

Cucina Nostra: Italian American Foodways on Television

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With its oddly literal title identifying a particularly specific source of viewer outrage (or superiority or befuddlement—it's all there), the Facebook page called "Giada De Laurentiis Over-Pronounces Italian Words" (2014) encourages viewers of *Everyday Italian* to add status updates whenever they hear De Laurentiis pronounce, in her *native* Roman Italian accent, "mozzarella," "ricotta," and "spaghetti."¹ I first encountered this site during a Google search for "Giada De Laurentiis speaking Italian," as I was exploring the social media miniconroversy in which the chef is routinely mocked for speaking pretentiously and, perhaps more significantly, in a "faux-Italian" or "contrived" accent (Byhoff 2009). Some of De Laurentiis's viewers are irked that the occasional accented Italian word appears amid an otherwise unaccented English; others fault her pronunciation, often because she doesn't sound like their Italian relatives: "I grew up with a grandfather who'd only speak Italian to me. Her pronunciation is forced and off about 80% of the time" (Byhoff 2009). Such commentary reveals the conventionally narrow conception of Italy, with viewers seemingly unaware that most Italian American immigrant grandfathers are, unlike De Laurentiis, of poor and working-class Southern Italian background and thus would share neither her regional and class identity nor her accent.² So too do viewers typically conflate Italy and Italian America, as De Laurentiis's critics—Italian Americans and non-Italian Americans alike—fail to realize that the Americanized pronunciation of *moozarell'* would have no business issuing from De Laurentiis's Roman lips. Perhaps even more significantly, the ongoing debate about De Laurentiis's spoken Italian reveals the extent to which she—and, more broadly, the Italian American celebrity chef—has become a primary site upon which Italian American identity is constructed, represented, and negotiated. Viewer claims regarding the level of authenticity or pretentiousness of De Laurentiis's speech not only affirm the complicated and contested nature of that identity but also draw attention to the cultural capital that the Italian language (and its concomitant ethnicity) may possess. And while De Laurentiis certainly has a legitimate claim on her accent (she is a native Roman, after all), her innumerable discussions of the matter—including a notable interview with Conan O'Brien—demonstrate that the precisely calibrated seasoning of accented Italian upon her otherwise clearly American English is a conscious choice: an aspect

of an on-air character shaped for viewer consumption, crafted in light of the cultural capital an Italian pedigree brings to the De Laurentiis brand (Conan 2013).

Social media grumblings about De Laurentiis's accent are, of course, small fry compared to the Paula Deen controversy, which raged in the summer of 2013, as I first began this article.³ But while De Laurentiis's pronunciation of "spaghetti" hardly treads upon the same controversial territory as the racist language and business practices that got Deen bumped from the Food Network and cost her millions in endorsement contracts, the public attention to their speech and behavior demonstrates the extent to which the celebrity chef has become a nexus for all manner of deeply held cultural meanings and fiercely fought cultural conflicts. Given the centrality of foodways to human culture and to various components of individual and group identity—particularly, in light of this essay collection, to ethnicity—it could hardly have been otherwise. Culinary TV programming has gained enormous popularity and media presence since the late 1990s; indeed, as Kathleen Collins (2009) writes in *Watching What We Eat*, "More than just a how-to or amusement, cooking shows are a unique social barometer" (5).⁴ Nonetheless, the genre gets surprisingly little attention from scholars. With rare exception, most scholarly analysis deems it the paradigmatic product of a culture obsessed with consumerism and celebrity and a vicarious substitute for cooking when no one has time to cook, for domesticity when the family dinner is in decline, for humanistic values when technology threatens to invade all corners of our lives, and for consumption when eating and body size have become obsessively scrutinized and patrolled (Adema 2000, 118–119). This is compelling analysis, no doubt, that resonates greatly for much culinary television. But this habitual focus on commodity culture and class distinction overlooks the full range of what Warren Belasco (2008) calls "the expressive and normative functions of food" (15)—most critically, for the purposes of this article, as they relate to what Peter Naccarato and I call "ethnic culinary capital," that is, the social meanings and values expressed by specific ethnic foodways within a multiethnic society such as the United States.⁵ Two serious and related flaws are at issue here. For one, scholars typically characterize the production and consumption of food as essentially consumer activities, no different from the choice, say, of an automobile. Foodways, then, are understood as always already contained within commodity culture, meaningful primarily as markers of class distinction.⁶ This near-exclusive focus on class, moreover, displaces any substantive interest in racial, ethnic, national, and/or regional identities. Thus, while Isabelle de Solier (2005) initially asserts that "the ideological work" of cooking shows is "the

indoctrination of viewers in hegemonic regimes of gender, . . . national identity, ethnicity and class” (470), she, like nearly everyone else writing on the subject, settles into an extended class analysis and, in so doing, largely ignores the wide range of programming that represents ethnic, racial, or regional cuisines.

Such analysis fails to explain the ongoing obsession with De Laurentiis’s Italian pronunciations or the many fan e-mails incorporated into the companion cookbook to *Lidia’s Italian-American Kitchen* (Bastianich 2001): “[Lidia] makes me happy because I’m Italian and she reminds me of my aunt and some of my family memories of good Italian meals, storytelling, and the warmth we Italians share with others. *Mille grazie!* What great cooks we are!” (45). Such responses instead insist that we recognize the full range of meanings viewers make of these chefs and their cooking, meanings rooted in complex—and often fraught—conceptions of their ethnic identity. Doing so will hardly vanquish class analysis from the discussion; instead, it will mutually inform analyses of class and ethnic identities, exposing the operations of each one within constructions of the other. My goal in this article, then, is to study the Italian American cooking show through a more multifaceted critical lens than is typically turned upon culinary television, deploying the interdisciplinary methodology of food studies and thereby restoring to TV foodways the context of the material culinary traditions from which they arise. Indeed, scholarship across the disciplines has confirmed that foodways are a foundational component of ethnic identity in the United States (Gabaccia 1998; Counihan 2002, 2010; Diner 2002). With regard to Italian Americans, Hasia Diner’s (2002) landmark study *Hungering for America* persuasively argues that the widespread starvation and deprivation of Italy and the comparative bounty of the United States powerfully shaped both the Italian American experience of emigration and assimilation and also the foodways that came to constitute Italian American cuisine: “Feasting upon dishes once the sole preserve of their economic and social superiors enabled [Italian immigrants] to mold an Italian identity in America around food. Plentiful, inexpensive American foods transformed the formerly regional *contadini* [peasants] into Italians and their food into Italian food” (Diner 2002, 54)⁷ In fact, for many immigrant groups and for Italian Americans in particular, the kitchen is a primary locus for the performance of ethnic identity, a fact routinely cited in studies of Italian American culture. In his foundational study *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian Americans*, Herbert Gans ([1962] 1982) notes that, while many Italian traditions diminished with the generations, some survived, “the most visible ones being food habits. The durability of the ethnic tradition with respect to food is probably due to the close connection of food with

family and group life” (Gans [1962] 1982, 33). Over fifty years later, Simone Cinotto (2013) refines this interpretation of the family/food connection, while nonetheless continuing to position foodways as a primary “symbol of domesticity and ethnicity” that is “less the result of cultural entropy than . . . [of] a dynamic process that took place in modern America and . . . needs to be historicized as a significant dimension of the Italian experience in the United States (Cinotto 2013, 21–22; see also Diner 2002).

Moreover, as food studies scholars have argued, due to the relative size of the Italian immigrant population (not to mention that of their descendants) and the relatively speedy and substantive incursion of its foodways into the American diet, Italian Americans are the ethnic group most routinely associated with food, and the Italian American culinary profile has arguably achieved the greatest degree of recognition. In “The American Response to Italian Food, 1880–1930,” for example, Harvey Levenstein (2002) argues that the radical demographic changes brought about by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigration had “remarkably little impact on the food habits of the great majority of native-born Americans” (75). He notes one striking exception: Italians, “who managed to survive assimilation with their Old World food preferences at least identifiable” and who produced “the first major foreign cuisine to find widespread acceptance among native-born Americans (76).⁸ In sum, the specific history of Italian American cooking and its distinctive position in American culture produce a context in which Italian American foodways have emerged as a prominent signifier of Italian ethnicity in American culture, making culinary TV programming a genre whose core components—cooking and eating—are perceived as core components of the host’s marked ethnic identity. Such programming—especially the cooking show—is thereby set on one of the primary stages of Italian American identity: the kitchen. And the theatricalization of that kitchen—the ways in which the Italian American cooking show narrativizes through the mass medium of television Italian American identities and families, the food and foodways, and the domestic setting in which Italian Americans have historically negotiated a relationship between Italy and the United States—makes Italian American culinary programming essential to an expanded study of the Italian American presence on television, not to mention in U.S. life.⁹

Despite, however, the compelling analogies between the home and TV kitchen as a primary stage of Italian American ethnicity, Italian American culinary programming has largely been overlooked both in media studies of Italian American culture (which often focus on representations of food in film) and in the growing body of work on Italian American cuisine in the United States (Gabaccia 1998; Diner 2002; Mariani 2011; Cinotto 2013;

Marinaccio and Naccarato 2015). Hence my attention to three chefs herein—Lidia Mattichio Bastianich, Mario Batali, and Giada De Laurentiis. Apart from anything else, the sheer fact of their celebrity warrants such attention. They are, almost inarguably, the nation’s most prominent Italian American cooking celebrities, each with extensive TV exposure in multiple venues.¹⁰ At issue here are four series, all of which live on in reruns: Bastianich’s *Lidia’s Italian-American Kitchen* (PBS, 1998–2004) and *Lidia’s Italy* (PBS, 2007 to present); Batali’s *Molto Mario* (Food Network, 1996–2007); and De Laurentiis’s *Everyday Italian* (Food Network, 2002–2007). The group represents each chef’s first incursion into culinary television, the moment when they developed their distinctive characters and cuisines against a far less crowded field of Italian American TV chefs. (The lone exception is *Lidia’s Italy*, whose presence herein will facilitate some worthwhile comparative historical analysis.) Against the other superstar TV chefs of the era—Bobby Flay, Rachael Ray, and Emeril Lagasse (not to mention the doyenne of the genre, Julia Child)—each of our Italian American chefs is not simply marked with a distinct ethnic identity but also charged with the representation of the corresponding ethnic foodway.¹¹ Lagasse is a Portuguese American bruiser who cooks a wide variety of cuisine; Flay is a New York dude cooking southwestern fusion food. But when Bastianich, Batali, and De Laurentiis prepare food, they do not simply cook, they also explicitly and repeatedly engage their ethnic identity. When Batali began on the Food Network in 1996, for example, he earned distinction as the only chef preparing Italian food on that network. When he was joined later by De Laurentiis, his somewhat notorious comment on their corporate identities affirmed not only their distinct ethnic niche but also its importance in shaping their individual programs (not to mention reaffirming restrictive gender roles): “Look, it’s TV! Everyone has to fall into a niche. I’m the Italian guy. Emeril’s the exuberant New Orleans guy with the big eyebrows who yells a lot. . . . Giada’s the beautiful girl with the nice rack who does simple Italian food” (Pollan 2009). Indeed, the basic conventions of the shows in question here make them a key vehicle for ethnic self-representation. They typically feature an Italian American host chef cooking and eating Italianate cuisine, he or she being in primary charge not only of recipe development but also of overall production content and design.¹² The ethnic identity of both the host and his or her cuisine is emphasized through the varying incorporation of recognizably Italian music, cookware and tableware, and mealtime protocols such as Bastianich’s trademark close: “Tutti a tavola a mangiare!” (Everyone to the table to eat!) This last is an example of the spoken Italian that peppers all three shows. Finally, ethnic identity is highlighted through autobiographical narrative elements, representing both

the chef's professional experience and also, through the presence of family and friends, his or her personal background and social milieu.

The complexities inherent in representing the ethnic identity of each chef and the fraught nature of that identity itself are made manifest by the ways in which their on-air characters challenge the stereotypical expectations of Italian American ethnicity while they are, simultaneously, motivated and validated by these same expectations. It is significant that the diversity of our three hosts illustrates a range of Italian American identities that diverge from mainstream conceptions of Italian Americans, grounded in the ubiquitous media imagery of the dark-complexioned offspring of the Mezzogiorno (Southern Italy). Witness the heritage of the U.S.'s most prominent media Italian American families: The Corleones are from Sicily, the Sopranos from Campania. By contrast, Bastianich, Batali, and De Laurentiis—through their varied physical presences just as through their varied cooking—illustrate more of the complexity and diversity of both the Italian and Italian American heritage. Yet while their composite portrait arguably interrogates narrow, stereotypical assumptions about Italian American identity, their carefully calibrated personas equally arguably engage those stereotypes, ultimately revealing a complicity with audience expectations of the "Italian" character. Bastianich is, somewhat paradoxically, simultaneously the most conventional and the most atypical figure here. Note her accented English, her grandmotherly air, tinged with an occasionally steely matriarchal snap. Surrounded by her children and grandchildren, in the studio kitchen set in her actual Queens home, she cultivates an every-grandmother appeal, and her fans respond: "[Y]ou sound like and you look like and you cook like all of the women I have loved most in my lifetime" (Bastianich 2001, 129), while another gushes, "You make me want to hug you after each show" (51). Yet (like many of her native Istrian dishes) Bastianich's name, lacking that final vowel, tweaks viewers' conventional expectations; many people, including my second-generation Sicilian American mother, have asked me if Bastianich is "totally Italian." The unsimple answer to that seemingly simple question indicts the question itself and with it the assumption of (and investment in) a stable ethnic identity from which it proceeds. Bastianich is an ethnic Italian, but her Istrian roots make her a Yugoslavian national; at her entry to the United States, after two years in a refugee camp in Trieste, she and her family were classified as displaced persons. Bastianich powerfully self-identifies as a successful immigrant, casting her own story as a triumph over her limited origins, a narrative with great currency in many corners of Italian America: "I am the perfect example that if you give somebody a chance, especially here in the United States, one can find the

way” (“*Nightline* Platelist” 2008). Bastianich’s impulse to cast herself as a representative Italian American immigrant extends to her careful management of her persona as a familiar Italian American *nonna* (grandmother). Beginning her restaurant and TV career as a markedly Italian American chef, she rolled out her Istrian and even her regional Italian cooking slowly, preferring instead to work a culinary terrain familiar to the mass American restaurant and TV audience. And her recent children’s books—*Nonna Tell Me a Story* and *Nonna’s Birthday Surprise*—are another venue through which to expand her audience and disseminate images of her grandmotherly persona, *Nonna Lidia*. The gist of each is a hyperidealized reinscription of the central Bastianich scene, as replayed over and over in her TV kitchen: Surrounded by her grandchildren, the chef leads them through the preparation of food for a family gathering (Christmas or great-grandmother Erminia’s birthday), all the while regaling them with memories of her own childhood mealtimes.

For his part, red-headed Batali and his ponytail are at odds with the conventional images of Italian Americans proliferated by *The Godfather* and its ilk, and his purportedly non-Italian looks, in fact, emerge as a pointed subject in his *Faces of America* (2010) interview, an installment of the PBS series in which notable Americans discover, through a combination of genetic and genealogical study, their various ethnic and racial backgrounds. In Batali’s episode, an interlocutor as generally well informed as host Henry Louis Gates, a Harvard University professor, affirms the stereotypically narrow conceptions of Italianate physical character, asking: “Did they [childhood friends and family] tease you because you don’t look Italian?” On the PBS website for the series, viewer comments regarding Gates’s query often have the weary air of responding to a tiresome cliché, noting that this high-profile redhead is not only a welcome sight in the mass media but a familiar one in their own lives; much of the commentary is critical of stereotypical assumptions about swarthy Italians and offers example after example of light-skinned, redhead, and blonde relatives. All well and good but for the fact that Batali’s red hair and pink complexion seem more the direct inheritance of his French Canadian mother (who has an Irish background) rather than some unnamed forebears in Italy (Buford 2006, 6). Further affirming Batali’s marginal purchase on conventional conceptions of Italian American identity is the fact that he is only partly Italian on his father’s side. While the realities of Batali’s background and appearance thus usefully interrogate these conventional conceptions—indeed, they call the very notion of such conventions into question—they nonetheless remain a potentially problematic aspect of the chef’s public persona and, as with Bastianich, threaten to undermine the brand. But the

fact that Batali seems to draw little criticism of *his* spoken Italian (which he learned as an adult) demonstrates the success of his Italianate self-fashioning, itself a fascinating composite of popular images of the Italian American men. He may have red hair, but the effusiveness of this *chiacchierone* (chatterbox) evokes a far more familiar character. And despite the fact that he almost never eats on air, his nonstop chatter about delicious food that his hefty physique affirms he has, in fact, eaten in the past exudes an unapologetically appetitive demeanor that draws upon conventional conceptions of Italian masculinity. And if this weren't enough, Batali himself plays the *nonna* card: While he can't, as Bastianich, actually *be* a *nonna*, he gets pretty close. His near-manic concern that his TV kitchen guests are enjoying their food, while he forgoes eating to continue slaving away in the kitchen, recalls nothing more than an Italian American grandmother—*his own* Italian American grandmother, in fact, the woman Batali characterizes as “nurturing and all over you” and cites as the source of his dedication to food: “My first true inspiration and understanding of the joys of the table was at the table at her house” (*Faces of America* 2010).

Against images such as those found on *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*, De Laurentiis's *la dolce vita* vibe offers a version of Italianate womanhood far less common to the U.S. media than the beaches and yachts of the Italian coastline, a departure from mainstream conceptions of Italian American identity that has led to the above-mentioned backlash. But from the very start, she has cultivated a fusion persona, starting with her audition tape for the Food Network, which featured her making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Her domestic labors do not always please the family elders, in fact, as typically represented on the show by her mother and her especially skeptical Aunt Raffy. Indeed, debating De Laurentiis's authenticity is a favorite pastime for many on the Internet and in her own kitchen, a fact that makes her show, ultimately, a compelling representation of a paradigmatic Italian American scene. Beginning with what's on the plate, De Laurentiis's character and culinary premise are “Americanized”; hers is not the Bastianich/Batali model of faithful adherence to the traditions of regional Italian cooking. She deals instead with basic, non-region-specific Italian dishes and concepts, explicitly streamlining preparation and adapting her recipes to American ingredients and a Southern California emphasis on lighter fare. In so doing, De Laurentiis's Americanizing of Italian food (using a range of nonseasonal or convenience ingredients in place of traditional preparations) and Italianizing of American food (“Italian Fried Chicken” and “Dirty Risotto”) offer a mass media representation of the culinary contact zone between *la via vecchia* (the old way) and the American way, not simply the

place, finally, where Italian American cuisine was born, but also where so much of Italian American culture was forged.

Unsurprisingly, then, the De Laurentiis kitchen, like many all over Italian America, is often “a stage where generational conflict [is] dramatized in a sort of theatrical *mise-en-scène* of the cleavages in the immigrant family” (Cinotto 2011, 17). Familial squabble—or what Cinotto (2013) calls “the contested table” (19)—becomes a trope; rarely does De Laurentiis’s aunt, with her thick accent and her disapproving looks, endorse her niece’s “untraditional” recipes. Yet the presence of the generations together in the kitchen confirms Cinotto’s claims that, amid the domestic conflict about “*mangiacake*” (“cake-eaters”) children and grandchildren, family dinners traditionally have functioned as rituals of togetherness even as attitudes and palates tensely and fitfully have adjusted to American life (Cinotto 2013, 17). In one notable episode in Season 4, “Italian Ladies,” De Laurentiis pays “tribute” to her mother and aunt, the women who “ruled the kitchen” and “taught” her the love of food. But making her Aunt Raffy’s beloved *pasta fagioli* subjects De Laurentiis to a barrage of criticisms: about the cheesecloth she uses to keep the herbs together, about the canned kidney beans instead of fresh, and about the butter she uses to sauté the aromatics. “I never put butter in *pasta fagioli* in my life,” proclaims Raffy, “This is the Americanization of *pasta fagioli*.” De Laurentiis tersely reminds her aunt, “Well, we do live in America now.” And when, moments later, she overhears her aunt muttering in Italian to herself as she adds some ingredients to the pot, she tosses off the quintessential zinger of the assimilated youth: “English. *English!*” This drama of generational warfare is very much a part of the show’s basic narrative, enacting an all-too-familiar chapter in countless hyphenated-Americans’ lives, but, in the end, resolutely maintaining the narrative of family harmony: Once the family has gathered at the table, a shared meal tends to restore the peace and cement familial bonds. Case in point: After the endless wrangling over the *pasta fagioli*, mother and aunt lavish praise on De Laurentiis’s vegetables and her espresso zabaglione, notably giving the stamp of approval to her Americanized touch of serving the latter for dessert (rather than breakfast) and murmuring contentedly when she confirms that she has, in fact, made the espresso “by hand.”

Such dramas of ethnic identity—Italian American and otherwise—have gone largely overlooked in the existing scholarship, as critics instead conventionally focus on culinary television as a means of engendering consumer desire and stimulating the pursuit of class distinction. What Signe Hansen (2008) refers to as “the new business of food,” apotheosized by culinary television, is perceived to create and sustain “a base of consumers whose appetites are literally and figuratively kept wanting” (50). Indeed,

the centrality of unrequited desire to analyses of contemporary culinary culture has given rise to the now-common phrase “food porn”: recipes, consumer goods, and representations of food and kitchens “so removed from real life that they cannot be used except as vicarious experience” (O’Neill 2003, 39).¹³ Focused on images of expertly prepared food and its companion lifestyle (aesthetically pleasing cooking equipment and kitchen spaces, enviable social settings), culinary television is understood to foreground what Cheri Ketchum (2005) characterizes as the “gap” between the viewers’ quotidian reality and their class aspirations (222). Whatever literal hunger may arise from the viewer’s perception of this gap, however, it is the arousal of a metaphorical hunger that critics deem the function of culinary television. Critical attention to what Hansen calls “the commodification of lack” (63), then, considers foodways primarily in terms of the culinary consumer capital they possess as sought-after markers of class distinction. De Solier (2005), for example, argues that the primary mission of culinary television is to “educate and differentiate” (467): “Through the transmission of practical culinary knowledge, cooking shows perform implicit ideological work. . . . [They] inform viewers in matters of taste, and how to use their taste in food in projects of social distinction” (470). The relative absence of eating on such shows, scholars note, demonstrates that gustatory pleasure is neither the primary object of desire nor the primary marker of this social distinction; that is, the enjoyment of well-prepared food is far less relevant than other, more clearly consumerist, behaviors and experiences. Most significantly, social distinction is achieved by the purchase of chef-branded food, kitchenware, and cookbooks, a “hyperconsumerism,” according to Lawrence Grossberg (cited in Adema 2000), in which “the very act of consuming becomes more important, more pleasurable, more active as the site of the cultural relationship, than the object of consumption itself” (116). Ketchum’s (2005) assertion that culinary television “encourages people to conceptualize their desires in terms of commodities and to see social connections as bonds formed through the acquisition and display of goods” (218) affirms, moreover, that social distinction rests not only on the possession of these consumer goods but also on the achievement of “social connection,” the participation in what Adema (2000) characterizes as the virtual “social milieu” of a celebrity chef’s fans (116). Hansen (2008), quoting Debord’s definition of fandom as “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (54), redefines it as a “non-social relationship, where people watch more and interact less with each other, [and that ultimately fosters greater] individual alienation through the consumption of hegemonic images” (54). As Ketchum (2005) aptly notes, we can’t be friends with the celebrity chefs,

but we “can use the products they endorse, or the recipes they offer, and form a connection with them” (231). In sum, the subtitle to Hansen’s (2008) article concisely expresses the dominant critical analysis of culinary television programming: “celebrity chefs deliver consumers” (65).

This focus on culinary consumer capital and the resultant absence of scholarly inquiry into the relations between culinary television and ethnicity parallels the erasure of ethnically identified hosts and programming content from the majority of scholarship. Julia Child, of course, receives considerable attention. Beyond the book-length study *Julia Child’s “The French Chef”* (Polan 2011), she is routinely cited as the woman who defined and popularized the classic format of the cooking show, “the dump and stir,” in which the host chef prepares a meal from start to finish from a seemingly isolated studio kitchen, in a manner that “literally turn[s] domesticity inside out” (Ray 2007, 52). Directly addressing the viewer as if in a private tutorial, the dump-and-stir host thus functions as a cook/educator, with a demeanor and ambience that foster an intimate connection between chef and the solitary viewer. On the other hand, as the avatar of what Krishendu Ray dubs “the anti-Julia shows,” which are “spectacular, antidomestic, and antipedagogic” (59), Emeril Lagasse demands considerable focus in discussions of contemporary programming trends that mention ethnic hosts and content in passing, if at all. Thus the explicit trajectory of Toby Miller’s (2002) essay “From Brahmin Julia to Working-Class Emeril: The Evolution of Television Cooking,” which focuses on Child and Lagasse as a means to trace the evolving cultural capital of “‘sophisticated’ international cuisine” (77), is effectively a canonical one, both in its ethnically cleansed “Great Man/Woman” historical narrative and in its theoretical focus on issues of class. This particular historical narrative, in fact, *enables* this particular theoretical focus. Considering both Child’s signature investment in French cuisine and Lagasse’s dazzling virtuosity in a range of global styles, Adema (2000), for example, argues that “familiarity with gourmet foods and exotic flavors” has become “a positive indicator of social and economic status” (117) and that culinary programming “empowers viewers . . . by expanding their familiarity with food traditions emblematic of elite culture” (117–118). Such a formulation, we should note, erases not only ethnic chefs from its analysis, but ethnic viewers as well, assuming an aspirational (and badly fed) mainstream white audience, wholly detached from “exotic flavors” and from rich culinary traditions of their own, and consequently setting their purportedly debased foodways into dialectic with those offered on television. This conventional reduction of both the TV audience and its foodways assumes that TV chefs characteristically represent exotic or global cuisines removed

from the viewer's daily life and culinary tradition, with the result that the food eaten and prepared on television is deemed elite or sophisticated. Witness Ray's (2007) definition of *cuisine*: "[C]uisine has a lot in common with *haute couture*. Cuisine happens when food enters the fashion cycle, where its fluctuations are described, debated, contested, predicted, and awaited in magazines, on television, and on the Web" (58). Like Adema, Ray's definition distinguishes cuisine from what most people actually eat, just as *haute couture* is distinct from what most people actually wear.

This definition of *cuisine*, then, parallels the canonical focus on nonethnic chefs, and the result of such methodological narrowness is a similarly narrow conception of "the expressive and normative functions of food" in which televised foodways are examined solely within commodity culture, with their primary function as markers of culinary consumer capital. Such a definition is inadequate to the scholarly study of food and eating. As Belasco (2008) notes, "In popular language, the term 'cuisine' is often reserved for high-class, elite, or 'gourmet' food," but he proposes "a more expansive view" in order to more completely explore the diverse and multivalent functions of foodways: "All groups," he suggests, "have an identifiable 'cuisine,' a shared set of protocols, usages, communications, [and] behaviors" that structure their foodways (15-16).¹⁴ Belasco's approach opens up a theoretical space in which to consider cuisine outside of the narrow framework of culinary consumer capital. I argue, then, that the expressive and normative functions of food include the operation of culinary *ethnic* capital at issue not only in all ethnic cooking but also in all representations of that cooking, such as in cookbooks and culinary television. Situating ethnic programming within canonical surveys of culinary television consequently engenders a revisionary critical practice and a more nuanced understanding of the cultural work of such programming with respect to ethnic identity. It does not wholly or simply displace analysis of class relations. Indeed, any given ethnic cuisine of the United States, as it adapted to the material conditions and culinary priorities of the mainstream American diet, evolved over successive generations, and encountered the cooking of other ethnic groups, should be understood in part as an expression of upwardly mobile class aspiration, given the function of foodways as a marker of assimilation to American culture. But the "shared set of protocols, usages, communications, [and] behaviors" inherent to any ethnic American cuisine do not signify solely and simply within the discourses of class relations characteristically deployed by the critics of culinary television. So, one cannot simply argue that *Everyday Italian* is the most visible manifestation of De Laurentiis, Inc., whose primary goal is to move the chef's signature cookware into the kitchens of

falsely conscious status seekers across the United States. Dumping those canned beans in the *pasta fagioli*, accompanied by the shocked protests of her queenly aunt, is hardly an upmarket move, evoking instead the more complex history of generational rebellion and negotiation with American values that characterizes not simply the Italian American experience but the experience of all ethnic groups in the United States. In so doing, De Laurentiis's soup demonstrates that ethnic foodways, including their representation on culinary television, cannot simply be constructed as "emblems of elite culture" (Adema 2000, 118).¹⁵

Certainly, neither the Italian culinary tradition nor the historical status of Italianate cooking in the United States would unambiguously qualify it as a vehicle for class distinction. Yes, the culinary practices of the immigrant generation were shaped largely in imitation (or excess) of the aristocrats in Italy. And there are, of course, many expensive Italian restaurants in the United States, not to mention the current cachet of foods like balsamic vinegar and pesto. But traditional Italianate cooking is, primarily, home cooking (Mariani 2011, 18–22; Hazan [1973] 1990, 5–6). Opposed to France or China, there is no comparable tradition of high cuisine in Italy. Even more significantly, for successive generations of Italian Americans—not to mention non-Italian Americans who ate in Italian American homes and restaurants—Italianate home-style food was brought to the United States by impoverished immigrants from the Mezzogiorno (Diner 2002; Levenstein 2002; Mariani 2011). Many early Italian American restaurants were spin-offs from boarding houses, catering largely to the disproportionate numbers of single male immigrants and serving, consequently, working man's food at working man's prices (Cinotto 2013, 182–184; Diner 2002, 75–76). As John Mariani (2011) documents in his exhaustive study of Italian restaurants in the United States, it is not until the 1980s that Italian restaurants began to earn the esteem long held by the great French restaurants (doing so, I might add, only by distinguishing themselves from Italian *American* restaurants) or that such ingredients as prosciutto di Parma and Parmigiano Reggiano began to appear on restaurant menus (1). Before that, beginning in the late-nineteenth century, the often raffish establishments Americans would commonly refer to as "that Italian joint" were primarily known as the source for "good guinea food" that would fill you up for not a lot of cash (58). Notes William Grimes (2009) in *Appetite City*, his culinary history of New York City, the city's early Italian restaurants served "the plainest of fare," with favorite bohemian haunts winning a "devoted following" for their "cheap *table d'hôte* and free-for-all atmosphere" (96).¹⁶ Moreover, the historically low status of Italian cuisine versus the French is indicated by the bygone habit of French names for Italian food, with

dishes such as “*Spaghetti Italiane*” presumably “providing some reassurance that the original Italian dish had been civilized and purified in French hands” (Levenstein 2002, 77). By the time Julia Child arrived to elevate American palates, French food had long been considered “sophisticated,” unlike the Italian food that Child routinely derided as second rate because of its reliance on simple preparations; as Mark Bittman (2013) reports in a memorial article for Marcella Hazan (whom he dubs “the anti-Julia”), Child once said to him, “I don’t get the whole thing with Italian cooking. They put some herbs on things, they put them in the oven and they take them out again.”

Suffice it to say that Bastianich’s many fans bring a different notion of “the whole thing with Italian cooking” to the table. When one viewer writes that the chef “make[s] me want to get back to my Italian roots, get back into the kitchen, and never buy fast food again” (Bastianich 2001, 51), her claim reflects the complex identity formation expressed through ethnic foodways. On one hand, the viewer’s vow to swear off fast food suggests an upwardly mobile class aspiration. But her claim to go back to her roots testifies to the ethnic culinary capital of getting “back into the kitchen” with Bastianich herself, drawing upon the core function of ethnic foodways to the maintenance of Italian American identity. Such ethnic capital, I argue, is at work for non-Italian consumers of Italianate food too, continuing to the present day from its bohemian origins in American culture. In essence, by representing a traditionally home-based cuisine inseparable from the immigrant experience and familiar to everyday Americans of all ethnicities, Italianate culinary programming seeks to provide a culinary ethnic capital rooted in a set of markedly Italian experiences and values. For many viewers, of course, engagement with Italianate foodways maintains their individual ethnic identity; for others, as Thomas Ferraro (2005) argues so persuasively in *Feeling Italian*, such engagement is a form of cultural play characteristic of the American melting pot. For all, Ferraro suggests, cooking and eating in the style of Batali or Bastianich represent an instance of “feeling Italian,” of thinking and acting in accord with those “patterns or structures of feeling [that] are demonstrably Italian” (2). It is important to note that “to ‘feel like an Italian’ means, first, to feel the way Italians feel, to have Italian or Italianate types of feelings, whether recognized or not; and, second, to feel that one’s identity is Italian or Italianate, *no matter the ancestry*” (3; italics added). By exploring values and behaviors that arguably compose “the *art of feeling Italian in America*” (3; italics in the original), Ferraro provides grounds for analyzing the extent to which foodways provide a culinary ethnic capital that enables *all* Americans to “feel Italian.” Indeed, the very essence of culinary programming, which

constructs viewers as “projects to be worked on” (Ketchum 2005, 231), makes it an especially apt vehicle for the provision of such ethnic capital. As de Solier (2005) argues, food is “mobilized in projects of self-stylisation and [class] distinction. In the transformative aesthetic of lifestyle cooking shows, the makeover of food promises a makeover of the self: [T]he stylisation of food through cooking is a means to the stylisation of the self” (477). The stylization of the self enabled by Italian American culinary programming, however, is not simply a bourgeois self-fashioning aimed at class distinction and mobility but, more broadly, the experience of a culinary *italianità* (Italianness): an engagement with the foodways that are understood to be distinctive to Italianate cooking and, consequently and variously, to Italian American identity in the United States.

The power of foodways as a mass market signifier of *italianità* is that they can be possessed by just about anyone with a chef’s recipe (or their *nonna*’s), a little time, and access to a kitchen. Their potential liability, however, is that placed into the hands of cooks far and wide, those recipes will do what recipes inevitably do: get adapted to personal tastes, seasonal and regional delimitations, and other ethnic and national culinary traditions (Gabaccia 1998; Mariani 2011). Indeed, the very premise of De Laurentiis’s show—“Italian” for “Everyday”—underscores her relatively free approach to traditional preparations. Too much freedom, though, and no amount of conciliatory compliments by Aunt Raffy will save you; your “Italian lite” will become simply “vaguely Mediterranean,” and your ethnic capital is gone. Thus the strenuous efforts of Bastianich and Batali, in particular, to consistently foreground the putative authenticity of their cooking, theoretically offering up their recipes for mass consumption but, by so explicitly setting ground rules, affirming and preserving their *italianità*. (Bastianich, in fact, seems highly rule bound: She is constantly reminding viewers to remember what she constantly reminds them to do.) As highly self-conscious representations of that elusive authenticity, their shows are paradigmatic examples of what happens when ethnic identities and foodways enter popular culture and the mass market. On one hand, these quests for and claims to authenticity emerge as legitimate and substantive explorations of culinary tradition. The shows under consideration here are products of an era marked by sustained critical consideration of Italian American identity on a variety of platforms—within organizations centered within the Italian American community, in various forms of popular culture (such as the film and TV industry), within the food industry, and within a wide range of scholarly production, of which this journal issue is one. As such, culinary programming typically challenges mass market, stereotypical representations of *italianità*—culinary and otherwise—that have brought

us Godfather's Pizza and the questionable claims of "That's Italian!" on behalf of Ragù spaghetti sauce advertisements. By contrast, these shows offer a complicated (and complicating) series of representations of ethnic identity, uncovering the diverse regional histories and traditions of Italian America and interrogating monolithic constructions of both "Italian" and "Italian American." And yet, as mediated representations of authenticity, these shows expose their own claims to scrutiny, providing a site that exposes fault lines in their own narrative constructions and invites critique of their core assumptions about Italian American identity.

For Bastianich (in *Lidia's Italy*) and Batali, as they fashion the authenticity of their cuisines and characters, the coin of their ethnic capital is tradition: Culinary *italianità*, then, engages a broader awareness of the regional cuisines of Italy.¹⁷ Bastianich typically begins her episodes with a travelogue, visiting homes, farms, and other producers of food to discuss foodways prior to the second half of the episode, typically shot in her home kitchen, where she prepares the dishes. This province hopping around the Italian peninsula parallels Batali's regional focus. He characteristically opens his shows by using a map of Italy, pointing out the region under discussion, and offering a quick lesson on culture, geography, and/or food traditions.¹⁸ Both Bastianich and Batali exemplify a moment in U.S. popular culture when regional Italian cuisine has been gaining significant popularity and critical attention, but also when Italian American cuisine is earning recognition as a tradition distinct from that of the motherland. Importantly, such developments have great significance beyond the table (and the food industry). As Diner (2002) and Cinotto (2013) have argued, the cultural work of Italian American foodways in the United States is inseparable from conceptions of Italian American identity. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrants from the Italian peninsula came to the United States understanding themselves as Sicilians or Abruzzese, and it was their experience of being characterized as Italians in the United States that generated a unified (and often inaccurate) conception of "Italian" character and culture. This process was facilitated by the emergence of something characteristically known in the United States as Italian cuisine, a hybrid product of the sharing and blending of regional Italian cuisines brought by millions of immigrants. This nomenclature, however, not only similarly obscured the diverse regional traditions in the background of this hybrid cuisine but also repressed its distinct history as a product of its country—this new thing, an Italian American cuisine. Contemporary Italian American culinary programming, then, intends to reverse this historical process; its representation of regional Italian cuisine has thus become a context in which Italy attains a more complex

signification and Italian American emerges as a distinct identity formation, a hybrid product of Italian *and* American culture.

The narrative format of *Lidia's Italy* perfectly embodies this intent. The apparently seamless transition between Bastianich's roaming of the Italian peninsula and cooking in her American home suggests a borderlessness that seeks to provide her and her cuisine with the stamp of authenticity. The journey from Italy to Queens, it would seem, is no journey at all. Note what is erased here, however, by the magic of television: Bastianich's actual history as an immigrant and, by extension, those of millions of Italian Americans, encompassing a set of experiences that produced a distinctively Italian *American* identity and cuisine. Such an erasure serves Bastianich well in her own pursuit of the heightened ethnic capital currently accompanying regional Italian cuisine with respect to Italian American cuisine, a move that parallels her assumption of a more cutting-edge TV format. The travel cooking show is a relatively recent and increasingly popular development in culinary television over the last fifteen years or so, as the genre has expanded beyond the dump and stir to include a variety of formats frequently set outside the kitchen. Bastianich's first series, *Lidia's Italian-American Kitchen*, is a dump-and-stir show; more to the point, it established her nationwide reputation as, initially, an Italian American chef. Thus, *Lidia's Italy* is a vehicle in which the chef adapts an increasingly popular format for the distinct purpose of generating ethnic capital not just for the viewer but for herself as well: The viewer gains a more complex understanding of the roots of Italian America and of Italy's regional cuisine, while Bastianich continues the national rebranding of her persona as an Italian (and not simply Italian American) chef and entrepreneur.

As a function of their investment in the Italian brand, Batali and Bastianich pay considerable attention to the genealogy of Italianate food, particularly with regard to the evolution of Italian American cuisine. Thus Bastianich's repeated reminders about the more heavily garlic-laden dishes of Italian America intend to distinguish them from the supposedly less odoriferous fare of the motherland, explaining that immigrants, missing the vibrant tomatoes, spices, and olive oils of Italy, compensated by flavoring dishes with the cheaper and more available garlic.¹⁹ And for both chefs, reminders about meal order (pasta as a *primo* [first course], never a side dish) or saucing (sauce is a *condimento*, so don't drown your rigatoni) exemplify their consistent efforts to redefine and reposition Italian food in American culture, an effort that involves legitimate historical claims but that, simultaneously, emerges as a narrative trope deployed to advance the status of Italian food in the United States and, thus, their own careers. This significance of food to current reconstructions of Italianate identities, particularly

in light of the relative ethnic capital accruing to putatively Italian versus Italian American identities, memorably plays out on *The Sopranos*: Witness the experience of Tony and the gang in “Commendatori” (*The Sopranos* 2000), the episode in which a visit to Italy demonstrates the misperceptions of many Italian Americans with regard to the mother country. Tony, Christopher, and Paulie head off with great fanfare and sentiment regarding a return to their roots, but they are strangers in a strange land, unaware that contemporary Italy is neither what they have seen in the movies nor their familiar Italian American New Jersey. The episode, in fact, self-consciously identifies mass media as a root of this cultural confusion: Tony’s Italian misadventures are prefaced by his umpteenth viewing of *The Godfather: Part II* (1974), which launches the episode. Paulie’s incompatibility with Italian culture is evident from his first moment, when his attempts at small talk with the locals over a morning espresso are rebuffed. And his (and his American companions’) alienation is succinctly expressed in his disdain for the seafood pasta he is served at dinner, asking instead for the quintessentially Italian American “macaroni and gravy.” With foodways thus serving a central symbolic function, episode writer and show runner David Chase operates analogously to Batali and Bastianich here, not simply opening up the space between cultures for a revisionary understanding of Italian and Italian American, but seeking to reclaim and recover Italianate identity from the distorted welter of media imagery long characteristic of mainstream American culture.²⁰ It is important work. But Chase’s choice to represent not only Italian Americans’ alienation from their Italian heritage but also their attachment to their Italian American traditions through the experience of one of the show’s least articulate and, arguably, least likable supporting characters is compounded by the obvious invitation to the viewer to mock Paulie’s ignorance. In so doing, the episode parallels Bastianich and Batali in identifying a distinct understanding of Italian/Italian American cultural relations, anchored in a putatively sophisticated embrace of Italy’s regional cuisine as a core component of *italianità* for the twenty-first century.²¹

Against these variant constructions of Italian American identity—rooted, as they are, in divergent relationships to Italy—at least one distinct constant appears across the programming of all three chefs: the routine incorporation of friends and family into the TV kitchen, joining the host chef in both the preparation and the consumption of food. In fact, in the history of cooking television, shows featuring Italian American hosts and Italian American cooking are somewhat unique in their characteristic representation of a significantly peopled kitchen. The very early *Chef Milani* (1949) and the popular PBS series *The Romagnolis’ Table* (1973–1975)

featured both husbands and wives at work in the kitchen; Milani's son also often appeared in the episodes, making them, in Kathleen Collins's (2009) words, "a strange, semi-functional stand-in for an Italian-American family" (41). Each of the three TV chefs discussed here follows suit. Batali is joined in every episode by three friends who sit at an adjacent high table while he cooks; Bastianich and De Laurentiis frequently incorporate friends and, more notably, family members to share in the cooking and eating. With these latter two, the foregrounding of *la famiglia* as a trope of Italianate culture is indisputable, and the Bastianich clan, where *mamma*, and not the Americanized upstart, is in charge, offers a striking alternative to the representation of the Italian American family on display in the De Laurentiis kitchen. In contrast to the generational tensions that bubble to the surface when De Laurentiis reaches for the butter, such departures from the matriarch's traditional standards are rarely visible in the Bastianich family. Bastianich is, of course, a figure out of Italian American lore and literature; indeed, the matriarch with an absent husband evokes the representative literary heroines of Pietro di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* (1939) and Mario Puzo's (1964) *The Fortunate Pilgrim*. Bastianich's legions of fans confirm her embodiment of this heroic figure, who, as noted above, reminds them of favorite grandmothers, mothers, and aunts. Notably, the chef's son, daughter, and son-in-law are her business partners; their dutifulness in the kitchen, then, is not an image of traditional commitment to the family alone but to the family business as well, rendering the Bastianichs an iconic and hypermediated version of the Italianate family, with its extraordinarily high emphasis on keeping the family together through working together. And when we remember Puzo's oft-cited assertions that the character of his mother was the inspiration not only for *The Fortunate Pilgrim's* Mamma Lucia but also for Don Vito Corleone, we realize just how deeply Nonna Lidia, matriarch of a culinary empire with family at her side, traffics in the classic tropes of Italian American culture (Puzo 1964).

It is, then, this deployment of the family kitchen as a theater of ethnicity that is, perhaps, the distinctively Italian American characteristic of the cooking show, a specific adaptation to the medium of television that reproduces on the grandest possible scale not simply the foodways and familial tropes at the core of Italian American identity but the stage itself on which that identity has historically been crafted and performed. In an era in which dump-and-stir shows that were primarily focused on the preparation of food were losing ground, Italian American chefs continued to work within the form, enabling the viewer to "feel Italian" through the theatricalization of the kitchen. By making public the ethnic behaviors and practices characteristically performed in private, these

shows replicate the processes by which Italian Americans have historically negotiated a relationship with U.S. mass culture. Indeed, the very appeal of culinary programming overall is the public performance of domestic rituals generally considered private: As Ray (2007) suggests, the viewer of a cooking show is “seeing and watching something that used to be intimate. Television outs what had become a private ritual” (59). This implicit narrative of public revelation engages the traditional conception of the Italian American home, which scholars have conventionally characterized as a hyperprivate space. Here, the descendants of the southern towns and villages, historically suspicious of outsiders, established the family as a unit guarding against non-family members in general and non-Italians in particular, with the primary goals, overall, being the careful monitoring of influences from U.S. culture and the resultant maintenance of ethnic identity. This phenomenon is most memorably expressed in Robert A. Orsi’s (1985) characterization of “the domus,” the sacralized construction of the Italian American home, governed by “a strictly maintained core of privacy” that guided relations between the family and the world at large (92). As Orsi notes, the family meal was a sacred ritual of the domus: “The kitchen, the theater in which this value-enforcing drama occurred, was the most important room of Italian Harlem. At these rituals, which defined the public hierarchy of the domus in the sacred space of the home, the people of the domus gathered to eat. . . . This was the sacrament of the domus, a corporate act of communal self-definition, bonding, celebration, and maintenance” (105).²²

Orsi’s conception of the domus as “theater” illuminates the corollary function of the cooking show in relation to the characteristic deployment of the domus as a space for public performance of ethnic ritual before the invited few. Whatever the privacy of the Italian American home, ethnicity was not hidden behind the bulwark of the front door. In fact, “The domus in Italian Harlem was a theater of self-revelation: on this stage, a person showed the world his or her worth and integrity, responsibility, and devotion, the respect they gave and the respect they were due” (Orsi 1985, 85). As Ferraro (2005) notes, “Feeling Italian in America began . . . in the contact zone of mutual Italian/American (re)construction, as a founding interplay between how the immigrants understood their new country and what the citizens at large thought of them, when the hermetic seal of Southern Italian culture cracked itself open to internal inspection” (10). Such studies as Orsi’s and Ferraro’s point to the way in which Italian Americans recognized the necessity to “incorporate members of the outside community into the domus,” and central to this performance of ethnic character was mealtime: “Hospitality, which was treated very seriously in

the community, was . . . [a] way of welcoming outsiders into the protective embrace of the domus" (Orsi 1985, 90). The "sharing of bread," Orsi suggests, "would lead to a sense of shared lives as well" (91).

The presence, then, of friends and family members in the TV kitchen replicates the ways in which, in the Italian American home, this particular room became a stage for the encounter between the private and public worlds. In so doing, Batali's format on *Molto Mario* is perhaps the most distinctively representative instance of the deployment of mass media as a means to "crack open" Italian American culture. The set is an open kitchen; Batali cooks in a whirlwind of activity, while three friends sit and watch, chat, sometimes help, and are effusively served delicious food. Batali, for all his professorial chatter (he is never shown to be ignorant of any aspect of Italian geography, the genealogy of recipes, and the science of cooking), is his "nurturing, all over you" Italian grandmother, producing a series of dishes and encouraging his guests to "Eat, eat" and to give no further thought to his laboring as he bravely returns to cooking without even so much as a bite of the fare he puts before them. Most significantly, though, this crowded kitchen, in which the work of the cook becomes theater and the act of eating invariably communal, functions as an innovative TV version of "welcoming outsiders into the protective embrace of the domus" (Orsi 1985, 90). Here, the viewer, who finds onscreen counterparts in Batali's friends, is part of a select few outsiders invited into the fundamental scene of Italian American ethnicity. As Ferraro (2005) suggests, such "participatory spectatorship" (138), in which the viewing audience joins the onscreen spectators in a "communal view" (133) of the central act or character, is a visual strategy characteristic of Italian American cultural production, "a primary mechanism for developing extended (familial, extra-familial) intimacy" (138). Ferraro's discussion of *Moonstruck* unsurprisingly zeroes in on the film's final sequence, set in the Castorini kitchen, as Loretta's romantic entanglements become a family matter, with the movie audience welcomed into the domus, effectively seated around the table over breakfast. In Batali's kitchen, we are similarly engaged in such participatory spectatorship. His setup insists that cooking and eating are communal activities: The onscreen guests watch the cook, ask questions (many of which the home viewer is asking him- or herself), and get conscripted into trimming artichokes or cleaning mussels. The camera work often replicates the guests' perspective for the TV audience, as close-ups of simmering pots and chopping garlic give us their view of the action. Batali also smoothly alternates between addressing his onscreen guests and addressing us through the camera, thus seamlessly blending his studio and TV audience into one intimate circle of hungry guests.

As a visual strategy, this TV equivalent of cracking open “the hermetic seal” of Italian American culture is a distinct innovation within the history of cooking shows. At the time of *Batali*’s premiere, the standard format was the classic model of Julia Child. Here, the single host chef, assistants vanquished off screen, is apparently alone in the kitchen; talking to the camera and using direct address to the viewer, Child (and the TV chefs who followed her) conducts what is effectively a private lesson, with an air of intimacy that is far more pedagogical than familial. It is true, of course, that the viewer is a kitchen voyeur with *Batali* just as with Child, but the absence of an onscreen audience fosters a private feeling for the viewing subject of Child’s tutorial that is eliminated by the spectacle of *Batali*’s peopled kitchen. Indeed, Child’s famous advice to the viewer (uttered upon missing the pan with a badly flipped potato pancake), “If you’re alone in the kitchen, who is going to see?” (“Julia Flubs Her Flip”), affirms a domestic ethos incompatible with the Italianate one, itself based in a culture, it is often noted, that constructs (and often negatively values) “privacy” in a way strikingly different from the American one (Ferraro 2005, 157; Orsi 1985, 133). Also incompatible are the emerging models for the “anti-Julia” shows that came to dominate culinary programming in the late 1990s. *Molto Mario*, in fact, was launched amid radical changes at the Food Network, with incoming President and CEO Erica Gruen committed to moving the programming emphasis away from instructional cooking shows to those offering much higher “entertainment” content, with the showbiz razzle-dazzle of *Emeril Live* as “the lynchpin of the whole strategy” (Collins 2009, 167). Premiering a few short months after *Molto Mario*, *Emeril Live* offers a vivid counterpoint to *Batali*’s approach, one that demonstrates the extent to which the Italian American sensibilities shaping *Molto Mario* diverge from the emergent mainstream in culinary programming. *Emeril Live* features a large TV studio audience, with the chef joined onstage by guests (celebrities, including celebrity chefs, who sometimes cook with him), all amped up with music from the in-house band. In keeping with this conventional talk show approach, Lagasse faces the camera and the studio audience at once, speaking to his live and TV viewers simultaneously. As a result, both sets of viewers are united not as guests in the intimate space of a virtual kitchen but as fans in a virtual theater, all members of the virtual social milieu conjoined by celebrity worship and consumption of the chef-endorsed products Lagasse endlessly hawks. With this “rock star” chef, “we are too busy cheering to do any real cooking” (Ray 2007, 54), as the participatory spectatorship modeled by *Batali* is paradigmatically altered, the familial intimacy of the Italian American kitchen giving way to the whipped-up audience frenzy accompanying Lagasse’s every utterance of “Bam!”

In the years that have gone by since Bastianich, Batali, and De Laurentiis brought Italianate cooking into the spotlight on culinary television, they have not been immune to the lure of showbiz TV cooking and the consequent increasing commodification of their cuisine. De Laurentiis has become a fixture on a wide variety of Food Network programming, appearing as a contestant, coach, or judge on various competition shows and as a host for a number of vacation travel programs. Batali's current "lifestyle" talk show, *The Chew*, edges into *Emeril Live* territory. And his expanding partnership with the Bastianich family, moreover, in a chain of restaurants and food emporia (Batali & Bastianich Hospitality Group) increasingly comes to feel like a turn-of-the-twentieth-century monopoly—the Standard Oil of Italianate food. Within that monopoly, the marketing juggernaut attached to the Bastianich family name—cookbooks, children's books, videos, restaurants, food products, a travel firm, and on and on—increasingly renders images of *la famiglia* as brand icons rather than real people. But in the initial forays of our three chefs into television, the representation of an ethnically marked "real cooking" in their communal kitchens incorporated a set of distinct generic conventions, composing a narrative format that set the Italian American cooking show apart from both historic and emergent trends in culinary programming. Evolving out of more than a century of Italianate cooking in the United States, the televised foodways of Bastianich, Batali, and De Laurentiis are the most recent exemplars of a living culinary tradition that, in all its stages, has been a primary vehicle through which Italian American identities have been constructed and reconstructed and, consequently, encountered time and again by Italian Americans and non-Italian Americans alike. As they are adapted to and disseminated by the mass medium of television, then, Italianate foodways continue to provide a rich source of insight into this historical process and to the variant ways that Italian American identity has signified in American culture. Recognizing this, finally, it becomes incumbent upon scholars to address the increasing range of largely overlooked ethnic culinary programming—Italian American and otherwise—through a revisionary critical practice that explicitly engages ethnicity, a practice more rigorously informed by an awareness of the material culinary practices and traditions these programs represent and the variant meanings they may make for the diverse ethnic viewership of American television.

Notes

1. There are any number of Web sources that illustrate the ongoing viewer obsession, usually critical, with De Laurentiis's spoken Italian and, thus, the authenticity of her identity. See also the various memes titled "Giada's Guide to Pronunciation" on "Food Network Humor" ("Giada's Guide to Pronunciation" 2009) and the Gawker page "Giada De Laurentiis Turns Over-Enunciation into an Art Form" (Byhoff 2009).
2. De Laurentiis was born in 1970, in Rome, to actress Veronica De Laurentiis, the daughter of film producer Dino De Laurentiis and actress Silvana Mangano. After her parents' divorce, Veronica De Laurentiis relocated the family to southern California when the young De Laurentiis was seven.
3. In June 2013, Deen was named in a lawsuit alleging racial and sexual discrimination. Before the suit was dismissed in August, revelations of Deen's use of racial epithets and other racially charged business practices, such as planning a "plantation-themed" wedding with an all-black wait staff, caused a media firestorm, resulting in the cancellation of her Food Network program, her cookbook publishing contract, and numerous endorsement deals.
4. In this article, I use the phrase "culinary television programming" to refer to the wide range of shows that focus on food and eating, which includes not only traditional "cooking shows" (focused primarily on instruction in cooking and the preparation of food) but also the travelogues, competition shows, and other forms of food-centric programming that have increasingly come to dominate the airwaves, especially in the last fifteen years or so.
5. On "ethnic culinary capital," see Marinaccio and Naccarato (2015).
6. Much of this work leans, implicitly or explicitly, on Bourdieu; see, for example, Adema (2000), de Solier (2005), Hansen (2008), and Ketchum (2005).
7. See also Cinotto (2013), who argues that "food—its production, distribution, consumption, rituals, protocols, symbolic values, and imaginative and material effects—shaped Italian [American] identity and made a diasporic Italian nation by embodying a distinct pattern of domesticity and intimacy" (3).
8. Cinotto (2013) calls Italianate food "the most eloquent symbol of collective identity for Italian Americans" (2). See also Diner (2002), as well as Mariani (2011), whose title, *How Italian Food Conquered the World*, affirms the global popularity of Italian food, with a particular focus on its place in the United States.
9. Because the chefs under discussion here are all Italian Americans, hosting cooking shows on U.S. television, I've chosen to refer to these shows as "Italian American," regardless of whether they center on Italian or Italian American cuisine.
10. Airing on PBS and the Food Network, the programs discussed here represent the two major venues for culinary TV programming in the United States. Even more significantly, each chef is a "brand"—a celebrity associated with cookbooks, kitchenware, and food products—and, in the case of Batali and Bastianich, an expanding series of restaurants and commercial enterprises across the United States. This level of exposure distinguishes them from earlier Italian American chefs working on television prior to the "celebrity chef" era (such as Chef Milani, the Romagnolis, and Mary Ann Esposito) and their contemporary, Michael Chiarello. Rachael Ray, who has an Italian American background, is certainly a celebrity at the level of the chefs discussed herein, but she does not work primarily in identifiably Italianate food. And while Marcella Hazan's influence on Italianate food in the United States is unparalleled, her landmark cookbooks primarily emerged before the celebrity chef era, and she never anchored a cooking show. Bastianich, Batali, and De Laurentiis, conversely, share a celebrityhood impossible without their TV careers. Their so doing provides the primary grounds for their inclusion in my study, while their various differences

strengthen their usefulness as a representative group of Italian American chefs. For one, beyond the obvious gender diversity, there is also the matter of national origin: Batali is a fifth-generation Italian American on his father's side, while Bastianich and De Laurentiis are immigrants—from Istria (still part of then-Yugoslavia) and Rome, respectively—who came to the United States as youngsters and whose first language was Italian. Also diverse is their cooking. Batali, who dropped out of Le Cordon Bleu to train in Northern Italy, focuses on the regional cuisines of Italy; De Laurentiis, on the other hand, completed her training at Le Cordon Bleu and works in a fusion cuisine, which ranges from Italian classics to Americanized and streamlined “everyday” renditions. Bastianich's history is somewhat more complicated; she got her start in American kitchens (and on television) cooking Italian American food and developed a regional Italian focus later in her career.

11. Child, of course, focused largely on French cuisine, but the absence of “Franco American” as a distinct ethnic American group uniquely positions French cuisine in the United States, where it has been seen not as an ingredient in America's melting pot but, instead, as a signifier of elite class status and culinary sophistication. There is, of course, increasingly diverse representation of various ethnic cuisines in culinary TV programming. Some, however, like Mexican cuisine, are represented by a superstar chef—Rick Bayless—who is not a member of the ethnic group. Other Latin cuisines are represented by members of the group, like Daisy Martinez, whose PBS show *Daisy Cooks!* focuses on Puerto Rican cuisine, but she has yet to achieve anything like the brand recognition and broad-based popularity of Batali, Bastianich, and De Laurentiis. Much the same can be said for Asian American chefs. The reasons for this are obviously multiple and complex, driven largely by the comparative histories of the various ethnic groups, their status in American culture and in American dietary habits, and the real (and perceived) demand for their food within the marketplace. In the end, as simultaneous embodiments of an American ethnic cuisine and culinary superstars with wide-ranging fame and influence, Italian American chefs are a singular case. Ideally, however, my study—which seeks, at its broadest level, to demonstrate the cultural work of culinary TV programming with regard to ethnic identity—will initiate a discussion of the wider field of ethnic cooking shows.
12. Italian American cooking shows typically feature both Italian and Italian American cuisine, the latter of which has increasingly become recognized as a hybrid American tradition with roots in the various regional cuisines brought by immigrants from the Italian peninsula. Where appropriate, I will distinguish between the two. At times, however, I will use the term “Italianate,” after Ferraro (*Feeling Italian*, 2005), in order to identify Italian and Italian American cooking (or culture) in the aggregate.
13. The term “gastro-porn” originates with Alexander Cockburn in 1977; see also Ray (2007), Kaufman (2005), and Chan (2003).
14. There are four main elements, here briefly defined: “a limited set of ‘basic foods’” (or “the primary edibles”); “distinct manner[s] of preparing food”; “flavor principles”; and “a set of manners” or “codes of etiquette” that govern dining (Belasco 2008, 16–18).
15. A recent example of the continuing failure to meaningfully consider ethnicity in studies of cooking on television—in particular, to consider as a context the culinary traditions in which the program participates—is Michael Z. Newman's (2013) “*Everyday Italian: Cultivating Taste*,” which goes the standard Bourdieu route. Advancing his thesis regarding the show's purpose, which is, he claims, to “explicitly and implicitly [promote] consumption in several ways” (331), Newman addresses ethnic identity in a mere few sentences, primarily to advance his observations about De Laurentiis's Italian sex appeal, which includes this somewhat discomfiting observation: “Giada is thin but curvy, in some ways a voluptuous kitchen goddess like Nigella Lawson; though as self-consciously sexualized as Nigella, Giada's Italian ethnic identity conveys sensuality more than Nigella's Englishness could” (334).

16. The fictional Garibaldi's restaurant in James L. Ford's (1895) short story "Bohemia Invaded" perfectly typifies the initial and long-held perception of "the Italian joint" in the United States. The centerpiece of Garibaldi's is a large communal table, where assorted artists, writers, theater folks, and other members of the downtown culture set mingle. The image of this table affirms the bohemian cachet of Garibaldi's clientele, qualities we are asked to find as appealing as the restaurant's grubby atmosphere. As the narrator notes, the "lint" issuing from the tablecloths and napkins is so excessive as to make the diners look like a herd of Angora goats, and the "littered" backyard (13) is said to be strewn with "old wine casks, bottles, jars, empty boxes, [and] broken chairs"—exactly the kind of "rubbish," he says, "that might be expected to accumulate about the kitchen door of an Italian restaurant" (13). The slovenly scene is identified by the narrator as "refreshment" to "the artistic soul" (3), and only a "Philistine," he says, would "ask why they keep the place so dirty" (3). Notably, the "Philistines" here—those unsophisticated citizens unable to appreciate the cultural, aesthetic, and culinary delights on offer—are the upper classes. By contrast, the bohemian's familiarity with Italian American cuisine marks his low-rent cachet, while the Philistines are exposed by their unfortunate habit of "chop[ping] their spaghetti into a pulp and eat[ing] it with a spoon" (2).
17. This equation of *italianità* with knowledge of regional Italian cuisine is the latest manifestation of a rhetoric that seeks to imbue "authentic" Italianate foodstuffs with the power to convey Italianate identity. In his discussion of the "Buy Italian" campaign of the mid-1930s, Cinotto (2013) discusses how the marketing strategies initially designed to increase consumption of imported Italian foods eventually were also applied to those produced in the United States, so that, ultimately, the system of "names, symbols, and images [associated] with Italian food—wherever it was produced—created a diasporic culture and code of consumption that in effect became *authentic*, that is, meaningful to the experiences of first- and second-generation immigrants. Italian American food as a whole was consistently shaped out of this commodified production of *italianità*, and for immigrants who in Italy had never tasted the food of other regions, the *italianità* represented by Italian food made in America was real and living" (175).
18. Batali's website prominently displays his investment in Italian regional culture and cooking, inviting visitors to explore Italy region by region, with detailed attention to regional geography, history, and foodways.
19. For a discussion of varying attitudes toward garlic use and their correlations to class and ethnic identity in Italian and Italian American culture, see Rocco Marinaccio (2012).
20. Stanley Tucci's *Big Night* focuses on this very matter, as the fictitious New Jersey Italian restaurant in the film struggles between faithfulness to regional Italian cuisine and its customers' expectations of Italian American food. This struggle is born out in a tension between the restaurant's brother co-owners: genius cook Primo, who refuses to acclimate to American tastes, and practical Secondo, more obviously invested in American-style success, who advocates for assimilation.
21. In the epilogue to *The Italian American Table*, Cinotto (2013) briefly reviews the varying roles that regional Italian versus Italian American food play in ongoing reconstructions of Italian American identity (214–215).
22. In some way, we ought also to note the parallel appeal of the cooking show to Italian America's most storied popular culture artifact: the gangster narrative. Here, too, the viewer is enticed by the look inside a closed society, as "our thing" is made "everybody's thing," and feeling Italian rests upon the vicarious thrill of making your bones while watching television. After all, as Ray (2007) suggests, the appeal of the cooking show is that what is otherwise "hidden in the inarticulate language of our limbs . . . [is] exposed to light," as the mysteries of cuisine—of unusual ingredients, tricky preparations, and unwritten recipes—are made public (59).

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