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Helen Zoe Veit. *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013. XIII, 300 S. ISBN 978-1-4696-1275-1.

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H. Z. Veit: Modern Food, Moral Food

âFood Will Win the Warâ â This maxim of the U.S. Food Administration highlights the importance of food for domestic and foreign politics, an importance that historians just recently have begun to dwell upon. The U.S. Food Administration was founded in 1917 when the United States entered World War I and it was responsible for coordinating the U.S. food aid campaign at home and abroad. The politics evolving around food in the Great War serve as a focal point for Helen Zoe Veitâs âModern Food, Moral Food. Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Centuryâ. In this book, Veit explores âthe ways Americans bought, produced, ate, and thought about their food and their bodiesâ (p. 1) in the first decades of the 20th century. In Progressive Era US, she argues, food became an issue that encompassed social, moral, racial, and economical questions â a development, that was according to her especially distinct during the war.

Veit traces the eraâs transformation of eating habits and the meaning of foodstuffs in seven chapters that deal with different aspects of change. In the first chapter, she examines domestic food conservation efforts in World War I and demonstrates how eagerly people took part in the campaign for meat- and wheat-free days as well as for saving sugar and fat. She finds the reasons for the massive voluntary support of the campaign in the values of self-control, patriotism and political maturity that were linked to peopleâs food choices in the war. This nexus allowed people to demonstrate their capacity for physical and, closely connected, political self-control by eating different foods than usual.

The second chapter deals with the changes of nutritional advice in Progressive Era US that made it possible to evaluate and compare foods. Veit highlights how the eraâs zeitgeist of rationality and efficiency together with the emergence of new nutritional knowledge created new ârationalâ ways to cook and to eat. She makes clear that the ideal of rational eating was heavily charged by moral implications, which was especially true in wartime, when older notions of proper food were turned upside down. For instance, as Veit shows, it could become rational and thus morally right to eat cats and dogs (although not a lot of Americans actually did this).

Chapter 3 then digs deeper into the American food aid program of World War I. Veit concentrates on peopleâs understanding of American food aid and its powerful role in the global world, thus adding another dimension to the dynamics of the domestic food conservation program. By linking domestic food conservation to combatting hunger in other countries, the food aid program was âthe most direct and meaningful way that ordinary Americans experienced their countryâs rise to powerâ (p. 6).

Chapter 4 shows how the emerging home economics movement took part in changing perceptions of housewives and housework. When the number of domestic servants decreased at the end of the 19th century, middle class women increasingly started to take on full-time housework. This change was accompanied by Progres-

sive concepts of housework as valuable, scientific occupation. Housework was then recoded as a labor of love in which a caring housewife provided her family with nutritious meals. In World War I, patriotism was added to the list of values that made housework honorable, since who could best overlook domestic food conservation than an efficient and loving housewife. This new importance of housework is one reason why it did not only restrain middle class women to the domestic sphere, but also enabled them to claim eligibility for political rights and participation on the grounds of their important service to families and the nation.

In Chapter 5, Veit deals with the way nutritional theories and eating habits were saturated with racial theories. She states that the emerging nutritional advice challenged eugenicist beliefs that racial change was solely a matter of genes and succession. Increasingly, black and white âeuthenists,â who believed in the impact of the environment on the human condition, highlighted the importance of diets not only for individual, but also for racial progress, thus adding environmental factors to a then more fluid concept of race.

Chapter 6 examines food in the context of immigration and Americanization and stresses a profound âculinary transformationâ. Around 1900, Anglo-Americans were mostly at least skeptical towards immigrant cuisines. Moreover, persuading immigrants to eat âauthenticâ American food (a notion that was invented simultaneously) was part of Americanization efforts. However, in the 1910s and 1920s âforeignâ foodstuffs and dishes entered mainstream cooking and became part of new dishes that were sometimes eventually regarded as typically American, such as macaroni and cheese. In this process, as uneasy as it was, eating âforeignâ foods came to be a symbol of culinary distinction for white, middle class Americans. Veit shows this very convincingly, however, one misses at least a few words on the colonizing character of this âeating [of] the other.â bell hooks, Eating the Other, in: dies., Black Looks. Race and Representation. Boston 1992, pp. 21â39.

The last chapter takes up changing body ideals in the 1910s and 1920s and shows that fatness, once a sign of wealth and social success, was increasingly deprecated, a transformation that proved to be especially lasting in the course of the 20th century. Thinness came to be associated with self-control and emerged as the dominant beauty ideal for men and, a while later, also for women. The exploding weight loss culture was, as Veit contends, âprofoundly compatible with Progressive ideals of self-control, moral righteousness, and asceticismâ (p. 159). In World War I, people even equated fatness with treason by literally regarding body fat as a hoard of food in a time when people were called upon to save especially fat and sugar.

The rise of industrialized food production is an issue that plays a role in nearly every chapter. Its interplay with the consumers of food is a topic that should be expanded in future historical studies. From my point of view, the ultimate strength of Veitâs study lies in two main aspects: Firstly, she excellently describes the intersections of food, nutritional knowledge, and a dynamic social order. Secondly, she does this with a very inspiring focus: Next to sources like newspaper articles and the records of the US Food Administration, Veit has discovered an exciting archival source. She has examined thousands of â up to date unprocressed â letters that were sent to the U.S. Food Administration in the course of its wartime food conservation efforts. Although Veit sometimes uses these sources rather descriptively, she again and again manages to connect historical food knowledge and eating habits with peopleâs understanding of their place in the world â and with their view on others. This is one reason why Veitâs study fills a gap not only in current food history but also in discourse history by examining the mindsets and practices of people who were the targets of (nutritional) advice.

According to Veit, the way people ate and thought about eating dramatically changed during only several decades. Although she plausibly and elaborately discusses these drastic transformations, her book might have benefited from examining some continuities or rather subtle changes from late 19th century food discourse. However, Veitâs book is an insightful and very well written history of America in the Progressive Era through the lenses of food and eating. Future food histories will profit from the range of topics and sources touched by this essential work.

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