

# “STRONG MEN AND WOMEN ARE NOT PRODUCTS OF IMPROPER FOOD”: DOMESTIC SCIENCE AND THE HISTORY OF EATING AND IDENTITY

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This paper presents preliminary thinking on food reform movements as a site for the continuous shaping and reshaping of the relationship between eating, identity, and citizenship in America. It examines the turn of the century domestic science movements and argues that its goals included not only bread baking, but citizen making, and that its effects included not only changes in eating habits, but changes in the significance of eating habits. The author contends that domestic scientists made eating available as a system of self making and in so doing naturalized class differences and normalized a middle class standard for “alimentary subjectivity.”

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“. . . Improper food is closely related with mental and moral defects. Strong men and women are not the products of improper food.” Ellen Richards, 1910<sup>1</sup>

“I believe our destiny as a nation depends on how we nourish ourselves. . . . The way we produce, prepare and eat food expresses the bedrock values on which our private lives are built.” Alice Waters, 1992<sup>2</sup>

What do Ellen Richards, the “mother of home economics,” and Alice Waters, founder of Chez Panisse and celebrated inspiration for a recent “revolution in American cuisine,” have in common? How might we understand the history that links Waters’ Berkeley based food reform movement, with its emphasis on the sensual pleasures of tasting and touching food, with the domestic scientists of the late nineteenth century, champions of scientific cookery best remembered for subordinating the appetite to efficiency and rationality?

This paper is part of a larger project that will examine these and other twentieth century food reform movements and the history of the relationship between eating, identity, and social order that is embedded within them. The project traces a century of food reform movements and suggests that somewhere in the tension between the similarities and the differences amongst them lies the story of both a steady growth in the significance of eating to identity and an ongoing struggle over the power to define that meaning and to shape the image of an ideal eating identity. This paper, more specifically, looks at the domestic science movement—a loose configuration of reform efforts by progressive era

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<sup>1</sup>*Euthenics* 22

<sup>2</sup>O’Neill 29

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women who campaigned to bring the home and women's work within it into the modern era through science, efficiency, and economy—and argues that it played an important role in the fashioning of a modern relationship between eating and identity.

Based on preliminary research, this paper will argue that in the same historical context in which sexual identity was born a new kind of eating, or alimentary, identity also emerged in part through the work of the domestic science movement. The turn of the century domestic scientists, I argue, drew on the emerging science of nutrition and the morality of female domesticity to create a salient system of knowledge through which individuals would come to know and assess themselves.

Like the “modern subject of food choice” described in John Coveney's *Food, Morals and Meaning*, (2000) the alimentary subject I am discussing here is similar to the sexual subject in his distinctly modern sense of autonomy and drive to better the self. This modern subject is distinctly alimentary in the sense that he seeks to know and to better himself through the empirical and the ethical system provided first by domestic scientists and later through other food reform discourses.

The domestic science movement not only provided a dietary framework through which individuals might construct their identities, but in so doing it naturalized class differences and normalized a middle class standard for alimentary subjectivity. The domestic scientists fashioned a body of empirical and moral truths through which modern subjects could come to know themselves and their place in a social order increasingly characterized as dependent on proper eating. This body of knowledge created new classes of nutritional being through categories that conflated the cultural difference of class with the biological difference of nutritional need. Furthermore, by incorporating middle class cultural preferences into the seemingly empirical science of domesticity, the reform discourse normalized middle class values as the standard against which alimentary deviance, now no small matter, could be measured.

#### FROM A HISTORY OF EATING HABITS TO A HISTORY OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EATING HABITS

The methodology that shapes this argument is influenced by Michel Foucault's ideas of discourse and formed in contradistinction to traditional histories of the domestic science movement. The few historians

who have looked at the domestic science movement have told a story of lady reformers who failed in their original attempts to change the diets of the poor but eventually managed to both create a female profession and spread a rational, scientific approach to cooking through home economics courses and corporate partnerships. Historians such as Harvey Levenstein and Laura Shapiro have asserted that the reformers may ultimately have had a profound impact on the American diet, but in general they have failed to make convincing arguments about this impact. For example, Shapiro calls the impact of the domestic scientists on the American diet “devastating” (Shapiro, 1986:10) but does not distinguish the impact of the movement from the changes wrought by the very forces that informed it; urbanization and the industrialization of the food system. Taking the rhetoric of the domestic scientists' motivations and aspirations at face value, traditional history fails to account for the power of their discourse because it looks for effects in terms of changes in eating habits, rather than changes in the *significance* of eating habits. Extant scholarship, in other words, works within modern notions of eating and being, rather than interrogating the process through which the meanings we now associate with eating came to be taken as common sense.

Historical analysis based on Foucault's ideas of discourse allows an examination of the process through which truths about eating and identity were made available by the domestic scientists and eventually came to function as a system of knowledge and power. As explained by Gail Bederman, discourse in this sense refers to a set of ideas and practices which, even though they may be inconsistent and contradictory, “When taken together organize both the way a society defines certain truths about itself and the way it deploys social power” (Bederman, 1995:24). The methodology of discourse analysis presumes that intellectual knowledge and concrete power are mutually constitutive. As Bederman explains, the daily practices which enforce a society's power relations are understood to determine what kind of knowledge will be understood as “true.” Ideas accepted as “true” are at the same time understood to determine the power relations and political aims people believe to be possible and desirable, as well as what kind of identities they can imagine and construct (Bederman, 1995:24).

Historians inspired by Foucault's *History of Sexuality* have located the emergence of a distinctly modern relationship between sexuality and identity in Western cultures around the end of the nineteenth

century as modern science, “was elevated to the task of uncovering aberrations of human behavior and making the self and its sexual complexities systematically intelligible” (Terry, 1999).<sup>3</sup> Scholars such as Jennifer Terry (1999), Angus McLaren (1997), and Carolyn Dean (1996) have shown that modern subjects began to develop a sense of their own interiority and their social identity as defined by their sexual desires and experiences as a result of discourses emanating from various locations (medicine, science, education, the law) which increasingly established sexuality as the truth of the self. At the same time the State increasingly made management of the body of its citizens a primary project and became particularly concerned with the surveillance and regulation of sexuality. Is it possible that a contemporaneous discourse about the relationship between eating and identity worked to establish a distinctly modern “alimentary identity” that has also become a strategic site for the management of bodies, desires, and difference?

John Coveney, in his book *Food, Morals, and Meaning* (2000), argues that a “modern subject of food choice” indeed emerged after the enlightenment as religion became less influential and the state, with the backing of scientific and medical discourses, took over the management of pleasure (Coveney, 2000:47). According to Coveney, the emergence of the science of nutrition at the end of the nineteenth century provided both an empirical and an ethical system through which the modern subject willingly strives to better his self (Coveney, 2000:90). “Modern nutrition,” he explains, “provides subjects both empirical knowledge of the body and an ethics which allows them to produce themselves as moral individuals. Nutritional discourse provides a daily conscience through a mode of living – a dietetics – which reminds individuals how to behave in regard to the rules of healthy living” (Coveney, 2000:47). Adapting Coveney’s thinking to a more historically particular project, the alimentary subject is understood to be produced not exclusively through nutrition, but through the more accessible food reform discourses, from domestic science to Alice Waters, that have harnessed the authority of nutritional science to reform ideologies.

Working within Coveney’s theory that a modern subject of food choice would be produced through an empirical and ethical system but shifting his broad

theoretical approach to a more localized analysis of turn of the century America, the focus of the discursive production of the modern relationship between eating and the self shifts from the male world of nutritional science to the female world of domestic science. Through the discourse and the reform agenda of domestic science nutrition was translated and given meaning for immigrants and the urban poor as well as for the “thinking classes” and also made an integral part of American consumer culture and public education

What I call the “modern alimentary subject” is, like Coveney’s nutritional subject, produced through both empirical and ethical systems. However, the alimentary subject discussed here is also understood to be produced through extant social systems and structures of identity and difference. Where Coveney highlights the limited autonomy of the subject’s “food choice” the alimentary subject is understood to be limited in his “choice” by extant social hierarchies such as those of class, which this paper will address, as well as race and gender which are understood to be mutually constitutive with class yet limitations of space prohibit me from addressing here.

#### **DOMESTIC SCIENCE: MORE THAN A WELL LAID TABLE**

The domestic science movement took shape throughout the final quarter of the nineteenth century and in 1899 was officially named home economics at the first of ten annual Lake Placid Conferences on Home Economics presided over by Ellen Richards.<sup>4</sup> The definition of home economics formulated in 1902 is, according to Stage and Vincenti still widely used: “Home Economics is . . . the study of the laws conditions, principles, and ideals which are concerned on the one hand with man’s immediate physical environment and on the other with his nature as a social being, and is the study *specially of the relation between these two factors*” (Stage & Vincenti, 1997:322).<sup>5</sup> Courses in domestic economy were offered as early as 1871, by 1885 domestic science was introduced to the public schools in Boston, in 1890 the reformers opened a food demonstration center (The New England

<sup>4</sup>Stage and Vincenti (1997) provide a useful chronology of events in the history of home economics (321-330) and Weigley offers a nice brief overview of the evolution of the home economics movement. Unless otherwise noted, the information in this paragraph can be found in Stage and Vincenti (1997).

<sup>3</sup>Foucault (1978) locates the emergence of sexual identity in the 1700s but historians such as Terry and Dean have shifted the periodization to the end of the nineteenth century.

Kitchen) in Boston that was to have numerous imitators, and by the turn of the century thirty colleges had domestic science departments. At the tenth Lake Placid Conference, held on the final day of 1908, conference attendance had grown from eleven to seven hundred and The American Home Economics Association and the *Journal of Home Economics* were born. By 1914 home economics courses were offered in 250 colleges and universities with four year programs leading to a bachelor's degree in twenty-eight, masters programs in twenty, and a Ph.D. in available in at one (Shapiro 185). Meanwhile, domestic scientists were fervently spreading their ideology through partnerships with large food manufacturers who enlisted their endorsements in print and in person at massive food fairs that were mounted throughout the country in the 1890s (Shapiro, 1986:190–216).

Ellen Richards, who in 1873 became the first woman to earn a BA from MIT and the first woman to earn an advanced degree in science, was a primary leader of the reform efforts (Hunt, 1912:104). Pushing the boundaries of women's authority from the home to the city, she argued that women trained in the science of air, water, food, and sanitation were desperately needed to save the populace from its outdated approach to domestic life. Urging American women to keep pace with progress in science and industry, she lectured, published, and agitated tirelessly in pursuit of rational and efficient domesticity, never failing to place reform in the matter of food as the most urgent priority for the well being of the social order. "In the interest of the race," she wrote in *The Cost of Food*, "of its mental as well as its physical development, there is no subject which should occupy the attention of educators comparable to that of food and its influence on human progress" (Ridior, 1901:). Combining her background in science with moral authority attributed to female domesticity by contemporary ideologies, Richards fashioned a program that was based in domesticity but clearly had ambitions far beyond a well laid table.

The domestic science movement was originally

<sup>5</sup>Throughout the evolution of the home economics movement there was ongoing debate over the proper name. I have chosen to refer to the reform movement I am discussing here primarily as "domestic science" because I am referring to a movement that predated the official naming in 1899 and because I am focusing on the work of Ellen Richards who always preferred the name domestic science over home economics. When I refer to "home economics" I do so because I am discussing an occurrence directly related to organization that officially bears this name (Weigley, Stage and Vincenti).

focused on trying to make the diets of the poor more wholesome and economical but in the mid 1890s the focus shifted from changing the diets of the poor, which turned out to be practically impossible, to educating the middle class. As explained by Richards, the "death knell" of the public kitchens aimed at reforming the eating habits of the poor "was sounded by the women who said "I don't want to eat what's good for me; I'd rather eat what I'd rather"" (Hunt 220). Spurred by both a frustrating realization of the stubbornness of the palates of the poor and an increasing sense of Anglo Saxon vulnerability in the midst of immigrant population growth that seemed to be outpacing that of the New England elite, the middle class reformers increasingly began to worry over the survival of their own.<sup>6</sup> "The well to do classes," wrote Richards, "are being eliminated by their diet, to the detriment of social progress, and they and not the poor are the most in need of missionary work" (Hunt 233).

The middle class child was a special target for the reformers who, like their other reformers of the time, strove to influence the malleable minds of the young (Boyer 179-183). As Richards explained: "Let the furrows be plowed deeply enough while the brain cells are plastic, then human energies will result in efficiency and the line of least resistance will be the right line" (*Euthenics* 82). Hoping they would not only bring new habits home to their parents, but eventually run their own households by the moral and practical tenets of domestic science the reformers increasingly sought to influence children through the public schools.

After the mid 1890s, the reformers became especially concerned to educate children in the fourth R—"the Art of Right Living." At the Lake Placid Conferences on Home Economics reformers gathered to debate pedagogy, shape curricula, and share syllabi for every level of education, from elementary through universities. At the second conference, in 1900, a reformer declared the movement's mission:

If in the training for citizenship, in the upbuilding of character, the home is a fundamental factor, home economics must bear an organic part in the general scheme of education. . . . At any point in the school system, our problem is this: How much of

<sup>6</sup>See both Higham (136–149) and Gosset (299–306) for an explanation of the sense of an imperiled Anglo Saxon population and the perceived threat of "race suicide" at this time, which was especially pervasive in New England in the 1880s and 1890s.

home economics can we give to this pupil, so relating it to his experience and limiting it to fit his development that it shall become an organic part of the equipment for life. (*Lake Placid* 27)

Contrary to common historical and popular representation, the domestic science and the home economics movement were about more than level measurements and scientific bread baking. The reformers saw themselves as producing not only standardized recipes and economical meals but citizens; citizens who were to understand themselves and be understood by others as directly linked to the well being of the social order through their alimentary behaviors.

Creating future citizens and an ideal society by making home economics part of "the equipment for life" was a goal that Richards also hoped to pursue through a new science that she dubbed "euthenics" in 1902 and in 1910 published a full length book, *Euthenics: the Science of a Controllable Environment*. To further explain and promote euthenics, the book deals with race improvement through the environment, providing an immediate opportunity for hygiene for the present generation so that a science of eugenics based on heredity could follow with hygiene for future generations (vii). Surrounded by Darwinian social thought, a rising eugenics movement, progressive reform strategies, and a growing sense of the vulnerability of known social hierarchies, Richards theorized that by promoting "right living conditions" she could help to secure the future of the race.<sup>7</sup> Individual, community, nation and race were linked by a direct chain of accountability, where the individual was to subordinate his desires to the good of the whole, to eat, that is, for the good of the race. In *Euthenics* she explained that, "... the richest food areas in the world have provided the worlds most powerful stocks of men of which we have any record, and it has been pointed out by many that improper food is closely connected with mental and moral defects. Strong men and women are not the product of improper food" (Richards, 1910). For Richard's home economics was coterminous with euthenics. Her 1904 effort to officially change the name of "home economics" to "euthenics" failed, but only because

euthenics was thought to be not as easily recognizable by the public (Weigley, 1974:95-96).

Clearly the domestic science movement, known mainly, if at all, for instructing young girls in scientific cookery did so name in the name of a less commonly recognized quest for the building of a social order that was to be based on an understanding of the individual's responsibility to that social order in all matters of private life and especially in eating. "Undoubtedly" wrote Richards, "A moral force is to be strengthened by spreading the biological lesson that man cannot live to himself alone, but that his acts or failure to act affect a large number of his fellowmen" (Richards, 1910). Understanding and submitting to natural laws was seen as integral to participation in social order and race progress:

The child's responsibility towards his environment must be developed both in its individual and public aspects. There should be conscious recognition of his organic relation to public health, to public morals, as well as to understanding of the laws that govern the moral and physical health of the individual, and of his obligation to keep these laws. (*Lake Placid* 230)

The domestic scientists were part of progressive era social thought which valued the importance of social whole over the individual life (Boyer, 1978:190) and made the intimate life of the individual, particularly as it concerned food and eating, central to the social order and to the specter of social disorder.

The domestic science movement was very much conscious of itself as providing a body of knowledge that was set to become available not only for self making but also for evaluating and classifying others. Though the domestic science movement was never monolithic and often met with resistance, much of its philosophy would ultimately be diffused through home economics courses in schools and universities, as well as through books, magazines, cookbooks and partnerships with large food manufacturers that were just beginning to construct a national audience through massive advertising campaigns. The diffusion of the empirical and moral tenets of the domestic science movement into the national curriculum and into consumer culture meant the fashioning of a new common sense about the relationship between eating and being, a truth about the relationship between eating and identity that made a new alimentary subjectivity possible.

<sup>7</sup>See Gosset, Higham, Boyer, Stocking and Pickens for more on the context of Social Darwinism, eugenics, and the science and social thought about race, biology, and culture at this time.

## An Empirical and an Ethical System

The system of knowledge produced by the domestic science movement was based in both empirical truths derived from science and ethical truths that gained their authority in part through their association with the so called private realm of female domesticity.<sup>8</sup> Cooking and eating were seen as a linked chemical process governed by the laws of science but only realized in its perfect form when subjects behaved ethically, using their moral nature to obey natural laws.

The domestic science movement relied heavily on the nineteenth century authority of science and especially the emerging truths of nutritional science to anchor its reform ideology. Practitioners of domestic science felt that all homemakers should be trained in the chemistry of cooking and cleaning, and advocated seeing the kitchen as a scientific laboratory. Based on a new science of nutrition that quantified food values and nutritional needs, the reformers vigorously promoted the argument that the value of food comes from its chemical composition, not from its cost, flavor, or place in tradition. Cooking was thought of as digestive process that happened outside the body in order to prepare food for digestion inside the body. In an essay called, "On External Digestion Commonly Called Alimentation," that was written to be distributed at a model kitchen run by the domestic scientists at the 1893 World's Colombian Exhibition, an author explained that, "Alimentation, or the preparation of food for digestion within the body, is only another name for a long series of processes, essentially digestive outside of the body . . . to this set of processes and phenomenon we apply the term external digestion" (*Rumford Leaflets* 45). She went on to explain that every process in the "domestic food laboratory or kitchen" must be adapted toward its end; "absorption through the living walls of the alimentary canal to minister to human nutrition" (*Rumford Leaflets* 48). The eating body was to be governed not by tradition, the senses, or even by moral law as provided by religion—but by scientific law. The alimentary subject would ideally seek to know and to better itself through a newly codified set of dietary knowledge that

the reformers both popularized and made even more salient by blending it with a powerful morality of its own.

For Richards and other reformers the kitchen was both a scientific and a social laboratory. The mission of the kitchen was a strength of body and character that was to be achieved through obedience to not only scientific but also moral laws. The New England Kitchen, for example, was a moderately successful public kitchen that aimed to fill the lunch pails of urban factory workers with nutritious and economical foods like beef broth and Indian pudding. But its mission was not only to provide efficient meals that would use the science of nutrition to produce labor power more efficiently. The New England Kitchen, like its many imitators, was also meant to act as a "silent preacher" (Richards and Abel 137) for it was understood to be the "duty of cultured men and women to try to arouse within these people a desire for right living" (*Lake Placid* 218).

The kitchens and other projects depicted domestic science not only as an empirically valid truth of the body, but also as a moral order through which individuals, families, the community and the race would prosper. Domestic science rhetoric made it clear that the reformers aimed to provide an ethical system through which individuals could become, and strive to better, themselves. "It is true," wrote Richards,

That man is part of nature, subject to nature's laws, but he has the power of control over himself and his natural environment, if only he will learn to use it . . . for man has a spiritual nature capable of high ideals for himself, ideals which make self control, foresight, and ambition possible . . . . He has power to set for himself a goal to strive for, to ask, 'What shall I make of myself?' (*Right Living* 16)

What should he make of himself? The discourse of domestic science, one could argue, is in its entirety an effort to provide an answer to this very question; a system of both knowledge and ethics through which the modern subject would become himself.

### Classifying Alimentary Subjects: Biology, Culture, and Class

The body of knowledge fashioned by the domestic scientists was particularly concerned with examining and codifying subjects according to class difference. Within the context of the late nineteenth century social thought in which moral and physical features were

<sup>8</sup>For more about the moral authority attributed to female domesticity see Shapiro (1986), especially 11-46. Ginzberg (1990) provides a good overview of the historiography of separate spheres, female morality, and the politics of reform (1-10) and an interesting assessment of the ideology of female benevolence as well as the possibilities of that ideology throughout her book but especially in chapter one, "Her Strongest Moral Organ" (11-35).

understood as fundamentally tied to biology, Richards and others were adamant that understanding and administering dietaries by class was not merely a matter of economics, but also essential to attaining the proper relation of man to his environment.<sup>9</sup> The dietary advice they issued, which was based on emerging nutritional research, divided individuals into nutritional classes, providing different dietary requirements for women at moderate activity, aged women, manual workers, brain workers, and so on. Richards' *Cost of Food* published in 1901 included sections outlining the unique dietary requirements of school children, active youth, students and brain workers, travelers and professional persons, and those in penal and pauper institutions. Gender, age, health, and occupational difference held equal status in the studies and the recommended dietaries they produced, so that the cultural difference of class status was naturalized in terms of nutritional needs.

No effort was to be spared, even by these scions of efficiency and economy, when it came to making sure that eating subjects would be strictly classed. In the hospital environment, for example, there were to be aside from patients four different eating rooms with different hours and bills of fairs of gradually decreasing cost. Staff meals would be designed to cater to the different needs of house officers and heads of departments; nurses and second assistants; engineers and workmen; and Scrub-women, janitors and choremen (Richards, *Cost of Food* 77-83).

Richards, for whom economy was paramount, warned that "It must be born in mind that a *separate order means increased cost*," and went on to explain that catering to the individual needs of different classes of workers was necessary even though it added cost, not only in preparation and service, but also in the work of forbidding the "higher quality foods to employees" who when "seeing and handling tempting foods, [may feel] aggrieved if forbidden to taste," and may do so "... if the stores are not under lock and key ... unless they can be made to feel that it is dishonest" (*Cost of Food* 80). The discourse on the science and morality of right living that was provided and popularized by the domestic scientists adamantly codified subjects by nutritional classes. These categories may have seemed purely rational, but in fact represented a potent incorporation of cultural differences into a language of science and the biology of nutritional needs.

Not only were alimentary subjects to be known to themselves and classified by others through categorical class difference, but they were to be

measured against a norm that was made in the image of the middle class. Nutritional research made available an empirical standard of a "good diet" (Coveney, 2000:66 - 84). Alimentary subjects could now be measured against an approved norm which, through the domestic science discourse, became shot through with middle class values. The ideal alimentary subject, seemingly designed by the immutable laws of nature, was encoded with middle class attributes whose cultural origins were obscured by the language of science.

The reform discourse, particularly in its later stages, seemed determined to correcting the nutritional failings of the so-called thinking class and has therefore been described by scholars such as Levenstein (1998) as "an assault on the middle class" (ch.6). However, by establishing a discourse about the relationship between eating, being, and social order that normalized middle class values they were, more importantly, positioning ideal alimentary subjectivity as central to the well being of the state and creating that ideal in their own image. The discourse of alimentary subjectivity was, like that of sexual subjectivity, normalizing from its inception. Where historians of sexuality have recognized that the homosexual was created as a new type of person through turn of the century medical and scientific discourses, we might recognize that a contemporaneous discourse on the science of nutrition and domesticity also fashioned new types of ideal and aberrant eating beings out of a conflation of science and culture.<sup>10</sup>

According to the discourse of domestic science a class of alimentary deviants was comprised in part by those intractable whose stubborn preferences led to the failure of the public kitchens. In *The Story of the New England Kitchen Part 2* Richards and Mary Hinman Abel (1893), her partner in the project, reported that the French and Irish are the "most incorrigible of all the communities" and went on to explain the problem, "One good natured, affectionate Irish Mother, when pressed to take an Indian Pudding home to her children replied, 'My Boy says, 'Oh! You cant make a Yankee out of me that way!' Here is the difficulty in an nutshell,

<sup>9</sup>Boyer, Gosset, Stocking all address the conflated terms of biology and culture that pervaded social, scientific and political thought at this time. Bederman and Terry also analyze the impact of this current in late nineteenth century social thought.

<sup>10</sup>See Foucault for the foundational theory of the discursive production of the homosexual as a new species and Dean and Terry for more historically specific treatments.

and all workers should take note of this national feeling" (139). Stunned by the obstinacy of the poor and immigrants the reformers not only retreated from their conversion mission, but established the incorrigibility of the poor as the benchmark against which the more educated classes would ideally know themselves through their own amenability to natural laws of economy, efficiency and nutrition.

Unlike the poor and immigrants, respectable Anglo Saxons of the middle class would embrace progress rather than tradition. The ideal alimentary subject would not cling to useless culinary traditions, such as those beloved by immigrants whose cultural identities depended on their maintenance, but would eagerly jettison these mere preferences formed by habit in favor of a scientific diet carefully calibrated to contain just enough flavor cause the secretion of digestive juices without over stimulating the appetite. At the third Lake Placid Conference Caroline Hunt, who would later become Richards' biographer, explained the importance of valuing progress over tradition: "The more clearly we see when a value lies in custom only, the more speedily shall we free ourselves from the tyranny of useless conventions and traditions. . . . Experience . . . is of the past; progress, of the present and the future" (*Lake Placid* 82).

Instead of a diet governed by tradition and based on recipes and techniques handed down from mothers and grandmothers whose approach to domesticity was dangerously outdated, the good alimentary subject would favor the diet found to be the most nutritious and economical by the new science of domesticity, a diet soundly based in middle class New England culinary traditions that favored brown bread, beef broth, baked beans, oyster soup, and Indian pudding. "It is astonishing" bemoaned Richards and Abel,

How few still partake of the simple fare known as New England. It seems to be part of the restless and hurried life of this generation in large cities to have abandoned the cheap and simple foods that need long cooking and little skill to make them palatable. . . . Now what is the result? The wage earner is illy nourished on money that is all-sufficient, if rightly expended, to buy him proper food. (150)

It was clear to the reformers that a healthy diet was accessible, even on a limited budget, and equally clear that the social order was threatened by those alimentary deviants who refused to spend their money properly by feeding their families that simple fare

known as "New England."

Alimentary deviants were also those who, like the hard working immigrants for whom eating meat was a sign of an improved lot in life (Levenstein 56), were unwilling to forego expensive cuts and other costly foods to comply with the science of domestic economy. As reported by Abel and Richards,

the United States Labor Bureau shows that our wage earners do not avail themselves of [the] opportunity of saving on food, but that they revel in unwonted luxury. This applies equally to citizens of foreign birth. "Where in the old country do you find a workman that can have meat on his table three times a day?" said one of our German neighbors. For this man American freedom has a very limited meaning. (151)

The reformers were adamant that both labor and health problems could be alleviated if workers would only recognize that "it is a false notion that *cheap* food is *poor* food" (*Rumford Leaflets* 126). The domestic scientists not only castigated the poor who they characterized as unwilling to understand that the true value of food comes from its nutritional composition, not its cost, but also defined the ideal alimentary subject as one whose intelligence, which we might read as middle class sensibility, would help them to rise above such misconceptions so that they, and thus the nation, might prosper.

Alimentary deviants were also those who did not share the middle class value of self restraint, and whose indulgence in improper food was destined to saddle the community with the care of weak offspring. One of the *Rumford Kitchen Leaflets* distributed at the Chicago World's Fair explained the importance of subordinating desire to more abstract, and more important, gains: "A higher rule of life than the mere gratification of health and pocket must prevail if . . . temptation is to be resisted. Therefore it is useless to begin reform of food of such as regard the pleasure of the moment above the good dimly seen in the future" (123). To be a moral, strong, a good alimentary subject one needed understand and subscribe to a "higher rule," an ethical system made available by the domestic scientists, and made in their image, through which one might know and better his self or be assessed and evaluated by others according to their distance from the normalizing figure of ideal alimentary subjectivity.

## CONCLUSIONS: WHY ARE WE WHAT WE EAT?

The modern alimentary subject as fashioned by the domestic scientists was an individual who would know and seek to better himself through a body of knowledge made up of both scientific and ethical truths about eating and identity. The modern alimentary subject was codified in terms of nutritional class, normalized against a middle class standard, and would go on to be, throughout the twentieth century, the site of ongoing contest and conflict over the power to define the meaning of eating and being and to shape the ideal form of alimentary subjectivity.

By understanding the history of modern American food reform movements as a location for the struggle over the power to define and shape the meaning of eating to the well being of social order, we may begin to be able to account for the significance of eating and identity in American culture. We may not only begin to place Alice Waters' missionary zeal in a productive historical context, but we may also begin to be able to account for the sometimes baffling moral violence of the "war against fat" that is being waged in America at this moment.<sup>11</sup> We might better explain, for example, how it is that we have come to live in a world in which a *New York Times* front page headline reads, "Philadelphia's Mayor Puts His City on a Diet" (Rimer). This project seeks eventually to advance in the direction of these questions, and their answers, but in the meantime rests on the provisional arguments presented here and borrows some appropriate final words from the domestic scientists themselves: "This is, indeed, a small beginning. All about us the entangled wilderness, undergrowth of ignorance and indifference, brambles of misapprehension; but it is something to have cleared a little standing place, it is something to have determined on the general direction in which we shall carve our path" (*Lake Placid* 239).

<sup>11</sup>Seid uses this terminology, which I find entirely appropriate, to describe the American anti-fat movement of the last half century.

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