

are produced, where, by whom and under what conditions. The last article, by Arun Saldanha, is on the violence of the Dutch when developing the spice trade in Indonesia. The author adheres to the opinion of Georges Bataille, who saw the push to increase the spice trade as “soaked with ambiguous desires and outbursts of destructive and self-destructive animosity” (p. 313). The Dutch used biopolitical techniques, blocking the importation of staple foods and destroying crops to drive up prices. This form of mercantilism had racialized populations before colonialization; the underlying ideology was the superiority of religion, not that of whiteness.

The diversity of the articles exploring the relationship between race and food, from production to consumption, in history and in the contemporary world makes the book unique and stimulating for readers interested in the fields of food and agriculture, as well as of developmental and gender studies. One may nevertheless regret that some articles, favoring a discursive approach, would have benefited from more extensive empirical content in order to highlight the racialization process. Moreover, the classification of the articles under three defined parts is not very pertinent and the impact on health of dispossession of land and food, marginalization of populations, migration or transformation of eco-systems has not sufficiently engaged contributors. The editors have covered a wide range of situations and, even though this diversity entails an important heterogeneity with regard to the gravity of conditions stemming from the racialization of food and land, certain fields have not been explored. Subjects such as internal migration due to seasonal work or displacement by development projects or armed conflicts—phenomena which are drastically increasing in developing countries—would be very relevant to grasping new forms of racialization which deny populations land and/or food, forcing them to change their diet with adverse consequences for their health.

Reference

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

EATING RIGHT IN AMERICA: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF FOOD AND HEALTH

BY CHARLOTTE BILTEKOFF (DURHAM, NC: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013)

Reviewed by Clara Hanson, Boston University

DOI: 10.2752/175174415X14180391604486

The White House kitchen garden may seem like a simple tool to teach Americans to be healthy in the midst of an obesity epidemic, but in her book *Eating Right*

in America: The Cultural Politics of Food & Health, Charlotte Biltekoff uncovers a more insidious impulse in the garden than meets the eye. *Eating Right in America* traces changes in rhetoric beginning with the establishment of modern nutrition at the end of the nineteenth century, followed by nutritional propaganda during the Second World War and the alternative food movement of the late 1960s through to the present. The book concludes with a critical evaluation of the anti-obesity movement, focusing largely on the past two decades. Biltekoff succeeds in her attempt to rethink discourses about eating right as a social duty, a moral measure, and a form of power by highlighting similar messages about class and citizenship in each seemingly unique movement. Unlike many books that challenge readers to rethink dietary discourse in terms of nutrition, economics or sustainability, Biltekoff challenges readers to move past debates about the definition of eating right in order to focus on the social implications inherent in movements that attempt to change the eating behavior of many to fit a certain definition of eating right.

The book begins with the establishment of nutrition in the late nineteenth century and traces its progression through the Second World War. Despite the emerging field's scientific methods, the first examples of applied nutrition actually built on existing moral precepts of appetite. Activists initially attempted to educate members of the working class about nutrition through outreach efforts like The New England Kitchen of 1890. These efforts were soon abandoned as audiences rejected the new scientific standard of eating right, largely because it failed to account for a diverse public palate. Early discourse morphed from reforming the working class to preserving and distinguishing the middle class. Ellen Richards was a critical proponent of both incarnations, and led the effort to bring lessons about "right living" and home economics to students. Ultimately, the discourse exploited the image of an unhealthy other by using coded language that conflated environmental factors with nutritional science to create a biological measure of class.

Early ideas of nutrition were rethought with the discovery of vitamins. New anxieties about hidden hunger, a paradoxical form of hunger caused by inadequate vitamin intake that was impossible to detect, emerged. War efforts pressured Americans to support their country in new ways, including eating healthfully according to the new Basic 7 food guide. The war broadened the purview of reformers to the entire American population. The result integrated ideas about proper nutrition and the image of good citizenship, and implored all to follow as an act of patriotism during wartime.

Although dietary movements following the Second World War seemed to move beyond earlier hegemonic definitions of nutrition, class and citizenship, they often perpetuated earlier moral ideas about eating right. One such movement was the alternative food movement that began in the late 1960s. As with earlier reforms, the movement employed empirical standards to define how to eat right, but, according to Biltekoff, the standards were equally moralizing. Reformers increasingly engaged neoliberal ideas that emphasized the responsibility of individuals in eating right. In one of her most cogent



FOOD,
CULTURE
&
SOCIETY

VOLUME 18

ISSUE 2

JUNE 2015

and provocative points, Biltekoff explores the parallels between early home economics leader Ellen Richards and alternative food activist Alice Waters. Both worked tirelessly to bring their visions of eating right to young students, and both believed doing so would repair critical elements of America's social fabric.

Neoliberal dietary philosophies were crucial to the anti-obesity movement. Even the language used following the September 11th attacks invoked ideas of diet and citizenship reminiscent of Second World War rhetoric. The anti-obesity movement also paralleled nutrition discourse from the end of the nineteenth century in two ways. First, it attempted to reform the diet of the poor through the rhetoric of personal responsibility. Second, it created a new measure of middle class identity that othered people with large bodies, especially if they were working class or minorities. By deconstructing the discourses of two historical and two contemporary movements, Biltekoff persuasively shows that while definitions of eating right may change, the moral messages these definitions implicitly spread have been told time and time again.

Biltekoff draws from an extensive bibliography to create a well-researched argument that is relevant across the fields of food studies and fat studies. *Eating Right in America* is concise, well written and packed with examples that compellingly interrogate conventional ideas about eating right. Although Biltekoff focuses on movements that have already garnered academic attention, her analysis offers a new and complex way to reexamine nutritional history. The way she engages dominant political philosophies and popular food ideologies will also compel readers to think more deeply about the messages they receive and the messages they share.

While *Eating Right in America* makes a significant contribution to the growing number of postmodern works that deconstruct nutritional discourse, certain sections should be expanded upon. The dynamics of race in these moralizing reform movements must be examined more deeply. Biltekoff critically examines race and ethnicity only in her final chapter about obesity. There are also gaps in her chronology. Detailed information from the 1920s and 1930s is absent. Dietary advice following the Second World War leading up to the alternative food movement in the late 1940s through the early 1960s is also missing. An analysis of food in civil rights activism, including the Black Panther Party's food programs, might be a good place to start. Despite these gaps, this volume significantly advances our understanding of nutrition beyond its science. The reformers Biltekoff deconstructs may or may not have been right about American eating, but by the end of her book, Biltekoff leaves no doubt that dietary discourse itself is in need of reform.