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## Food and Foodways

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### A Review of: “Vegetarianism, Movement or Moment?”

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## BOOK REVIEWS

VEGETARIANISM, MOVEMENT OR MOMENT? by Donna Maurer. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002. 192 pages.

Donna Maurer's main task in *Vegetarianism, Movement or Moment?* is to examine vegetarianism as a social movement. Based on participant observation, interviews with movement leaders, survey research, and an analysis of movement documents, she offers an engaging portrait of North American vegetarianism that helps to fill a significant gap in both the sociological and food and foodways literature.

Maurer introduces readers to the demographic profile of vegetarians, the paths individuals typically take in becoming a vegetarian, and the historical roots of contemporary vegetarianism in North America. White, middle-class, highly educated individuals are most likely to become vegetarian, and nearly 70% of vegetarians are women. Maurer reports that most vegetarians adopt a vegetarian lifestyle initially for health reasons and only later do they adopt ethical reasons such as compassion for animals and concern for the environment. Those vegetarians that are motivated by ethical reasons are more likely than health-vegetarians to become vegans, those who consume no animal-derived foods or products (e.g., clothing, cosmetics) whatsoever.

Maurer notes the difficulty in enumerating vegetarians. While surveys generally estimate the number of vegetarians to be between 1% and 2.5% of the U.S. and Canadian populations, results vary depending on whether the survey uses self-identification or an operationalized definition of vegetarianism such as not consuming meat, poultry and seafood. Thus, while between 1% and 2.5% of the U.S. population regularly followed a vegetarian diet from 1992 to 2000, three times as many people self-identified as vegetarians (p. 16). Most studies agree, however, that the number of vegetarians has not increased dramatically, despite the increased availability of vegetarian foods and the emergence of vegetarian organizations.

Vegetarian organizations are an important component of the vegetarian movement and include local and national groups such as the North American Vegetarian Society. Though only a small number of vegetarians are members of vegetarian movement organizations, Maurer contends that these groups play a vital role in both articulating and spreading a vegetarian ideology. This ideology consists of three interrelated concerns: concern for animals (animal rights), health, and the environment. Vegetarian ideology clearly illustrates the degree of overlap between the vegetarian movement and its allied movements, those that are related to, but separate from, vegetarianism: the animal rights, health food, and environmental movements. Though not all animal rights or environmental activists are vegetarians, Maurer argues that these movements “provide alliances and bases for potential new members” (p. 47).

Maurer maintains that vegetarianism is best considered a cultural movement rather than a political movement since its aim is not to effect widespread political change, but rather to “create a culture that is more tolerant of vegetarianism as it simultaneously moves individuals in the same direction” (p. 48). To do this, the movement seeks to build a collective identity that binds members together and is an important component of members’ individual identities. Yet, unlike other movements based on some shared master status (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender) the vegetarian movement must avoid forming a collective identity based on opposition to meat eaters since meat eaters are potential recruits and thus the basis for movement expansion and success.

Maurer also examines the factors that have limited the success of the movement including a weak collective identity. This weak collective identity is due largely to the recruitment strategies the movement employs. Rather than focusing on ethical arguments, vegetarian organizations focus instead on the personal benefits of vegetarianism, namely physical health and well-being. Recruitment, she explains, “involves a slow educational process, centered first on health and gradually moving toward more overtly ideological concerns about the environment and animal rights” (p. 145). Health-vegetarians, those who eliminate meat for purely health reasons and who do not support the environmental or animal-rights tenets of the vegetarian ideology, are unlikely to

participate in movement activities or to maintain a plant-based diet over the long term. When healthier meat products such as extra lean pork or beef become available, or when vegetarianism is not convenient, it is the health vegetarians who are the most likely to revert back to meat eating precisely because they lack a strong ideological commitment.

While the increased availability of vegetarian entrees in restaurants, and the rise of prepackaged vegetarian foods in supermarkets (e.g., tofu, veggie burgers, etc.) may seem to indicate moderate movement success, Maurer argues that the mainstreaming of vegetarian foods presents both opportunities and challenges for the vegetarian movement. The mainstreaming of vegetarian food, she writes, “presents a strong opportunity for the vegetarian movement to capitalize on a cultural environment in which vegetarian menu choices are acceptable. But it may also serve to further dilute the vegetarian collective identity” (p. 133). People may consume vegetarian foods, yet not identify as vegetarian; or they may identify as vegetarian when they only occasionally practice a vegetarian lifestyle. Maurer maintains that the limited success of the vegetarian movement is also due to its inability to convince the public that meat eating is both dangerous and immoral. Most individuals do not believe that moderate meat consumption is deleterious to one’s health, and thus, are more likely to reduce rather than eliminate meat from their diet.

Despite the subtitle, this is primarily a book about vegetarianism, not social movements. Excepting a few short references, primarily to the work of Herbert Blumer, the text fails to engage the voluminous social scientific literature on social movements. This is the book’s main weakness. Maurer offers no detailed review of social movement theory, despite her main thesis that vegetarianism is a social movement, albeit one that has enjoyed only limited success. *Vegetarianism* is thus less appropriate for use in a social movements course, and better suited for a course on food and foodways. Nevertheless, the book is quite accessible to undergraduates and generates lively discussions. I have used it twice in my senior seminar on the Sociology of Food and on both occasions students enjoyed the book tremendously. In both classes, though, the majority of students were not convinced that vegetarianism is a bonafide social movement, reflecting, I believe,

the very shortcomings of the movement about which Maurer writes.

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MANLY MEALS AND MOM'S HOME COOKING: COOKBOOKS AND GENDER IN MODERN AMERICA, by Jessamyn Neuhaus. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. 335 pp.

The very brief Introduction to *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking* establishes that Neuhaus' project will be to explore the premise that, "Cookbooks most vividly demonstrate the way that food preparation and gender seem hopelessly intertwined" (p. 2) in what the subtitle names "modern America." Although the starting point of such a vaguely defined period turns out to be 1796, the end point is never specified, but apparently it is the mid-1960s. Some cogent questions that Neuhaus asks in the Introduction and addresses in the book are: What kind of prescriptive rhetoric did cookbooks offer? What role, if any, might they have played in crystallizing and perpetuating the idea that women have the primary responsibility for daily food preparation? What were the specific responsibilities that women had in the kitchen at various points in history? What were the representations of men in relation to food consumption and preparation? What about the links between class or ethnicity and cookbooks? All these questions are of course of major concern in any serious study of the history of cookbooks and their social relevance. Neuhaus states that, "They show how foods, food preparation, kitchen labor, gender, class and race have intersected in the United States" (p. 1).

The book is divided into three parts. Part One, "A Most Enchanting Occupation: Cookbooks in Early and Modern America, 1796–1941," starts with the year that marks the appearance of the