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FOOD REFORM MOVEMENTS

Nicolas Larchet

Social historians have broadly defined two cycles of American history characterized by an efflorescence of social movements aiming to reform both the individual and the society at large: the Jacksonian Era, from the 1830s to the 1850s, and the Progressive Era, from the 1890s to the 1920s. The reform impulse thrived wherever there was a perceived vice, abuse or corruption of industrial civilization that needed to be changed, corrected or improved. Studies of “antebellum” and “progressive” reforms have thus been made across a very broad spectrum of interests, from temperance and anti-prostitution crusades to housing and sanitation laws. However, it is only fairly recently, starting in the 1970s and 1980s, that historians have rediscovered the figure of the “health reformer” (Whorton, 1982), frequently specializing in “food reform” – or depending on the context “diet”, “dietetic” or “dietary reform” – that is the zealous drive to change the way Americans eat or grow foods, based on religious or secular claims to truth (Kirkland, 1973; Levenstein, 1980; Aronson, 1982; Schwartz, 1986; Shapiro, 1986).

Not incidentally, as historians question the past from the vantage point of their present, it can be argued that this surge of interest in historical attempts to change American food habits is related to the emergence of a contemporary food reform movement, taking shape in the 1980’s and well established by the end of the 2000’s decade, centered around the promotion of fresh, locally-grown and organic foods.

“Simpler, plainer and more natural”: Dietary reformers and the agrarian myth in the Jacksonian Era.

Aroused by the Second Great Awakening, this religious revival movement that spread through the young republic in the first half of the 19th century, confronted with the making of an urban and industrial society, religious leaders were quick to embrace physiological reform, preaching a moral and physical salvation instead of a theological one and taking a prominent role in what has been called the Popular Health Movement of the 1830s-1850s. Health reformers usually embraced a large variety of causes: hydrotherapy, dress reform, sex hygiene, temperance, and among them all, dietary reform.

The most eminent dietary reformer of the era was the Presbyterian minister Sylvester Graham, who began his career on the temperance circuit in Pennsylvania in 1830. In his view there was no reason to limit temperance to drink, as gluttony also had his toll on human misery:

the worthy individual had to live a temperate life in his drinking, eating and sexual activities. He advocated a “simpler, plainer and more natural” diet, advising against the consumption of meats, white flour, condiments and alcoholic stimulants and calling for greater consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables at a time when city councils prohibited their sale – rotten fruits were widely held to be one of the causes of the 1832 cholera epidemic. He soon found allies in the medical and teaching professions, such as Dr. William Alcott, a prolific author and educator with whom he founded the First American Physiological Society in 1837. Graham’s ideas were circulated in books, pamphlets and periodicals such as *The Library of Health* (1835-1843) and the *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity* (1837-1839). Whereas the Graham diet, with its endorsement of whole wheat and high-fiber food, has made its way to the regimens of our day, one must not forget that slimming did not matter for Grahamites: the problem with the American diet was gluttony and indigestion, not fatness; therefore the solution was to be found in moral perfectionism rather than physical culture.

Even the foremost religious leaders of the time preached some measures of dietary reform, such as Joseph Smith who in 1835 in his *Doctrine and Convenants* prohibited the use of tobacco, alcoholic and hot drinks (coffee, tea) and advised for the consumption of whole grains, fruit and vegetables – if meat was allowed, it should be eaten “sparingly”. Another reformer who engaged in a mission to change the American diet after a divine revelation was Ellen G. White, one of the founders of Seventh-Day Adventism and a fervent advocate of vegetarianism who established the Western Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek, Michigan in 1866, which was to be made famous by John Harvey Kellogg at the end of the century. One of the most striking features of the Popular Health Movement was the role of women in the promotion and adoption of hygienic reforms: for instance, a third of the American Physiological Society’s members were women and at its second annual meeting the society acknowledged women’s role in health promotion, deemed “only second to the Deity in the influence that [they] exert on the physical, the intellectual and the moral interests of the human race”. Indeed, health reformers joined together with early women’s rights movements, as they did with abolitionists. If Mary Gove Nichols lectured on vegetarianism and sanitary education to women across New England, she also spoke and wrote against marriage, which she saw as the “annihilation of women”, and was acquainted with radical groups espousing the views of Fourier. Oberlin College, a hotbed for abolitionism and women’s rights, adopted the Graham diet in its dining room in 1835 – though they had to abandon it in 1841 amidst rumors of mass starvation.

As far as one was concerned with food reform, there was also more than just diet to be considered: finding the right way to eat supposed a right way to grow food. Agricultural

reformers also flourished in the Jacksonian Era, advocating the proper way to fertilize the soil or to breed livestock, drawing on the agrarian myth of a republic of small, self-sufficient yeoman farmers. Little has been written on the subject of agricultural reformers in their relation to the dietary reformers of the day – one can assume that they didn't appeal to the urban middle-class intellectuals who embraced health reform. Nevertheless some contemporary accounts seem to indicate a proximity of interests between both groups, such as the famous lecture on “New England Reformers” that Ralph Waldo Emerson – an occasional vegetarian himself – read in 1844 before the American Anti-Slavery Society:

What a fertility of projects for the salvation of the world! One apostle thought all men should go to farming; and another, that no man should buy or sell: that the use of money was the cardinal evil; another, that the mischief was in our diet, that we eat and drink damnation. These made unleavened bread, and were foes to the death to fermentation. It was in vain urged by the housewife, that God made yeast, as well as dough, and loves fermentation just as dearly as he loves vegetation; that fermentation develops the saccharine element in the grain, and makes it more palatable and more digestible. No; they wish the pure wheat, and will die but it shall not ferment. Stop, dear nature, these incessant advances of thine; let us scotch these ever-rolling wheels! Others attacked the system of agriculture, the use of animal manures in farming; and the tyranny of man over brute nature; these abuses polluted his food. The ox must be taken from the plough, and the horse from the cart, the hundred acres of the farm must be spaded, and the man must walk wherever boats and locomotives will not carry him. Even the insect world was to be defended, — that had been too long neglected, and a society for the protection of ground-worms, slugs, and mosquitos was to be incorporated without delay.

The quest for “Health and Efficiency”: Nutrition science and social reform in the Progressive Era.

Reformers at the turn of the 20th century were less likely to be found among preachers, when the early successes of the social gospel paralleled the institutionalization of social science as a legitimate cure for society's ills. In the same way that antebellum food reform couldn't be separated from moral and spiritual renewal, food reform in the Progressive Era was inextricably linked with social reform: a social problem oriented the first scientific investigations on human nutrition, defined by a loose alliance of biochemists, economists, statisticians, social workers, and philanthropists who were to craft a solution to the “social question” (that is, labor unrest) by attempts at rationalizing the working-class eating habits.

Wilbur O. Atwater, the son of a Methodist pastor and temperance advocate, earned a doctorate in chemistry from Yale in 1869, became professor of chemistry at Wesleyan University in 1873 and was named director of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in 1875. He struggled to get funding for investigations in the then-new field of human nutrition until he met with Edward Atkinson in 1885, the man who was to become his patron. An influential Boston industrialist, philanthropist and self-taught economist, Atkinson was interested in solving the wage problem by reducing the budget workers spent on food so that they would have more money for shelter and clothing without calling for higher wages, a move which liberal economic theory deemed impossible anyway. He introduced Atwater to Carroll D. Wright, U.S. Commissioner of Labor and chief of the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics, who mandated Atwater to analyze statistics on food consumption of factory workers and to determine what foods they should select to the best advantage of “health and purse”. In the Bureau report published in 1886, confronted with the classic instance of those who bought luxury foods for status (i.e., best cuts of beef), Atwater blamed the “extravagance of the poor”, resting on a “curious foundation made up of pride, ignorance and indifference”, and called for “a reform in the dietary habits of (...) the classes who work for small wages”, consisting “in many instances in the use of less food as a whole, and in many more cases in the use of relatively less meat and larger proportions of vegetable foods”. Suggesting minimum protein and calorie requirements, Atwater followed Atkinson in the claim that nutrition research could solve the labor problem: one could improve workers’ productivity and prevent labor agitation without raising wages, if only the working-class learned to eat scientifically and rationalized its domestic economy... Atwater exposed his views in various articles for *The Century*, a widely circulated periodical among the opinion-forming middle class. Lobbying for federal support, in 1894 he obtained funding from Congress for nutrition studies to be conducted at Agricultural Experiment Stations, with a suggestion to determine “rations less wasteful and more economical than those in common use”. From 1894 to 1911 more than 400 dietary studies would be conducted by the Office of Experiment Stations at Atwater’s instigation, engaging some of the foremost social reformers of the day such as pioneer of social work Jane Addams, who would collaborate on a dietary study of immigrant families living in the “congested districts” of Chicago, and black educator Booker T. Washington, authorizing a dietary study of black sharecroppers in the Tuskegee vicinity.

Whereas food reformers needed nutrition science to develop objective norms and standards of food needs, research had to be coupled with an education project to effectively change the people’s eating habits according to those standards. To put this strategy to work, Atkinson joined in 1889 with Mary H. Abel and Ellen S. Richards, two leading figures in the

burgeoning specialty of domestic science, to open a public kitchen in Boston. Established in an immigrant neighborhood, selling at a low price broths slow-cooked in the Aladdin Oven (a fuel-efficient, asbestos-insulated stove of Atkinson's invention), the New England Kitchen struggled to attract manual laborers and immigrants. Irish and Italians were especially disregarding the standard New England dishes served there – an Irish mother pressed to take an Indian pudding home famously replied “My boys says, ‘Oh ! You can’t make a Yankee of me that way !’ ”. Meanwhile other public kitchens opened in New York, Philadelphia and most notably in Chicago at Jane Addams’ Hull House. The culmination of the movement came in 1893 at Chicago World’s Fair, where Massachusetts erected a small cottage with a model kitchen serving more than 10,000 meals over a 2-month period to educate the public about “scientific cooking”.

While workers and immigrants resisted reformers’ endeavors to rationalize their diet, union leaders such as Eugene V. Debs opposed nutrition investigations on the ground that they could be used to maintain the U.S. laborer “at a cost as low as Chinamen are subjected to” (some workers ate more than usual when participating in the Office of Experiment Stations surveys to raise the nutritionists’ estimates of reasonable food expenditures). On the contrary, the movement had a large audience at the other end of the social spectrum: followers of food faddists Dr. John Harvey Kellog, a Seventh-Day Adventist vegetarian who ran the Battle Creek Sanitarium, and Horace Fletcher, a San Francisco art dealer and dietician who prescribed that food needed to be chewed thirty two-times before being swallowed, included 27th U.S. president William H. Taft, oil magnate John D. Rockefeller, liberal economist Irving Fisher, muckrakers Upton Sinclair and S. S. McClure. In 1909, Fletcher and Fisher organized the Health and Efficiency League of America, promoting educational campaigns through its organ *Good Health* magazine, treating food as fuel for the human body and engaging in a crusade against waste. As a matter of fact, food reform had close affinities with managerial values and the doctrine of efficiency: while Frederick W. Taylor sought to eliminate waste of time and energy in the work of laborers, home economists sought to eliminate waste of money and nutritious materials in the housewives’ selection and preparation of foods, translating techniques of scientific management from the factory to the home – from the production of goods to the reproduction of the labor force.

If somewhat unsuccessful in the short term, progressive food reformers were influential in the birth of two new professions, that of nutritionist (or dietician) and that of home economist. With the creation of the American Home Economics Association in 1908, Ellen S. Richards defined a legitimate area for women’s career in science, who had been barred from entering other fields, and helped spread nutritional knowledge among generations of students.

“Fresh, local and organic”: Sustainability and healthy living in today’s holistic food reform movement.

In 2009, The *New York Times* ran an article about the rise of the “sustainable-food movement”. Entitled “Is a Food Revolution Now in Season?”, it acknowledged the growing political weight of advocates of fresh, local and organic foods, emboldened by Michelle Obama’s campaign against childhood obesity. Three public figures are most commonly associated with this social movement: celebrity chef Alice Waters and journalists Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan. All three are members of Slow Food, an international organization founded in Italy in 1989 to counter the fast-paced, fast food lifestyle.

Alice Waters is credited with renewing the taste for local, seasonal products, which have been on the menu of her Berkeley restaurant “Chez Panisse” since its 1971 opening. She also started the “Edible Schoolyard” program at a Berkeley middle school in 1995, where students learn to grow, harvest and prepare produce from an organic garden as part of the school curriculum. Edible Schoolyards have since been duplicated in New Orleans, Los Angeles, Greensboro and Brooklyn. Waters’ lobbying efforts also led First Lady Michelle Obama to plant an organic garden on the white house lawn in 2009, the first to do so since Eleanor Roosevelt’s victory garden during World War II. Published in 2001, Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation* is a work of investigative journalism that has been compared to Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*. Denouncing the social, economic, environmental and health impacts of the fast food industry, from the exploitation of migrant workers in the meat packing industry to corporate sponsorship of school cafeterias, it had been required reading for the incoming freshman class at several universities and was adapted into a film in 2006. Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore Dilemma* was named by the *New York Times* one of the ten best books of 2006. It traces the origins of four meals, following three food chains: the “industrial”, taking the example of a McDonalds meal eaten in a car, the “pastoral”, which he divides in two meals, one coming from “big organic” corporations, the other from small organic farms, and the “personal”, consisting in a “perfect meal” entirely made of food he hunted, gathered and grew himself. Both Schlosser and Pollan also narrated the 2008 documentary *Food, Inc.*, exposing America’s corporate controlled food industry. While Schlosser called for “reforming the food industry” in the 2009 companion book to *Food, Inc.*, Pollan called for “a reform of the entire food system” in a *New York Times* open letter to the future U.S. president in 2008. The most distinctive feature of the contemporary food reform movement is thus its holistic approach: nowadays reformers attempt not merely to change

the American diet but rather to transform its globalized, industrial food system, intervening at every stage in the process of production, transportation, distribution, and consumption of foods.

However, if Waters, Schlosser and Pollan may be the public faces of this social movement, they did not play a central role in its emergence: the backbone of today's food movement is provided by a network of non-profit organizations engaging in various local initiatives such as farmer's markets, food co-ops, Community-Supported Agriculture farms, community gardens, urban agriculture and food education programs in schools and community centers, which all intend to promote the use of fresh, local or organic foods in underserved communities. A growing number of Food Policy Councils have been established nationwide to develop local food policies at the city, regional or state-level, bringing together various actors having a stake in food-related issues: anti-hunger advocates, nutritionists, farmers, retailers, community gardeners, urban planners, bankers, philanthropists... Most of these projects originated in the 1980s through government and private funding, primarily as a result of an alliance between anti-hunger advocates, sustainable agriculture groups and environmental approaches to public health.

As with earlier food reform efforts, a social problem oriented the early development of the movement: the discovery of underserved communities in American inner cities where low-income, minority groups had a limited access to supermarkets and paid a higher cost for food. Whereas sociologists and Civil Rights activists had long denounced a phenomenon of retail redlining, showing that the inner city poor paid more for lower quality goods, it was only at the end of the seventies that local governments started to tackle the issue. In 1977, two simultaneous actions were undertaken to decrease the cost of food and improve its access for low-income consumers. In Hartford, Connecticut, a non-profit named the Hartford Food System was established by the city to create "an alternative urban food system, based on greater resident self-sufficiency", formed by an alliance of environmentalists rooted in the back-to-the-land movement with black and Hispanic neighborhood organizations. The city contracted with community organizer Catherine Lerza, one of the authors of *Food for People, Not for Profit*, to prepare "a strategy to reduce the cost of food", devising four "self-help approaches": community gardening, solar greenhouses, food distribution systems and a food processing center. On that same year in Knoxville, graduate students and faculty of the department of urban and regional planning at the University of Tennessee completed a study of the city's food system, focusing on inequities in the food supply. Using data from this study the local Community Action Committee, an anti-poverty organization, received a two-year grant from the federal government to develop community gardens and food assistance programs. These initiatives led to the creation of the country's first Food Policy Council, established by a Knoxville city council resolution in 1982 to

ensure “that all citizens have access to an adequate and nutritious food supply” (government officials were also sensitive to the need to monitor the city’s capacity to supply and dispose of food for the coming World’s Fair).

Meanwhile, one of the first systematic efforts to study the U.S. food system was undertaken by Rodale Press, the publishing company founded by Jerome I. Rodale, an author, editor and health reformer who introduced organic farming to the United States in the 1940s via its magazine *Organic Gardening and Farming*. In 1980, Rodale Press launched the Cornucopia Project, a two-year intensive research program to “create an accessible body of information about the U.S. food system”, distributing a free newsletter to 25,000 people, publishing op-ed ads in various newspapers and issuing reports based on audits of the food system in several states. Headed by Medard Gabel, an international consultant and disciple of futurist Buckminster Fuller, the project ended in 1982 with the publishing of a white paper on food reform, *Empty Breadbasket? The Coming Challenge to America’s Food System and What We Can Do About It*. Most of today’s food movement intellectual toolkit is to be found in the Cornucopia Project agenda, which made recommendations such as “consume more fresh, locally-grown fruits and vegetables”, “support local farmers”, “develop a prudent diet”, “grow more food” (directed at consumers), “encourage sustainable farming methods”, “minimize energy and material use” (directed at the food industry), “establish a department of food”, “facilitate access to food”, (directed at cities), etc.

Detouring to Canada, this problematization of the food system was soon to be translated by philanthropic and international organizations in the new field of “health promotion” (otherwise known as the “new public health”), which objectives were stated at the 1977 World Health Assembly as “the attainment by all the citizens of the world by the year 2000 of a level of health that will permit them to live socially and economically productive lives”. In 1984 in Toronto, the international conference “Beyond Health Care” paved the way for the establishment of a Food Policy Council as a sub-committee of the city’s Board of Health, following recommendations made in the workshop “Healthy Toronto 2000”, an event recognized as a starting point of the World Health Organization’s Healthy Cities project, which acknowledged the role of the urban environment in shaping a healthy lifestyle. Among the prime supporters of the Healthy Cities project was the W.K Kellogg Foundation, created in 1930 by breakfast-cereal manufacturer Will Keith Kellogg – John Harvey’s brother – to “promote the health, happiness and well-being of children”. In 1987, the foundation established the Agriculture, Food and Human Values Society, associated with the academic journal *Agriculture and Human Values*, to foster agricultural studies in liberal arts colleges, and started funding research

such as The Local Food System Project in 1994-1997, providing technical assistance to six sites developing food policy structures based on the experiences of Hartford and Knoxville, among others. From this time on, the foundation would support grassroots initiatives to change the food system: in 2000, the Food & Society Program (renamed Food & Community Program in 2009) was launched to fund “projects supporting the creation of community-based food systems that support local, healthy, sustainably grown food”, organizing yearly conferences, delivering grants and providing fellowships to leading food advocates. From the mid-1990s to 2009, the foundation’s total funding to community food projects amounted to more than 230 million dollars, counting as the single largest contributor to the movement.

Welfare, charity or self-sufficiency? Hunger relief and the transformations of social provision.

Whereas Rodale’s Cornucopia Project, the World Health Organization and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation all helped to unite concerns for sustainable agriculture with health promotion, the social problems of hunger and poverty were also to be reframed in the 1990s in accordance with the sustainability and healthy living agenda. We have already seen that the first municipal efforts at reforming the food system in Hartford and Knoxville were related to the framing of the problem of low-income access to food – one doesn't have to stretch the imagination too far to see that what was defined as a problem of financial access to a necessity was to be aptly reframed as a problem of physical access to healthy, locally-grown foods, turning a right to the satisfaction of a basic human need into a duty to manage risks for health and the environment. How did this framing come to be?

One has to look a few years back in time to grasp the conversion of anti-hunger advocates from disillusioned efforts at federal lobbying to grassroots initiatives, directed at emergency hunger relief on the one hand, and at community food projects on the other hand. Following the rediscovery of hunger in the Mississippi Delta in 1969, a generation of activists trained in the Civil Rights movement and the War on Poverty successfully lobbied the federal government to develop income redistribution policies through food assistance programs, increasing participation in the Food Stamp Program and pressing for new legislation, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) – federal expenditures on food assistance grew by 500 percent in the following decade. Skilled at working within the legislative process, this group known as the “anti-hunger lobby” was compelled to rethink its strategy entirely in the early 1980’s. Following Ronald Regan administration’s severe cuts to welfare

programs and fiscal austerity measures, anti-hunger activists acknowledged that a continuous focus on advocacy for federal assistance programs held little chance of success. As new breadlines were forming in inner cities, a majority of activists were drawn to what sociologist Janet Poppendieck calls the “emergency food movement”, providing charity to families moving off of the welfare rolls via a growing network of food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens. However, what was intended to be an emergency measure endured to our day. Anti-hunger activists who could not settle for managing poverty and still wanted to make a change were thus forced to reframe the hunger problem by forging an alliance with sustainable agriculture groups through the mediation of urban planners.

The 1992 Los Angeles riots brought a major impulse to this strategy: the destruction of many food businesses in South Central Los Angeles that followed the Rodney King verdict prompted the department of urban planning at UCLA to conduct a study of the neighborhood’s food system, *Seeds of Change: Strategies for Food Security for the Inner City*, focusing on the issue of low-income access to food and proposing “a framework for food security planning that is equitable, economically efficient and environmentally sound”. The synthesis between urban anti-hunger interests and rural sustainability perspectives was to be laid around the notion of “food security”, defined after the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization as “the state in which all persons obtain a nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable diet at all times through non-emergency sources”. Andy Fisher, one of the study’s authors, called for a comprehensive reform of hunger alleviation in a policy paper considered a cornerstone of the community food security approach, emphasizing a shift from compensation to prevention: “Food security differs from hunger in certain crucial ways. First, food security represents a community need rather than an individual’s plight, as with hunger (...) Second, whereas hunger measures an existing condition of deprivation, food security is decidedly prevention-oriented, evaluating the existence of resources – both community and personal – to provide an individual with adequate acceptable food (...) A food system offering security should have sustainability such that the ecological system is protected and improved over time, and equity, meaning as a minimum, dependable access for all social groups”. In 1994, Andy Fisher joined with Mark Winne, then executive director of the Hartford Food System to build a national network of local food projects, the Community Food Security Coalition (Both Fisher and Winne were later to become W.K. Kellogg’s Foundation Food & Society Fellows). The coalition successfully introduced legislation supporting community food projects as part of the 1996 Farm Bill, securing federal funding ever since. In a political climate averse to social welfare and labor rights, dissolving the hunger problem in the more consensual notion of food security seemed like a prerequisite for food advocates: the call for

social justice had to be translated into an appeal to self-sufficiency and environmental responsibility to get external support.

Conclusion : The food movement between populism and elitism.

The contemporary food reform movement has emerged from an uneasy alliance between a plurality of professions, all engaged in a competition for material and symbolic rewards to be obtained from the government, non-profit or philanthropic organizations through the mobilization of practical and scientific knowledges. This plurality is evident in the many concurring terms commonly used to make sense of these efforts: “alternative food”, “(community) food security”, “food justice”, “food sovereignty”, “good food”, “local food”, “real food”, “sustainable food”, “true food” – or simply just the “food movement”. Nevertheless, unifying themes pervade much of this social movement, forming a set of shared beliefs, assumptions and values which can be traced back to earlier periods: the romanticized ideal of a pre-industrial past when man lived closer to nature, a sense of moral responsibility and civic virtues tied to agrarian living, anti-monopoly sentiments in the form of support to small farms, a yearning for self-sufficiency coupled with a denunciation of entrepreneurial and political elites – as it appears in the diatribe against agribusiness interests (“Big Agriculture”) and federal farm policies... All these familiar themes would identify the food reform movement with a particular brand of American populism.

However, the movement often faces the charge of elitism, for the already high cost of fresh, local or organic foods continues to rise while the cost of sodas, snacks and other energy-dense processed foods has been decreasing in the long term. In the words of epidemiologist Adam Drewnowski, who has spent much of his career researching how American’s food choices correlate to social class, “food has become the premier marker of social distinctions, that is to say—social class” (“Divided We Eat”, *Newsweek*). Ironically, the fact that many farmers’ markets, food co-ops or CSA farms that are established in inner cities end up catering to a majority white, upper-middle class clientele tend to lend weight to this charge of elitism, and to belie the assumption that there is an unmet demand for fresh produces in those communities. Critics have also pointed to the self-indulgence contained in the idea that consumer action would substitute for political action, as in the slogan “vote with your fork”. At the risk of turning into a class-prejudiced moral crusade, or of degenerating into a fad, the food movement would have to confront the eventuality that the problems with our current food system and diet may be mere symptoms of a wider social problem, namely the persistence of structural inequalities of wealth in

a land of abundance. While in 1984 the Physician's Task Force on Hunger in America denounced a "hunger epidemic" in American inner cities, this phenomenon has been eclipsed by growing social fears about the obesity epidemic, which in recent years has been used as an ultimate argument for the need to reform. Then, despite much evidence suggesting that both ills are related, a conspiracy of silence still surrounds the problems of hunger and poverty.

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