

Canadian Food Studies

La Revue canadienne des  
études sur l'alimentation

## Book Review

**Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science  
of Food on Canada's Home Front**

Ian Mosby

UBC Press, 2014: 268 pages

Review by Jennifer Brady (Queen's University)

When most of us think of Canadian history, particularly Canada's involvement in the Second World War, it is unlikely that food is what first comes to mind. However, Ian Mosby's new—and first—book *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front* invites readers to consider the primacy of food in the war effort in Canada. Mosby's detailed and thoroughly researched account explores food as a material and symbolic resource that was instrumental in marshalling Canadians' support for the war. Mosby also shows how the social, political, and economic changes related to food shaped the everyday lives of Canadians—particularly Canadian women—throughout the Second World War. *Food Will Win the War* is an important volume that fills a significant gap in the small, but growing, literature on Canada's food history.

Mosby is currently a postdoctoral fellow in the L.R. Wilson Institute for Canadian History at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. He completed his PhD in History at York University, in Toronto, Ontario. Mosby's other recent notable work includes a paper that received international attention and that reported on government sanctioned biomedical experimentation on Aboriginal adults and children throughout Northern Manitoba during the 1940s and 1950s (Mosby, 2013).

Mosby's book is based on his PhD dissertation and draws on extensive archival research to explore the ways in which food was mobilized by government, nutrition experts, and health professionals to rally Canadians' support for total war. His analysis also considers how concomitant shifts in ideas about food, nutrition, health, gender roles, private and public space, consumerism, citizenship, and expertise impacted Canadians' everyday experiences of procuring, preparing, and consuming food. The central argument of the book is not that food

“literally won the war,” but that food was central to shaping the emerging home front as well as a new and highly gendered ideal of the Canadian consumer citizen (6).

The first two chapters examine the ways and extent to which the government drew on food, and more specifically, new technologies of nutrition science to enlist Canadians—but women in particular—as educated, patriotic ‘Housoldiers’, for service on the home front. Chapters three and four look more closely at the changes in women’s domestic practices, which Mosby argues, were imagined through a discourse of sacrifice and patriotism and which were important more for their symbolic value in rallying support for the war effort. In the final chapter Mosby returns to the social and political changes brought with governmental interventions in Canadian food culture outlined in the first two chapters. In returning to the concerns presented in Chapters 1 and 2, Mosby situates his analysis in the broader context of the day to consider how nutrition science interpolated with wartime and early postwar debates about the social security programs that were established throughout the war.

This book would be of interest to scholars from a wide range of disciplinary and topical interests for research and teaching purposes. In addition to historians of food, war, or Canadian history, this volume is relevant to food studies scholars as well as those interested in sociological perspectives of the professions, expertise, and knowledge, critical nutrition studies, critical dietetics, women’s history, and the history of nutrition and Canadian food policy. Mosby’s accessible writing and the cogent narrative arc that develops throughout the chapters makes this a suitable volume for undergraduate readers or for those who are unfamiliar with the history of food, science, or nutrition in Canada, as well as established scholars with interests in the areas mentioned above.

Although the book has many strengths, the book falls short of fulfilling Mosby’s intention to look at Canadian women’s everyday lives “through the kitchen window” (15). Mosby notes that scholarship on Canadian women’s lives during the war has tended to focus on their roles in military or industrial work or other public roles. In contrast, one of Mosby’s primary goals is to elucidate the changes in women’s everyday lives and their experiences of food work brought by the social, political, and cultural exigencies of wartime. However, the book overall focuses heavily on the political structures that shaped women’s domestic roles and women’s entrance to public life by way of their involvement in community-based volunteer and advocacy work. Women’s personal, quotidian experiences of purchasing, preparing, eating, and feeding while coping with the social, ideological, political, and personal changes that took place throughout the war is largely left out of Mosby’s account, despite his intentions. Moreover, Mosby often makes reference to the influence of ‘nutrition experts’ but generally avoids distinguishing between the roles of the typically male scientists, researchers, and policy makers and the overwhelmingly female health professionals such as dietitians, home economists, social workers, and nurses in devising and implementing the policies and programs that led to governmental interventions and the wider political and social changes in Canada at this time.

Nevertheless, Mosby’s book makes an important contribution to the scholarship of food history in Canada and is an important resource for food studies scholars. *Food Will Win the War* sheds light not just on the food in Canada’s past, but provides important insights into the making of the contemporary Canadian foodscape.

*Jennifer Brady is a PhD Candidate in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen's University. Her dissertation work takes a socio-historical perspective to explore the professionalization of dietetics as a feminized profession and its evolving relationships with*

*home economics, food, science, and feminism. More broadly her work spans critical feminist perspectives of gender, food, nutrition, fatness, and the body.*

## **References**

Mosby, I. (2013). Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942–1952. *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 46(91), 145-172.