



## *Martha Stewart Roundtable*

# **Martha's Food: Whiteness of a Certain Kind**

**Amy Bentley**

Food sits at the base of the Martha Stewart empire. While her corporation, Martha Stewart, Omnimedia, Inc.—as its name implies—encompasses every aspect of homekeeping through virtually every medium, Stewart first entered the realm of professional domesticity as a private caterer. Ever since her foray (some would say invasion) into Americans' homes beginning with the 1982 publication of her book, *Entertaining*, people have held strong opinions about Martha Stewart. While Stewart has been called various derisive names—Betty Crocker from hell, the Uberhausfrau, the Ideological Stewart Apparatus, the anti-Julia<sup>1</sup>—she has also achieved cult status among many of her worshipful followers. Holding an appeal that transcends class, and even gender and race to some extent, Martha is a fascinating barometer of American culture at the turn of the twentieth century, and has done much to influence food in the United States in a variety of ways.

In this assessment of Martha Stewart I focus on food mainly as it appears in her print publications, essentially arguing that the extraordinarily polished appearance of Martha Stewart (MS) food belies its complexity of meaning. While MS food is “white,” it is a class-specific whiteness that transcends ethnicity and becomes accessible by cultivation rather than heritage. As such, MS food is based upon an invented artisan ethos only fully realized by those who have the luxury to perform the work, lending itself to elaborate conspicuous consump-

tion. Yet many (women in particular) find the intricate world of MS food most gratifying for less decorous reasons. Instead of being solely about proving one's status, MS food infuses a sense of pleasure into the daily, often mundane activities of procuring and preparing food. Finally, MS food has transformed food culture, no less by upping the ante in *haute cuisine* by taking an idealized meal to another level of complexity.

Martha Stewart food is the embodiment of whiteness. Though a metaphorical whiteness, it differs from the literal whiteness prescribed by the professional home economists and domestic-advice givers of the early-twentieth century, who advocated the moral elevation of food through enveloping all dishes in a creamy white sauce.<sup>2</sup> From the tiniest hors d'oeuvres to the catered weddings for two hundred, Martha Stewart food is whiteness with a high-church, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) gloss. Photographs and recipes of the lobster boils, the summer salads, and the hearty root vegetable purees of autumn are carefully constructed, controlled at every level, leaving nothing to chance. Precise measurements and exacting instructions—every detail is paid attention to in striking fashion. *Martha Stewart Living*, unlike other women's magazines, rarely features any food ritual or ethnic fare outside of mainstream America in general and New England in particular: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Fourth of July celebrations, church bake sales, Easter and the like are all regularly and prominently featured. Even so-called "ethnic" dishes that appear in MSL, such as egg creams, matzo ball soup and matzo brei, spaetzle, Greek tsourekhi, are absent any real trace of ethnicity. When Martha Stewart publications do feature some ethnic fare, the entire process is glossed in a patina of whiteness. A recent *Martha Stewart Living* piece, for example, focuses on the preparation and presentation of a (sub-continent) Indian dinner. Over the several-page spread an Indian woman (a deputy editor of the magazine) conceives and prepares the dinner, but the story unfolds not as an excursion into Indian culture and cuisine, but as a beginner's lesson in Indian flavors for her (white) husband and (white) friends. The result, not surprisingly and somewhat logically, is a lovely Indian dinner in the East Hamptons, Martha Stewart style.<sup>3</sup>

A brief comparison with another food and entertainment mogul, African American Barbara Smith, reveals this whitewashed quality more strikingly. Barbara Smith, variously known as Ms. B. or B. Smith, is doomed forever to be known as the African American Martha Stewart, a fact that she no doubt capitalizes upon. Her life parallels Stewart's in interesting ways: both grew up in the Mid-Atlantic, both were models who made their way to New York City, both have one daughter (Smith's is a stepdaughter), and both talk about food and entertaining in very personal and nostalgic terms. (A main difference, however, is that Smith got her start in the domestic enhancement industry as a restaurant owner and operator, something Stewart has never done.) Comparing Smith's food to Stewart's in their publications highlights just how New England Yankee white Stewart's food really is. Although Smith's books and magazine intention-

ally aim at and achieve a crossover audience, thus underplaying the creator's African American heritage, her food is grounded in a Southern and slightly Afro-centric orientation. *Rituals and Celebrations*, for example, features a Juneteenth celebration, a young woman's coming of age party with an African theme, and a Kwanzaa brunch.<sup>4</sup> Barbara Smith unfolds her domestic advice against the background of her African American culture, just as Martha Stewart unfolds hers within her (culturally acquired) WASP-y milieu.

Much has been made of the fact that Martha has transformed herself from white ethnic middle-class Martha Kostyra from Nutley, New Jersey, to Greenwich, Connecticut, Yankee Martha Stewart.<sup>5</sup> Whether Martha Stewart consciously remade herself in this way (and whether she should be disparaged for it) is not my concern, but there is no doubt that part of the whiteness of Martha Stewart food demonstrates an upper-middle-class sensibility. In her early years as a caterer, food became a route to the good taste and refined sensibility necessary to attain New England *nouveau riche* aristocracy. Martha's food is not only good to eat but good to think, belying a certain sensibility that many crave to emulate. In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, it is representative of upper-middle-class taste culture, providing those who aspire to it a kind of cultural capital.<sup>6</sup> The certain delicate taste combinations, compelling spicing, tender baby vegetables, fresh seafood, and the knowledge necessary to consume properly lobster, foie gras, or asparagus, are elements that indicate much more than ingestion of food. It is possible to illuminate the class orientation insinuated in her food by comparing it with the food of another set of successful publications also steeped in whiteness, although of a decidedly different kind.

The *White Trash Cooking* cookbooks, the popular series begun by Matthew Ernest Mickler, purport to take working-class Southern white culture and foodways seriously, and in doing so present a distinct persona both of the cooking and of the people who cook and consume the food.<sup>7</sup> The cookbooks, with their unflinching photos of overweight, unkempt people, ramshackle fruit stands, tired church supper tables laden with casseroles and fried meats, and unpainted shelves crammed with Crisco and Spam, promote themselves as "not a joke book or a parody," but a "warmly written, humorous, and quite serious cookbook filled with delightful traditional and unusual recipes."<sup>8</sup> Recipes range from the mundane to the quasi-parodic, including "Betty Sue's Fried Okra," "Fried Rabbit," "Perlow," "Mrs. Arnold's Saturday Night Shrimps," "Potato Chip Sandwich," "Fanny's Fruit-Cocktail Cobbler," and "Florence's Lemon Ice-Box Pie." The original *White Trash Cooking* contains positive endorsements from such luminaries as Roy Blount, Jr., J. William Fulbright, Helen Hayes, Harper Lee, Vertamae Grosvenor, and Barbara Kafka—seeming testimonials as to its authenticity and the seriousness with which the cookbook takes its subject.

Bourdieu has shown that in the realm of food, "taste" in its broadest definition can be examined and identified in terms of class. Essentially, he argues, while the bourgeois privileges form and aesthetics over substance, the prole-

tariat does the opposite.<sup>9</sup> Comparing Martha Stewart food with so-called white trash food as portrayed in the Mickler cookbooks results in some illustrative though no doubt oversimplified opposites that confirm Bourdieu's assertions: New England versus Southern, wealth versus poverty, control versus excess, disciplined bodies versus overweight/protruding bodies, understated opulence versus vulgar excess, clean versus dirty, leisure versus sloth, contrived versus natural, vegetable versus animal, ethereal versus carnal, pure versus mongrel, "worthy" versus "unworthy."<sup>10</sup> While white trash food is "white," and no doubt more widely produced and consumed than Martha Stewart food, by virtue of its class sensibility Martha's food embodies the ideal qualities of whiteness that Americans consider more deserving. Not just its food, but white trash culture in general is marginalized, becoming the other of mainstream American culture. As one scholar aptly observes, "There is something not quite 'white' about White Trash."<sup>11</sup> It is whiteness as ethnicity as opposed to whiteness as achieved cultivation.

As part of this white, upper-middle-class sensibility, Martha Stewart food is about the acquisition, production, and consumption of "good things," tasteful in its most broad sense. It holds the promise that good taste, refinement, and self-improvement through elaborate production of food can bring happiness. The whole cultural package has striking similarities to the sensibilities of the other Gilded Age (ours being the Martha Stewart gilded age of gold foil decorated wedding cakes) of a hundred years ago upon which social theorist Thorstein Veblen commented so brilliantly.

In his 1899 treatise, *A Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen insightfully articulated the obvious: the acquisition and consumption of goods at a certain level is as much or more about the demonstration of one's wealth, status, or power as it is about the utility of the objects. Best known for coining the term "conspicuous consumption," Thorstein explained that consuming conspicuously requires, in addition to wealth, both time and effort:

Closely related to the requirement that the gentleman must consume freely and of the right kind of goods, there is the requirement that he must know how to consume them in a seemly manner. . . . This cultivation of the aesthetic faculty requires time and application, and the demands made upon the gentleman in this direction therefore tend to change his life of leisure into a more or less arduous application to the business of learning how to live a life of ostensible leisure in a becoming way.<sup>12</sup>

While Veblen's focus is on the elite classes, he notes that those of less opulent means follow similar patterns, although as Americans descend the social scale "the duties of vicarious leisure and consumption devolve upon the wife . . .

under the guidance of traditions that have been shaped by the law of conspicuously wasteful expenditure of time and substance."<sup>13</sup> Women, then, whether by choice or by tradition, take up the job. It should be said that "waste" for Veblen means anything beyond that absolutely required for human survival. Not necessarily a pejorative term, however, he notes that "waste" to some degree is common at all levels, since all people, even those of the least means, desire pleasure and aesthetic indulgence in their lives.<sup>14</sup> Such endeavors as elaborate meals and expensive or time-consuming household decorative arts designate taste and thus one's class affiliation—or desired class affiliation.

It is easy to place Martha Stewart food squarely within this Veblenesque conspicuous consumption of leisure and goods. Only someone with a certain level of wealth—allowing for enough leisure time—would really be able to emulate precisely Martha's food: to make crackers from scratch, to stir batters by hand, to hollow out tiny cherry tomatoes to fill with grilled shrimp and corn salad, or to prepare the elaborate watermelon-shaped summer dessert (green-tinted cake for the rind, watermelon-flavored sorbet with seed-shaped chocolate pieces) featured on one *Martha Stewart Living* cover.<sup>15</sup> Being able to imitate Martha Stewart for any more than an occasional recipe signifies one's status, anticipated or real.

While the preparation of Martha Stewart food is a sign of one's status Stewart's food itself is prescriptive, class conscious, and authoritarian, as if she has taken upon herself the task of strict arbiter of proper American taste. In her magazines and cookbooks Stewart provides not only the recipes but also a prominent exhortation on how to serve them. In the monthly *Living* column (from which there came a similarly named cookbook) declaratively titled, "What to Have for Dinner," readers learn not only what to have, but how to serve: "An antique ironstone butter chip is just the right size for a chocolate kiss"; "The winter crudité salad looks especially pretty on a Paris-porcelain cake plate"; "This [rhubarb raspberry] crisp will look better in a white French porcelain tart pan than in a tin pie pan."<sup>16</sup> Not all the recipes are elaborate and expensive, but embedded in the instructions is a tone of moral authority and a hyperawareness of aesthetics: as if Stewart feels the need to educate the upwardly-aspiring in the proper mode of production and presentation, or is constantly projecting how the aesthetics of her recipes will be perceived and judged by others instead of merely how they taste.

The Martha Stewart empire is not all cast in this mold, however. Indeed, Stewart's genius is her ability to span the broad spectrum of household needs on all economic levels. In addition to the \$78 Noah's ark copper cookie-cutter sets available in the Martha by Mail catalogs, her selections of linens, bath accessories, paint, and garden accessories are best-sellers at Kmart, a decidedly middle-to lower-middle-class shopping venue (although research suggests that people of all economic levels shop at Kmart at least occasionally).<sup>17</sup> But Martha Stewart Kmart products are never featured, and are never even advertised in *Martha*

*Stewart Living* or *Martha's Kitchen*, her home and food show broadcast twice daily on the Television Food Network. It is as if the two parts of the MS empire had no connection. So while her Kmart enterprise is clearly aimed at a consumer with a moderate income, Martha Stewart *food* remains firmly attached to a more opulent idealized lifestyle and is placed deliberately at a distance from the more democratic offerings.

Martha Stewart food contains contradictions, though, which complicate and enrich its meanings and uses. In addition to being seen as indicative of leisure time (and thus wealth), the Martha Stewart made-from-scratch recipes and admonitions for hand mixing can also be regarded as *inconspicuous*-consumption—a Martha Stewart version of the mass-society thesis, in which a return to the artisanal production of food functions as a bulwark against the ease and reproducibility of mass-produced goods. Preparing food by hand signifies self-reliance and connotes a sense of simplicity and voluntary disconnection from the fast pace of our post-industrial, digital era. It can also result in less wastefulness, as opposed to Veblen's notion of conspicuous consumption as about waste. Moreover, using local, in-season ingredients, as Stewart recommends, as well as making tortilla chips from scratch run counter to the emerging global, postindustrial culture which includes the production and consumption of food.

Such artisanal production implies authenticity, control, and a connectedness with the past (whether contrived or not), all of which serve an important purpose for makers of Martha Stewart food. "Indeed," as anthropologist Susan Terrio writes, "it is the politics of cultural authenticity in the globalization of markets that enables 'genuine,' locally produced craft work and commodities to be maintained, revived, and/or reinvented precisely because they can be commoditized and sold as such."<sup>18</sup> Such practices help make people feel unique and in control of their circumstances. Jackson Lears, in his exploration of Veblen's bourgeois culture, found similar longings and accompanying actions from those espousing the Arts and Crafts Movement during this first Gilded Age:

The revival of handicraft at the turn of the century [was] suffused with upper-class forebodings and utopian aspirations. . . . Arts and Crafts ideology, like other manifestations of the antimodern impulse, served both to revitalize and to transform modern bourgeois culture. While Simple-Lifers stressed familiar virtues of discipline and work, aesthetes embodied a new style of high consumption appropriate to the developing consumer economy. . . . Resisting the emergent style of consumption, Simple-Life advocates sought to revitalize older producer values. Calls for the simplification of life stressed the sanctity of hearth and home, the virtues of life on the land, and the ennobling power of work.<sup>19</sup>

Lears goes on, however, to point out the accommodationism inherent in the movement. Simplifying one's life through the production of certain domestic items did not challenge the existing capitalist status quo, the troubling force that was altering society to begin with, but in fact accommodated it. As holds true with Martha Stewart food today, Arts and Crafts ideology, Lears points out, "did not challenge the separation of productive labor from joyful labor, nor protest the modern organization of work. Instead it eased adjustment to our twentieth-century world of organized capitalism, where 'work' and 'life' exist in separate spheres."<sup>20</sup>

While completely adhering to the Martha Stewart world of food production requires a certain level of means, home cooks can and do derive a sense of accomplishment and pleasure from cooking *a la* Martha Stewart, to whatever limited extent. Discussions with Martha Stewart fans and visits to Martha Stewart-inspired websites reveal the powerfully positive force she plays in people's (mostly women's) lives. While some women admit shortcomings (an entire show devoted to caviar revealed for many a snobbish element) they are also fiercely loyal to Martha Stewart and see her as transforming their lives for the better:

I too enjoy Martha Stewart. Not just for her tips and beautiful presentation, but because of her gentle disposition which brings with it grace to even the simplest of tasks. Who else could create such a peaceful and entertaining segment on the makings of peach ice cream? I also appreciate the nature with which she somehow convinces me I can do it too.

She has great ideas, you have to admit it, and while not all of them can be incorporated into an average working woman's budget and lifestyle, they certainly can be modified to everyone's bank account and liking.

And so maybe she is a little more talented than I am when putting iced flowers on a cake, but that doesn't mean that I can't be creative and ice mine with an Art Deco touch!

I guess my point is that I owe a lot to Martha Stewart for sparking my once dormant and commercial-stricken imagination. Martha is like a well of ideas from which I draw my own "good things."

Although most of the things she prepares are beyond my means they still give me that inspiration I need. Like sharing with a friend. She has a wonderful way of presentation and that's what I enjoy. She has a good sense of humor and can laugh at

herself. . . . Watching her show inspires the creativity I sometimes lose sight of.

For those of you that want to be “Martha Stewart,” why not try being the very best you [can], instead. It is certainly an attainable goal with rich rewards. Use Martha’s ideas as a jumping off point to create your world of good things.<sup>21</sup>

Time and again women indicate that instead of feeling threatened or defeated by Stewart’s ideas they employ them to explore their own creativity.<sup>22</sup> Still, the sense of simplicity rooted in Martha Stewart do-it-yourself activities is in reality often much more complex. While Stewart’s handcrafted approach evokes such positive notions as conservation of resources, treading lightly on the land, recycling food and household items, in actuality most of these projects (and recipes) are quite complex, require a fair amount of money, and can be wasteful of resources. To achieve the simplicity of bygone days, then, often requires enormous expenditures of time, money, and resources.

Moreover, this artisanal emphasis belies what culinary historian Rachel Laudén has recently termed “Culinary Luddism.” While she does not mention Stewart by name, Laudén argues that those who espouse such productions are offering up a romanticized and historically inaccurate, and never-existing, notion of “authentic cuisine.” “Culinary Luddism,” states Laudén, “combines a nostalgia for the past that never was with a hankering for a system of food product that, not by accident but by its very nature, was labor intensive, socially repressive, and morally exploitative.”<sup>23</sup> Instead of being “of the people” as such organizations as Slow Food and Oldways, and some cookbook authors characterize themselves, their rose-colored sense of food production and consumption in the past is ultimately quite elitist:

[Culinary Luddism] can all too easily let us forget how modern food allows people more choices, not just of food but of what they do with their lives. The foods of Culinary Modernism are egalitarian, available more or less equally to all, without demanding the disproportionate amount of the resources—either in terms of time or money—that traditional foodstuffs did. If we urge the Mexican to stay at her metate, the farmer to stay at his olive press, the housewife to stay at her stove instead of going to McDonalds, so that we may eat hand made tortillas, traditionally pressed olive oil, home cooked meals, we are assuming the mantle of the aristocrats of old. We are reducing the choices of others as we attempt to impose our elite culinary preferences on the rest of the population.<sup>24</sup>

Terrio concurs: "Tradition serves as a model of the past that changes constantly because it is continually reinvented and reconstructed from the vantage point of the present. Indeed, the uses of the past . . . reveal it to be a social construction strongly mediated and shaped by persistent contemporary concerns."<sup>25</sup>

Unlike some of Lauden's Culinary Luddites, and perhaps due in part to her no-nonsense, somewhat aloof persona, Martha Stewart never does quite come off as "of the people," although she is not afraid to get down and dirty and case some sausages with her bare hands. The end result, however, can be similar: that employing selected technological advancements in the kitchen (mass-produced food, electric mixers), is somehow inauthentic and too mundane—too accessible, we could say, to demonstrate one's uniqueness and status. Yet, this is also the very point for many. Less concerned with displaying their status, many seek a sense of artistry and artistic distinctiveness in an age when the non-distinctive is continually and inescapably available within a market nexus. One could argue that using Martha Stewart's ideas as a "jumping off point" to explore one's own creativity in food is still about consuming mass-produced goods—Martha Stewart, after all, has a viewing and reading public in the millions, and more than a few people are purchasing all those (mass-produced) "do-it-yourself" cookie cutter and cake decorating sets, complete with instructions. Still, for many, Martha Stewart food offers an antidote to mass-produced goods, and is, implicitly, a food-based, food-oriented exponent of the mass society critique.

Finally, when discussing such a topic as Martha Stewart food, one must certainly ask the question: How does it taste? Although taste is never quite at the forefront of MS food, the implication (not necessarily accurate) is that if the food is handcrafted, the taste will follow. While my response is that her recipes are actually quite good, others consider her food as suspect. Many in the food world regard Martha Stewart with disdain, having got her start "merely" as a caterer, and an untrained one at that. Stewart neither attended culinary school nor worked her way up the ranks, and thus is regarded as unworthy to stake such a claim in American food tastes. (Ironically, the woman many regard as a snob is snubbed for lacking the proper credentials.)

When discussing Stewart's influence on American food, however, appearance *is* more important than taste. As a culinary tastemaker, appearance and aesthetics are primary. Martha Stewart food has been called the food equivalent of pornography—"glossy, glamorous shots . . . stylized seductions of domestic fantasies," as one writer suggested.<sup>26</sup> Hors d'oeuvres and desserts in particular are the pinnacle of Martha Stewart food. While Stewart has gone low-fat in her recent cookbooks, and many desserts in *Martha Stewart Living* are composed around (lower-calorie) fruit, the aura of decadence remains and reigns. One writer has described her as a "Puritan who prepared sinful foods . . . that are redeemed by the prodigious labors, the molasses afternoons, involved in serving them."<sup>27</sup> But low-calorie or not, the remarkable food photography in Martha Stewart publications has created the image of a seamless final product, an ideal, an icon, which has shaped ideals of American food today.

Though always distinctive, since the early eighties there has been an evolution of Martha Stewart food and food photography. In the earlier cookbooks, food was shot within a particular context apparent to the viewer: a wedding, luau, or thanksgiving dinner. The photo, encompassing a macro-view, usually consisted of many dishes or platters of food, all in focus. The result, while compelling, was “busier” than more recent Martha Stewart photography. Today, Martha Stewart food (and the food of many others as well) is cleaner, sharper, much more minimalist, with much less clutter in the background. While in many Martha Stewart photos food resembles a still-life painting in its rich sumptuousness, most often it is spare, closely focused: one plate, one dish, one soup bowl, one dessert, or one hors d’oeuvres featured instead of a whole spread. If the photo does contain many items, only one remains in focus; the rest are blurred in a background. Colors are cleaner and lighter. This style is due in part to changing camera technology that allows for sharper images, and no doubt due largely to a talented group of food photographers and stylists who work for Stewart.<sup>28</sup> While much contemporary food photography follows these trends, Stewart’s results are truly stunning. The effects are mouthwatering images impossible to duplicate: A “real” dish of food placed in front of a patron—or family—is destined to disappoint by comparison.

This distinctive food photography, combined with other qualities of Martha Stewart food, has helped to transform food beyond the traditional  $A + 2B$  form. Anthropologist Mary Douglas has employed the equation “ $A + 2B$ ” to describe the mainstream American ideal of what a “dinner” should consist of, but more importantly, for our purposes, what it should look like. “ $A$ ” equaling the large serving of protein (usually meat) and “ $2B$ ” signifying the two servings of complementary vegetables (one of which usually is potatoes). This meal equation signifies a distinctly Northern European (especially British) heritage. Yet it has had a long history of its own in the United States, where for many people, a meal is just not a meal unless there is the above combination, at least in some related form, particularly a large piece of meat as a centerpiece.<sup>29</sup>

Martha Stewart food, as photographed for her magazine and her cookbooks, seems to regard  $A + 2B$  as too mundane, too bourgeois. For Martha Stewart the ideal meal formula more resembles something like “ $BAC + D$  over  $E$ ”—a more complex and thus perhaps more sophisticated version of standard American fare. The flesh ( $A$ ), while not absent, is enveloped in and often partially hidden by vegetables and/or pasta ( $B$ ), which are surrounded by secondary vegetables such as herbs ( $C$ ), but which are just as important to the meal as the primary vegetables ( $B$ ).  $BAC$  is accompanied by ( $D$ ), a dipping sauce (although Stewart does not particularly like this term). As important as the food itself, all are ensconced in silver, plateware, glassware, napkins, tablecloth and centerpiece ( $E$ ). The entire effect confirms MS food as the embodiment of a class-specific notion of whiteness, even as it is perceived (at least in part) as accessible by women of varying socioeconomic backgrounds. While others also have influenced

American cuisine in the last couple of decades,<sup>30</sup> Martha Stewart's new configuration of food elevated food in homes and restaurants alike to a new level. Not only has Martha Stewart food entered the realm of the private through print, television, and radio, but it has also changed dramatically restaurant (at least at the high end) preparation and presentation of food. Patrons have exchanged A + 2B for a more complicated notion of food. They expect Martha Stewart-like food constructed in Martha Stewart-like fashion, with an accompanying anticipation of its taste, an ideal almost impossible to achieve. Because of Stewart's fastidious insistence on handcrafted artisanal food, customers now expect high-end restaurants not only to serve hand-cured olives or made-from-scratch mozzarella, but also expect them to be made on the premises—goods shipped from a family-owned factory appear to be not quite authentic and artisanal enough anymore.<sup>31</sup>

Just as in the Arts and Crafts movement of a century ago, so too today do many seek satisfaction, even solace, in artisanal production. As Jackson Lears comments so insightfully on our own era:

The craft impulse has become dispersed in millions of do-it-yourself projects and basement workshops, where men and women have sought the wholeness, the autonomy, and the joy they cannot find on the job or in domestic drudgery. If the result of this craftsmanship has been to accommodate them to everyday routine, the motive behind it provides a touching commentary on the nature of work in contemporary society. One can hardly presume to "explain" such a vast and complex phenomenon, but it is at least possible to suggest that the contemporary craft hobbyist shares some of the motives of his turn-of-the-century forebears. He—or she—may sometimes feel a similar longing for individual identity and measurable accomplishment in a culture where all meanings seem to be evaporating in weightlessness.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps then, one could argue that while on the surface Martha Stewart food emanates conspicuous consumption, upon more sustained examination it is possible to also find a practice of distinctiveness through aesthetics, hard work, and careful preparation.

## Notes

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1. Jerry Oppenheimer, *Just Desserts: The Unauthorized Biography of Martha Stewart* (New York, 1998); "Martha Stewart: Domestic Doyenne or Goddess of Greed?" [www.beloit.edu/~amsterdam/students/rottenstein.html/](http://www.beloit.edu/~amsterdam/students/rottenstein.html/); Zachary Holden, "Martha Stewart, Comrade?" *Journal of*

## 100 Amy Bentley

*Advanced Stuff*, (Spring 1998), <http://www.wrecking.org/journal/>; Margaret Talbot, "Les Tres Riches Heures de Martha Stewart," *The New Republic*, May 13, 1996, 30-35.

2. Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (New York, oris 1986; repr., 1995).

3. Trish Hall, "A Taste of India," *Martha Stewart Living* (June 1999), 170-176.

4. Gary M. Stern, "The Next Martha Stewart?" *American Way* (September, 1999); Julia Reed, "Can B. Smith Be Martha?" *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, August 22, 1999, 26-29; Barbara Smith, *B. Smith's Entertaining and Cooking for Friends* (New York, 1995); Barbara Smith, *Rituals and Celebrations* (New York, 1999).

5. See Oppenheimer, *Just Deserts*, for example.

6. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984).

7. Ernest Matthew Mickler, *White Trash Cooking* (Berkeley, 1986); Ernest Matthew Mickler, *White Trash Cooking II: Recipes for Gatherin's* (Berkeley, 1997); Trisha Mickler and Ernest Matthew Mickler, *More White Trash Cooking* (Berkeley, 1998).

8. *White Trash Cooking* editorial material, Amazon.com.

9. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 197.

10. For more on white trash culture, see Gael Sweeney, "The King of White Trash Culture: Elvis Presley and the Aesthetics of Excess," *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, ed. by Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz, (New York, 1997), 249-266.

11. *Ibid.*, 252.

12. Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class* (oris. 1899; repr. Fairfield, New Jersey, 1991), 74.

13. *Ibid.*, 81-82.

14. *Ibid.*, 85.

15. See examples from: *Martha Stewart Living* (November 1997); Martha Stewart with Susan Spungen, *Martha Stewart's Hors d'Oeuvres Handbook* (New York, 1999); *Martha Stewart Living* (July 1999).

16. Martha Stewart, *What to Have for Dinner* (New York, 1995), 97, 124, 15.

17. Martha-by-Mail catalog (Summer 1999), 32; Marty Hair, "Merchandising Martha," *De-troit Free Press*, March 21, 1999.

18. Susan J. Terrio, "Crafting *Grand Cru* Chocolates in Contemporary France," *American Anthropologist* 98 (March, 1996), 71.

19. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York, 1981), 60, 73, 74.

20. *Ibid.*, 83.

21. "Opinions" section of the Unofficial Martha Stewart website: <http://www.du.edu/~szerobni/index/html/>.

22. This was also the theme in Molly O'Neill, "But What Would Martha Say?" *New York Times Magazine*, May 16, 1999, 145-46.

23. Rachel Lauden, "A World of Inauthentic Cuisine," *Proceedings, Cultural and Historical Aspects of Food* (Corvallis, Oregon, 1999), 136-145. (144)

24. *Ibid.*, 144.

25. Terrio, *Crafting Grand Cru*, 74.

26. "Martha Stewart: Domestic Doyenne or Goddess of Greed?" [www.beloit.edu/~amerdam/students/rottenstein.html/](http://www.beloit.edu/~amerdam/students/rottenstein.html/)

27. Talbot, "Les Tres Riches," 35.

28. Molly O'Neill, "All Torted Up," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, September 9, 1999, 137. MS photographer credits include Dana Gallagher, Maria Robledo, Gentl & Hyers, Beatriz da Costa, Victoria Pearson, Petrina Tinslay, and Simon Watson.

29. Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," *Daedalus* 101 (Winter 1972), 61-81; Mary Douglas, *In the Active Voice*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana, Illinois, 1998), chapter 3.

30. The Gotham Bar and Grill, for example, is commonly noted for inspiring the current vogue for "vertical food."

31. Discussion with Mitchell Davis, notes in author's possession.

32. Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 95.