question, however, calls upon students to relate the volume’s articles one to another. Students might, for example, profitably compare Mehta’s analysis of food and identity in blended families with the one offered by Derek Hicks in his chapter on gumbo in African American communities.

Students might also query what these and other contributors to this volume mean when they use the term “religion.” What would be lost—and what would be gained—by analyzing Mehta’s and Hicks’s data through the lens of ethnicity rather than religion? (Dallam observes in her introduction that few food studies scholars combine the lenses of ethnicity and religion, an unfortunate weakness within this still emerging field.) Benjamin Zeller’s essay makes the case for treating vegetarianism and locavorism as “quasi-religious foodways,” in part because many practitioners describe their commitment to these food practices using religious rhetoric. These include Alissa Herbaly Coons, who describes the “crisis of faith” that led her to become a vegetarian, as well as her later “reconversion” to eating meat (p.297). By this logic, then, can omnivorism also be quasi-religious? More broadly, what factors mark a foodway as being “religious,” and why should these factors be determinative?

Religion, Food, and Eating in North America has the potential to prompt many productive questions. Although designed as something of a self-teaching volume, it will be most effective in the hands of instructors who treat it not as a TV dinner (reheat and serve) but rather as a collection of raw ingredients whose flavors will benefit from pedagogical creativity. This collection is also most appropriate for an introductory course: much to my chagrin, it did not work in my revived upper-level seminar. My students found its articles easy to read but frustratingly thin. This usually engaged group of advanced undergraduates found little to discuss in class, and a senior who wrote a term paper that put multiple chapters of this book into dialogue discovered that she lacked the kind of data necessary to make a compelling argument. I would likely use Religion, Food, and Eating in a first-year seminar, but next time I teach my food and religious identity course I will instead assign several of the more sophisticated books listed in this volume’s excellent selected bibliography.

—David M. Freidenreich, Colby College

The Psychology of Overeating: Food and the Culture of Consumerism
Kima Cargill
New York: Bloomsbury, 2015
xi + 216 pp. Illustrations. $24.95 (paper)

In The Psychology of Overeating, clinical psychologist Kima Cargill argues that the overeating epidemic must be understood as deeply entwined with, and indeed a direct outcome of, consumer culture. Synthesizing an impressive array of research from across social and natural sciences as well as her firsthand experience as a clinical psychologist, Cargill’s truly interdisciplinary book expounds a compelling argument: Overeating can be traced to the single phenomenon of consumerism, which entails pursuing and consuming highly stimulating experiences that have become part of urban life in the West and are now spreading rapidly around the globe. While treatises on the obesity epidemic and critical analyses of consumer culture abound, The Psychology of Overeating’s thorough integration of these topics and introduction of a clinical psychological perspective offers novel contributions to scholarship on overeating and obesity, thus spearheading a heretofore nonexistent intervention of clinical psychology in food studies scholarship. The text is by no means a self-help book, though its accessible prose and complex, scientifically informed analysis of overeating at both individual and structural levels provide useful insights for the general public and those struggling with overeating.

Although Cargill backs most of her arguments with secondary literature and scientific studies, she also draws upon individual cases from her clinical practice. In the challenges faced by Cargill’s clients, we see the ways in which struggles with overeating often connect to patterns of overconsumption in other realms (e.g., excessive clothes shopping), and also how people’s relationships to food consumption come to function as addictions, both in terms of the ill effects on their lives and their inability to change consumption habits. By juxtaposing clinical cases of overeating with critical analysis of broad economic, social, and political factors contributing to this phenomenon, Cargill develops connections between individuals and collectives in overeating, avoiding simple structural arguments as well as individual pathologizing.

Cargill’s chapters make a number of ambitious sub-arguments about the multiple relationships between consumerism and food, some of which are better supported than others. Avoiding simple blame games, she explores how the food industry uses strategic marketing to convince consumers to buy more food, while consumers collude with them, allowing themselves to be tricked through self-deception. Linking the rise of overeating to a shift in the late twentieth-century United States from a culture of “thrift” to one of “anti-thrift,” Cargill makes the interesting claim that credit card debt and excess calories are the same thing—surpluses of consumption—thereby connecting the demise of balancing checkbooks to the demise of
balanced diets. Arguing for an understanding of overeating as an addiction that neither fully medicalizes overeating nor fully blames the food industry “bad guys,” Cargill examines biological studies of relationships between hormones and food alongside the history of the Big Food’s efforts to design “hyperpalatable” foods that make people crave more. The chapter on Big Pharma traces a symbiotic relationship between Big Pharma and Big Food, revealing a vicious cycle that proves lucrative for corporations and destructive for consumers in which food companies provide cheap, addictive foods that lead to health problems while pharmaceutical companies proffer cures for these ailments.

The normative tone of Cargill’s arguments and her comfort when using the terminology of pathologies present a somewhat uneasy, but potentially productive, contribution to extant critical food studies literature on overeating and obesity, the vast majority of which avoids normativity and medicalization at all costs. While most clinical psychological research focuses on individuals and works to diagnose abnormalities, Cargill oscillates between a language of pathology and one of structural determinism, an awkward—but, I would argue, fruitful—antagonism.

While much research on overeating presents singular, all-encompassing arguments (e.g., it is about chemical imbalance), this book ambitiously grapples with the neurochemical, neuroanatomical, and evolutionary factors, as well as the complex constellation of economic, historic, and cultural factors, responsible for the rise of consumerism and the attendant overeating epidemic. In embracing the complex, multifactorial nature of overeating and bringing clinical psychological analytical frameworks in dialogue with other explanatory models, Cargill makes a novel contribution to studies of overeating and presents a model for future interventions of clinical psychology in food studies.

—Emma McDonell, Indiana University