carefully represented in these pages. As one woman wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt in 1937, "if you can help…these dear house wives whom we work for…realize we are human even if we are a Black race" (p.66). Even those cooks alleged to be indispensable, like Idella Parker, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's codeveloper of the recipes in *Cross Creek Cookery*, had her patience sorely tried: "Our relationship was a close one, but it was one that often felt burdensome to me" (p.59). Rare within the cooks' reminiscences is the recalled admiration of grateful employers or recollection of paid holidays and regular wage increases.

Sharpless divides the book into chapters that range over such topics as "From Collards to Puff Pastry," "Long Hours and Little Pay," and "Gendering Jim Crow," rather than opting for a strictly chronological overview, as many of the vexing issues of cooking in another's domain persisted throughout the century Sharpless covers. I would have liked to have seen the author open up her discussion of the culture of culinary work further. While Sharpless's focus is indisputably the black women who toiled as kitchen laborers, black men also worked as cooks. Robert Roberts, butler to Massachusetts Governor Gore (and whose household manual cum cookbook has been well edited and introduced by historian Graham Hodges), or Rufus Estes, Pullman train chef and cookbook author, could attest that some challenges were shared by black chefs whatever their gender. Engaging in greater depth some of the recent work on black Americans and food would have added another layer to the discussion: although Sharpless discusses the southern-born California caterer and cookbook writer Abby Fisher in her introduction, she seems unaware of scholarship on Fisher that followed Nancy Hess's 1995 edition of her 1881 volume; cookbook historian Jan Longone, for example, has contributed important information on both Fisher and Malinda Russell—the first two southern-born African American women known to have published cookbooks. Sharpless offers the caveat that her book is "about the women and not the food *per se*" (p.xx), yet the book would have gained by paying increased attention to what black cooks had to say about food itself, along with the ways their lives intersected with food-centered work.

While Sharpless seeks to deconstruct the "racist clichés that surfaced at every turn" (p.xiii), the jacket photograph, of an aproned cook with a white child on her lap, works against her stated objective. Despite Sharpless's resurrection of the strange episode of the "Black Mammy Memorial," a project of the early twentieth century that hoped to enshrine sentimental notions of the selfless African American servant, the publisher's choice to show a nameless black woman on the cover undermines the narrative Sharpless carefully builds.

By allowing the women "in other women's kitchens" to imbue a first-person immediacy into an historical narrative of domestic workers in the South, Sharpless makes visceral what many in food and African American studies already know. Thanks to Professor Sharpless for allowing these cooks to make real the travails and triumphs they endured. May her volume continue to break down the stereotypes that plague us to this day.

—Rafia Zafar, Washington University

Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India During World War II
Madhusree Mukerjee
New York: Basic Books, 2010
368 pp. $28.95 (cloth)

Most readers with an interest in world history are familiar with Ireland's seven-year Potato Famine, which lasted from 1845 until 1852. Fewer know of the catastrophic 1943 famine that claimed up to three million lives in Bengal, an eastern Indian state and then British colony. In the fall of 1942, Bengal's rice crop failed following a devastating cyclone. As World War II raged on its eastern border with the Japanese invasion of Burma, Bengal went on to lose its source of rice imports. Despite this crisis, the enormous loss of life due to starvation was avoidable, argues author Madhusree Mukerjee, a former contributing editor at *Scientific American*.

Herself Bengali, Mukerjee dispassionately blames Winston Churchill and his War Cabinet for the tragedy. According to the official account, Bengal did not receive aid during the famine because there were neither food supplies nor ships to spare for such a relief effort. The rice-eating Bengali people would, British leaders further alleged, shun wheat. (Rural Bengal still considers the golden grain to be a luxury food, Mukerjee points out.) Churchill's bigotry toward Hindus, in general, and toward Mahatma Gandhi, in particular, is relatively well known. Even so, that the British prime minister declined to send Canadian and American food aid intended for India comes as a shock to the contemporary reader. As the Bengali people starved, Churchill meanwhile sent shiploads of Australian wheat to a Balkan stockpile meant to feed southern Europe once the war came to an end. Grain imports also went to other British colonies all along the Indian Ocean. Why was India, the jewel in the crown, singled out

as unworthy of food relief? Churchill famously proclaimed that he would not permit the British Empire's dissolution, and yet he was forced to do just that near the war's end. One must conclude, then, that Bengal paid the price for this turn of events.

The most damning evidence against Churchill in Mukerjee's book comes from the private papers of top British officials. In public, Leopold Amery, the Secretary of State for India, dutifully placed responsibility for the Bengal calamity "on Indians (for overpopulation, hoarding and misgovernment), the United Nations (which controlled shipping), and the Almighty (for crop failure)" (p.200). However, Amery's diary and correspondence reveal that he viewed the famine as a direct consequence of a war effort that tapped India dry of resources and manpower in the interests of an Allied victory. For his part, the Viceroy of India Lord Wavell observed that Churchill, who did not so much as respond to his telegrams about the dire famine in Bengal, did write to ask if Gandhi had died yet. That question seems logical, if peevish, given the gaunt Indian leader's age (he was seventy when the war began) and given that fasting had been Gandhi's chief form of protest in his long career as a freedom fighter.

Mukerjee does not rely solely on British documents to tell the story, however. She also interviewed scores of people in West Bengal who lived through this horrific period. Villagers who walked to Kolkata in the hope of finding food often breathed their last breath in the streets of the capital, eyewitnesses recall. Ashoka Gupta, a housewife-turned-social worker, recalls: "There was a hospital behind our house, and every morning some mothers would have left their babies on the steps in the hope they would be saved" (p.172).

The famine technically came to an end in December 1943, when Bengal experienced a bountiful rice crop. But a malarial epidemic then struck the region; and, for a while, it seemed likely that few would be left to do the harvesting. In 1944, India received 660,450 tons of wheat, thanks to the combined efforts of several leaders. If Churchill had again stubbornly refused to send this aid, a second famine would likely have been the result.

Much against Churchill's wishes, India gained independence three years later, on August 15, 1947. But the violence of the Indian-Pakistan partition that accompanied political freedom seems to have wiped the 1943 famine from public memory. (West Bengal remained with India, while East Bengal, which initially went to Pakistan, later became the independent nation of Bangladesh.) A book on famine can hardly be uplifting; but the narrative told in *Churchill's Secret War* is riveting nonetheless. Mukerjee's accomplished prose brings to light a forgotten chapter in the subcontinent's agricultural and political history.

—V. Vijaysree, Somerville, MA

An Extravagant Hunger: The Passionate Years of M.F.K. Fisher
Anne Zimmerman
Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2011
261 pp. $26.00 (cloth)

M.F.K. Fisher's strong suit has always been seduction. So it is not surprising that Anne Zimmerman's *An Extravagant Hunger: The Passionate Years of M.F.K. Fisher* offers not just a pastiche of Fisher's life, writings, letters, and biography; the book also reveals Zimmerman's close identification with the Fisher persona that she admiringly portrays via the trope of "the passionate years."

Reading this book is like rereading *The Gastronomical Me*, encountering quotation after quotation, some acknowledged, some not—Zimmerman's language is always reminiscent of Fisher's and heavily reliant on her writings. *An Extravagant Hunger* is also an exercise in rereading Fisher's letters, unfortunately undated in the notes but acknowledged to be sourced from *M.F.K. Fisher: A Life in Letters* and from the Schlesinger Library. So, why did Zimmerman publish what could be considered another over-explicated collection of Fisher's published and unpublished writings? Is her aim to draw more conclusions about Fisher's family, friends, and, to an exasperating degree, inner life; to praise once more Fisher's literary and gastronomical gifts; or to insert her own authorial self into the narrative of the famous American food writer?

Beginning her story in September 1929, when Fisher and first husband Al began their honeymoon on the *Berengaria*, and Fisher wrote to her mother Edith "that she loved Al more every minute" (p.6), Zimmerman comments that, "It was the first of many sweeping statements Mary Frances would pen to mask the hurts" (p.6). She then shifts to Fisher's childhood days in the Kennedys' Whittier kitchen where strawberry jam is cooking on the stove and Fisher experiences the first "bite that transformed her from a mere consumer of food to a connoisseur of tastes" (p.9). Fisher's childhood memories, according to Zimmerman, reveal that "the food on the dinner table was…reliably bad" (p.11), that "Aunt Gwen was attentive to the girls in a way that their parents were not" (p.22), and that "For Edith [the