GETTING PEOPLE TO WISH WHAT THEY NEED
How the United States Government Used Public Relations Strategies
to Communicate Food Policy during World War II, 1941-1945

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how the United States federal government used public relations to improve the diets of everyday Americans during World War II. The government invested in several years of research, led by Margaret Mead, to understand the competing forces that influence dietary habits, choice, and folkways. Information about healthy eating was distributed to media and food companies along with other messages about rationing restrictions and compliance. A vestige of that time that still exists today is the USDA’s Recommended Dietary Allowances. This study examines cookbooks, newspaper and magazine articles as examples of how nutrition information was presented. The study finds that the government chose not to prioritize nutrition messages as part of their overall PR strategy, but the messages were embraced by private industry and integrated into promotional materials. The addition of this story to public relations history challenges current PR histories as it demonstrates a comprehensive campaign that integrated research, planning, implementation, and evaluation of those efforts.
GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Forty percent of draftees were rejected from service in World War II because they suffered from malnutrition-related diseases. This inspired the government to find a way to encourage Americans to eat healthier, and led to the development of the Recommended Dietary Allowances. A team of social scientists led by Margaret Mead researched how culture might influence eating choices, and this paper investigates that research as well as how nutrition information was communicated in newspapers, magazines and cookbooks. This paper finds that while the government did not prioritize nutrition messages, corporate food producers integrated the government’s nutrition guidelines into their own advertising enthusiastically.
Dedication

To Sam and Caroline, my inspiration every day.
Acknowledgments

I was only able to complete this project with the support of teachers, librarians, archivists, friends, and family.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1940, a year before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, a committee of some of the United States’ most prestigious social scientists gathered with a single purpose: to see if they could study people’s food habits and understand those motivations well enough to teach Americans to eat healthier. The group was called the Committee on Food Habits, was led by anthropologist Margaret Mead, and included notable scholars Kurt Lewin, Rensis Likert, Ruth Benedict, and Curt Richter. While the first step of research was for dietitians to determine national nutrition standards, the essential second step fell these social scientists. In the introduction to their report, *The Problem of Changing Food Habits*, published in 1943, anthropologist Carl Guthe explained their role as “finding the most effective ways and means of adjusting habits to needs, of getting people to wish what they need.” More simply, the committee hoped that by understanding the social and cultural factors at play, Americans could make healthier choices about what they wanted—or wished—to eat.

Food rationing in the United States during World War II was the first time the American government placed restrictions on what Americans could eat by regulating specific commodities. Government officials knew the policies would be difficult and controversial, and they employed public relations tactics to help Americans understand and comply with the policies. But the government’s goals went beyond trying to educate about how to weather short-term circumstances caused by war; government officials also wanted to address public health issues brought about by malnutrition and poor dietary
habits, an area of research funded by the government since the early twentieth century. Increased communication from the government due to wartime conditions, and the addition of rationing which limited the food supply, created the perfect environment to inform and educate the public about food. The ultimate goal, articulated by Margaret Mead in *The Problem of Changing Food Habits* (1943), was to “devise such a system of education, communication, and change which will link the daily habits of the people to the insight of the laboratory.”

**What We Ate in the War**

Prescriptions for better habits do not always fit neatly with the expectations created by traditions and customs. Folkways collide with plans, recommendations, and advice from outsiders. When it comes to food and what people ate, trying to determine what people wanted and what they knew can only be hinted at by what is left behind, and what was kept. Clues are in cookbooks, popular press clippings, and handwritten recipes to provide insight into what people wanted, shared, or felt obliged to cook.

Two handwritten recipes for war cake provide a clue as to how a home cook might balance the desire to make a sweet and celebratory cake when restrictions and shortages made it difficult.

War Cake, no eggs--

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{3}{4} & \text{ flour} \\
\frac{1}{4} & \text{ butter or margarine} \\
\frac{1}{4} & \text{ dem: Sugar} \\
\frac{1}{2} & \text{ sultanas} \\
\frac{1}{2} & \text{ milk, enough to moisten well} \\
1 & \text{ teaspoonful bi-carbonate} \\
2 & \text{ tablespoonfuls vinegar}
\end{align*}
\]

Blend in bi-carb: in milk and vinegar and mix in cake.
Eggs were not rationed in the United States in World War II, but were sometimes unavailable due to military demands, most notably from autumn 1943 until spring 1944. Sugar, which was rationed for home use, was uneven in its availability. People who did home canning would be allocated extra sugar rations, and this availability would be seasonal with fruit crops. Home cooks were frustrated that commercial bakeries were given more favorable status. This recipe recommends the use of raw, or demerara sugar, which may have been easier to obtain than refined white sugar. Sultanas, which are raisins from white grapes, are used to increase sweetness and moisture, but they would have made the cake very dense, even with less than a cup of flour. The vinegar and bicarbonate of soda react to give the cake enough lift to rise, as the raisins would make the batter heavier. It can only be assumed that the recipe’s writer, or recipient, knew how long to cook the cake, in what kind of pan, and at what temperature.

**War Cake**

2 Cups Brown sugar  
2 Cups hot water  
2 tablespoons of lard  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 package seedless raisins  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
1 teaspoon cloves  
Boil all of the ingredients  
5 minutes after they begin to boil  
when cold add 1 teaspoon soda  
dissolved in one teaspoon hot water  
and three cups flour  
Bake in two loaves about 1 hour

This second war cake recipe replaces butter or margarine with lard, excludes eggs, but has generous amounts of sweetener with brown sugar and raisins. How many raisins constituted a package, so how generously they may have been distributed throughout the
cake is unknown. The recipe’s author also assumes the reader knows the oven temperature. Although not included in this recipe’s instructions, this quick bread-like fruitcake was often cooked and sent overseas in soldier care packages, and instructions recommended that the cake sit for a week or more to “cure.” These substitution cakes were not unique to the 1940s. Similar cakes, sometimes called steam cakes, were cooked during World War I and the Great Depression, as they provided options for home cooks who wanted to provide a homemade sweet but faced limitations in the ingredients they could afford or obtain.7

Something as simple as a handwritten cake recipe may not seem connected to government public relations during World War II, but the recipes provide some insight as to how nationwide government policies influenced daily life. Many public relations histories have been written by, and about, those with power and influence. This thesis explores a domestic government program, the research behind it, and how the program was reflected in media, specifically newspapers, magazines, and cookbooks.

Expanding Public Relations History

The history of public relations in the United States largely focuses on how corporations manage their reputations with their stakeholder publics or primary audiences. This is due to many business-academic relationships and academics with prior business experience and has resulted in a largely corporate-focused body of scholarship in PR.8 In the last twenty years, public relations scholars have worked to identify gaps in the canon of public relations history and challenged older narratives. These scholars demonstrated that the work of social movements, governments, nonprofits, religious organizations, and high-profile individuals also contain important insights into public
relations. For the purposes of this paper, public relations is defined with Russell and Lamme’s explanation, “a person, campaign, or program with high strategic intent and the intended public has a high level of agency.”

Some scholars questioned whether public relations can be applied to efforts that occurred before the term “public relations” was commonly understood; there is also debate as to whether public relations should refer specifically to the profession of communication and relationship management, or provide a more expansive view. Tom Watson argues that these earlier persuasive strategies should be called proto-PR, as the work shaped and influenced what is now called public relations. Scholars disagree whether practices that are similar to public relations, but not the work of professionals, should be included in the scholarship of the field. Bentele argues that PR is an organizational function that developed as a tool for organizations to manage relationships with their publics, but this excludes outside groups who implemented similar strategies. Expanding the literature to include the work of other groups, like activists and social movements, adds to the understanding of how persuasive information and relationship management is present in many realms.

Public opinion is a foundational element to a functioning democracy, and in the United States, American citizens are stakeholders. Government in America has changed and expanded its scope and purpose since the country’s founding. During Franklin Roosevelt’s presidential administration, the role and mission of federal government expanded exponentially. The messages that the government of that era chose to communicate to its citizens, how the government approached crafting, distributing, evaluating, and responding to those messages, represented a change in the role and
purpose of government, and how the government used and implemented elements of public relations. To ignore the methods of how the government communicates—large and small—would be a significant omission in the larger context of the history of public relations.

This thesis examines how the United States federal government attempted to improve Americans’ dietary habits during World War II when government policy rationed food. It examines the research behind this public health campaign, public relations strategies the government used to spread their food-related messages, media coverage, and nutrition information in cookbooks. This study contributes to the historiography of public relations by expanding public relations (PR) beyond a corporate narrative which has dominated most of PR’s history.

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1 Guthe, Carl. History of the Committee on Food Habits, 10.
3 “War Cake, No Eggs.” MS 2017-029 Military and Wartime Cookery Collection, World War II Recipes (Handwritten) Box 1, Folder 11. Virginia Tech Special Collections.
5 Collingham, Lizzie. Taste of War.
6 “War Cake.” MS 2017-029 Military and Wartime Cookery Collection, World War II Recipes (Handwritten) Box 1, Folder 11. Virginia Tech Special Collections.
Chapter 2: Public Relations Historiography and Theoretical Issues

Much of the scholarship on public relations history focuses on corporate and business narratives. This focus perpetuates a linear narrative of development that begins with a corrupt press agent, like P.T. Barnum, who would manipulate media and dominate headlines with half-truths intended to further his own selfish aims. Studies of PR evolve into a two-way symmetrical model where both parties listen and respond to one another, promoting understanding and mutual respect.\(^\text{15}\) Casting public relations in this light and telling only the story of a profession borne of corporate need ignores how religions, social movements, governments, nonprofits, and other entities have communicated their needs and managed relationships with their stakeholders and publics.\(^\text{16}\)

One dominant figure in American public relations history is Edward Bernays. A consummate self-promoter, Bernays wrote several popular treatises on public opinion and public relations in which he featured himself prominently. Bernays also loomed large in the mythos of public relations in America during the twentieth century because he lived through most of it—he died in 1995 at age 103. In 1923, Bernays wrote “Crystallizing Public Opinion,” in which he lauded himself as a father of public relations and discussed his influence in the corporate realm.\(^\text{17}\) Bernays characterized himself as a liberal intellectual and thought little of the American public, calling them “human herds.”\(^\text{18}\) He considered himself a benevolent, socially responsible, behind-the-scenes wire-puller.\(^\text{19}\) He was unabashed about connecting himself to the work of his uncle, Sigmund Freud.\(^\text{20}\) Bernays even convinced New York University to establish an early college course in public relations, which he taught despite only having an undergraduate degree in agriculture.\(^\text{21}\)
Bernays’ 1956 article “Public Relations: A Short History” continued to promote the supremacy of public relations and corporate influence (and himself). In that essay, Bernays acknowledged the broader public relations work of social movements and in the government. He discussed the establishment of the Committee on Public Information during World War I (in which he played a role) and the Office of War Information during World War II. Despite these inclusions, the corporate dominance and influence in the study of PR persisted.22

Scott Cutlip devoted his long academic career to chronicling and expanding the history of public relations. Much of his scholarship was devoted to an image repair strategy to PR to counteract the narrative that PR is a corrosive element in society, repeated in many other academic disciplines.23 His work also perpetuated Bernays’ earlier myths. The author of several sweeping histories on public relations, Cutlip acknowledged the significance of the government, nonprofit, and higher education influencing public relations in some of his writing, but he did not avail himself of many sources.24 His most influential work amplified the corporate narrative, as he drew from written histories of Bernays and others, as well as developed corporate partnerships that supported his academic work.25

The work of influential Harvard Business School professor Alfred Chandler also perpetuated the corporate-focused public relations narrative. Chandler’s award-winning business histories explored the global dominance of American industry and inspired many other scholarly works.26 Chandler’s work looms large in business history and continues the flawed narrative of American dominance and public relations as a tool only used by business.27

Heavily influenced by Cutlip’s teaching and scholarship, James Grunig and Todd Hunt developed what they considered an evolution of public relations. They established the four models of public relations in 1984, which they believed provided an evolution of public relations
as a profession from a seedy, unseemly, manipulative strategy to a profession based on mutual understanding, consideration, and communication. The four models representation is similar to Bernays’ and Cutlip’s depictions of the evolution of public relations.

In the four models, Grunig and Hunt identified and defined what they saw as four eras of evolution in public relations as a professional field:

1) **Press agentry and publicity**: typified by people like P.T. Barnum in the post-Civil War-era, with a goal of attention and persuasion; truthfulness and public concern was not a priority.

2) **Public information model**: a one-way asymmetrical communication that arose in the early twentieth century, founded on the belief that public relations professionals should provide truthful and accurate information about their clients, like a press release that includes information a company feels is important, but does not consider the needs or interests of its audience. Communicators may persuade and even mislead their audiences, but this is usually not the intent.

3) **2-way asymmetrical model**: founded on the belief that public opinion could be engineered for the good of society in much the same way it could be engineered for evil purposes. Much of the social science theory supporting this model came from Bernays, and emerged after World War I. The power of decision makers to determine what is “good” or “bad” for society is unanswered. Grunig and Hunt called it “scientific persuasion.”

4) **2-way symmetrical model**: values a give-and-take relationship between organizations and their stakeholder publics. Also supports the idea that public relations is a give-and-take, where practitioners represent the client to the
organization in addition to representing the organization to the client. The 2-way symmetrical model is an aspirational ideal of public relations, and is the foundation of excellence theory, a dominant theory of public relations practice today.\textsuperscript{32}

Public relations history in the United States largely repeats this linear narrative that focuses on the contributions of dominant individuals or case-study campaigns, while other perspectives, configurations, and theories have been excluded.\textsuperscript{33} The simplicity and easy narrative of the four models is still touted as how public relations has developed in the United States.\textsuperscript{34} The history of the practice of PR is much more dynamic and uneven. In the current era of fake news and the significance of one voice influencing millions, this generic view of PR is no longer relevant. Instead, the past 100 years of PR was neither progressive nor consistent. Employing a broader definition of who can practice public relations, and who publics may be, enriches understanding of the profession and its scholarship.

Recent scholarship has challenged the narrative, approaches, and definition of public relations.\textsuperscript{35} One theory that expands the definition of public relations argues that it is part of a larger history of human communication, and has evolved alongside journalism.\textsuperscript{36} Public relations can also be considered a layer within media history.\textsuperscript{37} According to Karen Miller Russell, political and social histories demonstrate the use of public relations, and she argues that the field still would have emerged even if big business had not.\textsuperscript{38} As efforts to communicate and persuade publics have existed and evolved throughout history, it is important to examine how public relations functioned and how persuasive efforts were integrated within a period of examination that may not include traditional media history.\textsuperscript{39}
Russell and Margot Opdycke Lamme took a new, expansive approach to PR historiography by creating four large sectors—religion, politics and government, business, and nonprofit/education/reform—to categorize public relations that covers centuries. Their analysis resulted in five dominant motivations for engaging with publics: profit, recruitment, legitimacy, agitation, and advocacy. While this expansive view creates a much broader historical field for public relations, there is still conflict and blurriness of motivation and intent within each subsection.

One potential benefit from breaking away from the dominant corporate narrative would be improving the overall reputation of public relations. The general public has a strong mistrust of business, and the profit motive of business bleeds into the reputation of public relations as a profession. Analyzing the past, separating public relations from business objectives, and expanding how PR views its own history will allow for new theories to help guide, and improve, current PR practice in all settings.

Recent historical explorations of public relations have been more inclusive, expansive, and reflexive; their creativity in perspective disrupts pervasive corporate narratives. Lamme and Russell called on scholars to reconsider strategic intent and individual agency—rather than power, place, or time—as an approach to public relations historiography. A focus on the intent or purpose of a message, and the agency of the recipient of that message, yields a more comprehensive look at PR and its influence. As the field of public relations historical scholarship expands and redefines itself, there is more room for broader interpretations and explorations of what the term means, how it has been applied to various settings, and how PR influences daily life, even in the most mediocre ways.
Public Relations and Public Information in World War II

The approach to government public information during World War II was a departure from previous eras. The Committee on Public Information (CPI) during World War I was considered more of a propaganda ministry, as President Woodrow Wilson had a contentious relationship with the press. The CPI fomented anti-German sentiment, xenophobia, and used manipulative propaganda techniques to identify potential subversives. George Creel, a failed journalist and skilled political operative led the committee, which included Edward Bernays; Ivy Lee, who had helped the Rockefellers salvage their reputations after the Ludlow Massacre; and Carl Byoir, who later worked with the National Socialist Party in Germany. The CPI’s tactics resulted in public mistrust and disillusionment with government information. Franklin Delano Roosevelt did not want to repeat the mistakes made by the CPI. He resisted establishing anything that would be perceived as a propaganda office. Eleanor Roosevelt, Fiorello LaGuardia, and other trusted advisors convinced Roosevelt to reconsider, as the American people deserved information about the growing national involvement in war-related programs like lend-lease procurement and military expansion. As president, he promised Americans that the federal government would distribute clear and honest information as effectively as possible.

During World War II, the government sought legitimacy for its war information bureau. At first, it called its public information office the Office of Facts and Figures, and appointed Librarian of Congress and beloved poet Archibald MacLeish at the head. A close confidant of Roosevelt, MacLeish embraced a strategy of truth. To him, maintaining American morale was one of the most important charges. MacLeish spoke publicly about the dangers of the psychological warfare used by Axis powers, and vowed Americans would be entitled to make their own decisions based on facts, not manipulation. MacLeish’s efforts lasted only about eight
months; by June 1942, Roosevelt had created the Office of War Information (OWI) and appointed Elmer Davis, a journalist, to head the agency.\textsuperscript{53} OWI still attempted to retain its original mission, which was to distribute war information through the media so people in America and abroad could understand U.S. policies and war efforts.\textsuperscript{54} In 1942 the Democrats retained only a slender majority in Congress and the OWI became a political football.\textsuperscript{55} By 1944, the domestic arm of the office had lost most of its funding and was largely defunct. The overseas branch, which only lost 10 percent of its funding and continued from its outpost in London with a mission to convince the “people of the world” of the overwhelming power and good faith of the United States.\textsuperscript{56} The OWI closed completely in 1945.

**Food as Domestic U.S. Policy**

Although World War II saw the most direct government food-related program with rationing, food issues have been a mainstay of U.S. domestic policy since the Colonial Era. A critical component of the United States’ independence has always been people’s ability to produce and obtain quality food.\textsuperscript{57} For the first European settlers, this meant access to food was no longer class-based. Crops grew well in America’s rich soil; hunting was no longer only for the nobility—anyone with a gun could obtain their own dinner.\textsuperscript{58} Food security and ability to make independent food choices became an integral part of Americans’ identity.

Agrarian dreams of self-sufficiency are mostly a charade, and the idea of America as a land of milk and honey is not a mythology that holds up well to scrutiny. There were food shortages, notably during the Civil War, and other factors, such as socioeconomic status, homogeneous food traditions, and geographic isolation that impacted Americans’ food choices and dietary habits.\textsuperscript{59} Food production safety laws were established near the turn of the twentieth century, and farmers began receiving agricultural subsidies in the early 1920s. However, until the
devastation of the Great Depression, the United States government kept its nose out of American kitchens.

The economic instability of the 1930s brought widespread hardship, and many local governments established school lunch programs so that children could rely on at least one stable food source.\textsuperscript{60} Individual states began their own food relief programs under the Hoover Administration, as Hoover held a fundamental belief that it was not the role of the federal government to provide for citizens in need.\textsuperscript{61} His successor, Franklin Roosevelt, disagreed. As governor of New York, Roosevelt enacted relief programs throughout the state, and as president he initiated a number of New Deal programs, a component of which provided a modicum of food relief for some of those who needed it.\textsuperscript{62} The scale of the Depression made food relief difficult. Great attempts were made to be fair and equal, as home economics educators sought to instruct women about how to get the most of their relief allotment. This effort had mixed results and varied from state to state and household to household.\textsuperscript{63}

In May 1940, when Germany invaded France and made more bold strides toward England, Roosevelt knew war was on the horizon.\textsuperscript{64} Transforming the United States from a Depression economy to a war production economy was a monumental task, and initially, Roosevelt hoped that everyday consumer goods and food would not be restricted. In a press conference at the White House on May 28, 1940, Roosevelt discussed how manufacturers and businesses were answering the call to prepare for war. He stated, “I think people should realize that we are not going to discombobulate or upset, any more than we have to, a great many normal processes of life.”\textsuperscript{65} This hope was premature. In January 1942, Roosevelt signed the Emergency Price Control Bill, which helped control inflation. At the same time, a preliminary system was established to hold the demand for goods to what was available.\textsuperscript{66} The Office of
Price Administration, led by Leon Henderson, compiled a list of essential items in short supply—rubber tires, sugar, coffee, shoes, gasoline, butter and other fats, canned goods, and red meat.\textsuperscript{67} Rationing of single items, like sugar and coffee, began in 1942. The comprehensive, points-based program regulating canned and processed foods, meats, fats, cheese, and other items, began in March 1943.\textsuperscript{68}

Every rationed item equaled a price in points, and every man, woman, and child in the United States received a ration book. Each book allotted 48 points per month and was good for six months. The ration points, allocated by stamps, could be spend on any combination of goods, from meat, butter, and canned vegetables, to sugar and shoes.\textsuperscript{69} Rationing meant Americans had to be strategic about their spending. For instance, a mother needing new shoes to prepare her children for back-to-school had to be wary of how she spent ration points months in advance. This large-scale policy reached every person in America. Roosevelt made a concerted effort to ensure that it did not matter if a person had more financial resources at their disposal—he hoped that with rationing, the playing field was leveled, and the importance of “fairness” and “equality for all” was paramount.\textsuperscript{70}

In addition to other war propaganda, rationing restrictions presented the government with a huge public relations quandary. By imposing these policies, the government took on the responsibility of not just making sure people understood what the restrictions meant, but also wanted to share tools with Americans so they, and their families, could thrive despite limitations. The government needed to inform American home cooks—women, primarily—about what rationing meant; the importance of compliance; how to use their ration books effectively; and how to feed their families when faced with the limitations of restrictions. To do this, information
was distributed via the Office of War Information. The media and Madison Avenue advertisers were very compliant in assisting with spreading these messages.\textsuperscript{71}

Within the history of government information and public relations, communicating food policy stands out as unique since women were the primary audience. Most of the scholarship examining rationing and the propaganda, public relations, and the media that supported it has focused on a feminist perspective, highlighting how women were targeted specifically by the Office of War Information and the media, and were depicted in advertising. The government assumed women were most affected by food rationing, as it was assumed they did the bulk of grocery shopping and cooking, thus it made the most sense for public relations and media messages to focus on women.

The government had to balance using information to create advocacy for rationing compliance and educational nutrition information to inspire Americans to change their short-term and long-term habits. To do so, they embraced many of the same tactics as groups before them by distributing brochures and pamphlets, seeking media coverage and third party endorsements, and preparing canned stories for media use.\textsuperscript{72} This tells a different story than much of the scholarship related to the history of public relations in government and politics, which largely focuses on how American politicians reached out to the public to garner support for themselves, persuade voters, or to gain support for war.\textsuperscript{73} With rationing, the policy had already been established and was framed as an inevitable burden, but garnering support, and keeping domestic morale high, was a priority of the U.S. government.

With rationing promotion, the line between propaganda and public relations is blurry. To create an effective history of this effort, it is important to define propaganda for this context, and the history of information management and censorship with regards to the many purposes of the
Office of War Information. Rationing was an effort to ensure equal access to limited resources, and a great amount of work went into engaging communities to support this common purpose. Rationing was also framed as an important patriotic duty, and the kind of emotional appeals to inspire public action presented by much rationing information reflect this intent. While some scholarship refers to rationing information and promotion as propaganda, the purpose was not to mislead or do harm, but rather compliance and to maintain morale.

**Folkways as a Strategy in Changing Food Habits Campaign**

The overall goal of the Committee on Food Habits was to “firmly establish these adequate [dietary] habits in the culture as food folkways.” The committee sought to understand how culture and society influenced people’s dietary habits and then wanted to use that knowledge to create lasting change. Their intent was to enact cultural change so that American citizens would modify their diets based on whatever the most recent scientific research determined was most healthy. In their work on understanding how to change American diets, the Committee on Food Habits focused specifically on folkways. The research the Committee on Food Habits conducted, to observe and record the cultural practice of food preparation and dining, was intended to supplement research by a second committee regarding nutritional research. The committee would then make recommendations about how to affect change in food habits. As scholars of culture, the committee members provided practical advice about how to solve problems that arise in culture, and suggested food habits that could improve national health through nutrition.

The term “folkways” is attributed to Yale University sociologist William Graham Sumner, who developed the term in the late nineteenth century. Whether he applied any scientific methodology is unknown, and unlikely, but by the 1940s his theory was popular among
social scientists. Sumner explained that folkways were unconscious habitual acts that humans used to help meet basic needs. Unlike mores, they did not have a moral or ethical foundation, but are mere habitual needs fulfilled as repetitive practices. When members of a society practiced the same habits, they became customs. Sumner argued that folkways were not purposeful or witty, but instinctual. Folkways were a source of pride, and distinguished group insiders from outsiders. He believed that groups take pride in the differences and eccentricities that set their in-group folkways apart. Sumner argued that the origins of folkways were unknowable, and acknowledged that they evolved and changed over time. Any notion of right and wrong was within the folkway, and folkways guided actions of “petty acts” like one’s daily comportment—acquiring and preparing food, courtship, greeting friends and strangers, celebrating life’s milestones, or honoring ancestors. Actions outside of determined folkways were taboo; actions with higher stakes, that have severe moral and ethical ramifications, were considered mores.

The relationship between the professional practice of public relations and folkways demonstrates how organizations interact with their publics. Some public relations scholars have called for the inclusion anthropological theories in public relations theory and education. Studying the mundanity of everyday life, and the knowledge that supports habits and rituals, expands and diversifies our understanding of how public relations practice can be informed and diversified.

In the 1940s, Margaret Mead, Kurt Lewin, and the other social scientists and dieticians studied target populations across the United States. Their goal was to understand people’s relationships with food in order to influence change. Although keenly aware that they were only an advising body, their research was intended to inform and guide the communication tactics that
were eventually employed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Office of War Information, the Office of Price Administration, and other wartime entities.

This ambitious research project led by Mead supported the idea of directing ration messaging to women. The scientists were recruited to work at the National Research Council’s Committee on Food Habits, Department of War-funded research. Specifically, the scientists were charged with identifying effective ways of adjusting America’s dietary routines. The most formidable task they faced was to encourage American women to add organ meats—which were nutritious, plentiful, and cost no ration points—to their cooking repertoire. Organ meat, like hearts, kidneys, tongues, and livers, were generally perceived as the food of “others,” and most middle class, white Americans were reluctant to try an unfamiliar food they associated with a lower socioeconomic or ethnic group. Popular thought assumed women shopped and cooked to satisfy the eating preferences of their male partners, but much of the Committee on Food Habits research found it was women, as the family’s culinary gatekeeper, who could play the most influential role in changing a family’s eating habits. To do this, Lewin applied his force field theory research and advocated reducing what he called “consumption barriers.” That meant removing all the reasons a person might say “no” before they could be persuaded to say “yes.” However, the project was abandoned, as the government felt it did not make sense to invest in long-term research during a time of change.

The government distributed general information about rationing, so that people could use their ration books effectively, as well as practical advice about how to cope and comply with restrictions. This included press releases, USDA and Office of War Information prepared radio content, and other outlets. Government war propaganda popularized a new image of women, immortalized in songs like “Rosie the Riveter.” Advertisers and editors also spread the
messages tailored by the Office of War Information. Although Roosevelt had a mixed legacy with the press throughout his administration, the press supported rationing, as paper rationing and the draft affected their own industry.

Advertisers also supported rationing, even though promoting limited consumption affected their own industry. The War Advertising Council told advertisers they could “best serve [their] own selfish interests” by showing sensitivity to public demands, including demand for information on how to contribute to the war. Businesses could also deduct advertising costs from taxable income, thus goodwill advertising directed toward postwar sales, the continued allegiance of distributors, employee productivity, or political aims, was an attractive investment for businesses. Together, mass media told women that complying with ration restrictions was a civic responsibility, and a way American women could display their patriotism and defy gender stereotypes to protect democracy.

The content of these advertisements largely ignored the roles of women who worked outside the home during the war, instead placed the responsibility of winning the war in the hands of the housewife. Housewives were the primary target of advertisements during the war. Selected ads depicting a mother and daughter tending their victory gardens together, while other ads militarized the housewife’s role.

That American women should cheerfully comply with ration restrictions was not the only message government and the media sought to share. Included in much of the material about rationing was nutrition information, distilled into a relatively simple graphic developed by the government that highlighted the “Basic 7,” which advised building meals sensibly from seven food groups. After more than a decade of widespread malnutrition among many Americans due to the economic hardship of the Great Depression, government researchers developed a
“yardstick for nutrition.” These findings were distributed hand-in-hand with ration information so that home cooks could devise meals with their limited resources that were filling and nutritious. Called Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs), one of the chief researchers of the program was nutritionist Lydia Roberts. Roberts used a democratic approach as rhetorical strategy to build solidarity among scientists to promote her findings. The RDAs suggested meals that reflected Anglo-American food preferences, and overlooked the desire of women who preferred to shop every day as a way to break monotony rather than plan meals in advance. While Roberts’ democratic approach worked as an appeal to other scientists, when it came time to share the strategy with the larger public, it was a harder sell.

When ration restrictions were lifted in the United States in 1945, American food consumption reached an all-time high. The government had a postwar commitment to famine relief, but instead of keeping ration restrictions in place (as many women preferred), the government attempted a voluntary rationing endeavor, led by former President Herbert Hoover. This effort failed, and the United States did not honor its promise to a hungry Europe. Even though food had “won the war,” it was not seen as being as integral to “win the peace.”

Food rationing during World War II was short lived, and the memory of what it was and what it meant has been clouded by time. The nostalgic mythology of Americans during World War II is that it was a “finest hour” when “Americans freely sacrificed selfish desires, did without, went all out, and ‘pulled together in common purpose and spirit’” to win the war. This easy story is not completely accurate—primary sources document the frustration of American mobilization agencies, complaints of public apathy, and half-hearted participation in rationing activities. While there is some comprehensive historical analysis of food rationing in 1940s America, very little has focused on the many aspects of communication related to the event.
Deeper exploration into the work of Margaret Mead and the Committee on Food Habits; helping the American public understand basic nutrition, the “Basic 7,” and how to compile healthy meals; as well as a more in-depth look at the effects of the role of public relations will provide insight into what Americans came to think, believe, and hold important about food during this era.
Research Question and Sub-questions

Based on what has been discovered as a gap in the literature, this thesis will address the following research question:

How did the United States federal government use public relations strategies to educate and influence Americans regarding food consumption from 1941 to 1945?

From this research question, several sub-questions are addressed:

- How did the U.S. federal government support research of American food habits?
- What were their conclusions?
- How did the U.S. federal government direct the media to communicate nutrition information?
- How did the popular press reflect U.S. federal government food information?
- How did American cookbooks reflect U.S. federal government food information?

Based on these conclusions, second research question will be addressed in the conclusion:

How does this study inform the four models and PR history?

Method

The scant literature representing communication efforts to support rationing during World War II reflects almost perfectly public relations scholar Stefan Wehmeier’s larger critique of the problems in public relations history—that PR history is constructed mainly through interpreting bits and pieces, and historians tend to eschew theory for narrative. This means that many sides of the story go untold based on which documentary sources are used. Wehmeier explains that wider use of available evidence and application of more theoretical constructs results in more reflection and explanatory power, finds greater truth about the past, and presents a more compelling narrative. Therefore, examining the history of food policy during World
War II with a focus on persuasive organizational and institutional communications strategies is a new and significant contribution to the literature.\textsuperscript{113}

In order to tell the story of public relations and food in World War II-era America, it is necessary to use historical research methods. This will allow for an exploration of what actually happened during this particular time and place by exploring available sources, previous interpretations, and characteristics of phenomena that occurred at the time. Most historical research begins with a question about an event or phenomena, or sometimes a single document spurs the investigation. Once the researcher established the context in which their subject occurred, they examine the history of that event as interpreted by other historians. Then the researcher seeks historical primary sources.\textsuperscript{114} Historical research rests on the availability of original historical sources. Many research projects with great merit end because the necessary sources no longer exist, never existed, are kept in private hands, or are otherwise unattainable.

Historical research is guided by both evidence and specific arguments. For example, any one primary source document will likely lead the researcher down a path that is interesting and related, but may expand the scope of research in an untenable way. Care must be taken that events are presented factually but with reasonable limitations. Understanding the context of the period is vital. Next, it is critical to craft a clear thesis or argument based on sources. Guidelines ensure historical data is valid and comes from reputable and documented sources, and limitations provide rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of certain information.

The final step in historical research methods is to present the main arguments and contextual information in a clear narrative. There are a variety of approaches to analyzing and presenting the results of historical research. Studies must explain the subject and the researcher’s findings without losing sight of existing interpretations, even if new discoveries challenge
previous related studies. When a researcher conducts a project also influences the method, analysis, and arguments of the completed work. Examining a course of events from the past with different primary source documentation and a different perspective can reveal new insights into the past event as well as what followed.

There are few existing popular histories of World War II and public relations scholarship that have employed a source-based historical methods approach to examining rationing and PR to the extent this thesis endeavors to achieve. This study will use historical methods to better explore how the United States federal government approached this problem, addressed it using research and communication strategies, and then how those communication efforts were repeated and regurgitated in periodicals, newspapers, and cookbooks. It will avoid imposing modern feelings or applying psycho-historical analysis. This study will explain how the government presented food and nutrition choices at a time of great change due to the exigency of war. This analysis will provide a broader perspective of the American home front during World War II, will explore how public relations has evolved as a profession and shaped American culture and memory, and will examine how government influences the dinner plate during a time of crisis.

**Primary Source Materials**

In each chapter, primary source materials were consulted. The tables below provide specific information as to what sources were included.

**Government and Archival Documents**

Archival materials that provide insight into how the government’s nutrition campaign was researched and executed were analyzed.

| Beltsville, MD. Special Collections, USDA National Agriculture Library. |
| College Park, MD. National Archives II, Civilian Division. Record Group 188. Records of the Office of Price Administration. |
| College Park, MD. National Archives II, Civilian Division. Record Group 208. Department of War Information. |
Newspaper and Magazine Articles

A preliminary search in Historical Newspapers Online with the keywords “Basic 7” or “Basic Seven” with publication dates between 1943-1945. Results were narrowed to remove repetition and avoid an over-representation of certain publications. This thesis includes 68 newspaper articles from a wide range of American publications.

Newspaper Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Basic Seven Foods.&quot;</td>
<td><em>Chicago Daily Tribune</em> (1923-1963), Apr 09, 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Eat Basic 7' Soon to be War Food Slogan.&quot;</td>
<td><em>The Atlanta Constitution</em> (1881-1945), Apr 03, 1943</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Hens Deserve 'E' for Production Housewives also Score for Egg Dishes.&quot;</td>
<td><em>The Washington Post</em> (1923-1954), Apr 14, 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Low Point Foods Easily Fit Basic Seven Requirements.&quot;</td>
<td><em>The Washington Post</em> (1923-1954), Mar 24, 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Quiz ‘Em’.&quot;</td>
<td><em>Los Angeles Times</em> (1923- Current File), May 16, 1943</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Ration Budget Menus to be Given Tuesday.&quot;</td>
<td><em>Chicago Daily Tribune</em> (1923-1963), May 29, 1943</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Sending Johnny to School Hungry?&quot;</td>
<td>Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963), Sep 05, 1943</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bennett, Anita. &quot;Personality Lunches Go to School.&quot;</td>
<td><em>Los Angeles Times</em> (1923- Current File), Sep 19, 1943</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manners, Marian &quot;Activities of Women.&quot;</td>
<td><em>Los Angeles Times</em> (1923- Current File), Sep 06, 1943</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manners, Marian. &quot;Blood Donor should Take Good Food.&quot;</td>
<td><em>Los Angeles Times</em> (1923- Current File), Apr 16, 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manners, Marian. &quot;Eggs are Abundant: Here are Hints for Cooking them.&quot;</td>
<td><em>Los Angeles Times</em> (1923- Current File), Mar 08, 1944</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manners, Marian. &quot;Fish for Your Dinner.&quot;</td>
<td><em>Los Angeles Times</em> (1923- Current File), Jan 21, 1945</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manners, Marian. &quot;Large Sweet Potato Crop Aids Menus.&quot;</td>
<td><em>Los Angeles Times</em> (1923 Current File), Dec 17, 1945</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manners, Marian</td>
<td>&quot;Meat Fits in Week's Best Buys.&quot;</td>
<td>Los Angeles Times (1923- Current File)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manners, Marian</td>
<td>&quot;Planned Nutrition.&quot;</td>
<td>Los Angeles Times (1923- Current File)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manners, Marian</td>
<td>&quot;Potatoes, Cabbage, Pork Called Best Buys of Week.&quot;</td>
<td>Los Angeles Times (1923- Current File)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manners, Marian</td>
<td>&quot;Squash Rated Protein Equal of Potatoes.&quot;</td>
<td>Los Angeles Times (1923- Current File)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manners, Marian</td>
<td>&quot;Timesavers Add Appeal to Meals.&quot;</td>
<td>Los Angeles Times (1923- Current File)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meade, Mary</td>
<td>&quot;Ration Budget Menus to Feed Two for Week.&quot;</td>
<td>Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meade, Mary</td>
<td>&quot;Troops to Get More Kinds of Canned Meats.&quot;</td>
<td>Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miller, Ruth</td>
<td>&quot;Resolutions for Housewife to make and Keep.&quot;</td>
<td>The Christian Science Monitor (1908- Current File)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nickerson, Jane</td>
<td>&quot;Here is Food for Thought.&quot;</td>
<td>New York Times (1923- Current File)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saver, Sally</td>
<td>&quot;Keep America Physically Fit by using Basic Seven Foods.&quot;</td>
<td>The Atlanta Constitution (1881-1945)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saver, Sally</td>
<td>&quot;Vitamin ABCs Easy with List of Basic Foods.&quot;</td>
<td>The Atlanta Constitution (1881-1945)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilson, Bess M.</td>
<td>&quot;Nutrition Knowledge Expands.&quot;</td>
<td>Los Angeles Times (1923- Current File)</td>
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</table>

For magazines, Readers’ Guide Retrospective: 1890-1982 from Ebscohost was searched between the years 1943-45 using the word “recipe,” because “Basic Seven” and “Basic 7” did not result in a large analysis pool. This created a pool of 79 articles. Many articles were from the New York Times Magazine and written by Jane Holt; because she is well represented in the newspaper section. Some articles did not deal with food, such as “Recipe for Successful Gluing” from
Popular Science published in June 1944, and those articles were also eliminated. This resulted in 49 articles that were analyzed for this section.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Issue Dates</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Source Information</th>
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Cookbooks

Fifty cookbooks published between 1941 and 1945 available in the Special Collections Library at Virginia Tech were analyzed to determine how nutrition information was communicated to home cooks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cookbook Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Publisher and Year</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beard, James, 1903-1985. <em>Cook it Outdoors.</em></td>
<td>New York: M. Barrows and Co, 1941</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Christian Church (Galax, Va.). <em>Galax Cook Book.</em></td>
<td>Galax, VA: Ladies of the First Christian Church, 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fisher, M.F.K. <em>How to Cook a Wolf.</em></td>
<td>New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1942</td>
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<tr>
<td>Granddaughter's Inglenook Cookbook. Elgin, Ill: Brethren Press, 1942</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harris, F. L. &quot;Victory vitamin cook book for wartime meals.&quot; (1943)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Howard, Madeleine. <em>Fare Ye Well with Ladies of the Realm.</em></td>
<td>London: Hutchinson. 1944</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Publisher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kent, Louise, Mrs.</td>
<td><em>Appleyard's Kitchen</em></td>
<td>(Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safford, Virginia.</td>
<td><em>Food of My Friends</em>. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White, Marion.</td>
<td><em>Mother Hubbard's Cookbook</em> (New York: M. S. Mill Co., Inc., 1944)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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22 Bernays, Edward L. Public relations. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. (1952);
30 This PR strategy within the four models is largely credited to the work and philosophy of Ivy Ledbetter Lee, who helped John D. Rockefeller and Standard Oil manage reactions to the Ludlow Massacre coal mining rebellion. He also worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad and the American Red Cross. He died at the relatively young age of 57 in 1934, which may be another reason why Bernays looms larger as a figure in public relations history.
World War I ended in 1918, and the years that followed contained great civil unrest, including women’s suffrage, labor movements, and severe economic inflation which only inflamed the chaos. In the United States, there was a rash of mail-bombings that were quickly associated with Russian and Eastern European immigrants. Coupled with a public fear of Communism, then-Attorney General Mitchell Palmer spent a year arresting and deporting immigrants in this first wave of the “Red Scare,” and this dark time in American history is called the Palmer Raids. The public fear driving some of this cruel nativism can be attributed in part to the fear mongering fomented by the Creel Committee during World War I. See Charles H. McCormick, Seeing Reds: Federal Surveillance of Radicals in the Pittsburgh Mill District, 1917-1921 (1997).


Blum, 21.


Girona and Xifra, 289.


Blum, 31.

Blum, 21-52.


Eden, 25


61 Ziegelman, 103
62 Ziegelman, 219
63 Ziegelman, 83
66 Goodwin, 315
69 Bentley, 15.
70 Bentley, 22.
71 Bentley, 31.
72 Lamme and Miller, 308 and 350.
73 Lamme and Miller, 315.
74 L’Etang, 79.
75 L’Etang, 78.
76 L’Etang, 79.
77 History of the Committee on Food Habits, 11.
79 A separate committee, the Food and Nutrition Board of the Division of Biology and Agriculture, was focused on identifying nutritional values of food and what should be included in a healthy diet. Both committees were organized by the National Research Council and funded by the Department of War.
80 History of the Committee on Food Habits, 14.
81 Sumner believed that the state could not interfere in changing folkways with legislation. This axiom has been used often in American courts as justification for hands-off philosophies in regards to human behavior, especially with regard to race relations and civil rights. Modern scholars consider this a misinterpretation of Sumner’s idea. Making certain practices illegal, like smoking inside buildings, or creating new structures, like reconfiguring office space, can change behaviors, norms, and opportunities. In the United States, immigrant ethnic groups retain certain folkways for a time, and may cling to or inflate the importance of a particular habit in order to manage the other stressful changes that come with adopting a new home in a foreign place. Folkways may persist longer when American nativist attitudes forced poor immigrants to live in relatively homogenous communities, but eventually they dissipate as later generations assimilate. However, ethnicity does not stop playing an influential role—as communities shift, the nature of ethnicity changes. The memory that persists—what it means to take part in the folkways of an ethnic heritage—is critical to identity.
There is far more scholarly research about rationing and its effects in the United Kingdom, as food rationing there lasted nearly two decades and was more far-reaching than in the U.S. Even Winston Churchill found the limitations monotonous. In the U.S., sugar was rationed, but there were many substitutions available, like corn syrup or molasses. Some recipes even advised adding candy, marshmallows, or chocolate bars as ingredients to make up for the lack of refined sugar, which insinuates that there must have been enough to go around to make such a suggestion worthwhile. In Britain sweets were highly regulated, and ice cream was an absent commodity for two years. In the United Kingdom, private companies and advertisers saw how they could turn a profit despite a government focus on limiting consumption. An analysis of wartime ads by Bovril, makers of a meat extract paste, found that ads never questioned the need for rationing, but were able to exploit the daily struggles of Britons in a way their government’s war propaganda could not. Commercial products could frame themselves as solutions and helpers in a time of great fear and danger. See Loxham, Angela. “Profiting from war: Bovril advertising during World War II.” *Journal of Macromarketing* 36 no. 2(2016) 198-213. A wily movie theater advertising ice cream in 1943 attracted so many customers the theater needed crowd control. However, the “ice cream” turned out to be an imitation made with “egg powder, synthetic cream, sugar, vanilla, and strawberry essences.” When ice cream manufacturing resumed in full, the sweet became a luxurious symbol of freedom, and the government still intervened to prevent profiteering. See Farmer, Richard. 'A temporarily vanished civilisation': Ice cream, confectionery and wartime cinema-going. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31 no. 4 (2001) 479-497.

103 Jack, 112.
104 Jack, 120.
105 Jack, 128.
107 Bentley, 12.
108 Bentley, 12.
110 Leff, 1297.
112 Wehmeier, 86.
113 Wehmeier, 87
Chapter 3: The Problem of Changing Food Habits

Government Research About American Food Habits

When Congress passed the Selective Service Act on September 16, 1940, the nation’s first peacetime military draft, government health officials envisioned tall, strapping young men arriving at the draft board. Out of a million young men examined, 380,000 were found unfit for military service.\(^{116}\) A third of the rejections were attributed directly or indirectly to nutritional deficiencies.\(^{117}\) American food habits had become a national security problem, and the government had a motive to try and influence American dietary habits.\(^{118}\) For a moment, malnutrition and poor eating habits garnered enough attention for the federal government to invest in in-depth research.\(^{119}\)

In May 1941, President Roosevelt addressed the need for better nutrition in the United States in a letter to the National Nutrition Conference for Defense, attended by 900 physicians, nutritionists, chemists, home economists, agriculturists, and educators. He wrote:

If people are undernourished, they cannot be efficient in producing what we need in our unified drive for dynamic strength. In recent years scientists have made outstanding discoveries as to the amounts and kinds of foods needed for maximum vigor. Yet every survey of nutrition, by whatever means conducted, showed that here in the United States undernourishment is widespread and serious … We do not lack and we will not lack the means of producing food in abundance and variety. Our task is to translate this abundance into reality for every American family.\(^{120}\)

The government was preparing to enter the war and realized a need to improve nutritional standards for armed forces, civilians, and overseas populations targeted for food relief. Roosevelt’s call led to the development of two research groups funded by the Department of War
and managed by the National Academy of Sciences. First, the Food and Nutrition Board, which was comprised of scientists looking to understand the nutritive value of food, was charged with determining a baseline of what comprised a healthy diet.¹²¹ The second, the Committee on Changing Food Habits, was comprised of social scientists who sought to understand why people made the food choices they did. This understanding, the committee hoped, would best prepare the government to help Americans understand the necessary components of a healthy diet.¹²² By understanding why people made certain food choices, the Committee on Changing Food Habits hoped to be able to persuade them to eat healthier diets.¹²³

When these two groups were established, research and education in food and nutrition was considered part of agriculture, not medicine or public health.¹²⁴ The Food and Nutrition Board wanted to remain independent, without too much influence from private industry or government. The committee’s first priority was to create a quantitative estimate of human nutrient requirements for health of all age groups in both normal and special circumstances.¹²⁵ The second charge was to translate those requirements in a practical way using food. These studies led to the Recommended Dietary Allowances.¹²⁶

The social scientists on the Committee on Changing Food Habits felt a deep sense of duty to their country. They wanted to channel their frustrations and sorrow about a world at war with projects they felt could contribute some kind of good.¹²⁷ As they performed their research, how to communicate nutrition information, not just research findings, drove much of the discussion.¹²⁸ The committee was comprised of luminary social and food scientists of the time, in academia and government.¹²⁹ Publicizing good eating habits went hand in hand with their research.¹³⁰ “In a democracy truth-telling is the only possible form of public relations, and all efforts to shape the news are self-defeating,” wrote Carl Guthe, an anthropologist at the
University of Michigan who chaired the Committee on Changing Food Habits throughout its duration.\textsuperscript{131}

During one of the first Food and Nutrition Board meetings, the chair, Russell Wilder of the Mayo Clinic, approached three committee members: Lydia Roberts, a professor of nutrition at the University of Chicago; Hazel Stiebeling, from the USDA; and Helen Mitchell, a nutritionist at the Kellogg sanitarium in Battle Creek.\textsuperscript{132} He asked the women to confer and determine some kind of benchmark for healthy eating, and then present it to the committee the next morning.\textsuperscript{133} Roberts recalled that meeting:

We three spent the evening threshing over the problem (while the men, we felt sure, were out seeing the town). The result was, of course, that the only report we could bring in the next morning was that it couldn’t be done, that the evidence was too scanty and too conflicting.\textsuperscript{134}

The group was given more time, and a sub-committee set forth to see what a yardstick for good eating might look like.\textsuperscript{135} The committee was enlarged, and led by Roberts, members studied the available nutrition literature, but they also surveyed nutrition workers in the field to get a sense of their opinions, and the evidence they used to draw those conclusions.\textsuperscript{136} From here, they synthesized the information, refined, went back and forth between the committee and their field respondents.\textsuperscript{137} They debated how to define proteins, minerals, and vitamins allotments, and struggled with how to explain the needed amounts of each.\textsuperscript{138} For some components, there was no research available—for example, no human studies provided guidance on niacin requirements, so the committee estimated by multiplying thiamine values by ten.\textsuperscript{139} While later research substantiated these values, the committee does admit to an element of guesswork.\textsuperscript{140}
Although every choice was justified by research, research results conflicted, and committee members worked to find consensus.\textsuperscript{141} Committee on Changing Food Habits leaders, despite their admirable charge, had a difficult time recruiting someone to oversee the committee’s day-to-day research efforts.\textsuperscript{142} In a letter from psychologist E. A. Culler to anthropologist Carl Guthe, Culler suggests Guthe reach out to prominent scholars like B. F. Skinner and Curt Richter, citing their notoriety would help the committee gain prominence.\textsuperscript{143} In a post script, however, Culler notes “The above persons have worked in nutrition, but I don’t know whether they are equipped to ‘sell’ their contributions to the public.”\textsuperscript{144} Ensuring that research was practical and could reach a wide audience had always been a primary concern.

Guthe faced rejection trying to find a committee secretary. Eventually he offered the position to Columbia University anthropologist Ruth Benedict.\textsuperscript{145} She turned him down, but suggested her former student, Margaret Mead.\textsuperscript{146} Mead was an unconventional choice, as she did not have a traditional academic career. She had earned a doctorate in anthropology at Columbia University and made a name for herself by publishing her dissertation as a popular book, \textit{Coming of Age in Samoa}, in 1928.\textsuperscript{147} In \textit{Coming of Age}, Mead wrote frankly about adolescence and sexuality, scandalous topics for Americans still adhering to Victorian principles.\textsuperscript{148} She purposefully directed her writing to a popular, not scholarly, audience.\textsuperscript{149} Mead spent much of the 1930s doing field research in the South Pacific, and had written several other books exploring culture and sexuality.\textsuperscript{150} Mead wanted to return to the West, and the coming war gave her good reason to leave. On December 6, 1941, Mead was appointed executive secretary of the committee.\textsuperscript{151} Mead would lead this committee of academic social scientists and wrangle their research into a book for the National Academy of Sciences in 1943. The committee had lofty
goals and did not achieve all they set out to find. Despite this, Mead was able to bring the project to completion and The National Academy of Sciences published the findings in 1943.152

Margaret Mead Leads Research in an Anthropological Direction

As committee secretary, Margaret Mead helped lead the brightest minds in social science, nutrition, and dietetics. In her work, Mead intended to use the “wartime setting … to shortcut and accelerate the shift in the American diet from a traditional diet, uneven and often inadequate, sanctioned by usage and folk belief, to a diet responsive to changes in nutritional science.”153 Mead felt that changing “folk belief”—the learned habits influenced by a person’s socioeconomic background, social support system, and personal attributes—was the best means to encourage better eating habits and build a healthier populace.154 The goal was to observe American dietary habits and then influence Americans to change those habits—to get people to “wish what they need.”155

Mead approached the problem of changing food habits from an anthropological perspective—as a cultural issue. While she sought to understand food choices well enough to influence change, she was also a cultural relativist.156 She believed that all cultures should be considered on their own merits, not compared.157 She also believed nutrition information and education needed to honor personal choice and autonomy, as an authoritarian approach might endanger democratic participation and community service.158 With authoritarian regimes taking control in Europe and Asia, there was a real concern that the principles of democracy might be lost, and the importance of independent choice was critical.159 If people could not make independent decisions there could be larger, more troubling ramifications.

Mead saw an opportunity for herself as well as a chance to do influential work with the Committee on Changing Food Habits.160 She sought to apply her understanding of culture and its
influence on human behavior to help boost American morale, which she felt was integral to an Allied victory.\textsuperscript{161} Another reason Mead took on the role at the Committee on Changing Food habits was because it allowed her to have additional funding for her research. Anthropologists were in demand during World War II, as their understanding of culture and personality could help shape subtle modes of communication.\textsuperscript{162} For example, anthropologists were recruited to work for the Office of War Information (OWI), where they worked on white propaganda, which truthfully stated its origin, and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS, equivalent to the CIA), which engaged in black propaganda, that falsely presented itself to embarrass and misrepresent the enemy.\textsuperscript{163}

Mead needed to navigate political relationships in order to see the committee’s research through. She promoted the services of the committee, writing countless letters to ensure that the committee was included in diverse discussions that were of interest to her, such as how the United States could best provide food relief to Europe.\textsuperscript{164} Mead’s fame was also a draw to outside groups and garnered some financial support. The Evaporated Milk Council made a donation to support the committee’s research, and in their accompanying letter wrote “… it is our understanding that this research will be carried out by the direction of Dr. Margaret Mead.”\textsuperscript{165} Later, Marietta Echelberger, of the Evaporated Milk Association, presented a talk to the Committee on Changing Food Habits on the place of milk in American Culture, as industry support did not come without strings.\textsuperscript{166} Some research was funded by the Cup and Container Institute, and several meeting minutes reflect concerns about power and influence of that particular organization, especially in light of what kind of food containers were needed to ship food overseas as part of the Lend-Lease Act.\textsuperscript{167}
For Mead and many other social scientists, war set a new agenda, and there was a sense of emergency that called for intervention. Democratic social reformers wanted to believe that social change could come naturally to Americans. Making a home in a new land, and enduring change, is part of the American mythology. Mead felt it was important to help build a cultural framework that favored change and diversity rather than trying to replace old norms with new norms.\textsuperscript{168}

The committee sought to identify “major weaknesses and deficiencies” in the dietary habits of Americans.\textsuperscript{169} The committee stated that it wanted to advocate for good dietary habits for all levels of the population, it specifically sought to reach “low income non-farm groups, largely concentrated in the eastern Industrial belt” and “low income groups of the Southeast, including and especially the farm and negro population thereof.”\textsuperscript{170} If they could interest people in nutrition, they might be able to educate them enough to motivate people to make changes in their habits. The hope was that people could adopt healthy eating habits not just as part of a short-term war effort, but as part of an overall culture change.

In one of her first meetings as committee secretary, Mead stated that she felt that Americans valued change—it was an inherent part of their patriotism:

On the whole, most of American life is attuned to change. Change itself has become a tradition and a cultural value. What is required is some basis for rationalizing desirable changes in food habits and in the present crisis the challenge to become strong through health will furnish such an appeal.\textsuperscript{171}

The committee itself could never quite agree as to where to focus their attention while they studied food habits. Most were driven to study the habits of the neediest Americans. Depictions of Americans facing hardship—however accurate—were becoming a political
liability. The committee’s focus on the needs of the most vulnerable Americans, which hearkened back to New Deal efforts, was going out of political style. There was pressure from conservative politicians who wanted to focus on mobilizing the nation for World War II and discontinue New Deal programs.172

In a letter to Carl Guthe from John Provinse, Provinse shared information from a consumer purchases study done by the USDA’s Bureau of Home Economics, led by Hazel Stiebeling.173 Provinse described the study as the “most extensive and detailed analysis ever undertaken of American consumption expenditures.”174 Provinse explained that while poor diet and low income are often associated, there are dietary deficiencies or maladjustments at all income levels, even the highest, which he attributed to poor home management, unappetizing food preparation, or “traditional ways of doing things.”175

Stiebeling’s study also found that in both good and poor dietary habits, food selection did not vary with income but rather quantity of available food.176 Problems of access were greater than problems of affordability.177 Changing the food habits of the more advantaged, they theorized, might help change the overall problem of patterning, and was important to changing the food habits of disadvantaged groups.178

Rationing Creates New Opportunity for Nutrition Messages

President Roosevelt hoped he would not have to ration goods, but once the United States entered the war, he realized that restrictions were necessary to control inflation and ensure items in high demand were available to general consumers.179 In 1942, he began a rationing program to ensure equal access to limited resources, and a great amount of work went into engaging communities to support this common purpose.180
Rationing created an opportunity for communicating nutrition information. This government program designed to manage food shortages brought about by war would provide a new reason for the government to disseminate nutrition information. The government could use societal changes brought about by war to influence sweeping transformation in the dietary habits of Americans, especially immigrant groups, minorities, and the poor.\textsuperscript{181} Rationing was also framed as an important patriotic duty, and the emotional appeals to inspire public action presented by rationing information reflect this intent.\textsuperscript{182} Rationed items included rubber, gasoline, and shoes, as well as sugar, coffee, butter and fat, canned goods and red meat.\textsuperscript{183}

Rationing food items marked the first time the United States government sanctioned what Americans could eat. Increased information about food—especially what people could and could not access—paved the way for more information about good nutrition. This effort by the government to inform Americans about rationing restrictions and provide education about nutrition used a myriad of communication methods, including press releases, news reels, radio programs, advertising, as well as outreach programs through extension services and other groups.\textsuperscript{184}

Once the rationing program began to influence the committee’s work, members and social scientists struggled with how to incorporate both compliance with the short-term goal with influencing habits that would last beyond the war.\textsuperscript{185} They hoped their research could be used to develop consumer education programs that would focus on the use of food instead of just nutrition information, where the basic theme would be advice about how to make the best nutritional use of the available food supply.\textsuperscript{186}
The Committee on Changing Food Habits researchers found that many American food habits stemmed from ideas of social status and tradition. European peasants gave importance to white bread, sugar, and eating meat every day.\textsuperscript{187} Puritans equated food that is healthful to food that is disliked. People in the South had a personal relationship with food—and avoided food that, for example, “disagreed with them.”\textsuperscript{188} Changing eating habits seemed simple but could have profound effects. Committee member Curt Richter explained that people would come to Johns Hopkins to be “reduced,” and this process of altering what people ate and how they thought about food was both physically and mentally transformative.\textsuperscript{189} When patients finished “they are not only thinner, but they are usually different people. Many of them have been eating just because of habits of thinking. A lot of food we eat is heavy starch and considered almost indecent in France,” Richter said.\textsuperscript{190} To change thought patterns, and habits entrenched in culture, the right terminology was important—when faced with a lack of meat, milk is a comparable nutritional supplement, but needs to be presented as a “casserole” in the right kind of container to be accepted.\textsuperscript{191} If milk was a good nutritional substitute for other proteins, especially rationed meat, how could messaging be altered to shift this mindset? While the Committee on Food Habits considered questions like these, their role as researchers was only to advise how to address the problems of dietary habits, and the work of communicating these messages was left to others.\textsuperscript{192}

Food marketing created another set of challenges. Mead discussed a milk consumption campaign that featured baseball players drinking milk.\textsuperscript{193} In her estimation, the idea behind this campaign was to show popular people drinking milk, and using influencers would encourage average Americans to increase their milk consumption.\textsuperscript{194} However, interviews by Natalie Joffe found that in America, a sign of growing up was one’s decision to choose whether or not to drink
milk. Because the committee believed that milk’s protein and calcium benefits were important to
good nutrition, they felt a nutrition campaign would need to make drinking milk a mature choice
to make it more widely accepted. In their consultative role, the committee could not see ideas
like these ideas to fruition.

Mead saw how overall themes in food consumption needed to be aligned. Advertisers,
she said, used a pleasure motivation, while schools and churches used duty. She felt that
appeals to the ego—focused on strength and survival—would unite the two groups.

In wartime, it is important to bring motivations together … We should keep appeals from
contradicting one another and get reinforcement for them both from responsible
government agencies and less responsible private agencies.

Mead recognized that increased education and logical arguments would not solve
America’s dietary problems. She believed through observing dietary patterns, scientists could
pinpoint the “deeper emotional content” of people’s food choices and preferences.

Americanism was also part of the problem. She noted that in the North, there was a “moral
overhauling” of eating behaviors (eat your vegetables or no dessert), whereas in the South, meals
were catered to the tastes of each member of the family.

**Directing Public Relations and Persuasive Messages in Changing Food Habits**

In her introduction to the Report on Changing Food Habits, Mead is dismissive of what she
considers public relations tactics.

Who should become the surrogate of the new nutrition knowledge, the mother, the
teacher the physician, the baseball hero, or moving picture actress, a puppet character like
“Little Jackie” of the Dental Hygiene Division, South Carolina Public Health Service,
‘the government?’ … Asking questions like these shifts the deliberations from such
questions as ‘Isn’t radio a good medium?’ … ‘Wouldn’t prestige or status be the easiest way to influence people?’ … These precise questions become, “under what conditions will individuals, with a known character structure, with known attitudes toward and ideas about food, eating a known diet, and with other known behaviors which will be affected by and will affect their food habits, tend to resist or accept an alteration in food preparation, food content, food proportions?”

Mead may have taken this passive approach because the committee had no role beyond their research and report. In meeting minutes from June 1941, Carl Guthe and other committee members discussed the possibility of getting millions of dollars in research funding. This did not occur, and the group had to beg for funding from the military and their home institutions to see the project through completion. In correspondence from Margaret Mead several years later, she wrote that as committee secretary, she had to account for nearly every penny, and had to ask for two or three hundred dollars just to complete a few projects. War created many problems, and one justification made to defund, long-range, multi-faceted research projects was that things were changing so fast, certain questions were not worth pursuing.

In meeting minutes, members discussed at length different promotional tactics for nutrition information they thought might work, or that they had observed in other places which might be adapted and applied successfully—the influence of prestige groups, how to arrange an education plan, using friend groups, having children teach parents. The researchers knew they had to relinquish control of their project, they may have resisted including their ideas for spreading messages in the final report. Mead herself was well aware of the power of the media, as she had gained her reputation as a popular writer and public scholar.
Mead’s written critique was also a bit biting and personal, as it directly mentioned some tactics originally introduced as possibilities by Hazel Stiebeling in the meeting minutes. It is possible that the two may have clashed personalities. With a Ph.D. in chemistry from Columbia, Stiebeling spent her entire career at the USDA in the Bureau of Home Economics. Due to Stiebeling’s role in government, she could not have directed the committee herself, but the work she had done at the USDA to create materials for cooperative extension services throughout the country mirrored much of what the committee hoped to investigate, and she likely shared this with the group. As a chemist, Stiebeling’s approach may have conflicted with Mead’s anthropological perspective.

In her autobiography, Stiebeling writes that her entire professional purpose at the USDA was to integrate her specialized knowledge and experience into recommended programs of action. In 1931, Stiebeling wrote pamphlets for cooperative extension programs. These documents laid the groundwork to develop food plans which provided instruction on how to prepare nutritional meals at low cost, and they reflected the problems families faced in the depression. Stiebeling sought to apply the newer knowledge of nutrition to the daily selection of food, without having to spend extra or violate personal tastes.

In 1935, Stiebeling led a nationwide consumer purchases study with other federal agencies. The study provided the first comprehensive picture of food consumption and dietary levels of American families, and indicated that a third of the nation’s families had nutritionally deficient diets. These findings facilitated efforts to enrich flour and bread with iron and B vitamins, and stimulated more vigorous nutrition education and school lunch programs.

Mead may also have been dismissive of what she considered public relations to communicate information about nutrition and food choice, as her ideas to change eating habits
employed some of her favorite persuasive tactics but contradicted her philosophy of cultural relativism. Mead’s plan to influence change involved using friend groups as educational tools and group feeding, like school lunch programs and mid-shift feeding for industry workers, and feeding centers in defense training facilities. Eating healthy, prepared meals in communal settings were what Mead thought would bring about real cultural change in American eating habits. By consuming prepared meals in group settings people might have some choices, but those options were limited compared to the amount of choice available for people who purchased their own food to eat at home, or in restaurants.

The distance that Mead placed between educators and eaters in her report might also explain why changing food habits was a tough sell and, ultimately, unsuccessful. There was a disconnect between the food humans need to exist and what food represents. Eating is a biological need, but the action carries with it powerful emotional ties. “It is the dinner table at present, and not the cafeteria, that is determinative in the health of the country,” said Paul Thomas Young, a professor of psychology at the University of Illinois when the committee met in 1944.

By 1944, rationing was fully underway and food restrictions limited consumption for everyone. The government’s focus went away from more broad examples of what healthy eating meant and became product focused—accepting soy, evaporated milk, and war bread.

Research Findings of the Committee on Changing Food Habits

The Committee on Changing Food Habits wrapped up their research in 1943, and the National Research Council published their findings as a book. This book included a collection of reports examined some food habits, but the content spanned many topics, which could reflect
Mead’s desire to include tangential things because it made the book look more substantial, or perhaps reflected her own scattered interests.

Divided into four sections, the Report on Changing Food Habits begins with a history written by Guthe and an overview of “The Problem of Changing Food Habits” by Mead. The second section featured the research projects by committee members or sponsored by the committee. The most notable contribution was by Kurt Lewin, but the report also featured the work of several other scholars. Hilde Bruch and Marjorie Janis examined the eating habits of children with food allergies, diabetes, epilepsy, and obesity. Earl Koos studied how friendship groups might be able to influence better eating habits in low-income communities. Gladys Engel-Frisch looked at the eating habits of shift workers. Virginia Fleming wrote a one-page analysis on the high turnover rates of unmarried women who worked for the Federal Government in Washington who were frustrated by the loneliness and high cost of living in the city. Rhoda Metraux discussed how to analyze verbal behaviors with qualitative methods during interviews, and as an example used a survey she conducted about food choices in Poughkeepsie, New York. Hortense Powdermaker wrote about the methods used by a field work class at Columbia University who were helping the project. Natalie Joffe briefly examined the food habits of several minority groups—blacks and Italian, Czech, Polish and Hungarian immigrants. Part three is titled related research, and includes two reports focused on researching rural eating habits, one by Margaret Cussler and Mary deGive who studied rural southern communities, and one by Herbert Passin and John Bennett, who looked at a community in southern Illinois. Some studies were full-length articles, but most were only a page or two. The report concluded with part four, which included meeting minutes and conference summaries, dealing with market research, child development, morale, and food supply issues in China and Europe.
Food Habits Explained With Lewin’s Channel Theory

At thirty pages, Kurt Lewin’s study is the study experiment in the report.227 He sought to combine quantitative psychology with anthropology by interviewing children and housewives in Iowa City.228

Lewin admitted that the simple question of figuring out what people ate and why was far more complex than he anticipated. For example, finding common terms and definitions for food, was challenging, as nutritionists and home cooks had far different perspectives. “Bread” can be loaves of bread, or rolls, buns, or biscuits. Leftovers could comprise any number of food items and would change depending on a variety of factors.

Lewin applied his channel theory to this research. He explained that food came to the table by different channels, and was controlled by a gatekeeper. Channels may vary based on shopping habits, and was influenced by income. Access to kitchen technology was important and varied as well—for example, only 11 of 107 housewives in the study owned refrigerators. This greatly affected how much people could buy and store. Ultimately, Lewin concluded that the small groups who worked together and reached consensus decisions about how to make dietary changes had a more powerful effect on lasting change than lectures and requests for compliance.229

Understanding Rural Food Habits

Radcliffe College graduate students Mary deGive and Margaret Cussler spent their young academic careers in service to the Committee on Food Habits and did research on the dietary habits of several communities in the South: Bath, North Carolina; Dutch Fork, South Carolina; and Nuberg, Georgia.230 As a result of their research, Cussler and deGive found the focus on cash
crops was the most detrimental factor when it came to nutrition in the rural South. With energy and resources focused on the biggest money-maker, everything else suffered.

In Cussler and deGive’s observations, the white landowners seemed to lead by example. They found that the landowners felt no obligation toward the diets of their white or black sharecroppers. Sharecroppers and tenant farmers who were forced to move frequently would have little incentive to plant gardens for their own use if they knew they would have to move at a landlord’s whim. DeGive and Cussler also wrote that black workers would likely be more influenced by white landowners, as blacks worked as cooks and domestics in wealthy white households, and “white tenants do not intermingle with the landlord socially or as servants.” In their report, Cussler and deGive document a process trickle-down of nutritional information, where urban white people are the influencers and would then pass habits to rural white people and then rural black people. Their own backgrounds as affluent, educated, white women may have had some influence over their perceptions. Cussler and deGive also stated that traditional public relations efforts—newspaper articles, pamphlets, and even home economics classes—would be so far removed from the daily lives of sharecroppers that their influence would be little to none.

Cussler and deGive found that the habits and traditions of older generations were also less influential, and as prone to change as any other. “The older people adopted the newer packaged and canned foods along with refrigerators and strip farming as part of the new and the good.” Ultimately, deGive and Cussler found that relationships were the key to food habits.

“We must realize that it is becoming less fruitful merely to enumerate the elements of diet than to concern ourselves with the complex operation of food habits. Otherwise, we shall be left with the gun apart, as the battle approaches.”
In his analysis of foodways in Southern Illinois, sociologist Herbert Passin recommended using existing attitudes to construct new ideas about food. In the poor, rural communities he visited there were favorable attitudes toward patent medicines. Passin thought vitamins could be marketed in a similar fashion and could be sold using similar techniques by travelling merchants or pharmacies—omitting, of course, the extravagant claims for cure that patent medicines use.

The research of Lewin, deGive, Cussler, and Passin indicate the strength and influence of messages communicated far outside of media, and forces far more difficult to understand, control or influence. The strength of personal relationships, the varied forces that influence choice, and the persistence of trickier messaging tactics indicate that the government would need to take a multifaceted approach to influencing dietary habits and understanding of nutrition. They also find that technological advancements were willingly adopted in the kitchen, and traditions were put aside for convenience.

Academia Versus Advertising

The final section of the Committee on Food Habits report included two sets of meeting minutes from the spring and summer of 1941, before the committee was officially established, but soon after the call from Roosevelt to begin research on how to improve the problem of malnutrition in the United States. In each, experts debated how to solve the problem of improving the country’s dietary habits. The first group, comprised of academics and government officials, met in late May. The meeting began with a presentation by Dr. I.H. Moore, who explained how a comprehensive education outreach program including gardening, cooking and menu planning and nutrition information, as well as well-baby clinics and a reduced cost school lunch program improved the overall health of tenant farmers and sharecroppers in Hancock.
County, Georgia. The hope was that the success of this program could be replicated to meet the needs of many communities across the United States.

The group included many social scientists who would continue with the Committee on Food Habits—Rensis Lickert, Ruth Benedict, Hazel Stiebeling, and twenty others—debated the options and offered solutions. They agreed that some kind of standard of good nutrition needed to be established and then explained to American citizens, but worried that at least a quarter of the population could not afford even the cheapest form of an adequate diet. How to meet the neediest populations, as well as find some messages that would reach immigrants, minorities, and people of different socioeconomic status. While everyone involved seemed to have a desire for a common outcome—better health related to improved eating habits—the challenges to communicating this information along with the known problems that would prevent the most vulnerable populations from being able to implement any dietary changes kept the conversation circling.

A second meeting, held on June 27, 1941, was entitled “Contributions from the Field of Market Research.” Here, men and women from advertising agencies and various special interest groups, like the American Meat Institute, discussed their perspectives and strategies. The Committee on Changing Food Habits knew from the start they would need industry partners to advise them. In a letter from Rensis Likert, when he was acting as chairman of the committee, to W.H. Sebrell, Likert wrote, “I think you should have a subcommittee in which you would bring in some outside experts in advertising, who would volunteer their services to be helpful in connection with publications which will be produced by agencies interested in the promotion of diet.”
Advertising professionals brought a different perspective to the idea of influencing food choices. In each instance, the executives dealt with more specific problems—like getting people to eat more meat or pineapple—with clearer desired outcomes, which usually resulted in a purchase. Those who could not be persuaded due to economics did not factor into their desired demographics.

“Emotional urge plus rationalization is the basis of all successful advertising,” said advertising giant Leo Burnett in meeting minutes.239 Others piped in, stating that in advertising copy, stories must be sound and reasonable, and that information should be simple and non-technical to reach wider audiences.

When one advertising executive mentioned doing more outreach to schools—with an estimated reach of 20 million people—the academics crept back in and discussed the challenges of different reading abilities and vocabulary that made that 20 million block more complex to quantify. In response, L.D. Weld, from the advertising firm McCann Erickson, explained that a well-rounded campaign—which included magazines, newspapers, billboards and recipe books—doubled the sales of crushed pineapple. He cut through some of the academic excuses—explaining that while magazines do not reach the lowest income groups, newspapers, radio, and outdoor advertising would reach a wide swath of people. “Habits aren’t too hard to change,” he said. His attitude reflects an arrogance—how different could encouraging people to eat canned pineapple be from encouraging a complete dietary overhaul?

A Lack of Priority to Change Food Habits

Changing food habits was ultimately considered less important to the government than more immediate and pressing messages, like ration compliance. An internal document from the Office of Price Administration provided a rating system for some of the government’s public
relations campaigns in April 1943 (see Image 1). These campaigns were directed toward women and concerned household affairs. Campaigns were evaluated against one another and ranked as major, average, and minor. Each campaign was evaluated in terms of importance to the war effort, how hard it was to “get the job done,” how many people the message needed to reach, and how much effort had already been given to the campaign. The memo states that it is important to set campaign priorities so that the public is not overwhelmed by too many messages.

IMAGE 1: Urgency Ratings for April. Campaign and Program Ratings for April 1943, RG 188, Office of Price Administration, Meat Rationing Branch, Box 756. File: Priority Procedure, War Campaigns, M 3969 Used in accordance with fair use policy.
An earlier ranking sheet from January 1943 explains how each campaign was evaluated. For example, the salvage of fats and greases was given a high priority, with an “ABB” rating (see Image 2). A pressing need for salvaged fat and grease was the primary reason, but that it was an easy way for people to cooperate, all families cook, and the campaign was already “well plugged” were also factors.

Nutrition was ranked average level of importance, and given a “CBC” priority rating (Image 2). The rating is explained, stating that while a healthy populace is important to a strong nation, there is no great amount of malnutrition in the United States, as less than a third of the population had poor diets (Image 3). The document also states that promoting good nutrition and dietary change is a difficult educational job, and while cooperation is likely expected, a campaign is not pressing and whatever was previously done (which is not explained), was on a different theme. Public relations strategists in the government realized that any attempt to improve American diets successful outcome would be incredibly difficult.

One vestige of the campaign to improve American diets during World War II remains to this day: the Recommended Dietary Allowances compiled by Lydia Roberts with the Food and Nutrition Board. The board tried to create simple guidelines that would be easy for housewives to follow. They broke food into seven groups, called the Basic Seven, and encouraged Americans to eat one item from each group every day. The seven groups consisted of:

- Green and yellow vegetables
- Oranges, tomatoes, grapefruit, raw cabbage and salad greens
- Potatoes and other vegetables and fruit
- Milk and other milk products
- Meat, poultry, fish, or eggs, or dried beans, peas, nuts, or peanut butter
- Bread, flour, and cereals
- Butter and fortified margarine

The guidelines were illustrated with a colorful graphic depicting each food group as a section of a wheel (see Image 1). At the center was a family of four—father, mother, son, and daughter—walking forward, toward the reader. The man wears work trousers and a slouching, wide-brimmed hat. The woman, wears a shirtwaist dress and sensible shoes. The daughter looks up at her father and the son wears short pants. In a halo around the family are the words: U.S. NEEDS US STRONG * EAT THE BASIC 7 EVERY DAY. This colorful graphic and appeal to patriotism was printed on posters, and in magazines, newspapers, and cookbooks. It was distributed widely by the USDA.
The Basic Seven infographic provided in a pamphlet distributed by the USDA was also widely used by commercial food producers. Used in accordance with fair use policy.
In a pamphlet for industry use, the government laid out clear rules for reprinting and using the nutrition guidelines. The pamphlet claimed that businesses and other groups had been reaching out to the government asking how they could help the war effort. The answer, according to the Office of Defense, Health, and Welfare Services, was to use extra advertising space to promote healthy eating. The government specified that the graphic could be printed in any size and color, and it must be “reproduced in [its] entirety, exactly as illustrated.” Specifically, no one food or food group could be accentuated as any more important than another. For example, if the National Meat Council wanted to reproduce the graphic in a cookbook, they could not reproduce the chart in a way that focused only on meat or manipulate the graphic in some way to eliminate legumes and other proteins from that section.

Complicated use restrictions notwithstanding, the recommended dietary allowance guidelines have lasted, evolving from the Basic Seven of the 1940s to the four food groups to the food pyramid and the modern-day “my plate.”

**Conclusion**

What drove social scientists to work on the committee was both a desire to contribute to a practical project that could be implemented for the good of the country, and, in some way, protect democracy as the threat of authoritarianism loomed abroad. Despite their initial enthusiasm, competing factors and lack of funding kept the committee from providing the full cultural overview they hoped to find. In the research they did complete, however, they found that competing factors influence the food choices people make, and where a person works, who they socialize with, and their economic status play the most important roles in why people eat what they do.
Despite the initial investment and concerns about widespread malnutrition, the government did not prioritize nutrition messages in the face of more pressing and immediate needs. The largest result of the project was the Food and Nutrition Board’s Basic Seven, not a cohesive plan to improve dietary habits by changing culture.

As a public relations campaign, the effort to change dietary habits in the 1940s was a messy and complicated one. Scientists disagreed on what foods were needed in a healthy diet, and social scientists disagreed on how to best influence people. Viewing this effort as a public relations campaign broadens and changes public relations history. So much understanding of public relations is driven by Grunig’s four models. From this approach, any communication effort in the 1940s would be considered one-way symmetrical—a public information campaign that provided useful information, but the primary flow is from sender to receiver. Additionally, a current best practice of professional societies like the Public Relations Society of America advocates for a particular formula to drive campaigns that involves research, planning, implementation and evaluation. The depth of research to inform this nutrition campaign in the 1940s, especially Kurt Lewin’s channel theory, as well as the use of friend groups, trickle-down information, and ordered meals to influence change, demonstrates an understanding that receivers of messages needed to be involved in the process, and how culture influences the reception of messages.

The Committee on Changing Food Habits was an opportunity for academics and government officials to channel their frustrations and fear at a time of war and confusion into a noble project. They sought to find the best path of communication in order to relay messages that would improve the lives of all Americans, especially the neediest. While the overall goal of the committee has never been reached, the efforts of the group and the influence of group members
at their respective institutions played a role in communicating dietary information for generations to come.


117 Advancing on the Nutrition Front." Social Service Review 15, no. 3 (1941): 560-62. JSTOR

118 Sherman, Henry C. “Nutritional Engineering II, Nutritional Improvement of Life.” Franklin Institute, Vol 239, no. 2, August 1944.

119 This conclusion may have been a mistake. A 1944 report posited that the large proportion of men rejected in the draft of 1940-41 with “physical defects” claimed that a more thorough medical examination process had been in place than had been used in 1917-18, which may have also caused the large number of draft rejections.


127 Mandler, Peter. Return from the natives: how Margaret Mead won the Second World War and lost the Cold War. Yale University Press, 2013.


129 Academic board members included anthropologist Ruth Benedict, who would later write The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, an influential book on Japanese culture post-war; Allison Davis, the first African-American to hold a full faculty position at the University of Chicago; Helen Mitchell, a nutritionist at the Battle Creek Sanitarium; Curt Richter, a biopsychologist at Johns Hopkins who developed the idea of the biological clock; Mary E. Sweeney, dean of human ecology at Michigan State; and Father John Cooper, a Roman Catholic priest and professor of
sociology at Catholic University. Government representatives included Hazel Stiebeling, head of the Bureau of Home Economics at the USDA; psychologist Rensis Likert, who was head of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics at the USDA, between academic appointments; John Provine, an anthropologist who headed the community management division of the War Relocation Authority, which oversaw Japanese internment; W.H. Sebrell, a nutrition expert at the U.S. Public Health Service who later led the National Institutes of Health; Ruth Tolman, a psychologist with the OSS; and Martha Eliot, a pediatrician and head of the Emergency Maternity and Infant Care program.

131 Guthe, Carl. Summary index of the proceedings liaison sessions, March 14-16, 1942.
146 Margaret Mead made a name for herself with her field work in Samoa, New Guinea, and Bali, but ten years of field work abroad made Mead yearn for home. The spread of World War II across the globe made the South Pacific unsafe for American researchers, but Mead was enthusiastic about the change. She was also pregnant, an unexpected joy for her and her husband, Gregory Bateson, as Mead had suffered several miscarriages and had other health concerns.


A second volume of findings was published after the war.


This was influenced by her teacher, Franz Boas. See Mandler and Howard.

Mandler, 65.

Changing Food Habits, 21


Mandler, 65-66.


Mandler, 65.

Mandler, 65-66.

Committee on Food Habits.

Evaporated Milk Counsel to the Committee on Changing Food Habits, 1942.

Committee on Food Habits, summary of the minutes of the executive sessions, January 23-24, 1943.

Committee on Changing Food Habits, Draft of proposed foreword to a memorandum on feeding in occupied countries and nutrition education, January 26, 1943. Stamped not for publication.

Mandler, 42.


Committee on Food Habits, Division of Anthropology and Psychology, National Research Council, Provisional Program of Action. February 28, 1941.

John H. Provinse to Carle Guthe, December 17, 1940.

John H. Provinse to Carle Guthe, December 17, 1940.

John H. Provinse to Carle Guthe, December 17, 1940.


Provinse to Guthe


Bentley, 79.

Bentley, 14-15.

“How Industry Can Cooperate with the National Nutrition Plan,” RG 208, Office of War Information, NC 148, Box 143, Folder: Nutrition


Committee on Changing Food Habits, Minutes of executive sessions committee on food habits, April 15-16 1944.

Committee on Food Habits, Division of Anthropology and Psychology, National Research Council, Provisional Program of Action, February 28, 1941.

Committee on Food Habits, Division of Anthropology and Psychology, National Research Council, Provisional Program of Action, February 28, 1941.

Committee on Food Habits, Division of Anthropology and Psychology, National Research Council, Provisional Program of Action, February 28, 1941.

Committee on Food Habits, Division of Anthropology and Psychology, National Research Council, Provisional Program of Action, February 28, 1941.

Changing Food Habits, 24

Committee on Food Habits liaison session, March 14, 1942.

Committee on Food Habits, Anthropology and Psychology Division Meeting, 1942. Excerpt VI: plans for next conference.

Committee on Food Habits, Anthropology and Psychology Division Meeting, 1942. Excerpt VI: plans for next conference.

Committee on Food Habits, Anthropology and Psychology Division Meeting, 1942. Excerpt VI: plans for next conference.

Committee on Food Habits liaison session, March 14, 1942.

Committee on Food Habits liaison session, March 14, 1942.
After the war she became a regular columnist in women’s magazines like *Redbook*; she was a regular guest of Johnny Carson on *The Tonight Show*; and she toured extensively, visiting as many towns and communities as she could fit in her schedule.

Later in life, Mead would be known as “the grandmother of the world,” a moniker she wore proudly. Perhaps this approach is a preview of that—where of course Mead felt it would be important for people to make their own independent choices, but in a group feeding scenario,
those choices are greatly limited. Something along the lines of—grandmother wants you to make good choices, and she also knows what that choice should be.

216 Committee on Food Habits, Anthropology and Psychology Division, meeting notes, 1942. Committee on Food Habits, Anthropology and Psychology Division, meeting notes, 1944.
217 Committee on Food Habits, Anthropology and Psychology Division, meeting notes, 1944.
226 Born in Prussia in 1890, Lewin moved to Germany to study in Frieberg, Munich, and Berlin, Lewin spent much of his early career attempting to combat anti-Semitism. He served in the German army in World War I, but took a teaching position at Stanford in 1930 and became an American citizen in 1940. Lewin was deeply influenced by Gestalt theory, and sought to understand human behavior as it was determined by all the variables in a person’s life.


Committee on Food Habits, 127.


Rensis Likert to W.H. Sebrell, June 10, 1941.

Committee on Food Habits, 146.


Bentley, 67.

Victory Bulletin, October 1943, 20; and Bentley, 69.

"How Industry Can Cooperate with the National Nutrition Plan," RG 208, Office of War Information, NC 148, Box 143, Folder: Nutrition

"How Industry Can Cooperate with the National Nutrition Plan," RG 208, Office of War Information, NC 148, Box 143, Folder: Nutrition

"How Industry Can Cooperate with the National Nutrition Plan," RG 208, Office of War Information, NC 148, Box 143, Folder: Nutrition

"How Industry Can Cooperate with the National Nutrition Plan," RG 208, Office of War Information, NC 148, Box 143, Folder: Nutrition


Chapter 4: War on the Table: Newspaper and Magazine Reporting about Nutrition During World War II

Newspapers and Magazines Influence Food Choice

The domestic sphere in the United States changed dramatically during World War II. War strained and changed many aspects of American home life—and shined a spotlight on the cracks that had always been there. War industry put women to work—in 1944, this meant about 16 million women, 6 million of whom had children at home.257 Housework has always been an unpleasant obligation, and changes on the home front added an extra level of complexity to housekeeping. Popular press editors could capitalize upon this need by presenting solutions to the new problems facing women.258 Newspapers and magazines wanted to engage with their readers, and provide them with relevant information in order to earn their trust and continue selling their products.

Newspapers and magazines provided not only quick entertainment but some easy answers to everyday problems. The women’s pages of newspapers are stereotyped to have only dealt with the four “F”s—food, fashion, family, and furnishings.259 These pages, however, were critical to women when they were published, and continue to provide important historical information. They contextualized the problems of the day to relate to the everyday needs of their readers—keeping a family fed and a household in relative order while working within the limits and restrictions that war and other economic concerns presented. Editors and food writers of newspaper women’s pages—women themselves—were trained journalists and home economists who took their reporting work seriously. They wanted to be a trusted source of information so they ensured recipes were accurate and sought to elevate the work they did and took seriously the job of reporting the world of food.260
One major goal of any public relations campaign is to generate earned media. As a government program, albeit one that was ranked a lower priority, the nutrition campaign had support and coordinated effort. It was integrated into government materials and communications, and distributed to private food companies and special interest associations. Companies received compensation for advertising during war—even when they could not sell some of their products—and were motivated to include government messages. Journalists did not have the same direct incentives, but may have felt the need to integrate nutrition messages into their writing or report on the state of nutrition as it seemed relevant to their beat. An analysis of 84 newspaper articles that included the term “Basic Seven” published between 1941 and 1945 from the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Washington Post, Norfolk Journal and Guide, The Christian Science Monitor, and Atlanta Journal Constitution were analyzed. “Basic Seven” did not generate enough magazine articles to analyze, so the broader search term “recipe” between the years 1941 and 1945 were used. This generated a collection of 91 magazine articles from Better Homes and Gardens, House and Garden, Parents, American Home, House Beautiful, and Good Housekeeping.

Newspaper Reporting About the Basic Seven

A short, syndicated current events quiz in the May 16, 1943, edition of the Los Angeles Times illustrates how confusing and overwhelming news was during World War II. The quiz demonstrates how nutrition messages might have been overlooked. The 12-item quiz covered everything from war bonds to zinc pennies. It asked questions like “how can we use milady’s lipstick to advantage in first aid?” Answer—write on the victim’s forehead the exact time a tourniquet was applied. Another question asked “Should mothers of children under two years work in war plants?” Answer—no, according to a child psychologist. Question six was titled
“slogan” and asked, “What is meant by the slogan ‘Eat the Basic Seven every day?’ The answer—one of the longest answers in the quiz—explained each category—green and yellow vegetables; citrus, tomatoes, cabbage or salad greens; potatoes and other vegetables and fruits; milk and cheese; meat, poultry, fish, eggs and legumes; bread, flour and cereals; and butter or fortified margarine. When included with everything else—news of the war, an entire country’s economy shifted to war production, new restrictions that impeded everyday life—this nutrition information, while valuable, could be lost in the din.\textsuperscript{261}

In order to sell publications and retain readers, food writers for women’s pages and in shelter magazines needed to understand their audience’s experiences, backgrounds, and challenges. During World War II, women dealt with rationing restrictions and other food realities while enjoying technological advantages that were unparalleled in history. A young woman at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century would not have had a refrigerator and would have cooked on an iron cast stove fired by wood or coal. Electric refrigerators were developed in the 1910s, but by the 1940s only half of American homes owned one.\textsuperscript{262} She would have learned to cook on a cast iron stove that required coal or wooden fuel. By the 1920s, electric and gas ranges became more commonplace, but were also more expensive. Many women kept wood and coal burning stoves alongside their more modern appliances to use when electricity was too expensive.\textsuperscript{263}

The self-regulating temperatures of gas and electric stoves provided home cooks with much more stability in the cooking process than ever before. Women did not have to stoop to monitor food or clean out ashes, and they could use lighter pots and pans. This rise in technology coincided with the discontinuation of families hiring kitchen help. For lower class women, this shift in labor meant less time doing domestic chores and fewer employment opportunities; for
middle class women, this meant a decrease in status. By the 1920s, the woman of the house was expected to do all of the cooking, in addition to other household chores.

Changes brought about by war affected women’s access to time-saving technology, which was one of the few things that truly gave them time to pursue activities besides domestic chores. Canned foods and devices like toasters, self-regulating ovens, and refrigerators changed kitchens, and lives, dramatically and relatively quickly. When war limited access to these technologies, by rationing canned goods and eliminating kitchen appliances for purchase due to war production, it was a huge adjustment for home cooks who were already asked to change many other aspects of their lives. Small appliances, like countertop toasters and stand mixers, were common, although restrictions on metal and steel made these products more difficult to purchase new. House designs in the 1920s began to add breakfast nooks and other spaces to allow dining in the kitchen, so mealtimes were less formal and the cooking prowess of the homemaker was on display. World War II took the kitchen from being on display to the family to a public realm that was integral to winning the war. Rationing limited access to both convenience foods and metal appliances that made cooking easier and less time consuming, so women who had become accustomed to the ease of processed foods now had to learn or re-learn new food preparation methods. They relied on the advice and information in newspapers and magazines, as there were few places to learn to adjust to shifting technologies and access.

**Your Favorite Food Advice by Unacknowledged Reporters**

Women food writers were second class citizens at their places of employment. They were frequently required to take on pseudonyms, as it was assumed that women reporters would leave their positions after marriage, and newspapers wanted to ensure consistency and build trust with their readers. For example, during World War II, “Marian Manners” was the persona of
Fleeta Louise Hoke at the *Los Angeles Times*. Hoke was the second writer to use the moniker, and she did community cooking demonstrations, wrote a daily column, and answered readers’ letters. In the *New York Times*, the food column was originated by Jane Holt, the nom-de-plume of Margot McConnell. When McConnell left the paper in 1943 for an editor position at *Women’s Home Companion*, Jane Nickerson took her place and wrote under her own byline.266

The *Chicago Tribune*’s pseudonymous food writer, Mary Meade, was the pen name for five different writers, but the longest reporter to use the name was Ruth Ellen Church, who served as food editor from 1936 to 1974.267 The paper explained the extensive research that went into formulating each week’s food column, and articulated the paper’s intention to help home cooks plan affordable, healthy menus around ration restrictions. “These illustrated menus, covering a week’s meals for a family of four … are carefully worked out within the limits of the red and blue ration stamps allowed for four persons.” Red ration stamps dealt specifically with meat, cheese, canned fish, butter, fat and salad oil; blue stamps were for processed foods. Meade took into consideration what was seasonal and popular, using survey information from local stores.268 She also took into account Basic Seven recommendations.

A typical menu column from June, 1943 began with an explanation of that quarter’s ration stamp allotments, which restricted processed foods; meat, cheese, fat and oils; sugar; and coffee. Meade began the menu with a Sunday roast that could be used as leftovers on Tuesday; roasted potatoes and glazed carrots with mint (for which she provided cooking instructions); a jellied vegetable salad and a graham cracker cream pie that would serve as Monday’s dessert as well. Monday was a simpler meal of poached eggs with fresh vegetables (asparagus, beets, carrots, and peas, all of which would have been in season in June); grapefruit and cavalo (avocado) salad; and bran muffins along with the leftover pie. Tuesday featured the leftover pork
roast, creamed potatoes, fresh spinach, jellied vegetable salad; whole wheat bread and cupcakes. Wednesday advised meatballs in tomato sauce, for which she gave instructions to cook the meat in simmering tomato soup; tossed green salad; corn meal muffins; canned pears; and brownies. Thursday was broiled lamb liver with bacon; fried onion rings; creamed wax beans; tomato and lettuce salad; enriched bread; and rhubarb brown betty, for which she provided cooking instructions. Friday was the week’s only meatless meal, featuring mushroom soup, and a cheese soufflé; broiled asparagus and tomato slices; pear and cottage cheese salad; bread; and strawberry shortcake. Saturday was lamb patties; browned potatoes; fresh peas; tossed salad; rolls; and raspberries and cream for dessert.

At the end of the column, Meade tabulated the ration points allotted for that week. Cooks could use 32 red stamps that week, and that entire allotment was used up by her advised meat and protein purchases—ground hamburger, bacon, lamb liver, lamb patties, butter, cheese, and the pork loin. There were 24 blue stamps allotted, and Meade used 20 in her meal plan for the canned items—pears, tomato soup, and plums (ostensibly the mushroom soup was either not rationed or made from scratch).269

Reporters like Meade wrote as much, if not more, than their male counterparts, and they were fixtures in their communities. Responding to reader queries and attending public events meant that reporters engaged with their readers and would hear regularly about what issues women struggled with most, in addition to writing daily columns. If they were savvy businesswomen, these reporters would understand that addressing the needs of their readers meant selling more newspapers.
Mixing Nutrition into Recipes and Meal Planning

The Basic Seven guidelines were first rolled out in April 1943. An advertising industry column in the *New York Times* reported in 1943 that the Grocery Manufacturers of America sent details of a revised nutrition program—the Basic Seven—to food companies nationwide. The nutrition program had significant industry support, and had been incorporated in an estimated $40 million worth of advertising. Nutrition program information was sent to private food companies to include in their advertising schedules.²⁷⁰

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* announced the program with a half column deep in the paper.²⁷¹ “Eat Basic & soon to be War Food Slogan,” the headline announced, and the short article explained that food demonstrations aimed at maintaining nutrition standards would be held across the country. It explained the seven basic food groups: green and yellow vegetables; oranges, tomatoes, and grapefruit (or cabbage or salad greens); potatoes and other vegetables and fruit; milk and milk products (like cheese); meat, poultry, fish, eggs, or legumes; bread, flour, and cereals; and butter or margarine fortified with vitamin A.

Some reporters derided the program as an example of government overreach. “Americans are without a doubt the most lectured people in the world,” opined Evelyn Hanna at the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. “If we continue to get our basic seven foods and 187 vitamins every day to sleep from 10 to 8 in the position of an architect’s T-square on a drawing board and walk like a West Point cadet, we’re going to be living when the year 2084 rolls around.”²⁷²

Martha Ellyn, food columnist for the *Washington Post*, had home economics students from the University of Maryland rework a week’s worth of recipes for her April 9, 1943 column. The students had to both maximize ration points and include the Basic Seven for each meal. Ellyn’s column acted more as meal planning advice than instruction, as she did not include
specific recipes (although she did suggest substitutions, such as raisins to replace canned peaches in a pie, or shortening to replace butter in Toll House cookies). “A knowledge of nutrition plus native imagination and a willingness to study recipes has turned the trick for these future homemakers,” Ellyn wrote. Most menu changes advocated using fresh or from-scratch methods for making soup or desserts rather than using rationed canned products. For the week, breakfast almost always included grapefruit; almost every dinner featured meat—roast beef on Monday; beef biscuits on Tuesday, liver on Wednesday, leg of lamb on Thursday, fish on Friday, baked beans on Saturday, and chicken with dumplings on Sunday. The complexity of the meals indicate that the plans were for cooks who did not otherwise work outside the home. If a home cook was expected to roast a leg of lamb mid-week, there must have been some assumption that she could stay in the home long enough to roast a 6-12 pound piece of meat for several hours, or that the family would eat very late at night. Lunches were simpler, comprised of cold cuts, peanut butter sandwiches, or soup; milk was listed as a beverage for every meal. Despite several evening meals with large meat dishes, there were no assumptions that leftovers were to be used to supplement other meals. The next time Ellyn mentions the Basic Seven is in a July 12, 1943 column. “You have been busier than a one-armed paperhanger with the hives if you’ve attempted to include in your diet the Seven Basic Food Groups recommended by the National Nutrition Program,” she quips. In the column she claims that some foods are to be subsidized, which should help with affording healthier foods, but that availability has been an issue. Green and yellow vegetables, milk, and bread and cereals were plentiful, but in the summer of 1943, potatoes, meat, and butter were difficult to acquire. Citrus fruits and salad greens were available, but expensive. Meat availability was an especially sore point.
The very mention of meat brings on all kinds of heated discussions. If you don’t mind eating ham, and it is a meat that you can eat, then you won’t have a meat deficiency. But try to include beef, veal, lamb, liver, and some of the variety meats in your menus and you will for the most time be wasting your time.275

Organ, or variety meats, were promoted as an alternative to better cuts of meat, which were rationed. That organ meat was difficult to come by may mean that they were more popular to use than has been assumed. Ellyn explains that chicken is just as scarce as other meat— “You stand in line 40 minutes because you have number 26 and then learn when it comes your turn that the last chicken has just been sold.”276

At the end of the column, Ellyn provides a dinner menu featuring chupe de mariscos, a Chilean seafood soufflé-type dish with lobster, clam, shrimp, and crabmeat; lima beans displayed in green pepper wedges; calavo (avocado) salad; muffins with honey; peaches and cream; and iced tea with lemon. Ellyn then broke the components of the meal into seven food groups, but may have made some errors in her selections, as she placed lima beans with green and yellow vegetables instead of with meat and legumes. By March 1944, Ellyn was less flippant and more practical. Ever acerbic, however, she begins her column saying that working within the “no point-low point” ration restrictions does not have to be “as grim as chalk dust.” She also admitted that some of the concerns of cooks before rationing “have proved silly,” and while cooks may miss canned fruit—pineapple, cherries, peaches, and fruit cocktail—alternatives were not as dire as predicted. Ellyn then provides suggestions for a day of low point meals—sliced oranges, oatmeal with raisins, poached egg on toast, and milk for breakfast; peanut butter or minced olive and egg sandwiches, carrot sticks, oranges, prunes, and walnut-stuffed gingerbread for lunch; and planked shad, parsley potatoes, string beans, bread and orange custard for dessert.
She provides specific recipes for the shad and custard, but the rest are just meal planning suggestions.\textsuperscript{277}

In her first discussions of the Basic Seven, \textit{New York Times} columnist Jane Holt reiterated the contents of the Basic Seven several times before dedicating two columns in 1944 to saving time in the kitchen. Holt had a much more serious tone than Ellyn, and presented her information more as a reporter on the food beat than the conversational style of some women’s pages writers.

“Women have neither the inclination nor the time to be kitchen drudges nowadays,” Holt wrote. “They must perform divers (sic) wartime duties and it is imperative that cookery—except on rare occasions of holidays or special family feasts—be streamlined to fit their schedules.”\textsuperscript{278} A well designed and organized kitchen, meal planning, and cooking in quantity so that dishes can last over several meals were some of the ways Holt advised women to manage their schedules. White sauce, large pieces of meat that last, like pot roast or ham, dried beans and peas to stretch meals, and puddings that can be used with rice or bread, could be made once and modified over several days.

Holt did not just repeat nutrition information—she also reported on it. In October 1944, she interviewed women who had taken nutrition courses at local universities and from the Red Cross who claimed to benefit from the information. Responses to the effort were mixed to negative. “I’ve been serving soy beans for six years,” wrote one reader. “I’m too old a housekeeper to change my ways. I see no improvement in doing so,” said another.\textsuperscript{279} Other readers commented that price inflation, reduced wages due to increased deductions, loss of domestic help, and gas rationing, affected their purchasing power, so they did not have as many choices to add to their plates.\textsuperscript{280}
Jane Nickerson was Holt’s replacement at the *New York Times* and served as the paper’s first restaurant critic. Nickerson interviewed Natalie Joffe, who worked with Margaret Mead on the Committee to Change Food Habits, about the symbolism of meat to American eaters. Joffe explained that meat consumption was integral to an immigrant’s American dream—as livestock in Europe and Asia was used for dairying and meat was scarce. Part of this same compulsion also drove Americans to prefer white bread to the coarse, black loaves of their homelands. These attitudes toward food persisted many generations removed from immigrant settlers. Meat was also practical—hunting was easier for the first colonists than farming. Bread and potatoes are usually always accessible and relatively affordable, meat is not. Meat is the star of the evening meal, which in America is the largest meal of the day. When meat is absent at the table, it means something is not quite right. Joffe’s interview gets at the heart of the difficulty Americans grappled with when faced with meat rationing. There were plenty of alternatives to keep from going hungry, but what meat represented, literally and metaphorically, was something akin to security.

In the *Los Angeles Times*, Marian Manners addressed the relatively low rewards of cooking nutritious meals. “No bands will play, no medals will be pinned on your chest because you choose the right food at the noon-hour refueling pause,” she wrote. She connected the duty to patriotism—“you’re one of the important volunteers for nonimpeded war effort, because right eating means more hours in the job and more pep and stamina to help end the war.”

Weight and weight loss related to health and good nutrition is not something directly addressed by most columnists but women were sensitive to issues of weight and “reducing” was popular. In the *Washington Post*, Ida Jean Kain suggested that by choosing foods from the Basic Seven, women could keep their weight under control. Her advice implies that Americans
have suffered from the same dietary issues for a long time. “You put all the blame on the high-starch diet—which you really like! Instead of fish, which you can always take or leave, you have pancakes or a noodle dish or some other high starch favorite on the meatless days. That steps up the starch, which gives you calories, and lowers the protein, which helps you to burn calories.”

Kain does not quote from letters but her tone addresses the problem as if it is a common and persistent one. She advises using the Basic Seven strategically, by advising women to find items from each category to replace what foods cannot be obtained rather than overindulging with easy carbs. She overviews the Basic Seven, then gives an example of a “reducing diet” that includes grapefruit, cereal, and coffee with milk and sugar for breakfast; a scrambled egg sandwich with a green salad, milk, and carrot sticks for lunch; and broiled fish, a baked potato, string beans with butter, coleslaw, and fresh fruit for dinner, with total calories adding up to 1,180. She closed her piece with a call for cooks who want more meal planning advice to send a stamped, return envelope to “Victory Reducing Diet,” one of the few connections between patriotism and nutrition among the analyzed articles.

One of the most influential newspapers in the South was the Norfolk Journal and Guide. In the mid-1940s, the paper was a 32-page weekly and the fourth in circulation among African American papers. It had a national edition, and local editions across Virginia, for Richmond, Portsmouth, and Hampton. The Guide was at the forefront of endorsing improved infrastructure in Norfolk and pressed for integration in the defense industries and the Department of War during World War II.

The weekly Nutrition Notes column in the Norfolk Journal and Guide was written without a byline, in a measured, instructional tone that treated food and dietary choices seriously, a far cry from the flippant, lighthearted voice of Martha Ellyn or the harder reporting of Jane
Holt. It may have also been syndicated, as its content often specified certain regions where a particular fruit might be in season—like cherries in the Pacific Northwest—and also cites advice from Montana’s agricultural extension service. This may also indicate that the author was not from the black community. Advising a balance between taste and nutritive value, the October 9, 1943 column provided advice on making good food choices that would meet Basic Seven needs, war limitations, and general thriftiness. “Use your ingenuity,” the anonymous columnist wrote, “to make one vegetable do the work of two.”

The author described the nutritive value of each food item listed as well as where it fit within Basic Seven guidelines without iterating the levels of Basic Seven. For example, she gave advice about how retain vitamin A by drying fruit instead of canning; how to best prepare liver, by removing skin and tough fibers with scissors and wiping it dry before braising, frying, or broiling it; she also advised removing the fat, skin and connective tissue of kidneys before cooking them. The specificity of her instruction is a departure from menu lists and other recipes that assumed the cook already understood these steps. The author addressed a late freeze and war conditions made the 1943 fruit crop skimpier than most. “Seedless grapes, for instance, are going into raisins instead of to market, but there are still plenty of grapes for the eating. Try tokays, red malagas, and ribes.” She also advised cooking many different kinds of root vegetables—turnips, parsnips, beets and potatoes—for their nutritive value and variety. She and suggested using seafood to replace rationed meat.

It is unknown how women integrated an understanding of the Basic Seven into their cooking, but some reporting sheds light on how the program was embraced. In a September 1944 article in the *Los Angeles Times*, Bess Wilson reported on the “busman’s vacation” of Essie Elliott, director of home economics for the Fruit Grower’s Exchange in California. Elliott,
posing as a food writer, went door to door in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Michigan and asked women what they understood about creating healthy diets. Women said they understood the importance of eating fruit and vegetables daily, but the expense of fruit and the distaste for vegetables in general made following through difficult. Elliott’s unscientific study also found that women were unpersuaded by government nutrition information, distrustful of meals that could be prepared in 30 minutes or less, and found many recipes too difficult to follow or expensive with unfamiliar ingredients. “You can change styles of dress in one-tenth the time it takes to change a food style,” Elliott states. Elliott found cooking was still considered a very private and individualized act, in both design and public scrutiny. “No one can see what goes on in the family kitchen, and it is simpler to do things there in the same old ways, those the housewife knows.” Elliott did maintain optimism, however, but as a public relations professional for a special interest group, it is important to consider her motivations. “There is no reason for being disheartened because we have not made the progress we hoped to in teaching women that nutritious food is the best disease preventative and health builder we have,” she said. “When we see the progress made in a single generation, we know that, little by little, we shall bring housewives to see that good, well-cooked food is safest, sanest, and least expensive. But there is a lot to be done before we have attained that goal.”

**Magazines Appeal to the Food Needs of a More Affluent Audience**

Popular magazines reached a different audience than newspapers. More expensive to purchase, and more targeted in their audiences, magazine content was directed to a more affluent and homogenous group. Shelter magazines devoted to home life appealed to women who dreamed of white picket fences, unlike a newspaper with various sections that could be shared by
a family with diverse interests and needed to serve an entire region with local news coverage, regardless of income levels.

The recipes shared by magazines like *American Home*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Parents* responded slowly to ration restrictions. This may have been because production schedules pushed content decisions far enough into the future that it took longer to integrate responses to this phenomenon. Most recipes in the analyzed sample were for desserts or sweets and did not suggest replacements for rationed sugar, which was limited to one pound per person in a household every two weeks. Recipes for rhubarb conserve, apple dumplings, brown betties, coffeecakes, and orange rolls required generous amounts of sugar, using one family member’s entire allotment in a dish. Sugarless recipes advised using sweetened condensed milk or similar substitutes, which would be rationed as well as a canned convenience item.

Most recipes were accompanied by narratives, some which addressed, or defined, the perceived needs of the reader; others merely reflected the author and his or her situation. In the March 1943 issue of *Parents* magazine, Lillian Pedersen Church shared the recipes, and story, of her black cook, Nola. Church attempts to portray Nola in a flattering light, as the article’s subhead proclaims “humor and rare understanding,” but Church does not seem to ask Nola her own opinions or desires, rather reports about Nola as reflected by Church’s own needs. According to Church, Nola was illiterate when they met, but Church’s young son taught her to read. Church writes Nola’s words in dialect and discusses how Nola’s service to her family allowed her to pursue a career outside the home.

The recipes Church included—jellied pineapple salad, rhubarb conserve, bacon broiled with sugar, pimento baked potatoes, eggplant casserole, and chicken turnovers—have precise
amounts and cooking instructions that seem unusual for an illiterate cook, so whether they came from Nola is unclear. Church ends the article proclaiming that Nola’s faith allows her to greet each day with “an armful of victory and a pack of peace,” Church does not connect Nola’s statement to a larger war effort message—that a term like “victory” at this time might imply—but rather her victory of daily existence, a mother, a participant in her church, and as a domestic employee. This article reflects the changing power dynamic in American kitchens. Most women had lost their domestic help at this time due to technology. Church claimed to express her appreciation of Nola, but she clearly does not see Nola as an equal. This demoralizing depiction of Nola is just one example of race relations on the home front that preceded the Civil Rights movement, which would gain momentum after World War II.

**Satisfying the Epicures**

Magazine articles also capitalized on the gourmet movement, which some scholars claim was founded as a direct reaction to the nutrition movement. Gourmets were primarily male, but did feature prominent women like M.F.K. Fisher. Gourmets bemoaned the loss of aesthetic that nutrition-focused meals brought to the table. House and Garden collected recipes in their February 1942 issue so decadent that one might not even realize the country was at war. Their recipes were for the “inner man,” whose epicurian content was the top concern of cooks and vintners. Oxtail soup, lobster mousse, and roast pheasant were served on Spode china. The article provides a recipe for nun’s bread, which they describe as an old Scots recipe. It is coarse and black, best served with smoked salmon and unsalted butter, washed down by a light dry sherry, slightly chilled. This recommendation runs completely counter to the information presented by Natalie Joffe in Jane Holt’s New York Times interview, whose research revealed that brown bread was undesirable. While House and Garden would appeal to a reader not in search of
practical, time, or money-saving tips, it is important to note that there was a media-buying public for whom concerns of ration allotments, cost, and nutrition did not apply.

Articles also had a sense of humor—and addressed real problems. The *American Home*, for example, discussed the bounties, or lack thereof, of victory gardens. “Now that all those seeds you sowed this spring … are bearing fruit, are you a little appalled at your harvest?” Gardening successfully takes skill and time, and people unused to growing food for consumption were likely to be disappointed with their crop yield. “You’re apt to be faced with half a bushel of home-grown something or other and not know quite what to do about it while it is at its edible best.” 302 Pickling, preserving, drying, and freezing were suggested to deal with making an abundance last.

Several different magazine articles drew recipe inspiration from international sources. In “Don’t put all your Eggs in the Same Old Recipes,” author Byron MacFadyen discussed eggs nutritive value as a protein, and their versatility allowed them to be used at any meal of the day. 303 In addition to eggs fried with hamburgers, chili with scrambled eggs, and spring omelets, MacFadyen also suggests making egg foo yeung (sic). “The Chinese do some interesting things with eggs. They make omelets with shrimp, lobster, and crab meat. Unfortunately, the extra ingredients they use to “make” the dish are available only at Chinese grocery stores.” Perhaps it was considered inappropriate to shop at a Chinese grocery store if one was not Chinese. Egg foo yeung, he explains, contains ingredients more readily available. “American firms prepare and pack Chinese vegetables, also soy sauce. If you can get bean sprouts and soy sauce, eggs foo yeung are well worth trying.” An easy way to stretch leftover pork that would not otherwise feed a family, this simple and practical meal would be easy to put together after a long workday and would appeal more to American dietary preferences more than most might assume.
Parents magazine also suggested several international options to add variety to mealtimes. Egg drop soup and Chinese beef with tomatoes also featured soy sauce and used eggs to add more protein. The article also suggested a Scandinavian buffet with pea soup and red grot, which is cherries with custard sauce, as well as a Slavic dinner with beet soup, veal stew, and kolachky, a Polish cream cheese pastry. In a November 1943 article for Home and Garden, Carlyn Coffin advised that Chinese recipes can help stretch a weekly ration. These are not Chinese haute cuisine, she warns, but rather “recipes based on Chinese originals, but a long way from them” which appeal to the taste-seeker and pocket-book. Nearly a year after their gourmet article, House and Garden appealed to tastemakers who also needed to mind their budgets. “How pleasant it is to be at once gourmet and patriot,” Coffin wrote.

Rice, noodles, and meat-stuffed pastries are familiar across many cuisines, and soy sauce at that point was ubiquitously accessible. A pork and eggplant stew with ginger, soy sauce, and bean sprouts would feed a family, and leftovers could be scrambled with eggs the next day. “If … you go on to investigate real Chinese cookery, you will find yourself amply rewarded,” Coffin concluded.

International dishes may not have been just a novelty or a passing interest for the writer. The addition of certain ethnic cuisines on American tables was intentional, and there was a vested interest in making China more palatable for Americans. The Chinese Exclusion Act, established in 1882, forced many Chinese immigrants into menial jobs that would not threaten American workers, like laundromats and restaurants. After 61 years of limiting immigration, the act was repealed in 1943. China was an ally during World War II, and it was considered important to gain approval on the American home front. “Our allies in this great struggle have much to teach us about the proper preparation of food,” wrote a Chinese cookbook reviewer in
the *Journal of Home Economics*. Novelist Pearl Buck encouraged American housewives to embrace Chinese cuisine, as it would provide new methods and ideas for making rationed food tasty, which was “inestimable value to the war effort.”

Magazine writers and editors may have had more freedom to report on matters related to their own food interests and tastes, and they did not have the regular column inches and tight deadlines to meet of their newspaper counterparts. Higher-end advertisers may also have created—or demanded—a need to appeal to audiences who did not want to address more basic needs. While some magazines addressed the issues related to nutrition and other food restrictions, in shelter magazines it was approached in a roundabout way. There seemed no pressure to provide advice about weathering the storm of shortages and rationing while integrating or adhering to new dietary recommendations.

**Conclusion**

The common thread between magazine and newspaper food writing is that writers and editors seemed convinced that their readers were burdened by their obligation to feed their families. Food writers wrote as though meal planning, shopping, and cooking were required, were an important responsibility, but not enjoyable. Women audiences did not have the luxury of their family members—who might follow sports for entertainment, read comics for a laugh, keep up with current events and business because it is the socially and fiscally responsible thing to do, food writing addressed the obligation of homemakers. Writers assumed home cooks, and home eaters, were bored by the same menus day-in and day-out. Regular menu planning columns in newspapers suggested meal variety for readers, but how this met the needs of cooks is unknown. Writers addressed food concerns without truly knowing what kinds of access to technology, financial status, or cooking skill their readers possessed. Writers did not assume that reporting
nutrition information was critical to every piece they produced, but they integrated that information—along with their opinions on its value—as they saw fit. They did not reproduce the graphics that accompanied Basic Seven information per government protocol, and this is likely due to space restrictions. However, it may have seemed needless as many private companies integrated nutrition information into their advertising in order to legitimize their products and appeal to home cooks.

The government’s desire to educate Americans and encourage them to adapt to healthier eating habits that would improve the overall health of the population was a lofty and ambitious goal. Based on analysis of articles from the popular press, it is clear that food writers, reporters, and editors explained the Basic Seven and occasionally integrated the information into meal-planning strategies for home cooks, but they did not realign their reporting or strategies in meeting the needs of home cooks based on this new nutrition information. Food writers in newspapers interacted with their publics on a regular basis. They received letters and attended outreach events. This constant back and forth conversation informed their content choices and reflects what their readers needed. Nutrition information, and specifically the government’s Basic Seven information, was just one more piece of content to integrate. This demonstrates a two-way asymmetrical communication that may reflect audiences did not request more information on Basic Seven, which is why it did not occur as frequently in food reporting as rationing and other food-related issues.

257 Flaws in the System, New York Times, March 18, 1944
258 Articles analyzed for this section include: Manners, Marian. "Large Sweet Potato Crop Aids Menus." Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File), Dec 17, 1945; "Red Cross Brought New Life to Virginia School with Penny Sandwich Program." New Journal and Guide (1916-2003), Oct 20, 1945; Manners, Marian. "Basic 7 Food Groups Idea Film Topic." Los Angeles Times (1923-

261 "'Quiz ‘Em". Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File), May 16, 1943.
The paper’s editors made deliberate decisions to refrain from denouncing social injustice outright because it was so entrenched in the South. However, this moderation allowed them to garner more advertising from local and national white-owned businesses than other members of the black press, including Goodrich, Pillsbury, and Ford.


Wilson, Bess M. "Nutrition Knowledge Expands."

Wilson, Bess M. "Nutrition Knowledge Expands."

Eating for Victory. Sugar was rationed from May 1942 until 1947.


*House and Garden*, Seven Cooks in Search of a Gourmet.

*American Home*, All for Victory

MacFayden, Byron. Don’t put all your eggs in the same old recipes.


Chapter 5: What’s Cookin? Cookbooks and Nutrition in World War II

How Cookbooks Reflect Government Food Information

A cookbook from any era may not explain what people ate or what people cooked. Publishing records may allude to what was popular, or sold well, but there is no true information as to what was used or useful. What was passed from friend to friend or through generations was personal and intimate. There are some non-scientific clues cookbooks provide, like a broken spine, a book’s tendency to fall open to a certain page, dog ears, smudges or stains. Marginalia—a checkmark or a cross, a scribbled substitution or adjustment, or a written “no”—might provide a hint as to where a home cook and a cookbook author reached consensus or disagreed.

Each type of cookbook had a particular goal. Many wanted to sell more cookbooks, or something related. Cookbooks used by companies as brand extensions were often free, and they sought to establish the brand as a trusted problem-solver for home cooks. Branded cookbooks may also have been the only books to provide instruction on how to use new technologies in the home, as home cooks at this time may or may not have had access to refrigeration, self-regulating ovens, and other small appliances. Some cookbooks sought to address the perceived needs of home cooks and provided recipe ideas, housekeeping instruction, and cultural commentary. Other cookbooks were used as fundraisers, for community organizations or charities. Regardless of how often they were used or how influential they might have been, cookbooks do provide some insight as to the role home cooks were expected to play at the time. The authors, the intended audiences, where books were produced, when and why each book was written may not explain exactly what was eaten at the time, but cookbooks and the recipes they include provide some insight into politics, world views, gender roles, and class perceptions.
War limited what food could be purchased and what was affordable, and these limitations influenced mealtimes. Home cooks may have sought advice from trusted sources in order to keep their families fed while dealing with new shortages and restrictions. The best-selling cookbooks of the 1940s have familiar authors and titles. Irma Rombauer’s *The Joy of Cooking* and Fannie Farmer’s *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book* battled one another, along with versions of an older favorite, *The Settlement Cookbook*, one of the first books to document Jewish cooking in the United States. In addition to these real authors, another influential and trusted voice in the kitchen was that of Betty Crocker, a fictional character created by the Washburn Crosby Milling Company (later purchased by General Mills), was personified by home economist Marjorie Husted.

Cookbooks were far more than a list of recipes and instructions; in fact, some had fewer specific instructions, such as measurements, cooking temperatures, and cooking times, than one might expect. For this chapter, fifty cookbooks published between 1941 and 1945 were examined to give some insight into how nutrition information was communicated by commercial, community, and corporate cookbooks. Inclusion of nutrition information of any sort, including vitamins, calories, or explanations of nutritious values of different foods, as well as charts, graphs, or infographics to describe nutrition was sought and examined. Recipe titles, ingredients, instructions and order of recipes in the book as a whole were also noted in order to determine how the authors presented information to their audiences, what they expected the audience to understand and what she felt needed instruction, as well as other assumptions about audiences and their statuses, domestic skills, and knowledge levels.

With the exception of one cookbook by James Beard, every cookbook was written by or edited by women. Women were also the assumed audiences of the books, despite depictions of
Rosie the Riveters working outside the home for the war effort, only about 30 percent of women worked outside the home—so the expectations for most women would be that they remained at home and provided for their families.\textsuperscript{311}

Cookbooks were not merely instruction manuals about how to cook particular meals. Most cookbook authors intended their work to be part of a conversation, and that the books could be read for pleasure as well as for advice or ideas. Recipes were interwoven between narratives. Authors addressed their readers directly. Cookbooks belonged as much on the kitchen counter as the bedside table. Authors presented their thoughts and worked to earn their reader’s trust, and they sought to work their way into one of the most intimate places of the home—the plate. How these authors communicated nutrition information, if any, and whether they integrated government messages about nutrition, demonstrates the reach of these messages and how they may have been prioritized by home cooks. At a time when government had inserted itself in American kitchens with ration restrictions, how did a pro-social message, with an intent to change dietary habits significantly, work its way into cookbooks, if at all?

\textbf{Just Like Mother Used to Make}

Cooking and meal preparation has long been considered an act of love and duty as much as a necessity. Opposite the title page of \textit{The Settlement Cookbook} was a small heart alongside a cartoon woman wearing a chef’s hat with the words “The Way to a Man’s Heart.”\textsuperscript{312} The voluminous tome, first published in 1901, established the tone for the kind of catch-all, comprehensive go-to book that a home cook could rely on for advice in any situation. \textit{The Settlement Cookbook} boasted 3,332 tested recipes and 188 menu options and sought to “address all the needs of a home cook,” whether that meant cooking for two or 40.\textsuperscript{313} The book was written by Lizzie Black Kander, who was known as the Jane Addams of Milwaukee for her
social work efforts. Kander worked to help Jewish immigrants adjust to their new homeland, and one of the most important components of that adjustment process was being able to make familiar foods in new surroundings. The book intended to be the go-to, the only cookbook a home cook would need. The authors of tomes like Settlement sought to be trusted experts for their readers—and did not draw from other named sources in the way community cookbooks or brand cookbooks might. While nutrition information was provided, these books did not echo the messages or format the government used to define or explain nutrition terms, as providing filling meals for families, friends, and loved ones was nutrition in itself. These books were designed to have a lasting place in a cook’s kitchen, or bedside table, and expected to outlast the war. These books attempted to address every need a home cook might have—from icings to invalid recipes—and not follow fads or other short-term occurrences.

Many other cookbooks followed in this style—huge, heavy, and hard backed. America’s Cook Book, compiled by the New York Herald Tribune Home Institute in 1942, boasted that its cover was washable. America’s Cook Book proclaimed that it was American ingenuity that had improved diets in the 20th century. “Some of the most drastic changes in our eating habits during the past twenty-five years have been due to the widespread knowledge of dietetics,” the preface states. “This nation was … the first to develop, scientifically, baby foods and to perfect strained foods for babies and invalids. Pasteur gave to the world the greatest idea for protection against impure milk, but Americans perfected the method, applied it, and made it compulsory.” America is presented as a place of progress and a leader in scientific discovery—home cooks were expected to translate that knowledge and leadership onto the dinner plate.
For Irma Rombauer, writing *The Joy of Cooking* gave her life purpose after her husband’s suicide. Rombauer addressed the many ways in which cooking satisfied her desire to be a person of use, when her identity had been wrapped up in her service to her family. She also described how changing tastes and cooking technology influence how and what she cooks. Her book was not just an instruction manual for making meals—as her book’s subtitle is “a compilation of reliable recipes with an occasional culinary chat.” This conversation was important and did not go unnoticed. In the preface to her 1943 edition, she writes of how her book expanded from the first, self-published edition.

…I now feel a close kinship with many thousands of persons. I hear from them constantly, through telephone calls, letters, messages and articles, and I am greeted as an old friend in the most unexpected places. My daughter says that when my book is praised, I purr like a cat.

As a businesswoman, Rombauer appeared pleased her book was slated for a new edition in 1943. This meant that her book could address ration restrictions while her competitors, who had new editions printed before restrictions were announced, would not. Rombauer kept her discussion of the restrictions to a minimum. “When the revision of this book was begun a year ago we had no intimation that international obligations would lead our land of plenty to ration cards.” There was no talk of war, but rather an appeal to an American virtue of flexibility, “our national responsibility.” *The Joy of Cooking* treated ration restrictions as passing, that there was no real reason to change for the long term, but rather adjust to temporary conditions. The emergency chapters Rombauer include address the need for sugar substitutions, meat stretchers, and meat alternatives. Most of the meat alternatives were listed in an index-like format, pointing the reader to recipes in other sections of the book. This may mean that Rombauer wanted to
make the book seem more useful, and she integrated her recipes rather than keeping them in a separate section. She may have also intended to demonstrate that eating within rations was not as unusual as ration restrictions would make it seem.

The nutritional information Rombauer includes in *The Joy of Cooking* precedes her ration-related chapters, which begin on page 772. The placement of this information is important—near the end of a tome, next to a section Rombauer herself described as rushed and temporary. Rombauer includes Recommended Dietary Allowances and cites the National Research Council’s Committee on Food and Nutrition as her source, but only includes a recommendation of how many calories a person should consume each day. She advocates the importance of understanding one’s caloric intake, and of being knowledgeable about how many calories one is consuming.

A calorie chart is not a die chart, nor is a cookbook writer a doctor … It’s fun to count other people’s caloric intake. Make a game of it. Watch the calories mount … Yes, you may eat and grow thin. It isn’t nearly as much fun as giving your appetite a free rein, but if you are inclined to take on soft, but unfortunately much-dated curves, a concentration on non-caloric food (with only an occasional indulgence) is advisable.\(^{320}\)

Rombauer considered her greatest competition to be Fannie Farmer’s *Boston Cooking-School Book*. *Boston* did not publish a war edition—it published versions in 1941 and 1945, with no mention of war in either volume. Nutrition information was identical in both volumes. The variety of meals and ingredients, however, is profound—chutneys, bouquet garni, mango, avocado, cassava—while these may have been novelties and not cooked by many of the book’s owners, that recipes included this kind of variety indicates availability of ingredients as well as breadth and diversity of taste.
Cookbooks Capitalize on War

Ruth Berolzheimer found cookbooks to be a lucrative endeavor—even if she was not the most capable cook (according to her nephews). As publications director of the Culinary Arts Institute, Berolzheimer published more than twenty cookbooks in the 1940s, some themed, like desserts, canning, dairy, eggs, and snacks, and multiple editions of larger, comprehensive cookbooks that sought to compete with cookbooks like Joy of Cooking, Boston, and Settlement. The 1943 edition of The American Woman’s Cook Book was published as a food stretcher edition, and dedicated in honor of General Douglas MacArthur, with a large portrait of the general on the book’s title page. Berolzheimer was unabashed about capitalizing on the circumstances affecting the plate during war, as she was a cookbook publishing powerhouse.

It is unknown how realistic and useful Berolzheimer’s ration replacement recipes were, whether they served to capitalize on the situation at hand or if they were tested for taste and accuracy. For example, with coffee rationed and intermittent milk shortages, Berolzheimer suggested several beverage alternatives. She suggested replacing coffee with yerba mate, a South American drink that tastes like bitter tea. For milkshakes, she suggested drinking lemon milk instead, which included two raw eggs, lemon juice, sugar, salt, and three cups milk; or prune milk, which was a combination of evaporated milk, water, prune juice, and lemon juice. “Hot-weather fruit milk drinks will intrigue children and grown-ups alike!” the page header proclaims, but recipes such as these may have only sought to fill a page rather than become a family staple.

Berlozheimer also used industry recipes generously—the Brazil Nut Fund, Corning Glass Works, Kellogs, Kraft Cheese, Heinz, and the Winter Pear Bureau are just a few of the special interest groups and private companies she cited throughout the book.
Some war-specific cookbooks relied on the strength of the author’s voice and the ability to connect with her audience. In the *Victory Vitamin Cook Book*, Florence LaGanke Harris claims there are 400 recipes within the book, but the text is conversational, with no menus or basic-level recipes, as are common in other cookbooks. Harris hoped to dispel the “folly of getting one’s vitamins from tablets,” and sought to appeal to those who “have an inquiring mind and like to know the whys and wherefores” of nutritional facts. Harris integrated the messages of patriotic duty with providing nutritious meals for families. “Now you’re in the quartermaster division and doing K.P. as well,” proclaims one chapter title. Women were in charge of the planning, execution, and clean-up of life’s daily battles. “What part does food play in all this?” Harris asks. “Men and women cannot do their best work when they are under-nourished or poorly fed; generals cannot plan successful campaigns when they are irritable and uncertain; soldiers do not win victories when their morale and determination are low.” She explains that it is only by combining the right vitamins and nutrients in our foods that keeps humans healthy enough to live—and perform patriotic duties. She dispels pushback:

> Your answer comes quick and pat: ‘Don’t be silly; I never have time, and so far as I can see I never will. I suppose I’ll just have to go on doing the best I can, selecting foods by guess and by gosh, and hoping that my family is well fed.’ Feeding families ‘by guess and by gosh’ has not worked out too well, as draftee rejections have shown; nor does guess work feeding square up with reports of scientific feeding used by the Axis nations. And it’s the Axis we are fighting, don’t forget that!”

Home cooks were told that victory overseas did not rely solely on well executed battles or well-supplied soldiers, but hinged upon the everyday duty of women providing nutritious meals for their families.
Harris, like many other war-era cookbook authors, played on a home cook’s sense of duty to country and equate thrift and ration compliance with patriotism. “We must build on the foundation of good health, and the most important single requirement for good health is good food,” wrote Demetria Taylor in *Square Meals on Short Rations with 337 wartime recipes.*

With this slim and colorful volume, Taylor sought to adapt common and familiar recipes to ration restrictions, and every page is crammed with possibilities. Taylor included the exact Basic Seven infographic and government nutrition information—as her goal was to align her recipes to the government’s official food rules. The busy design, however, left little room for practical instruction, and may only have sought to influence an impulse purchase, as the book cost as much as a popular magazine, and was small and brightly colored.

Taylor’s recipes list ingredients, amounts, and basic instructions, but omit things like cooking times and temperatures for many instructions. This may be fine for adaptations of familiar recipes, but for encouraging the use of substitutions or replacements, it might cause confusion or frustration. For example, women were encouraged to cook with organ meats—brains, kidneys, livers, and hearts—as more common cuts were prioritized for military and lend-lease use. When preparing beef kidneys for a pie, to state “Wash kidneys; split; remove core and membrane” without describing the different texture the organ would have, how difficult the membrane is to remove, and to omit a warning about the pungent odor cooks would face when handling the meat seems like a recipe to fail. Perhaps a butcher would explain in more detail, or a home cook would seek out the advice of an extension agent, but otherwise, this lack of information may allude to an overall lack of helpfulness, and influence, of many of these books.

Other war-centric books played on feelings of generosity in a time of instability by appealing to homemakers. Two cookbooks used as fundraisers for Russian war relief attempted
to create connections by appealing to the plate. *Fare-Thee-Well with Ladies of the Realm*, featured recipes collected by the Countess of Effingham, with submissions from the aristocracy and landed gentry, like Violet Bonham-Carter, the Duchess of Marlborough, and Lady Woolton, and contained ration-friendly British recipes. Another cookbook, the *Russian Cookbook for American Homes*, produced by a society for Russian war relief, focused on recipes for Russian food that also met ration restrictions, like meatless borshch (sic). Both books sought to gain sympathy from home cooks for Russian women and children who had suffered under Axis hostility. “The women and children have suffered most cruelly form the enemy who looted everything they could lay their hands on, and must have warm clothing … to withstand the rigours (sic) of the Russian climate.” Like the Chinese food recipes in popular magazines, presenting Russian food was an appeal to understand and accept another Ally, as Russians were “engaged in making a gift to all humanity, the priceless gift of freedom.”

**Trusted Brands are a True Housewife’s Helper**

Private companies had several incentives to advertise during World War II, even if their products were in short stock or completely unavailable. The government provided tax refunds and other financial incentives for companies to advertise, arguing that keeping brands in the public eye would benefit companies after the war. This investment helped brands align themselves as supporters of the war effort and to communicate that shopping was indeed patriotic. Americans were making more money after the lean Depression years but were limited in how they could spend it. Building brand awareness and loyalty allowed companies to maintain relationships that could endure after the war’s end.

The doyenne of cookbook authors, Betty Crocker, was the most popular and influential name attached with brand-related cookbooks. Ranked the second most popular woman in
America after Eleanor Roosevelt, Crocker spoke on behalf of General Mills, and the fictional character was represented on products, advertisements, advertorials, cookbooks, and radio.\textsuperscript{334} Crocker was a domestic overachiever, but provided solace to isolated homemakers, giving them encouragement beyond the kitchen. In addition to consulting about cooking on limited budgets with rations, she also provided advice about keeping a mate and balancing work and family life.\textsuperscript{335} While she had many contemporaries—Patricia Collier at Dole, Ann Pillsbury at Pillsbury’s, Mary Alden at Quaker Oats, Crocker’s influence has been the longest lasting. According to food historian Laura Shapiro, these “live trademarks” put a human face to new products. Quoting a business publication from 1957, Shapiro adds that corporate characters like Crocker “is a woman, between the ages of 32 and 40, attractive, but not competitively so, mature but youthful-looking, competent yet warm, understanding but not sentimental, interested in the consumer but not involved with her.”\textsuperscript{336}

Each decade brought a new interpretation of Betty Crocker—the Crocker of the 1930s and 40s was prim and schoolmarm-ish looking, her lips pursed severely and her face framed by perfect pin curls.\textsuperscript{337} In her introduction to \textit{Your Share, how to prepare appetizing, healthful meals with foods available today: 52 menus, 226 recipes, 369 hints on food buying, preparation, meal planning and serving}, Crocker, and General Mills, made clear the usefulness of the colorful, paperback pamphlet. The slim, fifty-page book is efficient and pleasant to look at. Color is used throughout, with bits of red highlighting titles and tips within each page. Cartoons are peppered throughout, and range from anthropomorphim foodstuffs to high-heeled housewives chasing livestock to families with heads bent in prayer at the dinner table. Recipes are organized logically, with adequate white space and a table of contents and index at the end. In her introduction, Crocker addresses the role of women in America—“strengthening your country’s
defenses” in war work abroad and at home. The bright red and blue front cover made the slim book stand out. The entire back cover reproduced the Basic Seven food chart and then explained each group with suggestions of what to eat. In addition, the book included five pages to nutrition topics related to war shortages. How to make vegetables more attractive, sugar replacement ideas, and tips for storing and canning ripe food was shared. Cereal foods were given the most creative presentation, as communicating their value was more than cooking advice—it was business for General Mills.

Crocker goes to great lengths to make the case for carbs. “The Staff of Life … became a victim of misunderstanding,” the text reads beside a cartoon of a crying piece of toast. “They think I’m all starch … fattening … just a filler … not protective.” The toast regains his confidence, however, when he claims that he’s a “really good pal,” and the “official extender during wartime rationing.” Defending the now enriched foodstuffs, additional vitamin B1 provided not just energy, but morale; as well as iron, niacin, protein, and energy-yielding carbohydrates. As an economical choice, the book also argues that 40 percent of American diets should consist of carbohydrates—and Kix, Cheerioats, and Wheaties, all General Mills products, help fill the gap. Other recipes varied in usefulness (could pecan nutburgers really be a viable replacement for meat?), other advice was more practical—extending leftovers by using them in soups or with scalloped potatoes in a casserole or adding cereal to ground meat for loaves and patties.

Investing in branded cookbooks was not a new advertising endeavor, but war restrictions brought the opportunity for new content and approaches. Cookbooks produced by brands became common as kitchen technology changed and home cooks may not have had adequate instruction as to how to integrate these new devices and foodstuffs in their lives.
In order to add even more legitimacy to their product, Sperry Flour hired the food writers on women’s pages in major Western newspapers for their *Stars of Western Cookery* book. Flour was first “enriched” in 1939, in an effort to appease eaters who preferred white flour but to retain some of the nutritive value of whole wheat flour. Adding synthetic thiamine, niacin, riboflavin, iron, and calcium to white flour and white bread was thought to be integral to improve the basic nutrition of people in the interest of national defense. The enrichment program played an important role in the disappearance of diet deficiency diseases like beriberi, which causes muscle weakness, loss of coordination, and an enlarged heart; and pellagra, which causes diarrhea, dermatitis, and dementia. Both diseases were rampant in the South and urban areas, but by 1948-49 were mostly eradicated, largely due to enriched flour. Getting home cooks and bakers to trust that the product would perform like the flours they were accustomed to was important. Using the personas of Marian Manners, Martha Meade, and others who entered the homes of cooks daily via women’s pages provided an additional layer of trust for this new product. Recipes had more specific measuring and mixing instructions as well as cooking details not always common in other cookbooks. Some recipes dealt with war shortages—adding a cup of “wheat hearts” cereal to extend meatloaf or providing sugar substitutes—marshmallows, jelly, marmalade, and sweetened chocolate.

Depending on the needs of a particular company, nutrition information may have served their product more than their consumer base. A brochure from the Ball Company, a maker of glass canning jars, explained how to can with less sugar or without sugar at all, despite home canners having access to more sugar rations if they intended to can. Some suggestions for fruit desserts included no sugar at all, but there was no discussion of a need to reduce sugar for health reasons—only to comply with ration restrictions.
Knox Gelatine’s branded cookbook, *Don’t Let Butter Rationing Scare You!* suggested that home cooks could stretch a quarter-pound of butter to a half-pound of spread using gelatine. Knox also advised that whipping evaporated milk with gelatine could act as a replacement for heavy whipping cream. In *Victory Cake Recipes*, Royal Baking Company advised penny-pinching home cooks to be wary of being thrifty in the wrong places, as it would be a “false economy to skimp on baking powder,” and they really cannot afford to risk a cake that might not rise. Promising recipes that omit sugar but still create tasty and economical cakes, home cooks could fulfil their patriotic duty and satisfy sweet teeth at home.

Sugar substitutes often proclaimed their own value—for example, how iron gave molasses a dietary advantage, sugar was not often bemoaned in branded books for its unhealthiness. The Beech-Nut Packing Company, which first canned hams before it sold baby food, produced victory garden worksheets. Pillsbury Flour Mills Company produced a mimeographed newsletter *Fightin’ Food Communique*, which was likely distributed to media outlets, as a proviso on the bottom of the first page states that while mentioning the source is not required, it is appreciated, indicates Pillsbury provided this information for free with the hopes it would benefit them with some free advertising. Clever puns, connecting the need to comply with rationing to the war effort—as the ability for the government to get food to troops overseas would hasten Allied victories, “The faster we invade, the faster the Axis goes to pieces … Our armies must help feed the hungry peoples they free,” so Americans must stretch their rations and jar their preserves. It is unknown if this exact verbiage was repeated in a local radio program or newspaper column, but it demonstrates the strength of the messages tying food preparation, consumption, and nutrition to the war effort that women and home cooks received.
Pillsbury championed soy, and also promoted enriched flour. Their message spoke of increased thiamine, iron, niacin, and riboflavin—likely unfamiliar terms, as vitamins and calcium were still relatively new concepts. “What does this mean in terms of daily intake?” Pillsbury asks. “Six slices of bread alone per day gives a moderately active man approximately 5-30% of recommended nutrients.” Reading between the lines, it seems as if by enriching bread flour alone, the government hoped to solve some of its more persistent nutrition issues. The alphabet soup of vitamins and minerals touted by companies were exactly the science-based nutrition information Margaret Mead hoped Americans would accept. The hard sell on enriched flour—which they promised would not look, taste, or bake differently than regular milled flour—promised the moon. Companies wrapped their products with government-endorsed messages to endear themselves to consumers and convince home cooks that by using their products they were not only providing nutritious meals for their families, they were helping win the war as well.

The Gourmands

As established with magazines like *Gourmet* and *Home and Garden*, gourmets—those who believed the taste and experience of food was more important than shortcuts or nutrition. James Beard, now best known for the foundation and cookbook awards named in his honor, wrote his first cookbook in 1940, *Hors d’Oeuvres and Canapés*, which established him among New York food elites. Born in Portland, Oregon, in 1901, Beard made his way to New York to pursue acting after being dismissed from Reed College for homosexuality. Like many would-be thespians, he found his way into food service and opened a catering business. His second cookbook, *Cook It Outdoors*, purported to be the first cookbook advising men to take up grilling at home. Beard’s book, like many cookbooks, was more narrative than instructional. “Probably the most popular item of food in America is steak, and I, for one, cannot for the life of
me understand why,” Beard opined.348 “I admit that a tender steak, perfectly cooked, is very
good. But why all the fuss and the downright worship of the sirloin and tenderloin and the
porterhouse, I’m damned if I can understand.”349

Beard addressed an audience of men with large appetites who sought to celebrate with
food. For Beard, food was about excess and flavor, not necessity. While rationing was not
enacted yet, war was imminent when Beard’s book was published in 1941. Beard likely would
not have predicted meat rationing or shortages, but his creative recipes (like hamburger
variations—Napa burgers sautéed in Cabernet, Bagdad burgers served with sautéed eggplant and
barbeque sauce, or Irish burgers made with corned beef and boiled potatoes), demonstrates that
there was a wide variety of options available to home cooks who were interested.

A contemporary of Beard’s, M.F.K. Fisher, published How to Cook a Wolf in 1942.350
Fisher was both satirical and contemplative in her book, and understood that what one chose to
eat in wartime (if one had choices) had increased meaning. “I believe that one of the most
dignified ways we are capable of, to assert and then reassert our dignity in the face of poverty
and war’s fears and pains, is to nourish ourselves with all possible skill, delicacy, and ever-
increasing enjoyment … with our gastronomical growth will come, inevitably, knowledge and
perception of a hundred other things, but mainly of ourselves.”351 Here, Fisher touches on the
bigger picture facing home cooks. It is a sentiment that is easily forgotten in the daily rush and
struggle to put food on the table, and pushed aside when the daily work at home is considered
less, or not at all. People can learn from what and how they eat, and how those habits shift and
change to accommodate personal needs and global concerns—but that reflective process is a
slow and intentional one.
**Government Food Information and Cookbooks**

It is impossible to know how one woman organized her kitchen and provided meals for her family over another. These choices are intensely personal and hinge on multiple factors. With cookbooks, it might be safe to assume that popular books had reasonably large influence, as they were purchased enough to encourage publishers to keep printing them. Branded cookbooks helped develop relationships with consumers, established themselves as not just ingredients but assistants who made everyday life a little easier and more predictable.

Cookbooks were an unreliable source of consistent nutrition information. Established authors made their own definitions and integrated nutrition information as they saw fit, but may have felt that their recipes overall were nutritious without vitamin and caloric breakdowns. Community cookbooks sought to preserve what is considered the culinary tradition of an area. There was an assumption that the recipes included in a cookbook were representations of the values of a community, and made that food inherently nutritious because it reflects the values and history of the culture. Cookbooks that sought to address war restrictions and food manufacturers who made branded cookbooks featuring their products, embraced the government’s nutrition guidelines. Food companies aligned their products with health benefits and information provided by the USDA, and took advantage of incentives to advertise. Companies used government messaging about the importance of healthy food to sell new products, like enriched flour, as well as old standbys, like molasses and baking soda. How home cooks interpreted this mishmash of information is unknown, but the United States still grapples with nutrition based diseases that largely derive from overmarketing of unhealthy foods, overabundance of enriched flour, and misinformation of what is healthy or unhealthy.


Howard, Madeleine. Fare Ye Well with Ladies of the Realm. London: Hutchinson. 1944


Howard, Fare Ye Well.


This illustration was by Neysa McMein, who created a composite of several Home Service Department members to create “a motherly image,” according to bettycrocker.com. McMein was a member of the Algonquin Round Table, according to Quinlivan, Bridget (January 30, 2015) [September 30, 2011]. "Once Upon A Time in Quincy: Local Woman Remembered for Famous Portraits". Herald Whig. Quincy, Illinois.


Beard, *Cook it outdoors*, 63.


Chapter 6: Conclusion

The history of public relations has been dominated by a corporate-heavy narrative shaped by powerful men who desired to ensure their own legacies. Contemporary scholars of public relations history have sent a call to expand that history by reconsidering what public relations means and how public relations is used to distribute targeted messages to specific audiences and manage relationships. Expanding the concept of public relations using Karen Miller Russell and Margot Opdycke Lamme’s definition, “a person, campaign, or program with high strategic intent and the intended public has a high level of agency,” allows groups without traditional public relations professionals to be included in this history. The addition of different narratives, and an expanded, non-linear history for public relations is a benefit to the profession. Expanding the definition and history of PR demonstrates a broader view of how public relations practices are integrated into many realms beyond business—government, education, social movements, religion, and public health. In each of these categories and more, leaders of organizations have worked to create messages to persuade and manage relationships with audiences who do have choices. Public relations professionals can learn as much from these histories to help their practice today as they can from a corporate focused narrative.

The history presented in this study attempts to record how the United States federal government sought to improve the dietary habits of Americans 1941-1943. The government spent an incredible amount of time and money to try and create a yardstick for good nutrition, but they also invested in studies to determine how to reach people and influence their eating habits. The program was also an opportunity to integrate some positive change during a time of social upheaval.
Thinking about this particular effort in terms of public relations helps break the stereotypes of public relations and expands the historical record to include more documentation as to how groups have used PR tactics in order to establish legitimacy, articulate messages, and generate support for their causes. Russell and Lamme report that Scott Cutlip admitted 1900 was an “arbitrary” starting point for PR history. In this context, an arbitrary decision has lasting effects and shapes the understanding of an entire profession. History isn’t linear, and decisions like Cutlip’s become misinformation when they are repeated in textbooks and then taught in classrooms as fact. This creates a false historical timeline and mythologies that are accepted and drive other decisions.

The history describing the evolution of public relations is similarly flawed. While business and corporate histories are important to include within PR history, their dominance excludes other applications of PR. Narratives by scholars like Alfred Chandler have skewed PR history to focus on how PR has evolved in a corporate context only, which delegitimizes the practice as a whole. Expanding how public relations is used by a wide variety of groups legitimizes the profession. Public relations has a reputation for being a tool only for the powerful and a way to spread propaganda or misleading information. In some cases this is true. However, the need for a group to have targeted, specific messages to help organize and motivate particular audiences to make choices is relatively universal. For groups to be able to communicate clearly with interested parties who have the agency of choice in their decisions is important, and goes beyond people with power.

The first research on the nutritive values of food was done by W.O. Atwater, a chemist and the first director of the Office of Experiment Stations at the USDA. He began to write about the connections of food composition, dietary intake, and health in Farmer’s Bulletins.
around the turn of the 20th century. Atwater advised readers to have healthy and balanced diets, to avoid overeating as it caused “an excessive amount of fatty tissue” and disease.

In 1916, USDA nutrition specialist Caroline Hunt published the USDA’s first food guide, *Food for Young Children*. By the 1930s, due to the constraints of the Great Depression, and an expanded government workforce and definition of service, the USDA began publishing more food guides. This effort, led by food economist Hazel Stiebeling, also provided shopping advice to create food plans that would be affordable and nutritious.

As the country shifted toward plans for war in the early 1940s, malnutrition became a concern of not just social welfare, but national defense. The Department of War funded research to develop nutritional guidelines to investigate how to encourage people to adopt these new eating guidelines. The National Academy of Sciences and the Department of War predicted that audiences would not just adopt these measures because the government told them to, which is why they invested in studies of culture and nutrition.

**Research on American Food Habits**

The Committee on Changing Food Habits was faced with a formidable task—figure out why Americans eat what they eat, and identify how to influence them to make changes to their eating habits. That Margaret Mead ended up heading the group’s research is remarkable. As an anthropologist, she focused on the idea that humans are influenced by culture, which was still a relatively radical idea. Culture is represented by customs and materials that are commonplace, and how a group of people chooses to create rituals and habits of everyday life. There are few things more everyday than food—it is necessary for human existence but one’s food choices can also be an important part of their identity. The government’s intention to influence those eating habits through an attempt to change culture is profound.
The Committee on Changing Food Habits was begun at a time of great uncertainty and charged with what seemed like a worthy cause. Those who served on the committee with Mead were pleased to be able to apply their understanding of social science to help influence people to adopt healthier eating habits. The committee did not receive the funding and support that it thought it might, which changed how Mead and others went about research. Instead of being able to depend on government support, researchers needed to get funding from their own institutions. This may have influenced the scope of research as well as the topics that were covered. Many of the studies were conducted by graduate students in anthropology at Columbia University, Mead’s alma mater. That the project reached completion—in 1943, the studies were collected and bound as a book, which was distributed and available for sale from the National Academy of Sciences—is a testament to Margaret Mead’s ingenuity and management skills.

**Government Directs Nutrition Messaging**

When the government enacted rationing in 1942, this created an opportunity for nutrition messaging. The government now had a reason to communicate food information, as ration restrictions limited purchasing of meat, sugar, coffee, canned goods and other items to provide extra food for the military and lend-lease agreements. Rationing also staved off price inflation and discouraged hoarding. Nutrition information could act as a way to inform consumers how to create healthy meals despite ration restrictions. This nutrition information was presented as the Basic Seven, and the government sought to create the simplest but most comprehensive message it could to communicate what comprises a healthy diet. The Basic Seven divided food into seven groups: green and yellow vegetables; oranges, tomatoes and grapefruit; potatoes and other vegetables and fruit; milk and milk products; bread, flour, and cereal; and butter and margarine. If Americans ate some food from each group every day, along with whatever else they chose to
eat, that would constitute enough of a nutritionally balanced diet in order to improve overall health. The accompanying graphic for the Basic Seven was relatively simple, and the food message surrounded an image of a working-class family, with dad in a slouched hat and mother in sensible shoes, along with a patriotic message—the U.S. needs us strong, eat the basic seven every day.

Despite the investment in research of nutrition, good food habits, and how to influence a change of habits, the government ultimately chose not to prioritize its nutrition program. Other messages were deemed more important, like the purchase of war bonds or ration compliance, or simply easier messages to communicate, like rubber and fuel conservation. While this does not mean nutrition and food related messages were abandoned entirely, it does mean that when faced with a choice, those with the power to decide decided healthy eating messages were less important.

In the popular press, information about food—the “food situation” with rationing, shortages, trends, new products, menu ideas, recipes, shopping lists, and nutrition information—was largely relegated to the women’s pages of newspapers and women-focused magazines. Women’s pages and magazines contextualized this information. Journalists not only wrote about what was happening with food, they presented that reporting alongside advice about how to manage the changes happening with food. The government’s specific nutrition campaign information and the Basic Seven were present, but was not championed or embraced, just suggested among other food information used to fill column inches and appease advertisers. While the government prioritized messages about ration compliance, many articles related to food dealt with the realities of managing those shortages and restrictions when faced with limited grocery options and mouths to feed.
The magazines analyzed for this study, almost all shelter magazines which focused on idealized domestic lives, were far less concerned with the realities of day-to-day life and presented a more aspirational lifestyle. Shelter magazines often aim to provide a kind of escapism. This may also speak to the publication calendars of magazines, as magazines need to schedule their content several months in advance. For a magazine with long lead times, incorporating food information dealing with things like ration restrictions that changed with some frequency and may have varied from region to region would be a risky endeavor. However, content did present some other lasting messages, like the acceptance of Chinese recipes and flavors. Advocacy for immigrant foods in American popular press may demonstrate which cultures were in favor at a particular time. In this example, China was an ally in World War II and the Chinese Exclusion Act, which limited immigration of people from China, had ended, so it made sense to present Chinese dishes in a way that was friendly to an American palate.

Nutrition information communicated in cookbooks published between 1941 and 1945 depended on the author and the cookbook’s overall intent. Authors who felt they were creating a book that should become a kitchen staple, like Irma Rombauer’s Joy of Cooking, often addressed nutrition information in their own voices, with an approach that suggested that by the mere virtue of being included in a cookbook, the recipes had nutritive value. This was certainly the attitude of community cookbooks, usually used as fundraisers, which took an approach that foods that were compiled by and represented a community were nutritious because the recipes contained within them represented the community’s values. Other fundraising cookbooks, such as the ones raising money for Russian war relief, also represented an attempt to make Allies seem friendlier to Americans at home.
Many cookbooks were produced by corporations, both food manufacturers and companies that made kitchen technology. These obvious advertising techniques might seem superficial, but it is important to note the tremendous amount of technological changes that occurred in American kitchens before World War II that made these kinds of cookbooks trusted sources of information. Self-regulating ovens, refrigerators, electric mixers, toasters, as well as prepared foods and mixes saved home cooks hours that used to be spent in kitchens. But many home cooks did not know how to use these technologies. The corporate cookbooks were some of the few entities that provided real instruction of how to use these new kitchen tools, and many non-corporate cookbooks reused the recipes from private companies and special interest groups in their books. This was one way brands developed lasting relationships with their consumers. This is evident as an article from *Fortune* magazine in 1948 famously stated that Betty Crocker, the fictional persona representing General Mills, was considered only second to Eleanor Roosevelt among the most trusted women in America.\(^\text{359}\)

Corporate cookbooks embraced nutritional messages from the government. This happened for several reasons. They were given financial incentives to advertise, even when their products might be restricted or completely unavailable. Adding the government’s nutrition information to an advertising messages gave one more level of legitimacy to their product and helped them present their product as having an even greater level of value. It might also make a food item seem as if it had government endorsement. The information in these corporate cookbooks also where Margaret Mead’s desire to influence diets based on science, not culture, is most obviously played out, and perhaps not in the way she expected. Company cookbooks encouraged home cooks to use new products like enriched flour, a modified and “scientifically” improved foodstuff. In America, the diet of most rural, impoverished people included cornmeal,
salt pork, molasses, and little else; this homogenous eating caused diseases like pellagra (from lack of niacin) and beriberi (from lack of thiamine). Today, beriberi and pellagra are rarely, if ever, ailments in contemporary America. Enriched flour contains those nutrients and more, and companies included messages about the importance of choosing enriched flour for baking purposes. This acceptance of science-based research led to an acceptance of modified foods like enriched flour. Yet Americans still suffer greatly from nutrition-based diseases. American eaters might be persuaded to accept certain changes to their diets or embrace new or altered foods, but how to eat healthy is still a struggle for many. The consumption of more processed foods has also worked to change the American flavor profile to make it more accepting and desiring of chemically modified foods.

Decisions about food information and healthy eating from World War II have repercussions today. The government’s Recommended Dietary Allowances still provide a baseline of nutrition information that many people trust and use to make eating decisions. Health professionals—doctors and dieticians especially—use these guidelines as educational tools. Companies that produce processed foods include nutrition guidelines, and George H. W. Bush signed the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act into law in 1990, requiring that all processed food health claims met Food and Drug Administration regulations. In recent years, restaurants have voluntarily begun to share similar information about their food in an attempt to demonstrate transparency and earn trust from their customers. Interest in food media has increased dramatically, with entire television networks devoted to providing instruction and information about food and food preparation. Despite this, cooking at home has decreased. Food and drink manufacturing is a multi-billion-dollar global industry. There is a mythology among some contemporary food writers that at some mystical time in the past, human diets were better than
what they are now. Yes, go back far enough and food was less processed. At that time, food was not easy to grow, catch, make, or purchase. People were afflicted with all kinds of nutrition-based diseases, including beriberi and pellagra, but also scurvy from lack of vitamin C, and rickets from lack of vitamin D. Perusing any diary from history will likely include descriptions of dyspepsia, indigestion, flatulence, and general stomach upset. Humans have more food choices than other animals, but the factors that inform their eating decisions are not always good ones. How those with the power to change and influence eating habits and food choices, and how people who could make choices use this information, is important to understand from both public health and public relations standpoints.

Changing Food Habits, Excellence Theory, the Four Models, and Public Relations History

James Grunig stated that excellence theory derived from analyzing public relations practices for fifteen years. Grunig claims that “excellence theory first explained the value of public relations to organizations and society based on the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the quality of relationships with stakeholder publics.” Grunig reached this conclusion based on the four models of public relations, which he developed. The models, which were intended to show how public relations evolved, state that public relations began as manipulative and persuasive press agentry and two-way asymmetrical communication, to a public information model that Grunig et. al. claim is the standard of many government and scientific agencies. Grunig’s excellence theory then states that the fourth model, a two-way symmetrical model where organizations are in constant communication with their stakeholders, is a modern ideal that organizations should strive to meet. The story of the federal government’s attempt to improve dietary habits during World War II depicts a campaign that understood the need for applied research, where communicators were in constant conversation with stakeholder publics,
and those driving the campaign understood that their audiences had competing priorities and would criticize their efforts, which upsets the timeline of the four models.

While never intended as a historiography of public relations, the four models have dominated public relations history. This timeline is unreliable and unsupported. Veering away from that narrative will work to create better understanding of the importance of public relations and its place in history. As James Grunig stated, all theories derive from presuppositions. The presuppositions that developed the four models of public relations are flawed, as Russell, Lamme, L’Etang, Watson, Benetle, Wehmeier, and others have argued. Examining nutrition information and the Basic Seven from the lens of public relations shows an advanced campaign that nearly aligns with modern research, planning, implementation and evaluation best practices articulated by the Association for Public Relations. The amount of research devoted to understanding food habits, to the development of a nutrition education campaign, the clear back and forth between message senders and receivers, a hybrid of two-way symmetrical communication and two-way asymmetrical communication where persuasive messages were sent to indented audiences, but that message senders, like journalists and authors, did outreach and were responsive to calls and letters in order to manage their relationships. Deeper investigation into the actual history of public relations, beyond the stories of Edward Bernays, Alfred Chandler, and Scott Cutlip, will work further to upset these timelines.

The story of the Committee on Changing Food Habits and the evolution of nutrition information in America from 1941-1945 is important because it shows that public relations did not necessarily evolve the way many public relations histories document. This campaign demonstrates an understanding for the need of in depth research into specific audiences, their needs, wants, and specifically their cultural influences in order to craft messages that will appeal
to them. Further tracing the campaign, the government makes clear that it was not a priority message during the war, as other domestic messages were given more weight. Despite this, private companies embraced the message and shared it on the government’s behalf, along with other earned media in the popular press. This may be one reason why the concept of Recommended Dietary Allowances has lasted, but this government connection to industry may have caused confusion in American citizens regarding what truly comprises healthy eating. A better historical understanding of this government public health campaign demonstrates not only how advanced public relations principles were used in an era before PR histories acknowledge, but also sheds light on the enmeshed relationship between government and industry in America. Whenever we make food choices—at the store, at home, in restaurants—these choices are informed not just by our own alimentary needs or desires of the moment, or what those around us are eating, but also government and corporate communications that have attempted to define what nutrition means.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

When looking at an historical era, or any topic, some things must be excluded. After the discovery process, it is easy to see why initial questions need to be revised, reworked, or reanalyzed to give a better perspective. An attempt was made to keep this analysis limited by focusing on how nutrition was communicated during rationing in World War II, but new details at every turn required context and extra layers of research. The complexity of communicating “good” nutrition, and how it was integrated into other food messages at the time was difficult to track. While not terribly prevalent in popular press reporting, one limitation of using digital scans of newspaper articles is that they are removed from context. Looking at the entire page and getting a sense of what advertising surrounded a piece, which advertisers were dominant, and
how advertising messages supported the content would provide better context of how nutrition information may have been perceived by readers. Magazine articles proved to be the most difficult to find nutrition information, and using articles from magazines like *Ladies’ Home Journal* might provide a better picture of how nutrition information was integrated into recipes and other food reporting, but as it was not present in the accessible databases, *Ladies Home Journal* was not included in this analysis. Other forms of media, such as radio and newsreels, were very popular and powerful at the time. However, given the time and space limitations of this thesis, those sources were not consulted, but could prove fruitful for future studies.

After analyzing 50 cookbooks, the most prevalent source of nutrition information clearly came from branded cookbooks, and a deeper look into the complicated relationship between government and private companies with regard to food would likely prove fruitful. The comparison of how absent nutrition information was from popular cookbooks provided some valuable context and demonstrated the gap that branded cookbooks were able to fill.

Other threads that could not be followed in this analysis were the complexity of the USDA in managing food policy information and distributing health messages, information that sometimes ran counter to the USDA’s own agricultural policy. Further analysis into how the USDA distributed information, or how states and university extension agencies communicated nutrition, would also prove fruitful. Broadening the scope out into other information sources, like radio broadcasts, if digital versions or transcripts are available, or newsreels, could provide new insight as well.

Taking a broader look at how the United States government made a concerted effort to present itself as a trusted source of information during World War II, and the integration of anthropologist researchers in information bureaus, would be interesting threads for other scholars
of public relations history to follow. So many campaigns came from the government at that time, and how the Office of War Information and the Office of Special Services went about researching audiences to develop messages using cultural insights may also work to expand the history of public relations and further dispel the timeline of the four models.

Public relations scholars interested in history, historians interested in public relations, and food scholars interested in the complex relationships between government and private companies, have many avenues to pursue and plenty of sources to draw from should they wish to study this era.

355 Welsh, Brief history of food guides.
356 Welsh, Brief history of food guides.
358 Chinese food went out of favor again in the U.S. with the start of the Cultural Revolution in China and Cold War in America.
361 One example of this is references of stomach upset in Samuel Pepys’ diaries, but there are many others.


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