

***Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race.* By Sherrie A. Inness (ed.), (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, viii + 286 p., reference, index, US.\$22.50, ISBN 0-8122-1735-7)**

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Volume 23, Number 2, 2001

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087941ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087941ar>

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**Publisher(s)**

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

**ISSN**

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

**Cite this review**

Everett, H. (2001). Review of [*Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race.* By Sherrie A. Inness (ed.), (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, viii + 286 p., reference, index, US.\$22.50, ISBN 0-8122-1735-7)]. *Ethnologies*, 23(2), 169–171.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1087941ar>

## REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

***Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race.*** By Sherrie A. Inness (ed.), (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, viii + 286 p., reference, index, US.\$22.50, ISBN 0-8122-1735-7)

Food is a growing area of scholarly research across disciplines, and *Kitchen Culture in America* is culinary historiography and text analysis seen through the lens of gender studies. Despite the encompassing nature of the book's title, its primary focus is food marketing and the construction of femininity, especially in the postwar period. Inness and her ten co-contributors' analyses encompass the beginning of the confection industry in the United States, Campbell's Soup, Aunt Jemima, marital sex manuals, children's and community cookbooks, frozen food marketing and the cookbook as culinary autobiography.

As one would expect from a volume that brings together scholars from Afro-American Studies, American Studies, History, English, and Media and Cultural Studies, the authors' theoretical and methodological perspectives are wide-ranging. Not surprisingly, this results in a somewhat uneven collection. For example, a few of the essays analyzing marketing trends consist primarily of detailed advertisement descriptions. While helpful, and certainly necessary in cases where the ads are not reprinted (yielding visual analysis with no visuals), it can be frustrating reading. In addition, a few of the media analyses appear to presume that the writer's interpretation is the only one possible. Would all American women in 1910 have gleaned the same message from the label on a can of tomato soup, as proposed by Katherine Parkin in "Campbell's Soup and the Long Shelf Life of Traditional Gender Roles"? Moreover, due to the emphasis on mass-mediated communication, there is relatively little attention given to vernacular expression. While mass-mediated texts, whether soup cans or sex manuals, are presented as a multiplicity of sites where gender norms are questioned and affirmed that must be examined; for all the sneaky ways texts posit ideology — or subvert ideology (Neuhaus, p. 110) —, few of the contributors here grant those who purchase the texts (the consumers) the same interpretive or expressive ability.

The weakest essay here, contributed by the editor, is built on the intriguing premise of gender construction in cookbooks written for children, both male and female. Unfortunately, Inness's argument is marred by generalizations, errors in logic, shallow analysis and, surprisingly, offhand (hetero) sexist statements. For example, in discussing the importance of kid culture in gender studies, she writes, "What does it mean that the toy I craved most as a child was a Betty Crocker Easy-Bake oven? (My mom never bought me one, which is probably why I became a professor)" (p. 133). Women who are not adequately socialized into traditional femininity are more likely to become professors? Women who played with Easy-Bake ovens probably won't become professors? These are limited options, indeed.

Analyses of the image of the African-American woman in food marketing ("Now Then Who Said Biscuits?: The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising, 1905-1953" by Alice A. Deck), and culinary autobiography, however, move beyond problematic, aseptic textual analysis to identify intriguing patterns in both mass-produced and vernacular communication, placing such trends in historical context and emphasizing the often overlooked centrality of culinary tradition and innovation in the sociocultural milieu. The contributions of Doris Witt ("My Kitchen Was the World: Vertamae Smart Grosvenor's Geechee Diaspora"), Traci Marie Kelly ("If I Were a Voodoo Priestess: Women's Culinary Autobiography"), and Janet Theophano ("Home Cooking: Boston Baked Beans and Sizzling Rice Soup as Recipes for Pride and Prejudice") underscore the importance of cookbooks with respect to women's history. In addition, for an engaging combination of primary and secondary research, original analysis and wit, Christopher Holmes Smith's "Freeze Frames: Frozen Foods and Memories of the Postwar American Family" must be singled out. Smith thoughtfully examines the political, economic and sociocultural forces contributing to the establishment of the frozen food industry, to argue that a far more complex set of gender relations existed in postwar America than has been previously assumed (p. 177).

Regardless of its weaknesses, *Kitchen Culture in America* serves up a provocative look into the ever-controversial relationship between culinary trends, consumer culture and gender construction. As a whole, the essays are well-documented, providing the reader with opportunities for further reading and exploration. Suggesting that popular cookbooks and TV dinners may be viewed as emergent texts, through which both

producer and consumer may explore divergent identities, the collection is an indication of the many directions available to the social scientist in the area of food and culture.

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***Bluegrass Odyssey: A Documentary in Pictures and Words, 1966-86.***

By Carl Fleischhauer and Neil V. Rosenberg. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001, xii + 189 p., 200+ black and white photographs, index, US \$ 35, ISBN 0-252-02615-2)

*Bluegrass Odyssey* is a collection of six photographic and textual essays, offering a personal account of the authors' love affair with the musical genre created by Bill Monroe in the middle of the twentieth century. Neil Rosenberg is well known to bluegrass fans, ethnomusicologists, and folklorists. As the author of *Bluegrass: A History*, he not only pioneered an academic field, he produced a folkloric venue: apparently that book has become an autograph manual for fans. (I assume that some of these artifacts will have made their way into archival collections by now.) Carl Fleischhauer, who has worked in video and photography at West Virginia University and the Library of Congress, will be somewhat less well known to fans, but those who read the small print will surely at least recognize the name from album titles, from magazines like *Bluegrass Unlimited*, and from Rosenberg's previous books. The men are long time collaborators.

Because the photos are all by Fleischhauer, nothing that occurred before he began to document the music in 1966 is presented here, except in text. We cannot see Monroe sharing a stage with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs or with Bill Keith and Peter Rowan, two significant stages in Monroe's career and the music's history. There is only one shot of Flatt and Scruggs, who *were* bluegrass for so many people throughout the 60s; the group dissolved before Fleischhauer was committed to documenting the genre.

I was puzzled that Bill Keith (whom many would say reinvented bluegrass banjo) does not appear in the book. Was it simply that Carl Fleischhauer didn't catch him? Jerry Garcia (best known as a rocker) and Doug Green (of the western vocal group, Riders in the Sky) make