kasher food. Comparable exoticism appears too in the packaging for the Canadian food line President’s Choice, which, as Charlene Elliott shows, pretends to scour the world for new tastes all the better to revitalize the values of the dominant culture at home. In these essays, the attribution of culinary pleasures to exoticized others enables the dominant culture to revitalize itself by playing on consumers’ investments in the ever new and the ever special. In complementary fashion, Lynn Fallwell’s contribution, on the image of German food in English-language travel guides, deftly shows how cultural empowerment can operate through a kind of self-exoticizing: the guides frequently present German food as fatty, meaty, and too wedded to a brutish past, therefore necessitating the intercession of other nations to bring it into the modernity of new, better cuisine. In similar fashion, Amanda Cozzi shows how dominant Victorian representations of London dining (as, for example, in Dickens) dealt with the threat of social enfranchisement of the working classes by imagining that workers who acceded to the pleasures of the table were alien upstarts incapable of appreciating the real values of English cuisine.

To be sure, the premise that power needs the panache of pleasure can become no less an a priori theoretical dogma. In this respect, some essays in Edible Ideologies do deal usefully with historical situations in which the cultivation of pleasure might indeed have seemed transgressive. For example, Marie I. Drew’s essay on the Holocaust cookbook In Memory’s Kitchen examines how in the camps the invocation of gustatory delight was a resilient resistance to attempts to crush spirit as well as body. Here, indeed, power and pleasure might be seen as irreconcilable contraries but only because of the irreducible specificity of this particular (and particularly horrific) historical case. In a different vein, Celia M. Kingsbury studies food restrictions during World War i, when there was little pleasure, just a blunt sense of spartan, communal sacrifice in service to the state. These cases represent unambiguous assertions of relentless power.

Many of the essays, then, treat power (and pleasure, too) as historically variable rather than as a fixed a priori concept. Not for nothing did Michel Foucault speak of the “spirals” of power and resistance. Here, Nathan Abrams’s essay, on the role of Jell-O in the spy case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (who used a cut-up Jell-O box as a contact device), is particularly intriguing. On the one hand, Jell-O was an all-American product that signaled assimilation into the national project. On the other, in a complicated twist, by using ersatz products like Jell-O in her supposedly Jewish kitchen, Ethel “proved” her inauthenticity—as dutiful Jew, as dutiful mother and housewife, and therefore as dutiful American.

The contributions to Edible Ideologies show a richness of concrete argument that theoretical simplicities simply cannot account for. Even LeBesco and Naccarato’s own essay—on the ways Julia Child and Martha Stewart play on democratic offers of culinary skills only to maintain boundaries between their celebrity privilege and actual culinary opportunities for ordinary citizens—demonstrates a complexity of analysis that complicates simple power/pleasure binary opposition.

Vividly and vibrantly, the essays in Edible Ideologies reveal multitudes of meaning when they stay close to concrete cases and read them for their historical complexities. Through diverse examples and divergent methods of cultural analysis, the essays offer rich interpretations of multifarious resonances of food in modernity.

— Dana Polan, New York University

Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America
Frederick Douglass Opie
238 pp. $24.95 (cloth)

Scholarly explorations of the importance of soul in black American culture often carry an elegiac tone. Just as Peter Guralnick has waxed nostalgic about the “brief flowering” of southern soul music, so the African American Review dedicated the entire Winter 2007 issue to the “post-soul aesthetic” that Bertram Ashe and others espied in the more anxious and ironic cultural works that followed the exhilarating breakthroughs of the 1960s. Soul itself, as it emerges from these and other studies, can look like a meteoric phenomenon—like a phenomenon that flared brightly but briefly in the Civil Rights era, leaving behind traces that we cannot repeat but under whose glow we remain caught. Soul, these studies suggest, might well have grown out of the ordeal of white supremacy, but, precisely because of this, it provided practitioners and audiences alike with opportunities for spiritual recovery, offering a sense of belonging and togetherness that can feel somewhat absent from the culture of our own period.

Frederick Douglass Opie’s new history of African American cooking, Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America, in some ways demurs from this common view. Three of Hog and Hominy’s best chapters are devoted to the rise of soul food in 1960s ghetto communities, and, while Opie is no less successful when chronicling the critics of this phenomenon than he is its advocates, the
strength of his historical narrative itself confirms that soul holds as much fascination for him as it does for, say, Peter Guralnick. And yet, whereas Guralnick’s fascination with soul music leads him to lament its all-too-brief span, and to treat it as a kind of cultural butterfly too beautiful to last long, Opie’s fascination with soul food leads him, by way of contrast, to push it backward and drag it forward chronologically, and to suggest that it grew out of “the associated foodways of people of African descent over hundreds of years (p.xii). Indeed, Hogs and Hominy argues that what came to call itself soul food following the Great Migration was only an especially explicit and exuberant manifestation of a tradition of soulful cooking that, always in flux, stretches back to pre-slavery West Africa even as it continues to evolve and flourish today.

Questions of nomenclature, of Hogs and Hominy’s sense of historical responsibility, do perhaps arise here. Early on the work announces that it will demonstrate that “the concept of soul in African American foodways… appeared long before the name ‘soul food’ was coined” (p.xi), but Opie never quite delivers on this tantalizing promise. Too little of his history, I think, is devoted to the period before 1900, and the book’s reliance on Alex Haley and Olaudah Equiano’s Interesting Narrative (which Vincent Carretta has shown is no more reliable than Roots) seems an unpromising basis from which to explore diverse West African traditions. The historical nuance that Opie brings to his exploration of African American foodways after 1900 can seem a little lacking in these early pages; here, Opie can be a bit quick to speak of a single African identity and is sometimes prone to view Africa’s present as a window on its past.

Despite these misgivings, few would challenge the fundamental tradition that Opie is proposing here. Academic research by Karen Hess, Jon Edward Phillips, and Ronald Segal, cookbooks by Verta Mae Grosvenor and Jessica Harris, and literary works such as Ntozake Shange’s If I Can Cook / You Know God Can, have all long since illuminated the many culinary echoes that one can find among all the farflung communities of the African Diaspora. This literature, indeed, has laid a foundation onto which Judith A. Carney and Psyche Williams-Forson, among other younger scholars, have been able to build their brilliant case studies. And in many ways Hogs and Hominy can be thought of as a useful gateway to these studies, a good first port of call for any student or general reader who is becoming interested in African American cooking and who wants to find out more about its full diasporic history. Innovative in its combination of historical and oral materials, informative in the diasporic connections it develops, Hogs and Hominy certainly does a good job of introducing such readers to a particularly vibrant and challenging area within the field of food studies. Its second half might be far stronger than its first, but Hogs and Hominy provides a definitive history of the grand social forces and unforgettable personalities that have revolutionized African American cooking since the twilight of the Jim Crow system.

—Andrew Warnes, University of Leeds

Kitchenspace: Women, Fiestas, and Everyday Life in Central Mexico
Maria Elisa Christie
Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008
xxi + 308 pp. Illustrations. $50.00 (cloth)

Kitchenspace is an evocative read that brought back to me many similar experiences I have had in Central Mexico over the years. The author, Maria Elisa Christie, conducted her research in three communities, all semi-urban villages typical of the region where most of the Mexican population lives. She describes the villages’ characteristic histories, focusing on specific women as they cook for local fiestas and their families’ daily meals. The title, Kitchenspace, refers to the indoor kitchen and the outdoor space where much of the food preparation, cooking, and eating is done, including space for growing herbs and edible plants and raising pigs, turkeys, or a few chickens. The book’s subtitle, “Women, Fiestas and Everyday Life in Central Mexico,” more precisely defines its subject. Christie was accepted into the Mexican woman’s world, and she shares a vision of life focused around the preparation of food and its changing role in Mexican society. Christie’s writing skills are impressive, but this remains first and foremost a thesis, making for an engaging but disjointed narrative.

The first part of the book explores aspects of Catholic folk celebrations in the communities. In Xochimilco, a village on the outskirts of Mexico City famous for the last remnants of the vast chinampas—floating gardens surrounding the ancient Aztec capitol of Tenochtitlán—Christie totally immerses the reader in descriptions of the yearlong celebrations surrounding El Niñoología (“Child of the Place”), a hand-carved wooden image of the baby Jesus that for centuries has been venerated and treated as a live child, receiving gifts of clothes and toys. This practice grew out of the traditions encompassing the child-being of the ancient Aztec god of war and protector of mothers. After describing several other festivals in Xochimilco, the author turns to the