

Graduate Association for **Food Studies**

Title: Review of “Sowing the Seeds of Victory: American Gardening Programs of World War I” by Rose Hayden-Smith

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The editors argue that commensal acts are essential for the integration of a society and that commensality is undeniably one of the most important articulations of human sociality. To some degree, this book is successful in its aim, but it perhaps lacks some depth and development. Its aim is broad and sweeping, and the articles cover just a few examples and could use more developed arguments.

The book does a nice job of giving a basic overview of the ideas about commensality and methods used to study it in the social sciences and the humanities. One thing this study of commensality lacks is a look at dining alone—the opposite of commensality. With such an intense focus on eating together, there must be some modern repercussions for eating alone, and perhaps including this type of research could temper the goals of the book overall. Commensality studies could be advanced with a consideration of what happens with the commensal unit falls apart or when people are forced or choose to eat alone. Apart from this shortfall, this introduction to commensality is useful for those who have a basic understanding of food studies and would be particularly useful for students and academics in the social sciences who seek a broad view of commensality. Those with more advanced knowledge might find the articles lacking in depth. Overall, this volume shows us just how vast the study of commensality is and how it continues to fascinate researchers from various fields around the world.

BOOK REVIEW | ANASTASIA DAY

*Sowing the Seeds of Victory:
American Gardening Programs of
World War I*
Rose Hayden-Smith

Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. 2014. x, 213 pp.

Rose Hayden-Smith's inaugural book, *Sowing the Seeds of Victory*, contextualizes the World War I war garden efforts within various progressive reform agendas and situates home front gardens as crucial models for localized, nutrition-oriented food movements for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Hayden-Smith argues that production of material food was secondary to the production of intangible social goods that reformers hoped to harvest from the soil: Americanization, women's rights, a modernized American civic realm, urban beautification, public health, and more. The particular focus of these efforts, in Hayden-Smith's telling, was children and youth; there, reformers hoped, was

the most fertile ground for growing social change.

Hayden-Smith studies two national gardening programs: the National War Garden Commission (NWGC), responsible for the iconic community and backyard gardens, and the United States' School Garden Army (USSGA), which operated primarily within the public school system. She also examines the Women's Land Army, which funneled women workers to understaffed farming operations. Her final institution of interest is the Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women, a pioneering center for academic research oriented toward female empowerment and employment in the agricultural sector. Additionally, Hayden-Smith examines the role visual imagery and propaganda played in all of these efforts. The final chapter discusses the impact of the World War I gardening ethos on American food systems into the interwar period and especially on the World War II food front; a prescriptive epilogue follows.

One of the strongest points of Hayden-Smith's historical analysis is her argument about historical memory. She hypothesizes that gardens were put to the service of self-consciously modern, Progressive Era goals, but the imagery surrounding gardens often drew upon America's past. While the prominence of gardening as a civic, patriotic, and uplifting activity was new, it was shrouded in stories of America's productionist past and peopled with images of yeoman farmers and founding fathers. Gardening advocates saw no tension between the backward-looking lens of garden propaganda and the unprecedented expansion of the regulatory state, the growing role of corporations in public life and celebrations of industrial, urban modernity. These gardens looked both backward to a simpler past and sought to build a modern citizenry and a progressive nation for the future.

Sowing the Seeds of Victory casts a wide and compelling historiographic net, illustrating the connection between war gardens and environmental history, women's history, political history, history of consumption, agricultural history, history of health/nutrition, and progressive ideology. It joins a recent wave of books from other scholars interested in food and war on American home fronts, including Cecelia Gowdy-Wygant's *Cultivating Victory*, a gender-based analysis of America farms and gardens during both World Wars, and Amy Bentley's *Eating for Victory*, an earlier book on World War II food and the politics of domesticity. Hayden-Smith's ambitions are broader than either of these antecedent texts; rather than choose any one analytic lens, she seeks to firmly embed gardens within the mainstream progressive social and political currents that characterize the early American twentieth century.

Hayden-Smith's primary goal is to cultivate the American landscape with twenty-first-century gardens in the pattern of World War I "Victory Gardens" (a posthumous appellation, as Hayden-Smith notes). *Sowing the Seeds of Victory* is written for a public audience and has an explicit activist bent; the academic apparatus of footnotes and extensive bibliography are confined to the back of the paperback. The conclusion includes a list of ten items of action for food activists today, accessible for both the uninitiated and the Greenpeace warrior. The twenty-first-century American public is intensely interested in food systems, judging by the meteoric rise of Michael Pollan, Mark Bittman, and the revival of the cult of Alice Waters; this book seeks to capitalize on that interest among a variety of audiences.

Hayden-Smith envisions a food future grounded in youth education, localized food systems, urban gardening, and reorganized crop classifications to promote vegetable produce over cash-crop commodities like soy and corn. Some of these recommendations are in keeping with her World War I subjects (emphasis on children's education and nutrition), and others are not (school lunch programs, which began in the 1930s). This raises questions about how we use history; for example, does her vision of the future include a generation of small-scale farmers oriented toward diversified market production, actively dying out in the World War I era? Or is her vision one of family production for domestic consumption across the American populace, as in Victory Gardens—or a combination of both? Unfortunately, Hayden-Smith leaves history behind in her prescriptive conclusion, so the reader is left to wonder.

While the book has been criticized for its presentist slant, simply raising these questions about how to practically apply history is valuable in and of itself (not to mention the questions raised about the future of food systems). While Hayden-Smith's activism may depart and arguably distract from her history at times, she provides an example for young scholars of one way to combine activism and academia within a book aimed at public audiences. Any undergraduate class on American history or food history would benefit from seeing how the past is relevant to the problems of today as well as from Hayden's portrayal of the World War I home front. Ultimately, blending the past with contemporary politics seems appropriate here. In her own activism, Hayden-Smith continues very much in the vein of the Progressive Era reformers who appropriated America's history of gardening for modernist agendas ranging from Americanization to women's rights; likewise, Hayden-Smith seizes upon Progressive Era garden history to promote a twenty-first-century future.

BOOK REVIEW | M. RUTH DIKE

Oil for Food: The Global Food Crisis and the Middle East Eckart Woertz

New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. iii, 268 pp.

Eckart Woertz discusses various courses of action that governments in the Persian Gulf took in order to improve their countries' food security after the 2008 global food crisis in *Oil for Food*. The extremely well-researched book takes a historical and political economic approach to examine food security in Gulf countries at a regional and national level. Throughout the book, Woertz moves from the origins of food security concerns in the Middle East during World War II to various efforts to become self-sufficient through mechanized agriculture; later he traces agro-investments in developing nations from the 1970s to the present. Ultimately, Woertz argues that Gulf food security hinges on Gulf countries' ability to pay for external food imports, rather than self-sufficiency through agriculture, which has proven untenable due to water scarcity.

Chapter one discusses the current food security issues in the Gulf—mainly the rising prices of food on the international market, the importance of low food prices for political legitimacy in the Gulf, lack of water for domestic agriculture, lowering water tables, and the import dependence of food items by country. In part one, chapters two through four give a twentieth-century history of food security in the region. Setting the stage for future food security concerns, chapter two explains the food shortages before World War II and famines in the Gulf, which were only averted during the war due to supplies from the Allied Middle East Supply Center in Cairo. In chapter three, Woertz analyzes the industrialization of agriculture in the Gulf after World War II, emphasizing the use of irrigation and mechanization. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, Saudi Arabia tried to become self-sufficient in wheat consumption with the launch of various industrial farm projects. Chapter four focuses on food as a political weapon, mainly in relation to US-Middle East relations. The US withdrew subsidized food aid from the Food for Peace program in the 1960s to influence Egyptian foreign policy, threatened food embargos after the Arab oil boycott in the 1970s, and considered a "Grain OPEC" to increase its political leverage. However, in the 1980s, the US tried to distance itself from its former policies and threats by depoliticizing food trade in hopes of stimulating commerce. The UN's decision to embargo Iraq during the 1990s posed