostly non-Western peoples maintained past practices and how such practices explained the origins of "modern" behaviors.[9]

Sidney W. Mintz overcame anthropologists' biases for "the primitive" and participant-observation methods with his groundbreaking book *Sweetness and Power*. Mintz begins with an observation of a condiment used at every modern table—sugar—and then works toward an explanation of how it got there. His focus on the interconnectedness of Europe (and, to a lesser extent, the United States) and Caribbean societies through the exchange of this sweet commodity reveals the consequences of world markets on center and periphery societies during and after colonialism. Mintz, like his predecessors and contemporaries, began his study with fieldwork in a rural location—Barrio Jauca, Puerto Rico—but his lens quickly widens to include the balance of power between the metropolitan homeland and the dependent colony. He challenges historians to move beyond their obsession with European pursuits of "gold and souls" to see that agriculture—particularly coffee, cacao, indigo, tobacco, and especially sugar—had equal, and perhaps longer-lasting, influences on the cultural practices of both "hub" and "outer-rim" societies over several centuries. His study of "foodstuffs," later to include soy, anticipates the approach now taken by popular writers such as Kurlansky, Barry Estabrook, and Koeppel, who have produced popular books on cod, tomatoes, and bananas, respectively.[10]

[8] Mark Winne, *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty* (Boston, 2008); Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman, eds., *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011). Janet Poppendieck, *Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement* (New York, 1998). On the importance of ingredient procurement for Thai dishes, see Mark Padoongpatt, "'Chasing the Yum': Food Procurement and Thai American Community Formation in an Era before Free Trade," in *Food across Borders: Production, Consumption, and Boundary Crossing in North America,* ed. Matt Garcia, E. Melanie DuPuis, and Don Mitchell (New Brunswick, forthcoming).

[9] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked,* trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York, 1969). Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York, 1966); Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois, "The Anthropology of Food and Eating," *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 31 (Oct. 2002), 99–119. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, eds., *Food and Culture: A Reader* (New York, 2013).

[10] Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985), xvii, xx. For a more recent history of sweeteners, see Carolyn de la Peña, *Empty Pleasures: The Story of Artificial Sweeteners from Saccharin to Splenda* (Chapel Hill, 2012). Kurlansky, *Cod;* Kurlansky, *Salt;* Barry Estabrook, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agribulture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit* (Kansas City, 2011); Koeppel, *Banana.*

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The story of a single fruit or vegetable has been a popular approach for food historians, often focused on a crisis related to its production or future. Such is the case with bananas. In the 1980s Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer's *Bitter Fruit* defined the crisis as banana cultivation's facilitation of American military intervention in Latin America, specifically the coup in Guatemala in 1954, when the Central Intelligence Agency carried out an undeclared war on the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán to allegedly defend the Western hemisphere against communism and continue the flow of profits from banana plantations. United Fruit Company's manipulation of national governments and its exploitation of labor in the interest of producing more bananas expanded the American and European colonial influence that Mintz had described.[11]

The story of bananas has been an effective way to illustrate the unique intersection of agriculture, business, environmental history, and diplomatic history to my students over the years. Popular writers, most notably Koeppel, have made the story accessible by combining the crisis of U.S. political intervention in Latin America with the new concern over the survival of the Cavendish, the single variety of banana now threatened by disease. To be sure, Koeppel is neither the first nor the only author to share this story, but he has been uniquely present on radio and in the pages of the *New York Times* to popularize the narrative. In my undergraduate classes, I find Koeppel's *Banana* a "gateway" book that opens students to more scholarly treatments. From this base camp, I am able to ascend to the loftier and more substantial scholarship of Soluri, whose *Banana Cultures* explores social and environmental change resulting from banana cultivation in Honduras. Soluri avoids the moralizing question "Do you eat bananas?"—the assumption being that anyone who does should be ashamed. Rather, he explores what it means to eat bananas, demonstrating the consequence of U.S. consumption of a monoculture and a single variety of fruit produced in a foreign land.[12]

Soluri takes at least a few of his cues from William Cronon's thinking on the relationship of food production to consumption. In *Changes in the Land* Cronon explores food cultivation under the colonial relationships of an earlier period and a different place but that was no less consequential to the future of indigenous cultures where the food was produced. Applying an ecological analysis to history, Cronon recognizes the environment as more than a neutral space where history takes place; rather, he sees it as an active agent in shaping human events that influence, and are influenced by, the course of social change. Similarly, Soluri demonstrates how the *force majeure* of the United Fruit Company produced enormous profits and also social conflict and environmental catastrophe that often came back to haunt the United States and the company's host nations. Both Soluri and Cronon recognize the dynamism of nature and culture often interacting over time to produce unintended consequences. For example, the United Fruit Company believed their manipulation of nature and society would lead to a stable business model. Instead, it precipitated political and social upheaval and a constant struggle against Panama disease, which claimed the Gros Michel—the first banana variety that dominated the industry—and is now threatening to destroy the Cavendish. In the context of economic history, the

[11] Stephen C. Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Garden City, 1982).

[12] Koeppel, *Banana;* Cohen, *Fish That Ate the Whale;* Peter Chapman, *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World* (New York, 2007). Dan Koeppel, "Yes, We Will Have No Bananas," *New York Times,* June 18, 2008, p. A21. Soluri, *Banana Cultures,* x.

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United Fruit Company no longer exists—a victim of its own conceit in controlling workers, foreign governments, and nature.[13]

Some pioneering American historians have transcended foodstuff studies to contribute to the evolution of food studies through immigration history. Hasia R. Diner, a contemporary of Mintz, began her career writing comparative histories of U.S. immigrant culture and Jewish communities. She applies a comparative approach to food in her groundbreaking *Hungering for America*. Diner acknowledges that the search for a reliable source of food played a central role in the motivations of early immigrants. She writes that "the history of each immigrant group entails a particular negotiation between the memories of past hunger and the realities of new foods available in greater quantities than previously encountered."[14]

Diner quickly transcends the familiar subject of hunger to see the inherent sensuality of food consumption. Food, like sex, inspires joy and perpetuates a people and a culture through its practices. Like Mintz, Diner reveals the relationship between country and city by studying how cuisines changed as formerly rural people became urbanites in the United States. Under these conditions, food became a source of national identity, experimentation, and a link to the worlds from which the immigrants came. The familiar experience of evolving from dearth to abundance frames her study, contributing to an explanation of why, despite European immigrant affinities for labor unions and revolutionary politics, few had a taste for social upheaval or socialism once they settled in the United States.[15]

Donna R. Gabaccia also expands beyond her interest in immigrant culture to a history of food and cuisine. *We Are What We Eat* challenges the notion of authenticity and immigrant loyalties to specific foodways by arguing that culinary boundary crossing has been a hallmark of an American way of life. Although Gabaccia recognizes that certain foods have become associated with specific immigrant groups, she demonstrates that American immigrants have been quick to adopt and adapt dishes, foods, and eating habits with origins that defy easy identification. Her writing is often whimsical and ironic; she chooses to avoid deep explorations of the roots of these foods and opts to celebrate the curious amalgamations and commercial creations that have emerged in the American diet. Her generalist approach is similar to that of Harvey Levenstein, who, in two books—*Revolution at the Table* and *Paradox of Plenty*—provides a useful overview of national food practices and dietary science from the 1880s to the end of the twentieth century. Although Levenstein aims to be more comprehensive than other scholars, covering everything from cuisine to food science to policy, both he and Gabaccia made the field of food studies comparative and sweeping in time and subject matter. Their introductions and macrolevel interventions allowed a new generation of food scholars to use food history as a foundation to address identity formation, the economy, and the construction of knowledge.[16]

[13] William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983); William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York, 1996). On the demise of the United Fruit Company, see Soluri, *Banana Cultures,* 173–92, 216–17; Colby, *Business of Empire;* Paul J. Dosal, *Doing Business with the Dictators: A Political History of United Fruit in Guatemala, 1899–1944* (Lanham, 1993); and Thomas P. McCann, *An American Company: The Tragedy of United Fruit* (New York, 1976).

[14] Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 10.

[15] *Ibid.*, 11. On the history of Mexican immigration and its influence on food culture in the United States and across the globe, see Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food* (New York, 2012); and Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Que Vivan los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque, 1998).

[16] Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998). Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (New York, 1988); Har-

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Historians of slavery were among the earliest adopters of food as a lens through which to understand the motivations and consequences of a specific institution. Slavery laid the foundation for early American society and undergirded the wealth of many Americans, especially southern planters. This fact has not escaped the finest American historians, though some have chosen to foreground food production. Daniel C. Littlefield's *Rice and Slaves* is a pathbreaking book in affinity with Mintz's work on sugar. Like Peter H. Wood before him, Littlefield explores the relationship of slavery to the development of rice cultivation in South Carolina. Both Wood and Littlefield appreciate the significance of slave labor in the making of this important crop, but Littlefield frames his study explicitly around slaves' relationship to food. His observation that white owners built their business and southern society through the exploitation of black bodies anticipates Joyce E. Chaplin's *An Anxious Pursuit*. Chaplin, like Littlefield, sees slave labor as necessary for technological innovation in southern food production during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Similarly, Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan expand this observation to other food crops in *Cultivation and Culture*.[17]

Rice, arguably, has received the greatest amount of attention among foods cultivated under slavery, not just because of the intensity of labor associated with it but because of the questions surrounding its origins. Judith A. Carney's *Black Rice* goes further in arguing that slaves offered expertise rather than just labor. In addition to considering the African origins of seeds, *Oryza glaberrima* (commonly known as African rice), which may have been the foundation for crops in America, Carney compares the methods used in rice cultivation along the Niger and Gambia Rivers and the mangroves of Guinea Bissau with agriculture along the southern Atlantic coast in the tidewaters of South Carolina. As a geographer, Carney applies her knowledge of soil, rivers, and ecosystems to develop a truly comparative and transnational study spanning several centuries. The findings are convincing, as are her studies of women's milling, winnowing, and parboiling practices in Africa and among African American slaves. Carney's ultimate contribution is to see African American slaves, particularly women, as skilled and knowledgeable laborers who imparted these gifts to America, albeit while subjugated by slave masters.[18]

Considerations of food production and consumption have triggered a similar evolution in the study of immigrant and "guest" farm workers in the United States. Studies of the bracero program—the bilateral agreement between Mexico and the United States from 1942 to 1964 that brought temporary Mexican guest workers north of the border—began with an emphasis on the creation of the policy, diplomatic relations, and the influence the program had on labor organizing in the fields. Although scholars continue to foreground the consequences of the program on unionization, some have begun to recognize how the braceros' presence fundamentally changed how certain foods were produced. For example, in *They Saved the Crops* the geographer Don Mitchell offers powerful

vey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York, 1993). For an example of a temporal and geographic macrohistory of food, see Laudan, *Cuisine and Empire*.

[17] Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge, 1981). Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974). Joyce E. Chapin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation in the Lower South, 1730–1815* (Chapel Hill, 1993). Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville, 1993). For a comparison of works on slavery and rice, see Jean-Pierre L. Glaunec, "The Color(s) of Rice: Red, Gold, White and/or Black," April 2002, online posting, H-SOUTH (Network on the Study of the Culture and History of the Southern U.S.) discussion list, http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6127.

[18] Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001).

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These Mexican guest workers, or braceros, are working in the 1956 lettuce harvest in Pajaro Valley, California, using a short-handled hoe known as "El Cortito" ("the short one"). The hoe, which caused debilitating back pain, was the object of protest for farm worker advocates throughout the 1960s and 1970s until California Rural Legal Assistance successfully sued to have it banned from the fields. *Courtesy Leonard Nadel Photographs and Scrapbooks Collection, Smithsonian Institution.*

evidence of the rapid transformation of lettuce production after the introduction of braceros. He argues that braceros' ability to harvest and pack in the fields—rather than sending the picked lettuce to be packed by better-compensated shed workers—led to major changes in the lettuce industry during the 1950s. During that decade, braceros went from being 4 percent of the seasonal field labor to accounting for 75 percent of all activities, including planting, thinning, cutting, and packing. The expertise, efficiency, and desperation of braceros inspired growers to increase investment in technology and mechanization. Such changes allowed divestments from the more expensive packinghouses, undercutting powerful unions among shed workers and generating greater profits for growers.[19]

Cindy Hahamovitch observes similar transformations in the sugar industry before, during, and after the introduction of Caribbean guest workers in Florida. Admitting that her *No Man's Land* seems "much ado about a small number of workers concentrated primarily in one industry," Hahamovitch, nevertheless, makes a convincing argument why the story is important to U.S. history. The importation of Bahamian and then Jamaican workers during and after World War II tapped a source of labor with extensive agricultural experience abroad, given that both populations had to escape declining local industries and land monopolies at home to survive. Between 1911 and 1921, Jamaicans, in particular, had traveled and worked widely across the Americas, including on the Panama Canal and in a variety of food industries; thirty thousand Jamaicans came to the United States to pick fruit, and ten thousand cut sugar cane in Cuba each year. By the 1940s, when

[19] Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California* (Athens, Ga., 2012), 206.

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migration began to increase again after the Great Depression, Jamaicans and Bahamians served U.S. agriculture up and down the Atlantic Seaboard.[20]

The availability of Jamaican workers facilitated the expansion of what Hahamovitch calls "America's sugar kingdom" in Florida during the 1960s. At a moment when the United States could no longer influence sugar production in Cuba through "*cuota y flota*" (production quota and gunship diplomacy), the United States lifted sugar quotas at home that had suppressed domestic production as far back as the New Deal era. Between 1955 and 1973 the policy expanded Florida's acreage of sugar cane eightfold and gave Americans continued access to sugar throughout the darkest days of the Cold War. It also produced fabulous wealth for individual investors who owned Florida sugar plantations. Such comfort, wealth, and security came as a consequence of the exploitation of Jamaican men in their prime, who left behind families and the obligations of educating and protecting their health. When the men were too old or too sick to work, their temporary status made them easily deportable, and, consequently, they became the responsibility of Jamaica and the handful of other countries from which they came. As Hahamovitch argues, "the United States took the fittest, letting other nations worry about their survival."[21]

The story of guest workers demonstrates how policies designed to advance food production touch on multiple themes in U.S. history, including diplomacy, immigration, and labor. In the case of the "new" history of guest workers, most authors' insights on food production have been by-products of their studies. Even so, these ideas should be considered essential to the advancement of food studies. Mitchell and Hahamovitch—as well as the historians Deborah Cohen, Ana Elizabeth Rosas, and Mireya Loza—convey the extensive knowledge that guest workers brought to the fields. Such experience should cause us to question the artificial distinctions between "skilled" and "unskilled" that allow employers and nations to deny these workers a living wage.[22]

Recent books on the farm workers movement during the 1960s and 1970s have made a point of appreciating the skills of farm workers more explicitly. Frank Bardacke's *Trampling Out the Vintage* and Bruce Neuburger's *Lettuce Wars* provide moving descriptions of their own labor in the fields and a real appreciation of the unique talents of *lechugeros* (lettuce workers) in Salinas, California. Bardacke and Neuberger reveal the tremendous talent these workers possess and its importance to the production of the food we eat.[23]

The history of the farm workers movement has drawn significant attention given the inevitable commemorations that attended its fiftieth anniversary in 2012. In my *From the Jaws of Victory* I have made more explicit the line of food and social justice activism that runs through the movement, highlighting what Cesar Chavez had in common with Upton Sinclair and more recent foodies such as Pollan. We should not forget that farm worker advocates achieved many of their goals through a boycott of grapes, even as we acknowledge the many new stories of heroism in the fields, conflicts among organizers,

[20] Cindy Hahamovitch, *No Man's Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor* (Princeton, 2011), 6.

[21] *Ibid.*, 137, 138, 9.

[22] Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill, 2011); Ana Elizabeth Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Berkeley, 2014); Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill, 2016).

[23] Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (London, 2011); Bruce Neuburger, *Lettuce Wars: Ten Years of Work and Struggle in the Fields of California* (New York, 2013). For similar observations about women who packed food, see Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930–1950* (Albuquerque, 1987).

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and resistance from those demanding more democracy in the movement. Indeed, I originally planned to focus on the union's relationship to the California grape industry before oral histories with veterans and the discovery of new evidence, including audiotapes of Chavez talking about his intentions for the union, led me to a broader interpretation of the movement. Amid the new, provocative revelations about Chavez, it behooves us to recognize how the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) forged a relationship between food producers and consumers to create one of the most successful social movements of the twentieth century. This achievement is made more meaningful by the fact that most producers (that is, farm workers) came from different racial and class backgrounds than the people who chose to stop buying grapes on their behalf. Although not without its complications, food—specifically grapes and, to a lesser extent, lettuce—became a conduit through which social justice could be realized.[24]

Warren J. Belasco's *Appetite for Change* recognizes our food practices as a source for social reform. His book, now in its second edition, reminds us that, as with the farm workers movement, considerations of how and when we eat were at the heart of the counterculture in the 1960s and 1970s. Numerous groups, from "the Diggers" of Haight-Ashbury to the rural communes that sprung up around the nation promoted the idea that food could function as a medium for change at sites of production, consumption, or distribution. The takeover of public parks for food cultivation (such as People's Park in Berkeley, California); the promotion of slow, communal eating for conversation and community building; and the creation of food cooperatives to cut out middlemen and corporate grocers are examples of the food practices born of the counterculture that have been incorporated into the new food movement.[25]

In the last decade, scholars studying food justice have focused on the unintended consequences of the alternative food movement—namely, that it has perpetuated racial and class exclusivity as farmers' markets and organic grocers supply food to a mostly white, upper-middle-class, urban population. Although no definitive study of unequal access to healthy food has emerged, a number of community activists and food scholars in the social sciences have begun to review the most effective and egalitarian approaches to producing and distributing unprocessed foods in America. Mark Winne's *Closing the Food Gap* and Alison Hope and Julian Agyeman's *Cultivating Food Justice* stand out for their attention to the problems that communities of color and poor families have faced in procuring healthy food. Winne, in particular, draws on his forty years of fighting hunger in Hartford, Connecticut, to review the most effective approaches to addressing food insecurity in American cities. As Winne demonstrates, solutions such as food banks often lead to the distribution of unhealthy, processed foods in poor communities of color while eliminating unwanted and expired foods from grocery shelves and giving middle-class do-gooders the false sense that they are solving the problem of hunger. Similarly, Janet Poppendieck's *Sweet Charity?* argues that volunteerism and private charities have exacerbated the problem of government neglect by replacing more effective antipoverty and antihunger programs. Both

[24] There is some debate about whether the origins of the farm workers movement lie in 1962 or 1965. Matthew Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley, 2012). For an extension of the lessons on food and social justice to Chile, see Heidi Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime: Grapes and Consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States* (Durham, N.C., 2014).

[25] Warren J. Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took On the Food Industry* (New York, 1989), 17–22. Warren J. Belasco gathers and presents the ideas of 1970s activist-scholars who were critical of the treatment of animals in our food system. Frances Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York, 1971); Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York, 1975).

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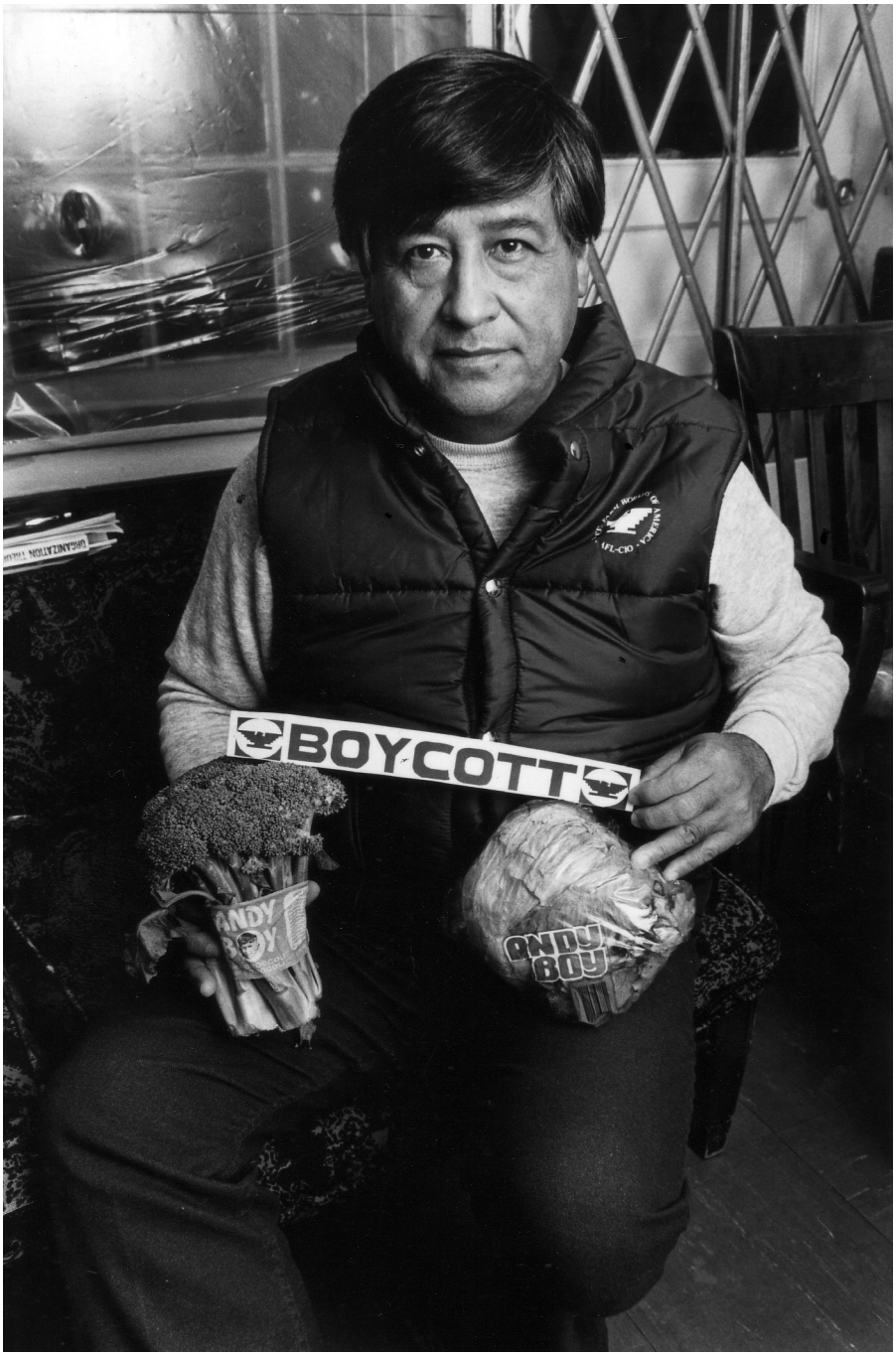

United Farm Workers of America (UFW) president Cesar Chavez is shown here in the 1980s encouraging consumers to boycott Andy Boy brand lettuce and broccoli grown by D'Arrigo Bros. Company. From 1965 to 1970 the UFW used the boycott against California and Arizona grape growers to win historic labor contracts. The perishability of fruits and vegetables forced growers, who wanted to avoid having their investments rot on docks or supermarket shelves, to negotiate. *Courtesy Archive of Urban and Labor Affairs, United Farm Workers Collection, Wayne State University.*

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Winne and Poppendieck underscore how the wrong action, no matter how well intended, can perpetuate society's privileging of white, urban bodies.[26]

Historians have been more attentive to the potential for organizing immigrants and creating labor unions among contemporary food workers, particularly Latin American immigrants in the poultry industry. Leon Fink's *The Maya of Morganton* provides a model for integrating studies of labor, immigration, and food in the transformation of the American South. The relevance of food is perhaps not immediately apparent but is an anchor, nonetheless. By focusing on the poultry industry and its role in the economic development of the South during the late twentieth century, Fink reveals one major factor that attracted mostly Mayan workers to the region. This immigration transformed the demographics of North Carolina, complicating its already-complex racial dynamics. The book reveals challenges to deep-seated white superiority but also questions whether African Americans and mostly indigenous people from Central America can form a union across racial lines. In the end, Fink shows that the common experience of working at a poultry farm was enough to overcome obstacles in organizing, including those generated by past human rights atrocities in immigrants' countries of origin and the challenges created by U.S. immigration legislation (including the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act). Rather than regard the Maya as the foundation of a new "apartheidlike lower caste," Fink sees them as the embodiment of modern radicalism that has reintroduced the tradition of unions to the "Nuevo New South."[27]

As with the study of rice, the study of chicken production has precipitated debate and new approaches. Kathleen C. Schwartzman, for example, foregrounds the poultry industry in her study of corporations and migrant workers in *The Chicken Trail*. Schwartzman, a sociologist, takes a slightly different approach than Fink by examining the movement of the industry and the workers across borders. In many ways, this is a reversal of the flow covered by Jefferson Cowie in his magnificent *Capital Moves,* in which the Radio Corporation of America built, dismantled, and moved television plants in New Jersey, Indiana, Tennessee, and eventually Juarez, Mexico. Schwartzman's study is not focused on one particular company but rather on the production of a single commodity, chicken, on either side of the border. Her focus on job recruiters operating under the new rules of engagement in the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) reinforced the narrative of a U.S. "job shortage" while deepening the problem of black unemployment. Whereas Fink sees in Latin American immigration optimism for a new labor movement, Schwartzman sees the ruination of the Mexican poultry industry, the evacuation of Mexican (Sonoran) towns, and the increased displacement of African Americans from the southern economy. Both studies are valuable. Fink's close study of Case Farms is community microhistory at its best, while Schwartzman's transnational study provides a much-needed macroanalysis in the wake of NAFTA.[28]

Psyche A. Williams-Forson's *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs* offers yet another approach to chicken that honors the relationship between African Americans and the domestic fowl. A model of interdisciplinary research in the field of American studies, the

[26] Winne, *Closing the Food Gap;* Alkon and Agyeman, eds., *Cultivating Food Justice;* Poppendieck, *Sweet Charity?*

[27] Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill, 2003), 181–85, esp. 181, 185. Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act, 110 Stat. 3009-546 (1996).

[28] Kathleen C. Schwartzman, *The Chicken Trail: Following Workers, Migrants, and Corporations across the Americas* (Ithaca, 2013). Jefferson R. Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, 1999). "North American Free Trade Agreement," *NAFTA Secretariat,* https://www.nafta-sec-alena.org/Home/Legal-Texts/North-American-Free-Trade-Agreement?mvid=2

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book draws on a wide range of sources to explain how black women shaped their lives and their community through food preparation. Williams-Forson reminds us that chicken has been at the heart of perceptions of African American criminality and inferiority in the United States: from allegations of chicken theft from white southern yards to the promotion of southern food, particularly fried chicken, through the use of demeaning black caricatures on restaurant facades and menus. Williams-Forson moves beyond these depictions to understand the place of chicken in African American lives through oral history narratives and cookbooks. She finds in these sources a rich vein of black feminist expression that counteracts mainstream "ethnic notions" of African American culture. The kitchen, in other words, is a place of black female empowerment, where female cooks signify dignity, creativity, and community against the forces of class separation and racial and gender discrimination. Attention to these subjects is rare within food studies literature, which makes Williams-Forson's book all the more valuable.[29]

White women's evolving role in food preparation and food culture has been a common theme for historians. Laura Shapiro's pioneering work *Perfection Salad* reveals the origins of the domestic reform movement from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. This "progressive" program focused on food preparation in creating opportunities for white, middle-class women living in the Northeast to participate in a national dialogue about the improvement of the nation. It also reinforced strict boundaries on how and where they could make a difference—notably in the kitchen. Through this role, female scientists produced recipes and theories of food meant to corral and uplift Americans' appetites, including sexual ones. The book compliments and anticipates the work of the activist-writer Carol J. Adams, who argues in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* that our culture of meat eating contributes to violence against women. Written and published at a time when feminism and gender studies were establishing a permanent place in the American academy and in society, both books also demonstrate another moment of synergy between academics and nonacademic writers.[30]

Since then, scholars have explored new roles for women in food culture. In *Fruits of Victory* Elaine F. Weiss complicates the role of women during the early twentieth century by showing how they also contributed to the production of food as "farmerettes" in the fields. Tracey Deutsch expands the study of women as preparers of meals by examining their procurement practices at midcentury in *Building a Housewife's Paradise.* Deutsch's book is an excellent example of how a gendered interpretation of an institution essential to modern American food culture—the supermarket—transformed women's history and business history. Her acknowledgement of housewives as not just preparers of food but also as shoppers demonstrates that women played key economic and public roles in twentieth-century America. This should not be a surprise to readers of Anzia Yezierska's

[29] Psyche A. Williams-Forson, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (Chapel Hill, 2006). On unique culinary amalgamations and practices among Mexican immigrant women, see Meredith E. Abarca, *Voices in the Kitchen: Views of Food and the World from Working-Class Mexican and Mexican American Women* (College Station, 2006). On female culinary writers, particularly lesbian cookbook authors, who have shaped American foodways, see, Katharina Vester, *A Taste of Power: Food and American Identities* (Berkeley, 2015). For studies of Asian American culture framed around food, see Robert Ji-Song Ku, Martin F. Manalansan IV, and Anita Mannur, eds., *Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader* (New York, 2013); and Valerie Matsumoto and Anita Mannur, eds., "Asian Americans on Meat vs. Rice," *Amerasia Journal,* 32 (no. 2, 2006), 1–19.

[30] Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (New York, 1986). Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (London, 1990). For a similar history of American meat consumption but with less attention to gender, see Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Baltimore, 2006).

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classic novel *Bread Givers,* in which mothers and daughters of Eastern European Jewish immigrant communities served their families by acquiring and preparing meals in the tenements of New York City's Lower East Side. By the mid-twentieth century the role of women as food procurers transformed the business of selling food. Deutsch shows that the creation of supermarkets was not simply a corporate effort to centralize consumption but was a response to female consumer preferences. Her study of local buying culture, especially in Chicago, complicates the march toward a national chain-store culture between 1910 and 1960. To be successful, owners of supermarkets had to respect the local practices and buying habits of women.[31]

The period after the 1960s produced equal, if not increased, disruption in production due to the changing nature of farming. Both popular and scholarly food writers have spent much of their time trying to explain the changing economic conditions and agricultural policy that shaped the relationship between urban and rural spaces in the United States. Pollan's description of food policy under Richard M. Nixon—particularly influenced by Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz—reveals just how important policy changes can be to the financial health of small farmers and the diets of most Americans. Under Butz's direction in 1973 Congress removed the agricultural price supports dating back to the New Deal; the support program, in part, had paid farmers to stop producing surplus food. Butz instead encouraged farmers to produce with reckless abandon and sell at any price since the federal government would now make up the difference between the real cost of a crop and its sale price. These subsidies have become the subject of criticism in such popular films as *King Corn* and *Food, Inc.,* and they explain why corn production, in particular, has skyrocketed since the 1970s.[32]

Nixon also advocated for a significant expansion of farm exports—and therefore more food production—by reducing trade barriers to selling U.S. agriculture abroad. He heeded another adviser, Peter Flanigan, who recommended "the fullest possible liberalization of policies with regard to agricultural trade." Nixon implemented this suggestion in his 1973 New Economic Policy, in which the federal government exempted unprocessed agricultural commodities from price regulations. The policy achieved his desired results: the trade surplus on agricultural goods grew from $1.56 billion in 1972 to $10.53 billion in 1974. The twin policies of removing New Deal programs to manage surpluses and liberalizing trade to sell new surpluses on the world market fundamentally reshaped the way we produce food in this country.[33]

Scholars have placed these policies in historical context, making connections to previous agricultural regimes and illustrating change over time since the 1970s. Deborah Fitzgerald's *Every Farm a Factory* begins by acknowledging the deleterious effects these policies had on rural Americans in the 1980s, forcing many farmers, in Butz's words, to "get big or get out." The policy encouraged family farmers to take out large loans that they

[31] Elaine F. Weiss, *Fruits of Victory: The Woman's Land Army of America in the Great War* (Dulles, 2008), 37. Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 2010). Tracey Deutsch's focus on female consumers demonstrates the value of examining gender-specific experiences lacking in other works such as Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*. Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers* (New York, 1925). On women and food preparation, see Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York, 1983). On Thai Americans' difficulties in procuring ingredients in Los Angeles, see Padoongpatt, "'Chasing the Yum.'"

[32] Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma,* 52. *King Corn,* dir. Aaron Woolf (Mosaic Films, 2007); *Food, Inc.,* dir. Robert Kenner (Magnolia Pictures, 2008).

[33] Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory,* 132.

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could not pay, leading to large debts, foreclosures, or even suicide. Fitzgerald sees in this recent history tragic echoes of the 1920s, when an industrial logic drove farmers to pursue an illusive ideal agriculture that was unsustainable. She focuses on wheat farming in Montana between 1918 and 1930 to understand how blind faith in science and technology can lead to ruin of the environment and of the people who feed the nation.[34]

Every Farm a Factory fits neatly into a longer tradition of interrogating the relationship between mechanization and food production, from Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* to Leo Marx's *Machine in the Garden* to Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis*. Fitzgerald has the greatest affinity with Cronon, whose book reveals how the commodification of crops has contributed to a disconnection between our food and its origins in the rural world. There is an ironic tension in all of these books that strikes at the heart of who we think we are as a nation, and the agrarian "origin stories" we hold dear as Americans (for example, Thomas Jefferson's statement about the virtues of early American farmers: "those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God"). The constant impulse to maximize profits in the fields and the belief that we can perfect our production of food has sometimes led to dire consequences for the people we often regard as the salt of the earth—family farmers. And, as Cronon demonstrates, what happens in rural areas fundamentally shapes the morphology and economies of our cities in ways that society too easily ignores or forgets.[35]

The end of agricultural supply management has been most thoroughly documented by Bill Winders in *The Politics of Food Supply.* As a sociologist he explains the principles of supply management established by the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA)—namely, the attempt to stabilize prices by managing farmers' productivity and avoiding either surpluses or overproduction of important crops. His analysis reveals how this system gave way to a laissez-faire approach throughout the last three decades of the twentieth century, beginning in 1973 with wheat and eventually extending to most agricultural products through the establishment of the World Trade Organization in 1995 and the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act in 1996. The consequences of the end of regulation are best witnessed in the increased price volatility of wheat and corn, two crops with traditionally comparable prices and that serve as bellwethers for U.S. agriculture. From 1949 until 1970 the difference between the two was 7 percent, and prices rarely dropped more than 20 percent. After 1973 the annual price difference was about 19 percent, leading to dire consequences for small producers and poor consumers. In his updated paperback edition Winders cites the rise of food prices and world hunger in 2007 and 2008 as consequences of these policy changes since a good portion of America's agricultural bounty is now traded worldwide. The popular writer and University of California policy analyst Raj Patel makes the same observations in his thought-provoking *Stuffed and Starved*.[36]

[34] Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven, 2003), 1, 3. For the quotation get big or get out, see Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma,* 52.

[35] Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford, 1964); William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991). Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London, 1787), 99, quoted in Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900–1970* (Chapel Hill, 2001), 20. For a challenge to assumptions about the evils of technology and the virtues of premodern food production, see Rachel Laudan, "A Plea for Culinary Modernism: Why We Should Love New, Fast, Processed Food," *Gastronomica,* 1 (Winter 2001), 36–44.

[36] Bill Winders, *The Politics of Food Supply: U.S. Agricultural Policy in the World Economy* (New Haven, 2009), xiii, xvi. Agricultural Adjustment Act, 48 Stat. 31 (1933); Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act, 110 Stat. 888 (1996). Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System* (New York, 2007).

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Both Patel and Winders indicate that deregulation has been driven by American officials' desire to increase the U.S. share of profits on particular items such as corn, wheat, soybeans, and milk on the world market. Such an approach privileges the making of commodity policy rather than food policy or rural policy. Pollan, for example, in 2008 famously called President Barack Obama the "farmer in chief" and challenged him to think of the Farm Bill as "food policy" rather than agriculture or commodity management. Pollan's recommendation privileges the dietary and environmental consequences of food production over the effects on domestic farm labor or hunger abroad, though his larger point is shared by Winders, Patel, and Cronon, among others. In short, the failure to see production in the fields as something other than food led to greater concentration of farm land in the hands of fewer people, the impulse to incorporate subsidized "foods" such as corn syrup into a greater proportion of the American diet, and increases in food prices for poor people everywhere.[37]

Winders's history also shows how food policy can lead to unintended social consequences. The AAA required owners of southern land to share profits with former slaves who had been sharecropping in the cotton industry since the end of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Rather than honor their commitment, white landlords dismissed tenants and invested in soybeans, feed grains, and livestock, allowing them to retain a majority share of the profit produced on their property. Winders argues that this maneuver triggered the Great Migration of blacks and poor whites to the North, laying the foundations for the emergence of the civil rights movement at midcentury. Although Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initially strengthened the historic supremacy of white southern planters, in the long run investments in food production contributed to the second Reconstruction and the end of Jim Crow.[38]

The emphasis on policy and the transnational turn in agricultural trade since the 1970s has inspired scholarship that also crosses borders. The passage of NAFTA in 1994 contributed to the trends described by Winders and increased the flow of food traffic across the U.S.-Canada and U.S.-Mexico borders. Roberto R. Alvarez Jr.'s *Mangos, Chiles, and Truckers* complements the macroapproaches that dominate food policy studies. Exploring "transnationalism from below," the anthropologist Alvarez spends time with the many people who have evaluated, grown, transported, and sold the food that has crossed the U.S.-Mexico border since the passage of NAFTA. In a broad sense, Alvarez confirms the findings of Winders and others that a policy designed to facilitate "free" trade among equals has instead contributed to greater dominance by U.S. producers over domestic markets abroad. This is best illustrated by U.S. influence exerted over Mexican agriculture. Alvarez uncovers an elaborate inspection process overseen by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that subjects this food to screenings and treatments that reduce diversity among varieties of mangos and other produce, and that increases U.S. officials' presence in Mexico. "Free" trade, Alvarez argues, has increased U.S. officials' presence in Mexico and more scrutiny and investment from north of the border.[39]

[37] Michael Pollan, "Farmer in Chief," *New York Times Magazine,* Oct. 9, 2008, p. MM62. On U.S. foreign policy addressing hunger abroad, see Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010); and Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (New York, 2012).

[38] Winders, *Politics of Food Supply,* x, 105–7. Agricultural Adjustment Act, 48 Stat. 31 (1933).

[39] "North American Free Trade Agreement"; Alvarez, *Mangos, Chiles, and Truckers,* x, 10–12.

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NAFTA has also produced unintended consequences. The subversion of national, local, and rural economies in Mexico—begun prior to NAFTA by U.S. and global policies and then extended by the agreement—has contributed to greater mobility among Mexican people, including their movement across the U.S.-Mexico border. Alvarez focuses much of his attention on Los Angeles, where the Latino population increased 57.3 percent during the 1970s. Since the passage of NAFTA, of the 9.5 million individuals in Los Angeles County at the time of the 2000 U.S. Census, 4.2 million were Hispanic, 71 percent of them Mexican. Although this immigration produced nativist responses manifested as California initiatives (or propositions) that restricted immigrant access to public services and outlawed bilingual education, few appreciated the economic benefits of this population increase. By spending time in the produce markets in downtown Los Angeles, Alvarez witnessed significant growth in the entrepreneurial activities of Mexicans (*fruteros,* or fruit traders) and the dramatic expansion of markets for Mexican commodities. For example, half of all mangos exported from Mexico are consumed in Los Angeles. Given that only one-third of Euro-Americans have ever purchased the fruit, this market has appeared largely as a consequence of non-European immigrants who routinely consume the tropical fruit in their cuisines.[40]

The story of mangos reveals a complex web of consequences that cannot easily be categorized as either "positive" or "negative." Mexico has endured more intrusions from the USDA as a consequence of the nation's increased sales in the United States—amounting to 10 percent of the total number of mangos produced by Mexico. Conversely, the increase has been significant over the last three decades, at an incredible rate of 4,500 percent. The emergence of these consumers has dramatically enhanced the clout of immigrant entrepreneurs in the wholesale markets of downtown Los Angeles. Mexican Americans, in particular, understand the needs of the new immigrant population and have worked in the markets for decades. These experiences mirror those of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European middlemen (discussed by Diner), who capitalized on the increase in Italian, Irish, and Jewish consumers in Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia. Similarly, the long-haul Mexican truckers (*troqueros*), moving produce from the interior of Mexico and eventually across the border, have used family and fictive kin networks to mitigate and manage competition. Alvarez argues that the most successful *troqueros* have been indigenous Mexicans who have a level of *confianza* (trust) among them unmatched by mestizo transporters.[41]

This short, somewhat-fragmented, but powerful book manifests some of the best trends in food studies, covering the most popular subjects in the field: production, consumption, and distribution. Alvarez's attention to the people moving and selling food places the larger policy history in context and complicates our notions of winners and losers.

Similarly, E. Melanie DuPuis's magnificent book *Nature's Perfect Food* troubles the standard narratives we find in studies of foodstuff—namely, that the food in question is "good" or "bad" for us, or its production does or does not contribute to the health of Americans or the local economies. Instead, she interrogates the notion that milk is "perfect" and questions how and why such a perfection story exists in our culture. As DuPuis

[40] Alvarez, *Mangos, Chiles, and Truckers,* 79, 5.

[41] On Italian *padrones,* Irish purveyors, and Jewish merchants, see Diner, *Hungering for America,* 74–77, 133–34, 197–99, 206–7. Alvarez, *Mangos, Chiles, and Truckers,* 7, 44.

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tells it, "milk is more than a food, it is an embodiment of the politics of American identity over the last 150 years."[42]

The transformation of fluid milk in America from a byproduct of urban breweries and a threat to infant health in the nineteenth century to a product of enlightenment by the early twentieth century demonstrates what DuPuis identifies as the allure of the "progress story." The application of science and the improvement of milk production was a "march to perfection" that has culminated in the popular ad campaigns asking, "Got Milk?"—as if to say that you must drink it to be healthy and American. Conversely, today, many health-conscious Americans (whom DuPuis calls "reflexive consumers") have embraced the opposite, "downfall story:" the notion that hormones in modern milk and the parameters of its industrial production have compromised a once-healthy food.[43]

DuPuis, a sociologist, avoids giving simple answers to these questions. Rather, her interest is in showing how both positions derive from our desire to simplify the story despite mixed or inconclusive evidence to support either claim. As such, DuPuis avoids answering the usual question of whether milk is good or bad for us, although she does acknowledge that most answers to that question are racially constructed. That most people of color are genetically lactose intolerant while northern Europeans can consume lactose without incident signifies the racial bias of the perfection narrative. DuPuis's observation of the "whiteness" of milk—not simply its color but the phenotype of its most popular consumers—is evidence of her mission: to show how our notion of healthy food is a consequence of many factors, not simply its effect on our bodies.[44]

DuPuis's refusal to offer advice about milk is perhaps the most refreshing (and entertaining) aspect of her book. In a memorable moment, she explains how both advocates and opponents of milk construct a "community of practice," with a message that is ultimately objectionable to most Americans. Whether it is the Advertising Council suggesting that "milk does the body good" or vegans protesting against the rBGH hormone and cow confinement, DuPuis observes, "the vast majority of people find both government officials and politically correct people annoying." These observations notwithstanding, DuPuis concludes, "the problem with milk is not that it is bad for you, but that it has a whole institutional apparatus that has made it *the* celebrated food, when many other foods and many ways of eating are just as deserving." The value of her study is not simply the knowledge we gain about a food item consumed by the vast majority of Americans but also the way we, as a nation, have produced narratives to rationalize what we do and do not put into our bodies.[45]

An effort to understand the origins of food advice and nutrition has been a major component of food history in recent years. Like DuPuis, these scholars buck the inclination of some popular food writers to prescribe diets or make food rules. Informed by poststructuralism, these scholars have questioned our notion of what is healthy by examining the constructed and contingent nature of our knowledge. Such an approach follows scholarly

[42] E. Melanie DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* (New York, 2002), 8. For another valuable treatment of milk, see Kendra Smith-Howard, *Pure and Modern Milk: An Environmental History since 1900* (New York, 2014).

[43] DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food,* 12, 228.

[44] *Ibid.*, 11.

[45] *Ibid.*, 217. Emphasis in original. On the maintenance of bodily boundaries, see E. Melanie DuPuis, *Dangerous Digestion: The Politics of American Dietary Advice* (Berkeley, 2015). For a history of the orange as a venue for discussing the pursuit of perfection in plant science and the marketing of citrus fruits, see Doug Cazaux Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkeley, 2005).

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inquiries into the social construction of race, which holds that racial difference is largely a product of past practices and historical conceptions of difference. Similarly, historians of food see our diets as a product of cultural and political thinking as much a result of proven science.[46]

Charlotte Biltekoff's *Eating Right in America* is perhaps the best example of this approach. Compelled by her encounter with the stories of perfection she heard as a chef in a famous vegetarian restaurant in San Francisco, she began questioning the long history of dietary reform in this country. Now a professor of American studies and food science and technology, Biltekoff has turned her attention to understanding nutrition and dietary health as a cultural construct and a "product of history." Her study traces the rise of modern dietary reform in the United States, from the beginnings of "scientific cookery" at the end of the nineteenth century to today's antiobesity campaigns. She demonstrates that the science of nutrition became the dominant means of determining healthy food in the United States, despite obvious class biases and citizenship requirements in reformers' recommendations. Such approaches to food advice reached a fever pitch during the Progressive Era, when early twentieth-century science converged with policy to create the Food and Nutrition Board and the Committee on Food Habits. In spite of the subjective nature of their advice, the prescriptions they offered for good eating became more authoritative and objective over the course of the twentieth century. Like DuPuis, Biltekoff uses food studies to reveal how we construct and promote knowledge in this country.[47]

Helen Zoe Veit's *Modern Food, Moral Food* focuses similar attention on diet during the Progressive Era. She has an affinity with Biltekoff in her appreciation of the historical underpinnings of today's obsessions with antiobesity, showing how "the idealization of thinness" was a concept born of progressive reformers hell-bent on promoting the "moral value of asceticism." Veit argues that reformers attempted to rationalize American diets by removing pleasure and tradition from their evaluation of what is healthy. Although not quite as explicit as Biltekoff about the constructed nature of this advice, Veit, nevertheless, provides useful examples of how government officials initiated a battle that was ultimately doomed by reformers' overconfidence in their ability to control fundamental instincts and desires.[48]

Viet provides interesting explorations of home economics within American education. Her focus on women and the institutionalization of school programs surrounding diet complements Susan Levine's *School Lunch Politics,* which explores the formation of the National School Lunch Program in 1946. Levine's history of this government program provides a throughway from the nutrition science explored by Biltekoff and Veit to its transformation into antipoverty programs in the 1970s. In these three books we see how the nation's preoccupation with nutrition shifted from a focus on middle-class consumers to the poor and people of color by the second half of the twentieth century.[49]

[46] Pollan, *Food Rules.*

[47] On the concept of "perfection" in food stories, see DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food,* 12–13. Charlotte Biltekoff, *Eating Right in America: The Cultural Politics of Food and Health* (Durham, N.C., 2013), 7, 23.

[48] Helen Zoe Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 2013), 8.

[49] Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton, 2008). For an examination of the economic transition of nutrition at a greater distance from the subject, see Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*.

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As Veit, Biltekoff, Levenstein, and Levine demonstrate, many reformers and government officials articulated concerns about American body size and obesity as time progressed. Obesity studies—or "fat studies" as it is commonly referred to today—brings together many of the considerations that are now animating food studies. Julie Guthman's *Weighing In* may provide the best model for mobilizing history to deepen our knowledge of the current crisis.[50]

Guthman, a geographer by training, explains how obesogens—dietary, pharmaceutical, and industrial compounds that may alter metabolic processes and predispose some people to gain weight—entered our food system, revealing how companies and people in powerful positions shaped the policies and definitions of the problem over several decades. She challenges Pollan's idea that subsidies for certain crops, such as corn, potatoes, and wheat—ingredients prevalent in junk food—have made processed food more affordable than fresh fruits and vegetables. Guthman's study of economics and the history of farming shows that, in part, the higher cost of labor associated with producing fruits and vegetables is a better explanation for the overproduction of machine-harvested crops such as corn, wheat, potatoes, and soy than the presence of subsidies.[51]

Guthman also points to a missing element in the argument about the overproduction of junk-food ingredients—the growing promotion of farming "inputs" such as seeds, machines, and chemicals in U.S. farms over the last century. She demonstrates that business beyond the fields has had the greatest influence on farmers' choices. This is the lesson, in part, of Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis:* how rural producers became beholden to the granaries that bought their product and sold it to processors en masse as food in cities across the nation. The commodification and storage of food enabled granaries to dictate prices and drove many farmers to expand production through the use of labor-saving steam-powered machinery.[52]

Guthman shows that the trend to increase production of less labor-intensive foods has culminated in the more recent technologies designed "to speed up and enhance biological processes and minimize loss." Farmers have become more inclined to embrace chemical inducements and genetically modified organisms in their crops, especially with the changes in food-supply policy and trade liberalization since the 1970s discussed by Winders and others. On the purchasing end of the farm process, weakened antitrust regulation over this same period has led to the formation of larger food corporations that now have the power to dictate the prices and production of raw foods. For example, the pressure that Tyson Foods places on livestock growers to lower beef prices has resulted in more feedlot husbandry, and with it a host of hormones and antibiotics to keep cattle healthy and growing faster than nature would permit. Additionally, retailers who buy the beef—big-box chain stores such as Wal-Mart—make their purchases in bulk and, therefore, demand "volume pricing" that further squeezes the profit margin for farmers (and even more, the wages of farm workers).[53]

[50] Julie Guthman, *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism* (Berkeley, 2011). For attention to these issues in a religious context, see Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America* (Chicago, 2011).

[51] Guthman, *Weighing In,* 122, 134–37. Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma,* 90–99.

[52] Guthman, *Weighing In,* 123. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis,* 120.

[53] Guthman, *Weighing In,* 125, 126–27. Winders, *Politics of Food Supply,* 132–35. On how bulk purchases also influence food distribution via trucks across America, see Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton, 2008).

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Although Guthman covers some of the same history as Pollan, her interpretations of the problem and solutions are different. She takes issue with his assertion that "When food is abundant and cheap, people will eat more of it and get fat." Such an approach, Guthman argues, places a disproportionate amount of emphasis on educating the individual consumer over enacting policies that would curb the presence of obesogens in the production process. Emphasis on individual choice also draws attention away from actions that might mitigate the consequences for those harmed by our "fatty" diet. Guthman argues that we need to see the rise in obesity as a "complex and interactive" public health challenge that requires attention to issues beyond education about calorie intake and more toward policy reform that prevents the production of bad food in the first place. As her book demonstrates, only a deep understanding of how our policies and farming practices came to be can lead us to effective health solutions for tomorrow.[54]

As I noted, the scholarship I have covered in this essay is far from exhaustive. Rather, I point to approaches and interpretations that show the promise of continued growth for the field. By its nature, food studies is interdisciplinary, which gives it strength but also opens it to marginalization and trend shifts. While food appears to have a center of gravity at the moment, on an institutional level, it is entirely possible for it to be absorbed into related concentrations and competing academic programs given its relationship to other prescient topics such as the environment, health, and trade. Conversely, rigid claims by one discipline to own and define "the history of food" or even what constitutes "food," threatens to stifle the vitality of the field. For me, the best way for food historians to maintain their critical edge is to practice and encourage the "creative trespassing" into disciplines I have explored in this article. Such an approach promises to keep historians at the center of discussions on how to feed a growing world population and to facilitate the intellectual cross-fertilization needed to solve the "wicked problems" our food practices and habits of modern living have engendered.[55]

For now, the trend in dining out and buying organic, locally sourced food—particularly among white, educated, urban professionals—has been a boon for popular writers who have channeled these interests into a wider consciousness about farms, the body, and the planet. Some of these writers, however, have shown an inclination to offer overly prescriptive solutions that often miss an opportunity to move beyond individual considerations of the problem. In this way, such works of popular interest have been a mixed blessing for those who want to tell a more complex history of our food.[56]

[54] Julie Guthman, "Can't Stomach It: How Michael Pollan et al. Made Me Want to Eat Cheetos," *Gastronomica,* 7 (Summer 2007), 75–79; Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma,* 102. Guthman, *Weighing In,* 6, 9.

[55] "Creative trespassing" is the third principle practiced by James C. Scott and Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan, the founders of the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University. On the program, see "Yale Program in Agrarian Studies at the Macmillan Center," *Yale University,* http://agrarianstudies.macmillan.yale.edu/about. On the consequences of climate change, including food production, as "wicked problems," see Matt Ferkany and Kyle Powys Whyte, "Environmental Education, Wicked Problems, and Virtue," in *Philosophy of Education,* ed. Robert Kunzman (Urbana, 2011), 331–39; and Valerie A. Brown, "Collective Inquiry and Its Wicked Problems," in *Tackling Wicked Problems: Through the Transdisciplinary Imagination,* ed. Valerie A. Brown, John A. Harris, and Jacqueline Y. Russell (London, 2010), 61–83.

[56] Pollan, *Food Rules;* Marion Nestle, *What to Eat* (New York, 2006); Anna Lappé and Bryant Terry, *Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen* (New York, 2006); Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* (Emmaus, 2006); Mollie Katzen and Walter Willett, *Eat, Drink, and Weigh Less: A Flexible and Delicious Way to Shrink Your Waist without Going Hungry* (New York, 2006); Jane Goodall, *Harvest for Hope: A Guide to Mindful Eating* (New York, 2005). For a critique of food advice books, see Guthman, "Commentary on Teaching Food."

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Avoiding overly simplistic interpretations and recognizing multiple causal points for our present condition will be the greatest challenge for food historians of the future. The scholarship I have highlighted demonstrates that we need to be wary of those who profess mastery of the complicated set of relationships that bring food to our tables. The best treatments of food explore the interactions among multiple actors and the influences of various policies and histories. These treatments, at their best, address the linked processes of production, consumption, and distribution. Ultimately, the role of the historian is to embrace these complex relationships to illuminate new ways of thinking about our food system.

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