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INTRODUCTION

Making Progress in Food

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The twenty-first century has so far proven to be an age of assessment at all levels, from optimizing websites to monetizing "likes" and the gathering of learning outcomes from Pre-K to PhD programs. This work of assessing relies on a culture of measurement, which of course has a precursor in the Progressive Era. Just as the marketing strategists and educational evaluators of today seek ways to quantify the qualitative, intellectually engaged people of the early twentieth century sought diverse data in large quantities with which to improve the lot of millions. Data had not been collected on this scale and with this purpose before.

The way progressives framed the data they collected and the uses they put it to shaped social life, law, and political organization in their era. The emergence in the late nineteenth century of the professions as we now know them was intrinsically tied to the work of measurement. Academic journals and conferences presented verifiable discoveries. Professional licensing exams measured fitness for inclusion in a prestigious community of practitioners. The biases at work in the construction of expertise have come under sustained scrutiny since the 1990s, when a critical history of the progressives emerged.

When exploring the role of food in this discourse, it is important to pay attention to how we frame the actors. The terms "domestic scientist" and "home economist" and "diet reformer" tend to be interchanged too loosely and applied without attention to the distinctions of the era itself. Reformers, of course, were engaged in all kinds of approaches to society, some radical some conservative. William and Harvey Kellogg and Fannie Farmer could all be designated food reformers, but the Kelloggs and Farmer approached their work in entirely different ways with different goals. The Kelloggs had a complete health system to sell, both intellectually and entrepreneurially. Farmer advocated for a more systematic approach to traditional cooking materials and techniques. Domestic science was a general term for the new impulse to apply scientific and systematic thinking to domestic spaces and tasks, but "domestic scientist" was not a job title, as it sometimes appears in the literature.

Home economics, which emerged in this era, was a defined academic area, encompassing (among many subject areas) bacteriology, family psychology, and institutional management as well as nutrition, dietetics, and food science—each a distinct discipline. People who worked in these interconnected fields could be known collectively as home economists but were more likely to identify with their subfields. Thus, a person who developed sample recipes for the cooking fat Cottolene (discussed in Helen Veit's article in this issue) was most likely trained in food science and would attend the American Home Economics Association annual conference but not necessarily identify as a "reformer" because they worked within the corporate structures of food development and marketing. While certainly a scientist at work on a product to be used in the

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domestic context, this person is also not usefully described as a domestic scientist because that term has no connection to specific curricula, certification, or career paths. The common practice of lumping all of these approaches together into one vaguely defined (and often distrusted) actor obscures much of the rich complexity of the new thinking about food.

The subjects explored in this special issue point to some useful questions about how these and other progressives approached food: Can we call any particular item or category of food "progressive?" And if so, what can progressive food tell us about the larger changes *and* continuities in society? What happened to food during the Progressive Era both physically and conceptually and how are those changes linked?

As we ask these questions, it is essential to recognize that when we look at food in this period, we are looking at multiple kinds of diversification primarily introduced from three sources: immigration, industrialization, and urbanization (which includes internal migration). Each of these phenomena intersected in the construction of new food systems and culinary trends. First, for example, comes the diffusion of an immigrant's spaghetti and tomato sauce into urban foodways, then the commercial canning of this dish to make it a national pantry staple enjoyed as "normal" rather than exotic across diverse foodways. The essays collected here are about products and ideas produced through this diversification. In Helen Veit's and Alana Tourin's articles, material goods—Cottolene and butter respectively—represent corporate invention of material and corporate invention of meaning. In Nicholas J. P. Williamson's and Chin Jou's articles, we see alterations to the body as an intellectual construct. In all four articles, food is both a material good and an abstract emblem of change.

The articles in this issue are also primarily written at the intersections between product development and audience reception. This is an important node to inhabit as it can help contemporary readers bring their own consumer experience into focus. On the one hand, we see the same pastoralist visual cues that Toulin identifies in the 1920s still calling to us from our butter packaging today; and on the other hand, we wonder "what is the next Cottolene?" Because the food systems and foodways that feed most of us today were all significantly altered in the Progressive Era, these points of connection can serve to shake readers out of a convenient blindness to the processes not only of how our food gets to our plate physically, but also culturally and intellectually. Indeed, taken together, these articles make an implicit case for including foodways in intellectual history, where new ideas and their reception get such close attention.

Many of the studies conducted and much of the data collected in the broad pursuit of progress at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries dealt in some way with food. Investigative work in agriculture, nutrition, preservation, and distribution led to changes in food chains and systems that in turn altered expectations and markets. When we look for progressives in action in the historical record, we often see them working on food problems, and this has created a unique historiographical problem. Food is an emotionally volatile substance, in history as much as in homes. Because food is so closely tied with both cultural identity and personal pleasure, any attempt to change palate, whether for the sake of enterprise or for social good, can be experienced as oppressive, both by individuals present at the time and by historians after the fact. Historians are also humans who eat while writing and who often have strong but unexamined senses of what is and is not tasty, healthy, and authentic. It is easy for the culinary predilections of today to cloud our understanding of past palates and food discourses. In the field of Food Studies, a central tenet (articulated well by Pierre Bourdieu) is that individual taste is socially constructed. When we write with

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that consciousness, it allows us to set aside our own palates as unreliable narrators of the food of other times.[1] We should assume that people of all levels of economic means followed their genuine preferences in food as much as they could and that unless we can prove they were conscious charlatans, they believed sincerely in the food they recommended for others.

Because food keeps us going both physically and culturally, it is useful for revealing the ways in which production and consumption during this period could be framed as progressive. As the articles in this special issue collectively argue, changes in thinking about and producing food result both actually and symbolically in changes to the human body. Historians have long understood the Progressive Era as a time of social transformation, but we can also see it as a time when the American body was transformed. Diet reform, the industrialization of agriculture, promotion of physical education, and the emergence of reliable contraception all impacted both actual physiques and, more broadly and lastingly, ideals about the body. While only some of these changes are explored in this edition, they are worth considering together because they created a new intellectual experience of the body: it existed in the midst of discourses about its own potential.

Work on the topic of food in the Progressive Era is often in the illuminating mode—shining a light on the origins of contemporary food systems, foodways, or perspectives on food. A good example of this is the recently published *The Poison Squad*, intended for and enjoyed by a popular audience.[2] In this narrative, Deborah Blum tells the origin story of our contemporary food safety laws, an issue that is often in the news lately with recalls of lettuces and contamination outbreaks at the national chain restaurant level. Blum organizes her answer to the question—where do food safety laws come from—around the life of one passionate individual—Harvey Washington Wiley. This is a good rhetorical device for engaging the reader and it also reminds us that the food reformers are still among us, individuals with their own personal food biases who nonetheless strive to understand food objectively for the good of the rest of us.

Some of the best books about food and progress or food and progressivism foreground the process of social construction and thus offer portraits of food in the past unclouded by contemporary or personal tastes. Helen Veit's "Modern Food, Moral Food," posits the construction of our contemporary ideas of food values in the intersections between ideas of physical and metaphysical health in the era of the First World War.[3] Her question might be, "where did our contemporary mindset about food come from?" and her answer, "it was forged in the social transformations of the 1910s."

Suzanne Friedberg's "Fresh," which asks how contemporary Americans came to assume that "fresh is best" begins before and ends after the Progressive Era, but is largely about changes in technology that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century in the United States. Friedberg brilliantly situates changes in technology within the dynamics of popular response—not all food progress was accepted as positive originally or at all.[4] Progress itself is a social construct and commodity in Friedberg's work. This is an important concept to keep in mind as we tell and retell the narrative of the industrialization of American food—not every innovation is acceptable, and the stories of rejection tell us just as much about what people want as do the eager adoptions.

While Veit and Friedberg explore a public discourse primarily concerned with the intersections of private cooking and mass production, Andrew Haley's "Turning the Tables" reveals the construction of the restaurant as part of the rise of the middle class at the turn of the century.[5] While Haley does not tie his argument overtly to narratives of progressive intervention, the story he tells helps to round out our

understanding of the world in which these impulses were entertained on such a wide scale. Middle-class Americans were in the process of claiming the public sphere as their own, imposing mores forged in the moment that carved a wide space between the grandeur of the economic elite and the perceived grubbiness of the lower orders. In the family restaurant, they created a reformed public space that framed progressiveness as veneration of tidiness and order, a stage set for rationalized but also democratized living. Bringing the middle-class body into the public sphere changed both those bodies and those places. Haley's guiding question might well have been "how did we get here?" when here is a commercial sphere full of "dining" options for people whose recent ancestors did not dream of "eating out," considering it the practice of either those too poor to have kitchens or those too rich and dissolute to have healthy family lives. The answer would be that the middle class remade public space through commercial dining.

The articles in this special issue come at the subject of food and the Progressive Era from a slightly different angle. They aren't trying to understand only how we got to where we are today, but rather to understand what it felt like to be in the progressive moment. What were the anxieties and aspirations, and how did they manifest through foods and discourse about food?

Helen Veit's exploration in this journal of the emergence of Cottolene as a common culinary product sets aside the twenty-first-century horror of "processed" foods to understand how a particular foodstuff was invented, marketed, and received by potential consumers. The essay is admirably free of the heroes and villains who populate so much food writing, past and present, so that our view is clear to the how and why of a new product. Most interestingly, we are witness to the blurring of the boundaries between foodstuffs and non-foodstuffs. With the successful marketing of Cottolene, Americans in great numbers happily consumed a byproduct of textile manufacturing. Today, when much of the discourse about food and industry engages ideas of sustainability, this reclamation of a waste product might seem really admirable, but still not entirely palatable because inconsistent with another popular (and vexed) trope, "real food." Cottolene could certainly be designated a progressive food but so, Alana Toulin argues, could butter, depending on its packaging. From my own research, I would add the refrigerator cake to this list and foreground the circumstantial nature of culinary definitions. Progressive food, as presented in this issue, is food that broadcasts a public narrative about its own desirable and admirable place in the history of food and cooking. As Toulin shows us, the food itself doesn't need to be new, but its narrative should foreground innovation.

Looking closely at the social life of food at the turn of the twentieth century, we can begin to understand the emergence of the modern body, always mindful that it existed both physically and intellectually, with the two manifestations often at odds. The idealization of the athletic physique, for instance, coincided with the production of urban bodies that were either repetitively stressed through factory work or underexercised in office work. The age-old role of cities as *entrepots* also introduced and normalized new foodways for those who had moved "in" from the country, expanding the lexicons of physical desire while simultaneously a gospel of self-control moved forward Prohibition. *The Jungle*, the text most often associated with progressivism, is a story of democratization—industrialization of pork made it more accessible to consumers—and simultaneously a call for control over the mess this progress produced. The reader comes to understand her own body's relationship to the flesh she consumes differently—pleasure is mixed with horror, guilt and anxiety. Intellectually consuming *The*

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Jungle changes the reader's body in that it provokes a physical reaction and potentially changes culinary consumption patterns. This awareness, too, is progressive.

Chin Jou's article about the popularization of the notion of the calorie seeks to recover the dawning of a new awareness, even the transformation of consciousness itself. Jou argues that whether or not an individual followed a calorie reducing regime in the 1920s, they likely absorbed the new intertwined notions of the slim ideal and of the body as calorie collector and burner. Acceptance of the new ideal as directed primarily at women could even trouble the traditional gendering of bodies. Jou argues, "The premium that diet advice columnists placed on willpower in the face of hunger and temptation could be seen as a means of claiming a traditionally male identity in which the rational mind triumphed over crude bodily impulses." The intellectual body was significantly altered, regardless of physical change or lack thereof.

Considering how many of the dispensers as well as the consumers of diet advice were women reminds us that those active in food sciences, food reform movements, and food marketing did not live apart from the people they dispensed advice to and may not themselves have been any more able to follow dietary advice than the next person was. They were as much creatures of the age of measurement as its propagators. A peek past the introductory essays of any Progressive Era cookbook confirms this. Recipes for fried chicken and frosted cakes attest to the complex interplay between cultural, individual, and idealized palates. The appetizing power of tradition is always strong, as Alana Toulin notes in her account of the corporate co-optation of purity as a concept in food advertising. While reformers struggled to establish new expectations and expertise in food safety, corporate producers of food stuffs hijacked their rhetoric, recognizing the power of purity to serve as a bridge between traditional foodways and modern mass production. As Toulin argues in her conclusion, "By co-opting discussions about food production and consumption and taking advantage of consumers' anxieties and ambivalence, many of the era's advertisements for prepared food reveal that purity—and its attendant links to hygiene, public health, and consumer safety—swiftly became a commodity that could be purchased."

Including marketing and advertising professionals alongside for-profit diet promoters and nonprofit social reformers complicates the usual portrait of the reformer as unilateral. These articles help us to see Progressivism as a discourse in which a collective market for food rules emerged through the simultaneous offer and demand of prescriptions for progress. This market existed both within and alongside capitalist exchange. Those who sought knowledge of calories in the lab and those who looked for it in the consumer goods or professional advice markets were collectively supporting the construct of measured existence, which is the primary legacy, too often overdetermined in the literature as a curse.

Nicholas J. P. Williams recounts a culinary discourse between managers of the New England Kitchen, designed to provide cheap nourishing food to those without access to kitchens, and the customers of the kitchen. When customers criticized a soup for lacking dumplings—a traditional Anglo-American addition to soups—the managers, uneasy about the nutritional qualities of those dumplings, on which they had been raised themselves, offered instead macaroni. According to the nutritional knowledge of the time, macaroni seemed preferable. Although it had long been featured in Anglo-American foodways, macaroni still carried an association with Italy, indicating to us as contemporary readers, that the managers of the kitchen were flexible with their culinary vocabulary—both accepting direction from the diner and borrowing materials from another culture. The macaroni themselves, bobbing in the soup, can

be seen as progressive because they arrived through an interchange between what we now might call stakeholders about the best possible soup for the particular market, including both its producers and consumers. The articles in this issue are full of such moments of exchange and interplay between people, ideas, and food, which illuminate foodways as never settled, but always in process and progress, sites for contest and compromise.

Notes

1 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).
2 Deborah Blum, *The Poison Squad* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018).
3 Helen Zoe Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).
4 Susanne Friedberg, *Fresh* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
5 Andrew Haley, *Turning the Tables* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

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