Food fight! America's ideological battle over lunch

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FOOD FIGHT!

AMERICA'S IDEOLOGICAL BATTLE OVER LUNCH

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of American Studies
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by
Julie Lynn Lautenschlager
2003
APPROVAL SHEET

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the requirements for the degree of

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DEDICATION

To my parents: Rev. Luther and Mrs. Linda Lautenschlager

You were the ones who tied those baby high-tops and encouraged my first steps. Now, thirty years later, you are still my cheerleaders and safety net as I continue to take new and uncertain steps in life. From saddle shoes, to clogs, to ballet shoes, to Reeboks, you have always kept me in my “walking shoes”--both literally and figuratively.

When I was young, a family trip to Virginia ignited my imagination. In 1998, you had the courage to let me follow the path to my dream. It has certainly been a struggle, but with your faith in me, I have managed to stay on track. Your support, and often consolation, has kept me true to the course in spite of significant hurdles. Last year, when life led me from Mr. Jefferson’s Alma Mater to his Monticello, you were there to share that exciting transition with me.

When I thought that this dissertation would consume every word left in my brain, I saved five of the most important ones for you--Thank you. I love you.
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ABSTRACT

The character of the noon meal consumed in public work or educational spaces is the product of an interactive process that brings a whole constellation of varied interests into the act of fashioning, sustaining, and revising the meanings communicated through food and the environment in which it is consumed. This dissertation examines that process, its major players, and effects beginning in the late nineteenth through the early twenty-first centuries.

Understanding the significance of lunch for modern Americans involves sorting out intricate relationships among food, ideology, and power. The history of organized feeding programs in workplaces and schools reveals a complex tale of coordinated efforts toward the primary goal of altering an individual's eating habits. A secondary benefit of this process accrues when that individual spreads the influence of new ideas to others. Working both in concert and isolation, various interests including both individuals and organizations, have attempted to alter the eating habits of their subjects toward the goals of increased Americanization, socialization, or productivity. Their efforts have shaped the role of lunch in modern American food ideology. These various interests carved out overlapping territories in the contest to gain access, influence, and control over Americans' lunch habits—they “colonized” lunch.

Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century progressives drove the opening wedge, introducing debate about the relationship between nutrition and industrial or educational efficiency. Then, during World War II, experts in business and government transformed lunch from a matter of primarily private concern to one of military necessity. After the war, issues over employee lunch remained a contested terrain in many union-management conflicts. Also during the post-war era, the national defense character of the school lunch faded while educators, legislators, dieticians, and others who had become enamored with statistics, used the school lunch as a tool to “even up the starting line” in equal opportunity programs. Such experiments on young Americans had both positive and negative outcomes ranging from the institutionalization of the federal free- and reduced-price lunch program to the sometimes troublesome effects caused by the distribution of excess agricultural commodities among school cafeterias. Finally, while the twentieth century was one of significant changes in women's roles both inside and outside the home, ideals of motherhood proved to be less elastic and amenable to shifting work and family patterns. The packed lunch, as a public demonstration of maternal commitment, also became the material site of conflict and contestation as to the very nature of motherhood.

By opening up American's lunch pails, buckets, boxes, and bags, and peering into the cafeterias, lunch rooms, and kitchens where lunch is prepared, served, and consumed, this project demonstrates how an historical understanding of the noon meal may provide clues about who Americans have been, who they are, and who they are becoming. Ultimately, Americans' lunch habits are shaped by a combination of forces including environmental constraints and the conflict generated from the encounter among home, workplace, school, and marketplace. Despite this legacy from the battle over lunch, individuals retain the responsibility and accountability for the personal food choices they make.
FOOD FIGHT!: AMERICA'S IDEOLOGICAL BATTLE OVER LUNCH
Introduction

Packing Lunch: American Eating Ideology and the Noon Meal

It is time for breakfast in the Land of Ev, and Dorothy, the little American heroine of L. Frank Baum's *Ozma of Oz*, the 1907 sequel to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, is hungry. Even as a young girl, Dorothy understands that certain foods are to be consumed at certain times. Meals have a name, a schedule, and an acceptable bill of fare.

The little girl stood on tip-toe and picked one of the nicest and biggest lunch-boxes, and then she sat down on the ground and eagerly opened it. Inside she found, nicely wrapped in white papers, a ham sandwich, a piece of sponge-cake, a pickle, a slice of new cheese and an apple. Each thing had a separate stem, and so had to be picked off the side of the box; but Dorothy found them all to be delicious, and she ate every bit of luncheon in the box before she had finished.

"A lunch isn't zactly breakfast," she said to Billina, who sat beside her curiously watching. "But when one is hungry one can eat supper in the morning, and not complain."1

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States, a specific midday meal known as lunch evolved in response to the changing needs of a growing industrial society. The story of lunch in American workplaces and schools contributes to the history of industrialization and commercialization in American society. These twin engines have animated American culture even as they have worked to transform it. As the work and education routines of many Americans

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moved them away from home for the better part of the day, the act of eating became more public and it also entered a new realm of scrutiny. The character of the noon meal consumed in public work or educational spaces is the product of an interactive colonization process\(^2\) that brings a whole constellation of varied interests into the act of fashioning, sustaining, and revising the meanings communicated through food and the environment in which it is consumed.

Understanding the significance of lunch for modern Americans involves sorting out intricate relationships among food, ideology, and power.\(^3\) The history of organized feeding programs in workplaces and schools reveals a complex tale of coordinated efforts toward the primary goal of altering an individual’s eating habits. A secondary benefit of this process accrues when that individual spreads the influence of new ideas to others. From the progressive reform movement aimed at improving the conditions of labor and the general welfare of workers, to the penny lunch movement in American schools, to the World War II effort to improve the meals of industrial workers, many different characters have played a part in structuring lunch for workers and students. Some were affiliated with reform movements such as progressive-era experts in the fields of science and nutrition. Yet business and government leaders, the media, and advertising have contributed as well. Working both in concert and

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isolation, these various interests, both individuals and organizations, have attempted to alter the eating habits of their subjects toward the goals of increased Americanization, socialization, or productivity. Together, they have shaped the role of lunch in modern American food ideology.

Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century progressives drove the opening wedge, introducing debate about the relationship between nutrition and industrial or educational efficiency. Then, during World War II, experts in business and government transformed lunch from a matter of primarily private concern to one of military necessity. After the war, issues over employee lunch remained a contested terrain in many union-management conflicts. Also during the post-war era, the national defense character of the school lunch faded while educators, legislators, dieticians, and others who had become enamored with statistics, used the school lunch as a tool to "even up the starting line" in equal opportunity programs. Such experiments on young Americans had both positive and negative outcomes ranging from the institutionalization of the federal free- and reduced-price lunch program to the sometimes troublesome effects of distribution among school cafeterias of excess agricultural commodities. Finally, while the twentieth century was one of significant changes in women's roles both inside and outside the home, ideals of motherhood proved to be less elastic and amenable to shifting work and family patterns. The packed lunch, as a public demonstration of maternal commitment, also became the material site of conflict and contestation as to the very nature of motherhood.

Throughout this work, I employ the colonization metaphor to represent the
highly diverse corps of individuals and groups who have been involved in efforts to control, change, and generally influence the ways in which workers and students consumed lunch during the twentieth and now into the twenty-first centuries. In a general sense, the term “colonization” describes a process by which powerful interests, including intellectuals, the government, and the media, adopt persuasive tools toward the end of rationalizing and routinizing the world around them. This process reflects what German philosopher Jurgen Habermas termed the colonization of the “lifeworld.” Habermas called communication the central feature of modern society. The open exchange of ideas among individuals and groups provides the basis for democratic forms of government. Along with the positive progress associated with modernity, however, Habermas described an equally negative disintegration of this communicative core. The emergence of the mass media, the blurring of the lines between public and private, and the growth of bureaucracy and interest groups have led to a crisis in legitimacy for both individuals and institutions. Quite simply, systems controlled by money and power have come to dominate and undermine the sphere of open discourse and debate—they have “colonized” the communicative sphere. The size, diversity, and complexity of modern society tends to perpetuate this process. Ultimately, system and forms of economic and administrative rationality prevail as colonization ushers in new levels of standardization and homogenization.

During the late nineteenth and into the early twenty-first century, the various interests involved in the process of colonizing American lunch habits have been propelled by a wide array of motivations and goals. Generally, however, some
combination of concerns for human well-being, national welfare, industrial efficiency, or financial reward, has constituted their efforts.

The mixture of philanthropic and capitalistic impulses has meant that, often, the colonizers have ignored or simply misunderstood the significance of certain eating habits to individuals and ethnic or minority groups. People have endowed their food with special meanings and significant social roles in processes ranging from religious rituals to the performance of ethnic, familial, and personal identities. In their efforts to rationalize and homogenize lunch choices, colonizers have drawn increased attention to social classifications evidenced through eating habits. The way a person consumes the noon meal, whether carried from home in some type of container or obtained at some public location, has been manipulated by the colonizers. As anthropologist Mary Douglas writes, food is a code that contains a message about “different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across those boundaries.”

The efforts of the colonizers in the environments of workplaces and schools demonstrate how much power and control they have exercised over the food codes or food ideology sent to and shared by American workers and students.

What is Lunch About?

This story of lunch is a narrative that begins in the late nineteenth century,

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when for the first time in American history, for the bulk of the population, the consumption of the noon meal took place outside of the home environment, most often in the workplace or an educational institution. This is not to say that before this time people always ate at home, nor that they did not possess the means to carry food from one location to another. It is merely to point out that beginning at this time, the act of eating lunch became more public for more classes of people.

The history of dining provides us with information on the extravagant foodways and entertainment practices of the elite from colonial times to the present. We can also find mention of the slave diet in antebellum America, and general commentaries on the habits of the poor through the centuries. There is, however, a gap in historical coverage when it comes to the lunchtime habits of working-class people and schoolchildren. For these groups in particular, the changes wrought by increased industrialization and systems of public education meant coping with the necessity to eat away from home, in an environment that might or might not have lent itself to accessing food from a local source. The character of a person’s lunch experience is directly related to two significant variables: his or her environment and

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Eating lunch involves more than the rote consumption of food. The public forum of the cafeteria or restaurant transforms a simple meal into a sort of social barometer. In an increasingly impersonal world of machines and mass education, when little else is known about a person, his or her lunchtime routine, be it consuming fare in an institutional cafeteria or from a lunch box, provides spectators with one means of assessing others in terms of their social origins. The lunch box or lack thereof is a highly visible, though potentially inaccurate indication of a person's place in the social hierarchy.

A fact of life in America's industrialized society is that much of the work of the day is completed between the hours of nine in the morning and five in the afternoon. The majority of Americans complete their business transactions and attend school then. Thus, for most people, the meal between breakfast and dinner must be consumed in a public place. Those with freedom of movement, who are not expected to punch a clock or remain within the confines of a schoolyard, have the advantage of going "out to lunch." Executives, at-home parents, and retirees can take their noon meals in a restaurant or café. In contrast, hourly workers and schoolchildren can seldom leave the premises because of time constraints. In addition, the modern factory system, with its staggered shifts covering twenty-four-hour periods, means that some workers may be eating a lunch meal at midnight rather than noon. Hence, many workers and students must choose between purchasing the selections offered at an institutional cafeteria, or they must transport their own meals. In either case, the
experience of lunch is shaped by environmental constraints.

This project focuses specifically on the modern American experience of lunch as a lens through which to view and understand more general efforts to achieve a rational society in an industrialized and commercialized world. It shows how the meaning of food for a noonday meal, carried in some type of container or alternatively obtained at a central location, has been manipulated by individuals, corporations, the government, the media, educational institutions, and assorted “experts.” In the hands of these individuals and groups, lunch and the material culture associated with it, have functioned in capacities as varied as an indication of social status; a badge of personal or group identity; and also as an instrument of power, control, and reform. The story of lunch is a chronicle of the politicization of what was once private and personal.

Lunch is partly about the encounter among home, workplace, school, and marketplace. Throughout the twentieth century, women were key elements in the equation that linked colonizers representing food producers, distributors, and nutritional science. Regardless of other duties within or outside the home, women have historically been the ones responsible for the procurement, preparation, and serving of family food. While women’s work is generally invisible in terms of paid labor, it has been and remains a public standard by which women are judged in their capacity as caretakers and mothers.6

6 See Marjorie DeVault, Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Catherine Manton, Fed Up: Women and Food in America (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1999); and for the British equivalent, see Nickie
In some cases, the role of women in packing lunches has been the subject of jeremiads from individuals and groups associated with the goals of rationalizing eating habits by focusing increased attention on nutritional quality and the efficiency of preparation and consumption. Sometimes, these interests cast women as their most powerful allies in the effort to provide healthful, satisfying meals to America’s families. At other times, however, a goal of this discourse has been to deny women their role in lunch packing in favor of a more rational and efficient system of meal production or for the promotion of commercial products. A result of the interplay of these diverse interests has been the creation of a body of prescriptive literature aimed at assisting women as they pack “proper” lunch boxes and hence maintain their “proper” social roles. A tension has arisen from the fact that working women must often be both the packers and the consumers of lunch. This fact is problematic for its basic inconsistency with still powerful cultural ideals of women as wives and mothers.

During the twentieth century, popular media and advertising, including magazines, cookbooks, newspapers, radio, and television, took hold of the traditional association between women and food and used it to sell products and encourage

consumer activity. When combined with the influence of home economists, nutritionists, and the public schools, the result was a gradual reinterpretation of how women could fulfill their responsibility for family nutrition.

Perhaps it is because the lunch box mediates relationships among people at such a personal level that the objects seem to arouse such a sense of nostalgia. The equation of lunch boxes with memories of the past serves as one way for people to attach their own meanings to an object. Sometimes, however, this nostalgia factor can be a subversive tool employed by the advertising industry to sell convenience products. Even as working wives and mothers purchase and pack these goods, they act as ersatz home-packed lunches and thus advance the illusion that lunches prepared at home represent a return to a mythical golden age when wives and mothers stayed at home and cared for their families as their sole employment.

Finally, lunch is about the tension between people and the homogenizing influences of technology. An important thread that runs through this study deals with the notion of mechanization and progressive rationalization that have characterized life in a modern, industrialized democracy. Corporate power, in the shape of directives from the state, educational institutions, the media, and industry, has worked to direct the creation of an idealized American consumer. Feeding human bodies, unlike machines, is not a simple matter of providing electricity, gasoline, oil, coal, or steam.

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7 See Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) for a discussion of how American life changed in important ways during the years after the Civil War.
Although people can perform several activities at the same time, they require a time and a place to eat. As industrialization mandated that people adapt to a clock-based society, it also required that they relinquish some measure of choice in their eating patterns. The ultimate outcome of this accommodation has been the creation of a more homogeneous approach to eating lunch.

The effort to encourage individual participation in the culture of production and consumption has resulted in a sort of masked individuality that creates an illusion of individual choice. While at one level, the ability to choose among an Oscar Mayer Lunchable, a home-packed brown bag lunch, or a hot lunch in a cafeteria or local eatery seem to provide plenty of options for personal decisions, these alternatives are products of the corporate structure of American life. The range of choices available to the American worker/student is evidence for what sociologist George Ritzer calls the “McDonaldization” of America. He describes the progressive dehumanization that is at the core of progressive rationalization. As people are guided by “institutionalized rules, regulations, and structures,” there is less and “less room for individual variation in choice of means to ends.”^8

Progressive efforts at Americanization and socialization of immigrants encouraged uniformity in the eating habits of ethnic groups, minorities, and the poor. Food historian Harvey Levenstein offers the hypothesis that the “square meals” served to military personnel during World War II “played a major role in speeding the process

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of nationalizing and homogenizing American food tastes." Similarly, the experience of eating lunch in a public setting such as a workplace or school, influenced by the work of the colonizers, served to inculcate a common understanding of how to eat an American lunch and more broadly, how to be an American.

The Future of Lunch Studies

Although this work strives to open a broad discussion of lunch in an historical context, much more work remains to be done. This is by no means a comprehensive study. The subject of the school lunch alone is rife with opportunities for future research into the social and political ramifications of the effort to make universal the provision of lunch for children. Similarly, lunch in the workplace offers ample avenues for expansive studies on class in America. The study of lunch fits into many disciplines including history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and political science. Scholars with a background in statistical analysis and surveying techniques may be able to produce more quantitative data that will help future researchers to better understand how people consume lunch in a wide variety of circumstances. Future scholars may also delve into the subject of lunch box manufacturing and histories of the various corporations involved. There is ample room for work on the subject of lunch.

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Organization

The chapters of this dissertation are arranged in a topical format with respect to chronology as much as possible.

Chapter 1, “Equipped to Eat: People, Material Culture, and the Noon Meal” looks at the development of the noon meal from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. It employs examples from literature of this time period in order to paint a word picture of contemporary lunch practices. In addition, in analyzing William McKinley’s use of the dinner pail as a political symbol during the latter years of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries, the chapter puts forth the assertion that public interest in individual’s lunch habits was generally limited until the dawn of the progressive reform. This chapter also includes a brief look at the evolution of lunch containers as material culture and their significance to general lunch culture.

Chapter 2, “Progressive Reformers: Efficient Workers and Students,” introduces the use of food habits as a tool for the reform and control of people. The chapter is a survey of the movement for industrial efficiency and its effects upon the lunches of workers. It shows how progressive reformers initiated the colonization of worker lunches through their focus on creating homogeneity among workers through the meals consumed in the workplace. Progressive reformers were of many stripes and had differing goals and approaches. Although some of their efforts did lead to improvements in the welfare of workers, their motivations were not always generated from the best interest of their subjects. What they accomplished, however, was the first significant trend toward individual, institutional, and/or governmental involvement in the previously personal responsibility for lunch during the work day. The second half of the chapter focuses on the penny lunch movement and reformers’ efforts to use
children to influence family eating habits.

Chapter 3, "Victory at the Lunch Table: World War II and the Noon Meal," focuses on homefront mobilization for World War II. This chapter traces the war food effort as it pertained to the noon meal. It looks at how the exigencies of wartime production brought increased levels of governmental and workplace interest and activity into the realm of employee meals. The war transformed the ideology of food into an issue of national security when federal committees, industries, and communities cooperated toward the goal of providing workers with the best nutrition available. As the gatekeepers of the family table, American women played a significant part in the war food effort, whether they were members of war industry or not.

Chapter 4, "Staking a Claim on Lunch: Eating on the Job After World War II," demonstrates how after the close of the war, many employees latched on to the noon meal as a bargaining point with employers, much as workers had during the earliest stages of industrialization in America. This chapter points out how modern employees continue to view the noon meal break as a right owed them as human beings. It examines the "time crunch" aspect of lunch culture in modern workplaces and the way manufacturers of convenience foods manipulate time concerns to market to busy people.

Chapter 5, "Carrying Lunch to School: Players in the Institutionalization of Students' Noon Meals," looks at the development of the federal school lunch program. Through an examination of issues such as the role of home economists and centralized schools in family life, and debates over commodity distribution and eligibility requirements for the school lunch, the chapter raises questions about the purpose and effects of the National School Lunch Act.

Chapter 6, "Lunch Ladies: Magazines, Advertising, and the Construction of
Women as Lunch Box Packers,” is about the advice literature and advertisements for convenience products targeted toward American women as the caretakers of the family. It shows how these media attempt to construct an idealized image of an American woman that is often at odds with the reality of life in modern American society.

The Battle Over Lunch

By opening up Americans’ lunch pails, buckets, boxes, and bags, and peering into the cafeterias, lunch rooms, and kitchens where lunch is prepared, served, and consumed, this project will demonstrate how an historical understanding of that meal may provide clues about who Americans have been, who they are, and who they are becoming. As the French gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin commented: “Tell me what you eat, and I’ll tell you who you are.”

The story of lunch in American workplaces and schools is complex and, at times, confusing. Importantly, the players involved in shaping the way lunch is consumed in these environments have often carried this complexity and confusion into policy. “Battles” over lunch have resulted from the contest between ideas and wills. During the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the intentions of progressive reformers, assorted experts in education and industrial efficiency, the government, and commercial enterprises became mixed and often indiscernible from one another. These various interests carved out overlapping territories in the contest to gain access, influence, and control over Americans’ lunch habits—they “colonized” lunch. Sometimes their efforts resulted in significant improvements in the health, well-being,

and productivity of workers, students, and Americans in general. At other times, however, as the colonizers' interest turned from provision of good nutrition to more overt efforts at intervention in foodways, the unfortunate result has frequently been the elimination of cultural traditions and introduction of homogeneity. In such cases, recognition of different ways of thinking about health and nutrition take a backseat to such goals as increased Americanization or the creation of revenue through the sale of commercial products.

As Ann Hulbert, the author of "'I Say the Hell With It!' School Lunches Are Making Kids Fat--But Collard Greens Aren't The Solution," observed: "Dietary issues have always tended to inspire zealotry in this country..." This history of the enthusiastic, if sometimes fervent efforts to gain control in the battle over lunch cannot hope to provide answers to all of the questions about why Americans think about and consume lunch in the way that they do. It can, however, help modern Americans to understand how we have arrived at this point and how best to move forward from here.

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Chapter 1

Equipped to Eat: People, Material Culture, and the Noon Meal

By dictionary definition, *lunch* is a light meal, often comprised of sandwiches, that is consumed primarily by students and workers, generally at some hour near noon, although the term may apply to a light meal eaten at an odd hour. While many different people certainly eat some form of midday meal, students and workers are significant because of the fact that they must generally consume their lunch away from home, hence in a public place. The public character of this meal has made it a particular target for those interested in reforming people's eating habits.

Lunch poses special concerns for anyone who spends the day away from home. For those who live far from workplace or school, or with a short break for lunch, the mid-shift meal is a problem of logistics. The problem can be solved either through specialized containers to transport food from place to place (e.g., lunch boxes to carry food from home to factory, office, or school) or through the provision of food services on or off the site of labor or educational activities.

Questions about the best method of providing lunch for workers arise early in the history of America's shift from an agrarian to an industrial nation. In many respects, the noon meal is an appendage of the industrial system. Early disputes between labor and management often involved the time allowed for breaks and meals. Although a three-meal-a-day pattern is neither divinely ordained nor necessarily healthful, it has nonetheless been the standard pattern throughout American

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history. It has been the titles and timing of the meals that have varied according to the social and economic growth of the nation.

The agrarian economy demanded a schedule of meals where a hearty breakfast was followed by the main noon meal, called dinner. A farm family’s day closed with a light evening repast known as “supper.” With the onset of industrialization, a new pattern emerged. People working in factories and other businesses found that a considerably lighter breakfast better suited their schedules. Then, a simple midday meal, called lunch, was consumed at the workplace and followed by the most substantial meal of the day, known as dinner. For much of the twentieth century, a quick test of a person’s rural or urban affiliation was asking him if he ate breakfast, dinner, and supper or breakfast, lunch, and dinner.¹³

“A Novel Hot Lunch Box”

The complex gastronomic problems with which mankind has been struggling ever since the dawn of civilization set in at last promise to be solved by a simple little device, which not only enables urbanites to defy anti-free lunch legislators and smile in serene contentment at the rebellious domestic cook, but threatens to put cheap luncheon counters into innocuous desuetude. It enables the tourist to penetrate the desert of the Sahara without a thought of where he is going to strike a restaurant. It will make traveling or exploring of any kind unalloyed delight, for whenever sustenance or inner comforts are needed all that is necessary is to unstrap the Bon-Vee-Von, and bring forth from its recesses the viands and liquid refreshments with which its different compartments have been provisioned.¹⁴

¹³ Elaine McIntosh, American Food Habits in Historical Perspective (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 154. McIntosh notes that more current usage of these terms marks those who eat lunch and dinner as being of higher social status.

The miraculous Bon-Vee-Von, so lauded in this 5 July 1903 article in the *New York Daily Tribune*, was produced by a firm in New York City known as the Union Lunch Box Company. While this summation of the Bon-Vee-Von appears in the format of a newspaper article, its language suggests more of an effort to encourage the distribution of lunch boxes than an unbiased, factual report. According to the article, the "ingenious little affair" seemed to offer features and benefits that would suit the needs and desires of everyone from the traveling man, to the miner, to the factory girl. Among the qualities that might interest such persons in this box were its sturdy construction, its many separate compartments for "solid food, a pint flask for liquid refreshment, tea, coffee, soup, etc., an alcohol lamp and storeroom for knives, forks, napkins, and toothpicks." Measuring the compact size of "eight inches wide, five inches deep and seven inches high," the box was touted as "not a burdensome piece of luggage." It would appear, indeed, that the Bon-Vee-Von could be all things to everyone saddled with the necessity to carry lunch. For "miners, watchmen, farmers, laborers and all other workers whose work exposes them to all the conditions of weather, and who have no facilities for procuring hot food when needed," as well as for "working women who do not wish to go to a crowded lunchroom, or who are in factories away from such places, the luncheon box will prove a great boon." In addition to its "low price of $2" which placed it "within the reach of everybody," perhaps its greatest attribute was its "neat, attractive appearance," which "especially recommends it to that class of people who desire to carry their luncheon in a receptacle that will not arouse comment."

This description of the Bon-Vee-Von may seem a trifle bombastic, rather like a piece of grandiloquent advertising copy. It can, however, reveal a great deal about the genesis of lunch culture in modern America. The beginning of the twentieth century is
in fact a very significant moment in the development of the circumstances, ideas, and objects that helped to shape the act of consuming lunch as it is known today. Following the Civil War, as railroads and new media of communication promised to improve distribution and create new national markets. Still, the instability of economic conditions remained a constant source of uncertainty and doubt for pioneers of all stripes: those in industry, farmers, and the numerous immigrants and emigrants to American cities. The unfortunate result of this cauldron of change, risk, and failure, was a series of financial crises and depressions that rocked the nation.\textsuperscript{15} It was in this super-charged atmosphere that the dinner pail and lunch box first emerged as political and social symbols.

\textbf{McKinley and the Full Dinner Pail}

In 1896, the Republican presidential candidate, William McKinley, used the symbol of a “full dinner pail” to attract the votes of the new industrial working class and the diminishing, yet still politically significant, American farmers. In the midst of the Depression that began in 1893, McKinley capitalized on the unifying aspect of the dinner pail and its positive associations with prosperity and plenty. The dinner pail conjured imagery familiar to each of these important groups. Farmers understood dinner as the most substantial and most formal meal of the day. Although they probably returned to their homes at noon, and so did not need a pail for their dinners, they would have understood McKinley’s reference to the full dinner pail as a symbol of plenty. Similarly, for industrial workers, the full dinner pail was a comforting, calming image in the midst of tremendous and unnerving economic and social change.

\textsuperscript{15} See Noel Jacob Kent, \textit{America in 1900} (Armon, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000).
McKinley’s use of the full dinner pail as a political symbol indicates that by the late nineteenth century, many American voters shared an understanding of what a dinner pail was meant to do—carry food from one location to another. In the years before industrialization was widespread, fewer people would have identified with this object.\textsuperscript{16} By the time of the McKinley campaigns, people had adapted to the temporal and organizational demands of the new industrial economy, even if these changes ran counter to natural rhythms.\textsuperscript{17} What is most significant about the full dinner pail symbol, however, is that it was just that—a symbol. McKinley and his campaign advisors said nothing about how they would achieve such a pledge, nor what would or should fill the pail, only that it would be full.

Census results from 1920 show that for the first time in American history, more people resided in urban than rural settings. This statistic suggests the preponderance of members of the lunching public. Still, aside from the political implications of the full dinner pail, during the later years of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth centuries, few individuals or groups took much of an interest in what types of food workers or students procured from various vendors or carried with them deep in the recesses of their dinner pails. A few of the well-off office workers, clerks and tellers might have had the time and money to go to a restaurant, but the fast and economical cafeterias, automats, and fast food establishments still loomed in the distant future.

\textsuperscript{16} Alan Trachtenberg, in \textit{The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age} (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 87, states that between 1870 and 1900, the percentage of the population engaged in industrial labor nearly doubled.

\textsuperscript{17} See E.P. Thompson, \textit{Customs in Common} (London: The Merlin Press, 1991) for a discussion of how industrial society made the shift from a task-based orientation to a clock-based format.
Unfair Luncheon Fare

Imagine the sheer variety of luncheon fare one might have encountered in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century factories in large cities across the nation. A high volume of immigrants to the United States coincided with the boom in industrial capacity; hence, many newcomers found themselves employed in often low-paying production jobs. In his 1905 book The Jungle, Upton Sinclair exposed the working conditions and questionable processing techniques of meat packing plants of early-twentieth-century Chicago. He also illuminated the struggle to feed workers an ample supply of calories on the limited incomes they brought home. The immigrant family in Sinclair's story clings to its traditional foods and items of minimal cost. Teta Elzbieta, the matriarch of the family, rouses the men for work and prepares the daily rations: "She would have ready a great pot full of steaming black coffee, and oatmeal and bread and smoked sausages; and then she would fix them their dinner pails with more thick slices of bread and lard between them—they could not afford butter—and some onions and a piece of cheese, and so they would tramp away to work."18 These workers carried two social "brands" out the door each morning: the obvious one of status as a worker, based upon the nature of the lunch container, and the equally potent label of "immigrant" communicated by the nature of the foods within the pail.

Another literary character from the turn of the century, Theodore Dreiser's Caroline Meeber, boards the train outside of Chicago with only a trunk, a satchel, a lunch in a paper box, and a purse with her train ticket, as she sets out to find a new life with her sister in the city. Later, as an employee of a shoe factory, Carrie experiences the feeling of being transformed from a human into a machine. She is a captive of the

equipment before her, making unnatural, mechanical movements with little or no control over the speed of her work. When, on her first day, the bell for the lunch break finally rings, Carrie welcomes the opportunity to leave her station, stretch, get a drink of water, and perhaps eat a little bit of the lunch she had carried with her. What she discovered was, however, not a pleasant room for workers to relax and refuel, but a dingy, smelly place with poor toilet facilities, and almost no provisions for comfort. After taking a drink from the water bucket in the corner, when Carrie returns to her work station to eat, she finds all of the available seating places in the break area occupied by other workers.

As the novel unfolds, readers see Carrie become involved with very wealthy characters who can afford to dine in the more refined establishments of Chicago. When the dinner companion of these characters, Carrie is mesmerized by the service, comfort, and food she receives: “She felt a little out of place, but the great room soothed her and the view of the well-dressed throng outside seemed a splendid thing. Ah, what it was not to have money!”\(^\text{19}\) The contrast was, after all, remarkable. By the close of the book, some of the characters experience a reversal of fortunes. The once prosperous Hurstwood finds himself dependent upon the local charities of New York City for his lodgings and his meals. Without exception, the services he receives are the result of concern on the part of private individuals or religious groups. At the Sisters of Mercy, he procures a free noon meal in a situation that highlights the dehumanization caused by poverty:

Space and a lack of culinary room in the mission-house, compelled an arrangement which permitted of only twenty-five or thirty eating at one time, so that a line had to be formed outside and an orderly entrance

effected. This caused a daily spectacle, which, however, had become so common by repetition during a number of years that now nothing was thought of it. The men waited patiently, like cattle, in the coldest weather—waited for several hours before they could be admitted. No questions were asked and no service rendered. They ate and went away again, some of them returning regularly day after day the winter through.20

For turn-of-the-century factory workers like Carrie and her cohort, the combination of poor pay and short breaks meant that carrying lunch from home was logical. Yet, for some, particularly male workers, the saloons and bars that were often situated close to factories provided their noontime food and drink. Whereas drink in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century workplaces had been common, indeed almost expected, by the mid nineteenth century, the change from a craft-oriented workshop labor force to a more industrially regulated one meant a new demand for regularity and system that translated to a need for temperance—at least during the working day. As Roy Rosenzweig demonstrates in Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920, factory owners suppressed the sociability associated with workplace drinking. Ethnically segregated saloons became the place where working-class men ate lunch and did their drinking. Temperance and prohibition movements dominated by middle- and upper-class, often “nativist,” men and women targeted these saloons. Drinking and/or dining in a saloon, like carrying a dinner or lunch pail, served as an automatic symbol of membership in the working class.21

The consumption of the noon meal in each of these situations, on the factory floor, at the elegant restaurant, in the mission house, or in the saloon, was

20 Dreiser, 387
conspicuously public, and yet for the poor worker and impoverished unemployed, it was scarcely visible to the broader society. Sinclair and Dreiser, and other writers and social critics, began to tug at the veil of poverty, exposing the other side of capitalist expansion. Still, lunch, although often taking place in a public location, remained at this time essentially a private concern, best handled at the individual level. Not until the growth of the progressive reform movement with its emphasis on alleviating poverty and Americanizing immigrants, along with advances in nutrition science and concerns about efficiency in workplaces and schools, did the personal matter of lunch become the focus of outside parties.

Packing the Box: Lunch Boxes and Material Culture

Material culture theory is grounded in the assumption that objects, as tangible and visual evidence of daily life, exude powerful messages in their roles as decorative arts, tools, and commodities. Although scholars approach this field from many different disciplinary traditions, many material culture theorists agree that “things” do social work. The production and consumption of material goods by members of a culture is a part of a process that serves to create and sustain relationships among humans. In this context, objects are not valuable simply for their materiality, but also for their role in structuring the chaos of the environment and contributing to the evolution and perpetuation of cultural systems.22

The advent of a consumer-oriented society and questions of when and how

people came to possess and value objects constitutes a common area of investigation and debate in recent material culture studies. Scholars of material culture, history, and anthropology often disagree over the exact period during which the transition from a producer-based to a consumer-based economy occurred. Some researchers locate its beginnings as early as the sixteenth century, many other suggest the eighteenth century was the true locus of change, while still others argue that full development cannot be claimed until the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.23

For the parameters of this study, the precise timing of the shift from a producer-based to a consumer society is not as significant as the fact that it was unquestionably evident in the United States by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By this point in American history, industrialization and commercialization had proceeded far enough to make lunch boxes commonly understood objects. As culturally familiar artifacts, meanings associated with lunch boxes could be manipulated easily by manufacturers, advertisers, the government, interest groups, and individuals. This process resulted in the creation and attachment of a battery of social and symbolic meanings to a simple, utilitarian object—the lunch box.24


Lunch Boxes: Food and Style on the Move

Historically, making food portable has been a common concern for a wide range of people including agricultural and factory workers, soldiers, explorers, settlers, students, and travelers. Although each of these workers and adventurers had different reasons for being unable to return home for a meal, they all faced the similar conundrum of how to select foods that would not be damaged by changes in temperature and could be transported easily.\(^{25}\)

Evidence of the need for portable food appears in many early American cookbooks in the form of recipes for dishes such as “johnny-cake” or “journey cake.” Generally, these recipes called for a combination of cornmeal and water or milk that was baked on a flat board so that it could be cut into squares and packed neatly. Mary Randolph, a native Southerner, introduced a regional variation when she published in her 1860 edition of *The Virginia Housewife* a similar recipe based upon rice or a cornmeal and rice mixture. Another comestible of this type was hardtack. A mixture of flour and water, hardtack was baked until it hardened, rather like a modern cracker. Hardtack’s durability and hence transportability made it a staple of the Civil War soldier’s diet. Many enlisted men derided these wafers for their primary, indeed perhaps only notable quality—tastelessness.

What these portable foods may lack in gourmet appeal they make up for in their ability to provide nutrition on the run. The need to carry lunch from one location to another has led people to the creative adaptation of foods and containers to suit their needs; a process that continues even as mass producers and marketers endeavor

to provide products for this purpose. Accounts of lunch carrying in historical and literary accounts list lard and molasses buckets, shoe boxes, tea and tobacco tins, and simple paper bags among the objects people have employed for this purpose.

The Oxford English Dictionary traces the use of the terms “lunch-basket” and “lunch-pail” to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The word combination “lunch box” did not enter into common parlance until the 1860s. In 1862, it appeared as a descriptor related to an 1862 patent for an “Improved lunch box. . . This invention consists of an arrangement of dishes, cups, etc., arranged within a case for the use of travellers.”

An early reference to lunch containers can be found in Stephen Crane’s 1893 novel, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. In this work, Crane describes the male character, a working man, as carrying his dinner pail. Drieser opens Sister Carrie with a description of Carrie’s baggage as she boards a train for Chicago, including a lunch carried in a paper box. Later, Carrie finds herself working in a shoe factory and once again consuming her lunch from a box. Plagued by a desire to have nice things, Carrie is troubled by her own comparisons between herself and other people she encounters in the city. She dreams of being seen among the fashionable set who take their lunches in fancy restaurants, not out of paper boxes.

A later work, Thomas Wolfe’s 1929 Look Homeward Angel, confirms Carrie’s observations regarding the relationship between the material culture of lunch and social status. Wolfe describes the paper bag of food carried by a school boy, the lard bucket lunches of black workers, and the shoe box lunches toted by travelers. In the early twentieth century, people who traveled from the western shore of the

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2 Oxford English Dictionary.
Chesapeake Bay to the eastern shore were often called “shoebees” because they toted their lunches in shoe boxes that had been lined with wax paper. Shoe boxes were not used as “everyday” lunch containers because as people bought shoes relatively infrequently, the boxes were somewhat rare and saved for special occasions such as a journey by train or steamboat. The shoebees held their lunches safely inside the boxes with a rubber band wrapped around the outside. In their estimation, a person who had the means to purchase a picnic basket was “well-off.”

Manufacturers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not blind to the re-use potential of their product packaging. When some tobacco manufacturers found that people were reusing their tins as lunch boxes, they redesigned the packaging to make it more appealing for that purpose. Probably the simplest and perhaps most commonly reused object for carrying lunches was the plain paper bag. The first paper bag was patented in 1859. It was remarkable for its versatility and simplicity. It could be used as a packaging tool or to carry goods from stores. Fairly inexpensive, the paper bag could be plain or decorated, often with the name of a commercial establishment.

No matter what the shape, size, or form of the container, it can send certain distinct, if unintentional messages about the person who carries it. For children, the possession or lack of a lunch box can act as a tool for social classification. A literary example from Harper Lee’s 1961 novel, To Kill A Mockingbird makes this point effectively.

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29 Bruce and Crawford, Cerealizing America, 66.
It is noon in a small southern classroom of the Great Depression. When the teacher instructs her class: “Everybody who goes home to lunch hold up your hands,” the “town children” send arms into the air. That leaves students who bring their lunches, or the “country folks.” At the appropriate moment: “Molasses buckets appeared from nowhere, and the ceiling danced with metallic light. Miss Caroline walked up and down the rows peering and poking into lunch containers, nodding of the contents pleased her, frowning a little at others. She stopped at Walter Cunningham’s desk. ‘Where’s yours?’ she asked.” As narrator Jean Louise Finch tells readers: “He didn’t forget his lunch, he didn’t have any. He had none today nor would he have any tomorrow or the next day.”30 In this world of home lunchers and packers, there are clear distinctions along social lines. Walter, unlike his other country counterparts, has not even the economic wherewithal to bring a humble snack in a recycled molasses container. Lunch serves as an index of economic status among these children.

For adults as well, lunch habits and containers can provide others with information about a person’s occupation and social origins. Over time, the lunch box has become identified with blue collar and factory workers—more an indication of vocational than professional work. Escaping from these socially constructed categories requires the ability to subvert them in creative ways. In 1985, journalist Anne Lear wrote “The Great Lunch Box Caper,” for the magazine Gourmet. In this article, Lear explains how she empowered her husband to carry his lunch box with pride among the status conscious membership of the “Washington Press Corps.” Lear notes that reporters who

“have arrived” do not carry lunch boxes, or at least not plebian ones. Dear me, no. They carry paper bags, at worst, and damn the leakages, or, better, they hide their sandwiches in (often otherwise empty) briefcases. Best of all is to carry a briefcase so expensively slim that the absence of a sandwich may be clearly noted and the inference drawn that the carrier invariably eats out at Lion d’Or, the White House mess, or someone else’s expense.

Anne’s husband, Gil, however, liked to carry his lunch. Anne prepared meals that suited his individual taste, and the extra time he saved by not leaving the office he was able to devote to pleasure reading. When the bureau chief walked by Gil’s desk one day, he commented: “‘Ah, I see you carry a lunch box.’” Anne decided to “retaliate.” She said to herself: “‘Lunch box, eh? Wait ‘til they see what I can put into that too, too proletarian bucket!” 31  Anne’s plan involved preparing and packing elaborate meals, complete with utensils, for Gil to consume as conspicuously as possible in front of his colleagues. Her entrées ranged from fettuccine Alfredo to rock Cornish game hen, to a whole lobster. Each meal was complemented with an appropriate wine. Eventually, Gil’s office mates and the bureau chief heard Anne’s message—as broadcast through Gil’s lunch box. Like the old adage, “you can’t judge a book by its cover” you cannot judge a person by his lunch box.

Looking for a Box

It is an interesting fact that today, there is little conspicuous advertising for lunch boxes. With the exception of “back-to-school” circulars from mass retailers, lunch boxes are generally exempt from large marketing campaigns. Each year, along

31 Anne Lear, “The Great Lunch Box Caper,” Gourmet (March 1985), 126.
with the paper, pencils, and pens that appear magically in store aisles even as families continue to enjoy leisurely days of summer vacation, lunch box displays multiply and signal the coming of the fall season. Although merchandisers now stock lunch boxes of various types all year, the selection is noticeably diminished during the “off season.” At such times of year, a lunch box quest requires shoppers to be sleuths in order to locate these items within a store. Often, they may be found amid an array of camping gear or miscellaneous household items.

During the early part of the twentieth century, the Sears and Roebuck catalog was a good source of information about the various kinds of lunch containers available. Although lunch containers ranging from “fiber boxes” to folding boxes that collapsed for easy storage and transport had appeared in earlier catalogs, the Fall 1929 Sears catalog provides a good description of the lunch products available during the early twentieth century. Although by mid-century lunch boxes and related paraphernalia had faded out of the catalogs, a mail-order shopper searching for lunch-related products in the 1929 catalog would have found index entries, including lunch bags, lunch baskets, lunch boxes, pails, and lunch kits. The presence of so many options suggests that no single container met the diverse needs of different lunch carriers.

The lunch bag was truly a multi-purpose object. It appeared in the section of the catalog devoted to purses, bags, wallets, and other small fashion accessories. Selling for the sum of fifty-nine cents, it was described as a “Hollywood box for girls,” fabricated of “artificial leather,” available in assorted colors, with an inner lining and a
clasping lock. Useful for carrying lunches, it could also be employed for carrying sewing and "many other uses." In addition to the gendered component of the marketing strategy, this entry reveals that lunch containers were a sort of "fashion statement." Such concerns with the outward appearance of the object anticipate later artistic developments in the box industry.

The listing for a "Tin Dinner Pail," was far less glamorous and was buried amid a flurry of other kitchen gadgets. It featured an interior divided into two compartments. A plain "Lunch Box," constructed of black metal with a hinged top and a wooden handle could be found under the heading "Needs for students." Another student box, the "School Lunch Box," appeared with other japanned metal objects. The box was blue, had a removable top, and two handles.

All of these receptacles resemble what twenty-first century and adults and children might conceptualize when they hear the words, "lunch box," with the notable exception that none of these containers came equipped with a thermos bottle. The first insulated bottle for carrying liquids was invented in 1892 by the Scottish chemist and physicist Sir James Dewar, but the "Dewar flask," or thermos bottle was a feature of only the "lunch kits" that appeared in the catalog. Under the entry for "lunch kits," the catalog offered two different fully equipped models. The first was the "Lunch Kit with Genuine 'Icy Hot Bottle.'" The kit was described as being: "Popular with factory, office, and outdoor workers, school children, and all who carry lunch." While

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32 1929 Sears, Roebuck and Company catalog, 231.
the copy noted that this kit was suitable for the worker or student, its traditional domed top marked it as a workman’s box. The other option was the “‘Icy Hot’ School Lunch Kit” that featured a vacuum bottle with a capacity of one-half pint and was described as: “A dandy kit for school children and others who carry lunch.” It was noted to be “light weight” and boasted a divided interior that was helpful for keeping the thermos in place.

Regardless of the brand on the vacuum bottle, there was generally little variation in the appearance and design. Most were available in a green, black, or blue “pebbled finish” and could be used to carry hot or cold foods or beverages. The manufacturer who produced bottles for Sears under the label “WLS” (which stood for “World’s Largest Store”) claimed that the WLS bottle could maintain the temperature of liquids eighteen hours for hot and twenty-four hours for cold. Another company guaranteed hot for twenty-four hours and cold for seventy-two. Although less important for a school child who would conceivably consume his lunch within six to eight hours of its preparation, such time frames might well be important for the factory worker on overtime or the adventurer on a long camping trip. The assurance that food could be kept hot or cold for a definite length of time meant that a box packer could expand the potential repertoire of the lunch menu. If one did not have to worry about spoilage due to temperature variations, foods such as soups and milk or milk-based items could be integrated easily into the lunch box. Most vacuum bottles also featured a cap that doubled as a drinking vessel, thus making a separate cup unnecessary.

A significant design variation in lunch boxes was the presence of a domed or a flat top. For the most part, the domed style is associated with workers’ boxes while the flat construction typifies children’s boxes. An answer to queries about whether
there is a specific reason for this absence or presence of this design feature remains elusive. Perhaps the domed style makes it easier to carry while tucked under one’s arm, or, more likely, it is simply a matter of providing a place to accommodate a thermos within the box.

Jazzing Up the Pail: Lunch Box Art

A significant innovation in lunch box manufacturing was the successful addition of colored lithographs to the outside of the containers. Although there were some earlier attempts to place lithographs on the surface of metal containers, the true dawn of lunch box art did not break until 1935. That year, Mickey Mouse became the first cartoon character to grace the body of a child’s lunch container. The Disney brothers contracted the Milwaukee based Geuder, Paeschke, and Frey Company, a manufacturer of tin trays and toys, to produce an oval-shaped carry-all sporting images of that spunky mouse. Later, the same company marketed similar boxes with imagery from *Snow White* and *Pinocchio*. According to Scott Bruce, a lunch box aficionado, collector, and historian: “By today’s standards, these relics look like glorified canned ham tins, but they revolutionized the schoolroom. Kids discovered that their social standing, if not graces, improved when a Disney pal joined them at the lunch table.”

Although the box industry slowed during the 1940s due to wartime mobilization and production, by the early 1950s, the market for metal lunch boxes was

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33 Scott Bruce, “The Power Lunch: It’s In the Bag,” *Disney Magazine* (Fall 1996), 106.
well established and fueled by an explosion of American cultural icons that resulted from the new media sensation—the television. Bruce commented: “In addition to the postwar affluence that enabled decorated kits to fit the family budget as well as a brown paper bag, the key to the spectacular boom was the television.”

The first of the TV character lunch boxes was manufactured in the fall of 1950 by Aladdin Industries, a manufacturer of vacuum bottles. The box featured Hopalong Cassidy, a popular children’s hero of the day. Bruce quoted an Aladdin executive who described the phenomena of the “Hoppy” box: “Overnight, the mundane, boring lunch box trade became Big Business. . . . We sold a staggering six hundred thousand Hoppy kits the first year.” From that moment forward, the latest TV characters and series logos were carried into schools nationwide via children’s lunch boxes. These metal boxes inaugurated a new era in the history of American lunch culture. Box manufacturers produced iconography including TV shows such as Lost in Space or The Brady Bunch, and later movies such as Star Wars. These boxes were bright, colorful, and overall visually stimulating. Many included coordinating, decorated thermoses. These boxes were generally hinged with a clasp closure. The illustrations often appeared on the front and back and sometimes around the “band” or outer edge. A few manufacturers made attempts at producing different shapes that mimicked the dome of workmen’s style boxes. One prominent example of this was the Disney School Bus design which was immensely popular and sold from 1961 to 1973.

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34 Bruce, The Fifties and Sixties Lunch Box (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1988), 7.
35 Bruce, The Fifties and Sixties Lunch Box, 9.

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While many TV and popular culture icons appealed to both boys and girls, box designers made concerted efforts to capitalize upon gender distinctions. Until Barbie hit the “tween” girl scene in the early 1960s, box designers had a difficult time targeting this group. Then around 1962, companies like Aladdin hit on the vinyl lunch carrier as a way to reach the audience of girls who believed themselves too old or too sophisticated to carry a simple lunch box. Because of their light weight construction, these bags were often less durable than other types of lunch containers. Sporting such images as a picture of the popular musical group, “The Beatles,” and one from the TV series, *The Flying Nun*, the bags were appealing for the weight and ability to mimic a purse, they rarely survived the rigors of a daily trip to and from school for a very long period of time.

Bruce notes that box iconography was a literal method of marketing in the schools. He claims that the educational system saw TV as a threat to its institutional authority and worked to discourage its ascendancy. Ironically, the very structure of the lunch box resembled the TV set. In fact, the original box decals measured four inches, which was approximately the same size as the screens of the first TV sets. Teachers and other educational experts might have been able to avoid the use of TV in their classrooms, “but those thirty small sets on the coatrack shelf never stopped broadcasting.”36

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36 Bruce, *The Fifties and Sixties Lunch Box*, 8.
Box Wars: The Mysterious Disappearance of the Metal Box

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and even into the early 1980s, character design-laden metal lunch boxes were a common feature of American children’s school gear. Curiously, however, after the early 1980s, such boxes all but vanished from store shelves. By 1987, steel boxes were things of the past. Box aficionado Scott Bruce reports that this disappearing act was the result of a “gaggle of militant mothers” who called the metal box a “killer, a classroom Corvair. After they paraded alleged victims of box ‘brain-bashing’ past the Florida legislature, a ban was slapped on the sale of steel boxes. Other legislatures soon fell to the inquisition.” This tale of mothers on the march has achieved the status of myth in lunch-box collecting circles. The actual existence of any Florida statute remains unconfirmed and seems to have originated with Bruce’s research for his box collecting book. Legend has it that after this incident, many box manufacturers turned to experiments in plastic and vinyl and that the box industry was altered significantly by the moratorium. Bryan Los, a writer on the “Lunch Box Pad” website found that the majority of manufacturers did not cease production of metal boxes until 1986-1987. In his efforts to corroborate Bruce’s story, he found that during the period 1972-1987, of the box designs produced, 41 percent were plastic, 39 percent were metal, and 20 percent were vinyl. He discovered that “half of all metal lunch boxes ever produced were sold when a supposed law was banning their sale in various states” and Canada. When Los

37 Scott Bruce, The Fifties and Sixties Lunch Box, 8.
contacted the Florida State Archives, archivists were unable to locate any such law. Further, he observed that in 1998 and 1999, the Thermos company had begun to produce metal boxes once again. Whether the maternal protests are truth or fiction, it was most likely the health of the financial balance sheet that instigated manufacturer’s shift away from metal. As plastic production techniques became less expensive, these boxes replaced metal ones.38

Lunch Boxes--Carrying More than Just a Meal

These brief historical sketches of American conceptions of lunch and lunch boxes demonstrate that food and the environment in which it is consumed are part of a complex web of meaning. The consumption of food is at once an intensely personal and political act. Lunch is a significant social event. As the historical and literary evidence in this chapter demonstrates, Americans’ consumption of the noon meal involves more than the simple ingestion of nutrients. People make observations about one another based upon visible evidence such as foodways. In this sense, lunch often involves a process of social stratification. The material culture and foods that make up lunch convey a great deal of information about the “makers, buyers, and users” of luncheon foods and equipment. As Ann Smart Martin suggests: “Material objects matter because they are complex, symbolic bundles of social, cultural, and individual meanings fused onto something we can touch, see, and own. That very quality is the

reason that social values can so quickly penetrate into and evaporate out of common objects.”39 It is also the reason that colonizers have been able to influence and alter American food habits toward a variety of different ends. As the following chapters show, attempts by outside sources to influence and often change the lunch time habits of individuals and groups may be viewed by the subjects as an attack upon the freedom of personal choice and the unity shared by those who consume lunches together in workplaces, educational institutions, or other locales. The colonizers’ efforts to manipulate lunch habits and the public response to these forays into personal routines form the core of the story of lunch in American workplaces and schools.

Chapter 2

The Progressive Reformers: Efficient Workers and Students

"Progressivism" is a somewhat generic label applied to a wide range of reform movements beginning at the end of the nineteenth and continuing into the early decades of the twentieth centuries. Under the umbrella of progressivism came causes as diverse as the municipal reform movement, woman's suffrage, and child welfare. Many progressive reformers expressed confidence in the overall goodness and moral perfectibility of humankind. Many believed that simply by improving the environmental conditions of a person's daily life, they could bring about a strengthening of character and thereby create a more virtuous citizen of the American democracy. One historian described the progressive impulse as growing out of the "social change and political ferment" that followed in the wake of rapid "industrialization, urban growth, and ethnic tension."40

It is not surprising, given the often contentious social issues and the tremendous variety of individuals and groups involved, that the progressive movement encountered problems. Among the leadership and rank-and-file of these social reformers, motivations and goals differed. For example, some business executives might become involved in a movement for better working conditions, such ideas as on site cafeteria services, if these improvements might also lead to higher worker productivity and lower costs. Clearly, workers crusading for the same cause would not see the objectives of their efforts from the same point of view. For the worker, a

cafeteria was a convenience and perhaps a health benefit. For the factory owner or manager, understandably focused on the financial stability of the enterprise as well as the stamina and effectiveness of employees, food service was less about catering to individual dietary tastes and needs than about providing fare that would be filling for the workers and would contribute most to their energy levels and ability to produce.

**Are You Going to Eat That?: Changing the Eating Habits of Immigrants, the Poor, and the Uneducated**

The carried lunch was a prime target for the jeremiads of nutritional reformers. The nature of the foods consumed from the dinner pails of the poor working class was often clearly linked to the heritage of a particular ethnic group or the inexpensive foods associated with poverty. Early proponents of factory cafeterias attempted to convince managers that providing food and improving both employee diets and eating spaces would raise profits. Properly fed workers would be productive and tractable.

As historian Lizabeth Cohen demonstrates in *Making A New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*, World War I saw growing working-class militancy and resentment toward management and ownership. Out of this environment, a new class of industrialists, proponents of the "enlightened corporation" and welfare capitalism, began to emerge. They saw themselves, rather than labor unions or the state, as responsible for "the creation of a more benign industrial society." 41

Industrialists' newfound responsibility involved more than the employee alone, it spread to include the broader community as well. These reformers hoped to push

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improved dining habits from the factory to the home. A member of the medical department at Standard Oil of New Jersey, Ernest F. Hoyer discussed some of the practical considerations involved in providing a hot meal in a factory canteen: "There are, of course, many pros and cons to the canteen idea--yet the fact remains, that it will not only stimulate the output--steady the efficiency--but also, besides helping physically, will eventually teach how and what to eat and so carry the good work to the homes."42

Some reformers were aware of the difficulty involved in altering eating habits. Particularly among the immigrants, food habits often expressed cultural heritage and identity. The anonymous writer of a November 1923 Literary Digest article entitled "Decline and Fall of the 'Full Dinner Pail,'" warned that no matter how reformers might view the contents of workers’ lunch boxes, for many people, these foods provided a "certain individuality" that appealed to "certain persons who do not like the idea of 'massed feeding.'"43 Reforming and improving people by targeting their "bad" (read "different") habits and ameliorating their unsanitary and inefficient environments motivated these progressive reformers. Because food consumption was so basic to survival and also a visible indication of the degree of "Americanization," the lunchtime food habits of workers and students became the focus of efforts to alleviate potentially dangerous distinctions of class and ethnicity that threatened to bring about social upheavals and general discontent in the workplace and even the nation at large.

A general progressive belief in a proactive government called for the intervention of so-called experts to remedy the social and economic problems that

42 Ernest F. Hoyer, "The Canteen Versus the Cold Dinner Pail," Industrial Management, 1 June 1921, 440.
43 "Decline and Fall of the 'Full Dinner Pail,'" The Literary Digest, 3 November 1923, 54-55.
plagued the nation. Many progressive reformers hoped to end poverty through the influence of expert advice and example. On the surface, this appeared to be a faultless undertaking. Sometimes, however, the efforts to achieve a certain level of social and economic parity resulted in the suppression of immigrant culture and the institutionalization of bureaucratic procedures that inhibited true progress.

Reformers often rightfully condemned unsanitary food gathering, preparation, and storage methods of immigrants and the poor but, based upon minimal general knowledge of health and nutrition, they sometimes inaccurately painted individual food choices as contributing to low energy levels and debilitated health. No amount of casual coercion or ranting and raving on the part of reformers could change the emotional and psychological significance of certain foods, nor alleviate the cash burden of procuring high-quality fresh and nutritious foods.44

Pure Food and Drugs: The Government Takes a Stand

By the late nineteenth century, scientific knowledge of bacteria, germs, and disease had made remarkable strides. As scientists came to better understandings of such processes as fermentation and putrefaction, the possibilities for improving the quality of human life also increased. In the 1860s, Louis Pasteur developed a process for killing off undesirable bacteria present in milk and other food products.

The growth of the food processing industry in the United States during this same time stirred controversy regarding the proper care and handling of food. Some small-scale food processors had been using various chemicals and other additives as cost-cutting measures. In an era before standard label laws and inspection of food

44 See Levenstein, Revolution at the Table.
processing facilities, no one knew exactly what might be in the tinned foods they purchased. In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair exposed the seedy underbelly of the meat packing industry in Chicago. The resulting products of large scale food processing were neither appealing to the eye nor healthful for the body. Even L. Frank Baum made a veiled reference to food concerns in his 1907 work, *Ozma of Oz*: "'I hope your lunch box was perfectly ripe.' observed the yellow hen in an anxious tone. 'So much sickness is caused by eating green things.'" Dorothy responded: "'Oh, I'm sure it was ripe. . . all, that is, 'cept the pickle, and a pickle just *has* to be green, Billina.'"45

Partly in response to such widespread popular concern over the quality of processed food, the administration of Theodore Roosevelt passed the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906. The Act included provisions for meat inspection and federal regulation of other food processors. Ultimately, some food processing giants saw the Act as a potential boon for their industry because it would serve to reassure consumers that their products were safe and clean. H. J. Heinz, for example, was instrumental in gathering industrial support for the regulations. Heinz knew that small companies would not be able to compete with larger conglomerates when the law demanded a higher standard of product quality.46 Heinz pickles, at least, would be clean and green.

The Pure Food and Drug Act thus demonstrates an early cooperative effort among government and industry leaders. But it did not ensure that all food would be safe or nutritious. For those who could afford better quality food, the Act ensured health and convenience. Many of the immigrants and poor, like the family of Jurgis Rudkus in Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, could not afford such assurances. For such people, a

45 *Ozma of Oz*, 40-42.
hot lunch in the factory cafeteria or the school lunchroom might be their best hope for a safe and nutritious meal.

**Making Lunch Efficient: Employers Take an Interest**

Frederick W. Taylor’s 1911 work, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, initiated a concern with efficiency in the workplace that soon became a rallying cry in management circles. Taylorism had the effect of making factory workers seem like industrial robots. In this atmosphere of nearly obsessive interest with productivity, the nature of employee’s meals soon fell subject to management inquest. Under these circumstances, reformers’ efforts to change workers’ food habits gained sanction from the quantitative investigations of efficiency experts.

Partially as a result of the need to mobilize American industry for production during World War I, more industries began to provide access to some form of sustenance during the workday. In a January 1917 article entitled, “The Disappearance of the Dinner Pail,” Mary Alden Hopkins wrote: “Eating is no longer a private matter. Food is potential energy. The business house that wants concentrated efficiency spreads a table before its employees and cries: ‘Eat, workingmen! For the work’s sake, eat!’”

At the close of World War I and the opening years of the 1920s, workers’ eating habits were truly shifting from being private matters to one of employer interest. The dinner pail was well on its way to transformation from a simple political symbol into what an anonymous author in a 1923 issue of *Literary Digest* called a “threefold

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evil—an evil to the employee, to the factory, and to the executives who run it.” Accordingly, continued the article, factory owners who had formerly expressed little interest in their workers’ meals “found that it is not a matter of philanthropy, but good business, to give the worker a chance to get a different sort of meal.” The author went on to describe reasons why even a small factory operator would want to encourage employees to eat in an on site cafeteria rather than bring their meals from home. The author’s research took him to Jonas Howard’s observations in Plant-Restaurant Management. Howard performed an early feat of investigative journalism: “Our data comes from sources which are beyond question. The writer, himself, has made investigations.” He traveled to various factories to inquire into the facilities and provisions for employee dining. What he found disturbed him greatly. There was a decided lack of space devoted to employee dining:

Have you ever, Mr. Executive, seen a group of factory workers sitting in a gutter on a hot day, eating the lunch brought from home in a dinner-pail? Have you noticed the results of using the gutter itself for a “table”? Have you realized that, having no other convenient place to lay his sandwich, the workman will often lay it on the ground or on a newspaper. Have you seen him fanning off the disease-carrying fly as he tried to eat in what peace and comfort he can find on a cold, hard stone?

In many small factories, every day, we see young girl workers eating the noon-hour meal while perched in the window-sill of a third or fourth story building. Or, we see them littering up the workroom with garbage, papers, string, and trash. You can’t blame them. They have to eat. They do not eat on your property through choice, and perhaps they are perfectly average in their tidiness.48

As a point of evidence, to illustrate the poor quality of workers’ food the Literary Digest writer included a listing of the contents of three dinner pails carried by

48 “Decline and Fall of the ‘Full Dinner Pail,’” Literary Digest, 3 November 1923, 52.
workers to a Chicago factory:

Pail a: Three swiss cheese sandwiches, with tomato catsup; lukewarm soup; slab of custard pie, with soggy crust; five dill pickles; vile coffee, lukewarm in a bottle; a stick of candy.

Pail b: One-half soggy, cherry pie; one piece of cake; cold coffee; one large, raw cucumber; cold, baked beans, half cooked.

Pail c: Half-cooked spaghetti, with garlic; cool coffee; soggy cake; strips of raw potato.

The tone of the descriptions provided both by the anonymous writer and by Howard suggest a disgust for the foods of poor people, especially immigrants. The lunch pail inventories emphasize that the spaghetti was with garlic, the vegetables were raw, and the coffee was of inferior quality and temperature. Howard described workers' food: “Cold sandwiches, doubtful pickles and food selected without any thought of its nutritive value form the contents of the average workers' lunch-box. If you don't believe, look into a few of them and see. There is almost no variety. A check made some months ago in an Ohio plant revealed a shocking combination of victuals in the dinner-pails of the workers. This plant now has its own restaurant.”

Both writers saw that the conditions in which workers were consuming their meals were unclean, inconvenient, inefficient, and the foods they choose to eat were often of poor quality and nutritional value. They sought to remedy the ills of the situation, but in their reforming zeal were clear indications of their disdain for workers and their ability to make sound judgments about nutritious food.

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49 “Decline and Fall of the ‘Full Dinner Pail,’” 52-54.
50 See Daniel Horowitz, The Morality of Spending: Attitudes Toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940 (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1985). Horowitz examines the shifts in social theorists' attitudes about morality and spending. He argues that the language Americans have used to talk about consumption have long been informed by moral judgments with an emphasis on how
While concerned about the conditions of on-site dining, Howard was equally censorious of the possibility that a factory worker might go out of the factory to seek a noon meal. This could result in the employee paying too great a price for food “that is positively injurious to his value as an economic factor in your business.” In addition, the employee might be late returning from his lunch break, thereby robbing the employer of valuable work time. Howard’s solution to all of these problems was the establishment of an employee dining hall and food service system. He trumpeted its positive effects: “It makes for contentment and satisfaction and the feeling that the firm is more than passingly interested in the employees’ happiness.”

During the 1920s and 1930s, support for the industrial cafeteria continued to grow. The reasons for such provisions were generally the same: “the desire to keep the employee in the establishment during the lunch hour, and frequently the wish to give employees better and more nourishing food than they would be likely to get outside, since there is a tendency on the part of many workers to economize on food to the detriment of their health and efficiency.” As more factories and workplaces began to make provisions for on site feeding a lunchtime revolution of sorts was underway. Workers came to their employers with a different set of expectations. According to a 1927 issue of Monthly Labor Review:

The operation of many industries at the present time not only involves the manufacture of the particular product or the maintenance of the particular service for which the industry is organized, but also includes the provision, within the industry, of many special services for the health and comfort of the employees, supplied often on a scale which makes them a special materialism results in a loss of self control and leads to moral decadence.

51 “Decline and Fall of the ‘Full Dinner Pail,’” 52 and 54.
management problem. Among the more important features of personnel work which contributes to the health and general well-being of the employees are the provision of adequate hospitals, with physicians and trained nurses in attendance, and of plant lunch rooms.53

As D. R. Wilson, the President and General Manager of the Wilson Foundry and Machine Company in Pontiac, Michigan stated: "Opening the tin dinner pail used to be a universal response to the noon-day whistle. But industry has learned that it has a responsibility toward employees even during the lunch hour. The plant cafeteria was one acknowledgement of such a responsibility."54

Feed the Children: Progressives and the Penny Lunch

"An ill-fed, badly nourished child is a menace to the community." With that striking declaration, Emeline E. Torrey opened her 1911 Good Housekeeping article, "The Penny Lunch Movement." The author was an ardent supporter of providing for child nutrition in the public schools, and she aimed to convert her audience to that stance as well. Toward that end, she appealed to both the heart strings and the selfish fear mechanism in her readers: "Not only is a child in this condition likely to be mentally stupid and morally more or less vicious, but he is also an easy victim to disease. Any of these three conditions by itself alone may make the child, in course of time, a dependent upon the state; the three combined are almost sure to lead to this deplorable condition." If such premonitions did not yet strike enough fear into the minds of American women, Torrey pointed out that these children would eventually add to the rolls of the paupers. The boys would become "truants, tramps, and

54 D.R. Wilson, "When the Dinner-Bell Rings," Factory and Industrial Management, March 1930, 568.
thieves," and the girls would find themselves residents of "houses of correction and
refuge." The ultimate threat, in Torrey's estimation, was that of disease which, once it
spread, would know no boundaries of class and status. She cautioned: "Where these
half-fed are found in numbers, there will be found the plague spots of disease, which
later stalks abroad and defies the men of science to overcome its terror until the cry of
the hungry and starved is stilled."\(^{55}\)

Torrey echoed the sentiments of a broad group of early twentieth-century
American reformers who took up as their cause the improvement of child nutrition.
Such efforts were neither new nor unique to the United States. In fact, much of the
groundwork for school lunches was laid in England and continental Europe.
Beginning as early as the eighteenth century, some Europeans were organizing mass
feeding programs for impoverished children and adults. Initially, the work was usually
carried out by private individuals or aid societies and later incorporated into
governmental services.

Among the more notable European programs was one begun by an American
ex-patriot, Benjamin Thompson, more commonly known as Count Rumford. Perhaps
most famous for inventing the double-boiler, kitchen range and baking oven, pressure
cooker, and drip coffee pot, Rumford spent time in England and Germany during the
late eighteenth century. While in Munich, Rumford founded the Poor People's
Institute, a place where indigent adults and children worked making clothes for the
army and in return received food and clothing for themselves. During their non-
working hours, clients of the Institute also received instruction in basic literacy and
computation. Rumford's greatest challenge here was to procure and prepare

nutritious food at a low cost. His strokes of genius in inventing kitchen equipment were in fact the direct results of difficulties encountered in the effort to feed large groups of people.\textsuperscript{56}

The U.S. lagged behind her European counterparts in the development of structured public feeding programs. It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that Americans turned toward the organized alleviation of poverty. One certain cause of the burgeoning interest at this time was the growth of cities. Industrialized cities were soon overcrowded with poor workers, many of whom were immigrants. The potential was great for unrest among people who are worn with labor, hungry, and crowded into deplorable conditions with strangers who did not speak the same language. Thus, most of the early feeding efforts were centered in large cities such as Philadelphia, Boston, Milwaukee, New York, Cleveland, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Los Angeles. Even some rural school districts endeavored to supply some type of nourishment to students who were too far away from home to return there for lunch and many of whom were too poor to bring anything along with them. By the 1920s the movement for school lunches was well established and organized, only to be challenged by the national economic depression of the 1930s which brought widespread unemployment and its attendant legacies of poverty and malnutrition. As hunger increased during this decade, it became more and more apparent that the individuals, school boards, school associations, and other philanthropic organizations could no longer manage to maintain adequate feeding without assistance. Slowly, the responsibility for such programs crept into the

purview of municipalities and states, and eventually the federal government.  

Providing meals for schoolchildren was quite a Herculean task both in the cities and in the one-room schoolhouses of the countryside. In both circumstances, the organizers and outside observers expressed concern that the provisions be available to those students who needed them, and yet not be cast in the light of hand outs. Boston was one of the cities where the “penny lunch” movement took shape. Torrey noted:

Many of those who have most closely studied the problems of poverty say we may not give the necessary food for fear of pauperizing the child. When we accustom him to receiving benefits without rendering an adequate return, we unfit him for his future work, sowing the seeds of a future dependency. This thought of having the child help himself, yet giving him an opportunity to get wholesome, well-cooked food once a day, started the penny lunches in Boston.

In Boston, the school system provided some basic supplies, but the bulk of the supplies for the penny lunch experiment came from “friends” who were later repaid from the profits. The first school involved in the experiment was the Winthrop School “situated in a congested area of Boston where living conditions are hard.” The program began in January 1910, and the foods served were simple. Among the dishes offered were: cereal, milk soups, cornstarch, rice, and tapioca pudding, and applesauce. Occasionally molasses cookies and ice cream were served for “gala occasions.” Food was not only supplied; it became an opportunity to teach. “Three days in the week the food was cooked by the children; on two days milk and jam sandwiches were served.” An important aspect of the experiment “was to teach the children that the food was not a gift, but an honest purchase, in which they paid a just price for value received. Another was to induce them to substitute this food for the

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57 Gunderson.
cheap candy, and green pickles for which their pennies had gone before. This was slow work, of course but there was a gradual increase in the receipts, until in March about forty-five hundred pennies were paid in.” In the end, the experiment was declared a success by the directors, the children, and the parents:

The mothers seemed to be glad of the help for the children. One grandmother, a hard-working charwoman, asked to be paid for her day’s labor partly in pennies, and when asked the reason, replied that she wanted them for her grandchildren’s lunches—“they thought so much of them.” The older girls themselves often told us how much better they felt to do the last hour’s school work. And even one of the tiny ones said to her teacher, on one of the last days of school, when lunches were not forthcoming, “My stomach doesn’t feel right, teacher, without my lunch.”

Reformers were keen on the possibility that in providing children with balanced meals and educating them as to the nutritional values of various foods, they could also influence the parents, especially the mothers, of these children. A school principal in Chicago trumpeted the positive effects of learning the appropriate social skills and decorum for group eating as a “social asset. The conception of a school lunch as a soup kitchen, pure and simple, ignores the fact that it is a part of an educational institution and should not smack of the orphan asylum.” The educational features of the school lunch were perhaps its greatest “selling point” when reformers needed to enlist support from outside the school community. If a school lunch could help to initiate children of the poorer sorts into acceptable manners and economics of proper food selection, then perhaps the dangers posed to society by poor food habits might be averted. One article advised teachers and potential teachers in rural schools that if no

58 Torrey, 242-244.
other community organization accepted the challenge of providing a hot school lunch, the teacher should take on this burden herself. The author said that the work of the school lunch should not end at the close of the noon meal, but it should "pass over into the homes of the pupils general information which will influence the selection of all the meals rather than apply merely to one part of one meal." Of the teacher, the author wrote: "Procuring a hot lunch at noon may appear as her initial aim, but in her mind it will be subordinated to that of reaching the parents through the children, helping them all to a better understanding of food values and good dietary habits, and making the school function as a civic and social center for the district."^{60}

The school lunch presented the possibility for reforming the habits of poor urban and rural parents who experts believed lacked both the intellectual ability to judge good meals and the social skills necessary for full participation in democratic society. When World War I broke out, the first selective service draft resulted in a dismal showing of national vigor. Fully 28 percent of the first men called were rejected as "unfit to bear arms" for reasons of under weight, undernourishment, and other "defects which should have been corrected in childhood." Reformers believed that had the parents of these draftees been exposed to education about proper nutrition, such deficiencies might have been prevented.\(^{61}\)

The disheartening selective service statistics instigated research into the causes of poor nutrition and its possible cures. A common solution was the school lunch. Studies found that both rural and urban children suffered the ill effects of poor nutrition. There had been a prevailing belief that rural children, by virtue of their

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^{61} "The School Lunch in Rural and Urban Districts," *The American City*, vol. 27, no. 1 (July 1922), 43.
proximity to the productivity of the land and livestock, were healthier and better nourished than city children. Investigations made to support this thesis found that it was flawed. Rural children might carry food to school, but the “usual fare” that these children carried in their lunch boxes was insufficient in “needed food materials.” City children suffered a similar fate from the ravages of “unwholesome food.” Some, who because of distance traveled or because “the mothers are away all day working in a factory or shop,” could not return home for lunch. If such children were fortunate enough to have been given “a few pennies with which to buy food,” they often spent it at “the corner grocery for pickles, candies and other sweets or at the push-carts for unsanitary and unwholesome food.” Even when children were able to return home for lunch, the meal they received was deemed “inadequate” because many mothers failed to “appreciate the full significance of food for children and serve a light lunch, preferring to prepare the more hearty meal in the evening when the father is at home.”

The literature on the subject of school lunches, similar to that of the factory canteen, exhibits an internal tension between the idea of a rationalized cafeteria-style hot luncheon prepared with the goal of nutrition in mind, and the often irrational, unbalanced lunches that might have been packed in haste and carried from home. In an article that praised the educational value of the school cafeteria, the boxed lunch was burdened with a reputation for having “contributed to disorder and problems of discipline.” Without elaborating on the subject of how a lunch carried from home could create such conditions, the author proceeded to describe the school cafeteria as

62 “The School Lunch in Rural and Urban Districts,” 43; 45.
a "virtually a necessity" and a "standardized cog in the well lubricated school machine." \(^{63}\) Sometimes community members expressed concern that if the school provided lunch for the child, the result might be to "weaken the sense of responsibility which parents should feel for the feeding of their children." In her survey of the penny lunch movement in Cincinnati, Ohio, Albertina Bechmann revealed that: "The reverse frequently happened. Mothers often came to ask what foods to select and how to prepare and serve them so as to satisfy the complaints of their children that the food at home was not so good as that at school." \(^{64}\) One author in the Journal of Home Economics suggested that, especially in the rural school, the teacher encourage parents to send their children to school with their lunches sealed in a glass jar that could be heated on a cookstove in a pan filled with water. This system was beneficial all around because it left with parents the "responsibility for his child's lunch" and it did not require much in the way of equipment, no at-school preparation, and resulted in only slight disturbance to the daily classroom routine.\(^{65}\)

The financial obstacles of procuring supplies of food and equipment along with the logistical challenges of preparing and serving the meal presented problems in both the rural and the urban setting. An author in Technical World Magazine in 1914 noted that where the "great cities" had experimented with hot lunches, the result was seen through "abundant proof that stupid children were usually ill-nourished children and that they changed quickly to bright and receptive pupils when they were properly fed." In smaller regions, the author commented: "It was found that lunches served at

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\(^{63}\) J. Mace Andress, "The Educational Value of a School Cafeteria," Hygeia, 7 (October 1929), 1030.
\(^{64}\) Albertina Bechmann, "The First Penny Lunch," Journal of Home Economics, November 1933, 761.

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cost prices averaged only a few cents a day per child, and parents were glad to be rid of the trouble of packing lunch boxes.” The article documented efforts made by the Extension Service of the Massachusetts Agricultural College on behalf of rural school children. Employees of the Service developed a “substitute for the dinner pail” that was a “cupboard” equipped with the basics of cookery. Because cookery lessons were often a part of the school curriculum, “the girls who have this work can prepare and serve a lunch to twenty or more pupils under the supervision of a teacher.” With such a program, it was only “necessary that the pupils bring from home their individual knife, fork, and spoon, with a plate and saucer and cup to supplement the kitchenette.”

Other options for the rural school involved greater participation on the part of students’ families. Irene Hume Taylor outlined some of the possibilities in a 1926 article in the journal *Hygeia*. She noted that in the rural school, the distance traveled by students meant that there was “no chance for them to have a substantial hot dish at noon unless the teacher manages to serve it at school.” Taylor advised the teacher to visit the parents of her charges. She predicted that many mothers “would be glad to be relieved of the daily task of putting up a cold lunch, if they were certain adequate food would be served at school.” Among Taylor’s suggestions for the teacher were that she enlist the help of mothers who would “take turns at preparing the luncheon, provided the distance to be traveled is not too great.” Otherwise, the teacher might make out a schedule for each child to bring supplies to feed the class for one week at a time or she might collect funds from each family to purchase supplies and then either fix the meal herself or “assign to the older children the project, thus combining the

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teaching of cookery with other subjects taught." Taylor went so far as to include several recipes for the aspiring teacher-chefs. Among them were "Cream of Tomato Soup with Rice" for twenty, "Cream Dried Beef on Toast" for fifty, "Lamb a la King" for sixty, and "Ham and Noodles" for seventy.67

The school lunch held the promise of fulfilling a dual role. It could simultaneously feed undernourished bodies and train eager young minds in the habits of efficiency, cleanliness, nutrition, and decorum. A third possible benefit was that through the children, reformers might reach and affect the health of the broader community. One such instance occurred in a rural mining town in West Virginia. There, in the late 1920s, one school teacher, Miss Mabel Baisden, took it upon herself to see that the "underweights" in her classroom who could not afford to bring milk to school for the "10 o’clock drink" would have milk to drink with their more fortunate classmates. Miss Baisden, in her role as "milkman" made sure that the necessary seven quarts of milk made it to school each day. When her "Ford broke down, Miss Baisden had to walk three miles carrying the milk."

Her project was not, however, in vain, for she saw the benefits that accrued to her students, and soon her idea caught the attention of the governor of West Virginia and was later replicated in other area schools. According to a report of Miss Baisden’s activities that appeared in the May 1928 edition of Hygeia, from the simple idea of providing children with bottled milk grew an enormous drive for the improvement of health among the children of Logan County. The results included increased immunizations against typhoid and smallpox and a general concern about nutrition and food values. The anonymous author advanced the notion that Miss

Baisden’s milk bottle held a magic akin to that of Aladdin’s lamp. Simply touch the magic milk bottle and see the fifteen-year-old Hungarian boy who had organized a “school sanitary squad.” In another school, the “negro children” sang “as only members of their race can sing, while the young gardeners put on a tableau showing how fresh vegetables grow.” As further evidence of the magic milk, a fourteen-year-old boy dressed up “in a white frilled petticoat, not even masked,” and carried a sign that read, “‘Celery quiets your nerves.’” Other classmates “were beans and apples and beets, while a fat boy personified a potato, with the slogan ‘These Make You Fat.’” The writer observed that somehow, through this simple milk project, the children of Logan County had “developed a county health consciousness which made them cooperate not only in the dramatic public advertising of their health program, but in the simple everyday observances of the rules of the game.”68 In summary, the author proclaimed:

You would never dream that just starting to drink milk in one school could change so many things in a whole county; that out of this project could come such county health spirit, felt by every school child. But if you go down to visit the ten white schools and the three negro schools of the Island Creek system in Logan County, you will see the results.69

Further evidence of the success was apparent at the time of the article, for even though the Logan County mines had entered a slackening period, the health record of the area children continued to progress “satisfactorily.” In Logan County schools, a “Gold Star pupil” was not one who achieved a perfect score in spelling or math, but “in the schools visited by the Island Creek Coal Company’s health nurse, the Gold Star pupils are those who rate 100 on living.” Miss Baisden, for her efforts, was awarded

68 “Aladdin’s Bottle of Milk,” *Hygeia* vol. 6 (May 1928), 278-280.
69 “Aladdin’s Bottle of Milk,” 280.
the silver milk jug as a prize for having the school with the best milk record. In addition, she won from the Island Creek Coal Company a one-year scholarship to the State Normal school “because of her outstanding health work.” The article closed with a statement of standards for the awarding of the next silver milk jug:

This year this awarding of the silver milk jug will be on the basis of the by-products of health—going a step farther than the purely physical standards used last year. Aside from the regular records of weight normalizing, of those forming the habit of drinking milk at home as well as at school, of those who did not like milk to begin with and who learned to like it through milk-drinking at school, there will be a check of each child’s condition, revealed by his ability to concentrate, interest, self-reliance, cheerfulness, friendly attitude toward others, freedom from colds and other illnesses, good posture. They are all foundations that will build life success for Gold Star children.  

Miss Baisden’s efforts began entirely out of her own initiative. She wanted to bring about categorical improvements in the health of her students. Although she received recognition from the state government and the local mining company, there was not yet a formalized national program for the distribution of commodities and funds for the purposes of providing school lunches. Soon after her experiments demonstrated their success, the nation was rocked by the economic and social pressures of the Great Depression. The widespread nature of economic difficulties brought new urgency to the questions about how to provide meals for poor children and how to respond when they could not afford to pay. One article on lunch room management suggested that children who could not pay might be employed as assistants in the lunchroom. The only difficulty that this idea presented was that it might single out the poor children and make them the subjects of their peers’ scorn.

70 “Aladdin’s Bottle of Milk,” 281.
Another option was to give such children "food checks without the other children knowing it; this may be considered a legitimate school expense, although it is frequently provided for through private philanthropy." The author concluded that the problem of "free feeding" was one of "tremendous sociological significance" but that "definite limitations should be set as to the extent of such aid." This issue would continue to play a part in school lunch discussions as federal involvement in the school lunch increased during the 1930s and 1940s.

Who's the Boss?

At the heart of the debates over lunch in workplaces and schools from the late nineteenth through the mid twentieth centuries is a question of responsibility. What we see over the course of this time is a progressive, although incomplete, shift from individuals maintaining the responsibility for carrying or otherwise finding a meal of their own volition, toward an environment where institutions accept the role of making food accessible during the work day. When institutions, influenced by goals as varied as productivity, socialization of workers, and even improving general health and well-being of such people, make these factors paramount, the personal decisions of what to eat become less amenable to individual tastes and desires.

This chapter illustrates how progressive era reformers cleared the way for themselves and others to initiate the colonization of lunch. The interference of progressive reformers, regardless of whether it culminated in good or ill, had a profound effect upon the messages conveyed through individual food choices and

71 W.J. Hilty, "Lunch-Room Management in the County School," Journal of Home Economics, April 1935, 214.
habits. The next chapter will show how United States involvement in World War II brought a new urgency to the already complicated equation of lunchtime responsibility. Having learned from the earlier drive for industrial efficiency as promoted by Frederick Taylor and his followers as well as the contemporary interest in dietary reform sparked by professionalization of home economics and dietetics, the crucible of war led factory management, government wartime committees, and other national and local organizations to focus on the nutritional value of lunch and the way in which it was packaged or served. The demands of a wartime mobilization lent sanction to efforts on the part of these entities to direct the consumption habits of American workers as well as the general population.
Chapter 3

Victory at the Lunch Table: World War II and the Noon Meal

Over the twelve-month period from the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 to the first anniversary of American involvement in World War II, the federal government encouraged a massive homefront mobilization campaign that resulted in increased employment and greater industrial productivity. As the nation shifted from depression to wartime boom, more and more men and women had the means to purchase consumer goods. Yet, in an ironic twist of circumstances, money in the pocketbook did not necessarily translate to access to commodities. Inflation had arrived in force, and the war effort meant that many goods, from automobiles to foodstuffs, were not available.

While the war raged in Europe and the Pacific, the military and the Lend-Lease nations demanded a larger percentage of American industrial output and food productivity. Unfortunately, for members of the homefront, this frequently resulted in increased employment and greater industrial productivity. As the nation shifted from depression to wartime boom, more and more men and women had the means to purchase consumer goods. Yet, in an ironic twist of circumstances, money in the pocketbook did not necessarily translate to access to commodities. Inflation had arrived in force, and the war effort meant that many goods, from automobiles to foodstuffs, were not available.

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72 Some of the background and information in this section comes from my Master's thesis, “'I Will Waste Nothing': American Women's Patriotism as Seen Through World War II-Era Cookbooks” (M.A. Thesis, Kent State University, 1997).


74 See Blum, V Was For Victory, 90-116. Blum argues that although the war introduced new demands on family income in the form of price controls, rationing, and income taxes, "the wartime surge of buying was exciting in part because for so long most Americans had had to stint. It was also frustrating because wartime shortages denied Americans much of what they wanted" p.92.

75 The Lend-Lease Act was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941. Under the terms of this act, the United States agreed to assist its allies through loans of military supplies that were to be
in higher prices at home. Both goods and services cost more under a wartime economy—when they were available at all. Beginning in 1942, the government rationed consumer goods such as coffee, sugar, and rubber. Because there was no precedent for such widespread federal intrusion into consumer activity, the government engaged in a program intended to reassure citizens that their strict adherence to national policies would, in fact, further the war effort. For civilians, making sense of the morass of wartime rules and regulations was a complicated endeavor. Even before the onset of point rationing in 1943, consumers had to be educated in new ways of budgeting their resources and conserving their supplies all the while maintaining optimum physical health and well-being for war production.76

Cooperative efforts among industry, various social science experts, and the media developed tools for shaping and directing the activities of wartime civilians. Earlier progressive reformers had demonstrated the effectiveness of orchestrated intervention in food habits toward the ends of increased industrial output and returned or paid for at the close of the war.

In April 1941, President Roosevelt created the Office of Price Administration and Civilian Supply, later known simply as OPA. Under the terms of the Emergency Price Control Act of 1942, OPA gained the authority necessary to ration consumer goods. In the United States, rationing took four different forms including: certificate, differential coupon, uniform coupon, and point. Certificate rationing came first and involved issuing a form redeemable for a single item such as a tire, automobile, stove, or rubber boots. Differential coupons applied to commodities such as gasoline and fuel oil. Because people’s needs for these items varied, this program allowed for flexible allocations. Uniform coupon, in contrast, assured that everyone received the same share of essential supplies such as shoes, sugar, and coffee. The administration of this plan required the use of individual stamps with specific validation periods so that each person could obtain his quota. This system was applied to shoes, sugar, and coffee in Ration Book 1, beginning in May 1942. Point rationing involved a similar procedure and began in March 1943 with canned and processed foods, but was later extended to cover meats, fats, and oils. For more information, see Barbara McLean Ward, "A Fair Share at A Fair Price: Rationing, Resource Management, and Price Controls During World War II," in Produce and Conserve, Share and Play Square: The Grocer and the Consumer on the Home-Front Battlefield During World War II, ed. Barbara McLean Ward (Portsmouth, NH: Strawberry Banke Museum, 1994).
educational achievement. Now, the rationing of both consumer durables and perishables necessitated that people make changes in their habits and traditions in order both to comply with government mandates and simply to navigate the shifting tides of wartime economic cycles. In this environment, it was necessary for the colonizers to cloak any efforts not directly related to the announced goal of winning the war in that mantle. During wartime, colonizers, many of whom needed the labor and cooperation of the American people in order to make the war a success, were less likely to condemn people for what they ate and more apt to focus on the overall objective of better nutrition.

The Committee on Food Habits

One of the major food-related advancements of the twentieth century was the development of a scientific understanding of the role that vitamins and minerals played in maintaining good health. While scientists in the early twentieth century had discovered vitamins and their importance in nutrition, methods for isolating the compounds in tablet form remained primitive. Therefore, nutritionists advocated diets rich in key vitamins and minerals.77

The data on vitamins and minerals in human diets sent shock waves reverberating through the nation’s scientific and nutritional communities. In the past, many crusaders for dietary reform were labeled extremists and faddists; now, reshaping the national nutrition had the approval of scientists, and soon, the endorsement of the federal government. For the United States, as it had been during World War I, it was the health of the first draftees that served as a wake-up call. The

77 Levenstein, Revolution at the Table, 148-149.
nation’s leaders heard the alarm sound when the military rejected for physical defects 40 percent of the first million men drafted. Shortly thereafter, campaigns for national nutrition that had traditionally devolved upon American women intensified. Critics had long held mothers responsible for the health of America’s children. The rejection of so many of the first draftees brought American mothers and wives to the frontlines of the nutritional battle. Unwilling to have their children or husbands deemed undernourished or vitamin deficient, many women were prone to accept the science of nutrition as gospel.

To ensure that all American soldiers were physically capable of fulfilling their duties overseas and to energize the homefront as it began vital war production, the federal government began by appointing a committee of the National Research Council to make recommendations to boost the nation’s nutritional status. The lasting result of their labor was a scale of recommended daily allowances of vitamins and minerals necessary for good health. These daily allowances became known as the nutritional “yardstick”—an objective way to ensure that all Americans consumed a diet that “measured up” to federal standards.

Such a campaign to equalize nutrition across the board meant the creation of a more homogenous national diet. Although the immediate result of improved eating patterns often included better health, the change also led many women to see their old

78 Levenstein, Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 65. The rejection of so many of the first draftees disturbed Americans. In the literature of the period, the rejections are used to illustrate the importance of vitamins and minerals to the national health and defense. For example, see Morris Fishbein, The National Nutrition (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, Co., 1942), 9 and 182-184; and Margot Murphy, Wartime Meals (New York: Greenburg, 1942), 88-89.

79 See Levenstein, Paradox of Plenty, 64-79 for a discussion of the complex history of the Recommended Daily Allowance and the various boards and committees that dealt with national nutrition.
habits, traditions, and folkways as inferior. At the same time, through the influence of
a major national nutrition campaign carried out through public/private partnerships,
they were persuaded that the needs of the state (i.e., nutrition as a measure of national
defense) and quantitative methods of science were superior. The door was open for
the state and the corporation to enter American kitchens.

In the latter months of 1940, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt appointed a
Committee on Food Habits under the direction of anthropologist Margaret Mead to
study American eating habits and to propose methods to reconcile food shortages with
traditional eating patterns. Mead and her cohort knew that the process of altering
food habits was not a simple one. As social scientists, they were well aware of the
relationship between food and culture and of the danger posed to national morale by
dramatic, government-mandated shifts in the food supply. Studies of eating habits by
historians, psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have demonstrated that
people’s consumption habits tend to be conservative and influenced by factors such as
ethnicity, gender, age, and class. Generally, people resist rapid changes in food
unless they come out of personal choice or economic necessity.

For one group of Americans during World War II, the understanding and
appropriate use of vitamins and minerals partially defined patriotic wartime activity.
American women carried the responsibility for maintaining a healthy, happy home
front by providing their families with proper nutrition. At the same time, many women
responded to wartime appeals for volunteers and industrial workers. Two radically

80 See for example: Levenstein, Revolution at the Table and Paradox of Plenty; Elizabeth Capaldi,
ed., Why We Eat What We Eat (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1996);
Roy C. Wood, The Sociology of the Meal (Edinburgh University Press, 1995); and Richard
different propaganda campaigns converged upon a common subject: American women. Some wartime slogans encouraged women to keep both feet firmly planted in the domestic sphere while others asked them to emulate the sacrifice of "Rosie the Riveter" by participating in war industry "for the duration." Those women who sought employment outside the home found glorification in their contribution to the national war effort but also faced criticism for their lack of time and energy to devote to family well-being. They found themselves burdened with reconciling both the time constraints of being working wives and mothers and the supply constraints imposed by rationing. While many people accepted changing women's roles as necessary for the duration of the war, still others remained ambivalent to any radical departures from women's traditional place in the home.81

Women fed into an expanding war industry while mothers were expected to feed new soldiers. Women thus retained the central responsibility for procuring and preparing family meals. In The Problem of Changing Food Habits, published in 1943, members of the Committee on Food Habits acknowledged this by targeting women, particularly "wives and mothers" as prime targets for the initial attempts at altering consumption patterns, citing them as contributing to the "weaknesses and deficiencies

in our national dietary habits." 82 "On the women," concluded the Committee, "more than on any one else, depends, in the short run and in the long run, the family's diet, both as to choice of food and as to preparation thereof." 83 While they chastised women for failing to provide adequate nutrition, they turned those shortcomings into an appeal for action. The findings of the Committee revealed that the putative relationship between health and patriotism was a powerful one: "Greater potency was given to the health area by linking health with patriotism. This was accomplished by the explanation of the government's concern over the number of young men rejected by the army on grounds which might be related to nutrition." 84 The Committee observed that women could be drafted into the ranks of kitchen commandos if pride in family health, nutritious meals, and the national defense were equated. As a 7 December 1942 New York Times report noted:

Washington, Dec. 6--Governmental agencies in Washington are providing an intellectual safety net for the American woman who is forced to swing on the wartime mental trapeze of running a home. The broadest media of expression, newspaper, radio, motion picture, magazine, pamphlet, cartoon, poster, public address and personal interview are being drafted by departments of the Federal Government and newly established war agencies to interpret the war's effects on the home. 85

The effort to constitute the ideal wartime consumer became a quest for the ideal woman--the patriotic, consuming housewife. As far back as the American Revolution, the ideology of republican motherhood emphasized the female's

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82 For more background on the focus of nutritional reform movements in the United States, see Levenstein, Revolution at the Table, and Harvey Green, Fit for America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).
significance in creating the moral atmosphere of the home. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, however, Americans’ perceptions of the home and women’s roles within it began to change. As industrialization and commercialization altered the relationship between the individual and the market economy, domesticity came to represent the training ground for appropriate consumption rather than strictly moral behavior.86 From the beginning of the industrialization process, the value attached to women’s work within the home had been on a steady downward spiral. Historians of women’s experience in the United States have demonstrated how industrialization redefined the sexual division of labor that had always served to separate men’s and women’s roles within families. Industrialization and commercialization removed men’s work from the home and gave it potent meaning through its cash valuation. In contrast, the labor associated with running a household remained outside the market economy and hence devalued by its lack of cash remuneration. In this environment, women’s connection to the general economy was channeled through the activity of consumption; shopping was deemed to be an appropriate female activity.87

One editorial from The New York Times noted that the arrival of point rationing in 1943 might, in fact, result in a blurring of the lines that defined the separate spheres of men’s and women’s appropriate activities:

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Women in the home will have come closer than at any time in the past to achieving equality with men, in the sense that they will now have to master an intricate rationing system, roughly equivalent to their spouses' income tax returns.

We can, in fact, already visualize a living room scene in which the husband struggles under the lamp with the new tax law covering his March 15 return while the woman of the house masters the Wickard coupon plan. This may not make for amusement so wildly exciting as to require a sedative to induce sleep. But it's about the best we have to offer for early 1943 homework, and the American home will patriotically do what's expected of it of course.\(^8\)

Such assertions of women's significance in the war effort were aimed to temper their tendency to hoard or to support the black market. In addition, they helped to make women believe that they could play an important role in the national war effort from their own kitchens. A woman's most significant contribution to the war might come in the conscientious planning and serving of meals that also entailed careful consumer practices.

The domestic science or home economics movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries instigated an effort to recast the value of women's roles within the home. Proponents of the movement attempted to dignify housework with the cachet of a scientific endeavor. Although the domestic science movement made significant strides for many women, it ultimately backfired, and served only to undermine further women's status. In the end, the home economics movement sold women out as it resulted in increased trivialization of the home and professionalization of the expert home economist who became a tool of commercial culture.\(^9\)

The Committee on Food Habits soon recognized the potential influence of the


professional class of home economists that peppered the country. Margaret Mead noted that the most important aspect of modifying the national food habits involved a "basic alteration in the culturally defined style of what is a meal and what is food." She continued:

. . . exigencies of wartime conditions have made it necessary to resort to special measures to accomplish immediate changes and adjustments to shortages and substitutes. Here the Committee was confronted with an already established program of directed social change. The officials of the change were trained home economists. . . .In all directed efforts to alter existing food habits, the home economists is in a key position, whether to give food demonstrations, calculate new menus to fit shortages, set up new methods of food preservation, direct the professional propagandist of newspaper or radio, or train the neighborhood leader to carry the word of mouth messages into homes not reached by other media. Preparation of materials in a form which could be used by home economists and experiments in procedures which would facilitate their tasks have therefore been an essential part of the Committee's work.90

The Committee hoped to employ the most recent scientific and technological knowledge toward the goal of modifying the deficiencies and weaknesses of the national nutrition. In order to accomplish this task, the members knew that they needed to address the cultural and social factors that influenced food selection and meal patterns. Toward that end, they focused their inquiries on the national "folkways" related to food rather than upon diet and nutrition. This method made them best able to make "recommendations upon the use or misuse of the forces which affect changes in food habits."91

In "Forces Behind Food Habits and Methods of Change," a study headed by

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Kurt Lewin and the Child Welfare Research Station of the State University of Iowa, researchers sought to understand how cultural and psychological factors affected food habits. These social scientists discovered that in order to answer the question, “Why do people eat what they eat?” they first had to determine how various foods made their way from marketplace or garden to the dining table. The “Channel Theory,” developed by Lewin, helped to explain the factors that were involved in food selections. This theory began from the assertion that “once food is on the table, most of it is eaten by someone in the family.”\(^{92}\) In order for food to arrive on the table, it had first to enter one of the many channels that lead into the household. Among these were the grocery store, the garden, delivery services, direct purchase from producers (farmers), or home processes such as baking or canning. What was of concern to these researchers as well as to the government, was the fact that during wartime, some of these channels could become blocked, therefore necessitating a family’s search for alternatives that might lead it to the black market in addition to being of potential damage to nutritional health. Lewin observed that whether or not a food entered into a particular channel was controlled by a “gatekeeper.” Most often, the gatekeeper was the woman of the family. Thus, women were the prime targets for campaigns related to rationing, food preparation, and nutrition.

Lewin’s study included housewives belonging to five different groups: “(high, medium and low income levels) of White American stock, and two subcultural groups, Czech and Negro.”\(^{93}\) He and his team of researchers interviewed these women during May and June 1942. The interviews focused on women’s attitudes and values toward

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\(^{93}\) Lewin, 35.
food and meals. When the researchers inquired about meal patterns, they found that lunch was the meal with the greatest flexibility. The women were asked: “In what terms do you think of the meal: what goes into breakfast? lunch? dinner?”94 The various foods that women mentioned were tabulated and analyzed. The researchers found that there was a fairly high degree of homogeneity across the groups with regard to food habits. Lunch, however, presented some interesting variations on this theme. Members of the “high group” were the most likely to list certain specific foods as characteristic of lunch. Women in the remaining groups saw lunch as a less structured, informal, “pick-up” meal.

When the researchers questioned women about the motivations and values that affected their food choices, the most common responses fell into one of four categories: money, health, taste, and status. Under the imperatives of wartime economy, the desire to fulfill these aspirations sometimes resulted in conflict for the gatekeeper. Lewin discovered that of all the groups, the middle income group was the one most often faced with conflict over the rise in prices that inhibited consumption desires. Members of this group felt that their financial and social position was tenuous. They wanted to maintain the aura of prosperity, and yet, they had a nagging fear of falling back into the “poor” category. Lewin wrote that “in the effort to resist lowering their social status they might economize first in those areas which are socially least prominent, such as food, thus keeping up appearances.”95 For the scientists and officials interested in improving food habits, this observation proved to be most troubling as it might lead to people consuming less nutritious diets out of a desire to maintain status over health and well-being. The only way to avert this potential hazard

94 Lewin, 42.
95 Lewin, 51.
was to change the way people thought about food and mealtime. This might best be accomplished by making “a food that had been considered ‘food for others, but not for us’ into a ‘food for us.’” Lewin continued: “In the American culture the ‘food basket’ has three distinct parts assigned to breakfast, lunch, dinner; many foods are considered fit for only one part. In case of food shortage this might change. Since lunch is the least structured of these meals there might be a greater readiness to change the content of the ‘lunch’ than of the other meals.”

The nature of wartime production meant that many more industries operated on a twenty-four-hour clock. In order to keep up with the demand, some workers found themselves working “midnights” which meant that they had to adapt the traditional schedule of meals to suit their working hours. Lewin observed an interesting phenomenon related to how these people organized their dining experiences. He asserted that “regardless of working hours, people eat according to the clock.” By the American cultural pattern, one eats breakfast as the first meal of the day. What Lewin found, however, was that a person who awoke at noon would eat a “lunch meal rather than a breakfast.” The problem, as Lewin saw it, was not so much that a person deviated from the standard meal order, but that his diet would suffer as a result of losing the “nutritional elements which he normally obtained through breakfast foods.” Mead made similar observations on the issue of meal schedules:

Meal patterns are equally arbitrary and important, and alterations in the time or designation of a meal may mean severe nutritional dislocations, as when some Eastern Europeans, upon immigrating to America, dropped the second breakfast, or when odd-shift workers eat

96 Lewin, 54.
97 Lewin, 43.
three meals, none of which is breakfast; and so the foods which customarily appear only at a breakfast table, fruit juice, cereal with milk, and eggs, tend to disappear from the diet.98

Fortunately, Lewin noted, “since the results indicate that the lunches of all but the high group are the least ‘structured’ of the three meals, it would follow that other foods might be fitted most easily into the lunch pattern.”99

While Lewin, Mead, and the other members of the Committee were concerned that the food habits of individuals and families were not measuring up to the yardstick of good nutrition, they also realized that in order to instigate rapid, broad-based cultural change in eating habits, it would not suffice to target selected people or families. Mead called for a balanced approach to reform where the experts in “applied science” maintained cognizance of and respect for certain subcultural patterns and habits, while simultaneously finding ways of “controlling a social process in such a way that the desired changes will occur.”100

After identifying the cultural and social patterns of specific subcultures such as “second generation Americans of Polish, or Italian, or Hungarian extraction, where both men and women work in the mills and the average grade completed is the fifth,” or “southern sharecroppers whose food habits are tied to a one crop method of production,” the next step was to uncover the most direct avenue by which to gain access to these communities without provoking unnecessary alarm or resistance to the suggested changes. Lewin experimented with two different methods of inducing behavior modifications: group decision and lecture. His test group consisted of the residents of eight men’s dormitories at the University of Iowa and approximately one

99 Lewin, 43-44.
100 Mead, 26.
hundred and twenty Iowa women from diverse economic situations.

In the dormitory experiment, the male students were divided into several small groups. Some of the groups received letters that asked them to discuss the possibility of increasing their consumption of wheat bread over white. Other groups were given letters that simply asked them outright to make this change from wheat to white. The experiment showed that the men who arrived at a group decision to change their eating habits were more likely to succeed that their counterparts who attempted to make changes based upon the petition of an outside entity. Interestingly, in the groups who received only the request for change, their degree of success in making the change and overall desire for group success was tied directly to their personal preferences. In contrast, among the group decision subjects, the desire for group success was independent of individual tastes. Except in cases where the majority of the group voting for the change was too marginal, the group decision method showed more positive outcomes than the request approach.

Among the women, a similar experiment was carried out. One group of women met with a nutritionist and discussed the possibility of using kidneys, brains, and hearts as main-dish meats for family meals. These particular cuts were selected because of the "known resistance" that existed among the subjects. The results of the study were predictable—the women who interacted with the nutritionist and other women made more significant efforts to change than those who simply attended the lecture and received the recipes. For the women in the discussion group, the decision to change was not imposed upon them nor was it contractual with other people. It was "made by the individual concerning her own action—the housewife decides what she will do at home. The group setting gives the incentive for the decision, and
facilitates and reinforces it."\(^{101}\)

Lewin’s experiments made clear the function of group experience in altering foodways. The nature of the eating situation, be it in a restaurant or cafeteria, with other people or in solitude, had a tremendous impact upon mealtime actions and attitudes. Lewin commented:

The psychological meaning of eating is closely tied to group situations. Eating with co-workers in a factory is something different from eating at the family table or eating in a restaurant. The “eating group” influences greatly the eating conduct and the eating ideology of the individual. One can say that every eating group has a specific eating culture.\(^{102}\)

The goal shared by Committee members and the government was to target these specific eating cultures in such a way as to institute changes that would result in improved nutrition. Their biggest challenge came in determining how best to frame the information so that it would be acceptable and inoffensive to the intended audience, the gatekeepers of the family table—American women.

Studies regarding the dissemination of nutritional information demonstrated that women resisted sullying the bonds of friendship with morally framed attempts to alter friends’ food habits. One study of women in an area of southern Illinois concluded that the sharing of recipes for special occasion dishes served as the only exchange of food-related data among friends.\(^{103}\) A method that seemed to work better was the “block plan, which invests a neighbor with a governmental sanction of

\(^{101}\) Lewin, 63.

\(^{102}\) Lewin, 44.

\(^{103}\) Study cited in Mead, 28. For an interesting interpretation of the meaning of recipe sharing, see Susan J. Leonardi, “Recipes for Reading: Pasta Salad, Lobster à la Riseholme, Key Lime Pie,” in Mary Anne Scofield, ed., Cooking By the Book: Food in Literature and Culture (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press, 1989), 126-137. Leonardi concludes that recipes have a special language that encourages reader response in a specific and gendered way. The giving and receiving of recipes has a series of conventions all its own.
patriotism and patriotic license for intrusion into domestic affairs. . . here also nutrition information can be discussed more efficiently if the emphasis is on adjustment of meals to wartime conditions rather than upon eating correctly, upon helping a woman to adjust a process rather than urging her to be good.” This plan, too, might suffer if the block leader felt that the tone of her efforts was “cast in terms which suggest that she is trying to reform her neighbor.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, a tactic which was patriotic, yet free of moralism, appeared to harbor the greatest potential for success. In Mead’s estimation, the best way to present nutritional information to the public was from the innocuous and disinterested perspective of science. She cautioned that nutritional reform not be linked in people’s minds with the shortages and hardships of wartime and therefore deemed to be one of the many temporary accommodations to the war situation. She articulated a long-term goal of transforming food habits so that they would be “based upon tradition which embodies science and to do so in such a way that food habits at any period are sufficiently flexible to yield readily to new scientific findings.”

Mead closed with the admonition that “the food habits of the future will have to be sanctioned not by authoritarian statements which breed rigid conformity, but by a sense of responsibility on the part of those who plan meals for others to eat.”¹⁰⁵ Thus did Mead express the commitment of the scientific community to the progressive improvement of the nation’s food habits. With a scientifically precise, broad appeal to the betterment of the human condition, but also an attitude respectful of individual and cultural variations, experts might be able to bring about a steady improvement in all Americans’ diets. The most significant element of Mead’s statements, however, was

¹⁰⁴ Mead, 28.
¹⁰⁵ Mead, 29.
her use of the word *responsibility*. A new group of people, scientists affiliated with
and endorsed by the federal government, would now play a key role in shaping
national eating habits. The changes in the wartime food supply caused by shortages
and rationing provided a rationale. The real challenge was in finding ways to link the
national needs, scientific data, and individual practices in a web that would produce
the greatest national fortitude as well as the most healthy and happy citizens possible.

In Bridgeport, Connecticut, a locally planned and administered program for improving
war workers’ nutrition brought these various interests into harmony.

"Pack a Lunch A Man Can Work On"

Improving the nutrition of war workers was a proposition that could transform
a whole community. In spite of wartime labor demands on men and women, the fact
remained that upon women fell the bulk of responsibility for providing all family meals.
When such meals were inadequate nutritionally, the result was a less than efficient
workforce—a danger to workers, industry, and the nation during wartime. A survey of
lunches in Bridgeport showed that the majority of the 75,000 industrial workers
carried their lunches. The most commonly carried items included sandwiches, coffee,
soft drinks, candy, and pastries. The Bridgeport Gas Light Company, whose home
economists presented cooking demonstrations throughout the community, launched
the campaign for improving the lunches of the city’s workers. The home economist-
demonstrators, because of their relationship with the wives and mothers who were
“responsible for workers’ lunches,” could include nutrition education in their
presentations.106 Eventually, the Bridgeport Plan united local officials, industrial and

commercial leaders, and the women of Bridgeport.

Changing people's food habits, as was demonstrated in the studies conducted by Lewin and Mead, involves a delicate balance of respect for traditional ways and care in framing the changes without making moral condemnations. As Lewin and Mead found, lunch was the meal most open to alterations. Although Bridgeport's initial goal for the Plan was simply to energize workers for optimal productivity, the possibility for the improvement in workers' eating habits carrying over to family meals was always present. After all, the same women who packed the lunches also prepared the breakfasts and evening meals for the entire family.

Those involved in the effort to reform Bridgeport factory workers knew that in order for the Plan to be successful, they had first and foremost to be assured of support from the women of Bridgeport. A diversity of ethnic backgrounds, to say nothing of individual personalities and tastes, made selling the Plan to Bridgeport women a challenge. Leaders found success when they played up the patriotic aspect of nutritional changes and also when the changes received the endorsement of religious and popular secular officials. Robert A. Crosby, the Executive Secretary of the Bridgeport Chamber of Commerce, in his enumeration of the many good things that might come of better food for working folk, summarized the main motivations for implementing and carrying out the Plan:

_For the worker:_ Better health, joy of living, more money—money otherwise lost through absences from work because of illness, for drugs, for medical bills, etc.

_For industry:_ A reduction in the huge bill, including $450,000,000 for colds alone, which industry now must pay because of workers' illnesses.

_For the public:_ Uninterrupted production of bombers, tanks, guns. That means fewer sons, husbands, and brothers lost on battlefields, a speedier victory, and return to normal family life.

No one, as we have said, can therefore question the desirability
of improving the nutrition of all people, and, in particular, of war workers. But how are these aims to be accomplished, showing tangible results in terms of improved health and faster production?

An answer to this vital question has been found in the “Bridgeport Plan.” In harmony with the wishes of government officials, who realize that the success of the national nutrition program must lie, finally, with the actions of communities themselves, Bridgeport Conn., has evolved a plan whereby women will be encouraged to pack nutritious lunches for the workers in their families. The slogan of the “Plan” led by the Civilian Defense Committee is “Pack A Lunch A Man Can Work On.”

Simple, isn’t it? And that, we feel is the signal advantage of this plan. Emphasis on one meal. It is believed that, having mastered the fundamental rules of nutrition for lunches, women will automatically then apply what they have learned to other meals for the entire family.107

A writer for the journal Hygeia, Helen Morgan Hall, began her article on Bridgeport with a brief jeremiad on the quality of foods consumed by the industrial workforce. She described the meals as “sorry affairs, both nutritionally and esthetically.” She attributed the statistics on absenteeism to the quantity of ill-fed “men drawn from relief rolls” and “others rejected for physical reasons by the selective service” who had poured in to meet the demands of wartime production. She warned: “Statistics show that two thirds of the American people are inadequately fed, and it seems safe to assume that a goodly proportion of this group are men turning out weapons for war.” The best insurance policy against the danger posed by this condition was education: “Ways to accomplish such dietary reforms are being sought by many authorities. Since this is a democratic country, the most obvious tool appears to be education--not regimentation, not force, but enlightenment regarding the right kinds of foods coupled with creation of a desire to eat those foods.”108

In Hall’s estimation, Bridgeport served as a model for the power of education

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to reform the eating habits of a diverse population. A “factory city of foreigners,” Bridgeport numbered eighty percent of its population of 180,000 as “foreign born or of foreign parentage.” Among the many nationalities represented were Hungarian, Polish, Lithuanian, Ukranian, Swedish, Italian, Russian, and Slovakian. Hall held Bridgeport up for emulation in other similar cities: “Experience in this city shows that what has happened in Bridgeport can happen anywhere in America if the citizens originating such programs understand and keep faith with the people.” These leaders who were so attuned to the needs of the people were primarily leading male citizens. Hall noted that the “active leadership” was shared by the chairman of the Health Division of the Civilian Defense Council (Dr. Joseph H. Howard), an executive of a local gas company, and the associate editor of the city newspaper.109

The leadership of the Plan met early on with some opposition from women who believed that they were being robbed of their individual prerogative to pack lunches as they so desired. They drummed up support with a letter from Eleanor Roosevelt sounding praises of the Plan as a way for women to contribute to the war effort. Later, Dr. Howard issued the following motivational statement:

This is America. Any individual here has the right to remain below par physically if he wants to, providing that, in doing so, he does not jeopardize the lives of others. But the man next door has a right, too. He is entitled to use the knowledge which brilliant scientists have got together for the sole purpose of making him a healthier and therefore happier person. This is the man we want to help through the Plan.110

One of the methods of instituting change in eating habits was begun with a survey of workers’ lunch boxes. On the Sunday prior to the Monday when the survey

109 Hall, 901.
110 Hall, 928.
was to commence, the pastors of local churches announced the details to their congregations, thus, “in Hungarian, Swedish, Ukrainian, the word went out to women from men they trusted.” At the same time, the local newspaper launched a new feature called the “Kitchen Soldier.” Each week in this column, a different woman would share her experiences in lunch packing: “The Kitchen Soldier, who might be Polish or Hungarian, or Italian, would agree only to modify the lunches she packed to include every day milk, meat (or eggs, fish or cheese), bread (whole wheat or enriched), vegetables, fruit.” Each of the menus was then evaluated by the country Chairman of the Committee on Nutrition, who happened to be a woman.

Dr. Howard expressed the Plan’s benefits: “This Plan becomes your Plan. All of you--once you have agreed that the men who are turning out war weapons deserve the best food that can be given them--will help each other with suggestions for packing better lunches.” After some initial resistance to the Plan, women were later described as inviting surveyors into their homes with greetings such as: “‘We’re expecting you,’ or ‘Oh, yes! This is what Mrs. Roosevelt said we should do.’”

Many women in Bridgeport also participated in classes conducted by the instructor of the nutrition subcommittee of the Civilian Defense Council or another volunteer who was a graduate of a Red Cross or Civilian Defense nutrition class. Hall described the content of the classes:

Here the spirit of the Plan is sustained; demagoguery is out, and emphasis is on helping women solve practical problems like: “What shall we put in the lunch boxes?” and “How can we save time?” Instructors launch quickly into such hints, unsnapping a lunch box and showing neat paper containers filled with intriguing foods packed inside. . . .Invariably such hints get women into what educators call a “learning mood.” In a moment, women are buzzing experiences to neighbors, pelting instructors with questions. This response pattern is the same whether the instructor’s
remains are being translated into Yiddish, Ukranian, or Hungarian.\textsuperscript{111}

One of the underlying goals of this nutritional education campaign was the creation of a sense of unity and common purpose. For the diverse population of Bridgeport, this meant conformity to a new way of planning meals and eating centered less around individual tastes and desires and more around the information and advice provided by experts. Although experts acknowledged that the “packaged lunch” continued to “hold the spotlight” for many people because of its “human, personal appeal,” increasingly, new parties assumed responsibility for providing lunches that would meet standards of nutrition set by scientists and enforced by the government.\textsuperscript{112}

The homefront wartime environment provided the conditions necessary for individual nutrition to become a part of the national interest.

\textbf{Government, Industry, and Community Cooperation}

The interplay among the causes of war production, national nutrition, and corporate America formed a complex web of mutual support toward achieving what were sometimes very different goals. As the agency overseeing food provisions in the workplace, the War Food Administration (WFA) was motivated by the goal of keeping up national productivity levels for the war effort. At the outset of the war effort, the WFA focused its efforts on improving the contents of lunch boxes. Later, when the agency was better established and had a greater amount of money and supplies to distribute, WFA honed in on the need to make meals available in the workplace.

\textsuperscript{111} Hall, 929.
\textsuperscript{112} Hall, 930.
Earliest efforts to improve the nutrition of industrial workers consisted of educational campaigns to get something more than a sandwich, a piece of pie, and a bottle of coffee into the lunch box.

Today the WFA has industrial feeding specialists whose services, for surveys and recommendations, may be requisitioned without charge by management or by governmental production and procurement agencies if they feel that production could be improved by better food facilities.\textsuperscript{113}

Although WFA maintained that the “main responsibility for adequate meals” rested with “management,” the agency started its efforts by converting the laborers because they were the consumers. Eventually, many labor unions became supportive of the in-plant feeding program. With labor on its side, the WFA then had to make its case with management. They eased plant leadership to their side with the hope of higher worker morale, fewer requests for a transfer, fewer employees leaving the job, and better productivity. Once a company agreed to open a plant cafeteria, it was eligible for assistance from the federal government. This assistance came in the form of extra ration points for food, access to equipment and supplies necessary for the operation of a cafeteria, and help with construction of additional buildings to provide space for food service.

At the local level, other communities in the United States launched programs similar to that in Bridgeport. As had been demonstrated in Bridgeport, through the cooperation of industry and community, both could benefit. The General Electric Company distributed bulletins to each of its plants across the country and employed a staff of home economists in plant Nutrition Centers. When the General Electric Home Economists made recommendations on what to include in workers’ lunches, “the planners kept in mind the subject’s taste buds and limitless variety was introduced through the use of paper containers--an angle that was assiduously promoted by the

\textsuperscript{113} “In-Plant Feeding,” \textit{Business Week}, August 19, 1944, 106.
The Westinghouse Company, a peacetime manufacturer of household appliances, shifted to war production, therefore forcing many appliance salesmen out of a job. The Company found that it could remedy this unemployment problem by shifting salesmen to jobs with the Health for Victory Clubs. These Clubs promoted good nutrition through balanced meals “for every day in the month, including box lunches” for a family of five on a budget of fourteen dollars a week. Although “Westinghouse equipment” was not “mentioned,” the Company still benefited from “plenty of goodwill through contacts with consumers, utility companies, distributors.”

There were other ways for non-governmental agencies and commercial enterprises to get into the act of promoting better nutrition. One of these was the “lunch box derby.” These events were public ways for businesses and agencies to publicize their commitment to the war effort. In 1942, a Los Angeles food store, Barker Brothers, sponsored a contest where twelve different workers’ lunches, submitted by home economists who were selected by newspaper food editors, were judged by a committee of aircraft workers’ wives. This was an interesting turn of events. Here, the wives judged the home economists’ selections based upon the following criteria: nutritional balance, appetite appeal, attractiveness, and variety.

The result was a lunch box show that was viewed by ten thousand women over a two-day period. Later, the ideas generated by this event were shared with 268 other Barker Brothers stores across the country. A Business Week summary of the Derby concluded: “The lunch box has become a definite food merchandising unit.”

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114 “Better Lunch Box,” 42.
115 “Better Lunch Box,” 42.
Brothers could provide a service to its customers by helping to solve the dilemma of what to put in the lunch box while at the same time generating a good relationship between business and customers.

A somewhat less commercialized lunch box derby was sponsored in the fall of 1942 by San Francisco’s branch of the American Red Cross and the local Nutrition Council, with assistance from the California Dietetic Association, the Home Economics Women in Business, the Parent-Teacher Association, and the American Women’s Voluntary Services. Together, these groups aimed to provide a “practical contribution to the educational campaign to improve box lunches for industrial workers.” According to a May 1943 Journal of Home Economics report by Gertrude York Christy, a member of the San Francisco Red Cross, the Derby was held in the auditorium of a local department store and included over one hundred displays of lunches for industrial workers as well as children’s lunches and “well-selected school cafeteria trays.” There was also a “special display of lunches for career girls and attractive, disguised lunch carriers. One group of girls sent in beautiful lunch containers made of round rolled-oats boxes, covered with wallpapers, shellacked and equipped with a gay cord for carrying. They looked like expensive knitting boxes.”

Christy reported that the California State Board of Health had a “fine exhibit” that included a map of California on which the locations of various industries were labeled with ribbons. These ribbons “led from the map to the tables” where specific lunches suited to the needs of the workers in each of the different industries were on
display: "There were lunches for the redwood workers, the Sierra miner, the city office worker, the ship-builder, the agricultural worker in the hot valleys, and the Mexican laborer."\textsuperscript{116}

The Red Cross had its own exhibition space where it featured lunches planned for "different nationality groups in San Francisco: British, Dutch, Russian, South American, Mexican, Chinese." At another Red Cross table was a display that contrasted a "well-planned lunch" for an industrial worker with one that consisted of "just whatever Mamma had in the house."\textsuperscript{116} Through the aid of a chart that broke down the nutritional values of each lunch and a nutritionist stationed nearby, the Red Cross demonstrated how a "well-planned" lunch would improve a worker’s mental attitude and physical stamina. The "well-planned lunch" included "three hearty sandwiches of meat, cheese, and peanut butter on whole-wheat and rye bread; a cole slaw salad; a large orange; a big square of gingerbread; and a pint of milk." The "poorly planned lunch," that was "really one purchased near a shipyard, included "two thin sandwiches of white bread with a spoonful of liverwurst, a paper-thin slice of bologna, a small apricot turnover, a very small piece of fruit, and a chocolate mint." The most incriminating facts about the purchased lunch were its lack of adequate calories, vitamins, and minerals. When a man who passed by the booth commented that the poor lunch resembled one that he might carry, a nutritionist cautioned:

That’s pretty low in vitamin B-1. Hope you don't get into any fights with the boss or the little woman at home. If you have a low-calorie breakfast such as a doughnut and coffee and then a lunch of only 700 calories you'd soon be cross enough for most any kind of argument.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{117} Christy, 286.
One of the main attractions at the Derby was a contest to evaluate the nutritional and "appetite appeal" of various lunches and to award prizes to the winners. The judges for the contest came from local "CIO and AFL auxiliaries, women who put up lunches every day," as well as a "jury of nutritionists" who approved the ladies' selections to see that they were nutritionally sound. Prizes were awarded by type of lunch: a midday snack, a snack for the late afternoon shift, and an afternoon "'wake-up snack'" for the worker on the midnight shift.

"A Wonderful Lunch in a Box": Prescriptions from Magazines, Newspapers, and Cookbooks

Another positive way to highlight the need for nutritional accommodations to the war situation was through the efforts of various cookbooks and women's magazines and newspaper columns. These sources addressed the difficulty that many women faced in preparing lunches for the men and children in their lives, and sometimes even for themselves. Although the war certainly increased the number of women employed outside the home, the Rosie the Riveter image was balanced by an equally powerful campaign that emphasized traditional stereotypes of housewives and mothers as engineers of household organization and agents of family health and happiness. Writers infused the activities of the housewife with national significance and offered women advice on how to overcome the constraints of rationing, new war-related time demands, and the physical limits of food in order to pack nutritious, appetizing lunches. One cookbook made explicit the importance of the lunch box to the maintenance of home front morale:

The lunch box is a part of the war program, and an important part. It carries sustenance and mealtime enjoyment that promotes good spirits, good health, and good work.
Menus for it must be planned as carefully as those for the family, in fact more so, since they are harder to vary and keep interesting. They should, of course, correlate with the meals of the family to save time, to prevent the buying of extra foods, and to include the good things that are served at the table. And they must carry their share of the foods needed for the day.118

According to the information presented by many wartime authors, it was important to pack a well-planned lunch in a tidy box so that the carrier would not feel a sense of embarrassment when opening it in the company of others. The lunch box was an opportunity for the housewife to demonstrate her skills. Cookbook authors cautioned:

". . . for the enjoyment of the lunch box carrier there are a few rules for you, the lunch box packer to observe." Among the tips offered: "Do yourself proud in the lunch box you pack. Don't make the man ashamed when he opens the box in front of other workers."119 Another author commented: "That it be neat and trim of appearance is even more important than for the dining table at home to be so. The dining table has the warmth and cheer of the room to enhance its appearance, while the box has nothing save itself and its packings to make it inviting."120

Similar to the cookbooks' prescriptions for appropriately balanced menus for the boxed lunch, women's magazines engaged their readers in an effort to follow the plans set out for them by home economists and editors. A January 1943 Good Housekeeping article, "A Wonderful Lunch in A Box," provided readers with menus for lunches that had been developed at the test kitchens of the Good Housekeeping Institute. The author told readers that lunch box packing was vital to the productivity

120 Robertson, et al. 313.
of war workers and that it was “a challenge that you can’t ignore.” The article also provided a forum to tell women about “the interesting activities, all designed to help homemakers plan and prepare meals that meet the needs of sound nutrition.” Toward this end, the author listed the contribution of gas and electric companies that were helping to organize local meetings and “advisory services” for women: “Homemakers who are doubling as war workers should find these activities helpful in meeting their special needs for menus that are easily and quickly prepared.” An October 1943 Good Housekeeping article, “Nothing Fancy About These Box Lunches,” included a “Daily Lunch Box Guide” that consisted of five categories of foods that should be included in every lunch every day: meat, poultry, fish, eggs, or cheese; vegetables; fruit; bread; and milk. The author of this article commented that the recipes had also taken rationing “into account, for they use foods that are widely available.”

A constant theme in the events and literature aimed at the lunch-packing women of America was the significance of their attentive planning and careful packing of lunch boxes. Packing lunch boxes or seeing to the proper nutrition of their families through other means was a part of women’s civic and moral duty. It was not simply a matter of tossing food into containers or onto the table, but rather a public display of a woman’s competency as a wife and mother.

122 Jane Giesler, “Nothing Fancy About These Box Lunches,” Good Housekeeping, October 1943, 95.
Winning the Nutrition War

Clearly, “lunch” was defined in many different ways by ethnic and regional groups, industrial and salaried workers, shift workers, men, women, and children. Still, the one thing that united all of these diverse lunch experiences was the fact that they occurred outside the home in an environment that was often beyond the control of the individual lunch eater. Events such as the Lunch Box Derby and other efforts drew public attention and support for the promotion of better nutrition. These events created a group experience that encouraged people to make alterations in their food habits. As Lewin and Mead demonstrated in their studies of foodways, people are more likely to accept dietary change when it is framed with patriotism and science and is a part of a unified effort toward some common goal—in this case winning the war with the support of the home front. The Bridgeport Plan, the General Electric pamphlets, the Westinghouse Health for Victory Clubs, the Lunch Box derbies, and the prescriptive information found in cookbooks and women’s magazines and newspaper columns presented nutritional change in a tone that was enriched by the cachet of science and the endorsement of the federal government. While nutritional reformers might have seen their subjects’ ethnic, regional, or personal foodways as inadequate and irrational, they had to take care in addressing their audience without moralistic judgment. They did this by recognizing some diversity in the lunch tailored to a specific ethnic group and also by enlisting leaders of these groups to appeal to other members. Although the various individuals, businesses, and the government each had different motivations and reaped different benefits from the crusade to alter Americans’ eating habits, the exigencies of war covered seams that might have divided their efforts and rendered them ineffective.

American involvement in World War II led to the creation of an atmosphere of
patriotic sacrifice for the greater cause. In this environment, it was important for the
government to encourage in everyone a sense of dedication and personal responsibility
for the success of the war. The lunches of industrial workers were a perfect target for
the twin goals of social reformers and the government. The ultimate result of
improvements in workers' lunches was increased dietary homogeneity toward the end
of better nutrition and increased morale toward the end of higher productivity.
Chapter 4
Staking a Claim on Lunch: Eating on the Job After World War II

When the U.S. emerged from World War II, the homefront experienced a period of readjustment to peacetime. Women who had secured employment in war industries found themselves pushed out in favor of the returning soldiers who were seeking jobs. An ideology of domesticity was highly visible in American life as men and women of the war generation looked ahead to a future that included a home and a family.¹²³

As food rationing came to an end and industrial production turned away from military preparedness, the eyes of the government officials and reformers turned away from the lunches of workers as their focus shifted to the implementation and direction of the National School Lunch Program.¹²⁴ As it had been in the early twentieth century, the worker’s lunch, although still subject to reformers, employers, and the government, was once again more of a personal responsibility and concern. Despite a waning interest in worker lunch on the part of many reformers, employers, and the government, the effects of their wartime intervention in worker lunches did not evaporate. In contrast, many workers had internalized an understanding of the relationship among good nutrition, well-being, and productivity. During the post-war years, workers interacted with the colonizers using tropes previously aimed at them.

¹²⁴ More information of the National School Lunch Program appears in the next chapter.
Lunch Time is My Time

Lunch might be thought about as an example of the automation of daily existence initiated by the industrialization and urbanization that truly took root in nineteenth-century America. Unlike working on a farm or in a small shop, factory work required employees to submit to certain demands placed upon them by their employers. Issues of monetary compensation for time “spent” have a different resonance when a laborer is working for someone else rather than himself. When the passage of time is oriented less to natural rhythms and more to the values of productivity and efficiency, time loses its neutral status and becomes friend or foe. British historian E.P. Thompson describes the phenomenon in terms of changing notions of the value of time and the role of the clock:

Those who are employed experience a distinction between their employer’s time and their “own” time. And the employer must use the time of his labour, and see it is not wasted: not the task but the value of time when reduced to money is dominant. Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent.\textsuperscript{125}

Thompson characterizes the changes in society as it shifted from a task-based orientation to a clock-based format. He notes that there was a “general diffusion of clocks and watches... at the exact moment when the industrial revolution demanded a greater synchronization of labour.”\textsuperscript{126} Thompson enumerates three stages in the process of industrialization and the development of time awareness. The first stage was marked by resistance. Pre-industrial people, accustomed to rising and retiring on their own schedule, had a difficult time adapting to the discipline of quantified time. The shift to the second stage was characterized by growing acceptance of the time-
management system as it became more internalized and widespread. An indication of this stage was the fact that workers began to fight “not against time, but about it.” 127 This bargaining over time included efforts to control the number of hours worked in a single day. In the third and final stage, workers became so adept with time categories that they were able to use them as negotiating tools against their employers in order to ensure that the number of hours worked and the amount of pay received were in appropriate balance.

This history of industrialization in the United States certainly fits into Thompson’s themes. Although American workers began the struggle for the ten-hour day at a later period than workers in England and other European nations, when the concept of time as a divisible commodity gained preeminence in the nation’s factories and trades, workers asserted their own interpretations of the time-work exchange. As mass production became more common and merchant capitalists reorganized the structure of the workplace, the conditions of labor changed. Workers in various crafts and industries came from a wide variety of occupational and social experiences and responded in different ways to changes in their work environment. Some felt a loss of independence as the result of constant supervision or machine-regulated production and others were upset by the reduction or elimination of breaks caused by the continuous production. As time went on, such workers became more aware of the fact that their time was, in fact, a commodity. Workers’ calls for shorter hours involved a desire to reclaim possession of their time for use both in bargaining with their employers and for marking out the boundaries between “labor” time and “personal time.”

127 Thompson, 388.
The mechanization of production has generally resulted in a marginalized role for the worker. Rather than being important for his humanity and uniqueness, he is significant only for his role in the productive process. It is a disconcerting prospect for humans to be reduced to such an easily replaceable status. When the famous children’s author, L. Frank Baum wrote the third installment in his popular Wizard of Oz series in 1907, he parodied the disturbing trend toward mechanization. Baum’s mechanical man, TikTok, befriends the main character of the Oz tales, Dorothy. When the young Dorothy offers TikTok some of the dinner from her dinner pail, he “declined, because as he said, he was merely a machine.”128 In order to reclaim some vestige of individuality in the face of tremendous pressure toward uniformity and efficiency, American workers since the time of early industrialization, have clung to breaks and mealtimes during working hours as a reminder of their humanity.

The interlude of early twentieth century progressive reform helped to secure better dining environments, and increased attention to workers’ meals during World War II resulted in significant changes, but after the close of World War II, the conditions and content of workers’ meals faded from the docket of reform issues. Although no longer the center of national attention, workers’ meals remained a significant element of personal identity and a central item in negotiations with employers. The government was less involved in workplace dining issues than it had been during the war, but it maintained an influence through judicial and legislative decisions.

128 L. Frank Baum, Ozma of Oz, 68.
Where Have All the Reformers Gone?

After being the subject of so much attention from early twentieth-century reformers and later the focus of home front mobilization efforts during World War II, progress in the improvement of dining facilities and respect for worker’s mealtime needs reached a level of stagnation.

The cartoonist Frank Adams attempted to draw attention back to the worker’s meal in his 1951 book, Then Ya Just Untwist. The book consists of a series of cartoon illustrations that depict the lives of working-class Americans. What is particularly interesting about these simple and often humorous cartoons is that with only a few exceptions, every one of them contains a lunch box somewhere in the drawing. In Adams’s work, the lunch box acts as a symbol of the paucity of suitable dining conditions, poor pay, and lack of respect from employers, family, and the culture-at-large that culminated in a sense of disenchantment for many working Americans. Adams dedicated his work to “those valiant men and women who miss their rides, punch time clocks, pay the taxes. . . and carry battered lunch pails.”

Among the cartoons in the book are several that parody the conditions of dining in factories. One illustration shows two men, sandwiches in hand and an open lunch box beside them. One sits with his feet resting upon the back of a third man who is in the middle of scrubbing the floor of the work station. He looks at his lunch partner and says: “You don’t get this kind of comfort in the cafeteria” (figure 10).

Many of Adams’s cartoons look at the way the conventions of gender were played out in the factory and the home. Adams’s illustrations show several women

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129 Frank Adams, Then Ya Just Untwist (Rialto, California: Rialto Publishing Company, 1951). Because this book contains no page numbers, future references will not be footnoted.
working in factories. An early cartoon in the book shows a rather portly woman carrying her lunch box in her hand and a scowl on her visage (figure 11). She passes a department store window in which stands a statuesque mannequin with an umbrella in her hand and an air of complacency upon her face. The contrast between the two is striking. One is trapped in the work-a-day world of lunch boxes while the other “enjoys” fine things and leisure.

In a telling image about the stress resulting from the necessity for two incomes in a household, a man and a woman, each dressed for factory work and toting a lunch box are arriving back at home. The characters appear to be talking over one another. On the steps of the house is a small child wearing nothing but a diaper. The child has his arms crossed and a look of disgust on his face. The caption reads: “Good Lord! I thought YOU took him to nursery school on YOUR way to work this morning!” (figure 12).

Many of Adams’s cartoons also make reference to the relationship between factory-working husbands and housewives. He parodies a popular notion regarding the housewife’s lack of “real” labor and her obsession with consumption. One cartoon shows a man returning home from what appears to have been a very difficult day on the job. His slouching posture, tattered clothing, and lunch box are overshadowed by the car steering wheel that he wears around his neck. Standing in the doorway of the house is his wife. A stout woman, she is dressed in a coat and hat with her purse dangling from her arm. Clearly ready to go shopping, she coolly demands of her spouse: “Did ya get yer paycheck?” (figure 13).

Another group of cartoons focuses on the tension that resulted from demands of work and family life. In one, a man dressed for work and a woman still in her bathrobe, both yet half asleep, stand at the kitchen counter. The wife hands one box
to her husband saying: “This one is your breakfast... in case you gotta work overtime” (figure 14). Still another demonstrates the husband’s dismay when he, hat in mouth and one arm in his jacket, rushes out to meet his carpool while his wife, still in her bathrobe, appears at the door holding his empty, open lunch box and asking: “Whadda ya want in yer lunch today?” (figure 15). A final image of this type shows a wife enthusiastically preparing sandwiches and filling a lunch box while her clearly unhappy husband looks on. She exclaims: “Today being your day off... I thought I’d pack your lunch pail and we could go to the park...” (figure 16). In this world of long hours and lunch boxes, leisure and enjoyment are uncommon.

There is one image that best summarizes the tone and message of Adams’s work. It depicts a tired-looking man standing before the desk of a rather disinterested loan officer. The man’s dented lunch box is on the floor beside him. He pours out his request to the officer: “Well... Saturday is her birthday... Sunday is our anniversary... Monday is Christmas... and I could use a new lunch pail.” (figure 17). In this image and text, more than any other, Adams makes clear the disenchantment of working people in post-war America. It emphasizes the industrial and manual workers’ sense of invisibility to their employers and to the broader public. Further, it epitomizes the growth of a culture with birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays that required a certain level of engagement with consumer society. The struggle to reach a level of competency at which the basic needs of food, clothing, transportation, and shelter could be met was such that for many, the durable goods and consumer luxuries that pervaded imagery of the “good life” in American society were all but unattainable. In Adams’s work, the lunch box is the symbol of that continuous effort. It is a material representation of unity among men and women working to achieve the accoutrements of a better life—a life where lunch did not always have to come out of a
Observations from the Real World

While Adams's cartoons highlighted the difficulties encountered by working people, Ida Bailey Allen, a nutritionist and cookbook author, made investigations into the actual lunches and dining environments common in American factories. Allen stepped into the reformers' role that had been vacated after the war and attempted to revive interest in workplace dining conditions and concern for the nutrition of American workers. Many of her observations reinforce points made in the Adams's book.

In the September 1955 issue of Today's Health, Allen declared: "lunch boxes old-fashioned? Declasse? Carried only by the 'underprivileged?' Not a bit of it! According to recent surveys, lunch boxes are carried by more than half out of the nation's 60 million city men and women workers of all classes. In addition, millions of workers in suburban and country districts, where restaurant facilities are often unavailable and workers do not have time to go home for lunch, carry a lunch box." Allen noted that even though many factories had facilities that served hot lunches, in a survey of "365 manufacturing plants of all types in the 48 states," each with cafeteria, more than 50 percent of the men and women employed still chose to carry a lunch box. Allen posed the question: "Why should these workers prefer to carry their lunch?" She proposed that the answers were obvious: "In many cases the time factor is important. In others the majority of both city and country workers cannot afford to buy adequate lunches in a restaurant or cafeteria. Some supplement their lunch with coffee, a soft drink, milk, candy or peanuts from vending machines."

Allen asked other significant questions about the consumption of lunch in

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America. Her research revealed that for the majority of American workers, lunch was not eaten in the “charmingly decorated, peaceful environment advocated by dieticians, nutritionists, doctors and psychiatrists, but in any place available.” Among the locations in which Allen observed workers eating were rest and lounge rooms, office desks, “by the worker’s machine; outside with lumber and crates for tables and seats; outdoors at shipbuilding plants; amid the noises and smells of processing plants. . . . Occasionally in small plants women workers get permission to fix an unused section of the building for lunching.” She saw that in good weather, rural workers often ate outside and their city counterparts sometimes dined at the local park.

In an effort to determine what kinds of foods American workers were carrying to work, Allen sent out questionnaires to workers in various locations across the nation. One response from a “manual worker” described his lunchtime observations:

The dreary pattern is not unique with me. Few of the men carry lunch boxes; mostly they bring sandwiches and a cookie in a paper bag. Then they buy coffee. The sandwiches are generally peanut butter, peanut butter and jelly or some kind of luncheon meat. The women carry more complicated sandwiches: sometimes cheese spreads with olive and pimiento. The bread is usually white, but sometimes you see a dark loaf.

There is a smaller group, mostly older workers, who carry lunch boxes. I know one man who has two thermos bottles, one for a hearty soup every day—even in the summer—the other for coffee. With this he has a few good meat sandwiches and a piece of pie or cake.

Allen’s informant went on to state that, in his estimation, the addition of some type of fruit would be the best improvement to workers’ lunches: “If the guys have fruit they eat it.” He further observed a general condition of “plain and simple malnutrition, due partly to poor planning and education.” His solution was to instigate change at the source of the lunch—the women who packed them.

Allen seemed to support this position on the need to encourage women to pack
better lunches. She observed that the three main reasons that women packed insufficient lunches were cost, lack of information, and time. Allen noted that there were 12 million working mothers in the nation who had to rush off to work themselves and as a result, often left husbands and children to prepare their own lunches. She concluded that in the end, no matter what her employment status outside the home, the woman was responsible for lunch:

For a man to bring home a well-filled pay envelope every payday he must be in good health. Proper nutrition plays an important part, not only in helping avert absenteeism due to sickness, with consequent loss of pay, but in promoting physiological well-being and maintaining the alert mental attitude necessary to achieving success. For purely selfish reasons, if for no other, it pays to pack a good lunch for the family provider.

Allen went on to give box packers advice about “what belongs in a lunch box.” She concluded with the assertion: “Success depends on the realization that the lunch box must contain the equivalent of a regular meal and the desire of the homemaker to prepare the food with intelligent and loving care.” The lunch was a clear reflection of domesticity and an extension of the home.

Adams and Allen used print media to bring attention back to the quality of workers’ meals and dining areas. To them, it appeared that these issues had receded from general public awareness. For the workers themselves, however, the challenges of food during the workday never disappeared.

Claiming Lunch: Workers, Management, and the Law

As Nelson Lichtenstein demonstrates in his essay, “Conflict Over Workers’

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Control: The Automobile Industry in World War II," wartime changes in the economy and the composition of the labor force contributed to a workplace climate that was not conducive to organized union efforts. Although worker militancy did not disappear during the war, the influx of new workers diluted the old nucleus of radical union activists to a point where they became relatively ineffective at gaining power over the productive process. The exigencies of war meant that labor was in demand and prices were high, and companies such as General Motors were able to take advantage of the changing labor force to reassert managerial control over the shop floor. After the war, unions, under the leadership of strong figures such as United Auto Workers President Walter Reuther, focused more on issues of pay and subsistence than on questions of shop discipline or productivity standards. In such an environment, lunch breaks were an important subject of conflict between workers and management.

For some workers, meals available in the factory were a benefit of wartime mobilization, and one that they proved unwilling to relinquish. As it had been during the earliest years of industrialization in the United States, after World War II, the worker’s lunch returned to its status as a bargaining point between employers and employees. Most workers refused to give up their lunch break as a concession to productivity or other goals of management. Lunch is a necessary break in the day. It is a time for refueling and socializing that helps to underscore the necessary separation between humans and machines.

An article in Business Week on September 1, 1945 predicted that there was "no likelihood that either workers or management" would “be willing to see on-the-job

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meals suspended and industry return to the days of the dinner pail." The same article cited evidence of workers striking to protest cancellation of factory-feeding programs and warned that demands for such programs would only increase the "reshuffling of workers in the transition from war." Those who were "accustomed to hot meals at 35c to 50c a day may prove unwilling to go back to lunchboxes in plants which serve no meals."132

The 1950s proved some of the prognosticators correct. In 1953, the employees of Northwestern Bell Telephone Company demanded that their concerns over their lunches be heard. The impetus for their actions was a new contract between the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and Northwestern. A clause in the contract stipulated that the Company would provide workers with funds for "additional expenses" incurred when the employee was required to attend to a job out of town. The workers believed that this phrase obligated the Company to pay for their lunches. Predictably, Northwestern's executives disagreed. They "contended that packing a lunch for out-of-town assignments doesn't mean any additional expense, because workers usually eat at home anyway; what they eat from a plate at home they eat from a lunchbox when out of town." The Union "agreed that workers normally go home for lunch--but for spaghetti, goulash, stew, and other leftovers that can be heated easily and put on a plate. You can't make sandwiches out of leftovers, said CWA, asking: Who ever heard of a spaghetti or goulash sandwich?" The lawyers for the Union "backed their case with workers' home lunch menus and lists of what they usually take with them on out-of-town jobs--mostly meat sandwiches packed at what CWA called 'strictly an additional expense.'"133

133 "Lunchbox is No Picnic for Telephone Workers," Business Week, December 5, 1953, 164.
Clearly, in the estimation of these workers, the lunch break was an important part of the day. The nature of the foods described indicates that many of them were probably members of ethnic groups that valued traditional foods. When the Company mandated that they break with their habits and consume their meal away from home, the workers deemed it appropriate that the Company make a sacrifice as well, in the form of compensation. In another case in 1951, the U.S. District Court ruled that if an employer required an employee to perform any job-related task during his lunch break, that worker had to be paid for his time.134 Both of these cases show how workers used the leverage of lunch to gain what they believed were their rights as employees. These cases also point to the fact that many workers sensed that their time and humanity were undervalued by employers.

Throughout the later decades of the twentieth century, food-related issues continued to be prominent in bargaining between employers and employees. In an important Supreme Court case in 1979, the high court ruled that food prices and services inside plants were subject to bargaining between unions and companies. The case came about after employees of a Ford plant had staged a three-month long strike against the company cafeteria because of its high prices. Justice Byron White wrote:

The availability of food during working hours and the conditions under which it is to be consumed are matters of deep concern to workers, and one need not strain to consider them to be among those “conditions” of employment that should be subject to the mutual duty to bargain. By the same token, where the employer has chosen, apparently in his own interest, to make available a system of in-plant feeding facilities for his employees, the prices at which food is offered and other aspects of this service may reasonably be considered among those subjects about which management and the union must bargain.135

134 "Lunch with Pay," Business Week, June 30, 1951, 34.
135 "Food at the Bargaining Table," Monthly Labor Review, September 1979, 58.
With this ruling, the court established a clear responsibility on behalf of both the union and the management to insure that workers had access to food during working hours. It did not, however, completely resolve the issue, merely mandated that the rules regarding pricing and access should be subject to bargaining.

**The “Lunch Crunch”: Transforming the Three-Martini Lunch**

Americans today, both workers and to a lesser extent students, have a wide array of options when it comes to procuring a noon meal. For the majority of these two groups, some type of on site food service is available, they may be able to leave and purchase food at a near by fast-food outlet or restaurant, or, as always, they may carry their lunches with them. According to a January 2001 survey conducted by the research firm Datamonitor, 20 percent of office workers bring lunch to work every day while 45 percent carry a meal at least once a week. One reason some workers gave for carrying their lunch was that it was easier for them to monitor the fat, sodium, and calories in their diets. Some were trying to lose weight or needed a special diet for health reasons and did not want to have to rely upon the cafeteria selections.\textsuperscript{136}

Dietary concerns alone certainly cannot account for the recent resurgence in the number of people carrying lunch. Something else is at work in this equation--the lunch “crunch.” This phrase appears with some frequency in newspaper articles related to the subject of lunch. The “crunch” aspect refers to a decrease in the amount of time available for the noon meal as well as for personal tasks in general. According to the author of the Datamonitor report: “People are really feeling that time is at a

premium and that they don’t want to waste it eating.” The report revealed that time was the most important variable in determining how an employee ate, or did not eat lunch. Many felt “peer pressure” if coworkers were either eating at their desks or skipping lunch altogether. The study broke down as follows:

Overall, 40 percent of workers do not feel that they are taking a proper lunch break. Employees aged 55 to 64 are even less likely to take a leisurely lunch—47 percent claim not to take their full allotted time. And while their younger counterparts, workers aged 18 to 34, are more likely to take their break—just 39 percent say that they shortened the lunch hour—they are more likely than other age groups to use the time for activities other than eating. Fifty-five percent of that group admits that they shop, run errands, or exercise during lunch.137

Bigger workloads and increased personal and employer demands make desktop dining a frequent occurrence for many workers. Gone are the days of the “three-martini lunch.” The phrase “three-martini” lunch was a sort of short hand code that referred to the extended lunches, frequently with large quantities of alcohol being consumed, that were common when employers could deduct such meals as a business expense. Although there is certainly much to be said for the business transactions that may take place over a leisurely meal, such lunches were extravagant wastes of time and money that served to enhance a sense of division among employers and employees. Changes in corporate tax laws in the late-1980s and early-1990s reduced the amount of deduction allowed for the business lunch resulting in a corresponding decrease in the number of three-martini affairs. Time and money increased in value when the possibility for deduction slipped.

Although rules regarding personal deductions for the so-called “three-martini

lunch” have seen reductions in recent years, deductions for employers providing employee meals have been enhanced.\textsuperscript{138} Beginning on January 1, 1998, business owners could deduct 100 percent rather than the previous 50 percent of the cost of employee meals provided free of charge or at below market value. Another tax law change allows workers whose hours are regulated by the Department of Transportation (commercial pilots, truck drivers, and merchant mariners, for example) to deduct a higher percentage of the cost of meals consumed on the job. The amount of deduction is slated to continue to rise until 2008 when it will reach 80 percent. The increased deductions were described by a legislative representative of the National Restaurant Association as a boon to both employees and America’s restaurants.\textsuperscript{139}

Not only did the change in tax law affect the three-martini lunch, but in some workplaces, it also affected the use of on site dining space. Many times, the three martini lunch took place in an executive dining room reserved for high ranking employees only. Segregated dining facilities for workers and management, particularly in factory settings, had been normal. Tighter budgets and criticism from staff has resulted in some companies abandoning the idea of separate eating areas. A common reason for the separation in early factory cafeterias was that workers were dirty from their jobs and managers did not want to muss their business attire. Increasingly, however, as more technology removed the messier aspects of factory work, managers have found that their interaction with employees as well as employees’ interaction with one another can be a valuable tool for building better working relationships and generating new ideas. The Kraft Foods Company, for example, in the early 1990s

\textsuperscript{138} The “three-martini lunch” deduction will be discussed in a later chapter.
opened up its executive dining rooms to any employees who wanted to hold a "special-occasion lunch" or "reception." According to the Director of Corporate Affairs: "The executives were not using these rooms as much as they used to, and we thought it would be a good idea to make them available to everyone." Although executives retain some scheduling privileges, the "democratized" dining room was well accepted by all: "The employees enjoy it, and if you want to look at it from a productivity angle, it is much better having them in the building than getting in their cars and driving somewhere for a celebration lunch."\footnote{Bryan Miller, “Earning It,” \textit{New York Times}, 18 June 1995, section 3, page 11, column 1.}

In a bit of a renaissance of the early-twentieth-century paternalistic attitudes toward employee meals, some employers encourage their staffs to eat “on campus” rather than run the risk of having them leave for lunch only to buy alcohol and unhealthy foods and return intoxicated and late for the afternoon hours. The health of the employees is important for productivity and costs. Unhealthy employees are a drag on the daily operations and potentially on health insurance as well.

Restaurants that once relied on lunch trade for both executive three-martini afternoons as well as more quick-service establishments have found that they must compete with both the corporate cafeterias and the carried lunch. In the summer of 1999, Lespinsasse, a pricey New York City eatery advertised: “In the 70s you had lunch. In the 80s you did lunch. In the 90s you skipped lunch. Perhaps it’s time you redefined lunch.” The creative marketing strategy was crafted to promote a special one hour-long, three-course meal for the fixed price of $36 (apparently reasonable in relation to other New York hot spots). According to a 1999 article in the \textit{New York Times}: “As lunch has come under increasing pressures of time, budgets, and health..."
concerns, many restaurants have realized that they must adapt, or face empty tables. They have chosen to give customers what they want, like two appetizers and a beverage in 45 minutes, or a meal ready to go in a container.\textsuperscript{141} Some restaurants, such as Morrison’s near New York City’s Wall Street, will prepare a “brown bag” lunch to carry back to the office.\textsuperscript{142} Other popular stops for early morning coffee have found that customers appreciate being able to buy a ready-to-go brown bag lunch for the day’s the noon meal.

The shortage of noontime diners in many of America’s biggest restaurants has resulted in recent talk in Congress about restoring the meal deductions as a support to the hospitality industry and a way to provide tax assistance to businesses.\textsuperscript{143} Whether or not the measures make any headway in Congress, the fact is that the nature of the midday meal has been dramatically altered by both financial and temporal pressures on businesses and individuals. Restaurants, the fast-food industry, and corporate food-processing giants recognize and benefit from the social and economic changes that affect the way American workers eat lunch.

\textbf{Reclaiming Lunch}

Attention to the lunch habits of workers in the post World War II era has included periods of both intensification and abatement in the perceptions of conflict regarding the employer’s sovereignty over an employee’s work time. While many


\textsuperscript{142} “This Brown Bag Crowd Could Surprise You,” \textit{Restaurant Business}, vol. 92, no. 15 (10 October 1993), 30.

\textsuperscript{143} Bill Husted, “Three-Martini Lunch Alive at the Palm,” \textit{The Denver Post}, 26 October 2001, Weekend Section, Pages EE-06.
workers have continued to internalize a sense of the lunch break as a right owed them as human beings, many employers have acquiesced through the provision of, at the very least, a time and a place for employee meals: a significant acknowledgement of the difference between human and machine. Still, as a 1994 dispute between the LTV Steel Company and members of the United Steel Workers’ Union demonstrated, the negotiation of these boundaries has not vanished. During the struggle between the Union and the Corporation, thirty workers were sent home when they refused to obey a supervisor’s command to return to their work stations when they had begun their lunch breaks only five minutes earlier. The Company wanted to maintain continuous production—even at the expense of worker meal time. Union negotiators asserted that the workers required twenty minutes of labor-free time as well as a clean and safe place to refuel themselves for the remainder of their shifts. In the eyes of the Corporation, the value of these employees’ productive work time trumped their need for personal time.

For manufacturers and marketers of convenience food products and quick-service food establishments, the reality of these continued tensions among employers and employees and the slippery issues of productivity, time, and money mean open territory for their efforts in the quest to influence workers’ lunch habits. The upshot of all of this debate about worker lunches is that although both the players and the conflicts have changed, the colonization of worker lunches and lunch times continues.

144 “LTV, Union Row Over Lunch,” American Metal Market, 13 January 1994, 102.
Carrying Lunch to School: Players in the Institutionalization of Students' Noon Meals

When it comes to debates over the quality of lunch and the environment in which it is consumed, no arena provides more examples of the colonizing process than the school lunch. The school lunch has been the hotly contested turf of a plethora of special interests including parents, educators, bureaucrats, scientists, members of the media, farmers and other agricultural groups, and the food service industry. By examining the carving up and distribution of responsibility for the school lunch among all of these colonizing groups, it is possible to trace their legacy from the first penny lunches in the late nineteenth century, to increasing federal and commercial interventions in the twentieth century, through to current discussions and debates over the merit of attributing rising rates of childhood diabetes and obesity to poor nutritional habits.

Making School Lunch Permanent

On 4 June 1946, President Harry S Truman signed into law the bill to make school lunches a permanent feature of the national budget. The text of Truman's statement revealed his hope for the program and the nation:

Today, as I sign the National School Lunch Act, I feel that the Congress has acted with great wisdom in providing the basis for strengthening the nation through better nutrition for our school children. In my message to Congress last January, I pointed out that we have the technical knowledge to provide plenty of good food for every man, woman, and child in this country,
but that despite our capacity to produce food, we have often failed to distribute it as well as we should. This action by Congress represents a basic forward step toward correcting that failure.

In the long view, no nation is any healthier than its children or more prosperous than its farmers; and in the National School Lunch Act, the Congress has contributed immeasurably both to the welfare to our farmers and the health of our children.\footnote{Truman Approves School Lunch Bill, The New York Times, 5 June 1946, 20.}

In the years leading up to the 1946 National School Lunch Act, legislators and assorted members of interest groups including those representing home economists, agriculture, and children began positioning for a permanent federally supported school lunch program. School lunches held the promise of acting as a homogenizing influence that could help to level differences across geographic regions, races, classes, and ethnic groups. Some observers went so far as to call school lunches “truant officers.”

According to a February 1941 article in Reader’s Digest, school lunches were helping to encourage attendance and attentiveness in students. Particularly in southern areas with high rates of poverty, teachers reported being pleased at seeing an end to the “slow death in lunch pails: corn bread spread with lard; flour-and-water biscuit and a slice of sweet potato; hoecake smeared with molasses.” Some of these teachers commented that they had “seen children bring empty lunch pails and go off alone at lunch time so that others wouldn’t witness their poverty.” One author credited school lunches with “winning a new generation away from the meal, meat, and molasses—the deadly 3-M diet on which millions have slowly starved.” The educational value of the lunch helped to create in these students an “appetite for protective foods—fruits and vegetables.” Without the vital nutritional elements found in such balanced school lunches, the author feared that the nation ran the risk of becoming overrun with “sickly, dispirited wrecks who might have been useful citizens.”\footnote{J.D. Ratcliff, “Eating Their Way to Health and Learning,” Reader’s Digest, 38 (February 1941),}
Schools As Ideological Centers

Throughout the early part of the twentieth century, schools had been broadening the scope of their activities to include physical examination of students and a general concern for children's social development and growth processes. The passage of the National School Lunch Act in 1946 was an important milestone in the history of American education. It was a significant step in the continuing institutionalization of the school as a site for child welfare as much as education.

The history of American education has paralleled that of industry in its increasing demands for uniformity and regimentation. Control over the time and motion of students has been a recurring theme. Another major theme has been the gradual erosion of family and community influence in favor of centralized school services. In The Superschool and the Superstate: American Education in the Twentieth Century, historians Joel H. Spring and Edgar B. Gumbert observe that although the processes of industrialization and urbanization did not destroy the family, they did alter the organization of family life by replacing family- and community-based social control with that exercised by the school. 147

Beginning in the nineteenth, but particularly in the twentieth century, American education has been defined by broadening bureaucracy and increasing institutionalization. According to historian Sol Cohen's study, Progressives and Urban School Reform: The Public Education Association of New York City, 1895-1954, one of the long term goals of the Progressive movement was to transform the public

94-95.
schools into social welfare agencies. Evidence of success in this endeavor may be seen in the profusion of services offered by schools and the battles that entrenched them there. During the early to mid twentieth century, public debates raged as to whether the government should provide financial aid to private and parochial schools. An important Supreme Court case in 1930, 

Cochran v. Louisiana State Board of Education, dealt directly with issuing free textbooks to students in private and parochial schools. The high court established the precedent that direct government aid is illegal, but funds used for the benefit of the child were considered indirect aid and therefore not a violation of church and state separation. Willis Rudy quotes from the case in Schools in an Age of Mass Culture: An Exploration of Selected Themes of Twentieth-Century American Education: “The schools... are not the beneficiaries of these appropriations. They obtain nothing from them, nor are they relieved of a single obligation because of them. The school children and the state alone are the beneficiaries.” This decision paved the way for continuing federal aid to private and parochial schools, including funds for child nutrition programs.

From medical services to busing and school lunches, the school has gone from being a minor character to the central institution in the lives of children and their families. Maris A. Vinovskis chronicles the extension of school control over children’s lives and concludes that the “life course of children today is much more defined by the experience of schooling than ever before.”

The reasons that this institutional transformation occurred are related directly

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to the goals of creating a virtuous citizenry and providing for social welfare. In an
industrialized democracy, the maintenance of balance and order requires some measure
of social control and organization. The increased flow of immigrants in the nineteenth
century helped to make obvious the need for some element of a common background
among the diversity of people who were coming together to form the American nation.
The best method for creating this common heritage focused on establishing a shared
educational experience. The schools, therefore, serve a social and a political function
that often results in conflicts of interest and control battles.

A writer in the Journal of Home Economics in 1940 expressed the possibility
for the use of the school lunch as a social reform tool:

It is obvious that the easiest as well as the most efficacious plan
for improvement of national nutrition is to better the feeding of children
during the school years when food needs are most exacting and when nearly
all the children of the community are gathered together five days a week
under the observation and control of the schools.151

The school lunch provided a convenient vehicle for home economists, teachers,
school administrators, government officials, and later commercial and business leaders
to gain access to the inner sanctum of the family table. Through American children,
these various interests, each with different goals, hoped to influence the decisions
about food that were made by the gatekeeper of the family diet. When the school
lunch was cast as a civic concern, it became an appropriate subject for public scrutiny
and criticism. Although the initiatives and purposes of the assorted experts involved in
the development of the school lunch program were often divergent, they expressed a
common concern about the quality of parenting in American society. Many believed

151 Agnes Fay Morgan, “How Schools Improve the Nutrition of Pupils,” Journal of Home Economics,
34 (December 1942) 721.
that only if and when parents were educated as to proper methods of child feeding, would there be an overall improvement in the health of American children.

A Role for the Home Economists

With regard to school lunches, the process begun with the first penny lunches came to full fruition with the promise of federal backing. The assurance of secure federal funding made it possible for many more schools to participate. Now, concern for child nutrition fell squarely within the public realm. Through the cooperation of the various levels of government, industry, and citizens, the progressive improvement of national nutrition could become a reality. As in the past, however, special responsibility for child feeding fell upon the women of America.

Women have traditionally been accountable for the family's well-being. A central part of that job has involved procuring, preparing, and sometimes preserving food. Responsibility for lunch preparation, whether to be consumed at home or away, has clearly fallen within the realm of feminine duties. The 1930 edition of Good Housekeeping's Book of Meals, advising readers on how best to plan for the various dining occasions of the day, described as "fortunate" any "child whose school provides a cafeteria directed by a woman especially trained in nutrition and lunch room management where a healthful lunch, carefully planned, prepared and served, awaits him daily." In contrast, "unfortunate" was the child "in a school where the lunch room is managed by an unscrupulous concessionaire who provides chiefly 'hot dogs', 'pop', dill pickles, chocolate bars, and 'loose' milk instead of bottled milk for the daily luncheon menu." This section, entitled, "The Lunch Hour at School," closed with a statement of women's duty: "The women citizens of any town or city should realize that the school lunch is a civic problem, and that the solution of this problem, is to a
great extent their responsibility.\textsuperscript{152}

The expansion and nationalization of the school lunch program resulted in a greater need for the promotion, supervision, and development of both existing and new programs. Women who were trained in home economics seemed to be the logical choices for leadership positions in these areas. Since the nineteenth century, women had been the backbone of the common school system because of the general cultural perception that they were by nature suited to nurturing roles. The facts that women could be paid less and could be treated in a subordinate fashion made them highly desirable to the male-dominated hierarchy responsible for hiring. The feminized nature of the teaching profession was mirrored in the feminized nature of employment in school foodservice. Some women, following in the tradition of republican motherhood begun during the American Revolution and continued in the professionalization of home economics, saw the venue of foodservice as a way to link culturally accepted roles in the private sphere with broader interaction in public sphere and efforts to alter the dynamics of the political world.

The task of parental education seemed particularly well-suited to the home economists of the nation. Women such as Lydia Roberts, an Assistant Professor of Home Economics at the University of Chicago, worked to make their field central to the project of improving child nutrition, and, in turn, national welfare. Roberts's textbook, Nutrition Work With Children, published in 1927, provided a detailed method for influencing child development and well-being. Roberts, like other national observers at the time, echoed the idea that nutritional health was not necessarily linked

\textsuperscript{152} Good Housekeeping's Book of Meals: Tested, Tasted, and Approved (New York: Good Housekeeping, 1930), 14. Italics in original.
to the outward appearance of the body. True, many poor appeared undernourished and were financially unable to purchase the quantity and quality of food that would improve their status. More disturbing, however, was the often invisible, and far more widespread problem of malnutrition "unassociated with dearth of food or poverty." The best method to remedy both sources of malnutrition was to reach parents through their children. Roberts noted: "The children constitute, indeed, a powerful machine which can put through most any task or reform if inspired and directed by the teachers." Roberts described the role of the school as being in "possession" of the children and thus uniquely qualified for the purpose of changing their food habits. Through the combination of trained teachers, physicians, nurses, dentists, and the provision of the school lunch, the school was in a powerful position to influence children. Roberts suggested that teachers obtain the "cooperation" of the "home" because "harmony in purpose and method between the home and the school" was "essential to complete success in the establishment of desired habits." She advocated "group mother-meetings, individual conferences, notes and telephone conversations" as methods for "assuring parents that the school" was "helping them in the task of rearing healthy children." While she commented that most parents were willing and enthusiastic with their support, she cautioned that in some situations the job of persuading "a mother that her duty lies in supervising personally the details of her child's life" was occasionally "far from an easy task." Cases of extreme wealth, where the children were cared for by paid staff, or severe poverty, where the mother had to work to keep the family alive, might present hardship in securing parental

154 Roberts, 235.
155 Roberts, 300.
assistance.

Roberts included in her work an extensive bibliography of sources related to child health, as well as a description of each of the national agencies and government bureaus that participated in the nutrition movement. Her book was successful enough that in 1954, Ethel Austin Martin published a revised and updated version, maintaining Roberts's legacy in her title Roberts' Nutrition Work with Children. Martin believed that nutritional science had progressed enough since the Roberts publication to warrant a new edition. Martin had been an associate of Roberts at the University of Chicago during the production of the first book. Her later experience included work as the Director of Nutrition for the National Dairy Council and the director of nutrition and health demonstrations for the Akron City schools in Akron, Ohio. Her additions to the Roberts text came mainly in the form of new scientific data on nutrition and child development. Like Roberts before her, Martin continued to advocate a cooperation among parents, school personnel, and the healthcare community. Her general attitude toward parents’ role echoed that of her predecessor. In Martin’s estimation, nutrition education belonged in the school because the school was “responsible for fitting the child for society and helping him be responsible for himself and his health.”156 Another reflection of the tenor of the earlier work was Martin’s inclusion of bibliographic information and an expanded chapter related to “Agencies, Organizations, and Movements Which Contribute to Nutritional Well-Being of Children.” An indication of the changes in child nutrition and school lunch programs since Roberts’s work was the addition of a new chapter on “Nutrition Services in State

What both Roberts and Martin accomplished was the validation of a role for experts and schools in the movement for child nutrition. Each author argued for the employment of professionals whose expertise and experience made them superior to most parents in the details concerning children’s nutrition. Martin made her position apparent when she discussed the value of the well-planned school meal. She asserted that because it did not vary in its nutritional elements as much as meals from other sources, it was one of the most important aspects of a child’s daily food requirements. Martin equivocated: “This is not to disparage lunches eaten at home or even packed lunches. Both may be, and often are, completely satisfactory. Experience has shown, however, that this is often not the case unless a special program has been instituted to acquaint mothers with children’s need for a nutritionally adequate noon meal.”

Clearly, Mother only knew best when she followed the advice offered her by the experts.

An author in the December 1942 issue of the Journal of Home Economics echoed the theme of Roberts and Martin when she stated bluntly her belief that parents needed expert direction: “The education of parents is indispensable whether their children happen to be well- or ill-nourished but particularly if the family income is restricted. The expensive and careful building up of children during the school year has been only too often undone during the unsupervised vacation periods.” The author of the article advocated a program of “action and education” that would include the feeding, physical examination and treatment of students, the “direct and indirect education of the pupils themselves,” and the education of parents and the

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157 Martin, 466.
"whole community." The cause of child nutrition was too important to the welfare of the entire country to be left solely to the supervision of potentially inept parents:

If we agree that one of the objectives of a democracy should be to wipe out the growth differences attributable to economic and social causes, we must recognize that this can be attained only by equalizing the quality and quantity of the food available to all children. Not only economic but also educational measures are required to bring this about because intelligence in the choice of food is even more important than increased income.\(^{159}\)

The 1946 National School Lunch Act was a significant step toward the naturalization of the school's role in child and family life. The growth of large consolidated schools meant that fewer children lived close enough to the school to go home for lunch. Slowly, the cafeteria school lunch became a standard feature of the American educational day. According to one observer in the 1950s, some schools had begun to publish lunch menus in the local newspaper to help mothers to avoid duplicating foods on any given day. While this seemed like a sensible plan, the problem was that children, too, had access to this information and on days when the school menu featured dishes that they did not like, they could make the decision to spend their lunch money "for a soft drink and candy at the store down the street." To foil such precocious youngsters, some schools responded by broadcasting descriptions of the daily fare over the radio for "the benefit of mothers only."\(^{160}\) This procedure assumed a particular kind of mother was involved—a stay-at-home Mom who could listen attentively a radio report of school lunch menus. Thus, even if mothers were not packing lunch for their children, experts expected them to play a significant role in the school lunch by balancing meals served at home with those consumed at school.

\(^{159}\) Morgan, 722.
In a nine-year study of school lunches conducted in Pennsylvania between 1935 and 1944, investigators arrived at the conclusion that the most successful lunch programs were those that were developed by "someone trained in nutrition and dietetics" and those where the children's "home dietaries" were ascertained "either through home visiting or by asking the children at frequent intervals to write out what they ate the night before and the same morning, as well as between meals." The study demonstrated that when a group of untrained mothers was placed in charge of the cafeteria of a "neighborhood school attended exclusively by one foreign racial group," the children were fed at school the same types of food that they are at home. Despite the fact that the mothers involved were generally interested in the school lunch program, the children remained undernourished and netted no improvement to their physical health. Mothers were important, but needed also to know their place in relation to the schools' dietary experts.

The Roots of Federal Assistance

The Depression of the early 1930s had tested the nation's private charities and state aid budgets. Historian Ronald Edsforth noted that the tradition of "local responsibility for poor relief" dated to the colonial era, "but had never been tested in an urban mass-consumer society." As more families experienced the stress of unemployment and other financial losses, it soon became apparent that the many individuals, school boards and associations, and other philanthropic organizations could no longer manage to maintain adequate school feeding programs without

increased public assistance. Slowly, more responsibility for school food distribution came into the purview of municipalities and states, and eventually the federal government. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt responded to the crisis with New Deal social measures that shifted some of the burden for social welfare from the private sector to the government. Roosevelt believed that the government had a responsibility to the citizens to see to the creation of an economic and humanitarian safety net.

By the early 1930s, the federal government had instituted relief measures designed to help both individuals and businesses to cope with economic pressures. A pamphlet on school lunches published by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in 1942 noted that during the Depression years, the government had acted to “bridge the gap between unused abundance and those in need.” Thanks to the support of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the National Youth Administration, “thousands of country and city children who had not been reached by the scattered earlier attempts now for the first time had a chance at the lunches.” WPA lunch projects employed people and fed children. One observer reported:

Reports show that before the establishment of the WPA projects, the food brought to school by many of the children in the rural sections of South Carolina consisted of such items as a sweet potato or a poorly cooked biscuit spread with fat. In Georgia, the mid-day meal of many of the children now fed on WPA projects was often nothing more than a piece of cold bread—occasionally supplemented by a piece of fried fish. The usual lunch brought to school by under-privileged children in Vermont was bread—sometimes spread with butter. Some of the poorer children in Minnesota are reported to

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have come to school empty-handed, while many others brought such unappetizing lunches as a pickle and a piece of soggy bread—packed hastily by an overworked mother.¹⁶⁶

Under the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, in 1932 and 1933, some Missouri towns received funds to support the labor needed to prepare and serve school lunches. By 1934, the program of relief had expanded to other states under the Civil Works Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, until it involved thirty-nine states and employed 7,442 women. In 1935, Public Law 320 provided for the distribution of excess agricultural commodities to poor families and school lunch programs. The purpose behind this legislation was two-fold. First, it provided assistance to families and individuals in financial distress. Second, it alleviated the market pressures caused by surplus food in a manner that did not inhibit the continuation of normal distribution. By 1940, each state had a representative of the Federal Surplus Commodities Commission who worked with the state and the various organizations responsible for school lunch programs.¹⁶⁷

The Works Progress Administration was another federal organization that lent support to school lunch programs. Under the umbrella of the WPA, schools received funds to pay salaries for cafeteria employees and the WPA saw that the supervisor in each school was qualified “by training and experience to arrange menus and direct personnel in this work.” Although participating schools benefited from federal involvement, initiative for lunch programs had to begin first at a local level. WPA Assistant Administrator, Ellen S. Woodward noted that a board of education often took the lead in establishing a program and remained as its official sponsor, but many...
programs also relied upon additional support from Parent-Teacher Associations, local civic groups, and other interested individuals. Woodward also commented on the proliferation of such programs in regions of unstable and stable economic circumstances. Most programs were begun in response to the needs of families on relief, but lunch providers soon realized that “growing children” needed a hot meal “irrespective of their financial condition.” It became the policy of many school districts to provide lunches for all students who wanted them.

The happy result of New Deal-era lunch programs was an overall improvement in the health of many children. Still, as World War II Selective Service rejections would demonstrate, a national nutrition deficiency persisted. In its 1942 pamphlet on school lunches, the Department of Agriculture summarized the desperate need for a strong commitment to a national lunch program. The Department pointed to successful programs in Europe and Latin America and proceeded to decry the lack of progress in the United States: “No one even knows with certainty how many children in this country are malnourished, but experts have abundant evidence that malnutrition, especially among children is a serious problem.” Further, nutrition science cautioned that good nutrition had less to do with the quantity of food than the quality. In a national survey conducted by the Bureau of Home Economics, the Bureau concluded that only one-fourth of diets were “good,” while another fourth were “fair,” and “far more than one-fourth were downright poor.” The study demonstrated that although the situation was “most acute among families with low incomes,” malnutrition was not confined to “those who cannot afford to pay for good diets. Because they do not know the principles of nutrition, or are indifferent, malnutrition is found in many families that do not have thin pocketbooks.” In spite of such dismal facts and figures, there was room for optimism:
Fortunately, our information on what makes a good balanced diet is getting better all the time. This country is now engaged in a vigorous campaign to make known to people generally these newer facts regarding vitamins, nutrients, and protective foods. Now, more than ever, there is an urgent need for getting this information to even the most remote citizens as rapidly as practicable, for improved nutrition and improved health are fundamental in adequate national defense.\textsuperscript{168}

**World War II and the School Lunch**

Although World War II strained the national coffers with expenditures for the military and aid to allied nations, through annually renewable congressional allocations, the school lunch commitment weathered the hardships intact. Support came in the form of cash subsidies payable to the sponsors of local lunch programs. A stipulation for the use of these funds was that they be used only toward the purchase of food supplies and not for payment of salaries for foodservice staff or for procuring equipment. Surplus commodities were also available, albeit in reduced quantities. According to one historian, in addition to the shrinking potential workforce as a result of higher employment rates, the foods available for distribution to the school food program fell from a high of 454 million pounds in 1942 to 93 million pounds by 1944. Perhaps even more telling, in February 1942 there were 92,916 schools involved in the school lunch program. These schools served a population of 6 million children. In contrast, by April 1944, only 34,064 schools were participating, and the students served had fallen to approximately 5 million.

These cash allotments carried the nation through the difficult war years, but in post war America, the lunch program faced a new battle. Congress had continually supported the lunch program, but had never made any provision for its permanent

\textsuperscript{168} "School Lunches in Country and City," 6.
budgetary status. Renewal of support was made on an year-by-year basis and was contingent upon availability of funds. This fact made some school systems cautious about undertaking a lunch program if funding might not prove to be consistent.

1946: A Benchmark for School Lunches and Child Nutrition

It was not until the 79th Congress met in 1946 that legislators set about the task of instituting a stable formula for the continual support of school lunch programs. The debates leading up to the approval of the National School Lunch Act in the Senate and the House highlighted long-held concerns over issues such as state’s rights and racial or economic discrimination among people.

Some members of Congress questioned whether the school lunch program should be supported by the federal government at all. The proposal encountered its most serious opposition in the House. It brought out old sectional enmities and created some interesting new alliances. New York Republican Representative James Wadsworth called it “another step calculated slowly but surely to transfer responsibility from the states.” A Democrat of Texas, Hattan W. Summers, told the House: “If you pass this bill, you will be inculcating in little children at the most impressionable period of their lives, the idea that they can get something for nothing from Uncle Sam.”169 When the bill finally passed the House in February 1946, The New York Times reported that the program differed from the one in place for nearly ten years in that it was permanent:

Republicans and Democrats alike joined in approval of the programs but divided sharply on the issue, now presented for the first time, that the

Federal Government should assume responsibility permanently. Members on both sides contended that the States could and should bear the responsibility.

Proponents of the measure, however, while agreeing that the treasuries of most of the States were just now in a better financial condition than that of the Federal Government, argued that there still were States and communities where continuation of the programs would depend upon Federal aid.170

The element that the House rejected was one related to an inclusion of funding for nutrition education and training programs. On this issue: “Democrats opposed even more strenuously than Republicans what they argued was a move in the direction of Federal control of the State school system.”171 When the bill moved to the Senate for debate, Ohio Republican Senator Robert A. Taft was defeated in his proposal to follow the House in rejecting the nutrition education allocation. In opposition to another of Taft’s ideas, the Senate went on to approve an increase over the House’s approved spending on school lunch programs.172

A proposal by New York Democrat, Adam Clayton Powell, to deny aid to any school that exercised discrimination based upon race, creed, color, or national origin caused a genuine stir. Some members interpreted Powell’s idea as a way to ensure “proportionately as much money for lunches for Negro children as for white children.” Texas Democrat, Representative William Robert Poage, however, voiced another possibility. Poage declared that the amendment meant that any state with a segregated school system would be ineligible for federal aid: “He said that it would result in having a Government official declare that States with separate schools for the different races could not benefit from the Federal funds. The majority leader, Representative McCormack, and Mr. Tarver declared that the racial issue had been raised by

171 “House Votes Fund for School Meals.”
opponents of the lunch program in order to alienate Southern support.” Despite the opposition that the race provision generated, it was upheld in the bill that passed the House in February 1946.

In Section 2 of the Act, entitled the “Declaration of Policy,” Congress made a clear statement of goals:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress, as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food, by assisting the States, through grants-in-aid and other means, in providing an adequate supply of foods and other facilities for the establishment, maintenance, operation, and expansion of non profit school-lunch programs.

The legislation stipulated that the states were to be given funds based upon two factors: first, the number of schoolchildren between the ages of five and seventeen in the state, and second, the need for federal assistance based upon a formula for comparing the per capita income of the state with the per capita income of the nation. Individual school districts were to determine which children needed a free or reduced price meal, but the text of the Act stated specifically: “No physical segregation or other discrimination against any child shall be made by the school because of his inability to pay.”

The Persistent Problem of Discrimination

From its inception in 1946, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) has

174 National School Lunch Act, Public Law 396.
not been without its critics. Throughout the decades since NSLP began, Congress has authorized amendments to the original legislation in the hope of silencing controversy around such issues as how to determine which children are eligible for free or reduced price lunches and how to most equitably distribute national funds among the states.

One of the biggest problems that schools face is determining how to provide assistance to children who cannot afford to pay without creating an obvious separation among free, reduced, and full cost lunches. Until 1970, the standards used to make such judgments were left up to the states and individual districts. Prior to Congressional action to standardize such practices, one critic complained that in Chicago, for example, among children from one family, one student might qualify for a free lunch because of age and being in school all day, while a younger sibling attending kindergarten for a half day would not. This writer for Parents magazine had been involved in a study of the Chicago school lunch situation that called upon a variety of community leaders including "doctors, nurses, nutritionists, legislators, and journalists." They uncovered what the writer, also a substitute teacher, described as the "shocking failure of the school lunch act" brought about by "bureaucratic red tape and callous indifference." As these citizens saw the problem, Congress had never authorized enough federal funding to make NSLP self-supporting. A requirement that states respond to each federal dollar with three state dollars had resulted in a system of passing the buck so that parents were the ones left footing the bill. In many cases, where states or municipalities refused to use tax money to augment NSLP, the costs fell upon poor parents who might not be able to afford even the few cents necessary to bridge the difference between the federal allotment and the actual price.

The ultimate cost came in the hunger and shame suffered by the children who
could not pay for their meals. Even though the original Act had specified that children should in no way be segregated based upon their ability or inability to pay, it appeared to the Chicago investigators that discrimination still flourished at the hands of "some unsympathetic school administrators" who "insisted on" such "humiliating practices" as requiring students to wear red tags around their necks that said "Free Lunch," making these students work for their food, or displacing them to the end of the cafeteria line. The writer commented on a proposal made by Michigan Representative Martha W. Griffiths in 1969. Griffiths called for the passage of a bill which would guarantee three meals a day to all children under the age of sixteen whose families were on welfare or had an income that fell below a specified poverty level. Although the writer did not make an outright endorsement of this proposal, her closing commentary on the dangers of hunger revived arguments reminiscent of those made by earlier reformers:

The Griffiths proposal may seem too expensive until one compares it with the cost of not feeding our nation's children, of not caring, of not sharing. That price is truly astronomical, computed as it must be in terms of crime, correction, hospitalization, early death. Since we cannot and do not wish to assume such high costs, let us instead pay the costs we should to underwrite school lunch programs that work.\(^{175}\)

In 1970, Congress responded by amending the Act so that it established national criteria for the eligibility of children for free and reduced price meals. The basis for the determination would be adjusted annually in accordance with the federal income poverty guidelines. School districts were still allowed some flexibility in using welfare income, family size, and number of children attending school as additional

ways for establishing eligibility. The federal poverty income was to serve as a baseline. Under the terms of the 1970 amendments, participating schools had to draft a statement which included details as to their policies regarding the determination of need for aid and their proposed method for collecting payment. In addition, schools were required to inform parents about the eligibility standards and to commit to a policy of non-segregation of children based upon ability to pay. This policy had to certify that the school would not publish or distribute the names of children receiving assistance and that these children “would not be required, as a condition of receiving such meals, to use a separate lunchroom, go through a separate serving line, enter the lunchroom through a separate entrance, eat lunch at a different time from paying children, work for their meals, use a different medium of exchange than paying children, or be offered a different meal than the paying children.”

Among the other important changes brought about by the 1970 legislation was the creation of a National Nutrition Advisory Council. This council was to be comprised of thirteen members who are appointed to service by the Secretary of Agriculture. The membership of this committee was to be composed of various experts in the field of child nutrition, including a representative from a state school lunch program; a school administrator and a school board member or teacher; a child welfare worker; a representative of vocational education; a nutrition expert; a school food service expert; a state superintendent of schools; and four people from the Department of Agriculture with “training experience and knowledge relating to child food programs.” The purpose of the committee was--and remains--to conduct studies regarding school lunches and to make recommendations for change based upon

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176 Gunderson, 31-33.
177 Gunderson, 34.
Commodities Distribution: Are Schools a Convenient Dump?

Another of the major battles over the school lunch bill centered around the degree to which the lunch program should be tailored to function as an outlet for the alleviation of surplus commodities. The commodity distribution aspect of school lunches dated back to the New Deal-era federal food purchase and distribution programs. In 1945, when the Chairman of the House Agricultural Committee, John W. Flanagan, a Virginia Democrat, introduced the bill to make school lunches permanent, he called for its approval "as a measure of national security and as a means of encouraging the domestic consumption of agricultural commodities." The New York Times reported that while Flanagan made his presentation to the House:

Waiting to be heard were representatives of the American Association of Home Economics, the National Education Association, and The National Congress of Parents and Teachers, who contend that the school luncheon program should be primarily for the benefit of children rather than for eating up agricultural surpluses, and who favor having it keyed with the educational system of the country. 178

Critics of the commodity distribution plank of the school lunch program charged that the prime motivation for lunches seemed to be one of an economic rather than a humanitarian nature. Some people believed that the schools were but dumping grounds for excess commodities not salable on the market. Defendants of the commodity distribution plan maintained that the products were helpful to school cafeterias that struggled to remain out of debt. In early 1944, the United States Office of Education weighed in on the matter. The Office proposed a plan under which the

school lunch program, then under the supervision of the War Food Administration, would be turned over to "State and local educational authorities, on the ground that school lunches are primarily an educational rather than a war food matter."\textsuperscript{179}

Support for the linking of food service and the Office of Education came from predictable corners—home economists, education experts, and parents. Ultimately, the educational and agricultural interests reached a compromise whereby the program remained under the umbrella of the Agriculture Department, but the funds would be spent by state governments, often through the state educational systems. As a part of the program, states were required to match some of the federal funds. A special formula allowed poorer states with large numbers of students to "receive a higher proportionate share."\textsuperscript{180} Congress required that the lunch programs be operated on a non profit basis and that funds distributed to the states through the Act be matched by the states. The terms of the 1946 Act stated that for the first year of the program, states had only to match one state dollar to each federal dollar; however, for 1951 to 1955 they would have to match $1.50 to each federal dollar, and for 1956 and after, they would be required to pay out $3.00 for each federal dollar. The states were allowed to consider the lunch payments made by children, the cost of labor, the value of donated commodities and equipment as part of their matching funds.

From the standpoint of child nutrition reformers and other experts, the School Lunch Act was a great leap forward. Not only did it guarantee that the federal government would remain committed to the program, it also set up a national standard for minimum nutritional requirements in school lunches. In order for a school to


qualify for federal assistance, the lunches had to meet certain criteria “prescribed by the Secretary on the basis of tested nutritional research.” These lunches were labeled Types A, B, and C. A Type A lunch was intended to fulfill one-third to one-half of the minimum daily nutritional needs of a child between the ages of ten and twelve, but the meal pattern could be adjusted to suit the needs of children of any age. A Type B lunch was one that aimed to be a supplement to carried lunches, mainly in schools where facilities were inadequate for the provision of a more complete meal. Finally, a Type C lunch consisted of simply one-half pint of whole milk served as a beverage. The amount of money that a school received per lunch was based upon the Type of lunch served. If a school failed to provide milk for reasons other than that the supply was unavailable, the reimbursement was reduced by 2c per lunch.\textsuperscript{181}

Of course, because the program drew its lifeblood from the Department of Agriculture, schools received indirect pressure from the Department to support agriculture by purchasing local products and surplus commodities. Over the years, commodities provided to schools free of charge or at minimal cost have included cheese, butter, beef, and other high-fat products, as well as such items as figs, potatoes, and peanuts. While these “bargains” certainly help to provide financially strapped schools with food for their lunches, the unpredictable nature of the commodities market has made the nutritionist’s job of menu planning a challenge. The task is further complicated by the fact that foods like figs are often not among those children are most apt to consume with avidity. Most importantly, the commodity foods are not always the most nutritious and healthful foods necessary for young minds and bodies.

\textsuperscript{181} Gunderson.
Recently, in recognition of the once again increasingly poor physical health standings of American children, including higher rates of childhood obesity and diabetes, the federal government, via the Department of Agriculture, embarked upon a broad effort to reform school food service, known as the “School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children.” This program was supported through federal legislation amending the School Lunch Program in 1994 and 1996. This legislation marked the first significant alteration in nutritional standards and requirements since approval of the original act. According to the new legislation, schools that receive federal assistance must meet certain nutritional guidelines over each one-week period. For example, the meals served in the cafeteria must average out to no more than 30 percent of their calories from fat, and must provide one-third of the government’s recommended daily allowance of protein, calories, and certain vitamins and minerals. In order to continue to receive aid under the National School Lunch program, schools had to institute these changes by the 1996-1997 academic year. Such menu restraints may render use of commodity foods more difficult in the years to come.

What’s Wrong with the School Lunch?

In spite of amendments to the National School Lunch Act and attempts to improve and strengthen NSLP, the school lunch that once held the promise of reforming eating habits, of helping to produce children imbued with health and well-being, and of leveling economic differences through provision of quality meals for those who could not otherwise afford them, has received a failing grade from many cultural critics, parents, and children. A 1994 article in Redbook asked the question: “Who’s to blame?” The article posits that the system breaks down around issues of cost and children’s changing eating preferences. Financially, providing lunches that
are high quality and low cost has proved to be an increasingly difficult endeavor. Schools that suffer under budget restraints find that they must use free government commodities as the framework for menu planning. These products are not always the most nutritious or desirable foods. A major difficulty for school food service directors is that children often want high-fat and high-salt foods and refuse more nutritious fare. They want the fast-food, commercial products that they are familiar with from life outside school. According to Redbook's survey of school food service directors, many see the cafeteria as a business and students as customers whom they must entice—regardless of their poor habits. The directors contend that children's tastes are formed before they come to school as a result of three factors: parents who are too busy to cook and hence rely upon take-out and fast food; the advertising industry that encourages children to view fast food as "cool"; and the prevalence of microwave ovens that allow even the youngest children to "cook," so that their idea of a meal is something that comes prepared in a box."\(^{182}\)

For schools with tight budgets, often the acceptance of commodities is a necessity, not a choice. Their only other option is to opt out of the federal system entirely by inviting in vendors, a private contractor, or other food service institution to provide meals. This idea presents another set of nutritional and educational concerns.

**The Questionable Trio—Schools, Corporate America, and the Government**

Although the commercial imagery on lunch boxes and their connection to TV and other media was disturbing to many social critics, members of the educational

establishment, and parents, more upsetting were the pervasive corporate influences that came in the form of partnerships between corporations and schools toward the end of providing a school lunch. As early as the 1950s, the Gorton’s Fish Company worked to develop fish sticks that would obviate the difficulties involved in serving fish to students in the conventional format. According to the Company, their “Perchies,” were easy to prepare and store and were proportioned to suit the protein requirements of the Type A school lunch.183

More recently, an outcome of the 1990s-era legislation to amend the National School Lunch Act has been an increased degree of cooperation among schools, government, and private industry. Under the rubric “Team Nutrition,” the government unveiled a new program that was intended to help schools to initiate, publicize, and popularize new school lunch nutritional guidelines. According to the USDA journal, Food Review, “Team Nutrition was created to be the implementation tool for USDA’s ‘School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children.’” The Team was to provide for technical assistance, training, and nutrition education. As a part of this effort, USDA established “public and private partnerships that promote food choices for a healthy life.” A major corporate partnership in this endeavor was formed with the Walt Disney Company. Disney contributed through the production of thirty-second public service announcements that featured characters from the popular animated movie, The Lion King. The Company also distributed posters for use in the schools. The Scholastic Company, in association with Team Nutrition, helped by developing a nutrition education program for use with a standard school curriculum.184

Perhaps the most controversial example of cooperation among the government, the schools, and private industry has been the growth in the number of schools contracting their food service out to management groups and even fast food chains. Major companies such as McDonald's, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, and others have been key players in the effort to integrate corporate names into school cafeterias. While these endeavors are generally met with accolades from the student population (hamburgers and pizza continue to top the list of favorite student meals) the nutritional value of these lunches is subject to question. The fast-food chains answer the nutritional debate with the often valid assertion that their menu items can be adapted to suit new federal nutritional scores. Taco Bell, for example, has formulated a special low-fat menu for use in schools. Some schools have found that the participation rates in the lunch program are much higher when such foods are a part of the regular meals. A sort of compromise measure adopted by some is to follow a regular cycle of "brand days" where fast-food meals are featured.

Fast-food chains have a more difficult time silencing critics who say that their involvement is evidence of creeping commercialism infiltrating the nation's schools. In an exposé in the September 1998 issue of Consumer Reports, the magazine noted that the 1990s had witnessed incredible growth in the amount of corporate sponsorship visible in the schools. From free book covers provided by Kellogg's to a Pizza Hut reading program that rewarded successful students with a coupon for a free Personal Pan Pizza, commercialism seems to have become a typical feature of school life in America. Critics of mass commercialism in the schools contend that when commercial entities such as McDonald's enter the lunchroom scene, "they are selling more than today's lunch; they are creating tomorrow's consumer habits." Further, critics argue that by providing schools with their products and sponsoring the production and
distribution of educational materials, corporations erode the ability of schools to teach children to engage in independent thinking and analysis. A representative for the Center for Science in the Public Interest commented that brand name products are, for the most part, "not particularly nutritious. Yet, when schools sell fast foods in their cafeterias, they are sending a message that the foods are A-OK."

"Junking" Junk Food—Consequences for School Revenue in Lean

**Economic Times**

In early 2002, legislators in the Commonwealth of Virginia introduced a proposal to require public school to eliminate "so-called junk food" from vending machines within the schools. The impetus for their action is a claim that such poor quality foods are contributing to a rising rate of childhood obesity and general poor health. Although schools that participate in NSLP must turn off the machines during hours when the cafeteria is serving, they are free to have them on at other times. The problem is that the schools reap tremendous financial rewards from the sale of such foods during and outside of school hours. The Newport News City Schools, for example, during the 2000-2001 academic year made a profit of $153,191 from vending machine sales to students and staff. The money was then used to cover costs ranging from field trips to general supplies. Many supporters of school vending contend that students should be allowed to make their own judgments about what they should and should not eat. They back up their stand with the argument that if the students cannot

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obtain the sodas and snacks that they want at school, they will bring them from home. In this situation, the schools end up locked in a battle between access to much needed extra funds and questions about student health and welfare.

At the center, this debate over commercialism in the schools revolves around a question about who is and/or should be responsible for controlling the curriculum of the nation’s schools. It involves a sense that schools should be a commercial-free zone where students learn to make evaluations and judgments without the influence of advertising. Advertisers and corporations that step into this zone are motivated by a need to sell their products and to create a bond of good will with future consumers. In schools, they have not only the opportunity to reach a captive audience, they gain the aura of trustworthiness and an assumed lack of bias that accompany institutions of learning.

**Defending and Debating the School Lunch**

During the twentieth century, the United States shifted away from a system of local and private philanthropy in providing school lunches toward a national effort to feed children as a wartime, defense measure. Federal assistance for the school lunch was intended to outfit America’s children with the health and strength to win battles of

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both literal and figurative natures. Theoretically, a well-fed child would be more apt to absorb learning, and hence more well-equipped to be a productive citizen.

The national school lunch was a centerpiece of programs such as the New Deal and Great Society because of its proponents' assertions that it could help to "even up the starting line" for children of differing economic and social backgrounds. In that sense, it appealed to people from a broad spectrum of political perspectives because it was neither a conservative nor a socialistic proposal, but an idea grounded in the core belief in equality of opportunity.

Although the initial program acknowledged a dual benefit for agricultural interests and students, neither the early proponents of child feeding programs nor their successors were prepared to reconcile the often dissonant economic needs of the agricultural community with the nutritional needs of growing children. Nor were advocates equipped to provide accommodations for or barriers against the other colonizing interests, among these food manufacturers, advertisers, and the media, when they entered into the forum of the school cafeteria.

Over time, various groups comprised of different combinations of educators, legislators, scientists, business people, and others enamored with the use of statistics and numbers as indicators of social progress, have entered into the debates about school lunch. As these groups endeavored to impose their own visions and agendas on school lunch the results have included both great strides and questionable policies. The result of these interventions has been the conversion of the school cafeteria and lunch box into a battleground for a series of turf wars, the prize being control over the
school lunch.
Chapter 6

Lunch Ladies: Magazines, Advertising, and the Construction of Women as Lunch Box Packers

American anthropologist Anne Allison spent a year conducting fieldwork in Japan. One of the central subjects of her study involved the experiences that she and her nursery school-aged son had as participants in the culture and rituals associated with the Japanese educational system. Much as in the United States, the school lunch is an important part of both the educational and nutritional goals of Japanese school curricula. Japanese preschools require their students to carry lunches with them. These lunches, packed by the children’s mothers, are placed in special containers called obentos. As a part of learning to obey authority and follow directions, teachers inspect students’ boxes to ensure that each student consumes all of the food in his obento everyday. Japanese women expend a great deal of time, energy, and money trying to make the contents of the obento box as appealing as possible for their children. There exists an entire body of cookbook advice literature devoted to the preparation of obentos. In addition, many companies manufacture obento kits and specialized packing products.

For Japanese mothers, the obento box is a highly public evaluation of their commitment to their children. The obento production process is inscribed as exclusively female and it thereby enhances the gendered division of labor in Japanese society. Further, Allison asserts, the obento is a manipulative tool employed by state-sponsored schools that uses the “natural convenience and cover of food not only to...
code a natural order, but also to socialize children and mothers into the gendered roles and subjectivities they are expected to assume in a political order desired and directed by the state.187 She concludes that in Japan, the ritual preparation and consumption of the obento is one element in the ideological indoctrination process that begins for both mother and child once the child enters the public educational system. Through the complex interplay of mothers, children, schools, and the state, the obento is a tool by which “mother and child are being watched, judged, and constructed; and it is only through their joint effort that the goal can be accomplished.”188 Important, however, is the fact that although this message is manipulated and sometimes masked by the ideological apparatus, it can also fall victim to subversion by non conforming subjects. Ultimately, Allison concludes, the “manipulation is neither total not totally coercive” and often it is a source of “pleasure and creativity for both mother and child.”189

Children’s school lunchboxes in the United States, though in a somewhat less structured and organized fashion than the Japanese example, serve a similar ideological function as the site of a persistent national ideology about traditional gender roles and visions of idealized motherhood. Mirroring the obento from another angle, the American school lunchbox, its “packers,” and “carriers” also benefit or suffer from (depending upon one’s perspective) similar types of masking, manipulation, and subversion.

188 Allison, 195.
189 Allison, 195.
The American child’s school lunch box also serves as the entry point for the sales regime to gain ground in shaping notions of “proper” lunch. Although various commercial elements have been involved in lunch beginning in the early days of lunch wagons, automatst, and diners, the insidious nature of commercial colonization of school lunch is the most powerful testimony to the ascendancy of commercial culture. The commercial colonizers, following the trails set down by earlier reformers, center their efforts on the gatekeepers of the family table—American women and more specifically, mothers. These colonizers cull from the methods and successes of previous reformers and utilize the established channels to sell their products. The result is an increasingly complicated relationship among families, educational institutions, the state, and the marketplace.

Setting the Table: Women and the Responsibility for Lunch

At the April 1944 meeting of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs in St. Louis, Missouri, Mrs. Florence Kerr, a representative of the Federal Works Agency spoke regarding the positive effects of child-care and recreation centers for working mothers. She noted that more of these centers would be constructed “if suitable locations near the working place of the mothers could be obtained.” Later at the meeting, when the new officers of the Federation were introduced, the new President, Mrs. LaFell Dickinson, “advocated that women turn their attention more closely to the task of homemaking in the years to come.” She asserted: “Let us have one dynamic
cause for our permanent goal, the career of homemaking." Each in her own fashion, these two women gave voice to the tension experienced by many American women; the difficulty of balancing time and attention between career and family life.

According to historian of household technology Ruth Schwartz Cowan, although there have been numerous opportunities for moving more labor outside the home, thus freeing women for paid labor outside the domestic realm (public kitchens and laundries, for example), as a whole Americans have rejected these options out of a desire to preserve the autonomy of the individual, private family unit. The persistence of the autonomous tradition with regard to lunch has meant an incomplete shift of responsibility from Mother to restaurant, workplace, or school. Regardless of other duties within or outside the home, women have historically carried primary responsibility for the procurement, preparation, and serving of family food. This phenomenon continues to define everyday home life for many American families whether "Mom" is a fulltime homemaker or a career woman.

Although in economic terms, this work is both invisible and undervalued, feeding the family is the core of what is culturally considered to be "women’s work." Over the years, attempts to delineate women’s place in the American

191 See Marjorie L. DeVault, Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Catherine Manton, Fed Up: Women and Food in America (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey); and for the British equivalent, see Nickie Charles and Marion Kerr, Women, Food, and Families: Power, Status, Love, Anger (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). Each of these works deals with the association of women with the responsibility for family feeding.
192 For an interesting study of women’s feeding work, see DeVault, Feeding the Family: The Social
Republic have led popular writers and historians to use such terms as “separate spheres,” “republican motherhood,” and “true womanhood.” In prescriptive literature such as women’s magazines, writers have used these words to glorify ideal feminine types. The degree to which the majority of women have imbibed and exhibited these prescriptions in their everyday lives is often unclear and difficult to tease out of historical evidence. What is most significant is the fact that regardless of how individual women accept or contest the concept of a gendered division of labor, it has been a popular standard, often disseminated through the media, by which they have been and continue to be evaluated in their roles as wives and mothers. A child’s school lunch or spouse’s work lunch invites a particularly public evaluation of a woman’s abilities and dedication to her loved ones.

Women’s magazines provide an interesting glimpse into the evolving cultural expectations of women in the United States. Over the years, articles and advertising in these magazines have contributed to the construction of women as caretakers and consumers. An examination of their content during the twentieth century reveals interesting shifts in women’s roles.

During the early years of the twentieth century, some magazine articles

Organization of Caring as Gendered Work. DeVault provides a modern sociological study of women’s perceptions of their responsibilities when it comes to family meals.

acknowledged the lunchtime difficulties faced by the “business woman.” In November 1911, Bertha Stevenson published “The Young Business Woman’s Lunch” in *Good Housekeeping*. Stevenson paid particular attention to the health requirements of the successful business woman. In her estimation, lunch was a vital element of the health regimen and needed to be intelligently planned, neither comprised of “anything on the bill of fare that happens to be novel, or that promises to be toothsome,” nor sacrificed to “the inspection of the bargain pile” at the local shop. Stevenson encouraged women to look through the helpful articles on diet and health available in magazines, so that they would learn to “stick to plain food, and to cultivate a relish for it.” After all:

> Food for working efficiency is the question before the business woman. If she cannot maintain her physical well-being, she cannot take the first step toward success. How can a girl who feeds herself on cream puffs be anything but mercurial? The whole world recognizes that in a crisis women are unequalled for endurance and nerve. But in spite of this there is a tendency among business people to look upon girls as an unreliable and uneven proposition for the long pull. The typical girl laughs easily and cries easily. For business she needs an emotional thermostat.

Ultimately, Stevenson concluded that lunch time for the working girl needed to be used to the best advantage: “Make it furnish food that really feeds, a breath of outdoors, and a restful mood. These are great friends of good looks, good temper, and good health.”

In a 1920 *Delineator* article, “The Dinner-Pail of the Business Girl,” authors H.M. Conklin and P.D. Partridge provided ideas for the carried lunch of the “business

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girl.” For many of these working girls, the high cost of meals in tea room and hotels and the poor quality of food available in delicatessens (éclairs, potato salad, raisin buns, and dill pickles, for example) meant that the dinner pail was the best alternative. At issue was the quality of food within the dinner pail. If packed by the girl herself, it was likely to be insufficient due to being prepared in the haste of the morning rush. If “some other member of the family” put up the lunch, this person, “who has never been in the habit if carrying a lunch,” might make the packing part “merely a routine of getting together anything that is convenient and quick to prepare.” The authors proceeded to offer menus and packing tips to help make the luncheon meal enticing and filling.195

While these earlier articles never broached the possibility of the working woman being a wife or mother, at least they acknowledged the likelihood that some women, or “girls,” were employed outside the sphere of home and domestic service. By the 1930s, such articles dedicated to the needs of working women disappeared from the pages of magazines. What came in their stead was a deluge of articles that focused on the lunch-packing duties of American mothers. These articles emphasized the significance of a well-planned and well-packed lunch toward the nutritional health of children. They did not, however, mention women packing lunches for themselves.

The Mystique of the Lunch Packer

The ideal American woman, according to the prescriptions laid out in mid through late twentieth-century magazines, was one dedicated to her family’s health and well-being above all else. This type of woman was the one described in Betty Friedan’s 1963 consciousness-raising book, The Feminine Mystique. Friedan, having herself worked as a writer for women’s magazines such as Redbook and Ladies’ Home Journal, decried the way that magazines, advertising, and other popular culture media and pseudo-scientific proponents of popular sociology and psychology had constructed an image of the “happy suburban housewife” that they had elevated to the status of the ideal American woman. Friedan described this phenomenon:

The suburban housewife--she was the dream image of the young American woman and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world. The American housewife--freed by science and labor-saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth and the illnesses of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment. As a housewife and mother, she was respected as a full and equal partner to man in his world. She was free to choose automobiles, clothes, appliances, supermarkets; she had everything that women ever dreamed of.196

Many of the mid twentieth-century articles aimed at female lunch packers contain a central theme that lunch packing is an important aspect of a mother’s work and as such it is one in which she should invest her time, energy, and love. This message often appears along with information on one or more of the following topics:

196 Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique: With a New Introduction and Epilogue By the Author (New York: Dell, 1994), 18
child nutritional guidelines and daily requirements including food safety; suggestions
for avoiding monotony in the boxed lunch for both luncher and packer; descriptions of
the different types of boxes available commercially; an enumeration of the
paraphernalia necessary for efficient packing including ways to increase the
convenience and thrift of the process; ideas for special extras to include as a surprise
to the lunch eater; sample menus and advance preparation plans; and recipes for
foods conducive to packing and carrying.

In much the same way as earlier writers on the penny lunch movement
capitalized upon women's sense of fear and responsibility for their children's future,
writers at mid century used these same personality traits to promote the importance of
the home-packed lunch. These writers imbued women with a sense of the gravity of
the task at hand. A child who had the freedom at school to make "à la carte"
selections from a vendor or even the school-sponsored cafeteria might not make wise,
nutritious choices. A 1933 Hygeia article commented on this problem:

Years of careful training presumably influence the child to choose and
consume a well balanced meal. He may see that his lunch always includes a
hot food or beverage, a fruit or vegetable, and a meat or meat substitute,
usually as the sandwich filling. However, the young citizen away from the
parental roof and watchful eyes may toss his lunch into the wastebasket,
buy a hamburger and run out to play. Hence it is up to mothers to pack
lunch boxes which are so intriguing that they will be investigated and
their contents devoured with avidity.197

How, then, to perform this feat of culinary artistry and stealthy nutrition was

197 Mary C. Brown, "What Your Child Eats at Noon," Hygeia, 11 (September 1933), 807.

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the subject of the packer advice genre. One of the first indications of a good lunch was its outward appearance. For the boxed lunch, this meant that the box itself was sturdy, "adequate and attractive." The vacuum bottle, which might or might not be sold with the box as a part of a lunch kit, should also exhibit the qualities of neatness and durability. Finally, the various odd containers, whether constructed out of heavy-duty paper or cardboard, glass, metal, or enamel, should be of high quality and aesthetically pleasing. One author believed that "the influence of one such box and a well-planned lunch" would raise "the standard of the entire class." Another writer noted that it was "very easy to equip a cheap basket after the fashion of the expensive automobile luncheon baskets now on the market." This author recommended the "light-weight enameled ware dishes." She observed: "Fortunately they are not unbeautiful. They usually come in good shapes and have just a little blue for decoration." In matters of box assemblage, a 1933 article in Hygeia made extensive notes on the best methods for preparing and wrapping food. The author suggested using decorated sheets of waxed paper "made especially for sandwich wrapping." Some of her other ideas included purchasing special paper products with "Mother Goose decorations," and for older children, mother might buy paper cups complete with handles and designs "copied from Dresden china, with all the original lovely colors." 

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198 Lillian Alber, "Recess and a Square Lunch," The Delineator, October 1922, 52.
199 Hunt, "The Children's Lunch at School," 337.
200 Brown, "What Your Child Eats At Noon," 809.
With all of this lively advice, writers attempted to generate a sense of commitment to the home production of well-balanced lunches. By attributing health, safety, and well-being to the contents of a lunch box, writers helped to give women a feeling of accomplishment and pride in their efforts to send spouses and children out the door with adequate and attractive meals. A 1936 article in Good Housekeeping transformed the lunch packing process into something of an art, albeit a time-consuming task. The author encouraged readers to approach this duty “in a spirit of adventure.” She observed that leafing through magazines and cookbooks, tarrying in food shops “with their enticing bottles and jars, boxes and cans,” and “even careful scouting of soda-fountain menus” might lead packers to “perfectly grand luncheon ideas” that they had “never dreamed of before.” She continued:

Say to yourself, “Monday’s lunch is going to be scrumptious,” and make it so with the very best sandwich mixture you can concoct; add crisp celery, some moist and velvety chocolate cake, and a big juicy pear. Tuesday’s, in contrast, might be homey with pink slices of cold ham baked as your family think only you can bake it, sweet and spicy with brown sugar and clove. It’s always a grand old favorite for sandwiches, tucked with lettuce leaves between slices of whole-wheat bread. A nice big tomato would go well, too, and that perfect gingerbread from your special recipe. Wednesday’s lunch can be thrifty, but with a thrift so toothsome that Dad may even suspect that you are exceeding the budget. And it’s only left-over meatloaf that has taken a new lease on life with carrots and--well, you find out for yourself. It’s the Leftover Meat Sandwich recipe we give you on page 164. We are so grateful to the reader in Missouri who sent it to us. And so on through the week until, before you know it, Saturday has come, and you find yourself looking forward to next week with new lunches to conquer.  

201 Helen E. Ridley, “Box Lunches That Intrigue,” Good Housekeeping (September 1936), 85.
In 1964, Bonnie Lehman, a woman who had clearly taken her job as a lunch-packer with a high degree of seriousness, wrote “Readin’, Writin’, and Lunchboxes,” for Parents. Lehman described a morning routine that was not at all harried, but in contrast, found her rising on some mornings “bright and shiny eyed with energy to spare.” She continued: “... and when morning greets me with a smile in return, I like to tuck a little surprise in the lunchboxes. (This happens seldom enough, I might add, that my surprises don’t lose their surprise). These are whatever strikes my fancy at the moment, such as a candy bar, a brand-new pencil or (for my husband) a funny picture or joke cut from a magazine.” Lehman commented that she found it necessary to prepare a different luncheon menu for her children and her husband. Although Lehman’s husband appears in the photographs that accompany the article, he is not an active participant, but merely looks on lovingly as his wife stirs a pot of his favorite chili. Lehman demonstrated the importance of the lunch box to marital bliss when she cautioned readers:

May I suggest these dishes make their first appearance at the dinner table rather than in the lunchbox? I can well remember the time, after we were first married, when I tried two new dishes in my husband’s lunch. He disliked them both (intensely!) and I still get kidded about it sometimes. A new food stands or falls on its own merits when eaten out of a lonely lunchbox. When the new dish is shared, a dash of wifely enthusiasm can make it taste better. As my mother says, “Salt and psychology make the best seasoners.”

Alice D. Hanrahan, author of “Your Child’s First Lunch Box,” in the September 1954 issue of Parents, noted in her byline: “Four of the author’s seven children are lunch-toters, so she advises you from considerable lunch-packing experience.” To an uncertain young mother, such credentials might have placed this author squarely within the ranks of the lunch box expert. Hanrahan clearly had her finger on the pulse of lunch room culture. She observed that the lunch box for a young child needed to be particularly well-planned and attractive for “this one link with home should give him a feeling of security and being loved.” She suggested allowing a child to go to the store to select a special box. A good way to avert potential lunch room embarrassment was to stage a mock lunch at home “to acquaint your child with his lunch box and the type of lunch he’ll take to school.” Hanrahan commented that in spite of the many ideas on lunch packing to be found in magazines and cookbooks, many children preferred stability and sameness in their food, so she advised that mother not try to “enforce variety.” Finally, she urged mothers to take special care in their packing routines because children compare and discuss their lunches among themselves. She closed with this nugget of wisdom: “Send your child to school with a lunch box he can display proudly, a nourishing lunch he’ll enjoy and an occasional surprise to keep him interested in this important midday meal.”\(^{203}\)

Hanrahan described a substantive responsibility for mother. She had to

provide tasty nutritious treats and love in a portable format. The child’s lunch, in her estimation, symbolized his status among his peers and expressed the mother’s caring ability and child-focused life. Prescription and force were no ways to win a child’s affections. The best solution was to empower the child with a sense of control over the box and the fare within it. A November 1956 Parents article took this process one step further. In “Candidates for School Lunches,” the magazine provided a “ballot” for children where they could select the elements that would go in to their school lunch. While their parents might have been making a choice between Democrat Adlai Stevenson or Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower in the Presidential election, children, too, could exercise their decision-making power by selecting among categories including sandwiches; soups and hot dishes; salads and finger foods; desserts and fruits; and beverages. The last column, “Dark Horses,” was a checklist for mothers of “good will ambassadors to add warmth and fun to your child’s school lunch box.” Among the ideas offered were: special napkins; a typed menu for the lunch of the day where, “to promote good food habits,” the mother could “explain briefly what each food offers nutritionally”; labels on sandwiches and maybe an extra “to share”; homemade fudge; a “pocket puzzle”; a set of jacks; or, finally, a “shiny coin--to buy something special--perhaps for you.”

Here, an ideal mother could reap the rewards of her child-centered life as she garnered a material manifestation of her child’s love.

Many of the lunch packing articles from the 1960s forward to the current era

have continued to emphasize the mother’s responsibility to make her children healthy and happy. In “Packed with Love: Lunch-Box Foods Kids Will Eat,” Parents magazine told readers: “Packing lunch for her children must surely be one of the supreme tests of a mother’s love.”205 According to the prescriptions offered in advice articles, this love is best demonstrated through foods that are homemade and home packed. In 1999, on the World Wide Website marthastewart.com, Martha Stewart, the modern good-living guru and self-appointed expert on all things domestic, proposed her ideas for packing love in the lunch box that were nothing short of food-as-art. Among her ideas was an apple cup that involved nearly as much work as a main course dinner. The recipe instructed the chef to cut an apple in half and then to use a melon baller to scoop out the flesh. Next, the would-be artist should use a lemon stripper to “carve the child’s initial into the flesh of the apple. This takes only moments but is guaranteed to bring a smile to your child’s face.” The final stage of production involved filling the exposed cavity with chicken salad and then placing the whole works into “a plastic container until it’s time to say goodbye.” Stewart had other ideas as well, such as making a cereal bracelet out of Cheerios or Fruit Loops and then attaching a note to the eatable jewelry such as “Have a Great Day.”206 With these ideas, Stewart assumes that mother cooks in a kitchen that is equipped with such

206 www.marthastewart.com, cooking and entertaining, September 14, 1999. It is interesting that Stewart uses brand name cereals for this project, but she (or some member of her staff), must have neglected to consult carefully with a box of “Fruit Loops” for had she done so, she would have seen that Kellogg’s popular cereal name plays on the double “o” in “Loops” and misspells fruit as “Froot.”

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specialized tools as melon ballers and lemon strippers. She also assumes that mother has another resource—the time necessary to devote to preparing special lunch box menus.

The New Lunch Packers Mystique

An analysis of packer advice literature in women's magazines from the 1930s to the 1970s revealed sparse references to working women packing a lunch for themselves. Authors of articles instead focused on the fulfilling role of stay-at-home lunch packer. One article in the February 1930 issue of Woman’s Home Companion, “Lunching Alone,” took as its focus the lunch of the homemaker:

If you eat alone at noon doubtless you have read many articles about the importance of the food your husband chooses at lunchroom or restaurant, many discussions of the foods that should comprise the school lunch. But how much attention have you ever given to your own problem? The problem of the woman who eats at home is not the same as that of the business man or woman. His is simply one of spending his lunch money wisely. Your problem is one of utilizing leftovers, of choosing food which can be prepared with that minimum of time and trouble you are willing to spend on yourself. Too often the woman who eats alone makes no attempt to convert leftovers into more palatable form, gives no thought to the proper nutritional balance of her meal—if indeed her collection of odds and ends can be graced by so substantial a name. Such a procedure is wrong, physically and psychologically. For men and women in business lunch time brings a certain relaxation, a chance to turn the mind away from the business of the morning. Lunch time should have a comparable meaning for the woman who lunches at home.207

A Better Homes and Gardens article from March 1963, “What the Men Are

207 Elizabeth Shaffer, “Lunching Alone: Addressed to the Woman Who Eats By Herself At Noon,” Woman’s Home Companion, 57 (February 1930), 78.
Having For Lunch!” further illuminated the type of people having lunch in public places. The “out-to-lunch” crowd was made up of men, not women. The article surveyed eleven of the “top-notch” restaurants across the country to find out which luncheon dishes were most popular with men. The author Myrna Johnston commented: “Some of their favorites are elegant enough for dinner when you invite the boss; others are downright delicious for a family supper or a casual buffet.”

Although throughout the century there existed a dual message about whether a woman’s place was in the home or the workforce, from the 1930s to 1970s, the image of woman as caretaker and homemaker did indeed dominate in lunch packing articles. Beginning in the 1970s, however, some recognition of diverse roles for women began to creep back into magazines in general and lunch packing articles in particular. The birth of two new magazines in this decade, Working Woman and Working Mother, underscored the fact that many readers of women’s magazines were trying to reconcile the demands of work and family life with the cultural prescriptions for ideal American womanhood.

Articles from the 1970s exhibit an increased sense of the need for different types of lunches for different types of people. For example, in “Lunch-To-Go,” a 1976 article in Ladies’ Home Journal by Sue Huffman, the “Food and Equipment Editor” of the magazine, large photographs sent a visual message about matching

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carrier, container, and contents. The first three images show what are clearly masculine hands grasping respectively: an attache case, a brown bag, and a traditional workman’s style domed lunch box. The final three images show more feminine hands holding two different purse-style bags and a children’s Disney school bus metal lunch box. Along with these pictures, the author provided sample menus for what she described as a “festive, teen, hearty, diet, junior,” or “health” lunch. While the menus and the boxes are not linked with words, the sample menu for a “hearty” meal appears beneath the workman’s box and the “diet” and “health” menus may be found under the purse-style representations. The author noted a resurgence in carried lunches because they were “suddenly the most satisfying way to get better food that’s better for you--at better prices.” The article presents a paradox between its visual cues and its verbal ones. According to the introduction, the recipes provided would yield food that was amenable to transport to school, office, or factory; yet like the wives and mothers assumed to be doing the preparation, the aforementioned foods could “happily stay at home as well.”

An article with a similar message appeared in the September 1977 issue of Good Housekeeping: “These days, everyone is brown-bagging it! Lunch at the desk or out on the job saves time and money, helps watch calories too.” Although this article also showed different carriers and their meals, unlike the previous article, it included a head shot of each luncher: a young female athlete with her baseball cap,

ball, and glove at her side; a male construction worker; and male and female office workers. Under each image appeared a sample menu. For the young athlete, a “School Lunch”; for the construction worker, “Hearty Fare”; for the female office worker, “Calorie Counter’s Delight”; and for the male worker, an “Attache Case Lunch.” The article included other recipes designated as “Portable Breakfast” and “Shopper’s Special.”

While each of these articles acknowledged that a woman might have to pack a lunch for her own day on the job as well as for her husband and children, they made strong gender-based distinctions in the types of foods and containers that a woman should use. The “dieter’s” lunch and the purse-style bags were clearly feminine while anything “hearty” and professional was masculine.

Another interesting feature of these two articles is the fact that neither made any suggestion of culinary assistance from a husband. Lunch was still a woman’s job. During World War II, as many women moved out into the workforce for the first time, an article in Parents in October 1943 pictured Alan Bunce, the popular star of the radio serial “Young Doctor Malone,” in the kitchen with his two sons as they prepared the boys’ lunches for the day. Bunce, complete with an apron, smiled as he busily prepared sandwiches for the open boxes that lined the table. The article advised women that if they desired any such assistance from their husbands, they had a responsibility as well: “If you want Dad and the children to help in packing their own

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lunch boxes remember to make it convenient— the chances are they’re not as familiar with the kitchen as you are!" Interestingly, after this image of a man actively participating in lunch preparations, my investigation did not turn up another until a September 1992 issue of *Working Mother*. In this article, similar to the one in 1943, the author again constructed a scenario where Mom had done the background preparations: "Now you can please everyone without being a short-order cook! Just whip up a batch of any of these terrific, easy recipes, then let your gang choose their favorite add-ins and garnishes to pack along with lunch. Here, Dad jazzes up a Classic Chicken Salad with mango chutney and slivered almonds."

How, then, could a woman, burdened with the responsibility for providing love and nutrition in a lunch box, cope with the time pressures of being a working mother? Enter convenience products and advertising.

**Buying In: Convenience and Love at the Grocery Store**

Women’s magazines depend upon a combination of advertiser dollars and subscription fees in order to make their profits. In her study of women’s magazines

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211 Eva Seldens Bank and Cecily Brownstone, "If They Take Their Lunch," *Parents*, 18 (October 1943), 52-62.
213 Ellen Garvey author of *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s-1910s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), demonstrates how at turn of the century, magazines became increasingly driven by advertising revenue rather than editorial content. As a part of this process, advertising moved from the back matter of the journals to more prominent locations in the front and center regions. Sometimes, advertising even masqueraded as fiction, making the separation between content and commercials shady. According to Garvey, this transition in magazine style allowed for advertising to infiltrate the middle class American home without
from 1981 to 1983, Ellen McCracken employs critical techniques from the field of literary analysis to “decode” the messages sent by women’s magazines. Her main point is that women are active readers who can accept, reject or interpret content according to individual needs and desires, but, according to Stuart Hall’s neo-Gramscian model which views ideology as a site of struggle, there is a consistent set of underlying tropes at work in the meanings these magazines and advertisers employ in order to sell products. In essence, the magazines are agents of cultural hegemony that help to make a social system that is grounded on the equation of women and consumption seem natural. McCracken concludes that magazines are what Stuart Hall refers to as a “leaky system” because the reality of a reader’s life is often a direct contrast to what she sees on the pages of a magazine. In McCracken’s estimation, advertisers may take advantage of this situation, using the very unreality to sell products.\(^{214}\)

The most significant aspect of this new focus on advertising was the manner in which it worked along with editorial content to construct idealized American women. For example, an advertisement beside a 1951 *Good Housekeeping* article, “From Freezer to Lunchbox,” was for McCormick/Schilling Pure Vanilla Extract. The advertisement provided a recipe for “Date-Nut Sandwiches,” using, of course, one

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teaspoon of vanilla. According to the advertisement, the vanilla “puts extra goodness in school day sandwiches and desserts... adds richer, fuller flavor that won’t cook out, bake out or freeze out!” The article and ad complemented one another. The article told readers that with a home freezer, they could prepare sandwiches and desserts ahead and “store enough lunches for a week in one free morning.” While the idea of putting up lunches in advance might save time at one end, the preparation of homemade breads, fillings, and desserts required a significant time commitment on the other end.215

By the 1970s, the tension between articles and advertisements became more pronounced. In the September 1977 Good Housekeeping article, “Lunch Box Specials,” discussed earlier, amid the various recipes for homemade sandwiches, cakes, and other lunch box delights, appeared several small advertisements for the Betty Crocker product, Hamburger Helper. Hamburger Helper appeared on supermarket shelves in 1970.216 As more women entered the workforce and new technologies allowed food processors to develop time-saving meal alternatives, the messages broadcast by the magazine articles and those sent by advertisers in the magazines seemed at odds.

This trend continued into the 1980s. As in previous decades, information and

215 Mary Jean Leedy, “From Freezer to Lunch Box,” Good Housekeeping, 133 (September 1951), 185.
ideas in the lunch packing articles continued to assume that the wife and mother was also the chief lunch packer. “Lunches Kids Will Love,” in the September 1989 issue of Parents magazine, offered ideas for ways to increase the child appeal of boxed lunches. The author suggested trying special finger foods and other labor-intensive, bite-sized treats. Rather than being concerned with specific foods in the lunch box, the author told readers to concentrate on overall nutrition quality and food safety. The most interesting aspect of this article was its proximity to a full-page advertisement for ready-made, Jell-O Pudding snacks. The advertisement consisted of a collage of three pudding cups, a handwritten note atop an open lunch box, and a Polaroid picture of a young boy, sitting before an open book, a look of smug satisfaction upon his face. This youngster is pleased with himself for he, in the guise of the “school board,” wrote a note to his parent that requested three extra pudding snacks be placed in his lunch from this time forward. The reason being that he, as the star student of the accelerated reading class, had used up so many brain cells that only a Jell-O snack could now replace them. The advertising agency responsible for this advertisement employed a creative approach to reach the “parent.” Naming neither mother nor father, the ad could be addressed to either one, though the placement of the ad in Parents, read primarily by women, suggests mom as the intended audience. The ad itself is humorous. The boy has clearly attempted to manipulate his parents by invoking the authority of the school board. The subtext of the ad demonstrates who truly holds the power to influence family purchasing decisions—the child.

The interplay of the ad and the article is interesting because of the juxtaposition
of a mass-produced convenience product against the time-consuming ideas such as crafting animal-shaped sandwiches with cookie cutters. The consistent message to women is that either through culinary artistry or consumer activity, the lunch box is more than a meal, it is a symbol of love. This advertisement plays on a key element in selling convenience products to women—guilt. This sense of maternal guilt stems from the idealized image of mother as caretaker and homemaker that continues to dominate women’s magazines even as more and more women find themselves living lives that require them to balance these domestic duties with other tasks and responsibilities outside the home. Advertisers have responded by redefining “homemade” to include foods carried from home but that originated from the grocer’s shelf.

In recent years, manufacturers have begun to offer a new alternative to the lunch box and the school cafeteria—the “lunchable.” Lunchables are convenient, commercially-produced, complete ready-to-go lunches in disposable boxes. Lunchables hit the American supermarket scene in 1988. They were the brainchild of product developers at the Oscar Mayer meat processing company. The term “Lunchables” was the brand name that Oscar Mayer gave to these pre-made lunches, but today, many other companies distribute similar products under different labels.

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217 For an interesting discussion of how toy manufacturers and advertisers sell to parents and children, see Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 1993). Seiter examines toys in the context of the relationships among children, parents, and manufacturers. She argues that it is a middle-class delusion that children should be shielded from consumerism. She notes that people need to come to terms with the fact that parenthood and consumption are inextricably linked.

218 For the purpose of clarity, the term “lunchable” will be used to refer to the entire product category while “Lunchable” will denote the Oscar Mayer brand product specifically.
In addition to the market explosion in other brands of lunchables, there has been a tremendous increase in the variety of meals available. The original Lunchable was comprised of a simple combination of different meats, cheeses, and crackers. Today, lunchables range from make-you-own pizza and taco kits, to waffles with syrup, to dessert packs of cookies, frosting and toppings. According to a June 1995 article in the trade publication, Supermarket News: “It was a breakthrough concept, an early hit with both consumers and marketing gurus. Having since settled in as a fixture, the lunch kit still reigns from a marketing standpoint as one of the few consistently dynamic impulse items in the processed meat case.” A President from Oscar Mayer noted that the products were initially marketed toward children “as the eaters, and parents as the buyers.” With the passage of time, however, their marketing strategy had evolved to include adult consumers as well. Product developers hit on “low-fat” options as the way to entice adult lunch carriers. Market research showed that working mothers were “leading the trend in adult consumption.” A representative from Oscar Mayer stated: “From a consumer standpoint, one of the keys to success for lunch combinations is that moms are challenged with what to make for lunch every day. Kids get bored, and it is a convenient solution to those two consumer problems.”

While children might like the foods in lunchables and parents might enjoy their

convenience, nutritionists have criticized the trend toward such products because they are often high in fat, sodium, and sugar. Some schools, in an effort to maintain student participation in the school lunch program have begun to include a lunchable type meal in their menu rotations. Although a 1999 survey of home-packed school lunches in Fairfax County, Virginia revealed that the lunch provided by the school cafeteria was the most nutritious option for students, the dietary intern who conducted the study found that when competing against most home-packed lunches, the lunchable was actually superior in nutrition. Most home-packed lunches contained no fruit or vegetables and too many sweets. The typical home-packed lunch was: a ham sandwich on white bread with mayonnaise; a bag of pretzels; a six pack of peanut butter crackers; and a Capri Sun brand fruit drink. According to the intern, a child with a home-packed lunch was "no better off than with a Lunchables; in fact, it could be worse."\(^\text{220}\)

Such nutritional controversy places mothers in an awkward position. They hear from nutritionists that both the home-packed lunch and lunchable alternatives are nutritionally inadequate to the meal from the school cafeteria. Yet, many children appear to prefer the lunchable. According to a 12 October 1999 article in the Atlanta Constitution, Oscar Mayer, as the leader in the lunch kit category had sold some 1.6 billion Lunchables since the line debuted, with an annual increase in sales of fifteen percent. Moreover, in a survey of Atlanta area elementary students, children preferred

\(^{220}\) Carole Sugarman, "You Call This Lunch? Lunchables are Everywhere." The Washington Post, 29 September 1999, F1.
lunchables over home-packed or cafeteria food. While one third-grader was "happily eating his pizza Lunchables," one of his comrades was "ignoring his homemade peanut butter and jelly sandwich because it was 'smooshed.'"\textsuperscript{221}

Advertisers have capitalized upon the fun factor and child-pleasing qualities of the pre-packaged meals. One advertising campaign that was disseminated through both women’s magazines and television commercials pitted the Lunchable product directly against the home-packed lunch. It featured children peering discontentedly into paper bags while one smiling child proudly displays his Lunchables. Another ad that appeared in the February 2002 issues of both Better Homes and Gardens and Woman’s Day showed a smiling boy holding his Lunchables Cracker Stackers with the words “Groovy Mom” above his head. The advertisers sent a clear message in those two words: “good” mothers buy Lunchables.

**Gilding the Lunch Box**

Lunch boxes are invested with specific meanings and significance for both packers and carriers. A curious phenomenon of recent years has been the increasing nostalgia attached to old metal, and now even plastic lunch boxes. Dubbed as “collector’s items,” authentic boxes from the 1930s to 1980 can claim price tags into the thousands of dollars. The market for such treasures has grown so large that now

\textsuperscript{221} Diane Lore and Reagan Walker, “Leaning on Lunch Sets; Parents Hop on Prepackaged Meals, but Are They Nutritious?” The Atlanta Constitution, 12 October 1999, 1B.
reproductions are widely available. The Hallmark greeting card company has begun to market a line of miniature tin lunch box ornaments sporting such popular culture heroes as Super Man, Howdy Doody, Hot Wheels race cars, and the Lone Ranger among others. Similarly, many gift shops are selling miniature candy-filled reproductions featuring images such as the Candy Land board game, Mickey Mouse, and G.I. Joe, to name just a few. For those hard-core collectors not satisfied with reproduction boxes there are innumerable antique stores and World Wide websites that specialize in the sale of “authentic” lunch boxes.

Why do lunch boxes conjure such a sense of nostalgia? Certainly part of the reason has to do with the near disappearance of tin lunch boxes after the mythical “mother’s crusade” in Florida petitioned the government to eliminate metal boxes. Still, the eclipse of metal boxes does not alone account for their collectability, nor does it explain why people seek out plastic boxes as well. Perhaps the “old-fashioned” boxes evoke memories of an era before lunchables and other convenience foods made inroads into the nation’s lunchrooms. The metal boxes that saw their heyday during the 1950s and 1960s might represent the notion of an ideal wife and mother, investing her time and energy into packing a well-balanced, appetizing lunch for her charges. Feminists such as Betty Friedan might contend that these boxes are symbolic of the feminine mystique that denied women an identity outside the domestic realm. In this sense, the lunch box is tied to modern Americans’ perceptions that today’s women are busier with work outside the home and less family-oriented than in the past. It may, in
fact, be an image of a family that never existed in reality.222

Much as early lunch containers represented the movement of men and children away from the home, modern convenience products, lunch-related material culture and dining habits connote motion and the dispersion of the family to work and school. In the latter decades of the twentieth century and now into the twenty-first, it is the manufacture and distribution of convenience products rather than food containers that have seen growth. From “drinkable” yogurt in a tube to prepackaged individual servings of crackers, potato chips, and now, even carrots and dip, the explosion in single-serving foods demonstrates that a market exists for foods that require little or no preparation. Even when eating at home, Americans seem to be less interested in spending time preparing meals. At the 2001 Food Marketing Institute trade show in Chicago, food processors unveiled more new products in the “home meal replacement” category. Sagging supermarket sales in recent years have demonstrated a trend toward more fast food dining and take-out style meals. The Food Marketing Institute conducted a survey of consumers in which they found that three out of four consumers cooked at home at least three times a week, but of that number, under half reported making a meal from scratch. In fact, less than a third of people under the age of forty listed themselves as “scratch cooks.” A newspaper reporter covering the convention commented: “Convenience used to mean condensed soup, TV dinners or

ready-to-eat breakfast cereals. Then came Hamburger Helper. Now it’s bagged salads to go with a pre-basted pork tenderloin that requires little cooking, casseroles out of a box or the no-refrigeration-needed spaghetti dish that heats in the microwave.\textsuperscript{223}

Over the course of the twentieth century, changing family structures, work and meal patterns have necessitated that many women develop new ways of fulfilling their responsibility for family food. Still, as the women’s magazines continue to show and the trend toward lunch box collecting attests, the persistence of social prescriptions that place the bulk of responsibility for family meals on women mean that many women must seek out alternative ways to fulfill that role. In that capacity, advertisers and manufacturers have responded to the changing American woman in ways that have made balancing their assorted responsibilities at least somewhat easier. Whether for good or ill, the trend continues to affect change in the nation’s purchasing and eating habits. While the lunchbox represents a mythical “golden age”; the lunchable is a symbol of the postmodern era: no box, no packing, just pure consuming at the economic and physical levels.

\textbf{Maternal Love Within a Box of Boxes}

The obento of the Japanese school child is a miniaturized version of a five- or


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six-course meal. Both the containers and the food within them are highly stylized and reflect general Japanese attitudes toward the proper presentation and contents of a meal. The food and its vehicle are coded messages about "social order and the role that gender plays in sustaining and nourishing that order." Like the Japanese obento box, the lunch box of an American school child is a powerful material representation of a mother’s love. The lunch box is, in a sense, a metaphor or synecdoche of maternal love. During the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, the ideological function of the lunch box has been the contested ground of various individuals and groups ranging from scientists and educators to the government and advertisers. Despite their often different purposes and approaches, these interests have shaped the way American women view their maternal responsibilities.

The colonization process that has affected lunch in general has had profound effects upon the modern American child’s school lunch box. Through the efforts of early school lunch advocates and federal nutrition education campaigns, the lines of communication among schools, the government, and parents were established. With such lines open, a whole bevy of interests gained access to mothers—the gatekeepers of the family table. With regard to women’s roles in packing school lunches, the food manufacturers and marketers have had the most influence. Playing on ideology of true motherhood, commercial products are marketed in such a way as to render maternal love a purchasable commodity. Typified by the “lunchable,” the lunch box of the

224 Allison, 198.
modern American student has become a collection of small boxes, bags, or other containers that are the products of a trip to the grocery store rather than the result of hours of slavish maternal labor. The lunch box has been reduced to a "box of boxes" that when taken as a whole provide evidence of the ideological manipulation of food and gender achieved through the interaction of colonizing forces.
Conclusion

Remember the "Golden Mean" and Blame Not the Oreo

During the final week of July 2002, two very interesting news stories appeared in the Hampton, Virginia newspaper, The Daily Press. Both were Associated Press articles that received attention across the nation. The first, "Childhood Obesity Focus of Summit," appeared on 26 July. According to the article, the former United States Surgeon General, David Satcher, was at the helm of an effort to plan a national summit to take place in October 2002. The summit would be sponsored by "dozens of government agencies and other organizations" and was slated to include participants named as "health and education experts." The representatives intended to "discuss ways to trim the fat." The motivation for the summit came from recent studies that had shown rising rates of obesity among both adults and children over the past decade. Satcher was quoted: "This is not about appearances. It is not about aesthetics... It is about health." He went on to point out that obesity could eliminate the progress that has been made toward fighting heart disease, cancer, and "other ailments." In contrast to adults, who presumably make their own dietary and exercise decisions, "youngsters are supervised by the schools that have a responsibility to encourage more exercise and better eating habits."225

On 27 July, another news story broke. It appeared under the headline, “Obese Diabetic Sues Fast Food Restaurant.” According to this story, Caesar Barber, a fifty-six-year-old man from the Bronx, filed suit in the Bronx Supreme Court in which he named McDonald’s, Wendy’s, Burger King, and Kentucky Fried Chicken as responsible for his weight and other “serious health problems.” Barber was quoted: “They said ‘100 percent beef.’ I thought that meant it was good for you.” Barber, listed as five-foot-ten and two hundred and seventy-two pounds, had heart attacks in 1996 and 1999 and continues to suffer from diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. He told reporters that he had consumed fast food for “decades, thinking that it was good for him until his doctor cautioned him otherwise.”

Such articles raise questions about where or with whom responsibility for a person’s food choices and their consequences rest. During the twentieth century, as reformers, corporations, the state, schools, and the media entered Americans’ kitchens, each claiming to have the answer to nutritional health and well-being, the issue of what to eat and why was been muddied rather than illuminated. Even before World War II, colonizers, or ideology shapers, in the guise of efficiency experts and progressive reformers, endeavored to influence how people thought about and consumed food. Because of the effects of industrialization and systems of mass education, lunch, as the most public and hence most visible meal of the day became the focus of their efforts. World War II lent a new sense of urgency to the problem of

poor nutrition. In the past, advocates of the colonization process saw the eating habits of the poor and immigrants as contributing to health problems and bad working habits, under the strain of war, national nutrition was an issue of patriotism that had implications for national security. From then on, the language of nutritional advice and advertisement was melded as new public/private partnerships participated in the formation of an American eating ideology.

**Drama in the Lunchroom**

Imagine the act of eating lunch is an unfolding drama. The stage might be anywhere a person prepares, procures, or consumes lunch. The action begins unfolding in the late nineteenth century and extends through to the present day. It is a drama of epic proportions. In the roles of protagonists, we have the American lunching public; in the roles of the antagonists, we have the long list of colonizers or ideology shapers. Clearly, antagonists are not reducible to a single template. They bring a plethora of motives to their efforts to alter the lunchtime habits of workers and students. With their first entrance on the stage, the antagonists pull back the curtain to allow others to follow them into the limelight. From act one forward, the antagonists play key roles. Although their actions stem from a variety of motivations including sometimes conflicting concerns for human well-being and economic welfare, many of their ideas do, in fact, seem to benefit the protagonists.

The antagonists enter this drama in a specific and significant order. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century progressive reformers drive the entering
wedge; bringing concerns about the relationship between nutrition and industrial or educational efficiency into the act. Their work sets the stage for business and government leaders during World War II who rely on the exigencies of wartime mobilization to cast regulated civilian lunch habits as a military necessity. Following the war, the antagonists’ efforts to rationalize and routinize lunch do not abate but only shift to accommodate new circumstances. In many workplaces, lunch becomes the terrain of union-management conflicts. Meanwhile, in American schools, the government, businesses, dieticians, and education experts work separately and often cooperate to develop new standards of child nutrition and new measures of student achievement. Their efforts help to push the school lunch to the center stage of equal opportunity programs. Finally, during the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, broad changes in women’s roles at home and in workplaces render the packed lunch a fraught arena of conflict over the nature of motherhood itself.

Importantly, however, the script for this play is very much a dialogue, not a monologue. The protagonists do not simply allow the antagonists to direct all of the action. Like the antagonists, the protagonists are not all of a piece. At different times and in different venues, they alternate between acceptance and resistance. A constant theme in the protagonists’ interactions with the antagonists is their refusal to forfeit their humanity and individuality. Their lunch habits, in spite of the orchestrations of the antagonists, generally tend to defy standardization. The protagonists represent variability and sometimes even irrationality in a world where the standard and rational are reified.
The Saga Continues: Contemporary Lunch Room Drama

Tensions rise and fall as the dialogue of lunch takes its course. Although there are clear high and low points in this drama, it does not have a specific moments of climax and dénouement because the drama unfolds continuously. Today, the cast of antagonists and protagonists remains much the same as at the opening scene of Act One. Those working to colonize and shape American eating ideology include reformers of various stripes, experts in nutrition and medicine, members of the government, corporations endeavoring to promote an efficient workforce and sell products, the media, and advertisers attempting to influence the way Americans eat.

While it is simple to define modern American eating ideology as a heritage from twentieth-century ideology shapers, providing a concise definition of what that ideology is becomes less clear-cut. In fact, American eating ideology is constantly changing and ever-contested. The way Americans think about food and their eating habits is the product of the complex interplay of different social, economic, and political forces. It is clouded by mixed, and sometimes antagonistic messages. For example, while one nutrition guru promotes a diet high in fat and protein another warns that such a regime will result in heart disease. Ultimately, the problem is less one of defining American eating ideology than it is one of reconciling its implications for individual health. If we are to avoid more situations such as that of Mr. Barber, education remains our most effective personal and national defense against the ravages of poor nutritional health.

In a world so full of differing opinions about what, when, why, where, and how to eat, it is all the more important that we educate children about the range of choices available so that they can make good decisions. Clearly, we need to be concerned over what our kids are eating at school and what messages they are receiving about
food from their class work, their peers, the media and advertisers. If American eating
ideology can be said to be based upon anything it is freedom of choice and personal
responsibility. Supermarkets, fast food restaurants, and convenience products show
no signs of disappearing anytime in the near future. Eating choices are a right that we,
as Americans, enjoy. With that right, like any, comes responsibility. With American
parents rests the responsibility to set examples for their children about how to balance
the spectrum of choices in order to create a diet that is both healthy and pleasurable.
Schools can provide information about how to make good choices, but it is not the
responsibility of the school to control the choices individual children make.

In a November 1999 article, “The Lunch Box as Battlefield,” in *Gourmet*
magazine, author Perri Klass related a telling experience she had with packing lunches
for her young children. Her eldest son attended a day-care center where “unhealthy”
foods had been banned from lunch boxes as the result of an unfortunate situation
where one child traded his winter coat for the Oreo cookie of a classmate. Klass
responded:

> I have a message for you all: Stay out of my child’s lunch box; stay away from his plate! You are, of course, free to take the whole-grains-and-lentils route, or to raise your children to think that anything highly spiced is strange and icky and likely to lead to immoral behavior. It may turn out to be an extremely clever strategy, for which you’ll pat yourselves on the back someday when you realize you’ve created adolescents who can act out full-scale rebellions merely by scarfing down Mounds bars. But you can’t remove temptation from your child’s path by legislating what mine can eat.

> It’s a misguided notion anyway. The food choices that children will grow up to make have to be choices—if there is a food you don’t want your child to eat, she has to be able to watch someone else eating it without going into a frenzy.\(^{227}\)

\(^{227}\) Perri Klass, “The Lunch Box as Battlefield,” *Gourmet*, November 1999, 244.
Although the colonization process has produced many laudable effects such as national nutrition guidelines, improved dining conditions in many workplaces and schools, and the federal free- and reduced-lunch programs, the erosion of personal choice and control alluded to in Klass’s story demonstrates the negative outcome of this same process. The best way for Americans to balance the two extremes is to reassert personal responsibility. Recently, in January 2003, United States District Court Judge Robert Sweet took a stand in this spirit when he dismissed a class action lawsuit against several fast-food chains. The suit alleged that the chains should be held accountable for obesity among Americans. In drawing the closing curtain on this case, Sweet described it as one of “unique and challenging issues” which included questions of personal responsibility, common knowledge and public health.” In his ruling on the case, he summarized: “If consumers know (or reasonably should know) the potential ill health effects of eating at McDonald’s, they cannot blame McDonald’s if they, nonetheless, choose to satiate their appetite with a surfeit of super-sized McDonald’s products.” Sweet’s conclusion echoes the sentiment expressed in a line from the tragic Medea penned by the fifth century B.C. Greek playwright, Euripides:

“Moderation, the noblest gift of Heaven.”

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229 Euripides, Medea, Line 636.
THE LITTLE GIRL PICKED ONE OF THE LUNCH-BOXES

Figure 1. Illustration from L.Frank Baum, *Ozma of Oz* (Reilly and Britton, 1907; repr. Dover Publications, 1985), 42.
Figure 2. Illustration from L.Frank Baum, *Ozma of Oz* (Reilly and Britton, 1907; repr. Dover Publications, 1985), 66.

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DOROTHY OPENED HER TIN DINNER-PAIL

Figure 3. Illustration from L. Frank Baum, *Ozma of Oz* (Reilly and Britton, 1907; repr. Dover Publications, 1985), 67.
Figure 4. Political cartoon from William McKinley's 1900 Presidential campaign. Courtesy of the Stark County Historical Society, Canton, Ohio.
Figure 5. Photograph, ca. 1936. demonstrating the positive effects of surplus commodities in the school lunch Program. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
Figure 6. Photograph, ca. 1936. demonstrating the positive effects of surplus commodities in the school lunch Program. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.
Figure 7. Photograph, October 1938. Farm children and their lunch pails in rural Nebraska.
Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Photograph Collection
(Library of Congress.)
Figure 8. Poster, 7 July 1941. Produced by the WPA Federal Art Project to promote school lunch. Works Projects Administration Poster Collection (Library of Congress.)
YOUR COMMUNITY
can sponsor a school lunch
program for its children

Figure 9. Poster, 1941. Produced by the Government Printing Office to promote school lunch. Make America Strong Series. Northwestern University Library.
"You don't get this kind of comfort in the cafeteria."

Figure 10. Cartoon from Frank Adams, Then Ya Just Untwist (Rialto, California: Rialto Publishing Company, 1951).
Figure 11. Cartoon from Frank Adams, *Then Ya Just Untwist* (Rialto, California: Rialto Publishing Company, 1951).
"Good Lord! I thought YOU took him to nursery school on YOUR way to work this morning!"

Figure 12. Cartoon from Frank Adams, *Then Ya Just Untwist* (Rialto, California: Rialto Publishing Company, 1951).
"Did ya get yer pay check?"

Figure 13. Cartoon from Frank Adams, Then Ya Just Untwist (Rialto, California: Rialto Publishing Company, 1951).

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"This one is your breakfast ... in case you gotta work overtime."

Figure 14. Cartoon from Frank Adams, Then Ya Just Untwist (Rialto, California: Rialto Publishing Company, 1951).
"Whadda ya want in yer lunch today?"

Figure 15. Cartoon from Frank Adams, Then Ya Just Untwist (Rialto, California: Rialto Publishing Company, 1951).
"Today being your day off... I thought I'd pack your lunch pail and we could go to the park..."

Figure 16. Cartoon from Frank Adams, Then Ya Just Untwist (Rialto, California: Rialto Publishing Company, 1951).
"Well ... Saturday is her birthday ... Sunday is our anniversary ... Monday is Christmas ... and I could use a new lunch pail ..."

Figure 17. Cartoon from Frank Adams, Then Ya Just Untwist (Rialto, California: Rialto Publishing Company, 1951).
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VITA

Julie Lynn Lautenschlager was born in North Tonawanda, New York, January 16, 1973. She graduated from Hoover High School in North Canton, Ohio, in 1991. In 1995, she graduated Summa Cum Laude from Mount Union College in Alliance, Ohio with a B.A. in History and French. From there, she went to Kent State University in Kent, Ohio where she received her Master’s in History in 1997. Her thesis, “‘I Will Waste Nothing’: American Women’s Patriotism Seen Through World-War II Era Cookbooks,” received the Distinguished Master’s Thesis award from the University. She entered the College of William and Mary’s American Studies Program in the Fall of 1998. In August 2002, the author joined the staff of the Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series in Charlottesville, Virginia, as an Assistant Editor.