Title: Book Review of *Three Squares: The Invention of the American Meal*
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a few short paragraphs (136-7). Also missing is coverage of topics relating to the drinking age debate, which for many youths in America is one of the greatest "turning points" of their lives.

Overall, Smith's engaging narrative style provides the reader with specific and useful facts. The book will surely be useful to scholars in history, anthropology, American studies and others who are interested in the culture of American beverages. Scholars interested in the development of corporations and business history will surely find details about the rise of American companies such as Starbucks, Kool-Aid and Welch's (to name a few) useful. Researchers focused on the food and beverage industry will also find a great resource in the fact-packed pages of Smith's book.

BOOK REVIEW | **RACHEL A. SNELL**

Three Squares: The Invention of the American Meal
Abigail Carroll

New York: Basic Books, 2013 .344 pp.

Abigail Carroll's *Three Squares: The Invention of the American Meal* traces the evolution of the American meal from the colonial era to the present. By exploring the concurrent development of dining and snacking habits, Carroll provides insight into the development of class-consciousness, national identity, and the growth of consumer culture in America. Carroll argues that "the shape of the meal is also the shape of society" and ably demonstrates the power of food studies to illuminate fresh perspectives on identity formation (219). So much of American identity is wrapped up in choices of how, where, and what to eat. Carroll reveals that a significant portion of that identity is inherited from the past.

In *Three Squares*, Carroll contends that our eating habits "lie deeply embedded in popular assumptions about what is normal, good, fashionable, healthy, and American" (xii). A relatively recent invention, our modern eating habits and current dining customs stem from developments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that influenced the timing of dinner, impacted the composition of breakfast, invented lunch, and legitimized snacking. To explore this transformation, Carroll's text is arranged chronologically and thematically. The first two chapters present a chronological narrative of eating habits prior to the nineteenth century. In these chapters, Carroll traces eating habits from the earliest period of colonial settlement in North America to the post revolutionary period. This overview of eating in America from times of subsistence to times of plenty sets the stage for the remainder of the book, which describes the development of each meal, with separate chapters for lunch, breakfast, dinner, and snacking. The final chapters explore current practices and speculate about how emerging concerns related to health and tradition might impact American dining in the future.

In order to show the development of a uniquely American middle-class identity in the nineteenth century, Carroll describes the evolution of dinner from subsistence to a family repast imbued with specific cultural meaning. The informal and pragmatic nature of colonial dining shifted during the late eighteenth century to become more complicated, genteel, and self consciously imitative of European conventions. The atmosphere of the dining table with its prescribed etiquette, extravagant table setting, and increasingly elaborate fare set the stage for a deliberate performance of identity. As Carroll writes, "the ritualization of dinner as a nightly ceremony . . . spoke of class values; the trappings aided the ambitious middle-class family in identifying itself as respectable and successful" (69). To accommodate these aims, dinner evolved from a hearty, midday repast meant to refuel the family for the remainder of the day's labor into a meal served to mark the end of the working day. Dinner brought the family, scattered by work and school during the day, together and provided parents with an opportunity to model proper behavior to their children. Dinner, according to Carroll, "did double duty: it fed Americans' spirits as well as their stomachs" (76). As men and children spent more time outside the

home, the evening meal solidified their sense of belonging within the family, the growing middle class, and the nation.

While dinner defined the transformation of eating habits in the nineteenth century, breakfast and lunch embodied shifting ideas about health, work, and the influence of commercialization in the twentieth century. Processed foods like orange juice concentrate and TV dinners simplified the process of preparing meals. A growing emphasis on profitability and efficiency invented lunch as a "lighter, colder, cheaper, and quicker" meal hastily grabbed from a cafeteria before returning to the office or brought to work in a paper bag (103). Profitability and efficiency likewise reshaped the morning meal, transforming breakfast from a varied and calorie dense repast as "business incentives drove entrepreneurs to create new products, grain producers to seek more profitable outlets than livestock agriculture for their goods, and middle-class Americans to simplify their morning routine in order to get to work" (134).

The greatest influence on American dining, according to Carroll, was business. The establishment of dinner in the nineteenth century served as a counterweight to rampant American capitalism. She describes how "rigid work schedules streamlined breakfast and lunch" and placed greater emphasis on dinner as an opportunity for family bonding, etiquette training, and social striving (216). Likewise, business interests remade snacking by rebranding and repackaging not only foodstuffs, but also American attitudes toward snacking. Commercialization transformed snacking from an activity of dubious morality and an indicator of a lack of self-discipline (associated with immigrants and the boisterous lower classes) to a routine leisure activity in American homes.

In *Three Squares*, Carroll presents a detailed overview of American food culture, but her history excludes much of the population. The book tends to focus on middle-class American food culture, particularly in its discussion of the nineteenth century. Carroll presents a more complete picture of contemporary American society, but the focus on dinner as a uniquely American institution—adapted to business practices and desire for family togetherness—often precludes attention to other groups. The final chapter, "The State of the American Meal," explores the eating habits of working class and immigrant families. However, these groups are conspicuously absent from earlier chapters tracing the evolution of the American meal.

Carroll's contentions about the development of the American meal and its connections to capitalism and class consciousness will be of interest to food specialists and those concerned with the development of American culture. Her chronological approach to American dining from the colonial era to the present provides an exceptional overview of food and American history that would benefit students of American history. Her admonition in *Three Squares* that we are not only *what* we eat, but *how* we eat is particularly noteworthy in light of our current obsession with the source, treatment, and environmental impact of our food. Carroll reminds us that before we can understand how we eat, we must first understand why.