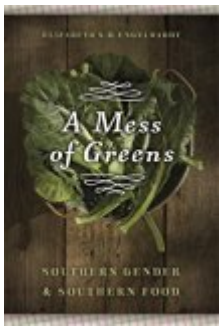
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Elizabeth Sanders Delwiche Engelhardt. *A Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011. xi + 265 pp. $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8203-4037-1.



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Published on H-SAWH (March, 2013)

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In their kitchens, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century southern women made much more than meals. Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt's *A Mess of Greens* analyzes the power of southern foodways in shaping gender ideals and women's experiences. The book spans the 1870s through the 1930s in five chapters, each focusing on one historically situated practice of food preparation and consumption. Engelhardt argues that women, including both native southerners and migrants to the region, responded strategically to gender norms in their personal culinary decisions, their activist efforts to reshape food production and consumption, and their entrepreneurial endeavors. As the site where diverse women and their equally diverse motives converged, foodways provided a unique space for collaboration that could bridge races, generations, and social backgrounds.

Building on booming food studies scholarship and on interdisciplinary examinations of gender in southern culture, Engelhardt's combined focus on women and southern foodways breaks important ground. Evidence culled from literature, newspapers, correspondence, archival collections, government records, scrapbooks, civic groups' cookbooks, and locally published market bulletins illustrates the complex construction of southern foods' gendered meanings. Deftly placing her examples in context with multiple historiographies and interdisciplinary methodologies, Engelhardt successfully demonstrates that food played a central role in defining southern identity. Her case studies persuasively show that a full scholarly understanding of such diverse topics as women's Progressive activism, black and white women's club movements in the Jim Crow South, the cultural "New Woman" archetype, the ascendance of brand marketing and chain retailing, and the significance of the South in national culture requires close analysis of southern gender and southern food.

In describing her project, Engelhardt cites the concept of "lenticular logic," the distorted thinking that Tara McPherson's *Reconstructing Dixie:*

Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South (2003) identified in twentieth-century media depictions of the South. According to McPherson, mainstream culture's lenticular approach presented whiteness and blackness in isolation from one another rather than acknowledging the process through which these identities were mutually constructed. Engelhardt's case studies challenge such simplifications by demonstrating that southern foods' meanings stemmed from the complex interrelationships of race, class, and gender. In selecting her examples, Engelhardt guards against a lenticular logic in contemporary popular and scholarly thought by which "some foods are lifted and celebrated while other equally common ones stay in the background waiting for their day" (p. 7). Advocating the centrality of such unexpected topics as moonshine, southern girls' tomato canning, and malnutrition to understanding southern cuisine, *A Mess of Greens* raises provocative questions for future scholarship on southern foodways.

Chapter 1 tracks the evolution of national magazine stories and novels about female moonshiners, characters whose transgressions provided source material for authors writing from the 1900s through the 1930s about the experiences of feared and marginalized "New Women." In these narratives, illegal production of alcohol brought women outside of the home, reflecting the social disruptions caused by the ascendance of mass production. Some narratives sympathized with female moonshiners, identifying the limitations of Prohibition and women's Progressive reform movements by demonstrating that women chose to produce illegal alcohol because their alternative prospects remained dim. In addition, some of the narratives reflected social anxieties about women's changing roles by asking, "Would food become a tool used by women to defy the government? Or could it be tamed?" (p. 31). In later chapters, Engelhardt complicates these questions by exploring women's strategic use of the government as a tool to reshape culinary norms, defying some conventions of femininity in the process.

Chapters 2 and 3 document women of diverse racial and economic backgrounds, including educators and activists from within and outside the South, who deployed domestic science and Progressivism to broaden the scope of their own public activities and to increase the economic opportunities available to women. Chapter 2 narrates Progressive activists' campaigns to convert Appalachian women from relying on cornbread as an easily prepared staple to preparing beaten biscuits. By 1900, this crusade had elevated the biscuit as a marker of middle-class status. White middle-class settlement-house activists moved to rural Appalachia, providing cooking lessons that advocated beaten biscuits as healthful and hygienic. Settlement-house training simultaneously pushed Kentucky women to adopt standardized cooking tools, promoting consumer goods like rolling pins in place of improvised instruments like beer bottles. Nevertheless, although cornbread now ostensibly signified a failure to fulfill the ideals of middle-class feminine domesticity, activists' journals noted the resistance of Appalachian women to domestic-science teachings. Notably, rural women criticized cooking methodologies that expanded the time and labor required of them for food preparation.

In other contexts, however, the domestic-science movement expanded southern women's educational and career opportunities, accommodating the profit motives of southern women. Engelhardt narrates this process through the intriguing subject of her third chapter, the tomato-canning clubs that flourished in the South during the 1910s and reached a membership of 500,000 girls nationwide. Inaugurated by white southern women, and later expanding through the federal government's increased hiring of African American women as home-demonstration agents, the clubs provided instruction in agricultural and preservation methods to white and black girls, typically

between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Notably, tomato-club training included scientific and technological education, as well as instruction that enabled members to market their products successfully and make significant profits. Members' reports, newspaper coverage, and educators' scrapbooks suggest that money drove interest in the clubs; girls reported that tomato earnings helped them acquire college educations, prized consumer goods, and a proud sense of economic independence. Simultaneously, tomato clubs provided spaces for interracial collaboration. Although white agents' treatment of their black counterparts varied within the region, some agents acknowledged African American women's roles as key collaborators. Jane McKimmon, a white leader, publicly stated that black and white women were "lifting each other" through their mutual exchange of knowledge (p. 114). The window for this type of collaboration proved temporary, however, as expanded federal control altered home demonstration, and the ascendance of 4-H training marginalized girls in favor of boys.

Engelhardt's fourth chapter further explores the limitations of the tomato-club movement, examining pellagra, the nutritional-deficiency disease that plagued families too impoverished to provide the land and resources necessary for a girl to participate in a tomato club. Prominent in journalistic and literary depictions of the South, particularly in narratives about textile mill workers' challenges and activism, pellagra embodied the destructive potential of the industrialized consumer economy. The allure of consumer goods drove people to exploitative mill employment, and the consumption of mass-produced food items like carbonated sodas weakened workers' bodies. In such stories, Engelhardt argues, "Over and over, mills that promised to set employees up as consumers in their own right turned the promises around to consume the employees instead" (p. 139).

Even as corporations strengthened in the 1920s and 1930s, however, southern women negotiated spaces in which they strove to profit from food on their own terms. The book's final chapter and conclusion identify such sites: the curb markets that proliferated in the 1920s and where countrywomen sold produce to town residents; the market-bulletin publications that facilitated exchange of agricultural goods and services; and the cookbooks produced collaboratively within communities by civic and religious groups. Archival silences, Engelhardt explains, pose challenges to scholars using these sources. What were the intentions behind and responses to the "Civil Rights Cake" in a 1924 Arkansas cookbook produced to raise funds for library construction? (Without commentary, the cookbook applies this moniker to the recipe for a black and white layered cake.) What did participants in curb markets think and say? What were the racial and socioeconomic backgrounds of people who corresponded through the market-bulletin networks, exchanging seeds and agricultural advice? ***A Mess of Greens*** argues that cookbooks can provide insight into historical practices through their provenance and the "stains or annotations" they carry (p. 178). One book from Engelhardt's own family collection includes her grandmother's commentary revealing the gender, age, ethnicity, and professional backgrounds of people who contributed recipes.

Similarly, Engelhardt's conclusion explores the ambiguity of authorship in market bulletins through the lens of Elizabeth Lawrence's ***Gardening for Love,*** a 1988 publication documenting the market-bulletin correspondence that garden writer Lawrence engaged in from the 1940s through her death in 1985. For Engelhardt, the existence of historical mysteries in this evidence speaks for its significance: "Over the course of the four decades of her experience with the bulletins, Lawrence met only a handful of her correspondents in person. Through their mutual love of plants, gardens, and place, they formed friendships outside of the traditional social hierarchies. We cannot know for

certain if, for instance, some of the letter writers were African American (Lawrence herself was white), or from mill villages (Lawrence was a middle-class town woman), or otherwise crossing conventions. The possibility existed that they were, and that, therefore, communication between groups said to be taboo could have been happening out of sight of traditional recordkeeping" (p. 198).

This intriguing hypothesis invites further archival research. Additional sources would be essential to proving the existence of the type of communications that Engelhardt imagines. Compiling more extensive evidence from journals and correspondence and implementing the close-reading approach that Engelhardt applies in *A Mess of Greens*, scholars may find greater insight into the backgrounds of bulletin participants. Although archival records of marginalized women's experiences often remain fragmentary, more detailed evidence of African American women's and mill women's daily lives is needed to determine what role market bulletins played in their activities. Oral histories and burgeoning archival collections on food, such as the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America's culinary holdings, might provide a point of departure for investigating community cookbooks and food publications.

Given the wide scope of *A Mess of Greens'* arguments, chronology, and case studies, it contains some other examples that could likewise benefit from further exploration. Engelhardt assesses literary scholarship about the moonshine and mill narratives, but there is no systematic consideration of this fiction's popular reception, which researchers could track through sales figures and through searches for readers' reactions in periodicals, journals, and correspondence. Such evidence could provide another key perspective on how individual women negotiated their gender identity through the lens of food.

The fascinating tomato clubs, particularly the reports young members sent Jane McKimmon to document their activities and progress, also invite further analysis. Engelhardt uncovers only one report that clearly went through a formal rewrite, seemingly in response to teacher feedback, leading her to conclude that "for the most part the reports give an unedited glimpse into early twentieth-century farm girls' cultures" (p. 89). However, more detailed assessment of the audience for these documents, and of the instruction tomato-club members received to create their reports, is necessary to support such a conclusion. Students likely shaped their own writing with prototypes in mind. An analysis taking these potential biases into account might complicate Engelhardt's claims, demonstrating the degree to which rural girls embraced the tomato-club movement as a strategic opportunity for self-promotion that could help them transcend the isolation of domestic labor.

It is a testament to Engelhardt's project that her work raises such fascinating questions relevant to diverse scholarly fields. Her chapters' five topics provide information applicable to diverse dialogues in women's history, cultural history, social history, and American studies scholarship. The book's accessible, vivid writing style and commanding use of historiography and theory result in a text that would serve well as an undergraduate or graduate reading assignment. *A Mess of Greens* encourages students to think about the power of gender in everyday life while broadening their understanding of many scholarly interpretations of food in southern culture.

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Citation: Emily Westkaemper. Review of Engelhardt, Elizabeth Sanders Delwiche. *A Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food.* H-SAWH, H-Net Reviews. March, 2013.

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