

Theodore C. HUMPHREY and Lin T. HUMPHREY (eds.), “ *We Gather Together* ” : *Food and Festival in American Life* (Logan, Utah State University Press, 1991,289 p., ISBN 0- 87421-155-7)

Carole Counihan

Volume 15, numéro 1, 1993

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082548ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1082548ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d’Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Counihan, C. (1993). Compte rendu de [Theodore C. HUMPHREY and Lin T. HUMPHREY (eds.), “ *We Gather Together* ” : *Food and Festival in American Life* (Logan, Utah State University Press, 1991,289 p., ISBN 0- 87421-155-7)]. *Ethnologies*, 15(1), 144–148. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1082548ar>

One of the most intriguing things about this book is the introduction to Fraser herself, who deserves further serious study. She can be seen within the context of women collectors or field researchers whose work has been neglected or undervalued. Some others, most notably the journalist Mary Weekes of Regina, have also been overlooked. As Dempsey notes in his introduction, when Fraser began publishing, few had written very much about the Plains Indians. She was in great demand as an authority on the Blackfoot by the 1960s but was interested in other topics as well, and was frustrated when her publisher showed no interest in her work, entering what Dempsey describes as “a long and bitter period in her life” (p. xi). Someone should further explore the life and work of Frances Fraser, and Douglas and McIntyre should be commended for bringing her to light again.

Sarah CARTER
University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta

Theodore C. HUMPHREY and Lin T. HUMPHREY (eds.), “*We Gather Together*”: *Food and Festival in American Life* (Logan, Utah State University Press, 1991, 289 p., ISBN 0-87421-155-7).

This volume consists of fourteen essays divided into three sections: Part I — Family and Friends, Ritual and Renewal; Part II — Regional Specialities: Work and Play; and Part III — “Boosterism”, Food, and Festive Performance. In addition, the volume has an Introduction by Theodore C. Humphrey, Sue Samuelson, and Lin T. Humphrey, and Afterword by Michael Owen Jones, an Appendix with “Soup Night Recipes and Philosophy” by Lin T. Humphrey, and a Selected Bibliography prepared by Michael Owen Jones and Theodore C. Humphrey. All of the contributions celebrate the way in which formal and informal family, neighbourhood, and community groups express their identity and celebrate their unity through rituals of commensality. The foods themselves, the traditions involved in their preparation, serving and consumption, and the collective experience of both working and eating together all communicate powerful messages of group identity and continuity.

The essays cover a wide range of food-centered festivals in United States culture. They are exemplary in focusing attention and analysis on events that most

of us usually take for granted. Theodore Humphrey's essay "A Family Celebrates a Birthday: Of Life and Cakes" uses a description of his daughter's twenty-fourth birthday to express the ways in which "foods are turned into highly symbolic forms in a context of festivity and ritual" (p. 19). Humphrey shows how the birthday party combines traditional elements such as the cake and candles with idiosyncratic and variable elements such as raspberry filling in the cake and a household candle instead of the usual small birthday ones. In an essay that is more theoretically speculative than many in the volume, Humphrey suggests that in the presentation of the cake, the blowing out of the candles, and the sharing of the pieces, "The entire history of conception, birth, life, and death has been played out" (p. 24).

Sharon R. Sherman's "The Passover Seder: Ritual Dynamics, Foodways, and Family Folklore" focuses on the food-centered Seder ritual in an evolving family context. Sherman shows how her family's Seder combines longstanding and widely shared traditional elements of the Jewish Seder with elements added over time by individuals. These, too, become part of the tradition and take on their own meaning and value in expressing familial as well as Jewish beliefs.

Lin Humphrey's "'Soup Night': Community Creation through Foodways" is about a family tradition of hosting a weekly soup dinner for a varying group of friends. Humphrey makes the soup, she and her husband host the event, and their friends bring bread or wine. Eating together and sharing responsibility for both the content of the meal and the sociability of the gathering constantly recreate a sense of community out of scattered friendships. Similarly, in "A Halloween Brunch: The Affirmation of Group in a Temporary Community", Nancy Klavans writes about how parents and children from a local Montessori school gather every Halloween to cook and eat a "nostalgic Norman Rockwell-type of home-cooked country farm breakfast" (p. 49) which serves to unite families of diverse ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds who have in common sometimes nothing more than their children's school.

In "No Smoke? No Fire: Contemporary Hamming the Ol' Fashioned Way", Amy E. Skillman shows how 92-year-old Bud Gardener and his male friends cure hams in Boone County, Missouri. The "womenfolk" participate by presenting them with pies and coffee at the end of their three hours of labor. Skillman's essay is interesting in showing how even as the methods and curing ingredients are "modernized", a "tradition" of hog-curing is maintained by the acts of first working together and later eating the finished product together, and by the quality of the product itself. Barbara C. Fertig's "Hog Killing in Virginia: Work as Celebration" also emphasizes the importance of "celebratory work, work as a festive affirmation of identity" (p. 123). In this essay, the primary spotlight is again on the men who slaughter, clean, and butcher the hogs, but the women are also important as they prepare the sausage and cook a meal for all the workers.

In Eleanor Wachs' "'To Toast the Bake': The Johnston Family Clambake" and Kathy Neustadt's "'Born among the Shells': The Quakers of Allen's Neck and their Clambake" family and community relationships are solidified through working and eating together. The Johnston clambake on Hough's Neck in Quincy, Massachusetts, is a family affair that incorporates friends and extended relatives. The work and foods are ritualized and clearly divided along gender lines. The same holds for the much larger community clambake on Allen's Neck in southeastern Massachusetts. This clambake is organized by members of a local Quaker church and makes money and good will for the church as well as reaffirming ties of kinship, neighbourliness and hospitality throughout the community. Both clambakes express some of the tensions of the modern world, and the encroachment of the urban megalopolis with its attendant pollution and crowding. However, both also express a temporary resolution of these tensions, for the clams are purchased from elsewhere and the tourists eat with the locals in a commensal transcendence of hostilities.

Theodore Humphrey's "'It's a Community Deal Here, You Know': Festive Community Life in Rural Oklahoma" describes a barbecue held at the Calvin Pauley ranch near Morrison, Oklahoma, attended by approximately 400 past and present residents of the town. It is a tradition started by Pauley and his neighbour "out of the recognition of the need for 'folks to visit', an activity that the improvements and increased mechanization of agriculture in the area had served only to inhibit" (p. 159). Carol Edison in "Roast Beef and Pit-Barbecued Lamb: The Role of Food at Two Utah Homecoming Celebrations" writes about two community-organized festivals in rural Utah: the Koosharem tradition of preparing a roast beef dinner for adults, free for those over 65, and the Fountain Green barbecued lamb sandwich meal to raise funds for community organizations. Both, she says, "reinforce individual membership within the community and symbolically display community-held values and community identity, thus maintaining those values and that identity for future generations" (p. 151).

Edison introduces a function of commensal rituals carried on in the remaining papers in the volume: their financial aspect. Food rituals can simultaneously serve social *and* economic functions; food is both meaningful and enjoyable, hence marketable. Anne R. Kaplan's "It's All from One Big Pot': Booya as an Expression of Community", shows how volunteer organizations celebrate their membership and make money by sponsoring the booya. The distinction between insiders who spend 24 hours making the booya, "a hodgepodge of meats, vegetables, and seasonings cooked to an unrecognizable paste" (p. 171), and outsiders who come to eat it, is "both created and integrated at a booya" (p. 170).

A similar distinction between insider and outsider is implicit in Thomas Adler's "Bluegrass Music and Meal-Fried Potatoes: Food, Festival, and Community" about bluegrass festivals in Indiana and Kentucky. At these coexist

commercial foods sold to make money and feed the hungry musicians and spectators, and private family foods cooked to celebrate the unity and festivity of the social unit. But in Anthony T. Rauche's "*Festa Italiana* in Hartford, Connecticut: The Pastries, the Pizza and the People Who 'Parla Italiano'", and James Griffith's "'We Always Call It 'Tucson Eat Yourself'": The Role of Food at a Constructed Festival", commercial foods take over. Interestingly, the former festival died, killed by the very Italians who organized it, because the food elements predominated over other festival elements in a way that violated the Italians' sense of what a festival should be. Yet the Tucson festival has been a splendid success precisely because of the centrality of food. 45 organizations representing 37 ethnic groups sold traditional foods at the 1985 festival. The sale of these foods not only made profits for the various organizations, but also provided enjoyment for the many people involved in their preparation as well as the thousands who came to eat. "In a very real sense, it is the food that sticks the festival together" (p. 231) and enables the success of an effort to unite the thousands of citizens of Tucson in a positive celebratory manner.

The fourteen papers in this volume effectively demonstrate the ability of commensal rituals to express community and affirm group identity. They also show the value of paying close attention to the everyday events of the world around us and to the constant and often spontaneous remodelling of food rituals. What I wished they would do more of is to suggest the further ramifications of the events they describe. For example, how do these festivals relate to quotidian American foodways? How, in particular, do they relate to the cult of diet and health food that prevails in contemporary conceptions of food? Nowhere in the papers is there even a suggestion of concerns for health or weight, and this is remarkable. The authors might have some interesting speculations on why the participants in the festivals they studied have very different attitudes towards food than many Americans.

I also wished the papers had given more attention to analyzing the social relations of power within the groups they analyzed. Class and gender issues are barely hinted at. Interestingly, Sherman's and Lin Humphrey's are the only essays in the volume where women are central. In both cases women are important in creating foods and in maintaining meanings of the rituals. But it is surprising — given that food is most commonly the almost exclusive domain of women — that in all of the other essays, men are central and women are either peripheral or of parallel importance to the men. This may be due both to the formalized nature of many of the festivities studied and to the fact that many deal with outdoor forms of cooking and eating, traditionally the province of men. Yet I would like to see a more extended analysis of gender relations in the essays with attention to how festivals both reflect and challenge traditional hegemonic gender relations in the United States.

Finally, I wished that there had been essays in the volume dealing with the commensal rituals of people of color in the United States. While the essays cover ethnic diversity among white Americans quite broadly, there is no mention of African-Americans at all, and Native Americans and Hispanics have just a brief mention in Griffith's article on the Tucson festival. Descriptions of the food festivals of people of color would greatly enrich the volume and our understanding of the wonderful ways in which food recreates community.

Carole COUNIHAN
Millersville University
Millersville, Pennsylvania

Paul SMITH (ed.), guest editors Tom GREEN and Sylvia GRIDER,
*Contemporary Legend: The Journal of the International
Society for Contemporary Legend Research*, volume I (En-
field Lock, Ifissarlik Publishers).

Since the 1960s and particularly following the first American symposium on legend held in 1969, there has been increased discussion regarding the specific structure, form, content, function, theoretical and methodological approaches to legend studies. Many of these debates were brought to the forefront in the 1980s with the institution of the "Perspectives on Contemporary Legend" seminars at Sheffield, England under the direction of Paul Smith. The birth of the International Society For Contemporary Legend Research in 1988 and the recent launching of its journal, *Contemporary Legend*, are the direct result of the Sheffield seminars held annually since 1982. This first volume compiled by guest editors Tom Green and Sylvia Grider, is primarily a selection of papers from the seventh annual "Perspectives On Contemporary Legend International Seminar" held for the first time at Texas A & M University in 1989. More importantly, it also symbolises the new trends and directions manifest within the present legend scholarship.

The title *Contemporary Legend* represents a distinct departure from the more traditional approaches to the genre. As described on the inside cover, the aim of the publication is to:

promote and encourage research, and to provide a forum for those working in this vibrant area of traditional narrative scholarship. Within this context the term 'legend' is inter-