

Graduate Association for **Food Studies**

Title: Book Review of *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America*

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materialist and culturalist epistemologies, which traditionally have expressed opposing perspectives concerning how consumption practices are shaped and maintained. Is milk consumption a result of adaptations resulting from its nutritive value and the role of lactose (im)persistence in populations, or did lactose persistence arise from cultural ideologies shaping its prevalence? Wiley argues that the answer is both—the biological effects of milk and its role in the cultural imagination have together resulted in geographically specific consumption patterns.

What *Cultures of Milk* does not address, as Wiley discloses in the Introduction, is how these same biocultural processes have shaped dairy production. Production and consumption form a dialectic relationship; one cannot exist without the other. Wiley gives tantalizing hints concerning the role of production in both locations. For example, regarding state promotion of dairy consumption, she ties the U.S. school lunch program to the need to dispose of surplus dairy production. India, on the other hand, struggles to produce enough milk to meet demand, and has no comparable school or government programs. Given that India and the United States are two of the world's largest milk producers, this is a topic ripe for further analysis. Additionally, Wiley notes that Southeastern Asia is a little-studied region in terms of dairying practices. Further research on this topic will help close this gap in the literature.

In *Cultures of Milk*, Wiley asks the reader to consider the broader ramifications of telling children to “drink their milk.” She encourages us to consider the meanings we digest along with our dairy, and their biological, cultural, individual, and national ramifications. Wiley explores these views past the limits of “bio-ethnocentrism,” the normative establishment of Western European dairy practices inherent in many previous analyses of milk consumption (106). She inspires scholars to ask how specific historical, biological, economic, and political contexts shape dairying worldwide. In short, Wiley illuminates a path for those wishing to explore the distinctive ways in which biology and culture come together to shape lived experiences across the globe.

BOOK REVIEW | AMANDA MILIAN

High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America *Jessica B Harris*

New York: Bloomsbury. 2011. ix, 304 pp.

The author of nearly a dozen cookbooks and a recent inductee into the James Beard Foundation's Who's Who of Food and Beverage in America, Jessica B. Harris is among the top scholars of foodways in the African Diaspora. In *High on the Hog*, Harris constructs an elegant narrative history that connects the culinary experiences of the African and American continents to show how African Americans shaped the country around them. Harris disputes the portrayal of foods associated with slaves as “unhealthy, inelegant, and hopelessly out of sync with the culinary canons that define healthy eating today” (1). She discusses not only rural Southern fare, but also the elegant feasts that African American cooks prepared for the wealthy. These two distinct strands of the African American culinary experience guide the narrative. Ultimately, Harris emphasizes African Americans' culinary ingenuity, their ability to overcome adversity, and the significant role they played in the development of American cuisine, manners, and taste.

Moving chronologically and topically, *High on the Hog* offers a broad narrative of the origins and innovations of the African American culinary journey. Each chapter contains three parts: the introduction uses the author's personal experiences as a lead-in to the main subject, which is a topical analysis of African American contributions to American society and culture; finally, the chapter closes with an examination of the food of the period. Harris convincingly demonstrates how the diaspora built culinary connections between Africa and America. She walks the reader through African markets and traditional African and European dishes and cooking techniques. Through the Middle Passage, African slaves brought their culinary techniques and African tastes to America. After a somewhat superfluous “arrival story” for the many cultures on the North American continent, including the

Spanish, French, Dutch, and English, Harris relates how each interacted with the Native Americans and arriving Africans (46). Harris's comparison the culinary habits of Native Americans and Africans, as two "agricultural societies" whose "daily life was organized around the hunting and gathering of food," is short, but intriguing (53).

Harris's most compelling arguments come from her analysis of slave cooks and their contributions to American cuisine. She divides the African culinary tradition into two strands and distinguishes between the emerging Europeanized "elite" cuisine and that of traditional African heritage. Despite this division, both contribute to the blending of culinary tastes in America. The cooks in the kitchens of wealthy whites, or "slavery's elite," shape one thread (68). Through their position in the owner's house, slaves could influence the foods served at the table and helped create a creolized diet (71). Harris uses biographies of the prominent slave chefs, Hercules and James Hemings, to illustrate not only the chefs' struggles in bondage, but also how their skill in preparing European-style meals provided them with luxuries rarely afforded to other slaves. The other thread relates to free and enslaved urban caterers and vendors. They used their skills as cooks to create entrepreneurial opportunities and transform their African culinary heritage into marketable American dishes. In the post-Emancipation period, Harris contends, the two distinctive strands of African American culinary history solidified into the "basic African-influenced" fare of the less prosperous and the "European-oriented offerings" of the wealthy (162-163). Representatives of the African-influenced strand, including Black cowboys, the first African American cookbook authors, Harlem street vendors, and professionally trained culinary experts, all used food to secure a place in American society. Mary Ellen Pleasant, a representative of the latter of the two strands, moved west looking for opportunities and used "culinary know-how" to prepare and serve the types of elaborate meals desired by the white upper classes and the "newly affluent" (153). Fueled by necessity, all of these groups drew upon their culinary heritage and the

practices common in African markets.

These two threads become more complex in the mid-twentieth century. The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s brought an "increasing internationalism and growing awareness of self in the African American community" (213). By the 1970s, class no longer served as the primary factor in African American food choices, and instead, people across classes chose foods that "reflected a newly discovered pride in African roots and international connections" (215-216). African American cuisine became increasingly diverse. Harris concludes her narrative as she began it, by asserting that African Americans should receive acknowledgement for their integral part in America's culinary character and that the stigma attached to "slave food" is ill deserved.

This book's narrative structure seamlessly weaves together individual stories with the broad trends of history. Her range of source material, including city directories, cookbooks, journals, oral histories, literary works, and secondary literature, help Harris tell a myriad of tales. However, historians will feel frustrated by the lack of endnotes and the inclusion of only a select bibliography in the "Further Reading" section. Nonetheless, readers will appreciate Harris's inclusion of twenty-three recipes at the back of the book, including "Gumbo," "Son of a Gun Stew," and "Grandma Harris's Greens," as well as a list of selected African American cookbooks. Anyone with a general interest in culinary history, or the history of African Americans, should appreciate Harris's contribution to the field and her skill as a writer.

BOOK REVIEW | STEPHANIE BOLAND

Pure and Modern Milk: An Environmental History since 1900 *Kendra Smith-Howard*

New York: Bloomsbury. 2011. ix, 304 pp.

Pure and Modern Milk: An Environmental History since 1900 is a cogent study of dairy production from the turn of the twentieth century to the