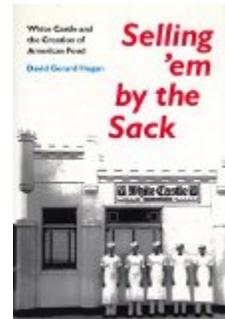


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Gerard Hogan. *Selling 'Em by the Sack: White Castle and the Creation of American Food*. New York: New York University Press, 1997. x + 199 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-3566-4.

Reviewed by Jill Silos (University of New Hampshire)
Published on H-Grad (December, 1998)



In *Selling 'Em by the Sack: White Castle and the Creation of American Food*, David Gerard Hogan explores a basic but frequently overlooked aspect of society and culture: how and what people eat and what it reveals about major developments of the past. In this study of the White Castle restaurant chain, Hogan argues that the development and rapid acceptance of the American fast-food hamburger was in itself a vital component of the creation of an American ethnicity: once a people have their own readily-identifiable cuisine, Hogan suggests, then they have a readily-identifiable common ethnic identity and culture. Hogan demonstrates in this work that it is not the larger and more familiar McDonald's and Burger King restaurants that deserve the credit for the close association between the hamburger and the American identity that prevails around the world today. Rather, the predecessor of these chains, the White Castle corporation, was the originator of the fast-food format. Therefore, though White Castle is not today the largest or the most competitive of the hamburger chains, Hogan claims that it was a crucial influence in the creation of the American identity.

Hogan's study begins with a discussion of American eating habits prior to the development of the chain-style restaurant following World War I, including the effect on the American diet of increasing ethnic diversity due to immigration. The result was that there was no single American diet: like the spatial separation of urban areas into distinct ethnic enclaves in the earlier twentieth century, American food habits were similarly defined by different ethnic cultures. However, as Hogan chronicles in his first chapter, modern developments in mass culture, transportation, and industry created a need for quick, easily-accessible meals outside the home, which

propelled the development between the two world wars of the forerunner of the fast-food restaurant: the pharmacy soda fountain, luncheonettes, cafeterias and automats. White Castle emerged, Hogan explains, in 1916, when J. Walter "Walt" Anderson, a short-order cook in Wichita, opened his own burger stand to capitalize on the new local popularity of the flattened, grilled ground beef sandwiches he served as a cook. However, the corporation began when he teamed up with Edgar "Billy" Ingram, and the two soon began the "fast-food revolution." This revolution was the introduction of standardized food preparation procedures and architecture, the creation of a specific White Castle corporate culture, and the strategic marketing of ground beef as a safe and suitable food for not only White Castle's urban working class customer base but also for the rapidly expanding middle class in the 1920s. As White Castle continued to expand, Hogan argues, it became a truly "national institution" with a decided influence on the acceptance of the hamburger as an important staple of American food habits, evident in the proliferation of similar restaurant chains throughout the United States in the twenties and thirties.

However, as Hogan explains, the durability of White Castle was largely the result of Ingram's influence over the company, and its endurance through potentially devastating developments like the Great Depression, the labor crunch of World War II, and the "burger wars" of the sixties and seventies. Hogan carefully outlines the way in which some events like war and depression were met by the corporation and influenced corporate decisions, like the decision to begin hiring women during World War II. Such a decision places White Castle squarely within the major developments of the era, and Hogan's explication

of this places his work within the existing historiography of the impact of the war on American hiring practices and the new role of women in industry. Similarly, Hogan accounts for the importance of the automobile and post-war suburbanization on the growth of White Castle's competition and its eventual position, due to Ingram's steadfast refusal to expand through franchising, as a secure but small player in the current fast-food industry. Though no longer a "national institution" itself, White Castle was the genesis of what truly is now a "national institution": the fast-food industry itself.

Hogan's emphasis on the corporate history of White Castle is both the primary strength and weakness of his study. He relies extensively on the records of the corporation, including careful and detailed attention to the minutes of manager's meetings and the company's newsletter, *The White Castle Official House Organ*. This almost exclusive use of corporate records may be frustrating to historians looking for a social and cultural exploration of American food and society. Although on his first page Hogan states that White Castle is important because it "drastically changed American eating patterns and, hence, American life," this work does not really emphasize American eating patterns: what little statistical evidence Hogan provides about such things as hamburger consumption or the socio-economic status of the customer base is mostly uncited or from the records of White Castle itself. As largely corporate history, it does not provide a voice for White Castle workers or patrons except that which is contained in the corporate-edited newsletter; in fact Hogan briefly mentions but does not thoroughly explain such aspects of White Castle history,

including the facts that unions "never stopped trying" to organize White Castle workers (p. 115) and that White Castle was "confronted by a growing criticism and a brief boycott" during the civil rights movement of the 1960s (p. 165). These aspects of the history of White Castle might more solidly place this corporation within the larger history of the American labor movement and the civil rights movement, but Hogan does not pursue any extensive examination of them.

However, the emphasis on corporate history does provide an illuminating look at the decision-making process of an American corporation over time and in response to changing American conditions, especially the intersection of business practices and consumer trends. This is evident in Hogan's discussion of White Castle's practice of "vertical integration": in controlling the manufacture of its own paper products and buildings, White Castle continued to practice one of the major techniques of American industrial expansion that began in the nineteenth century. It also highlights the creation and importance of corporate culture and the influence of particular individuals, in this case Billy Ingram, over corporate policy. Students of American business history will appreciate these aspects of the work, and Hogan's straightforward prose and narrative structure will make this kind of history accessible to beginning students of business and history.

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Citation: Jill Silos. Review of Hogan, David Gerard, *Selling 'Em by the Sack: White Castle and the Creation of American Food*. H-Grad, H-Net Reviews. December, 1998.

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