

came the focal point of the community's economy, and its landscape was reconstructed to resemble a recognizably ethnic place.

Hoelscher's discussion of the invention of ethnic place adds a level of complexity to previously published scholarly works on public memory and the social construction of ethnicity. Although he relies on John Bodnar's dichotomy of vernacular and official culture, Hoelscher's analysis is more nuanced than Bodnar's in *Remaking America* (1992). Hoelscher shows how vernacular and official cultures interacted, and how ordinary people at the local level influenced legitimate cultural expression at the state level. Calling something a social construct is the common coin of contemporary academe, but Hoelscher should be commended for returning agency to analyses of public memory and for revealing the architecture and history behind the construction of ethnic places.

Heritage on Stage should stimulate research on this topic in Iowa history. Comparisons between Iowa and Wisconsin ought to be made. Hoelscher's book is loaded with insights and guidance on relevant sources and methodologies. The bibliography and footnotes are extensive, displaying the author's wide reading across many disciplines. Although much of the text is written in an academic style, emphasizing analysis over description, the prologue and chapter introductions are more reader friendly, preferring description over analysis. If a book on ethnic tourism in Iowa is pursued, care should be taken to attract a wider audience than Hoelscher's book will likely receive. Scholars, public policymakers, state bureaucrats, local officials, and general readers are all united by the need to know more about this important and relevant topic.

We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans, by Donna R. Gabaccia. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998. 278 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ANNE KAPLAN, MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Leafing through a cooking magazine recently, I came upon a recipe for mushroom ravioli with roasted-tomato sauce—a mouthwatering assemblage of fancy mushrooms, leeks, and white wine stuffed into commercially made wonton wrappers. Is this a sin against Mother Italy, a creative solution for adventurous and time-pressed consumers, or, perhaps, a little bit of both? Such unlikely blending of ingredients and cultures would not surprise Donna Gabaccia, who devoted ten years of research and eating to answer the question: "If we are what

we eat, who are we?"(9). The result is a book bursting with facts about food and eating from colonial times to the present. Gabaccia acknowledges her debt to the insights of semioticians and anthropologists—and here, she should have added folklorists—that food is a potent symbol, part of the grammar of everyday life. But she chose another approach: a "culturally sensitive yet essentially materialist and economic view of American eating" (237), stressing the need to produce and market the raw materials of the cuisines that evolved in the United States. The variety of American cuisine, she says, has resulted from the interplay of national, regional, and ethnic forces.

To capture American eating habits in less than 300 pages requires a broad brush and some hard decisions. Gabaccia chose five metropolitan areas to represent the nation's regional and ethnic diversity: New York, Charleston, Minneapolis-St. Paul, San Antonio, and San Francisco. She also selected these urban areas to reveal different rates of regional integration into the emerging national marketplace, different types of farming, processing, production, and sales, and different rates of commercial evolution. Impressive research in oral history collections, published and manuscript reminiscences, newspaper files, and agency archives, as well as dissertations, locally produced cookbooks, and a broad slice of secondary sources turned up a wealth of data. Although Marylanders and Montanans, Kentuckians and Coloradans—and certainly Iowans—will not find a perfect match for their experiences in the designated regional centers, they will most likely agree that the generalizations are accurate. Indeed, Gabaccia confesses that her selections skirted both the most intensive corn belt of the Native American world and the later one of the "pig-rearing, liquor-distilling region of . . . Ohio, Iowa, and Illinois" (238).

The book's introduction, "What Do We Eat?", begins with the contemporary gustatory scene. How did we get to the point where a Pakistani entrepreneur could successfully sell bagels and "New York deli" to Anglos and Tejanos in Houston? How do eaters reach a balance between the desire for the known and the lure of the exotic? Finally, are sun-dried-tomato bagels with avocados and sprouts a modern abomination, the symbol of all that's wrong with contemporary America, or only a current incarnation of an old, familiar American impulse? In the remaining eight chapters, Gabaccia builds her case for the second answer.

Since colonial times, people of differing backgrounds have met and their foodways have mingled. British, French, Spanish, and Dutch colonists, African slaves, and Native Americans all brought their foods to the table. The colonial powers' trade routes brought exotic ingre-

dients into port cities; in the hinterlands, newcomers survived by selectively adopting native foods. Necessity initiated many exchanges, while culture dictated which new foods were considered edible. Regional isolation as well as variations in foodstuffs and ethnic settlement militated against homogeneity. By the end of the colonial era, Americans were eating hybrid, "creolized" diets, the basis of distinct regional cuisines. There was no national cuisine, and region surpassed ethnicity in defining foodways.

Throughout the nineteenth century, successive waves of immigrants were added to the mix. Living in ethnic enclaves, often poor, they tended to culinary conservatism. Most could not afford the standardized canned goods emerging on the new national market. They maintained familiar foods for social and symbolic reasons as well. Nonetheless, flour milling, meatpacking, canning, and baking were becoming corporate endeavors, eventually penetrating regional and ethnic enclaves. And cross-cultural borrowing continued to occur.

Eventually, ethnic businesses emerged to serve their own and larger communities. From pushcart vendors to small grocers and restaurateurs, they best reached their own niches—a continuing, if small, source of frustration to corporations trying to break into the ethnic market. Some ethnic entrepreneurs crossed over into manufacturing or selling nonethnic goods—witness all of those Greek-owned candy shops. Others sold their ethnic businesses to big corporations, which "uncoupled" the ethnic link (Heinz products, Chef Boyardee). And Americans of all descriptions continued to cross over themselves, sampling street food or restaurant offerings, often altered to accommodate "American" tastes, and peering into their neighbors' cooking pots.

All is not rosy, of course. Gabaccia devotes a chapter to "food fights"—the failed attempts by home economists and social workers to Americanize immigrants by teaching them to substitute bland New England-style cooking for their traditional fare. Two world wars, food rationing, advances in dietary science, and hippies' and yuppies' desire for simple peasant food or exotic eating experiences pointed the nation back to simpler, bean-and-vegetable cuisines and then expanded the range to the global marketplace.

Final chapters on eating as big business, the popularity of cookbooks, and "nouvelle creole" bring the book full circle. Gabaccia concludes that, as eaters, we are not a multiethnic nation—that is, a nation of defined ethnic groups who stick to their treasured traditional cuisines—but rather a nation of multiethnics who pick and choose from a range of options guided by both cultural conservatism and a taste for novelty. "What unites American eaters culturally is how we eat, not

what we eat. As eaters, all Americans mingle the culinary traditions of many regions and cultures within ourselves" (226).

If this conclusion seems self-evident, the lack of surprise does not diminish the scope of research or the skill with which Gabaccia weaves together the regional, ethnic, and national strands. Readers will enjoy the anecdotal style of presentation and will, no doubt, learn some shocking truths: Heinz's famous 57 varieties was "a meaningless number" that Henry J. Heinz "pulled from his hat" (156); Planters Peanuts was founded by an Italian immigrant fruit vendor; and the quintessentially bland American TV dinner was invented by Carl Swanson, a Swedish immigrant.

A short book on so complex a topic is bound to miss some points and raise some quibbles. Errors in reporting on Minneapolis-St. Paul, this reviewer's region, make one wonder about the accuracy of detail in other chapters. For example, the Twin Cities did not share the milling business, nor was St. Paul home to Pillsbury and General Mills (57); a quote from a St. Paul woman is inserted into a paragraph on New York Jews (104); and the understanding of Ojibwe wild ricing is not only peculiar but omits the controversy over Anglo-owned, paddy-grown rice operations (118). More important, where are contemporary Native Americans, residents of all five regions, in this discussion of "American" and "ethnic" eating? Except for the strange and brief mention of cooperative ricing ventures, they disappear from the book after the colonial era. Furthermore, a closer look at the interplay of ethnic and regional factors would have produced a far more interesting picture and, perhaps, innovative conclusion. Did Chinese Americans in the large San Francisco enclave respond to the American environment in the same way as Chinese Americans in the small community in Minneapolis-St. Paul? In other words, which factors best propel interethnic borrowing or ethnic retention?

Gabaccia explicitly states her preference for a materialist, economic look at American foodways over a more anthropological point of view. Although this choice turned up many interesting details to flesh out her look at over 300 years of eating, in the end she is dealing with culture and identity, phenomena best understood from an anthropological, folkloristic, or semiotic perspective. For at least 20 years, these disciplines have been arguing that ethnicity is a "permeable membrane" and that identity is multilayered, flexible, and socially constructed. More insights from these fields would have provided tools for a stronger, more detailed analysis of food, culture, and identity.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.