

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

By Ian Mosby

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A Book Review by

*Tracy Moniz*

Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada

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Ian Mosby's *Food will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front* (2014) presents an original, robust, insightful, and engaging discussion about the role of food—its production, consumption, and service—in defining and transforming the Canadian home front during and in the years immediately following the Second World War. Through multi-disciplinary perspectives and comprehensive archival research, Mosby advances his thesis that, while food did not literally “win” the war, it was a key site for political, socio-cultural, and scientific change and, more specifically, a key site where gendered notions of wartime citizenship were expressed and challenged on a national level.

As a historian of food, health, and nutrition in Canada, Mosby leads readers into Canadian household kitchens during the Second World War to learn—chapter by chapter—the ways that the war transformed the politics, culture, and science of food on the home front. Chapter One explores how the federal government worked through public education on malnutrition to encourage Canadians to voluntarily change their eating habits. By analyzing Canada's Food Rules and other educational materials, the author argues that advice on wartime nutrition reflected the scientific consensus of nutrition experts—a consensus which, in turn, formed the basis of a public health program that prioritized industrial, military, and agricultural wartime needs more so than it worked to prevent serious illness. In Chapter Two, Mosby considers how Canadians, especially women, responded to food rationing and price control—two direct, large-scale forms of government intervention in the kitchens of regular Canadians. He argues that, through their support for these programs, women brought about a vision of social and economic citizenship that emphasized their rights as consumers to fair prices and equitable food distribution during the war and in the postwar years. Chapter Three demonstrates how the mobilization of women's unpaid labour to meet wartime demands—specifically via campaigns on food conservation and thrift as well as voluntary labour—blurred lines between women's public and private sphere roles and highlighted the social and economic importance of women's domestic labour to the war effort.

Building on these early chapters, Chapter Four focuses on how these influences on Canadians' eating habits translated into a distinctly Canadian food culture and culinary practice. In writing about food, such as in wartime cookbooks and recipes, women expressed alternative

visions of wartime citizenship and postwar reconstruction—visions that embodied their experiences of social, economic, and political change throughout the war. From within a postwar context, Chapter Five then considers how the science of nutrition altered political debates over social security and reconstruction and vice versa, arguing that a breakdown in scientific consensus, combined with questions around the effectiveness of nutrition as the basis for social and political change, ultimately dismantled the scientific consensus that originally spurred the wartime malnutrition “crisis”. The final chapter brings together and builds on key messages throughout the book—that the war changed Canadians’ eating habits after a decade of lack and want; that the war enabled and fostered a new vision about the place of food, nutrition, and consumption in Canadian politics and culture; and that, even if temporarily (but no less importantly), the war destabilized pre-war conceptions of gender, citizenship, and nation.

The arguments advanced in this book reflect extensive archival research and a solid grounding in secondary literature. Mosby arrives at his conclusions based on a comprehensive critical analysis of official records of federal government departments involved in the governance of food and nutrition during the war as well as records of other national organizations involved in efforts related to food and nutrition. Mosby supplements this by examining popular discussions on food and nutrition in print, radio, and film media; national news and lifestyle magazines; women’s sections in wartime newspapers; and cookbooks and other forms of culinary literature. With respect to the latter, which are often overlooked as scholarly sources, Mosby reviews different genres of popular food writing in both English and French, capturing a more inclusive Canadian perspective. The author weaves archival evidence—textual and visual—throughout the book to illustrate his ideas, and the book also includes a comprehensive section of bibliographic notes to add historical context and scholarly support.

Mosby describes his text foremost as a work of food history that fills a gap in the historiography of food and eating in Canada and that, more broadly, contributes to the growing field of critical nutrition studies with its focus on the significance of official (government) efforts to define and measure the concepts of health, hunger, and malnutrition. These noted scholarly contributions are valid and important, but certainly not exhaustive. The book’s thorough and insightful analysis and ensuing arguments also add value to and advance Canadian scholarship in fields such as media history, the history of the Second World War (particularly as viewed in the shadow of the Great Depression), women’s and gender studies, and women’s (labour) history.

*Food will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada’s Home Front* makes a particularly valuable contribution to research on women’s unpaid labour which, in historical scholarship and practice, has received far less attention and recognition than women’s wage labour. The book speaks to the magnitude, necessity, and value of women’s unpaid labour in the historical context of the Second World War. Furthermore, the book contributes in a novel way to lingering discussions on changing wartime gender relations sparked by Ruth Roach Pierson’s seminal text *“They’re Still Women After All”: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*. Mosby’s book furthers a less-explored analysis of how women’s conflicting public-private roles during the war impacted their lives in the domestic sphere. By analyzing the war’s impact on women and, specifically, social relations of gender, from within the decidedly-feminine domestic sphere, this book explores changing wartime gender relations through the lens of women’s everyday experiences and realities, rather than from within the patriarchal confines of the military-industrial complex (which traditionally excluded women). This results in a more progressive view of women as empowered female citizen-consumers who found their “voice”

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

throughout the war and indeed used it to articulate and enact change in both the private and public spheres.

Students and researchers across related areas of scholarly interest in Canada—from food and war historians to scholars of media and gender—will benefit from reading this book, as will general readers with an interest in these fields. The text's accessible, direct, and engaging writing style creates a broad academic and popular appeal. *Food will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front* makes a distinct and much-needed Canadian contribution to literature in these fields and, more broadly, to Canada's war story. The book demonstrates how food impacted the everyday lives and national consciousness of Canadians during the war and how it was, in fact, leveraged as “a weapon of war”—a war ultimately fought as much by women in their own kitchens as in the factories and war zones.

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### **About the Reviewer**

Tracy Moniz is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University in Canada. She holds a Ph.D. in Communication and Culture from the joint graduate program at York and Ryerson Universities, a Master of Arts degree in Journalism, and an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature, French Studies, and Professional Writing and Communication. Broadly, her research interests include gender and media, media history, and writing practice and pedagogy. Her recent work focuses on media representations of women's labour during the Second World War in Canada, engaging with questions of how gender ideology imprints itself on media discourse.

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