

***Glazed America: A History of the Doughnut* by Paul R. Mullins. (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2008. Cloth cover, Pp. 224, \$24.95)**

In 1941, a surgeon named J. Howard Crum proposed an unusual weight loss plan—the eight-doughnut-a-day diet. Crum claimed that the doughnut was “a nutritious healthful food...enjoyed and relished by most people” (Mullins, 124). Crum was a shill, of course, bought and paid for by the Doughnut Corporation of America. But, the fact that even a few people took him seriously is proof that America is madly in love with doughnuts—an infatuation that Paul R. Mullins explores in his engaging book *Glazed America: A History of the Doughnut*.

Mullins begins with a brief history of the doughnut. He traces the treat back to the ancient Hebrews, citing a Biblical passage about “cakes mingled with oil, of fine flour, fried” (34). The grandfather of the modern doughnut was the Dutch *oly-koek*, a fried dough lump sprinkled with nuts or raisins. Eventually, the *oly-koek* gave way to American “crullers” and “dough-nuts.” These early doughnuts were not ring-shaped; they were often cut into fanciful patterns, and one cookbook offered the vague instruction to “make them into what form you please” (46). Twentieth-century technological advances—such as the invention of doughnut-making machines and the introduction of premixed doughnut flour—allowed for the dessert’s mass production. The rise of American commuter culture led to a proliferation of roadside doughnut stands in the 1940s and 50s. What better way to enjoy a family outing than with a box of glazed doughnuts?

The next three chapters of *Glazed America* provide an analysis of the doughnut’s role in American culture. Mullins describes how the doughnut has become an unlikely political battleground. Some see it as a manifestation of everything wrong with America. To these critics, the doughnut symbolizes greed, laziness, and obesity. Doughnuts, Mullins writes, “have been transparently moralized as ‘bad’ foods symptomatic of a variety of individual and social evils” (121). Others take pride in the humble doughnut. Eating doughnuts has become an act of resistance against “food Nazis,” a celebration of the right to do what one pleases, calories and cholesterol be damned. Whether good or evil, doughnuts are almost impossible to avoid in American life. Mullins chronicles the various venues of doughnut consumption: in doughnut shops, in cars, in churches and schools and offices and at weddings...the list continues.

To back up his arguments, Mullins draws on a rich variety of sources, ranging from nineteenth-century cookbooks to episodes of *The Simpsons*. Though his case is convincing, it is also limited. Mullins links the doughnut with mass-produced comfort foods like hamburgers and ice cream. Doughnuts, after all, came of age during the drive-in era that also gave us the Big Mac. So, how is the doughnut any different than, say, a McDonald’s burger? Why does it merit a book all its own? Mullins writes, “doughnuts provide an insight into who we want to be and who we think we are” (5)—one of the few instances where he slips into turgid sociology-speak—but the same could be said for any fast food.

Mullins also spends too much time on a doughnut culture that may not even exist anymore. In recent times, the doughnut has shed the blue-collar image that Mullins spends pages dissecting. Nowadays, doughnuts are more associated with white-collar drones than with lunchpail-toting hardhats. Mullins gestures in that direction, including a quote about how doughnut-related obesity is not a disease of “working-class stiff” but rather the result of “highly educated people dunking doughnuts...while hunched over a computer screen” (148). Yet, he goes no further in this regard. It is a blind spot in an otherwise scrupulously thorough book.

*Glazed America* is not a filling book. At less than 250 pages, it goes down quickly. Nor is it particularly substantial. It is, however, light and enjoyable, the literary equivalent of a Krispy Kreme served piping hot from the oven.

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