

We Are What We Eat

*Ethnic Food and the
Making of Americans*

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Mangiando, ricordo:
Dedicated to Tamino,
my German-speaking,
Italo-Polish-American child,
who eats Ethiopian and cooks Cuban
and who grew up with this book

brother and brother, between family butcher and his suspicious neighbor/consumer, and between family and community interests, than they were a fight-to-the-death between small, anticorporate immigrant businesses and modern, corporate American food industries. As the case of kosher meat reveals, the sources of failure came from inside ethnic communities—from competing ethnic provisioners, family feuds, and shrewd ethnic consumers, not from the ruthless capitalists of America's industrializing food corporations.

Even as enclave businesses flourished and the cultural conservatism of their consumers seemed invincible, savvy but financially insecure ethnic businessmen looked for less volatile markets. They began to deliver the products of the national marketplace to enclave consumers. At the same time, they also learned to lure new customers to cross ethnic boundaries and purchase dishes of ethnic roots and inspiration different from their own. A second round of multi-ethnic borrowing and blending was soon under way.



Crossing the Boundaries of Taste

In the 1920s, a Texan concerned that visitors to New York might “run along home with the idea that New York . . . is simply a collection of B&G Sandwich Shops [and] Thompson One-Arm Cafeterias” surveyed the fuller culinary scene in his guide to *Dining in New York*. He recommended Sardi's as “an Italian-American restaurant [that] quietly specializes in the three sea-food dishes that made the fame of Prunier's of Paris.” He sent visitors uptown to Arnold Reuben's for a pastrami sandwich and downtown to the Lower East Side to Perlman's, where “insolent, lackadaisical waiters talk back to you, bawl you out, bang your order down in front of you, bring you tall, blue siphons of seltzer wherewith to wash down the amazing rich food.” He recommended Moneta's on Mulberry Street, “ruled over by the watery gray eye of Papa Moneta himself,” and also the low-priced Barbetta's, with its artistic clientele. He suggested a visit to The Bamboo Forest/Young China and the Chili Villa—one operated by Mr. Williams, a former student in China, and the other by a New Englander who supplemented her “hot tamales” with Cape Cod clam chowder on Friday night.

A trip to Harlem, he warned, promised danger, along with glimpses of

“black folks who behave” and “white folks who don’t,” and the opportunity to enjoy “barbecue restaurants, coffee-pots, quick-lunches, fish-and-chips places” and the “best fried chicken, sweet potato pie, and bacon and eggs in all New York.” For the visitor seeking American food, the author suggested the Yoshida Room, “owned by Japanese . . . run by Japanese . . . manned by Japanese,” but serving American blue plate specials that included pork chops and apple sauce, and minute steak, without so much as “a water-chestnut, a leek, or a bamboo shoot on the premises.”¹

Rian James, the guidebook’s author, believed that what made New York unique, and intriguing, was not its corporate chain cafeterias and sandwich shops but its ethnic diversity. Already in 1930, New York’s multi-ethnic population had become an essential part of the city’s appeal to visitors and tourists. Ethnicity and cultural diversity were necessary ingredients—along with skyscrapers and vast museums—in what made New York the city it was. James seemed to think that Americans might feel some anxiety about visiting Italian, Chinese, or African-American restaurants, so his guide offered them necessary help in identifying and enjoying them. At the same time, James obviously believed that many Americans, regardless of background, could also find pleasure and novelty in the food and atmosphere of ethnic restaurants, at least once they knew what to expect and how to get there.

The boundaries around ethnic enclaves in the United States have never been firm or impermeable. National corporations, ethnic businessmen and clients, and consumers from a wide variety of backgrounds all have had their own motives for “crossing over.” Transgressing the cultural borders of America’s many eating communities proceeded in a series of overlapping phases from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, but the years between 1900 and 1940 represented a particularly intensive phase of cross-cultural borrowing.

During these years, ambitious businessmen in ethnic communities, eager to escape the fragile and changing personal loyalties of their enclave clientele, sought new consumers in their multi-ethnic urban and regional markets. As they moved out, however, they did not leave their cultural origins behind them. On the contrary, they frequently created a variety of market niches where businessmen like themselves dominated particular types of food trade. These niches included marketing ethnic foods adapted

for multi-ethnic eaters and selling new snacks or “street foods” of wide appeal to a national market. In some areas, immigrant retailers also dominated the grocery or restaurant trade, while not selling foods of any particular ethnic origin.

Neither crossing over nor ethnic niches were unique to the twentieth century. An earlier generation of immigrants had made foods as diverse as French sauces and German beer popular with American eaters. In the nineteenth century, America’s newly wealthy industrial “robber barons” discovered cosmopolitan, French-inspired food and made it a culinary symbol of their newly elevated status. Immigrant restaurateurs, chefs, and hoteliers educated America’s nouveaux riches in how to eat and behave like aristocracy, and were also the main purveyors of their extravagant French meals.

A modest cafe founded in 1828 by the seaman and Italian Swiss immigrant Giovanni Del-Monico and his confectioner brother became the favored eating place of the wealthy. From a simple coffee house with pastries and a European clientele, the Delmonico family business expanded after changing its name to sell “macaroni and filets” to New York’s middling classes in the 1830s. After a fire—and the arrival of several more members of their family—they moved and opened a larger restaurant. Lorenzo Delmonico—nephew of the founders and the restaurant’s actively involved manager and urbane host until his death in 1881—made French cooking the center of Delmonico’s menu, initiating what became a decades-long fad among wealthy American eaters. Delmonico’s interpretation of French cuisine was defined by offering choice and excess: there were 346 entrees, some incorrectly translated, on his bilingual menu; these included 11 soups and 27 veal dishes. None of the Delmonico family had formal training in cooking, whether French or any other cuisine, but they quickly hired French and German chefs, educated at fine European restaurants. Other immigrants with experience in fine restaurants created Delmonico’s signature deferential service, which contrasted sharply with the slapdash, noisy atmosphere of the beefsteak, ale, and pie eateries of antebellum New York. Deferential staff, as much as its vaguely French cuisine and fine imported wines and liqueurs, defined Delmonico’s fare as “high class.”

On the other hand, middle-class Americans who tried the cuisine at Delmonico's during its early days often lacked enthusiasm for these new, continental tastes. One visitor thought the servings much too small and complained that "we satisfied our curiosity but not our appetites." Another found olive oil about as palatable as lamp oil. But wealthy Americans learned to love the restaurant. During the 1860s and 1870s, under Chef Charles Ranhofer, Delmonico's catered the most conspicuously expensive and extravagant dinners of the era, aping the grandeur of France's Second Empire. A visiting Englishman entertained his clients—American coffee and tea merchants—by spending \$20,000 for music, trees, and a gold-leaf menu of ten courses, with two to six dishes in each course. Wines, champagnes, and liqueurs accompanied each course.²

Everywhere in the United States, wealthy investors in the 1870s constructed grand hotels and French-inspired restaurants to feed and accommodate newly status-conscious travelers. Just as the Delmonicos had done in New York, restaurateurs in towns like Dubuque or Chicago hired European staffs to introduce cosmopolitanism to their own nouveaux riches. In Chicago, the German father of memoirist Elsa Proehl Blum prided himself on teaching wealthy Americans how to eat and how to live well. Paul Proehl had been born in 1858 in Dresden, where his parents owned a fine hotel. After an apprenticeship in German cooking, Proehl trained further at Maxim's in Paris. Then he immigrated to New Orleans to manage a recently opened "Paris-style" hotel. After marrying a musician, he became maître d'hôtel at the Congress and Auditorium Hotel in Chicago, "centers for much gay social life" with a daily round of "swell luncheons" and "brilliant dinners." The hotel had a French restaurant, a palm garden, and huge banquet rooms. Aware of the parties and glitter of a grand hotel, Elsa Proehl Blum grew up thinking that "Chicago was in those days the Paris of the U.S.A."³

Even San Antonio, still almost a frontier town in the 1870s and 1880s, had its own grand hotel, built by the German brewer William Menger to provide first-class accommodations. Menger continued to lager his beer in the hotel's basement, but upstairs he offered elegant reception rooms and restaurants, where traveling cattlemen enjoyed banquets that included French wines and local meats like buffalo hump, wild turkey, deer, and turtle, cooked and sauced in the French manner.

The appeal of foreign food and drink was not limited to the wealthy. While robber barons savored French food in fine restaurants, humbler Americans developed a taste for German lager beer. Before 1840 Americans had drunk the dark ales and porters of the British Isles or high-alcohol drinks distilled from sugar and corn. Lager beer was a lighter, more effervescent drink than ale and porter, manufactured with yeast that fermented to the bottom of a vat; it required cool storage (in a lager) over the winter. Lager beer had developed in Central Europe and probably was introduced in the United States by Philadelphia brewer John Wagner, who brought the necessary yeast when he left his position as a Bavarian braumeister. In 1844 Fortmann and Company introduced lager production to Cincinnati, and the brewery that would grow into the gigantic Pabst Brewing Company began operating in Milwaukee. Boston got its first German lager brewery in 1846, Chicago in 1847, San Francisco in 1849, St. Louis in 1852, and San Antonio—where one-third of the population was German—in 1855. In the Midwest, especially within the triangle of German settlement bounded by Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Milwaukee, every little town had its own brewery. Indeed, according to one historian, "breweries were as much a part of many Wisconsin communities as churches, schools and flour mills."⁴

Most brewers were Germans, as were their earliest customers. The names of Brooklyn's early brewers make the origins of lager in the German community there very clear: Meltzer, Liebman, Seiz, Worthschaft, Wundchenmeyer, Bull, and Gottschalk. Initially, all produced on a small scale: in New York, Ruppert's in its early days sold beer from house to house.⁵ But these businessmen did not limit their markets to Germans for long. From a modest production of only 750,000 barrels in 1850, total barrelage rose to 3.8 million in 1860, 6.5 million in 1870, 39.5 million in 1900, and 59.5 million in 1910.⁶ A historian of beer has called this the "German engulfment of the American brewing industry,"⁷ while a historian of the prohibition movement noted, "In just a few decades, the amount of alcohol that a statistically average American consumed in hard liquor was replaced by the equivalent amount carried in brewed drinks."⁸ In 1850 that statistically average American consumed 1.5 gallons of beer annually; fifteen years later his consumption had doubled to 3 gallons.

Beer became popular with new immigrants and old Americans alike. For

some immigrants it was a familiar drink; the south Chinese had brewed it at home (calling it wine), and Jewish men had learned to drink it from their Christian neighbors in Eastern Europe. By 1900, however, Mexicans and Cajuns also drank beer, as did Basques. So did southern blacks and poor whites. Some Irish immigrants held to their ale and porter, but their children joined the multi-ethnic crowd of lager fans. Italian men stopped in saloons to talk to comrades and drink a glass of beer, or they sat in their kitchens drinking beer and eating roasted garbanzos. Italian women drank it, too: Rosa, who worked at Hull House, remembered that "in the summer when it was so hot you couldn't stay in those buildings, the women and the boys and girls and babies were sitting down in the street and alley. All the women would bring down their chairs and sit on the sidewalk. Then somebody would say, 'All the women put two cents and we'll get the beer.' So everybody did and the children would run by the saloon and get the can of beer. That's all the please we had—the cool from the beer in summer."⁹

The operators of German saloons and beer gardens seemed uninterested in maintaining the cultural boundaries around *Klein Deutschland*. In the years just before World War I, 40 percent of San Francisco saloonkeepers had German names, and Chicago Germans dominated not just their own ethnocentric *lokale* but also the saloons that catered to a multi-ethnic crowd.¹⁰ It seems likely that consumers preferred German to other saloonkeepers because of the special pleasures they offered alongside the lager beer. No one knows who invented the "free lunch," although saloons in both New York and San Francisco claimed to have done so. Whatever its origins, it quickly became popular with workers and businessmen in most American cities. Gertrude Berg's Jewish grandfather described how pleased he was to eat at a free lunch counter "for the price of a glass of beer—five cents."¹¹ In San Francisco, visitors found that "no formality, whatever is observed at eating . . . All eat standing, and it is not a rare occurrence to see millionaires walking about the room, or leaning against the bar in eager converse—each with a chicken drumstick or wing in one hand, a slice of bread and cheese in the other, like country school-boys at noon-time." The cheapest saloons served "a few chips of 'bologna,' . . . a plate of cheese, some dried beef, crackers, pickles, mustard and sausage," all for 5 cents. Two-bit saloons offered a full meal.¹²

German brewers also attracted new pleasure-seeking customers by at-

taching beer gardens to their breweries. These were large, tree-lined outdoor spaces or cavernous, parklike interior halls: "Immense buildings," according to one observer, that "will accommodate from four hundred to twelve hundred guests."¹³ Junius Browne reported that New York's Atlantic Beer Garden was "the most cosmopolitan place of entertainment in the city; for, though the greater part of its patrons are Germans, every other nationality is represented there, French, Irish, Spaniards, Italians, Portuguese, even Chinamen and Indians."¹⁴ On the other side of the country in California, too, according to the nineteenth-century chronicler B. E. Lloyd, "Beer gardens became rivals of Babel. Not only the German population centers there on Sundays, but foreigners of different nationalities, and many Americans, join in the eating, drinking, and merry-making."¹⁵

Saloons and beer gardens provided more than a beer; they sold entertainment and recreation—*theater, song, and games*—even charging admission. In San Francisco, Lloyd found "dancing, swinging, bowling, jumping, running, and singing constitute a part of the amusements." The result was that a "free and easy feeling pervades the whole throng."¹⁶ In New York in the 1850s and 1860s, lager beer became a fad among urban youths "on the town." A contemporary noted, "New Yorkers ran mad after it, and nothing was spoken of or drunk but LAGER." The same man noted a popular English-language celebration of this new habit of "stepping out":

Twas drank in 'fader land' first,
But now we drink it here,
Then drink it boys! Drink freely!
Three rounds of lager bier!

Besides drink, one could enjoy billiards, shuffle boards, and bowling in many saloons.¹⁷ New York's Jewel City Cafe had a beer garden downstairs, and immigrant Gustav Mann praised a "high-class restaurant, cafe, and nightclub with dancing" upstairs.¹⁸

What America's wealthy had done earlier for French cuisine and elite cosmopolitanism, its artists and intellectuals accomplished for the Italian food of newer immigrants during the Progressive Era, associating it with

cultural rebellion and adventure. On both coasts, Italian restaurants attracted urban "bohemians" who had settled in nearby neighborhoods. In New York, the memoir of Maria Sermolino describes one such "table d'hôte" managed by her father in New York's Greenwich Village.

Gonfarone's Restaurant got its start as a hotel for Italian migrants; at first it offered an inexpensive fixed menu for residents in a dining room of "about fifteen tables with fifty to sixty cane-seated wooden chairs," sawdust on the floor, and the "smells, noises, and commotion of the kitchen" in the dining room. As it attracted consumers from outside the Italian community, the restaurant eventually grew to five buildings along Macdougall and Eighth Streets. It served businessmen at lunchtime, and in the evening its clientele ranged from college students and clerks to lawyers and other professionals.

Author Sermolino insisted that Gonfarone's was "not essentially an artists' and writers' hang-out. It had none of the trappings of pseudo-bohemian retreats and was completely devoid of all artistic trappings." But she also describes Greenwich Village bohemians—those "impecunious American artists and writers in the neighborhood"—as frequent customers in the restaurant.¹⁹

What attracted bohemians to Gonfarone's? Sermolino did not believe the restaurant's appeal lay exclusively in its food. A typical menu in the first decade of the century included a pint of California red wine, assorted antipasto, minestrone or spaghetti with meat or tomato sauce, a choice of main dishes (boiled salmon with caper sauce; sweetbread with mushroom gravy; broiled spring chicken or roast prime ribs of beef), vegetables and salads (spinach, potatoes, green salad), a dessert (biscuit tortoni or spumoni), fresh fruit, assorted cheeses, and "demi-tasse." At 50 cents, the menu was far more expensive than a typical workingman's dinner but well below the prices of a restaurant like Delmonico's.

Sermolino suggested in her memoir that Gonfarone's special atmosphere was as important to cross-over consumers as its food or moderate price. Gonfarone's offered entertainments with its meals, including a knife-brandishing chef, a juggling waiter, and a bus boy who played harmonica. Of even greater importance, Sermolino believed, was the fact that her "papa, and Madama Gonfarone, his partner (who was the head chef), and the waiters and bus boys and cooks, and the bartender and the dish-

washers and musicians, spoke and thought and acted 'Italian.' This little Italian world was friendly, pleasant and gay." And that was what bohemian guests craved, even more than spaghetti bolognese. According to Sermolino, guests ate at Gonfarone's to learn and to practice new values. Her father "helped propagate among Americans a simple, Latin variety of hedonism. They opened up new approaches to sensory and spiritual pleasures . . . They brought new tastes, new sounds, new scents, new form, new colors, but above all, new feelings to America." They taught that "life was not all hard and earnest" but "an adventure to be enjoyed."²⁰

These were precisely the values that appealed to bohemian eaters, in their rebellion against the self-restraint and moral probities of Victorianism. The case of San Francisco's Italian restaurants makes the linkage between food, Latin hedonism, and bohemianism even clearer. There, too, the Italian restaurant Sanguinettis had offered a table d'hôte with "dago red" for local factory workers before the 1906 fire; thereafter, bohemians and other travelers directed there by hotel guides dominated among its clientele.²¹ San Francisco's Bohemian Club was supposedly founded around the Italian table of another restaurant nearby, operated by Joseph Coppa. Coppa had come to San Francisco from Turin via Paris and Guatemala, and his restaurant—known before the fire for a large mural—became the meeting place of Coppa's School of Literature, a group described as "hard-drinking high rollers" who took inspiration from Coppa's "Table Red" wine.²² San Francisco guidebooks pointed tourists to restaurants with "bohemian atmosphere"—including sawdust on the floor, an informal, talkative chef or owners, singing bartenders, and a clientele of intellectuals, artists, or patricians cultivating an anti-Victorian rebellious flair in their dress and leisure-time pursuits.²³ It was an atmosphere that quickly generated competition from non-Italian entrepreneurs. Even New Orleans boasted its bohemian hang-out: Cafe Lafitte, described by an urban guidebook writer, "Scoop" Kennedy, as a place "complete with wagon wheels, sputtering candles and colorful characters."²⁴

While New York uptowners flocked downtown to Greenwich Village, uptown restaurants in the theater district, such as Rectors, soon also promised "bohemian" atmosphere, complete with Italian or other foreign foods prepared for a fast, theatrical crowd of bachelors hoping to meet actresses. A historian of New York night life describes the appeal of such places to

New York's middle classes, who "in leisure desired the same lack of respectability" but who "in everyday life" remained "committed to the world of respectability."²⁵ Not surprisingly, immigrant restaurateurs (first Rumanian Jews, and later Greeks and Russians) also developed the food and entertainment emporiums that came to be called nightclubs.²⁶

By the 1930s, Italian restaurateurs consciously marketed a dining "experience," not just ethnic food. A 1927 brochure of San Francisco's Italian Chamber of Commerce advertised that "the Italian Food Shops and Delicatessen Stores of San Francisco's Latin Quarter are the Meeting Places of the Bohemians and of those who Love 'La Cucina Italiana.'"²⁷ In New York, guidebooks for out-of-towners distinguished between the unacceptable dimly-lit restaurants of Little Italy, located in cellars with "their windows always covered with steam," and the midtown Italian restaurants, whose newly altered menu and ambiance attracted a multi-ethnic crowd.²⁸

Guides to San Francisco's restaurants agreed with Maria Sermolino in New York: eating in their city was much like travel, only much easier because in San Francisco "it is but a step across a street from America into Japan, then another step into China. Cross another street and you are in Mexico, close neighbor to France. Around the corner lies Italy and from Italy you pass to Lombardy, and on to Greece."²⁹ Gertrude Berg knew her father's Samovar restaurant in New York's Spencer Arms Hotel "had to make believe," so that people could forget they were on West 69th Street.³⁰

No enclave businessmen enjoyed greater success attracting culinary tourists in search of inexpensive exoticism than Chinese restaurateurs in the Chinatowns of New York and San Francisco. Even more than Italians, however, they had to modify their offerings to accommodate American tastes. Beginning with the Gold Rush, the Chinese of San Francisco had gained considerable cross-cultural experience serving up all manner of "English" dishes in cheap restaurants and cafes for miners. Later, Chinese chefs often managed the kitchens of prestigious San Francisco French restaurants as well. They also busied themselves trying to sell Americans variations of their own homeland dishes.

Fried rice and chow mein originated among Chinese immigrants cooking for non-Chinese eaters. While the exact origins of these and other

dishes may never be known (Was chop suey left-overs cooked for drunken American miners or a special dish prepared for a Chinese visitor?), by the 1850s miners had already ventured into Chinese kitchens willing to try something other than fried eggs and beans. Many viewed Chinese "Hangtown" fry (a relative of what we know today as Egg Foo Yung) as a cheap alternative to American meals, dished up by Chinese cooks.

Still, Chinese food seemed too adventurous for Americans more sedate than miners. B. E. Lloyd's 1876 guide to the "lights and shades" of San Francisco scarcely mentioned Chinese food as a viable option for visitors. It noted instead that the Chinese—while usually penurious eaters—often staged great banquets where exotic and rare, but sometimes also disgusting, foods were consumed.³¹ At this date, Chinese food was mentioned as a curiosity but not yet recommended for consumption by tourists. Even in the 1930s, the San Franciscan Clarence Edwards hesitated to recommend many Chinese restaurants to middle-class eaters because of what he called Chinese chefs' disregard for sanitation and "the usual niceties of food preparation." He suggested that visitors to San Francisco try an "artistic Japanese meal" instead. Edwards was even more squeamish about Mexican restaurants, however, with their "usual disregard for dirt"; he reported monkeys, cockroaches, and parrots at Felipe and Maria's, despite its "truly Mexican" food.³²

After the 1906 San Francisco fire, "Chinatown" relocated to a quarter envisioned by city fathers as a potential tourist attraction. One Chinese restaurateur succeeded in attracting cross-over tourist consumers by dressing a Chinese woman in European style and having her serve drinks, while Chinese musicians entertained eaters with music.³³ Chinese restaurants that catered to tourists moved upstairs, to differentiate themselves from the simple shops serving Chinese food to Chinese bachelor workers at street level. As early as 1883, a guide for strangers in San Francisco urged tourists to hire a guide to take them to Chinatown, but also recommended four restaurants where they could safely eat—all above street level, of course.³⁴

Thereafter, guides to tourists regularly emphasized the exotic "dangers" and mysteries that could surround their search for a meal in Chinatown. Guides sometimes conceded that readers might be "timid travellers," and

recommended they not ask too much about the ingredients.³⁵ They often described a restaurant's exotic or luxurious decor—balconies with carvings of twining vines, red upholstery, and dark booths—in greater detail than its menu. Two Polish Americans claimed that eating food in Chinatown restaurants was akin to consuming "a plate of cooked grass and noodles" but they—along with others apparently—nevertheless saw a meal in Chinatown as a necessary, if slightly anxiety-producing, part of an urban holiday.³⁶

By the 1920s and 1930s San Francisco guides described Chinese food more sophisticated than chop suey and chow mein. A whole range of eateries now beckoned from the city's Chinese district: simple rice shops, noodle shops, chop suey and chow mein shops, along with night clubs, and finer restaurants, all competing for the tourist trade. Guides for New York and San Francisco suggested that tourists allow waiters to recommend shark fins or other new dishes, and to let themselves be guided to new tastes.³⁷ Some even emphasized the healthfulness of Chinese food, insisting that the "Chinese cook is really a Chinese doctor," and listing the wide variety of "interesting foods"—ginger, bitter squash or melon, sea worms, birds' nests—used in their cooking.³⁸

In New York, the most avid cross-over consumers of Chinese food were Jews. Some Jewish New Yorkers remember eating Chinese food as a regular end-of-sabbath meal, and some Chinese restaurateurs even noted "kosher" dishes on their menus.³⁹ Years later, Jews, remembering this practice, would wonder whether kosher chow mein, if eaten regularly on Saturday night, and sometimes even prepared at home by their Jewish mothers, might not be considered an authentically Jewish dish.⁴⁰ Most of the food consumed by Jewish diners in Chinese restaurants was probably not strictly kosher. But since Chinese chefs chopped the forbidden pork and shellfish very finely, offered a wide range of poultry dishes, never used milk (which kashruth laws forbade in meat dishes), and served tea (also popular with Russian Jews), a Chinese meal offered Jewish New Yorkers what one called "safe treyf"—a combination of the familiar and the forbidden. Reported one older Jewish man, "I felt about Chinese restaurants the same way I did about the Metropolitan Museum of Art—they were the two most strange and fascinating places my parents took me to, and I loved them both."⁴¹ Here, then, was cosmopolitan urbanity for the Jewish middle classes, a

more day-to-day confrontation with the cultural diversity that other tourists sought intermittently as excitement and adventure.

Novelty, entertainment, and a sense of partaking in the excitement of big city life were the same cultural bridges across which immigrant entrepreneurs marketed inexpensive snack foods, sometimes of ethnic inspiration, to the masses of low-income consumers. Some of their inventions—the urban creoles of their age—became new culinary symbols of their home regions, in the same way that rye'n'injun, flour tortillas, and hoppin' john symbolized the regional cuisines of the colonial era.

New York street snacks included frankfurters, hot corn, sweet potatoes, pretzels, ices, ice cream, chewing gum, knishes, arbis, and sweets. (Arbis were cooked yellow peas, reported Federal Writers' Project employee Benjamin Simms, "served to the buyer in a glassine or white paper bag with salt and pepper.") Jewish carts offered baked apples and retchinicks—a soft cake made from buckwheat.⁴² Areas around garment shops swarmed with "glib-tongued salesmen" of bagels and knishes, warmed "in an erstwhile baby carriage that now bears a portable hot oven."⁴³ Dining at the pushcart was not as elegant as a meal at Delmonico's or even Gonfarone's. But street foods offered low-income consumers from a wide variety of backgrounds an inexpensive way to purchase new and novel foods and to experience their own version of multi-ethnic cosmopolitanism.

Greek entrepreneurs were particularly visible in the street-snack trade, creating a distinctive retail niche with the confections of many nations, from peppermints to Turkish taffy. Around 1900 Greeks took over the manufacture and sale of candy and sodas from German and French confectioners like Sebastian Chauveau of Philadelphia, who had first manufactured and popularized gum drops, jujube paste, and marshmallows. Two pioneers in this Greek niche were Eleutherios Pelalas of Sparta and Panagiotis Hatzideris of Smyrna, who had opened their Chicago sweet shop in 1869. Chicago quickly became the "Acropolis" of the Greek-American candy business. Practically every busy corner in the city was occupied by a Greek candy store. From store-front candy, successful Greek retailers moved on to ice cream and soda, but then they had to work night and day "to pay for marble soda fountains and expensive furniture."⁴⁴ Still,

Theodore Saloutos, the first historian of America's Greeks, believed that generally confectioners catering to the multi-ethnic crowd enjoyed more success and higher status in the Greek community than the owners of a shoeshine parlor or enclave coffee shop. Greeks flocked into the ice cream trade, and came to dominate it, much as German saloonkeepers of an earlier generation had dominated the beer trade.

Other street vendors adapted immigrant eating habits to invent new novelties for multi-ethnic consumers. Vendors at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition (popularly known today as the St. Louis World's Fair) adapted the wafer-like cookies popular with Swedish and German immigrants into cone-shaped containers for ice cream. Italian vendors in California found a healthy market for a Mexican specialty they popularized as "hot tamales." Throughout the Southwest, Mexican-American market stands like the one described by Richard Vasquez offered "burritos de huevos, chorizo, frijoles, tamales, tortillas, both the flour and corn types, and a few other things, such as hot dogs and hamburgers."⁴⁵ Most of the purchasers were not Mexican-Americans, although many of the vendors were.

Popular street snacks, whether invented, blended, or ethnic specialties, soon came to symbolize their cities, just as the creole blends of the colonial era had symbolized their regions. The muffuletto of New Orleans originated with the sesame-studded rolls on which the Sicilian grocer Sal Lupo, circa 1900, had layered meats, cheeses, and the olive fragments he could not sell from the bottom of the olive barrels. Elsewhere, urban eaters called somewhat similar sandwiches hoagies, poorboys, grinders, and heroes.

Unique to Fall River, Massachusetts, and a few nearby Rhode Island towns was a creole that Octavio Paz almost certainly would reject as an abomination of the melting pot: the chow mein sandwich. In this popular dish invented in the 1920s, chefs ladled chopped meat, celery, onions, and bean sprouts in gravy onto a hamburger bun or Portuguese bread along with chow mein noodles. Both Chinese and non-Chinese lunch counters served the sandwiches, even offering meatless versions on Fridays for Catholic customers. For the Depression-era youth of Fall River, "the chow mein sandwich was a real treat," cheaper even than a Chinese meal, costing only 30 or 40 cents.⁴⁶

In the Southwest, Ignacio (Nacho) Ahaya gave Tex-Mex cuisine a new culinary symbol when he invented and named a snack after himself. Work-

ing one day at a border club in Piedras Negras, Ahaya was asked to prepare a snack for Anglo officers' wives while the cook was out. A local described how he "grabbed a whole bunch of fried tortillas, put some yellow cheese on top, let it heat a little bit, then put some sliced jalapenos on it."⁴⁷ Apparently the officers' wives enjoyed their "nachoes," and the popularity of the dish spread.

In New York, Louis Auster carefully guarded the secret to his "egg creams," a mixture of soda water, cocoa, and sugar that he created in the 1920s. His grandson reported that "people came from miles and miles . . . egg cream was tantalizing. It was like marijuana. They needed it." Only when he was approaching death did Auster teach his sons and grandsons the secret formula of his egg creams. It was a day, his grandson recalled, "like my bar mitzvah," when a boy realizes, "Today I am a man."⁴⁸

That "deli" would triumph over egg creams as a nationally recognized symbol of New York eating was not obvious at the time. Germans had opened the first delicatessens in New York without making New York a "deli" town (although Richard Hellmann, a German operating a deli on Columbus Avenue, did succeed in marketing his mayonnaise widely by 1915). During the Depression, delicatessen owners had to work hard to market their relatively expensive cold cuts (for "feinschmecker") to a wider, multi-ethnic public. The Mogen Dovid Delicatessen Corporation, a trade association of Jewish deli owners, wanted to change that, by altering consumers' assumption that the delicatessen store was "only for Jews" or "only a luxury."

In its monthly publication for members, Mogen Dovid editors noted that "the choicest delicacies can become necessities if the people get used to them and can get them at ordinary prices." A later article by a member of the association noted that "the Jews, because of their more delicate taste, have taken to delicatessens more readily than others, and they are the ones who contribute most to the spread of the article among the general population," but a third author nevertheless hoped to spread the word with "a lot of advertising." A fourth author agreed: in the midst of the Depression, "Our trade still has large markets to capture or to develop." Delicatessen owners reported progress attracting more customers, and of diverse backgrounds, when they offered sandwiches with exotic names. The most successful deli food of the Depression was the Reuben sandwich,

popularized by Arnold Reuben from his own tiny delicatessen. Reuben subsequently named sandwiches for any actor who visited his store—allowing him eventually to leave the deli trade and open a real restaurant.⁴⁹

One deli founded during this period symbolized the final transformation of delicatessen food from a Jewish to a New York specialty. Lillian and Louis Zabar founded their delicatessen in Brooklyn in 1934: Mr. Zabar ran the smoked-fish section; Mrs. Zabar cooked the prepared dishes. Their sons, who remain involved in what became a deli famous throughout the world, described their mother as the company's first maker of blintzes, potato salad, stuffed cabbage, and coleslaw. After it moved to the Upper West Side, Zabar's accomplished what the deli owners of an earlier era had only dreamed of: it became a market where multi-ethnic consumers crowded its narrow passageways to sample not only pastrami, kosher sausages, and smoked fish but also pasta salad and feta cheese.

In Michigan, the pasty became a simple but satisfying symbol of Great Lakes eating. A turnover of pie-like crust with filling, the pasty originated in Cornwall, England. Cornish miners then brought it with them to Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where Finns (who believed it to be an American dish, since Cornish miners, after all, spoke English) adapted it to their own tastes. The Finnish pasty of the Upper Peninsula contained beef, potatoes, onions, and carrots or rutabagas. Church women sold the first pasties as fundraisers, and the first commercially produced pasties appeared after World War II as bar food. Today pasties are widely available in specialty shops, bakeries, restaurants, bars, and grocery stores across northern Michigan, the Upper Peninsula, and upper Minnesota. It is as commonly eaten as the hamburger; a frozen version is even marketed to Michiganders who have retired to California and Florida.⁵⁰

In the Southwest, it was chili that came to define a new regional and creole Tex-Mex cuisine. Early Anglo visitors to San Antonio reported eating "hashes" and stews of meat and peppers dipped up by a spoon as early as 1828. Their meals came from Mexican cottages off the Military Plaza, where a visitor, Edward King, in 1874 assured readers that a "fat, swarthy Mexican mater-familias will place before you various savory compounds, swimming in fiery pepper, which biteth like a serpent; and the tortilla, a smoking hot cake, thin as a shaving, and about as eatable, is the substitute for bread. This meal, with the bitterest of coffee to wash it down

... will be an event in your gastronomic experience." Experts south of the border steadfastly denied that chili was a Mexican dish. But by the end of the 1870s and in the 1880s, entrepreneurial Mexican "chili queens" were selling the dish to miners, traders, soldiers, and market patrons from stands and long tables on the Military Plaza. In 1893 the World's Fair in Chicago introduced the meal to the nation, by hosting a booth that called itself the San Antonio Chili Stand. Chili quickly became a prime attraction for tourists to San Antonio and other Texas towns.⁵¹ When San Antonian Atlee B. Ayres visited New York, he learned that people there "remember our city because of the Chili Stands, the Menger Hotel and the Alamo."⁵² Chili was declared the state food of Texas in 1977. In the 1980s, *Favorite Recipes of Famous Texans*—a great favorite of Anglos—passed along chili recipes from Texans such as Lady Bird Johnson, Frank Tolbert, Bill Clements, and Ron Bird.

Consumers in German-dominated Cincinnati also made a chili concoction its new creole culinary symbol. Completely unrelated to the chili of San Antonio, Cincinnati chili is a meat sauce flavored with chili pepper, cinnamon, and all-spice. When served with spaghetti, it is called "two-way chili," but a hungry consumer can also have it three-way (with cheese), four-way (with onions added), or five-way (topped with beans). An immigrant from Macedonia, Tom Kiradjieff, invented the dish. Kiradjieff migrated to New York in the 1920s, where he first sold Coney Island hot dogs topped with Tex-Mex chili. When he moved to Cincinnati in 1922, he developed Cincinnati chili to attract new customers to his lunch stand. His chili had a flavor reminiscent of Balkan and eastern Mediterranean cooking (notably its combination of tomato, cinnamon, and all-spice). But no one in Cincinnati thought of Cincinnati chili as a Macedonian dish, nor did Kiradjieff market it as such.

The dish evolved as Kiradjieff worked with his multi-ethnic customers. The original decision to mix the sauce with spaghetti, and to make beans optional, was Kiradjieff's. In the 1930s his customers requested it be served more like the Italian spaghetti they knew, that is, with its sauce on top of the spaghetti, and with additional accompaniments as layers of topping.

By the 1940s, Kiradjieff and his family marketed Cincinnati chili from their chain of Empress Restaurants. In the 1950s, five brothers from Greece who had worked and trained in Kiradjieff's restaurants altered the

recipe somewhat and opened competing restaurants—the Skyline chain. Skyline then brought chili to the Kentucky suburbs of Cincinnati. Like pasties, frozen and packaged versions of Cincinnati chili sell to native Ohioans retired to Florida.⁵³

Thus, wherever large numbers of immigrants settled, cross-over buying and selling transformed regional creoles into twentieth-century forms. New Yorkers now ate “deli,” Jewish rye, and spaghetti, while Californians more often experimented with soy and dago red. New migrations added the “Mex” to Tex-Mex and other southwestern cuisines. In the Midwest, the modified central and northern European foodways of Germans, Bohemians, Finns, and Scandinavians defined a new regional cuisine based on pot roasts and casseroles, with their European “roux” (butter and flour) thickeners replaced by mushroom soup, and on yeast-risen baked goods like coffee breads and kolache.

The popular ethnic foods of the 1920s and 1930s were not those we know today. Ethnic food meant chow mein, not dim sum; spaghetti, not pizza; pastrami, not bagels; tamales, not fajitas. Restaurant and eating guides of the 1930s still misunderstood pizza (a toothsome “inch-thick, potato pan-cake, sprinkled with Parmesan cheese and stewed tomatoes”) and “beigels” (“hard-crust doughnuts”) but recommended both to prospective buyers.⁵⁴ Some enclave foods still remained in their enclaves, not having attracted cross-over consumers.

Recently arrived immigrants also developed cross-over economic niches by dominating the production, processing, or sale of foods unmarked by any obvious ethnic labels. Almost everywhere, for example, immigrants pioneered and dominated truck gardening of vegetables for multi-ethnic regional markets. As early as the 1720s, Germans specialized in providing New Orleans with cabbage, fruit, salads, greens, beans and peas, and fish. In Texas in the 1840s and 1850s, they developed truck gardening around port cities like Galveston and Indianola. In the 1890s Belgian farmers became truck specialists in San Antonio, and by 1910 they were able to sponsor the Famous Belgium Gardeners’ vegetable float in the annual Battle of the Flowers Parade.

In California, Chinese immigrants made up between half and three-

quarters of the cultivators of specialized vegetable crops in the early 1880s. Many had turned full-time to provisioning other miners, to escape hostility in the minefields. Men like Tu Charley of the Yban River basin in the 1890s peddled over a 100-mile territory the cucumbers, tomatoes, beans, melons, and produce he had raised. Others traveled smaller distances with baskets of produce on a bamboo pole balanced across their shoulders. In 1870 San Francisco had over a hundred Chinese truck gardeners; by 1880 Chinese truck gardeners were also prominent in Los Angeles and in the upper Sacramento Valley. Polly Lawrence, of the Italian Ghirardelli family, remembered that during her childhood a Chinese man came daily to the family home with his fresh produce.⁵⁵

Fishing often became an important niche, too, with immigrant fishermen marketing to a multi-ethnic urban market. In Tampa, Florida, Giovanni Savarese began a fishing fleet in 1885 that grew to 15 vessels and 150 smaller “smacks.” As the Italian population of Tampa increased (attracted to jobs in the cigar industry), Italian fishermen and fish markets proliferated; by 1920 there were 20 fish markets, directly marketing the fish of Tampa Bay. In San Francisco, the Chinese developed shrimp fishing and drying in several colonies around San Rafael, San Bruno, and San Mateo. They introduced the use of funnel-shaped traps for shrimping and fishing. At first, their market was their own countrymen in California and China. Once established, they also delivered fresh bay shrimp to San Francisco restaurants. In 1880 half of all California fishermen were Chinese; thereafter Italians (who made up 40 percent in 1880) increasingly replaced them. Most Italian fishermen were from Genoa and Sicily; Sicilians specialized in squid fishing.

In Texas and Minnesota, dairying became an important economic niche for northern Europeans. On the Great Plains, even in the midst of severe droughts, Swedish farmers raised more dairy cows and produced more milk than their American neighbors. Scandinavian and German farmers disparaged Americans for their neglect of haying and their willingness to go without milk while their dairy animals foraged for themselves in the winter. Dairying was a challenge to Europeans accustomed to more temperate climates, especially during the extreme heat and cold of Great Plains summers and winters. An English woman complained that “for two or three months the milk, freezing as soon as it is taken from the cows, affords no

cream, consequently no butter. It is nevertheless possible to obtain butter, by keeping the churn near the fire and churning cream and milk together," a method she found "exceedingly troublesome."⁵⁶ The child of a German noted that "on some hot days Mother sat down cellar with her churn which was barrel-shaped . . . During the summer months we'd have to keep the churn in a cool, dark place or it would dry out and leak."⁵⁷ In Minnesota, a Finnish child reported how she "packed butter in clean crocks, covering them with waxed paper which we secured with string. We poured rich cream into pint and quart bottles, separating the stacks of cardboard bottle caps that had to be pried apart and firmly pressed on."⁵⁸ In Fresno, California, Danes developed dairy farming and buttering; in Marin county, it was Swiss "milkers." None of these dairy experts marketed exclusively to their own kind, or to ethnic enclaves. Their dairying expertise allowed them to provision other milk-drinkers, too.

Similarly, in many American cities, Germans dominated baking. In Manhattan, between half and two-thirds of the city's bakers were Germans in the years between 1870 and 1890, and the same was true in San Francisco, where Marguerite Clausen's father had arrived from Germany at age 14. Throughout Clausen's childhood, family life revolved around his bakery, first in San Francisco, then, after the earthquake and fire, in multi-ethnic Sausalito, Fairfield, and Richmond. Of her father the baker, Clausen reported, "We didn't see much of him," for he got up early to bake, then delivered his goods, then went to sleep very early in order to rise again at an early hour. Her father used no machinery in his bakery until near the end of his career, in 1933, when he had begun using a mechanical mixer to prepare cakes.⁵⁹ Clausen's clients were not Germans: throughout the United States around 1900, Austrians, Alsatians, and Germans sold not their dark breads but the fine, white "Vienna bread" Americans preferred. With time and the mechanization of baking, Germans also formed an important contingent of workers in bread factories.

Unlike the German bakers, an even larger niche for cross-over immigrant workers failed to appear as food processors in census figures. These were domestic servants and cooks—fixtures of life in northern middle-class American families. In the South, domestics and cooks were African-American women. Elsewhere, immigrant women of many backgrounds, along with some Chinese and Japanese men, struggled to cook meals daily

for families who wanted familiar food, not the foods of the enclaves from which their workers had emerged.

Foreign-born domestics had to learn how to prepare American food—and often rather quickly, as their employers showed limited interests in the foods they already knew how to cook from home. One Mexican girl reported home, "You should see the way the americanos eat. They have a machine that makes ice cream and they eat it every night, after they have chicken or steaks . . . And they have an icebox . . . La señora is teaching me how to cook all the foods."⁶⁰

Special cookbooks prepared literate Chinese men and Finnish women for the challenge. The *Ch'u shu ta ch'uan Chinese and English Cookbook* also offered aid to the employer "who desires good things to eat" but suffers frustration because he is unable to talk "to the Chinese cook or because his Chinese cook does not know the methods of preparation." The cookbook provided bilingual recipes for 41 American puddings, 35 cakes, 25 soups, 60 meats, and 40 vegetables.⁶¹ There was not a single recipe for Chinese food among them.

In *Kokki-Kirja (Complete Directions for the Preparation of American Foods)*, Finnish domestics received directions in Finnish for 588 American-style recipes, listed by their English names; the cookbook also included a glossary of household terms.⁶² Again, no Finnish recipes appeared among the American ones.

Far from vast immigrant settlements and their enclave markets, and far from the kitchens of urban middle-class America, astonishingly small groups of immigrant businessmen in the American South established a visible niche as grocers and restaurateurs to native-born blacks and whites. In Mississippi, Chinese men fleeing West Coast discrimination against Asian laborers began selling groceries to poor blacks and whites in rural towns in the 1870s. They sold not dried squid or soy sauce but the staples of southern cuisines—cornmeal, fatback, crackers, beans. The same was true even in Charleston, with its African-American fishermen and street traders. In 1824 a German Lutheran church, a German "friendly society," and an Irish "Hibernian society" had joined Charleston's synagogue as symbols of the city's (limited) ethnic diversity. Charleston's first city directory, published that year, lists grocers and sellers of grog with Swedish, French, Scottish, Irish, and German names, scattered widely throughout

the city. By 1850 Germans (the largest group) almost completely dominated the import, wholesale, and retail grocery trade, and many of them sold to black customers. In a society where ownership of plantations defined wealth and status, immigrants instead pursued entrepreneurial paths to prosperity in food business. Apparently they encountered little competition from native whites, and the competition from slaves was not sufficient to prevent the creation of their own niche.

Charleston business directories after the Civil War reveal the tenacity of this ethnic niche. Germans still dominated bread and cake baking, candy and confection making, and the wholesale and retail grocery trades. Germans and Irish were well represented as butchers and (along with Italian- and Spanish-surnamed businessmen) as retailers of tropical fruits. Germans outnumbered others as importers of liquors and wines, while men with Irish names more often sold the beverages. Of the 13 restaurants in Charleston in 1869, Germans operated at least 8.

Typical of immigrants in the Charleston grocery trade was Otto Tieneman, who arrived in South Carolina in 1839 and went into business in 1841. By the 1880s Tieneman and his sons employed ten workers and did \$600,000 worth of business as provision dealers. At that time, an Irishman, James Cosgrove, together with his son, supplied the city's retailers with soda water, ginger ale, lager beer, ales, porters, mineral waters, and fine cigars; Cosgrove had arrived in 1852. A Charleston business booster during these years felt he had to single out two American grocers as "among the few native born Charlestonians engaged in any branch of the grocery or provision business in this city."

Even smaller groups of newly arriving immigrants challenged German and Irish dominance in the grocery and liquor trades after 1880. The Italian A. Canale, "Importer of foreign fruits and wholesale dealer in apples, potatoes, onions, lemons and nuts"—a native of Genoa—employed ten assistants in his \$100,000 business in 1884.⁶³ By 1910, fruit dealers in the city's directory were 10 percent Italian and Greek. Greeks quickly established retail groceries and restaurants as their preferred business niche. The first Greek opened a restaurant in Charleston around 1900. By 1910 Nick Stratakos and George A. Panuchopoulo operated Charleston's Academy Inn, which they advertised as "the best restaurant in Dixie."

They offered standard southern fare, while the nearby Globe Restaurant operated by "Geuissepe" Savarese offered the "Italian Plan . . . Spaghetti a Specialty." In 1910 Greeks ran 17, and Italians 5, of Charleston's 60 restaurants. During the 1920s Greeks began opening groceries, and by the 1950s, they operated 10 percent of the city's groceries and roughly a third of the city's restaurants, cafes, and lunchrooms.⁶⁴ Their customers included both black and white Charlestonians.

In this respect, Charleston was quite typical for much of the American South, where Greek immigrants began as hucksters of home-manufactured candies and then operated what might be the only ice cream parlors, candy stores, lunchrooms, and restaurants in small and medium-sized southern towns. Typical was Garifolos Zenos, who came to the United States in 1909 to work in his brother's candy store in the oil boom town of Sour Lake, Texas, and then opened his own ice cream and candy store in Port Arthur. Zenos's Confectionery Store became famous for its huge, decorative mirrors and its 24-foot onyx soda fountain. The path of the Greek immigrant Tom Anthony was not totally different: it first took him to Chicago to work in a factory and then to Atlanta, where he operated a fruit stand. After returning home to fight in Macedonia, Anthony settled in 1912 in San Antonio and opened the Manhattan Restaurant. Similarly, two brothers-in-law, George Petheriotes and Angelo Mytelen, first peddled fruit in St. Louis and sauerkraut in New Orleans, then operated a series of cafes in Hattiesburg, Gulfport, and Houston. In Houston, they then expanded into the wholesale coffee business with their sons.

In Alabama, Greek immigrants owned 90 percent of the state's restaurants. The Birmingham candy-seller Nicholas Christu, like many immigrant food retailers, had consciously settled where "there were no [other] Greeks," so as to avoid business competition.⁶⁵ But this of course meant that there were no Greek consumers either, and little familiarity with Greek food among native southerners. As a result, only a few of the many Greek restaurants in the American South offered Greek cuisine. Greek restaurants generally sold inexpensive, southern home-style cooking: Beef stew, dumplings, vegetables, macaroni and cheese, with an occasional gyros "sandwich" or Greek salad. In Charlotte, North Carolina, Greek restaurateurs sold lots of grits, but they eventually removed moussaka from

the menu, since few customers were interested. In nearby Monroe, a Greek owner reported, "Customers like Greek salad and baklava . . . but the best sellers are chicken tenders, beef and Italian food."⁶⁶ Greek businessmen prepared skordalia (olive oil and garlic) only for Greek kitchen workers and countermen.

Even in cities with substantial immigrant populations, like New York and Chicago, the sale of "American" foods from lunchstands and diners became a Greek niche. Diners had begun as wagons and carts that purveyed "chewed sandwiches" and other cheap meals round the clock in New England's factory districts in the 1870s and 1880s. After 1900, Greek immigrants helped transform them from streetcars into small trolley-like but permanent buildings that offered quick counter service at all hours of the day and night. In New York the only way to identify a Greek-owned diner or lunchstand might be the little blue paper cups decorated with the Parthenon and a frieze. Even today in diners, "You have to satisfy everyone," according to Charles Savva who came from Cyprus in 1973. A *New York Times* reporter found that his Harvest Diner in Westbury, Long Island, served everything from "pancakes to lobster tails, omelettes to spaghetti, moussaka to matzoh ball soup." Most of New York's 1,000 Greek-owned coffee shops and diners today still offer encyclopedia-sized menus and a gargantuan array of multi-ethnic desserts.⁶⁷ But most of their offerings are not Greek foods.

Greeks selling regional, or multi-ethnic, foods to multi-ethnic customers provide the most puzzling example of an ethnic niche in twentieth-century food markets. Why, after all, should 85 percent of Chicago's Loop restaurants be Greek-owned, as the historian Theodore Saloutos reported them to be in the 1950s? These were not men who had learned the restaurant trade in Greece. It seems equally inexplicable that among 956 Greek men surveyed in Chicago in the early twentieth century, mostly of peasant origin, 105 were waiters and cooks, 83 were operators of ice cream parlors, 55 were operators of restaurants, 24 were proprietors of fruit stores, 15 owned saloons, and 13 owned candy stores.⁶⁸ Consumers and other restaurateurs alike seemed very aware of the existence of this Greek economic niche. Thus, in the 1940s the German Catholic and Polish Jewish purchasers of Minneapolis's popular Schiek's Cafe worried over their pros-

pects: "What do we know about the restaurant business?" they asked themselves, and their public. "We are not Greek or Chinese so how can we be successful?"⁶⁹

One explanation for the development of ethnic niches outside enclave economies points to their origins in the business practices of immigrant entrepreneurs. Although ethnic family ownership and cooperation remained common in niche businesses, as they had been in enclave businesses, the real key to creating and expanding ethnic niches was wage labor recruited through ethnic channels. Wage labor in a niche restaurant or grocery store provided a cheap source of help for the proprietor, while providing a kind of apprenticeship for wage-earners eager to open their own businesses eventually.

Like enclave businesses, cross-over businesses generally began as family-based enterprises. In the restaurant partnership of Maria Sermolino's father with an older Italian woman chef, Sermolino's mother ran the cash register, and she and her sister helped bartenders make drinks and glued labels on wine bottles. On the other side of the country, in California, Chinese shrimp men called their businesses the "four family association," while an Italian described fishermen as "a lot of fish people together, all Italians, like a family."⁷⁰ Fishermen in San Francisco learned their trade— weaving nets, sailing, fishing—from their fathers, often beginning work at age 7 or 8. When fathers died, a partnership of brothers often carried on the family business.⁷¹

As family businesses grew, cross-over entrepreneurs eschewed bureaucratic and corporate hierarchy and sought to continue their personal contacts with their customers, usually on a cash basis. In San Francisco, Achille Paladini, a fisherman, had pants made with special pockets "that extended to his knees" in order to carry enough cash for a day's business. Although Paladini eventually operated a string of fish trucks, he worked alongside his children and employees until his death.⁷² German brewers, even the most wildly successful and wealthy, built "dynasties," not corporations. In St. Louis, Adolphus Busch got his start in large-scale brewing when he married Lilly, the daughter of Eberhard Anheuser. His son August

A. ran the family business after his father's death. August A. Busch's sons Adolphus III and Gussie (August, Jr.) headed Anheuser Busch through the 1930s and 1940s. In 1975, Gussie's son August III took over.⁷³

Not surprisingly, the intense cooperation among family members and co-ethnics brought criticism from American businessmen unable to enter an economic niche. In Minnesota, the Chippewa/Ojibway peoples had sold wild rice since their first encounters with European fur traders in the eighteenth century—when a sack of rice purchased two gallons of rum. For European homesteaders, rice became “a cheap article of diet . . . everybody likes,” selling for about four dollars a bushel in the 1850s.⁷⁴ Organized cooperatively, two to five extended families of kinsmen camped near the rice lakes, and a “rice chief” supervised harvesting to ensure that “what serves the rice is law; what harms the rice is illegal.” European farmers saw the celebration, singing, and dancing that accompanied cooperative harvesting as “unproductive.” For decades European-Americans sought legal access to rice lakes reserved by law or treaty for the Chippewa. Ethnic cooperation worked: Chippewa harvesters first marketed to a trader in Minneapolis or Bemidji; one, Harvey Ayer, worked intensively with the Mille Lacs Indians to this end in the 1930s, and in 1936 Schoch's Grocery Store in St. Paul advertised wild rice as a harvest-time special.⁷⁵

Cooperating California farmers also disturbed American businessmen with their “un-American” practices. Japanese who settled near Stockton's Wholesale Produce market at first rented individual stalls and received individually numbered plates to put on their produce wagons or trucks. This market was chaotic—a place where a Japanese child remembered that buyers “came out running, shouting orders to farmers,” producing “bedlam everywhere as the men yelled, honked, and gestured.” All that changed when Chiyo Shimamoto's father joined together with other farmers in a Japanese Vegetable Growers' Association. In the reorganized market, the Japanese growers had two rows of stalls, the Greek and Italian gardeners their own rows.⁷⁶ As late as 1943, John Brucato, the head of a West Coast Victory Garden Council and the operator of a Sebastopol ranch and winery, found himself accused of being “a lousy Sicilian Communist” when he created a market for farmers selling directly to consumers.⁷⁷

Ethnic niches in agriculture particularly struck—and puzzled—ob-

servers. By 1920 Japanese farmers raised 90 percent of snap beans; 50–90 percent of artichokes, canning beans, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, fall peas, spinach, and tomatoes; and 25–50 percent of asparagus, cabbage, cantaloupes, carrots, lettuce, onions, and watermelons. At that time they made up 3 percent of the farmers in California.⁷⁸ In Walla Walla, by contrast, onions were monopolized by Italians; in California's Central Valley Italian specialties included grapes, cabbages, and ultimately broccoli, garlic, and cauliflower.

Niches like these developed because bonds of ethnicity shaped labor recruitment, not just marketing. Chinese, Japanese, and Italians typically hired themselves out in gangs, working for a boss or subcontractor of their own ethnicity, who might also provide them with their food on the worksite. Italian family truck farmers operated boarding houses for their employees, and they preferred Italians. Employers leasing large tracts and needing hired harvesters to supplement family labor almost always turned to contractors, and thus immigrant harvesters, of their own background. One student of Japanese agriculturalists claimed that Japanese employers could hire laborers cheaper than other groups since ethnic ties eliminated competition among labor contractors.⁷⁹ Ethnic ties spread agricultural expertise and linked wage-earner, small-producer, and retailing cooperatives into a vertically integrated ethnic chain of production that ultimately delivered to a multi-ethnic and American marketplace.

Labor recruitment through ethnic channels produced ethnic niches with a few visible “kings” and large numbers of humbler producers. Chinese farmers in the California Delta cultivated tracts of up to 500 acres, employing Chinese labor. Typical was Chin Lung, who came to California in 1882 at the age of about 18 and worked for a rice importer while learning English. Because he spoke English, he could negotiate leases for his ambitious laborers as well as provide housing and food for hundreds of Chinese laborers at harvest time. Eventually known as “the potato king,” Chin Lung had his equivalent in the Japanese farming community—in “potato king” George Shima.⁸⁰

Labor recruitment worked a similar effect in the urban restaurant trade. The three immigrant groups establishing niches in restaurants—Chinese, Italians, and Greeks—included large numbers of male sojourners, who created a high demand for boarding houses and restaurants in enclave

economies and who also sought jobs there. In the restaurant trade, as Sermolino noted, Italian-style service (in contrast to American cafeterias and automats) generated as many as twenty dishes per eater, thus providing ample employment for low-wage waiters, busboys, and dishwashers. All were immigrants recently arrived from Italy; many lived behind the restaurants, where they also ate. Many wage earners in these humble positions saw their employment as an opportunity to learn the restaurant trade, and some went on to start restaurants of their own.

Explaining why Greeks dominated the diner business in New York, Peter Drakoulis (whose grandfather founded the Empire Atlantic Supplies Company to furnish paper goods and chinaware to diners) also emphasized the influence of labor recruitment: "Someone came over from Greece, worked as a counterman, and then brought over his brother." In a pattern familiar in the South's candy stores and cafes, George Fallis arrived in New York in 1930 at age 18 to work as a dishwasher in a restaurant owned by his father's brother; two months later he became the chef's assistant, then the short-order cook, then apprentice to the baker. In 1940 he opened his own diner.⁸¹

Enclave foods, enclave businessmen, and American consumers of a wide variety of backgrounds all crossed over culinary boundaries in large numbers in the early years of the twentieth century. Crossing over produced new, regional creole foods; it also created ethnic niches in multi-ethnic, regional food markets. Wage labor recruited from within the ethnic community created considerable competition in these niches, but it also gave businessmen the capital and know-how they needed to spring out of their enclave economies and into a wider multi-ethnic market.

Cross-over businessmen usually "carried ethnicity with them," so their business niches gave regional marketplaces an ethnic flavor, even in the culturally homogeneous South. Ethnicity was no longer confined to enclave economies where consumers bought from producers and retailers of the same background. Ethnicity had instead become a dimension of multi-ethnic cross-over exchanges.

Ethnic foods also left their enclaves, to be purchased by a wide range of American consumers. They, too, often remained marked by an ethnic

label, even as they gradually found mixture with other ingredients in multi-ethnic creoles. The ethnic origins of foods like pasties, deli, and chili remained identifiable, even when people of a variety of backgrounds ate them, alone or in combination with other ethnic foods.

Both the ethnic cultural conservatives we first viewed in their nineteenth-century enclaves and Americans with deep historical roots reaching back to the colonial era participated in the cross-over exchanges of the early twentieth century. Immigrants and minorities seemed eager to balance their search for familiar foods (in enclave groceries or in the form of processed flour and meat) with the pursuit of pleasure, recreation, and novelty through cross-over eating. Native-born American eaters with little sense of their own ethnic roots were as intrigued by novelty as were the enclave conservatives. Different consumers sought different identities by eating new foods: robber barons and middle-class New York Jews wanted their own versions of cosmopolitanism; Bowery boys and Italian mothers wanted camaraderie and sensory pleasures heightened by lager beer; bohemians wanted hedonism and "wine, women and song"—the pleasures they believed Victorian middle-class culture forbade them.

With businessmen and consumers of so many backgrounds regularly shuttling back and forth across ethnic boundaries, and with new creoles and ethnic markets emerging not just in cosmopolitan New York but in Cincinnati and Charleston, the meanings of ethnic, regional, and national identities entered a period of intense scrutiny and confusion in the early twentieth century. Eventually, the nation itself had to come to terms with its many cultural and economic cross-over residents, and try to determine what—if anything—defined Americans of the twentieth century.

But not before nativism and xenophobia—both prominent features of U.S. politics in the early twentieth century—had expressed themselves in opinions about the foods Americans should consume. Between 1880 and 1940, a veritable "food fight" erupted over what it meant not only to be, but to eat, American. Here again, however, the preference for variety and novelty would win over those intellectuals and home economists who would define patriotic eating by the regional eating habits of the New England past.