TO LIVE AND DINE IN DIXIE: 
FOODWAYS AND CULTURE IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY SOUTH

by

ANGELA JILL COOLEY

KARI FREDERICKSON, COMMITTEE CHAIR
GEORGE C. RABLE
LISA LINDQUIST-DORR
JOHN M. GIGGIE
GRACE ELIZABETH HALE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the transformation of food culture in urban areas of the American South during the first part of the twentieth century. From 1900 to 1964, southern culinary practices became more public and more in line with national trends. The first three decades of the twentieth century marked an important period of change. In southern homes, white, middle-class, urban women formed a commitment to scientific cooking and used its strict rules to construct new racial and class identities within the urban environment. At the same time, newly urban peoples began frequenting a variety of different types of public eating places. Socio-economic, racial, ethnic, and gender diversity within these spaces encouraged the white power structure in southern cities to implement laws to regulate these public spaces. Such regulation included municipal ordinances that restricted eating places based on race and contributing to the development of a system of racial segregation within the region’s urban areas.

White southerners maintained racial segregation in public eating places through images and everyday rituals that identified the black consumption of food as subordinate to white consumption. At the height of Jim Crow, however, southern consumption culture also cultivated the seeds of segregation’s destruction. Segregated black cafes stimulated African American community building and empowerment, both of which served to undermine the strength of segregation. At the same time, as southern food practices became more entwined with national standards, food systems emerged and spread across the South that encouraged more democratized spaces for the consumption of food. The nationalization of southern food culture, the determined efforts of civil rights activists to end segregated eating patterns, and the continued
intransigence of white supremacists to maintain racial segregation in food venues encouraged the United States Congress to enact the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which, among other things, required the desegregation of public eating places.
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INTRODUCTION: Steaming Fried Chicken and Other “Sacrilege”:
Food Practices in the Twentieth-Century South

In 1955, Mary R. Wheeler of Waynesboro, Virginia, wrote an angry letter to the editor of Life magazine complaining that the southern fried chicken recipe included in an earlier issue was not “authentic.” The recipe in question instructed readers to simmer the chicken in water for thirty minutes before serving. One word summed up Wheeler’s reaction to the notion of steaming fried chicken: “sacrilge.” The editor responded to Wheeler’s complaint by assuring its readers, “Life’s fried chicken, the specialty of a real southern cook, is both authentic and crisp.”

Wheeler’s concern that the national magazine might misrepresent a dish as important to the southern consciousness as fried chicken symbolizes a broader concern about the effect of an increasingly national culture on ways of life deemed to be particularly southern.

Food culture offers a good vehicle for examining this phenomenon because food has, and has always had, a proprietary nature. Like Wheeler, individual cooks take ownership over dishes that can be prepared in a variety of ways and adopt one method of preparation that is considered to be proper. Individual restaurants, although preparing and serving essentially the same menu as their competitors, mark their own dishes and recipes as special and exclusive. Localities, states, regions, even nations lay claim to foods, recipes, and drinks as “traditional” dishes impervious to the vagaries of time or fashion.

Foodways, however, are not so unyielding. Practices associated with the provision, preparation, service, and consumption of food tend to change along with society, culture, economics, technology, and consumer tastes, to name only a few factors. Depending upon her age, Wheeler may have witnessed significant changes in food practices even in the small Shenandoah community of Waynesboro. The first half of the twentieth century represented a significant period of change in the ways that southerners obtained, cooked, consumed, and thought about the foods they ate. In many ways, these changes reflected broader technological, economic, political, social, and cultural shifts. Both Wheeler’s willingness to consult *Life* magazine for recipes and her disdain that the national periodical botched this regional specialty reflects a similar tendency among the broader southern populace to accept the convenience represented by more nationalized modes of consumption and sustenance and, at the same time, reject changing food consumer practices as antithetical to traditional southern mores.

This dissertation explores the evolution of southern food culture from 1900 to 1964. During this period, southern food practices became progressively more public in nature and increasingly more in line with national norms. As national standards permeated southern foodways, by way of consumer products, national advertising, scientific cookery, public eating places, and chain restaurants, southerners responded with a mixture of eager acceptance, wary application, and determined intransigence, depending upon the circumstances. At its best, some southerners recognized that more modern foodways offered convenience, luxury, and participation in a more national culture. Southerners who lived in cities and had financial means, particularly whites, used their access to these new foodways to help identify themselves as part of a growing, national, white middle class. At the same time, however, many white southerners
interpreted some features of these changes as threats to the region’s racial, class, and gender hierarchies.

The first three chapters in this dissertation examine the important changes related to foodways that took place in southern cities from the turn of the twentieth century through the 1920s and how these changes contributed to the formation of a system of racial segregation in the South. The last three chapters explore southern food practices from the Great Depression through the civil rights movement and consider how the continued modernization and nationalization of food consumption contributed to the dismantling of this system. For purposes of this dissertation, the South includes the eleven former Confederate states plus the border states of Maryland, Oklahoma, West Virginia, and Kentucky (which roughly corresponds, by the way, to the states in which a restaurant patron can order a glass of sweet tea). This study, however, is most concerned with the urban areas within this region. Granted, within this vast terrain, many sub-regional and local culinary traditions thrived. This dissertation is less concerned with the actual foods consumed in these areas than in the manners, rituals, and regulations associated with the provision, preparation, cooking, service, and consumption of foods in the American South. A general analysis of such culinary practices in the urban areas of the region provides insight into the region’s broader social, cultural, legal, and economic circumstances.

\[2\] Scholars can debate what constitutes an urban area. David Goldfield uses a definition that relates primarily to population and includes as “urban” towns with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants (in 1910). Cities would be somewhat larger than that with “small” cities possessing from 5,000 to 15,000 residents (in 1910). David Goldfield, Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 41. I also use the term “urban” more broadly, although with no precise definition. Most of this research is based on the situations of Atlanta and Birmingham which, according to Don H. Doyle, were the second and third largest southern cities, respectively, (behind New Orleans) in 1910. Don H. Doyle, New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 15. Based on less extensive research in other southern cities, such as Richmond, Louisville, Savannah, Montgomery, and Galveston, similar practices seem to have been common across the South.
For southern historians, foodways provide a valuable signifier to the study of broader cultural values because of the intimate connections that exist among food, identity, consumption, sexuality, and other features of culture. Food holds a special place in southern culture because it is so intimately connected to the southern body and provides sustenance that can contribute to health and well-being, or alternatively infirmity and weakness, of individuals. For many white southerners, the welfare of particularized southern bodies served as a suitable metaphor for the constitution of the larger white southern body as a whole. For this reason, studying how southerners understood the processes by which they consumed sustenance can reveal the hopes, anxieties, and culture of the South. Most important for this dissertation, exploring how southerners discerned consumption in its most intimate and personal manifestation provides historical insight into the construction and divergence of southern identities based on race, class, ethnicity, and gender.

*To Live and Dine in Dixie: Foodways and Culture in the Twentieth Century South* argues that the development of segregation in public spaces devoted primarily to eating depended upon interactions related to consumption, social control, and racial purity. As newly urban peoples of various races, classes, ethnicities, and genders gathered in public eating places, white authorities worried about the effect on white supremacy and racial purity. Racial segregation represented one part of a more comprehensive system of rules intended to regulate these spaces in the manner befitting the emerging middle class. Once segregation was established, white southerners maintained this system through images and everyday rituals that identified the black consumption of food as subordinate to white consumption. At the height of Jim Crow, however, southern consumption culture also cultivated the seeds of segregation’s destruction. Segregated black cafes stimulated African American community building and empowerment, both of which
ultimately undermined the strength of segregation. At the same time, as southern food practices became more entwined with national culture, food systems emerged and spread across the South that encouraged more democratized spaces for the consumption of food.

Understanding these complex interconnections requires a detailed exploration of the evolution of southern food culture in the twentieth century. Food culture is a broad concept that encompasses the social, cultural, and economic practices associated with the provision, preparation, service, and consumption of foodstuffs. Historians who research foodways participate in an interdisciplinary discourse that engages scholars of history, anthropology, sociology, literature, and gender studies, to name a few. These disciplines inform the academic inquiry into foodways and encompass many themes that are important to this dissertation. Because recent scholarship on southern foodways seeks to change a common popular conception of regional cuisine as static and monolithic, much of this literature focuses on southern foods as diverse, progressive, and contested.

John T. Edge, the director of the Southern Foodways Alliance, considers barbecue to be the South’s “most contested food,” and so perhaps it is fitting that much of the recent scholarship on southern foodways has focused on how barbecue has been constructed and reconstructed in the southern consciousness.³ In Savage Barbecue: Race, Culture, and the Invention of America’s First Food, for example, Andrew Warnes investigates the history of barbecue from the slow-cooked iguanas of the Taino in the Caribbean to outdoor parties in eighteenth-century London to the African American dominated pits of the American South. He finds that the attraction of Europeans and later white southerners to this fare stemmed from its inherent “savage” nature.

The food’s identification with Native American and African American cookery allowed white consumers to participate in a ritual that was both savage and respectable at the same time. In *Republic of Barbecue: Stories Beyond the Brisket*, Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt takes a more contemporary view of barbecue mores as she and a group of eleven graduate students traveled across central Texas to document in text, pictures, and interesting anecdotes the region’s barbecue culture. These works attempt to move away from southern foods as merely a feature of nostalgia to consider the complex history and contemporary reality of the foods and food practices that southerners so often take for granted.

Arguably the most nostalgia-fueled southern food tradition is the presence of a black woman in a white kitchen to cook and serve for the white family. Yet even this standard image of southern literature and memory has a complicated and varied history. In *Cooking in Other Women’s Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960*, Rebecca Sharpless presents this history from the perspective of the women who lived it, the African American cooks who labored for years in white kitchens for long hours and little wages. Sharpless argues that, despite the challenges and stereotypes associated with black cooks, African American women found new opportunities to provide for their families by laboring in white kitchens and developed methods for resisting the more oppressive features of domestic work.

This dissertation contributes to this developing scholarship in southern foodways by examining the experiences of southerners as the consumption of food became more public and

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more national in nature. Specifically, this study considers how different types of southerners reconfigured evolving food practices to reflect particularized understandings of race, class, and gender. Like Sharpless, this dissertation explores the labor relationships within white kitchens but from the perspective of white southern employers. It examines white views on the connection between black labor and white consumption and the effect of that relationship on white racial purity in the South. In this way, some of this dissertation’s findings contradict what we thought we knew about black labor in white kitchens.

For example, there was a brief but important episode during the first two decades of the twentieth century when white urban middle-class women attempted to replace black cooks with white lower-class domestic servants. The two-fold impetus for this short-lived and unsuccessful movement related to their concern for the white body and maintaining racial purity. First, newly urban white middle-class women worried about the ability of black cooks to prepare foods worthy to be consumed by, and thereby became a part of, the white body. Second, they demonstrated concern over the possible degenerating effect to the white race if poor white women continued to labor in textile mills and other factories. This moment in the history of the urban South provides significant insight into the meanings that these white women placed on the food that entered their white families’ bodies and its essential role in maintaining racial purity.

In the same period that some white southern women attempted to remove elements that they considered to be detrimental to racial purity from white homes, namely black cookery, their husbands completed a similar and more successful reconstruction of southern eating spaces in the public sphere. Although dining out in the South would have been somewhat restricted until after World War II, the number of public eating places increased dramatically in southern cities during the first two decades of the twentieth century. As eating places became more numerous,
they also changed qualitatively, serving as “quick order” eateries in which inexpensive, lower-end fare could be ordered and consumed hurriedly and simultaneously as replacements for saloons where diners could linger for long hours to eat, drink, socialize, and engage in a wide array of legal and illegal activities.

Some public eating places served primarily one role or the other, but many satisfied both needs for urban communities. As public eateries evolved, the patronage became more diverse. At one time exclusive to the white elite, southern eating places of the early twentieth century began to serve a broader assortment of newly urban peoples representing different classes, races, ethnicities, and genders. The customs that emerged within these spaces differed significantly from that culture in which the hegemonic white professional classes were attempting to mold society more generally. This divergence led to the implementation of various regulatory schemes directed specifically toward maintaining health, morality, and racial purity within public eating spaces in southern cities. Under this new regime, African Americans and whites continued to interact in public eating places, but in a more constricted manner that marked African Americans as servants.

Because of their importance in the implementation, maintenance, and defense of segregation culture, gender and sexuality represent significant themes. Scholars of food culture in general have also identified these concepts as important to understanding the culinary consciousness of a society. In her influential work, *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities*, Elspeth Probyn suggests that examining the various manifestations of everyday eating, specifically “what, how, and with whom we eat” can help us to reconnect with understandings of gender and sexuality on a fundamental level because all three of these topics—food, gender, and sexuality—
involve the essence and substance of human bodies. Probyn’s work provides a significant theoretical underpinning for this dissertation. A primary foundation for the importance of food to southern history and notions of racial purity is that the consumption of food causes its substance to merge with and become one with the human body.

Unlike other forms of consumption—the purchase of clothing, theater tickets, or other tangible objects that remain outside of the body—food forms an integral part of humans as the body takes what it needs for the formation of muscle, bone, fat, and other tissue and eliminates what it does not. In the early twentieth century, an elite group of chemists, nutritionists, and home economists studied the science of digestion and nutrition. Because their findings were relevant to the everyday work of modern housewives, they distributed their research and findings to lay women in the form of cookbooks, newspaper articles, advertising circulars, and public school curriculum. Women with access to this information, primarily white and middle class, understood these findings and implemented their implications to build stronger white families.

A similar, although less overt, association was made between food and sexuality because the two served similar functions in forming the human body. Like the consumption of food, sexual activity also involved the invasion of the human body by a foreign substance which could thereby become a part of the body. For white southerners, sexuality represented the absolute foundation for racial purity and the means by which whiteness or blackness was transmitted from parent to child. In her memoir Killers of the Dream, Lillian Smith recalls that southern mothers taught their children to “be careful about what enters your body” through a combination of verbal and non-verbal cues. This warning applied to the consumption of food and drink and

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7 Elspeth Probyn, Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities (New York: Routledge, 2000).
sexuality. In cities, food and sex gained other similar attributes because both represented a product that could be bought and sold, often in restaurants which fronted for brothels. For white southerners, the constitution of the body that emerged as the result of both nourishment and sex related directly to constructions of whiteness and racial purity. For this reason, the white power structure often interpreted public eating places to represent gendered space, and sexual expression considered to be inappropriate affected negotiations of power within such spaces.

In addition to a study of gender and sexuality, this dissertation represents an examination of the urbanization of the American South. A guiding book in the current historiography of the urban South is *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, in which Don H. Doyle argues that the newly emerging cities generated the economic and cultural changes that shaped and fostered the New South. Doyle identifies the period starting in 1880 and ending in 1910 as the most significant period of southern urban growth as a result of an increase in the numbers of people who migrated into cities and an increase in the number of southern cities.

Doyle focuses much attention on the urban business class, composed of white merchants, manufacturers, and bankers, that controlled the industrial and financial capital of these young cities and was primarily responsible for urban growth. Southern cities differed somewhat from their northern counterparts in the composition of their population. Unlike northern cities of the Gilded Age, southern urban areas were not populated significantly by foreign immigrants. According to Doyle, although certain cities had a significant African American population, most

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early southern urbanites consisted of white migrants from the region’s hinterlands. Like Doyle, this dissertation sees southern urban areas as “nerve centers of a changing economy and culture” when it comes to the modernization of the region’s foodways during the twentieth century. The most important developments of consumerism, scientific cooking, and public eating space emerged from (although did not necessarily originate in) southern cities and from there spread into the countryside by way of technological change and federal funding (for example, in the form of extension services and highways). The period 1900 to 1920 represents the most

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9 Don H. Doyle, New Men, New Cities, New South, xiii-xiv, 10-14. Doyle agrees with C. Vann Woodward in that he sees new cities as a break from the South’s rural past. C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1951). In this respect, Doyle disagrees with urban historians, like David R. Goldfield, who argue that the formation of early southern cities relied primarily on the region’s rural areas and that, until the 1990s, southern urban areas continued to be influenced primarily by their immediate surroundings. Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). Scholarship on the more recent urban South tends to assess the region’s role in the Sunbelt, a term used to describe the amorphous combination of the western and southern sections of the nation after World War II. These works emphasize the role of southern states and municipalities in economic development, the rising expectations of southern urbanites, how federal planning and spending contributed to an increase in regional prosperity, the increasing economic strength of southern consumers, and the view of Sunbelt cities as “new” models of urbanization stressing their impact on the broader region.


10 Doyle, New Men, New Cities, New South, xiii.
important formative years for this development. During these years, there is a marked increase in consumerism and a noticeable new commitment to scientific cookery among certain white women in southern cities. During this period, there is also a significant increase in the numbers and types of public eating places. The contested nature of these public spaces and the desire for the business class to implement social control measures contributed to a new system of regulation over these spaces and, as a result, the firming of white supremacy and racial segregation within cities.

This dissertation deals with a population of city dwellers that is much broader than the “new men” in Doyle’s work. The urban business class is certainly important to the story of modernizing food practices. This class of wealthy merchants, industry leaders, and financiers patronized the fine restaurants that emerged in the late nineteenth century and dined in the style to which the planter class had been accustomed in the antebellum seaport cities. But the wives and daughters of Doyle’s “new men” participated significantly in a modernizing food culture as well. They led efforts within southern women’s clubs to create scientific cookery as the standard in the urban kitchen; they actively worried about the effect of the presence of black women in these kitchens on white racial purity; and they dined in ladies cafes connected to fine restaurants but isolated from the smoking, cursing, and other “inappropriate” behavior that took place when even the most respectable men congregated for food and drink.

Doyle’s urban business class regulated public eating places in reaction to the behavior, and perceived misbehavior, on the part of the urban lower classes. A lower class of white collar families—the smaller merchants, managers, accountants, bookkeepers, and their wives and daughters—make up a less delineated “middle class” of urban folk who would have by necessity participated in the cultural underpinnings of urban food consumption. The exigencies of urban
living would have brought these men into public dining spaces at least periodically. Although their salaries might not have afforded dinner at fine restaurants every night, their business interests might have caused them to travel (especially jobbers or salesmen). Single men in this middling group who boarded at hotels regularly would have had to dine out as southern hotels adopted the “European plan” of service, which did not include meals as part of their nightly rate. Such men might also grab lunch at a “quick order” stand or cafe located downtown. Forced to negotiate urban food markets, their wives and daughters would have adopted the standards of domestic science advocated by urban women’s clubs and thereby entered into the orbit of the women of the business class for whom cooking lectures, afternoon teas, and shopping trips made up the serious business of urban life.

A third group of urbanites includes the broadly defined working classes. This was an even more fluid class that included white and black industrial workers, new wage workers, black domestic laborers, and foreign immigrants. Unlike the more discernible middle classes, there would not have been any particular food practices that tied this group together. They would have participated in urban consumer markets, but low wages, discrimination, and continued ties to rural ways would have limited their access. Many working-class urban families continued to raise chickens, grow crops, and perhaps keep a milk cow for several decades after they left the farm. Most of them did not have the resources to eat out. But a certain number of lower-class urbanites would have been actively involved in public eating establishments as proprietors, employees, or customers.

The vast majority of the new eating places that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century were low-end eateries, often ephemeral places that might not have been open for more than a year or two quickly to be replaced by similar establishments. These businesses were
operated primarily by lower-class men and women who supplemented low wages by cooking and serving inexpensive meals, and often other goods and services, from their homes or another location. Although foreign immigrants did not represent a large portion of the southern population, they played a significant role in urban eateries. The owners of many of the new cafes and lunch rooms were Greek immigrants who opened their own businesses for financial profit and personal independence. The lower-end eateries operated by Greeks and other lower-class southern urban-dwellers had a more diverse customer base than fine restaurants. They received patronage from the lower classes, middling white collar workers, immigrants, blacks, whites, males, and females. It was primarily these lower-class spaces that encouraged and engendered the regulation of eating places in southern cities, including a system of racial segregation.

In the development of southern segregation culture, this dissertation is most influenced by Grace Elizabeth Hale’s *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. Hale describes the emerging consumer culture of the New South as inherently antithetical to white supremacy because consumption welcomed anyone with financial resources regardless of the consumer’s race. In this way, class played an important supporting role in the creation of segregation culture because a growing black middle class could consume equally with whites. White southerners created segregated spaces in new urban areas in order to recreate white supremacy. Images that circulated through the new consumer sphere helped to portray and define whiteness. Hale devotes one paragraph to eating in which she describes the various ways that

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southerners negotiated public dining space in the segregated South. To a great extent, this dissertation was inspired by a desire to explore those places in greater depth and to examine how the “intimate” action of “touching of the product to lips” that Hale describes made the experience of eating space different from that of railroads, theaters, and other segregated space.¹²

Like *Making Whiteness*, this dissertation identifies a significant class element of segregation culture. Certainly, segregation prevented middle-class African Americans from frequenting fine restaurants. The connection between race and class in public eating places, however, is most evident at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. Fine restaurants existed in southern urban areas throughout the late nineteenth century, and white middle-class entrepreneurs regulated these spaces by deciding who could dine within them and what activities could take place. But de jure segregation in public eating places did not occur until after the turn of the twentieth century at a time when the most significant trend in public dining was the rise of lower-end or quick-order eateries. These spaces could not be easily regulated by relying on individual proprietors or communal censure. It was primarily the fear that lower-class whites and blacks would mingle, thereby threatening racial and gender hierarchies and the power of the white business class to maintain social control, that provided the incentive for white city authorities to attempt to create racially segregated eating space in the cities.

In addition to race and class, gender also played a role in this process. Unlike in earlier saloons or fine restaurants, women were not separated and “protected” in lower-end eateries. The presence of women in unregulated establishments created the potential for sexual interactions and race mixing. Cafes and lunch rooms provided spaces for white men to mingle with black women and perhaps for white women to interact with black men as well. Regulation could not,

and did not, end miscegenation in the South, but it gave white city leaders and their white constituents an understanding that social control was maintained in this regard. Yet miscegenation still occurred.

But southern sexuality, as with politics, had been the privilege of white men of status. 

When such men engaged in either the rape of or a consensual sexual relationship with black women, the actions usually took place among the private space of plantation or home. Such settings for inter-racial sexual liaisons were made possible by the close proximity between black domestics and their white male employers. This familiarity remained relatively constant from slavery to emancipation to segregation and gave white men of status sexual dominion over their white wives and their black servants. The mixed-race children who resulted from such liaisons existed as open secrets in the South. Sexual activity between black and white that took place in public eating places, however, materialized what was supposed to be invisible and ignored.

White males of authority in the urban South, who might have slept with black women in the privacy of their own homes, nevertheless took pains to disavow and condemn such conduct in

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13 In the various ways that white men dealt with black-on-white rape accusations, Lisa Lindquist-Dorr connects sexual access to the social and political standing of white men in White Women, Race, and the Power of Rape in Virginia, 1900-1960 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 7-10.

14 W. J. Cash traces white male liaisons with black women to the southern plantation and lessons that white men learned as boys. He claims that this common practice in the South reveals a basis for the southern exaltation of white women. W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South (Alfred A. Knopf, 1941; New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 84-87. In Killers of the Dream, Lillian Smith makes the same connection between white male sex with African American women and idolatry myths associated with white southern womanhood. Smith actually goes further by suggesting that it is the guilt of the white man for transgressing the taboo of miscegenation that gave rise to the paranoia that African American men too lusted after white women thereby feeding the “black rapist” mythology (117-123). Despite their willingness to attack southern mythology, both Cash and Smith share the white fallacy, common in the mid-twentieth century, which identified African Americans as highly sexualized.
public by closing down cafes where such activity allegedly took place and by enacting segregation laws to prevent racial mixing in public spaces.

By the 1930s, white supremacy and racial segregation firmly regulated public eating places in the South. But the elements that would serve to dismantle the system existed as well. One of these elements included the empowerment that African Americans found in their own accomplishments and institutions related to food in spite of the oppression of Jim Crow. Many scholars explore African American foodways as an enabling force within an otherwise unjust culture. In *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, & Power*, Psyche A. Williams-Forson examines the complicated history of the black southern relationship with chicken as a problematic stereotype, as a source of sustenance, and as a vehicle toward self-reliance. As with many episodes in African American history, Williams-Forson explains that white myth-making hid a powerful connection that African Americans developed with chicken to build independent lives for themselves after emancipation by cooking and serving this dish on their own account.\(^{15}\) This dissertation also finds empowerment of the African American community through foodways. In the black cafes that developed during Jim Crow, African Americans found brief respites from oppressive rituals, employers, and institutions that existed in the outside world. Within these cafes, African American entrepreneurs sustained black bodies with food, black neighborhoods with community and fellowship, and black futures with jobs geared toward education and opportunity.

In addition to African American empowerment, the increasing nationalization of southern foodways, a process which culminated after World War II, also contributed to the dismantling of southern racial segregation. The South connected with national foodways by a variety of means.

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from the expansion of extension services that transmitted national norms into the southern hinterlands, to the distribution of foodstuffs in national markets that caused most of the food consumed in the South to cross state lines, to the development of chain stores and restaurants and fast food. This nationalization, as well as the meanings attached to consumerism in the post-World War II period, worked to the benefit of civil rights activists who identified consumer citizenship as an important component of Americanism.

The notion that consumer activities have political significance is the subject of Lizabeth Cohen’s book, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, in which she argues that the nation’s increasing consumerism led to greater politicization as consumers began to see their rights in the marketplace in political terms. One of the lasting points of Cohen’s important work is that consumerism served to divide consumers on the basis of class, gender, and race. At the same time, however, consumer power provided groups that had been politically and economically subjugated with a weapon by which to attack this oppression. This dissertation agrees with Cohen’s assessment as it relates to the public consumption of food in southern eateries. By the 1930s, with white supremacy firmly reasserted in southern cities and small towns, African Americans had become securely subordinated as culinary citizens in the American South. By the postwar period, however, the ubiquitous nature of public eateries in the South, the greater national presence that these spaces represented, the democratizing nature of these spaces, and the commitment of an African American population

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dedicated to equality within the consumer sphere provided the ingredients for the civil rights movement to achieve a measure of racial equality within public eating places in the South.
CHAPTER ONE: New South, New Food: Transforming Southern Food Culture

Eugene Walter’s childhood memories start in his grandmother’s kitchen. Growing up in an urban middle-class household in Mobile, Alabama, in the early twentieth century, Walter recalls food preparation as a combination of tried-and-true methods and eager application of modern technologies. His grandmother signified this intermingling of old and new by keeping two stoves side-by-side in her large kitchen. The modern gas range made cooking quicker and more convenient. But she maintained an old-fashioned iron stove for baking biscuits, cakes, and other breads. Walter’s grandmother handled the old stove with a practiced hand. Even though the older technology did not have a precise thermostat, she had learned as a child how to gauge the oven’s temperature by watching her family’s black cook. In her old age, Walter’s grandmother continued to rely on African American labor in the kitchen. The cook, Rebecca, arrived early each morning to prepare breakfast and stayed all day to help with the afternoon meal.18

Walter’s culinary memories reveal a southern food culture in transition from cooking methods based in an agrarian past and passed on through oral instruction and experience to new practices propelled by modernity and consumerism and dependent on scientific knowledge and technological advancement. Although, like Walter’s grandmother, some women continued to hang on to the former model, by the turn of the century the latter vision captured the southern imagination. Modern technology and a new consumption-based culture conspired to alter culinary practices that have too often been considered static. For this reason, the term “New

South” meant far more than the conventional images of new industries and new cities. Along with these changes, the notion of the “New South” implies significant cultural shifts including an emergent modern food culture. Under this new regime, white middle-class women learned how to cook from experts in the field, administered their kitchens with scientific precision and business-like efficiency, used written recipes, embraced new foods, and purchased products and appliances based on the latest technologies.

As white southern middle-class women adopted these new food routines, such practices took on racial and gendered meanings that reflected the South’s society and culture. Because African Americans had deep-rooted associations with southern foodways, white advocates of modern eating practices attempted to redefine southern food as “white” by standardizing recipes and mandating instruction even for the simplest foods. These practices contrasted with the white perception of African American cooking as unsystematic and plain. White middle-class urban and small-town women, who had greater access to consumer markets than their African American, lower-class, or rural counterparts, considered these advancements to be “white” knowledge that black servants could practice under white supervision, but could never really own.

In addition to race, gender represented a significant component of white middle-class southern domesticity and New South food culture. The women who embraced this new food culture believed that knowledge, thrift, and cleanliness reflected the feminine ideal assuming that such values were directed toward the interests of the home. They also believed that only white women possessed these virtues. They interpreted homemaking as empowering in that it enabled women to manipulate and control society. An educated woman read cookbooks and other household manuals. She recognized a quality cut of meat and understood its market value. She
attended pure food lectures and cooking demonstrations. These mundane skills and feminine attributes played an important role in the construction of the southern middle class, but also in the construction of whiteness itself. White women determined which foods could be consumed by, and thereby become a part of, the white body as well as how such foods would be prepared. They embraced modern theories of nutrition and pure food as tools for building a stronger white race and maintaining racial purity.

White middle-class, urban women served as “New Food” boosters committed to using culinary knowledge to improve southern society starting in the kitchen. From the 1900s to the 1940s, it became apparent that the way southerners prepared and consumed food had undergone a permanent modification and that these changes were more accessible to a wider population of southerners. World War I acted as a turning point in this process because the United States Food Administration, a war-time agency responsible for food conservation, spread this information to the broader population.19

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Modern food culture owed its existence to technological advances and increased consumerism. During the antebellum period, the South lagged behind in the implementation of updated cooking technology. Iron stoves became commercially available by the 1830s, but most southern households failed to adopt them until after the Civil War. Nineteenth-century southern

19 The white middle-class women in this chapter can best be defined as the wives and daughters of the business class described by Don H. Doyle in New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). For Doyle, southern business leaders became a cohesive social class as they built new cities and recognized their common world view and shared interests. (19) Their wives and daughters experienced the same cohesiveness as they developed new food habits for the urban, business-focused society that their husbands and fathers were creating. This dissertation also adopts Doyle’s view that the South’s nascent urban areas represented the driving force behind the region’s growth and modernization.
cookbooks often gave recipes for stove and fireplace cooking.\textsuperscript{20} An engraved picture of the nineteenth-century Virginia Governor’s kitchen shows a large cooking fireplace that took up most of the wall and rose well above the head of the cook who had to stand nearly in the fire to tend the food.\textsuperscript{21} In one Mississippi plantation, the hearth measured “six foot deep so they could set the hot pots and skillets on it.” Large open fireplaces necessitated the use of heavy iron pots and messy wood and ash that filled the kitchen with heat and smoke.\textsuperscript{22} Unpredictable temperature contributed to imprecise cooking times and necessitated flexible recipes and creative, experienced cooks.

By the late nineteenth century most southern homes relied on iron stoves fueled by wood or coal that were less messy and dangerous because the fire was contained within the structure of the stove. But the necessity of heating a fire still contributed to unpredictable results in unpracticed hands. Oil-fueled, and later gas and electric, models allowed more ease of use and reduced heat in the kitchen. Although technology simplified matters in the kitchen by making cooking more convenient and comfortable, southern cooks required additional equipment and utensils. Modern stoves enabled the use of light-weight pots and pans made from aluminum instead of cast iron. Middle-class homemakers began to accumulate a variety of pans and utensils

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Helen Bullock, \textit{The Williamsburg Art of Cookery or Accomplished Gentlewoman’s Companion} (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1966).
\end{itemize}
that had specialized, instead of more general, purposes such as measuring spoons, paring knives, doughnut cutters, bread knives, ice-cream freezers, and meat grinders. The convenience and availability of train travel by the twentieth-century allowed such finished commercial products made in the North to be transported to and sold in southern markets.\(^{23}\)

In addition to new appliances and utensils, southern grocers stocked new food products that southern housekeepers previously would have produced at home. An 1806 recipe reveals the time and effort necessary to make yeast for baking bread:

\[\text{Pour one quart of boiling water over eight (8) Hops (or a small handful) when cool, pour a little at a time of this strained Hop tea over a well mashed potato. Put into it three tablespoons of wheat flour with a little brown sugar; this must be mixed very smoothly with some of the Hop tea. You will then put on some of the same to boil...pour it scalding hot over the flour and begin thereby, giving it a glazed look. The remains of the tea and dough can be now poured together. When cool sit in a pitcher for fermentation.}^{24}\]

This yeast recipe, which was included in the cookbook of Charleston native Catherine Lee Banks Edwards, differs little from those provided by other early southern cookbooks, such as Mary Randolph’s \textit{The Virginia Housewife} (1860), Annabella Hill’s \textit{Mrs. Hill’s New Cook Book} (1867), or Mary Ann Bryan Mason’s \textit{The Young Housewife’s Counselor and Friend} (1875).\(^{25}\)


By the end of the nineteenth century, however, southern cookbooks began to assume that southern women would purchase yeast instead of making it at home. Among the earliest to take this approach, *The Dixie Cookbook* suggests several name brand yeasts that the homemaker could trust, including Twin Brothers, Stratton’s, Eagle, and National. Later southern cookbooks called for the use of “yeast cake,” with no instructions on how to prepare it, or they required baking powder, a modern commercial food product that served a similar purpose. As southern consumer markets expanded, a wide range of food products became available for purchase. In a 1906 newspaper article, a baking company proudly announced the opening of a new sanitary factory to bake bread in Atlanta. Now, Atlantans did not even have to bake their own bread. They could purchase the patriotically named Uncle Sam Bread at their local grocery store. By the early twentieth century, the salaried class of southern cities and small towns could purchase a wide variety of ready-made food products, from canned chicken to bottled salad dressings.

New technology and products brought southern women into national consumer culture, but also implicated how they thought about the physical space of the kitchen and the activity of cooking. Turn-of-the-century white southerners considered kitchens of the Old South to be purely private spaces not open to public intervention or scrutiny and not an intimate part of white

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family space. The risk of fire caused well-to-do southerners to physically separate the kitchen from the rest of the house. A kitchen represented a hot and messy space. At the very least it was an uncomfortable environment, and it had the potential to be dangerous as well. The turn-of-the-century white middle class interpreted antebellum kitchens to have been “Mammy’s” space—an area of black authority. In most white families, only the cook, other servants involved in food preparation and service, and certain female members of the family occupied this domestic space.

White and black women learned how to cook based on oral tradition, visual inspection, and trial and error. Youngsters gained such knowledge from their elders—mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cooks, etc.—and then from their own experiences. Girls served as apprentices who learned by doing—at first helping an older female to perform her kitchen duties and later taking on these responsibilities in her own home. Illiteracy contributed to the oral nature of pre-twentieth-century cooking and the personal character of kitchen space. Abby Fisher, who in 1881 authored the first African American cookbook published in the United States, feared that her work would never see the light of day because neither she nor her husband could read or write. Only through dictation to a third party did she publish her work.\(^{30}\) A white antebellum author, Mary Ann Bryan Mason, revealed other concerns. She worried that people might consider her household manual to be “pretentious.” She agonized that her showy display of knowledge and the suggestion that she could instruct women outside of her personal realm might be inappropriate.\(^{31}\) For all of these reasons, the process of cooking in the South before the twentieth century tended to be private and unsystematic.

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\(^{31}\) Mason, *Young Housewife’s Counselor*, 235-237.
Social change contributed to evolving notions about southern kitchens and the art of cooking. Only a small percentage of white antebellum women had the benefit of enslaved labor in the kitchen; nevertheless, the emergent post-war middle class imagined that emancipation had created a “servant problem” in the South. By the turn of the century, the southern white middle class believed that dependable, competent servants, especially cooks, no longer existed among the region’s African American population. This perception most likely stemmed from the ability of free African American women to make employment choices that benefitted themselves and their families. Most black women building new lives in the South’s urban areas had two job options—they could either take in laundry or cook for white families. In 1918, researchers surveying conditions in Athens, Georgia, found that the majority of black women chose the former. Most black women preferred to work as laundresses because they could work at home, which allowed them to take care of their own families. In addition, they could take in laundry from more than one white household to increase their earning potential. Another downside to cooking in white homes, not addressed by the Athens’ study, was the increased risk of sexual abuse by white men. For all of these reasons many black women given a choice preferred not to work in white kitchens. This inclination contributed to a perception by southern white women that black cooks were inexperienced and undependable.


Although the truth behind the South’s so-called “servant problem” lay in the ability of African American women to leave unsatisfactory jobs, white women interpreted such choices as personal slights that left them suddenly responsible for their own kitchens. One Georgia club woman described her experiences with a black cook who refused to show up for work even after the employer went to look for her. Other white women complained that northern recruiters came to southern cities promising black cooks better situations in the North. The white women who complained about servant inadequacies saw themselves as part of a national, or even international, problem. In 1899, the Atlanta Woman’s Club hosted a lecture on the topic where an assumed expert named Mrs. Stetson announced “that the whole civilized world is now finding difficulty in the servant question.” Mrs. Stetson no doubt intended the “civilized world” to mean “white” European nations including the United States. White Atlantans, however, saw the southern problem as more acute because they considered early-twentieth-century black help to be less skilled and less reliable than either their nineteenth-century enslaved forebears or their foreign-born white contemporaries in the North.

Certainly, social and economic changes particular to the American South affected racial and class dimensions related to the so-called “servant problem.” The twentieth-century South offered few job opportunities for African Americans, and whites still considered black southerners to be the region’s laboring class. Lack of opportunity devalued black labor so much that African Americans did indeed constitute an inexpensive servant class. As a result, even relatively poor white families could afford at least one servant to cook and clean, and black


servants played a primary role in cooking and serving food in southern white households.36 Katie Geneva Cannon who worked as a domestic servant from childhood recalls cleaning and cooking for white textile workers whose house was not even as large or nice as her own. But because she was black, she could not get a job working at the local textile factory. Race forced her into domestic service.37

White southerners remembered longtime family cooks as “loyal” servants. “Sally used to cook wonderful breakfasts with grits and gravy and broiled chicken and sweet potatoes,” Birmingham native Virginia Foster Durr recalled in her autobiography. “She never came to prayer service because she was cooking breakfast. We always thought breakfast was God’s reward to us for the prayer effort.”38 Even when Durr moved to Washington, D.C., as the wife of a New Deal administrator, she continued to employ a black cook from Alabama, revealing that the notion of black domestic service never left those white southerners who had grown up with the practice.39 Certainly, American culture in general encouraged the image of blacks as servants, but such representations found their fullest realization in the South where most African Americans lived.40


39 Barnard, Outside the Magic Circle, 90.

40 See, Hale, Making Whiteness, 122-197.
Despite a widespread white belief that African Americans should constitute the South’s laboring class, some white southern middle-class women suggested hiring white girls as one possible solution to the servant question. White urban woman’s clubs championed this proposal in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In Birmingham, Mrs. Kirk, president of the Fenelon Club, considered African Americans to be inherently unfit for domestic service because of their supposed “dishonesty and utter disregard to morality and cleanliness.” By contrast, she “expect[ed] perfect service” from “only the intelligent, self-respecting white woman.” 41 White middle-class discourse explored possible effects that white domestic service might have on the white race as a whole. In particular, they considered the factory work that employed so many poor white girls to be morally and physically degenerating. In Atlanta, Mrs. Lewis Beck emphasized the “dignity” that white girls would bring to domestic work and argued that white women “had been discriminated against” because they did not get household jobs. 42

Support for white domestic labor in the South was complicated by the general recognition that white supremacy necessitated a strict status differentiation between black and white. Advocates of the novel practice fixed their arguments on benefits to the white race, particularly the fear that formal domestic education for African Americans, often funded by northern philanthropists, threatened the position of less-educated poor white girls. For this reason, Atlanta club woman Mrs. William H. Felton encouraged domestic education for poor white girls that would fit them for a career in domestic service and would improve their own homes and


families. Fellow club member Mrs. Edward Brown seconded Felton’s call for domestic education for white girls, but cautioned against disturbing the racial status quo: “I do not believe it would do justice to either race to develop in Georgia a class of white woman who would be recognized as identified exclusively with domestic service.” The fact that white middle-class women considered the widespread use of white servants and cooks reveals a fairly fluid southern domestic situation at the turn of the century as well as a capacity to value class status over race in food preparation and service. It also emphasizes an increasing concern over the effects on racial purity of black preparation of foods served to white families.

Concerns over domestic service gave manufacturers and publishers opportunities to sell new commercial goods designed for the home in southern markets. In doing so, many advertisers encouraged the perception that white women could not take care of their kitchens without assistance. In 1883, *The Dixie Cook-Book*, which was a national cookbook originally published under the name *Practical Housekeeping* and repackaged to appeal to southern housekeepers, promoted this image with the engraving of a distraught white housewife standing in the middle of her kitchen in tears. The kitchen is in complete disorder. Pots and pans, broken dishes, and food litter the floor. A cat eats out of a pan on the kitchen table. A fire rages on the stove. Outside the window, an African American cook carrying all of her possessions walks away from the house. Inside, a white man holding his burned dinner tries to comfort his wife by saying,

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“Don’t cry, Pet, I’ll do all the cooking.” In a newspaper advertisement from the same period, a retail food company in Atlanta marketed Campbell’s condensed soups as the solution to “the servant problem” saying, “The cook can’t spoil the soup…Her part is just [to add] ‘hot water.’” Such images encouraged the view that white women could not perform kitchen work without help, in this case in the form of consumer products. This perception—that of a hapless white housewife dependent upon inadequate black labor—helped sell a wide range of newly available food products.

Although advertisers agreed that a solution to the “servant problem” could be found on store shelves, white middle-class women believed that they could, and should, take control over their own kitchens. In doing so, they emphasized a scientific approach to cooking and housekeeping. Beginning with the white middle class, scientific cooking changed the way that women gained knowledge about their principle household duties. This new field, commonly referred to as domestic science or home economics, could not be learned at home through an informal apprenticeship and could not be based on trial and error. It required the discipline of a classroom and the precision of a laboratory. The American domestic science movement began in the northeast by professionals, mostly women, who were concerned about the effects of the industrializing nation on the home and family. Domestic scientists imagined that industry threatened the American family by moving productive work to factories and bringing costly manufactured products into the home. At the same time, however, they believed that modern thought and technology provided tools for women to organize their households more efficiently


and to rebuild the foundations of the home. This new professional discipline combined chemistry, nutrition, economics, and aesthetics to teach women how to run their households like a business. Although home economics had antebellum precursors, such as Catharine Beecher’s household manuals, the discipline took form at an upstate New York conference in 1899. Within a decade, it achieved many of the hallmarks of a scholarly discipline—organizing a professional association, publishing a journal, and developing a curriculum.

Although domestic science was a broad discipline, food formed a core component. Scientific cooking involved the application of principles and precision to the preparation of food. Progressive proponents of this new discipline compared the home to a factory and advocated scientific management in the kitchen—including the use of modern equipment, strict schedules, store-bought products, precise recipes, and standardized measurements as well as a knowledge of the chemical processes of nutrition and digestion. Because domestic science was developed to meet the needs of a salaried, consumer-oriented population, the urban middle class represented the first southern constituency to adopt this new culture. Woman’s club members embraced the movement because it helped them to better negotiate the South’s emerging consumer markets.


In addition to fitting the twentieth-century urban lifestyle, home economics also met the needs of this white-supremacist and class-conscious society. At a basic level, white southern women championed domestic science because they identified tools to help sustain white supremacy, establish class lines, and promote racial purity. They did not have to read too much into its principles to draw out these ideas. The architect of the national domestic science movement, Ellen H. Richards, explicitly envisioned a profession that would help to improve the white race. During an initial naming controversy for the new discipline, Richards suggested the term euthenics. She explicitly saw it as a companion to, and improvement on, eugenics.

“Eugenics deals with race improvement through heredity,” Richards writes. “Euthenics deals with race improvement through environment.” In euthenics, Richards hoped to improve the “race”—in particular the white race—by imposing certain household standards that would improve the health, well-being, and overall circumstances of whites.50

The connection that Richards made between eugenics and euthenics, or domestic science, is significant for understanding the southern movement. Eugenics was a turn-of-the-century pseudo-science intended to improve the human race by preventing those who were not considered fit to reproduce from doing so. In the American South, eugenics focused primarily on improving the white race by confining the vaguely defined “feeble-minded” in mental institutions and through forced sterilization. Southern white club women understood and actively

supported this effort. In Louisiana and Georgia, among other southern states, white middle-class women took leading roles in lobbying for institutional and sterilization laws. Although such laws primarily affected poor whites, they were nevertheless racist in intent. They aimed to build a stronger white race by preventing those who were thought to degenerate the race from breeding. For the southern white women who supported eugenics, domestic science represented a more affirmative approach to achieving the same ends by ensuring that white children received proper nutrition and healthy food. Moreover, it was an approach that white women could control in their own homes and communities.

Scientific cooking supported the South’s racial and class hierarchy in a variety of ways. Implementing its principles started with a properly arranged kitchen. The kitchen needed to be located near the pantry and dining room to save the time and energy of the server and to make sure that foods were served at the appropriate temperature. A proper housekeeper stocked her kitchen with “necessary kitchen equipment,” including a wide variety of utensils, pans, dishes, towels, cookbooks, and furniture as well as modern conveniences such as running water, an ice-cream freezer, refrigerator, and electric toaster. She purchased foods as an informed consumer selecting, for example, only a fresh, choice cut of meat and obtaining it at a reasonable price. All of these decisions had to be made before the homemaker performed or supervised any actual cooking or food preparation.

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In addition to keeping the kitchen and managing the shopping, a middle-class housewife was responsible for meal planning, which required an understanding of food chemistry, nutrition, and digestion. The knowledgeable housekeeper planned her family’s meals according to scientific standards by considering the chemical composition of each food and the nutritional needs of each family member based on their age, gender, and occupation. A young person generally needed more tissue-building proteins than an older person while a family member who worked outside needed more foods that generated energy than an office worker. In this way, food itself became gendered. Energy-generating and muscle-building foods, such as red meat, potatoes, and other heavy starches, became associated with men and their particular roles within society. Lighter foods, such as salads, sandwiches, and so-called “dainties,” became associated with women and their assumed lighter duties and responsibilities.53

To prepare food for home consumption, domestic science advocated cooking foods to improve their appearance, flavor, and digestibility as well as to destroy harmful bacteria. Complicated home economics recipes served several purposes. First, they took into account the best way to prepare meats, vegetables, and other foods considering the chemical changes that occurred in the food based upon the manner of application of heat. For example, some foods might be made more digestible through the process of boiling; whereas, other foods would be made less so.54 Second, domestic science recipes standardized measurements and clarified recipes to avoid confusion. Older cookbooks often used antiquated or vague measurement standards. Mary Randolph’s recipe for rice waffles calls for “two gills of rice…and] three gills

53 Atlanta Woman’s Club, Atlanta Woman’s Club Cook Book, 10-11.

of flour” and her corn meal bread recipe called for “a piece of butter the size of an egg.”

By contrast, domestic science cookbooks standardized measurements using teaspoons, tablespoons, cups, etc. with associated measuring spoons and cups that women could purchase and rely upon to be exact.

In addition to making recipes easier to follow, scientific cooking encouraged variety in the southern diet to ensure that people received sufficient nutrition and to make cooking and meals more interesting. Most devotees insisted that drudgery and monotony at mealtimes prevented people from receiving proper nutrition. Finally, the primary purpose of domestic science recipes was to make food look and taste better. Taste and presentation were not considered to be merely aesthetic but were also thought to contribute to better digestion because “the tempting appearance or flavor of a food increases the flow of saliva and digestive juices, thereby adding to the ease of digestion.” In this way, domestic scientists took what had previously been considered an art, the preparation, taste, and appearance of food, and turned it into a science. Although new consumer products had simplified a housewife’s responsibilities to some extent, scientific cooking imposed a strict regime of rules and requirements to ensure that its adherents could be identified and distinguished from those who did not belong.

For meals that required no actual cooking home economists still implemented intricate recipes that served many of the same purposes. Salads represented a staple of domestic science fare and usually required little to no cooking. Older southern cookbooks paid little attention to salads and offered few recipes. The Young Housewife’s Counselor and Friend, published in 1875

55 Randolph, Virginia Housewife, 141.


by Mary Ann Bryan Mason, provides a recipe for chicken salad and for a dressing (roughly approximating mayonnaise) that could be used on “lettuce, slaw, tomatoes, lobster, cucumbers, celery, etc.” Mason offered no exact directions or precise ingredients and invited the cook to throw the salad together in any configuration she saw fit.\(^{58}\) Such ambiguity did not work for domestic scientists a generation later. Salads were considered to be a necessary food for daintier feminine appetites and represented a staple of club luncheons as well as an appetizer for formal dinners.

Scientific cookbooks usually included a large number of salad recipes and emphasized their preparation and presentation. The *Athens Woman’s Club Cook Book* includes over forty different recipes for salad or salad dressing—all of which involved precise combinations of fruits, vegetables, meats, cheeses, mayonnaise, and in some cases gelatin.\(^{59}\) The *Atlanta Woman’s Club Cook Book* includes a recipe for the inappropriately named “As You Like It” salad that consisted of only four ingredients—tomatoes, lettuce, mayonnaise, and boiled eggs. These ingredients had to be combined in a very specific manner to properly construct the salad. The cook peeled the tomatoes, hollowed out a portion of the center, and stored them on ice until time to serve. Just before serving, the cook filled the center of the tomato with mayonnaise and one-half of a boiled egg so that “the rounded top [of the egg] rose a little above the tomato.” The hostess served the finished dish on a lettuce leaf.\(^{60}\) The exact combination of ingredients and instructions for serving the finished product made this relatively simple dish more complicated.

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\(^{58}\) Mason, *Young Housewife’s Counselor*, 235-237.


\(^{60}\) Atlanta Woman’s Club, *Atlanta Woman’s Club Cook Book*, 62.
In this way, its proper preparation and presentation helped to distinguish those who belonged from those who did not.

White southerners contrasted this scientific approach to food preparation favorably against the cooking standards they imagined at work among the world’s black populations. Despite their reliance on black labor in the kitchen and their commitment to certain individual black cooks, the white middle class belittled African Americans in general for not using written recipes or exact measurements. In particular, white southern culture mocked the perceived illiteracy among black cooks which had resulted from lack of access and opportunity. The *Atlanta Constitution*, for example, described a cookbook as “[a] very useful book…[i]f only cooks knew how to read.” White American cooking was negatively described as “slip shod…as if a man had the stomach of a hog or ostrich.” Criticizing black domestic skills did not stop with African Americans at home. Unlike “white” cooking habits, which were considered to be changeable and learned, white southerners considered black food practices to be immutable and innate and believed that primitive food cultures existed among all black populations. A February 1908 *Atlanta Constitution* article erroneously described African food as plain, raw, and unprocessed: “It is eaten as it is found, with but little preparation.” These two opposing perceptions—white food practices interpreted to be methodical and scientific compared to

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African food practices described as unsystematic and plain—established “white” food as the normative and “black” as the other.64

Such a distinction in the kitchen mattered a great deal for white southern Progressives who bought into the power of science and experts. Diet was connected to morality, brain function, and mental capacity, so a population that was not considered to be capable of eating properly was considered inherently deficient in these areas as well. Citing the importance of cooking education at Georgia’s white female industrial school, the Milledgeville Union Recorder writes, “Let me know what a people eat, how they eat it, and I will tell you their character, their habits and their mental power.”65 By undermining the ability of Africans in general and African Americans in particular to cook properly—meaning that they did not cook according to scientific principles—white southerners established one basis for re-establishing white supremacy on terms beneficial to the white middle class.

White women imagined domestic science principles and the food produced by their use to be an inheritance from their white forebears in Europe. At a 1908 housekeeper’s exposition in Atlanta, organizers described salad as a French invention. Whether this assertion was accurate or not, the fact that southern domestic science devotees categorized it as such emphasized their understanding of the dish as a creation intended to feed the European, and therefore white, body.

The characterization of this important dish as European in nature connected these New South

64 The notion of marking food based on race or gender was not particularly new to the New South because many foods, such as chitterlings, pig’s feet, and other inexpensive fare had long been associated with the African American community. Likewise, antebellum southerners did not necessarily consider pork to be an entirely appropriate food for the diet of white elite women. However, southern understandings of racialized and gendered food play out differently in the twentieth century by serving to heighten middle-class anxieties in a South where black mobility and consumer markets became the norm.

women to a larger “white” world devoted to science, progress, and order. They also connected themselves to the international colonizing race responsible for establishing social order among so-called lesser races worldwide and established a justification for the white middle class to take similar action in the American South.

In the same way, a commitment to domestic science helped to separate these white women from the plantation kitchens that they envisioned to have been dominated by black laborers. At the turn of the century, urban white middle-class women held little nostalgia for past culinary traditions. In a 1915 column for the *Atlanta Constitution*, Isma Dooly describes Liddie, a young African American woman who cooked on a Georgia plantation, as an “artist” in the kitchen where she learned to cook in the old style from her mother.66 Idora McClellan Moore describes a similar visit to a plantation house where the cook, Mammy Judy served her white guests a large plantation dinner—“biscuit, an’ batty cake, an’ waffles, an’ fried chicken”—and sent Sarah Ann to the back yard beforehand to slaughter a fresh chicken.67 Dooly and Moore observed these scenes as culinary tourists. They identified plantation-style cooking as quaint but old. For them and the many urban middle-class white women like them, the plantation kitchen worked for a different time period, but had no purpose in modern society. This understanding helped to establish white women as the moral authority in their households in a time when reasserting white supremacy seemed primary.

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The white middle class also attempted to create a level of separation between themselves and rural foods traditionally associated with African Americans. This is not to say that white women did not consider themselves or their food to be southern. On the contrary, the Atlanta Woman’s Club claimed that their cookbook “specializes in typical southern recipes.” But they actually downplay rural foods, such as corn and pork, generally associated with the South. For example, although the cookbook provides a good index with headings listed by food type—such as “Chicken,” “Beef,” “Lamb,” and “Fish”—there is no “Pork” heading. Pork recipes, including instructions for preparing pork chops, ham, and bacon dishes, are given throughout the cookbook, but there is only one individual index listing for pork. Also, there is no recipe for that most southern of dishes, chitterlings.68 Similarly, there are only two recipes that include grits or hominy as compared to Mason’s 1875 cookbook with five hominy recipes and a long history of hominy to describe its unique southern-ness going back to the first English southern settlement, the lost colony of Roanoke.69

Domestic scientists dressed up other rural foods in strict rules and recipes designed to redefine them as appropriate for consumption by whites. The Atlanta Woman’s Club Cook Book includes twenty-five different recipes for sweet potatoes each with a listing of ingredients and instructions.70 Some recipes called for modern food products such as marshmallows. Compare this to the five methods (not specific recipes) given for cooking sweet potatoes by Mason’s 1875 cookbook.71 Domestic science devotees prepared vegetables in ways that would have horrified

68 Atlanta Woman’s Club, Atlanta Woman’s Club Cook Book, Index.
69 Atlanta Woman’s Club, Atlanta Woman’s Club Cook Book, 38; Mason, Young Housewife’s Counselor, 229-232.
70 Atlanta Woman’s Club, Atlanta Woman’s Club Cook Book, 21-26.
71 Mason, Young Housewife’s Counselor, 228-229.
their southern forebears. Mason considered cooked celery to be “a barbarism.” But the Atlanta Woman’s Club proudly offered Honorary Life President Mrs. Irving Thomas’s recipe for creamed celery which involved boiling the celery until it could be mixed with a cream sauce. Downplaying some rural foods and dressing up others represented another attempt by white southern club women to recast southern food as the providence of whites distinct from plantation lore in the first few decades of the twentieth century.

White middle-class women also used scientific cooking to elevate themselves above poor whites. From the standpoint of the white middle class, nutrition and pure food were important to prevent the degeneration of the race. In the middle-class home, proper food and nutrition was thought to maintain the productivity, purity, and thereby the supposed superiority of white bodies. The supposed ability to regenerate the race with proper food, or alternatively to degenerate the race with improper sustenance, reveals an exaggerated importance attached to the white body. In the 1940s, white southern liberal Lillian Smith describes this importance in terms of religion, health, and morality. Religion played a part in caring for the white body because the body was given by God and therefore, it was a religious imperative to keep the body healthy. According to Smith, southerners tended to the health of the white body through a series of important rituals including “taking baths, eating food, exercising, and having daily elimination.” The white body related to morality because putting the wrong thing into the body was not simply unhealthy; it was immoral.

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72 Mason, *Young Housewife’s Counselor*, 233.

73 Atlanta Woman’s Club, *Atlanta Woman’s Club Cook Book*, 191.

74 Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, 87-89.
This explanation of southern cultural understandings of the white body during Smith’s childhood sheds light on the importance of food to the white body. “[E]ating food” constituted one of several activities in which southerners engaged to regulate the health of the white body, according to Smith.  

75 But for those middle-class mothers focused on building healthy white bodies to contribute to the race, consuming the “right” types of food was important to maintaining racial purity. These women assumed that consuming nutritious, pure food would help to build strong white children and thereby contribute to a stronger white race. Southern cookbooks encouraged this image focusing on the family, presumably the white family, and the nutrition that each family member needed to be strong. The 1928 cookbook published by the Georgia Branch of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, *P.T.A. Interpretations of Food*, focuses on how white middle-class mothers could build strong children and families through the appropriate use of food starting in the womb. The Georgia P.T.A. interpreted the responsibility for building strong white families to be a new one for white women but an important duty nonetheless. One nostalgic recipe for “Mammy’s Mush Bread” explains “[t]his recipe is dedicated to the old colored mammies, whose pleasure and duty it was to administer to the wants and needs of the mistress of the household, in the ‘Fore de war days.’”  

76 In other words, the plantation kitchen had put care for the white family in black hands, but modern food practices placed this responsibility with the white mother. The P.T.A. cookbook, like other southern cookbooks of its day, relied on home economics experts to advise the white mother on how best to build the white bodies under her care.

75 Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, 87.

In an age of increased consumerism, pure food became a significant political and social issue. With a large number of families no longer raising and preserving their own foods, the fear of adulterated products grew. At the same time, industry created new products and additives that may or may not have been healthy. An 1894 *Atlanta Constitution* article described the dangers of adulterated products:

> It is appalling to think of the wholesale adulteration of almost everything entering into human consumption, and every year brings forth new articles thus contaminated…Buckwheat…is composed of meal, low grade wheat and rye flour and…sweepings from the mill floor; coffee…beans being molded from pastes that are variously made of coffee grounds, roasted bread crusts, dried turnips, clay, beef blood, dye, beans and rye…there are baking powders that are composed of starch, alum, and phosphoric acid…pepper and mustard are powerless powders of flour, nut shells, rice and bakers’ refuse.  

In unregulated consumer markets, southerners had good reason to worry about adulterated food. But white southern women interpreted pure food to mean more than simply unadulterated products. Pure food meant food fit for consumption by white bodies. In this way, pure food contributed to racial purity.

Domestic scientists considered pure food and adequate nutrition, as defined by the strict standards of turn-of-the-century home economics instruction, to be essential to proper mental and moral functioning. They assumed that people who did not eat properly would be deficient in these areas. In 1908, the Atlanta housekeepers’ exposition offered lectures on salads for the price of one dollar. Organizers described an “improperly prepared” salad as “indigestible.”

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fact, the only thing that would make these salads truly “indigestible” would be if the mayonnaise spoiled. Certainly, however, women did not pay one dollar to learn that mayonnaise needed to be kept cool. Instead, they used the term “indigestible” to mean something much broader than its literal interpretation. They used the term to describe a food that was not fit to be ingested. Although a poorly prepared salad might be physically digestible, it was not worthy to become a part of the white body. White women envisioned the properly prepared, nutritious foods cooked according to domestic science principals to be the only fare fit for white consumption. Like eugenics, they thought this process would create a stronger race by focusing on what each individual white body contributed to the whole.

As Lillian Smith describes, white middle-class southerners considered what went into the white body to be significant and believed that consumption affected not just a body’s health but implicated racial identity as well. This point is best illustrated by considering the clay-eating practiced by a small number of lower-class southerners. In various isolated parts of Maryland, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, a few black and white southerners made a habit of eating dirt for both sustenance and pleasure. Mostly mountain folk, clay- or dirt-eaters, as they are commonly called, fed on a white or yellow oily clay, called kaolin, that had a subtle but sweet taste. Some clay-eaters rolled the clay into a small ball that dissolved in their mouths. Others chewed and swallowed the substance raw. Still others preferred to cook the clay until it became hard and crumbled in their mouths.80

Journalists and writers who observed the practice revealed a simultaneous fascination and revulsion with the custom. Fascination stemmed from the exotic, global nature of clay-eating

among cultures considered to be “primitive” and “tropical,” such as Asians, Africans, and Native Americans. The *Montgomery Advertiser* informed readers that women and children of Siam considered a certain type of clay to be a “delicious dainty” and that “no means of persuasion” would convince the “negroes of Guinea” to halt the practice.⁸¹ Such discourse marked those who ate dirt as part of an exotic or even foreign culture. Closer to home, white observers seemed to include black clay-eaters as part of this exotic “other” because they rarely criticized African Americans who practiced the custom.⁸²

White southern clay-eaters, on the other hand, received a great deal of public criticism for the habit. Journalists applied a variety of epithets to white dirt-eaters, including “indolent,” “worthless,” “barbarian,” “miserable specimens of humanity,” and “the lowest type of the white race.” From the perspective of the white middle class, the custom affected more than just individual health and well-being; it related to the racial status of those involved and as a result threatened the purity of the southern white race. White observers consistently contrasted a white clay-eater’s physical appearance with that of a non-clay-eating, lower-class white. The former

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was most often described as “bluish-yellow,” “yellow,” or “ashy” in complexion; the latter as “fresh pink and white,” “milky white,” or “red-faced.” Such terms identified one important marker of race—in this case the physical color or tone of the skin. The descriptions applied to white clay-eaters, such as yellow or ashy, were also commonly applied to persons of African ancestry. The complexions of those lower-class whites who did not consume clay—pink, white, and red—represented color words used to describe the tone of “white” skin. Lillian Smith recalls white skin as being “the source of…strength and pride…a symbol of purity and excellence…proves that you are better than all other people on earth.” Consumption of food that threatened such an important symbol also acted as a threat to what it symbolized. In this way, the consumption of the wrong type of food brought racial identity into question.

In addition to the physical appearance of white clay-eaters, white middle-class comments on their morality mirrored turn-of-the-century white perceptions of African American behavior. White journalists repeatedly described white clay-eating families as degenerate. Of white clay-eaters in eastern Maryland, the Atlanta Constitution wrote, “Their morals are lax, and a man and woman will live together and rear a family without troubling themselves about a marriage ceremony.” Contemporary white southerners would have recognized these moral judgments as


84 Smith, Killers of the Dream, 89.


48
similar to those made about African Americans. In a national magazine, one anonymous white woman from Alabama described the supposed sexual immorality of black women: “I…have never come in contact with but one negro woman whom I believed to be chaste. I have always had black servants…there was not one of them who did not have illegitimate children or was not herself an illegitimate; generally both were true.”86 The turn-of-the-century white middle class would have recognized sexual wantonness, a trait supposedly shared by white clay-eaters and African Americans, as another marker of race.

One journalist writing about white clay-eaters in North Carolina blatantly suggested that dirt-eating affected racial identity by suggesting “that [clay-eaters] may without exaggeration be spoken of as a race, so widely are they separated in the matters of social customs, education, and manner of living from all other classes of people in America.”87 In truth, clay-eaters of both races represented an extremely small percentage of the southern population. Yet, their cultural significance belied their numbers especially for white middle-class southerners who consumed stories about these odd mountain folk and their lifestyle. Clay-eating served as a cultural reminder of the tenuous nature of race at the turn of the twentieth century and of the significant relationship between consumption practices and race. For a white middle class newly dependent upon uncertain consumer markets for their sustenance, the peculiar complexion and behavior of white clay-eaters confirmed for them that the consumption of food related directly to racial standing or identity.


The racial significance of food consumption gave the pure food movement a special resonance among the southern white middle class. Like domestic science in general, southern woman’s clubs embraced the national movement to ensure the purity of the commercial food supply. One observer suggested that impure additives, such as the practice of adding clay to sugar and flour, might lead all Georgians to become clay-eaters. To avoid such an outcome white women attended pure food expositions where national manufacturers assured them of the safety of their products. In March 1900, the Atlanta Retail Grocers’ Association sponsored a pure food show at the local armory where national food manufacturers exhibited their products. This exhibition, designed after similar events in the North, marked one of many such occasions that occurred in cities across the South.

Another way to secure white adherence to pure food was by educating white women in domestic science principles. Middle-class women received cooking education from a number of sources. Woman’s clubs offered cooking classes at public forums, such as the 1908 housekeeper’s exhibition in Atlanta. National food manufacturers supported these efforts by sponsoring demonstrations or cooking lessons featuring their products. As new technology came into the market, education became even more important. In 1914, the Athens (Georgia)


Woman’s Club planned a series of classes to demonstrate how to cook with a gas stove. Women paid twenty-five cents for each lesson or one dollar for five lessons.⁹¹

Girls also learned how to cook at public industrial schools and later at public primary and secondary schools. Such instruction took place primarily, although not entirely, at white institutions. In 1891, Georgia became the first southern state to implement public scientific cooking education for white girls with the establishment of the Georgia Normal & Industrial College (GNIC). President J. Harris Chappell established cooking as one of several industrial departments and considered it to be important to a white girl’s education.⁹² Georgia established GNIC to train white women for occupations deemed appropriate for females such as teaching, stenography, sewing, and bookkeeping. The school offered domestic education, however, primarily to prepare students for their future roles as wives and mothers. Demonstrating the importance of such knowledge for all white girls, GNIC required every student to take cooking.⁹³

Other southern states followed Georgia’s lead by establishing similar programs. In 1898, the new Alabama Girl’s Industrial School in Montevallo offered a domestic science degree.⁹⁴

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⁹⁴ Lucille B. Griffith, Alabama College, 1896-1969 (Montevallo, 1969), 3-4. The industrial school at Montevallo changed names from the Alabama Girl’s Industrial School to the Alabama Girl’s Technical Institute to Alabama College to the University of Montevallo. For
Cooking programs at these schools followed national standards for scientific cooking education. GNIC explicitly copied the well-known cooking schools of the northeast especially in Boston where modern scientific cooking originated. These schools hired northern-educated teachers who taught the chemistry, economics, and nutrition of cooking. Chappell began his tenure as president of GNIC by touring northeastern cooking schools to understand how to establish such a novel program in Georgia.95

Southern white industrial schools trod a fine line between presenting the act of cooking as a suitable white occupation while separating their own students from black domestic servants. They achieved this balance by highlighting the enhanced standing a white woman held in the home if she knew how to cook. Despite the opinion of some white middle-class women that industrial schools should produce white domestic servants, the schools denied such an objective. Even though scientific cooking represented Chappell’s pet project at GNIC, he nevertheless ranked cooking at the bottom of the school’s various industrial departments based on “what they are worth in the market…as a means of making a livelihood.” Chappell considered cooking skills to be important to white women not for their “commercial value,” but because they benefitted the white home.96

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95 Georgia Normal & Industrial College, First Annual Announcement of Catalogue, 28.

Industrial education expanded scientific cooking into more rural areas and exposed a larger number of women to this new food culture. The young women who studied scientific cooking at Montevallo tended to be the daughters of small-town professionals or land-owning farmers. A typical student grew up in a nearby county and came from a family that had lived in Alabama for at least two generations. Most graduates married, presumably bringing a scientific understanding of cooking into their own homes, or taught school where they could spread this knowledge to the next generation. Mary Louise “Mamie” Meroney represents one such early Montevallo student. Born in 1891 to a Montevallo merchant and his homemaking wife, Mamie graduated from the Alabama Girls’ Industrial School in 1911 with a domestic science degree. After graduation, she taught at Montevallo until shortly after her marriage. In 1917, she married Dr. William Earle Wofford and moved to Cartersville, Georgia, where she raised a family presumably using domestic knowledge and cooking skills that she learned at school.

The Alabama Girls’ Industrial School attracted white girls from across the state and contributed to the spread of domestic science knowledge beyond the city. Vera Law was born in

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97 These conclusions are based on a family history review of Montevallo students who graduated with a degree in scientific cooking, home economics, or domestic science during the school’s first two decades. Names and fields of graduates obtained from annual school catalogs for the years 1891 to 1918. Fathers’ occupations and property ownership obtained by reviewing federal census records for the years 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930. Marital and employment status of graduates were obtained from alumnae lists in school catalogs, when available, and federal census records.

March 1895 in Elba, Alabama. Her father was a traveling salesman. In 1915, she graduated from Montevallo with a domestic science degree. There is no indication that Law ever married. By 1920, she had returned to Coffee County, Alabama, where she taught in the public schools along with her sisters Ella and Ada. In 1930, she lived in Pike County, Alabama, where she taught in the public schools there. This alternative path, travelled by Law and many other cooking-school graduates, enabled some southern white women to become financially independent in a gender-appropriate manner, but also allowed for the spread of domestic science knowledge to more rural areas where these educated women taught.99

In addition to industrial schools, domestic science knowledge spread from the urban middle-class to other southern populations through home demonstration work. In 1914, federal monies provided by the Smith-Lever Act funded female home demonstration agents to travel the countryside and teach homemaking to rural women. Modeling the approach that had proven successful in the cities, home demonstration agents helped rural women form clubs where home economics lectures and demonstrations took place. In the early twentieth century, rural lifestyles were much different than those of their urban counterparts. Country families generally relied on older technology such as wood-burning stoves and outdoor wells and remained more self-sufficient than town and city households. As a result, home demonstration agents included topics relevant to rural needs, such as growing and canning vegetables, dairying, raising poultry, and

selling home-produced products. In the rural South, home demonstration agents tried to turn nineteenth-century work into twentieth-century opportunity. They trained rural women to produce farm goods for sale and then to use the money they earned to participate in consumer markets. In addition to learning how to become a consumer, rural women learned about nutrition, recipes, and health just like their urban counterparts.\textsuperscript{100}

The intent of the Smith-Lever Act had been to improve rural life for all farming classes including land owners, tenants, and sharecroppers; however, in many cases poor whites and African Americans were skeptical about its purposes. Some farm families considered domestic work to be so easy that training was unnecessary. Others accused home demonstration agents of spying on behalf of landlords or the government. Some landowners did not want their tenants to participate in home demonstration clubs because they worried about the agents’ political motives. Race complicated the issue even further. Whereas Congress intended home demonstration monies to be accorded to both races, southern administrators inevitably gave African American women less support and funding. For all of these reasons, home economics instruction spread modern food practices into the rural South primarily benefitting wealthy white land-owning families.\textsuperscript{101}

Home demonstration also reveals the tendency of domestic science to make previously private spaces a matter of public concern. Rural kitchens became the subject of public concern when federal monies sent educated women into the countryside to change and monitor how food was prepared and served. But this facet of home economics extended beyond legislative concern.

\textsuperscript{100} Lynne Anderson Rieff, “‘Rousing the People of the Land’: Home Demonstration Work in the Deep South, 1914-1950,” (PhD diss., Auburn University, 1995), 50, 68, 72, 79, 81-82.

\textsuperscript{101} Rieff, “Rousing the People of the Land,” 69-72.
In southern cities and towns, displaying a mastery of domestic science skills represented one key characteristic of membership within the white middle class. Women who perfected the discipline’s recipes and serving suggestions displayed their achievement by holding luncheons, teas, and parties for all occasions. Women opened their kitchens and dining rooms to their peers for inspection and approval. In this way, private spaces became forums for public performances of white middle-class respectability as hostesses certified their allegiance to modern food practices. Society pages filled with lavish descriptions of such displays and learning to prepare a proper meal for such occasions started early. GNIC offered dining room training to its cooking students by inviting local guests from Milledgeville to lunch or dine at the school. Students created menus, set tables, served meals, and displayed proper etiquette for such occasions with prominent visitors looking on to judge their performances.\(^{102}\) Such displays in school and in local communities revealed a subtle change in the way women thought about their kitchens from the “olden days [when] the kitchen was apart from the house [to a modern perception where] the kitchen is a part of the house, and the most important part.”\(^{103}\)

As important as the kitchen had become to southern society, in the early part of the century modern food culture remained limited primarily to an educated or salaried elite. Home-front mobilization during World War I helped to disseminate this knowledge to a broader population. Again, Congress played a key role when it passed the Lever Food Control Act in August 1917 authorizing President Woodrow Wilson to take control of the nation’s food supply. Later that month, Wilson created the United States Food Administration and asked Herbert


Hoover to head the wartime agency designed to conserve American food supplies through a combination of compulsory and voluntary measures. Among other things, the Food Administration mobilized state home demonstration agents to implement food conservation efforts.\textsuperscript{104}

Voluntary food conservation efforts advocated by the Food Administration differed little from principles espoused by domestic scientists for the past two decades. Scientific cooking guidelines related to meal planning, nutrition, and food economy, at one time intended to stretch the family income, became patriotic commands for winning the war. Cities sponsored community kitchens where women learned food preparation and conservation techniques. On January 25, 1918, Birmingham celebrated the opening of a “Hoover Kitchen”—named in honor of the much revered federal administrator—where demonstration agents instructed ten students at a time on coal and gas ranges. Among other things, students learned how to use “substitution” products such as potatoes, peanuts, and soy beans in place of wheat. Manufacturers and other business interests encouraged these efforts by supplying free food, utilities, and other supplies. The Alabama Coal Operators Association funded visits to Birmingham for instructors to take food economy practices back to coal mining camps.\textsuperscript{105} Through such initiatives, the Food


\textsuperscript{105} “Report of Mary Feminear State Chairman of Home Economics and Food Conservation Food Administration Department,” January 28, 1918, folder 58, box 5, Correspondence of Richard M. Hbbie—1917, Records of the Alabama Food Administration, Southeast Region, National Archives Records Administration, Morrow, Georgia.
Administration allowed a more modern food culture to spread to lower socio-economic communities probably for the first time in the South.

Still, prejudice and discrimination continued to restrict African American opportunities. White women encouraged black servants to take cooking lessons for the purpose of improving white homes and families. But white employers subscribed to a mistaken notion that African Americans did not have the capacity to practice domestic science principles on their own account. While white households attempted to safeguard racial purity through the implementation of knowledge and scientific methods, out of perceived necessity they also continued to rely on African American labor in the kitchen. In 1906, Booker T. Washington pointed out that “everything depended upon to make blood and muscle and bone and health and prosperity is at the mercy of the [black] cook.”106 White women agreed with this assumption and worried that this reliance threatened the well-being of the white family.

Again, domestic science offered a solution. New technology, food products, and kitchen appliances helped ensure that no hands, black or white, ever had to touch the food. The use of baking powder to make biscuits rise did away with the necessity to knead the dough for extended periods of time. Electric mixers and the wide variety of spoons and other utensils that stocked the modern kitchen had a similar effect. Packaged products promised sanitary production facilities where clean machines, not humans, prepared the food. One cracker company boasted that their product was “cleaner than bread because the material is mixed by machinery and barely touched

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with the hands."107 Modern consumer products promised a solution to domestic problems that southern society had not even known it had.

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The turn-of-the-century South represented a region where food culture was in transition. The way that the white salaried class, in particular, thought about food and cooking was changing from a system based on tradition to one based on scientific knowledge. New food culture served to disparage other southern constituencies such as African Americans and lower-class whites. Lack of access and financial resources prevented those in these two groups from participating at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, as a perceived inheritance of the “white” world, the white lower class found itself in a better position to emerge into this new culture when their situation improved. Despite implementation of this new culture into many white southern middle-class households, the truth was that African American servants supplied most of the food-related labor in these homes. Although the domestic sphere was important to the development of this new food culture, southerners did not limit themselves to eating at home. The turn-of-the-century South saw an explosion of public eating spaces, and the middle class identified another opportunity to mold society in its own image.

In the Annie Fellows Johnston novel, *The Little Colonel: Maid of Honor* (1906), Rob Moore meets Mary Ware and her sister Joyce at the train station and takes them to Benedict’s, a popular Louisville eatery, for lunch. Mary has never eaten at a restaurant. To hide her inexperience, she carefully mimics Joyce’s actions. An African American waiter serves the first course. Mary looks around the restaurant to take in her surroundings. The restaurant consists of a long room with an elaborately decorated soda fountain where patrons perch on high stools to enjoy drinks and food. On the far side of the room, black waiters set tables with starched white tablecloths, bone-white china, and real silverware. Beautiful crystal chandeliers powered by electricity illuminate the room, and decorative electric wall sconces attached to square columns provide additional light. Electric fans cool the diners.

Rob, Mary, and Joyce sit at a table near the soda fountain allowing Mary a better look at the elongated mirrors behind the counter reflecting young “Gibson girls” on the other side of the room. The restaurant embodies Mary’s pre-conceived notions about the South. She tells her host, “I’ve always thought of Kentucky as a place full of colored people and pretty girls and polite men.” Benedict’s fits her imagined South perfectly: “[I]t certainly seems to be swarming with colored waiters...[and] the ladies at the tables in front of me and the ones reflected in the mirrors are good-looking and stylish.” Mary compares Rob to character in a Thomas Nelson Page story:
“I know that everybody in the South can’t be as nice as they are, but whenever I think of Kentucky and Virginia I think of people like that.”

Johnston set this scene at Benedict’s Restaurant, a real establishment in turn-of-the-century Louisville, Kentucky. The fictional character, Mary Ware, represents many young girls of her day who had never eaten at a restaurant. Until World War II, most southerners lived their entire lives without enjoying Mary’s experience. At the same time, however, public eating establishments were becoming a part of the South’s urban landscape. Like Mary, many turn-of-the-century restaurant patrons wanted to see these public spaces as microcosms of their image of southern society and culture. Such patrons included the white elite of southern society—business owners, politicians, bankers, journalists, men’s club members, and their wives—representing the same racial and social status as advocates of pure food and domestic science reform. From a socio-economic perspective early devotees to southern restaurant culture were primarily the white upper-middle-class men who propelled economic expansion in the New South and, to a lesser extent, their wives. But many lower-level white collar workers would likely have partaken in this consumption experience at some point. The types of eating places this social group frequented included fine dining establishments specializing in expensive food and drink, more moderate restaurants offering home-cooked fare that in some cases were operated by churches.

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109 For purposes of this chapter, this entire cadre will be referred to as the “middle-class” or “white middle class” unless a more specific designation is necessary.
and clubs for charitable purposes, and smaller cafes with limited menus that solicited a lunch
crowd.\textsuperscript{110}

In the Old South, restaurant dining would have been limited to the planter elite and even
then on relatively few occasions. In New South cities, restaurant diners used this consumption
experience to create new urban identities that recognized their status as the region’s new elite.
For these consumers, the private and public realms intersected in eating establishments because
they represented public places where one of the most personal of activities took place. These
white southern professionals tried to separate themselves as a class from the more diverse bi-
racial cities and towns in which they actually lived. The white middle class transferred food
culture developed in the home—such as the use of African American labor and the veneration of
white womanhood—into public spaces in which eating took place. In this way, the white middle
class projected their own class identity into these spaces and regulated public activity through
cultural means.

At the same time, however, public places represented a potential threat to cherished white
middle-class ideals related to the home and family. They worried about a variety of alleged
public immorality that might threaten the white family, and public restaurants represented
particular points of entry for vice. Of the many new public spaces that emerged in southern cities
and towns—including railroads, train depots, department stores, and the like—public eating
places represented public venues where a primarily domestic activity took place. Home
continued to be the primary site of dining for southerners which meant that any potential new
food culture developing in public places represented an active threat to the private concerns.

\textsuperscript{110} This assessment is based primarily on restaurant advertisements and listings in city
directories.
White southerners respected a deeply ingrained commitment to protect their bodies—and thereby their race—from potential sites of pollution. This commitment played out in the home with pure food and domestic science reform. In the public sphere, protection from bodily pollution necessitated regulation in the form of health codes and racial segregation laws. Such laws protected racial purity by ensuring that pure food entered the white body in the public sphere and by protecting white women—the source of racial purity—from perceived dangers, particularly those related to white female sexuality. White southerners perceived an inherent sexual tension in public eating places based on a deep connection between food, home, and sexuality. Eating and sex both involved intensely personal activities that entailed consumption in its most intimate form. In both cases, the human body consumes a substance which thereby becomes a part of the body.

Thus impurity from either food or sex threatened to soil the entire whole. In the domestic sphere, both acts assumed certain gender roles considered to be static and natural. The process of moving one of these intimate activities, namely eating, into the public sphere necessarily implicated the other creating a certain amount of sexual tension in public eating places especially where white women were involved. To this end, the white middle class did not trust a new, increasingly mobile southern public to uphold deeply held cultural mores in the public sphere. Through their participation in state legislatures, city councils, and women’s clubs, they imposed health and racial segregation laws in an attempt to maintain social control. But such measures also served to uphold middle-class morality and to mold public eating places in their own image.\footnote{This argument elaborates on Grace Elizabeth Hale’s brief comment, in \textit{Making Whiteness}, that restaurants “made public the decidedly home-centered rituals of eating” (187).}
If Johnston had set Mary Ware’s story in the antebellum South, it is unlikely that Ware would have had the experience of dining in a public place. Before the Civil War, and for most southerners well after the conflict ended, eating represented an activity that took place at home. To the extent that eating took place outside of the home, the food was prepared at home and consumed elsewhere—in the fields, at school, or on the road. For wealthier antebellum southerners, hospitality was based on a circle of kinship and acquaintances. Such southerners often dined outside of their own homes for leisure, companionship, and necessity, but such activity generally took place in the private residences of friends and family. In the years preceding the outbreak of Civil War, Sarah Clayton Jeter, a planter’s wife from Opelika, Alabama, often entertained family and friends for tea and dinner. Her father Nelson Clayton, mother Sarah Carruthers Clayton, Cousin Salley, Dr. Denniston, and other neighbors and acquaintances represented frequent guests and often enjoyed the Jeter’s hospitality at mealtime. In turn, the Jeters dined at the homes of their friends and relatives. 

Similarly, Mary Chestnut often dined at the homes of those close to her acquaintance. In 1862, Chesnut enjoyed her move to Columbia, South Carolina, after living in the “social desert…of Camden.” In Columbia, she regularly dined, supped, and took tea at the homes of friends and neighbors and noted that dinners “are the climax of the good things here…the most hospitable place in the world.”

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112 Sarah Matilda Clayton Jeter, Diary and Correspondence, folder 281.1.1.1.1, Birmingham Archives, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

invited her to stay for meals and then called for her husband to join her. She raved about the quality of the fare—“mutton, beef, poultry, cream, butter, eggs, fruits, and vegetables”—which was usually brought to town from a country plantation. Her hosts inevitably served dinner using their best silver, china, and tableware even though “they have not had time to alter things or add because of the additional guests.”114 In Richmond too Chesnut raved about the quality of the private dinners she attended. At a dinner party at her cousin’s house in 1863 in honor of young Wade Hampton, the quality of wine available in Richmond’s private wine cellars pleased her, even during a time of increasing hardship for the Confederacy: “If everything in the Confederacy were only as truly good as the old Mr. Chesnut’s wine-cellars!”115

In the event of a long trip, antebellum travelers also took advantage of the hospitality of family, friends, or acquaintances. Southerners respected the personal nature of eating and relied upon family and friends for sustenance. Travelers who did not have personal relationships in a particular locality depended on vicarious associations by carrying “letters of introduction” to commend them to others. Such letters led to invitations for meals, housing, and anything else that the traveler might need including a letter for use at a later destination. On a lengthy trip through the South in the 1830s, the Englishman J. S. Buckingham depended on letters of introduction for invitations to private residences for dinner parties, meals, and sometimes lodging. Many Savannah, Georgia, locals entertained Buckingham and his party for dinner based on letters of introduction he received from acquaintances in Charleston. In turn, his Savannah hosts gave him a letter to deliver to Judge Hale in Augusta where Buckingham and his party dined and lodged

114 Woodward, Mary Chesnut’s Civil War, 347.
115 Woodward, Mary Chesnut’s Civil War, 484.
while in that town. In Augusta, he received the hospitality of a number of prominent locals causing him to note, “[T]he resident families seemed to vie with each other as to who could show us the greatest kindness and attention.” In more rural areas, southerners often opened their homes as temporary boarding houses that served meals to passing stage coach passengers and other travelers. A few houses offered such hospitality for free, but more likely travelers paid for the service—generally twenty-five cents for a single meal or one dollar for supper, lodging, breakfast, and horse-boarding.

Despite this dependence on private residences, public venues, such as hotels and steamships, also hosted a public table for meals. The public table was, in fact, exactly that—public. Guests dined together at one long table and ate a set menu for a set price at set times. Public tables rarely offered a bill of fare or menu because patrons took whatever had been prepared for them. Public tables often served the same food for every meal with little variety—usually a greasy portion of pork or bacon, some form of corn meal, coffee, and very few fresh vegetables. Antebellum hotels provided such service under the “American plan,” meaning that meals were included in the price of boarding, so travelers had little reason to look beyond their immediate surroundings for their next meal. In other cases, meal times coincided with the


118 Amos Andrew Parker, *Trip to the West and Texas...In the Autumn and Winter of 1834-5* (Concord, NH: White & Fisher, 1835), 275.


arrival of a stage coach so that travelers might eat at a hotel’s public table without staying there.  

On southern steamships, the captain decided when and how meals would be served and eaten. Traveling up the Alabama River from Mobile to Montgomery, Buckingham noticed that the dining schedule followed a strict social hierarchy. Planter-class passengers joined the captain for the first seating. Poor whites who worked aboard ship ate next. Finally, slaves joined the ship’s black workers for dinner. There was no room for anyone who fell outside of these categories. On Buckingham’s trip, confusion arose surrounding the meals of two affluent free black female passengers. They ranked below the planter elite and poor whites, but above black slaves. The captain seated them in the pantry. Metaphorically, they sat outside the Deep South racial hierarchy and so physically they were seated away from the public table altogether. This decision, along with the judgment as to where and when to seat everyone else on board, rested with the individual captain because Buckingham had experienced different dining arrangements on other steamships.  

There was no standard cultural practice or legal regulation that designated where or when each passenger would sit for meals.

Public tables on steamships and elsewhere in the South were hit and miss—mostly miss—in terms of quality of fare and fellow diners. Buckingham often complained about the quality of the food and the unsanitary condition of the facilities. In Sparta, Georgia, where his stage coach stopped for dinner, Buckingham recalls, “[T]he sight of the public table prepared for the passengers was so revolting, that, hungry as we were after our long and cold ride, early rising, and violent motion, we turned away in disgust from the table, and made our dinner in the

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121 Buckingham, Slave States of America, 1:189-190.

122 Buckingham, Slave States of America, 1:480.
Throughout his travels in the South, Buckingham pondered how so many people could consume whatever was set before them without comment. He decided that Americans in general and southerners in particular simply had no experience in distinguishing between good and bad food. But poor food was not Buckingham’s only complaint. He frequently criticized filthy tables, broken dishes, rusty silverware, and the lack of a slop bowl at tea time.

Just as often, however, Buckingham complained about the quality of his dining companions. Because rich and poor frequently ate at the same public table for the same price, Buckingham took many meals alongside people he considered to be the dregs of human society. On board ship to Charleston, Buckingham recalls, “The passengers who assembled at the table with us, to the number of ten, were among the most vulgar, dirty, ill-bred, and uncultivated persons that it had ever been our lot to mingle with; and the prospect of sitting down three times a day to the same table with such a party, was a very unpromising one.”

As a wealthy white Englishman, Buckingham’s own prejudices against Americans because of their accommodation to slave ownership as well as the lower class of all societies no doubt affected his opinions on public dining. In Tallulah Falls, Georgia, Buckingham complained that he was required to eat at the same table with his own white “man servant” because it contravened his upper-class British sensibilities. Nevertheless, his experiences


126 Buckingham, *Slave States of America*, 1:5.

illustrate an important point about public dining in the antebellum South. There were very few, if any, cultural or legal standards that governed how public dining took place. Wealth may have, or may not have, enabled those of means to dine in luxury among persons of their own class. But as Buckingham’s memoir reveals, wealth, class status, even race did not establish any particular standard for dining out in the Old South. The quality of fare, service policies, and other features of the dining experience depended upon the uncertain availability of fare and, more importantly, the individual judgment and capability of independent proprietors.

This is not to say that some antebellum southerners had no opportunity for dining out. In larger antebellum cities, restaurants existed for travelers and locals to frequent and enjoy. New Orleans, Richmond, Charleston, and other significant antebellum southern cities were noted for their fine dining establishments even before the Civil War. Buckingham raved about the hotel dining rooms in New Orleans, some of which served hundreds of patrons at one time. It is easy to speculate that such establishments with fine chandeliers and large columned ballrooms would typically host only the wealthiest of New Orleans society. But even the finest hotel restaurants in New Orleans, with large, decorative, and comfortable accommodations, offered service at a public table with no privacy and little flexibility with regard to dining arrangements.  

Richmond too reportedly had fine dining accommodations in the antebellum years, many of which were named after the proprietor such as Tom Griffin’s and Charles Thompson’s. Such establishments offered good fare to the antebellum elite often from local sources. Thomas Joseph Macon recalls, “When a gentleman entered a restaurant [in Richmond] and ordered a piece of roast beef, or a steak, he got home-killed beef, fat, tender and rich in flavor, and when he called for oysters they were set before him cooked with pure country butter, or genuine fresh hog’s

128 J. S. Buckingham, Slave States of America, 1:331-336.
lard.” The Chesnut family regarded Charleston’s restaurants so favorably that they sent their enslaved black cook Romeo there to train.

In addition to fine dining restaurants, many antebellum towns offered billiard halls where men ate, drank, played games, and gambled. Some billiard halls, such as Mr. Montague’s in Raleigh, North Carolina, catered toward a lower class crowd by offering a free lunch for anyone ordering drinks. Such places no doubt represented rougher environments where men drank, gambled, and fought, sometimes to the point of serious injury or death. Other gaming places sought a more elite crowd, such as Able’s Senate in Huntsville, Alabama. Able’s served oysters and fresh fish in the land-locked city and solicited the business of well-dressed “gentlemen.”

Despite the existence of fine-dining restaurants and billiard halls in some antebellum cities, the undoubtedly significant financial resources of people like Buckingham rarely purchased a good meal or private accommodations. In many places, it simply did not exist at any price. Overall, the antebellum South provided very few options and no real standards for public dining. Like all public eating places in the antebellum South, the leisure experience of dining out was rarely the point, and no established cultural mores or government directives dictated either the management’s fare or the patrons’ behavior.


130 Woodward, Mary Chesnut’s Civil War, 347.


132 Parker, Trip to the West and Texas, 107-108, 175.

After the Civil War, southerners and transplanted northerners began to open and patronize public eating places in the new cities and railroad towns. In the late nineteenth century, many of these public places represented more modern versions of their antebellum precursors. In this way, they allowed the New South elite to dine in the way that southern planters had been accustomed. Public eating facilities catering to travelers became permanent, standardized, and public facilities. They advertised along popular railroad lines epitomizing the new mobility of the New South. The railroads that spread throughout the South in the twentieth century actually became mobile restaurants that physically carried the concept of eating in public across the region in the form of dining cars. Southerners who had never eaten in a restaurant or even seen a public eating establishment in person gained familiarity with the concept from afar by glimpsing the white-coated African American waiters as they served patrons on rail cars that whisked through small southern towns.

In the fictional town of Whistle Stop, Alabama, Ninny Threadgoode recalls watching the Silver Crescent pass through town on its way to New York in the evenings just as supper was being served “with the colored waiters dressed up in their starched white jackets and black leather bow ties, with the finest flatware and silver coffeepots, and a fresh rose with baby’s breath on each table.”

134 In this way, the same trains that brought national consumer goods into southern kitchens also brought the leisure experience of eating out into the southern imagination. Regardless of social class or race, southerners had the opportunity to catch glimpses of this spectacle. White southerners like Ninny Threadgoode who noticed the dining cars as they traveled through town would have recognized cultural similarities between the experience of

dining on the train and eating at their own kitchen table, such as the use of African American labor to serve the dining public.

Ninny Threadgoode represents the many turn-of-the-century southerners captivated by relatively new consumer spaces. Although dining cars may have been common in other regions, they did not become widespread in the Deep South until after 1900. In the late nineteenth century, the more limited southern railroads clung to old patterns of travel by making scheduled stops at mealtimes for passengers to eat at hotel or station dining rooms. Hotels responded by advertising the availability, but not necessarily the quality, of their meal service. In 1867, the American Hotel located near the Staunton, Virginia depot announced that “the eastward-bound train stops for breakfast and the westward-bound train for dinner.”¹³⁵ Train passengers presumably had few dining options so hotels had no need to brag about the quality or value of their fare. Potential customers only had to know that food was available.

Lengthy stops to accommodate meal service no doubt caused much delay and consternation to the traveling public. Railroads expected passengers to eat quickly and to board the train immediately when its departure was announced. Passengers who desired the large meal or leisurely dining experience of southern legend were either out of luck or likely to cause a spectacle by delaying the train even further. One inconsiderate passenger made headlines in Birmingham, Alabama, when he refused to board the train until he had finished a large meal at the station dining room. Waiters reportedly whispered behind their hands at the passenger’s brazenness when he refused to re-board the train, but the conductors responded by holding the

train’s departure until he finished his meal.¹³⁶ Until 1899 passengers traveling from Birmingham to Washington aboard the Alabama Great Southern railroad stopped three times for meals. In addition to lengthening the trip, the twenty-minute stops no doubt limited the quality and enjoyment of the dining experience. In June 1899, the railroad added a “dining and observation car” providing the opportunity for a pleasant, more relaxing meal, at least for passengers who could afford the experience. Turn-of-the-century railroads also changed the manner in which they delivered dining services by eliminating the “table d’hote” or public table in favor of a la carte service to provide a more astute consuming public with greater choices.¹³⁷

Much like Ninny Threadgoode in Flagg’s novel, the southern public responded to the new dining cars with curiosity and fascination. In 1901, a number of Birmingham residents went to the railroad station to witness the arrival of a new dining car that served the Louisville and Nashville Railroad’s “Chicago and Florida Limited.” The railroad understood the public interest in dining cars because an employee travelled to Birmingham the day before to announce the car’s arrival and to solicit publicity for the event. Reporters and other guests examined the car before it moved on to Montgomery and reported on its decorative yet serviceable interior.¹³⁸ The look of dining cars may have captured the public’s attention as much or more than their function.

The Louisville and Nashville Railroad purposefully provided diners with a comfortable and


modern experience that enticed all of the senses. Passengers could see the beautiful polished mahogany wood that covered its interior walls and doors. Through large observation windows, they could view lovely and strange scenery as the train passed through countryside and small towns. They could feel the soft leather cushions that padded the dining-car chairs which, unlike other seats on board, could be moved out from under the table for passengers’ convenience. Over the constant murmur of the train, they could hear the low hum of electric fans and the flicker of lights powered by a special generator. They could smell the tantalizing aromas wafting from the small but modern kitchen and taste the delicious foods served on “imported linen, china, and cut glass.” The typical domed roof construction offered benefits to people on and off the train. For dining passengers, it provided additional light and ventilation and made the ceiling look higher. But for southerners who, like Ninny Threadgoode, contented themselves with admiring the dining car from afar, the dome allowed them to easily identify the object of their affection.139

Turn-of-the-century southern travelers possessed meal options beyond the iconic dining car as well. Southern hotels also catered to a new mobile population that needed to eat and wanted to partake in the leisure experience of dining. Much like southern railroad dining, the region’s hotel business changed in the early twentieth century as operators abandoned the American Plan in favor of the “European plan”—meaning that room prices did not include a meal.140 This trend occurred at hotels across the nation and, like train travel itself, reveals a southern traveler more connected with a national, cosmopolitan, and modern culture. Under this


new scheme, hotel rooms generally cost one and a half dollars per night (as opposed to the two dollars per night for American-plan rooms), and patrons purchased meals separately either at the hotel dining room or another eating place.

Starting around 1900, many hotels across the South from Virginia to Kentucky to Alabama advertised the European plan either as the only option or as an alternative. Moreover, hotels identified their new marketing strategy as one of many modern and upscale accommodations. In 1902, Montgomery, Alabama’s newest hotel, the Arlington, advertised the European plan along with its “new and fresh” architecture and furniture. Seven years later, the Lynnhaven hotel advertised its use of the European plan and boasted “Norfolk[, Virginia]’s latest and largest fire-proof hotel.” Management encouraged visitors to book reservations via telegraph. In 1913 Louisville, only the Willard Hotel still solely advertised the American plan, but the Willard was an older establishment that promised “Best in the City for the Money,” but no modern conveniences or advancements. The Willard Hotel also differed from many others because it catered to in-state travelers. For the modern, upscale southern hotel at the turn of the twentieth century, the new fee structure reigned.

This change encouraged southern hotels to make their restaurants more appealing because hungry well-to-do travelers now had options. They could eat in a railroad dining car, at their hotel, at another hotel, or at a separate restaurant. Turn-of-the-century hotels advertised the


142 Birmingham News, April 15, 1902.


144 Louisville Courier, Southern Prosperity Number, March 25, 1913.
quality of their fare and surroundings, not just the availability. In Louisville, the same hotels that
advertised the European plan also highlighted their in-house eating establishments claiming
“excellent cuisine” or “distinctly ‘the best place to eat.’” More dining choices also led to an
increase in the availability and popularity of restaurants not connected to a hotel or railroad. The
1903 Atlanta City Directory listed one hundred forty-four public eating places as compared to
twenty-three reported in 1878 just twenty-five years earlier. This increase represented an overall
increase in dining options, some of which would be frequented by the lower classes, but middle-
class dining establishments increased also, such as Durand’s Restaurant at the railroad depot
which opened in 1899 and the Empire Restaurant located in the Empire building which opened
in 1903. A multitude of changes contributed to this rise in Atlanta and similar increases in
other southern towns and cities. The New South represented a time of opportunity and mobility.
Southern cities and towns saw a great influx of people. Men who boarded away from a family
environment needed access to good, affordable meals. Many turn-of-the-century eating
establishments catered to this new salaried population and its cosmopolitan tastes.

Patrons who could afford to dine at Benedict’s Restaurant and similar establishments
across the South used the experience to nourish their inclusion in the white middle class. Late-
nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century restaurants offered the ultimate experience for a
population that reveled in conspicuous consumption. A new array of public eating establishments
offered choices in fare, eating times, ethnic cuisine, interior and exterior décor, and modern
amenities. In Louisville, Benedict’s competed with the Vienna Restaurant and Bakery, an

145 *Louisville Courier*, Southern Prosperity Number, March 25, 1913.

146 *Sholes’ Directory of the City of Atlanta for 1878* (Atlanta: A. E. Sholes, 1878), 413, 419; *Atlanta City Directory* (Atlanta: Thomas J. Maloney, 1899), 1472; *Atlanta City Directory* (Atlanta: Foote & Davies Co. and Joseph W. Hill, 1903), 1547-1548, 1572.
establishment that exuded Old-World elegance in its name, fare, and design. Originally opened in 1893 by Frank Erpeldinger, an Austrian immigrant, by 1905 the Vienna resided in a new three-story brick building in downtown Louisville that was both modern and decorative. Patrons dined at imported oak tables and chairs covered by fine white linens with the convenience of electric lights and comfort of ceiling fans. A second-floor kitchen and bakery prepared authentic Austrian breads and rolls. And on the third floor, patrons could choose from a selection of fancy pastries. The front façade of the building was decorated in a modern Art Nouveau style that announced the name of the restaurant with colorful ceramic tile and the building with beautiful stained glass.147 When Louisville diners ate at the Vienna Restaurant, they did much more than simply take in sustenance. They participated in a modern, cosmopolitan experience.

Restaurants allowed the new urban middle class to dine in an elegant environment suitable for an elite class. But the middle class also transplanted many of the eating mores developed at home to the public sphere.148 Among the similarities was the prevalence of African American labor. In Louisville, locals considered black restaurant labor, just like black domestic service, to be a natural use of supposed black servile talent. *Louisville Courier* reporter Malcolm W. Bayley considered African Americans to be superior southern cooks: “When it comes to country hams, from Virginia to Kentucky, be they roasted to a turn or cooked in a number of appetizing ways; chicken, fried Maryland style; okra, or gumbo, which is only prepared and in a


148 In *From Boarding House to Bistro*, Richard Pillsbury makes a similar point. But he uses the fact that dining out was similar to eating in as an excuse for people to not go out to eat. In fact, the commonalities between home and public dining may have served to encourage dining out among the urban middle class because it turned a novel experience into a familiar activity.
right and proper manner in the South; and a hundred and one other delectable dishes—all these are only to be done correctly and in an appetizing form by our dusky kings and queens of the kitchen.” Bayley’s assumption made black cooks an obvious choice for working in restaurant kitchens.

Nevertheless, turn-of-the-century white businessmen distrusted their public black workers as much as their wives distrusted black domestics at home. Despite his commendation, Bayley characterized black restaurant laborers as inherently dirty, lazy, and wasteful. Such pejoratives caused Bayley to believe that in the public sphere, as in the white home, black servants needed white oversight. Bayley quoted his wife, who his turn-of-the-century readers would assume had experience working with black servants in her own kitchen, when he wrote that black cooks “would bankrupt the average [white] family in no time, if allowed full sway. And as for cleanliness, it’s the hardest matter in the world to make them treat dirt as their enemy.” In an odd rejection of conventional thinking, however, Bayley asserted that eating out helped alleviate white fears about a supposedly filthy, wasteful black cook because “as long as we can’t see it, we don’t care how the kitchen looks, and as long as prices aren’t boosted we’re not particular about what they waste.”

African Americans of both genders labored in southern restaurants—cooking food in the kitchen; serving meals in the dining rooms; and bussing the white-clothed tables. But whereas African American women were common domestic servants, black men were considered to make particularly good restaurant servers, reflecting a continuing image that men belonged in the

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public sphere, even as laborers. Perceptions of black male servers offered contradictory images that reflected their uncertain position in southern foodways. White restaurateurs and customers celebrated black waiters as “faithful” servants. By the time Willis Rose, an 85-year-old African American waiter, died in 1924, he had served at the same Macon, Georgia, restaurant for fifty years. Rose’s obituary claimed that he “made it a rule to study men’s tastes,” and frequent customers reportedly waited until Rose could serve them even if it postponed their dinner.\(^{150}\)

Despite such professed reverence, like domestic servants, black restaurant waiters often suffered abuse and ridicule by their white employers or customers. In Montgomery, Alabama, one restaurant customer made fun of his black waiter for writing the wrong food item on his check. The diner had a sandwich and a cup of coffee, but when he received his check, the waiter had written “pie” instead of “sandwich.” When questioned, the waiter responded to the amusement of his white customer that pies cost the same as sandwiches, but that the word was easier to spell.\(^{151}\) Despite the white customer’s ridicule, this incident reveals a resourceful post-emancipation African American population that developed strategies to overcome a lack of opportunity and education that resulted from discrimination.

African American men also developed strategies to dispel disparaging comments and to take subtle action against negative treatment by white employers and customers. For thirty-five years, Tommy Sims served tables and acted as maitre d’ in southern restaurants. Although Sims’s career spanned the post-World War II era, his experiences reflected those of male African


American servers of an earlier time. Calling Sims a “local institution,” the *Birmingham Post-Herald* represented him in the same way that Macon, Georgia, had fashioned Willis Rose—as the black male icon of the southern white imagination. To the white eating public, he embodied this image—wearing a black tuxedo as he seated customers and offering flaming desserts served with a smile and one-liners that were “as crisp as the white handkerchief in [his] breast pocket.” Nevertheless, Sims’s celebrated wit revealed his views on race relations in good-natured ways that criticized the treatment of African Americans in a manner that did not threaten white customers. He often told restaurant patrons the following story about a captain and his three crew members aboard a sinking ship:

Two of the crewmen are white, one is black. Only three men, including himself, will fit in the life boat, says the captain, so each one will answer a question to see who will lose his life. The first question, to a white man—how many states in the union? Second question, for the other white man—what is the U.S. population? Third question, to the black man—name them.\(^\text{152}\)

This “joke,” which Sims might have told as he served Bananas Foster in Birmingham’s Andrew Jackson Room, reveals much about his experiences working in restaurants. Whereas the white captain in this story asks the white crew members a question that was possible to answer, he poses a question to the black crew member that has no answer. In this way, Sims subtly revealed the indignities and injustices no doubt experienced by the much-mythologized African American men who served in southern restaurants.

The public eating establishments that spread across the South in the wake of railroad expansion, urbanization, and industrialization maintained connections to the southern home in other ways too. Some owners actually established eating places in their homes, especially when

women, and less often men, opened their kitchens and dining rooms to local workers. In 1903 and 1904, around thirty percent of the one hundred forty-four public eating places listed in the Atlanta City Directories were located at the proprietors’ residence.\textsuperscript{153} Women opened eating places in their homes—usually specializing in lunch—to make ends meet. In 1904, a white woman in Atlanta named Alice Carey, widow to John, opened her Edgewood Avenue home up to serve lunches, most likely as a result of the financial stress of losing her husband. According to the city directory, she did not remain in business the following year.\textsuperscript{154} Like Carey’s venture, many home-based lunch establishments were short-lived, but they nevertheless emphasized the close connection between food and home even in the case of a public establishment.

Restaurants that were established outside of the home used wholesome advertising to tie themselves to familial settings. For example, an advertisement for the Manhattan Cafe in Athens, Georgia, asserted, “The food we serve is selected with the same care the housewife exercises. In fact everything we do is with the idea of reminding you of home.”\textsuperscript{155} Many public eating places tried to create similarities between dining in and eating out. The Do Drop Inn connected its restaurant to domestic images with a fun limerick:

\begin{quote}
If lunching far from home and your nearest of kin
Come lunch with Mrs. Peel at the ‘Do Drop Inn.’
There you’ll be stuffed till it makes your head spin,
Delicious home cooking and neat as a pin….
It is there that the ladies fair retreat,
At the hour of noon in order to greet
The hungry and weary, and give them a seat.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{153} Atlanta City Directory (1903), 1547-1548, 1572; Atlanta City Directory (Atlanta: Foote & Davies Co. and Joseph W. Hill, 1904), 1314-1315, 1341-1342.

\textsuperscript{154} Atlanta City Directory (1904), 1314.

\textsuperscript{155} Bryant, Athens Woman’s Club Cook Book, 340.
This verse stresses home-cooking, sanitary conditions, family, friends, and rest. The maternal Mrs. Peel, who managed the Do Drop Inn for the Daughters of the American Revolution, promised to feed customers until they were “stuffed” like a kindly grandmother might do.

Other eating places constituted family ventures. As Atlanta rebuilt from the ravages of the Civil War, O. L. Pease opened a restaurant with true domestic appeal by advertising as “Pease and His Wife.” In 1904, Andrew Marshall Verner, an unemployed Atlanta city employee, opened a restaurant using a special barbecue sauce that he and his wife developed at home, and a Brunswick Stew, based on his wife’s special recipe. Just like in the white middle-class home, the “white” recipes were prepared in the restaurant’s kitchen by an African American cook.

Restaurateurs who did not advertise or provide a home-like environment nevertheless introduced themselves to the eating public as a long-time friend. Like the “letters of introduction” of old, they offered testimonies from other southerners representing their fitness to operate a local restaurant. In 1869, after more than eighteen years of serving food in Nashville, Robert G. Thompson moved to Atlanta and opened a fine dining establishment in the growing city.

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Thompson used newspaper advertisements to claim the endorsement of residents of his former hometown asserting, “Whenever a Nashvillian comes to Atlanta he goes direct to Thompson’s Restaurant. They know what one of his honest square meals is.” As a “pioneer” in New South dining, Thompson understood that consumers had more choices in urban fare and he took advantage of good press. Early in his tenure in Atlanta, he invited the entire staff of the Constitution to his cafe for ice cream covered in pale sherry wine and “toast after toast” of some unnamed drink. Upon leaving the establishment, the Constitution staff not surprisingly “[r]esolved…that Thompson’s Cafe, is entitled to the patronage of the public, on the ground of superior merit.” In this way, in addition to claiming commendation by residents of his former city, the restaurateur garnered the endorsement of an important institution in his new home. Thompson conducted restaurant operations well into his seventies, retiring in 1903.

By the early twentieth century, public eating establishments opened by women’s clubs or church women had become common ventures. Various clubs and churches contributed to the operation of the Sheltering Arms Restaurant, a philanthropic enterprise open for a limited number of days each year. The purpose of Sheltering Arms was to fund a new hospital. Each week a different club or church took responsibility for its operation. Middle-class married women managed, made out menus, and oversaw the kitchen, and in a move that was more novel


for its time, younger unmarried women served customers.\textsuperscript{163} Although the restaurant was not open every day, it was apparently very popular. In 1904, the restaurant reopened using the ladies’ dining room at Carl Witt’s restaurant reporting that “it was necessary to secure a well-equipped place in order to adequately serve the large patronage of the restaurant.”\textsuperscript{164}

In 1900, a restaurant run by the Christian Church also received significant public support. Operated by the ladies of the church, the restaurant advertised “well-appointed tables, delightfully prepared food and attractive young ladies to wait upon them.” The restaurant served a middle-class clientele, describing their dinner customers as “business men and women.” It accepted male and female patronage, but specifically sought male customers. The restaurant emphasized not only the use of female servers, which would have been a rarity in turn-of-the-century Atlanta, but also the waitresses’ attractiveness. They also advertised a barbecue dinner to be served on Election Day so that male patrons could eat heartily “while they discuss the outcome of the election” because the restaurant sat next to a polling place.\textsuperscript{165}

The operation of charitable eating places, which made a prominent place for women, highlighted a significant feature of early restaurants and cafes: they were predominately male


preserves. These enterprises specifically solicited the patronage of businessmen. Many early southern eating places represented male domains for practical reasons. Early-twentieth-century urban men found themselves outside of the home more often than women, and for this reason restaurants specifically solicited male trade. In 1892, for example, Atlanta’s Gate City Bank Restaurant advertised itself as a “Business Man’s Retreat” and offered wild game to tempt urban businessmen.166

Thompson solicited male trade by announcing in one ad that “New York gentlemen…had ‘stepped over from the hotel’” for dinner.167 Thompson declared his cafe to be “equal to any first-class establishment in New York.” To accommodate the cosmopolitan middle class of Atlanta, he hired a Parisian cook named Mr. Eugee to take charge of the kitchen.168 Because New York featured many of the nation’s oldest and most well-known restaurants, the patronage of genuine New Yorkers would have validated Thompson’s claim to maintaining a high-class restaurant in this New South city. Such ads were no doubt intended to attract local businessmen who envisioned themselves equal to any New Yorker. Atlanta housewife Polly Peablossom complained that her husband never came home for meals anymore because he ate dinner at Thompson’s every day.169 The perhaps-fictionalized Mrs. Peablossom failed to indicate her husband’s occupation, but Thompson’s reportedly fed Atlanta’s middle-class businessmen

166 Atlanta City Directory (Atlanta: R. L. Polk & Co., 1892), 42.


catering to the journalists, politicians, doctors, and lawyers who, among others, desired the
oysters, quail, venison, fish, and game that Thompson’s served daily in his main restaurant.\textsuperscript{170}

Another reason that men predominated in southern restaurants involved the inherent
sexual tension that existed in public eating places. Culturally, restaurants were seen as male
space. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, an \textit{Atlanta Constitution} that may have
covertly feared change in southern gender relations condemned New Yorkers who had taken up
the “Parisian custom of…taking meals at the restaurants.” Of particular concern seemed to be the
fact that northern women had adopted the custom: “[Y]ou may see women and girls sitting at the
same table with men and ordering their meals with the nonchalance of old habitués.”\textsuperscript{171} Female
restaurant dining continued to be a cause of concern for southerners into the twentieth century. In
restaurants and cafes, white women could be exposed to any number of activities deemed
inappropriate for their gender, including drinking, gambling, violence, foul language, sexual
innuendo, race mixing, smoking, and any number of these seemingly vile activities
simultaneously.

For these reasons, restaurants, especially fine dining establishments, often carved out
space for middle-class women to participate in this consumer experience without being exposed
to a predominately male environment. A middle-class woman’s normal daily activities—
shopping, club work, and excursions with her husband or other women—sometimes required
eating away from home. Restaurateurs tried to ensure that white women would be placed on the

\textsuperscript{170} “Thompson’s Restaurant,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, December 5, 1871,

\textsuperscript{171} “How New York Lives,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, June 21, 1868,
same pedestal that they occupied at home. Pease and his wife solicited the patronage of white females who needed a respite “after fatiguing walks” or “shopping” trips. He promised a “safe and pleasant retreat” for women to “refresh…with oysters or any other delicacies.”

Some operators ensured the comfort and safety of female patrons dining in the public sphere by creating special ladies dining rooms and cafes. Accommodations for white women had antecedents in urban restaurants of the antebellum South, but they proliferated in urban southern areas in the late nineteenth century. Ladies cafes promised “neatly furnished…quiet, retired [dining rooms]…with every home comfort.” Thompson’s Ladies Cafe allowed women to bring male companions, but other ventures, such as Allen’s Palace Restaurant’s Ladies Dining Room and Ice Cream Saloon also in Atlanta, were “for ladies only.” Both proprietors put these facilities under the charge of their wives. Department stores also opened cafes that catered to their predominately female trade. Richmond’s Miller & Rhoads advertised a “Light Luncheon” to appeal to fatigued shoppers. Their service included a choice of salads, light meats, hot rolls, sandwiches, and soda fountain specials, accompanied by music, to be enjoyed by ladies who would be “losing no time from shopping.” Ladies cafes offered lighter fare considered to be appropriate for a woman’s more delicate tastes and offered pleasant and gender-appropriate

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amenities, such as piano music during lunch and supper hours.\textsuperscript{175} Most importantly, however, they offered space in which it was considered appropriate for white women to dine.

Birmingham’s Albert Restaurant did not have separate facilities for female dining, but nevertheless attempted to offer a form of “protection” for women. Albert’s advertisements explicitly offered for “ladies” to be served “at the tables.” This condition implies that men had an option of eating elsewhere, perhaps at a counter or bar where they presumably would come into close contact with others as they ate. White women—as the term “ladies” no doubt designated—apparently had no option to sit elsewhere, or perhaps Albert’s simply meant to ensure them that they would have access to an eating place “safe” from close contact with unknown men dining beside them.\textsuperscript{176}

Although “appropriate” space could be carved out in the public sphere for middle-class white women to dine out, achieving such accommodations for lower-class white women to serve food proved more difficult. With the exception of charitable enterprises sponsored by a church or women’s club, it was uncommon to see white women waiting tables at a turn-of-the-century southern restaurant. The image of white women serving unfamiliar men in public places subjected them to servile and sexual representations normally reserved for African Americans. Unlike their black counterparts, public discourse explicitly identified white waitresses as objects of admiration for male customers. In 1880, the \textit{Atlanta Constitution} considered female waitresses at a new restaurant in nearby Rome to be “one of the freshest novelties.” Instead of going to the

\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Richmond Times Dispatch}, April 4, 1907, http://www.loc.gov/chroniclingamerica/.

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Birmingham News}, April 26, 1902.
new restaurant to eat or drink, young men reportedly went to “gaze at the fair waitresses.” In 1899, the practice may have been such a novelty to Birmingham, Alabama, diners that Mac’s Restaurant advertised that they used only female servers because it was a woman’s duty to serve and because women were better at such things: “She keeps her fingers out of the soup and doesn’t spill the coffee.”

Such advertising highlights the sexual nature of white female service in southern eating places because they served a mostly male clientele—and strange, unfamiliar men at that. As Mac’s Restaurant correctly notes, by the early twentieth century serving food had long been considered women’s work. But in a normal day, white women served food at home where they encountered only husbands, sons, fathers, brothers, and close family friends. In the public sphere, they encountered any number of strange men who, as in Rome, might at the very least ogle them. As the use of female servers became more common in the South, the sexuality inherent in public eating situations became more obvious. By the 1930s, white lower-class female servers had become common in southern restaurants. At the Peabody Hotel’s grill room in Memphis, journalist Jonathan Daniels commented on his waitress’s attractiveness. Daniels’s companion, a Mississippi plantation owner, highlighted the sexual nature of restaurant service by comparing it to prostitution. He noted that when poor white women were pushed off of the farms “the weakest and the dumbest go into the whore houses…but the pretty and smart ones get jobs like these.”

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179 Daniels, Southerner Discovers the South, 129.
The use of white female servers provoked criticism because it upset southern notions about proper racial and sexual mores. The Mississippi planter dining at the Peabody complained that he preferred to focus on his “food and…companions, not on the servants.” No doubt, African American laborers had prepared, cooked, and served food for the planter and his family for generations. Attractive white waitresses could not manage the “invisibility” that whites expected of black servants. Despite Ralph Ellison’s insightful comment on the position of blacks in America, however, African American servers occupied one of the more “visible” roles in southern society—that of serving food to white consumers. Perhaps the planter was not as troubled by the waitress’s attractiveness as he was by the sudden visibility of lower-class white women—who might otherwise be laboring out of public sight on a family farm or in a textile factory. More importantly, he may have been bothered by the obvious sexual availability of these white women—available for wanted and unwanted advances—a trait that was supposed to be associated with black women.

Because the use of white waitresses violated southern cultural norms, many in the South considered it to be a “northern” practice. In 1899, the Yankee Kitchen, a Birmingham restaurant that catered to the “masses,” advertised the use of “white girl waiters.” The regional name of the restaurant emphasized the notion that this practice contrasted with southern dining mores. In 1915 Atlanta, an unnamed northern business opening a chain of lunch counters had to hire

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180 Daniels, Southerner Discovers the South, 129.

181 In his memoir Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison asserts that blacks were “invisible” in southern society because whites refused to see them. Invisible Man (New York: Random House, 1951).

northern women to wait tables because white women from Georgia refused to take the jobs. With
tongue firmly planted in cheek, the *Atlanta Constitution* compared the practice to Sherman’s
march “shelling Dixie’s hurtful menial traditions with a sweeping fire that is crumbling them as
fast as they come under the range of the guns.”\(^{183}\) The white waitresses who served at Atlanta’s
all-night restaurants near the theater district reportedly spoke with “Ohio accent[s].”\(^{184}\) Some of
the white waitresses who served in southern restaurants and cafes did not grow up in the South
and, therefore, would not have been familiar with southern cultural and racial mores.

Early-twentieth-century southern comments about white women who waited tables
addressed the sexuality issue by assuming that male customers admired the servers and that the
waitresses did not return the affection. Men who ate at Atlanta’s all-night restaurants were
advised to place their order with “the little girl with the white apron and ask her to smile so you
can see the dimple.” But asked if the dimpled girl returned the attraction, *Atlanta Constitution*
journalist Britt Craig answered, “Well, hardly…Think it possible for a lass to glory in the smiles
of an admirer absorbed in the joint occupation of buttering hot cakes and keeping his cuff out of
the coffee?”\(^{185}\) In another article, Craig assured white middle-class Atlantans that these working-
class white women fended off unwanted advances with a “jolt.” He also negated the perception


\[\text{\footnotesize 185}^\text{Craig, “Sure, Atlanta has a Night Life,” November 8, 1914.}\]
that sexual attention may be desired by describing the white waitresses as chaste women who served their customers nothing more than “coffee cups and pancakes.”

The close connection between food and home meant that dining practices developed in the public sphere might then be transferred to the private realm, and white female waitressing triggered this southern anxiety. Britt Craig ultimately determined that lower-class white females should be employed as servers not just in public restaurants but in private homes as well. By the turn of the twentieth century, southern working-class women commonly labored in textile mills, but rarely took domestic service jobs. Like many white middle-class women, Craig argued that white girls would find a cleaner, more moral environment in a private home and that they would be better workers. He described white female servants as fashionable, frugal, healthy, well-fed, and moral—the opposite of common white perceptions of black servants. According to Craig, the optimal domestic service arrangement involved a white employer and white female servant: “Mrs. Jones [a hypothetical white employer], if she can get white help, has no negroes around the place. Whites are more reliable, more dependable.” He thought that white servants would receive an “uplifting association” by working in white homes, and this relationship would benefit the white race in general. Despite endorsements of white domestic service, white southern girls refused to take such jobs. Those who did so suffered ridicule and ostracism from the white community. One girl recalled, “I found I was entirely cut off from my friends; they looked down on me, and the boys would not come to see me on Sunday.”

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In other cases, southern discourse on restaurant culture revealed a broader anxiety about the potentially demoralizing effect of public activity on private space. The *Atlanta Constitution*’s Isma Dooly articulated this underlying white southern trepidation by describing her fear over dancing in public places and its deteriorating effect on the home. Although examples no doubt existed in her own hometown, Dooly chose to look northward to describe the negative effects of restaurant culture. Public eating places had become more popular much earlier in places like New York than in Atlanta and other southern locales. By 1915, New York’s Broadway theater district had developed all-night eating places nicknamed “lobster palaces” that catered to a wealthy, after-theater crowd. Lobster palaces were well known for extravagant and expensive meals and for condoning late-night eating, drinking, dancing, and general debauchery.\(^{189}\) Dooly believed that these establishments were bad for society because they depreciated the morals of those most responsible for social conduct (*i.e.*, middle-class women). At lobster palaces, affluent women gathered to eat, drink, dance, and make contact with people they would never have invited into their homes. But even worse from Dooly’s perspective, these decadent scenes infiltrated private gatherings because “soon the most elegant of dinner parties in the private house had to be concluded by a trip to the nearest cafe where there was dancing.”\(^ {190}\) Fears over

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northern depravity would have spoken to Atlanta’s middle class because their city had its own late-night restaurant district.\(^{191}\)

The increasing presence of women in restaurants encouraged politicians to call for protective legislation. In 1914, South Carolina governor Coleman L. Blease asked the state legislature to prohibit smoking in public eating places frequented by women. Such legislation would have been unnecessary in the nineteenth century when “ladies’ cafes” kept women away from male influences considered to be inappropriate. Blease’s particular concern involved second-hand smoke that might pollute the bodies of white women who did not receive any particular protections in the common eatery. The governor based his appeal on vivid imagery describing the bodily pollution inflicted on women exposed to smoking: “[P]eople in South Carolina (I will not say gentlemen, nor will I say true men) sit in our public dining rooms, restaurants and cafes and smoke cigars…and whiff and puff and blow the smoke out through their nostrils, and this smoke is carried either by the natural breezes or the current of an electric fan into the eyes, mouths and nostrils of refined women.” He requested that the South Carolina legislature prohibit smoking in public eating places patronized by women. This proposed law did not represent a general public health measure. Rather, it constituted legislation specifically designed to protect white women who participated in the leisure activity of eating out.\(^{192}\)

Blease’s speech reveals a southern culture transitioning from one based on private conduct, in which case behavior considered to be inappropriate could be regulated by family or

\(^{191}\) Craig, “Sure, Atlanta has a Night Life, November 8, 1914.

community censure, to one that was much more public and therefore in need of official regulation. He longingly remembered “the time…when, if a gentleman smoked a pipe…while walking along the street by the side of a lady he was not regarded as well reared, and such a thing as smoking while riding in a buggy with a young lady would not have been tolerated.” Private conduct, which had previously been the primary characterization of southern activity, could be self-regulated. The opinions of family and community served as sufficient deterrent to prohibit actions that a cohesive class agreed was inappropriate—in this case smoking in the presence of white women. Blease recognized, however, that public censure could not regulate places of public accommodation. Specifically, Blease identified those from outside South Carolina “who have no respect for us or our ladies.” Such individuals, according to the governor, “should be made to respect them” as should any residents “who are not decent enough to respect [South Carolina] women.” Here, Blease specifically refers to new populations of proprietors and patrons who operated and patronized the new “quick order” cafes. Newly migrating to the region (or country) or to an urban area, they failed to understand the local mores established by the hegemonic white professional classes. The governor understood that only legal requirement could force this motley urban assortment to respect these cultural standards.

Although Blease opposed the use of tobacco, smoking served as a metaphor for his greater anxieties over the racial purity of white women. The descriptive imagery the governor used—the “whiff[ing] and puff[ing] and blow[ing]” of smoke out of the male body and into the various orifices of the female body—constitutes a thinly veiled sexual reference which is bolstered by his additional claim that women might be exposed to syphilis, among other diseases.

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193 Blease, “Message from the Governor,” 37-38.
through such contact. Although Blease does not blame black men for smoke-filled southern cafes, other white southerners of the period openly theorized that African Americans carried and spread syphilis and that black men did so by raping white women. By referencing this common theme, Blease is not only relying on a well-defined southern trope to support his cause, he is connecting white cultural fears of bodily contamination and racial impurity to activities taking place in the relatively new consumer sphere of public eating places.

For the southern white middle class, public eating establishments implicated concerns about bodily pollution and threats to racial purity in many other ways as well. An obvious concern involved the possible association of white women and black men in public eating spaces. Although public interracial eating occurred in the South until the early twentieth century, white southerners rarely discussed these occurrences. Southern white discourse related to interracial eating and more significantly reflecting the fear of white women and black men eating together focused on well-publicized incidents of interracial eating outside of the South. One such event took place in October 1901 when the American President Theodore Roosevelt invited Tuskegee President Booker T. Washington to dine at the White House. For years afterwards, Roosevelt suffered southern criticism for his courtesy to one of the great men of his day. On the surface, white southerners condemned Roosevelt’s action as “a great shock to Southern

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sentiment” or “counter to a deep seated feeling on the part of a large section of the country." 197

White southerners also professed concern that in accepting the President’s invitation Washington set a poor example for other African Americans. In Texas, an unnamed African American man was reportedly shot for “impudence” when he tried “sitting at a table with a white man.” 198

A close examination of southern press coverage of the Roosevelt/Washington incident reveals that white southern discontent with this incident involved the President inviting a black man to dine with his white wife and daughter. In the immediate aftermath of the story, Washington’s *Evening Star* tried to temper the controversy by rewriting the details to make it seem like Washington had lunched with Roosevelt by himself. The *Star* story asserted that Roosevelt did not formally invite Washington to dine with him. Rather, as the *Star* explained it, Washington appeared at the White House one day while the President was eating alone. Washington had news for the President so Roosevelt invited him to sit and dine. At first Washington declined, but after further urging by the President, he accepted the invitation. 199

The *Star*’s revision of history attempted to mitigate the idea that President Roosevelt endorsed so-called “social equality.” In this story, the white man (President Roosevelt) did not invite a black man to dine with his white family. He simply demonstrated good manners in inviting an unexpected guest to join his table. Also, the black man (Washington) did not desire social equality. He only reluctantly accepted the urging of someone considered to be his


superior—both because of his position and his race. The Star’s rewriting, and its subsequent re-printing by southern white newspapers, suggests that a version of the Roosevelt/Washington meal without the familial elements might have been more palatable to a white southern audience.200

Of course, the Star simply invented its version of the story. Roosevelt’s family joined the President, Washington, and another unrelated white male guest at the White House dinner. Washington received a formal invitation to dine at the White House. White southern commentators berated Roosevelt for inviting a black man to eat at the same table as his white wife and daughter. In a story reprinted by the Birmingham Age-Herald, the Macon Telegraph insisted that when a white man invited a black man to his dinner table to meet the white man’s daughter “there is but one more step to miscegenation,” suggesting that there was very little difference between black men and white women eating together and sleeping together.201

In May 1908, another highly publicized incident involving white women dining with black men occurred when the Cosmopolitan Club, a small group of young black and white men and women who regularly met to discuss issues of the day, arranged a dinner at Peck’s Restaurant in New York City. They sold tickets to the event and arranged black and white speakers who represented a variety of political backgrounds. According to Mary White Ovington, who attended the dinner, “the thought that all men can work together for good, was the dominant word” or theme of the speakers. The next day, reports appeared in newspapers across the nation that “[n]egro and white had sat down together in a restaurant in New York and


talked miscegenation.” Southern reports of the dinner tended to focus on the race and gender of the participants. Ovington recalls, “By the time the story got thoroughly drenched in their imagination, the gathering became a meeting of voluptuous white women and smirking Negro men.”

In Georgia, the New York dinner became the topic of political debate when one candidate reportedly accused the other of supporting “social equality.” A campaign circular distributed by Governor Hoke Smith “couple[d] the name of [opposition candidate] Joe Brown with [the Cosmopolitan Club dinner] in a way as to intimate that [Brown] was on the same plane.” The campaign literature in question instructed Brooks County, Georgia, voters to “[r]ead the account of the banquet of the Cosmopolitan Society of Greater New York, of Monday night, WHERE WHITE GIRLS AND WOMEN DINED SIDE BY SIDE WITH NEGRO MEN AND WOMEN.” In both cases, southern commentators seemed to care as much about the gender of those involved—meaning that white women dined with black men—as their race.

Although the Washington/Roosevelt and Cosmopolitan Club dinners were well-publicized incidents of their day, early-twentieth-century southerners did not have to look beyond their immediate surroundings to find examples of interracial eating. Such activity reportedly occurred across the South prior to 1910. In Atlanta, the races regularly came into

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contact with each other in restaurants and so-called “near beer saloons.” In the small railroad town of Elkton, North Carolina, prior to 1915, whites and blacks ate in the town’s only restaurant with no divider separating the races. In Birmingham, prior to 1914, interracial eating was a common practice especially in lunch cafes, although it may have been customary for the races to sit on opposite sides of the room. Such reports, however, do not specifically mention the gender of the white and black persons who routinely ate in the same facility. And gender may, in fact, be an important ingredient present in the highly publicized northern cases of interracial dining and not necessarily so in the South at that time.

In Atlanta, for example, women could not enter saloons at all so white women and black men would not have associated with one another in the “near beer saloons” where interracial eating took place. And across the South black male patrons would not have been allowed into ladies cafes and dining rooms. But as more women began to enter public eating places as patrons and servers, southern restaurateurs would have found it more daunting to keep apart. In fact, the combination of interracial eating, the increasing tendency for white women to dine and work in public eating places, a constantly changing and growing New South population, and an


207 “To Stop Serving of Whites and Blacks in Same Restaurant: Judge Lane will Introduce Ordinance Today Prohibiting Black and Tan Lunch Rooms,” Birmingham Age-Herald, December 15, 1914.

atmosphere already concerned with the notion of racial purity created a situation where the middle class could no longer rely on certain recognized and understood cultural mores to regulate an ever increasing number of public eating spaces. Taking the same approach as Governor Blease in South Carolina, city councils across the South began to pass legislation that regulated these new public spaces.

At the turn of the twentieth century, health codes were not new to most southern cities, but applying such requirements to public eating facilities was new. In the late nineteenth century when eating places were designated for the middle class and mostly catered to a male clientele, sanitation had not been a huge concern. The early twentieth century saw an opportunity for the pure food movement to merge with conspicuous consumption and allowed the emerging white middle class—a segment of the population committed to both movements—to mold the public dining experience in the image of their own carefully constructed domestic practices, by compulsion if necessary. Atlanta extended its health codes to include fastidious examinations of public eating establishments. The 1924 Atlanta City Code was the city’s first to include an ordinance requiring the inspection of restaurants. Restaurants were required to keep walls and floors clean and to have a clean water supply. Kitchens could not be connected to bathrooms or sleeping quarters. Employees were required to be free of communicable diseases and wear clean, washable clothing. Restaurants had to pass sanitation inspections before they would be given a city license.  

Atlanta drafted its 1910 law that required racial segregation as a licensing ordinance. The law required eating places to obtain a license that would allow service to either whites or blacks.

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The stated purpose of the Atlanta ordinance was “to stop the races from mingling in near beer saloons and restaurants. Saloons and restaurants must now be straightout [sic] either for whites or negroes.” This measure passed with very little public discussion. As a matter of fact, the Atlanta Journal article announcing the ordinance focused more on another law passed the same day that allowed the city council to issue short-term licenses to near beer saloons. But in 1924 the council added racial segregation to Atlanta’s restaurant health code: “All restaurants shall be provided with ample facilities for washing and cleansing all eating and cooking utensils, and with a proper supply of hot water and where there are white and colored places adjoining, dishwashing and foodstuffs must be handled separately.”

A more common approach to racial segregation was to incorporate such laws entirely into city health codes. On December 15, 1914, in the same year that Blease worried about bodily pollution from cigarette smoke, Birmingham added racial segregation to its health code. Birmingham’s ordinance was fairly typical for the time and made it illegal “to conduct a parlor or lunch counter at which white and colored persons are served in the same room.” The Board of Commissioners passed the law unanimously. The Age-Herald reported that Police Commissioner, Judge A. O. Lane,
planned to introduce the ordinance to improve “the peace and happiness of the community.”

Because the city included this racial segregation law as part of its health code and because de facto segregation was not sufficient, the Board of Commissioners seemed to be worried about potential “contamination” to the white race, which without saying this directly, focused on white women.

These laws were designed for more than mere sanitation purposes. They were designed to help protect the moral health and racial purity of white southern society. As such, these ordinances codified Blease’s concerns about threats white women might face as they entered public eating establishments. City councils across the South reflected this same fear for the white race and the risks that white women faced in public eating places when they passed racial segregation laws. In this way, racial segregation in public eating establishments revealed the increasing tendency of women to eat in public spaces and, like Blease, the desire of the white men on the Birmingham Board of Commissioners to protect them from any imagined threats.

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The passing of Jim Crow and other legislation related to restaurants occurred at a time in southern history when most southerners—black and white, rich and poor—ate out seldom if at all. Nevertheless, this legislation became a priority for the white middle class that controlled state legislatures and city councils across the South. The reason that city councils passed such laws related to the uncertainty that these relatively new eating places posed. In the late nineteenth century, very few eating places existed in southern cities and towns. The prices at those eating places that did exist reserved them for an elite patronage. But in the early twentieth century a

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213 “To Stop Serving of Whites and Blacks in Same Restaurant: Judge Lane will Introduce Ordinance Today Prohibiting Black and Tan Lunch Rooms,” Birmingham Age-Herald, December 15, 1914.
larger variety of eating places developed and a broader clientele meant that they could not be trusted to monitor themselves. Those frequenting these places could not be left to their own devices. Restaurant regulation presented one opportunity for the governing middle class to implement social control measures on society at large. But many within society did not necessarily want to concede to the dictates of a ruling elite, and southern eating places remained contested space.
CHAPTER THREE: “A First-Class Lunch in Every Respect”:
Cafes, Lunch Rooms, and Public Eating Places as Sites of Cultural Conflict

In 1875, the *Atlanta Constitution* published a joke that poked fun at the ignorance of rural, lower-class southerners with regard to public eating establishments. In the short article, a rural native—described as a “bow-backed old chap, pants in boots, hair down on his shoulders”—ate at a restaurant for the first time. The customer ordered oyster stew and then argued with the waiter over whether he had brought the correct dish. “I’m willing to admit that I’ve allus lived way back, and that I never ate an oyster stew, but don’t take me for a fool, mister,” the old man asserted. “Don’t think I can be drawed in by some chalk-colored gravy with four or five bits of meat floating aroun in it”.214

This scene as described by the urban newspaper reveals much about dining out in the New South. First, it recognizes the existence of a rural-urban cultural divide developing in the South by the late nineteenth century. The stranger in the story is positioned as a “country bumpkin” stereotype unfamiliar with new modes of consumption developing in urban areas. Rural migrants traveling to or through growing cities and towns had little knowledge of or faith in these urban institutions. Although this story did not necessarily describe an actual event, similar scenes no doubt played out in eating establishments across the emerging urban areas in the South as city populations swelled with rural migrants.

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Second, the story suggests that new urban consumers regardless of their origin may have had reason to distrust public eating places. The old stranger admits to never having consumed oyster stew before; however, he did not recognize the dish that the waiter served as any type of food he had ever consumed. The quality and types of food served in urban eating establishments no doubt varied as much as the spaces themselves. The opportunity to consume new foods in a different environment certainly attracted diners to public eating places, but fare of unknown quality and unfamiliar foods may have contributed to disappointment and anxiety as well.

Finally, this chronicle reveals that early urban eating places were not restricted to the high end of the socio-economic scale. The man described in this story is not well-groomed, well-dressed, or well-spoken, but he is nevertheless allowed to sit down and order a meal at an urban eatery. Although some public eating establishments were no doubt reserved for the upper echelon, a variety of different types of public places where eating took place developed, including, among others, saloons, sidewalk stands, cafes, restaurants, and lunch rooms, that represented fairly diverse urban spaces. Such places provided opportunities for people of various classes, ethnicities, races, and genders to gather for the purpose of working, socializing, eating, drinking, and intermingling of all sorts.

Because of this diversity, urban eateries often represented contested spaces where proprietors, employees, customers, civil authorities, and the general public attempted to express their own priorities, which were often at odds with each other. Conflict sometimes took an active, brutal form involving criminal activities such as robbery, fisticuffs, or shooting. More often, however, clashes within public eating places involved more subtle cultural conflicts as proprietors, employees, and customers vied with each other and civil authorities to have their vision of appropriate public discourse and activity prevail. This was particularly true in the case
of lower-class establishments where the cultural attitudes toward class, race, ethnicity, and gender often differed from those of higher-status restaurants.

Public eating establishments met many different needs in the urban environment. Proprietors and employees found opportunities for financial reward, social advancement, and place within society. The legal, and sometimes illegal, activities that took place inside urban eating places offered opportunities for profit and to consolidate local networks and power that may not be available to the average workman. Many proprietors improved their own circumstances and those of their families by providing sources for partnerships, financial assistance, and employment. Employees, most of whom in the early twentieth century were immigrant or African American men, saw opportunities for upward social mobility by opening their own eating places in the future.

For customers, such establishments provided public space for grabbing a quick lunch, eating an evening meal, drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking cigarettes or cigars, socializing with other men, discussing matters of public interest, and, in many cases, engaging in illegal gambling and illicit interaction with women. Women no doubt represented a small proportion of customers, but their presence in unregulated contact with men in spaces designated for public consumption nevertheless aroused the suspicion of those whose own wives and daughters patronized more respectable ladies cafes. Race complicated these issues even further. Regardless of the existence of segregation laws, southern eating places represented space where blacks and whites intermingled, even if their status was unequal. This constant inter-racial interaction led urban authorities to greater circumspection in regulating these public spaces.

In addition to sexual and racial intermingling, many of the other activities that took place in public eating establishments often represented violations of the public trust. Civil authorities
often sought to regulate, obstruct, or even shut down these operations. In the twentieth century, urban and town governments imposed licensing requirements for eating places that may have differed from those of other businesses primarily because of the health regulations that applied to food. Such regulations reflected the importance that white authorities attributed to food, the Progressive concern for health and government regulation, and white southern anxiety over the purity of the white body.

The general public, who may not have frequented lower-class eating establishments, nevertheless maintained an interest in such facilities to the extent that they believed that activities within such establishments threatened the general order or public health. To many in authority, lower-class eating places represented spaces where vice could take place that threatened to disrupt public order and where citizens could get around ordinances intended to protect public morality, especially those related to alcohol and prostitution. In particular, authorities feared that these spaces acted as fronts to legitimize illegal drinking, gambling, and illicit sexual activity.

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The development of urban environments in the South initiated significant changes to the manner in which southerners took meals. In the countryside, the midday meal represented the largest repast of the day. Rural women labored over dinner, as it was called, all morning as soon as the breakfast dishes were put away, and families gathered for a leisurely meal and break from agricultural work at the height of the day’s heat. Leftovers from earlier in the day usually formed a small evening supper.

Urbanization and industrialization changed these long-held food habits. Early-twentieth-century home economics instruction held that housewives had the choice to serve a light meal or luncheon with the heavy dinner in the evening or to have a heavy dinner at midday with a light
supper to follow.\textsuperscript{215} For the growing number of manual laborers and office workers in southern cities and towns, however, this choice remained limited. Workers generally did not have time for a leisurely midday meal. In a letter to a former employer, Joseph R. Smith, who clerked at a Birmingham office supply company in 1915 recalls his typical workday: “Went to work at 7:30 and worked until 6 with a 30 minute break for lunch.”\textsuperscript{216} Urban lifestyles ran according to clock time, and lunch hours were limited. Most working men and women had little time to prepare meals and eat during the working day. As a result, lunch came to define the midday meal for most urbanites. Many workers prepared their own lunches and took them to their shop or office. But saloons, stands, cafes, restaurants, and lunch rooms provided a good alternative for many working men who wanted to get a quick meal.\textsuperscript{217}

In the early twentieth century, the presence of women of both races, even white women otherwise considered to be respectable, became an ordinary sight in common eateries that did not feature a separate ladies’ cafe. This occurrence reflected the more public daily activities of southern women living in cities and towns. Women bore primary responsibility for their family’s shopping, and stores were often located in downtown areas that may not be convenient to home. Also, professional men might take their wives out for a special treat. The \textit{Atlanta Woman’s Club Cook Book} advises that women who take primary responsibility for preparing the family’s meals

\textsuperscript{215} “Luncheons,” Home Economics Lab Notebook, Box 1, Cherry Waldrep Clements Papers, Special Collections Library, Georgia College & State University, Milledgeville, Georgia.

\textsuperscript{216} Joseph R. Smith to Robert Jemison Jr., October 23, 1962, folder 17.2, Hill Ferguson Papers, Birmingham Archives, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

deserved a “half-holiday” on Thursday afternoons and a “dinner out.” Working-class women often could not return home in the short amount of time allocated for their lunch break. In the late 1930s, Dorothy Dickins found that, although farm women and textile mill employees tended to eat lunch at home, female garment plant often purchased lunch in town because these factories were located further away. In addition to necessity, young women frequented public eating places for leisure and entertainment. When dating became a popular form of gendered interaction in the 1920s, women often visited soda fountains, cafes, or restaurants with their male companions.

In the late nineteenth century, the local saloon provided a preferable and convenient site for working men to eat out. In an effort to entice midday customers, many saloons offered free lunches. For the price of a glass of beer or whiskey, patrons could devour impressive spreads for their midday repast. The free lunch started early in the South’s urban areas. In 1868, Atlanta’s State House Saloon owned by Noonan and McGuire advertised “free lunch is served every day.” The Clipper Saloon was among other late-nineteenth-century choices in Atlanta for a

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218 Home Economics Department, *Atlanta Woman’s Club Cook Book* (Atlanta: Atlanta Woman’s Club, 1921), 13.

219 Dorothy Dickins, *Some Contrasts in the Levels of Living of Women Engaged in Farm, Textile Mill, and Garment Plant Work* (State College: Mississippi Agricultural Experiment Station, 1941), 27.


free lunch. In other urban areas across the South the free lunch became a common feature of bar houses. Saloon lunches were limited to male customers. They commenced around 10:00 or 11:00 a.m. and continued until 12:00 or 1:00 p.m. Advertisements rarely clarified the saloon’s expectations of patrons lunching for free, but customers were no doubt expected to wash down their meal with beer or whiskey, both of which generally ran around five cents per glass, and follow with a cigar purchased from the proprietor.

Saloons generally allowed patrons to help themselves to free lunch counters. These buffets may have started out as simply “a cracker and a slice of cheap sausage,” but by the turn of the century, they involved “a first-class lunch in every respect” and provided “a square meal,” consisting of hot turtle soup, roast beef, potato salad, olives, pork and beans, or barbecued pig—the same fare served at many of the finer restaurants and hotels in the city. A competition arose among saloon keepers to make sure that they had the best fare to attract customers. Many proprietors used up their profits to keep pace. In June 1897, the expense associated with the practice, the risk of losing customers if they did not keep up the spreads, and the low status of

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persons attracted to the counters encouraged a group of Atlanta saloon keepers to petition the city council for legislation prohibiting the practice.226

The free lunch issue created a rift in the city’s saloon community that implicated broader class issues. Initially, free lunches at saloons targeted higher-class customers. In 1868, Noonan and McGuire, located near the state capital, identified their free lunch as appropriate fare for men in town for the meeting of the state legislature. Their advertisements brag that “when Speaker McWhorter…called the Speaker pro tem. to the Chair because he…wanted ‘to take a plate of soup,’ he no doubt had in his mind’s-eye the Noonan & McGuire State House Saloon.”227 Despite these original expectations, as more working-class men migrated to the South’s urban areas, free lunches inevitably attracted a less well-to-do clientele causing many operators to resent the practice. Sid Holland, who managed the saloon at Atlanta’s Kimball House Hotel, and John P. Buckalew, proprietor of Buck’s Place, opposed serving free lunches. Among other things, they criticized the type of patron attracted to a saloon by the free lunch. According to Holland, Kimball’s House abolished the custom and saw an increase in the class and behavior of their lunch-time patrons. Buckalew agreed, lamenting the fact that free lunches cost the saloon quite a bit of money and only attracted “the lower classes of trade.”228

Saloon owner Philip Breitenbucher disagreed and argued that the ability to serve food with the drinks aided the digestion of his patrons. Also in support of the free lunch, Ernest


Naylor, proprietor of the Opera Saloon, believed that the counters served charitable interests: “The lunches attract a poorer class of trade, but it does me good to see the hungry ones eat.” Despite these opinions, most saloon keepers seemed to oppose the counters, but heavy competition among urban bars necessitated their submission.\(^{229}\) By June 18, 1897, the effort to abolish free lunches in Atlanta’s saloons seemed dead when the police committee of the city council tabled the proposal.\(^ {230}\) In response to the city’s failure to act, the Atlanta Retail Liquor Dealers’ Association agreed to voluntarily abandon the practice.\(^ {231}\) Shortly thereafter, the city council changed its policy and ended the free lunch counters by limiting bar food service to pretzels and crackers.\(^ {232}\)

The free lunch issue in saloons galvanized urban areas across the South. In 1901, the same issue played out in Macon, Georgia, when a group of saloon keepers petitioned the city council to abolish the practice. Patrons protested the movement asserting that they saved a lot of money by frequenting free lunch counters and made many strong friendships “over the bar rails.” Macon saloon keepers who opposed the measure vowed to continue the practice even if legislation required otherwise: “They say that if council should grant the petition and forbid the


serving of free lunch they will sell lunch for five [cents] and give away a glass of beer with each purchase of lunch.”

Despite such allegiance, in the early twentieth century, controversy and temperance advocates succeeded in ending the counters, and a slew of inexpensive, quick-order eateries replaced the free-lunch saloons in Atlanta and across the South. The growth of cafes, lunch stands, and lunch rooms popularized eating out especially among those who would not or could not frequent saloons. Lunch places catered to a growing working and business class in the South composed of men, and increasingly women, who worked too far from home to return at lunch time. Unlike the higher-class restaurants where primarily white native-born higher middle-class men, and sometimes women, intermingled in a more controlled environment, urban lunchrooms and cafes saw a more diverse dining population with a motley assortment of various ethnicities, classes, occupations, genders, and races, meeting and intermingling in one form or another.

Early twentieth-century lunch places took different forms and often started as a sideline to some other business enterprise. They generally did not feature the fancy décor, architecture, or cuisine of finer dining establishments. The seating arrangements, décor, and menus of quick-order establishments revolved around function. Seating took place at counters or simple tables. Advertisements of the various breads, drinks, and other foodstuffs served at the cafe covered the walls. The menu offered items that could be prepared and served quickly, such as soups, hot dogs, and sandwiches. The Duke family grocery store in Atlanta represents a typical early-twentieth-century urban lunch establishment. The Duke family operated a lunch counter at their small grocery store. The long and narrow room had originally served as a store, but the family cleared space beside the cash register where they could set out several wooden stools. Behind the

233 “Wail from Patrons of Free Lunch Counters,” Macon Telegraph, June 27, 1901.
counter and beside grocery shelves ready to serve to customers, the Dukes maintained a small kitchen area with a long line of pots and pans steaming with the day’s specials. The Dukes decorated the wall of their establishment with signs advertising an array of modern consumer edibles such as Sunshine Bread, Pet Milk, and Orange Crush.234

The historical era during which southern cities and towns started to teem with public eating places coincided with an influx of Greek immigrants into the region. Although the percentage of immigrants in southern cities was quite small, especially compared to national trends, the influence of this ethnic group on the southern food service industry was significant. Greek immigrants operated a variety of different food-related businesses in southern towns and cities. They opened grocery stores, dairies, fish markets, fruit stands, confectionaries, cafes, lunch rooms, and restaurants. As entrepreneurs, they came to dominate the retail food service industry monopolizing the quick-order segment of the industry and opening higher-class establishments as well.

From roughly 1890 to 1920, Greeks immigrated to the United States in large numbers to escape financial and political difficulties in the Balkans. Greek immigrants primarily settled in northern cities. According to one estimate, only one in fifteen Greeks who immigrated to the United States prior to 1920 settled in a southern state.235 In 1908, the Greek population of Atlanta, Birmingham, and Savannah was estimated to be five hundred each (compared with an estimated Greek population of fifteen thousand and twenty thousand in Chicago and New York,

234 “Atlanta, ca. 1925, Man sitting at lunch counter drinking a soft drink in the business operated by the Duke family,” photograph, Vanishing Georgia, Digital Collection, Georgia Archives, Office of Secretary of State, http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/.

respectively). These estimates may be exaggerated. The federal census lists one hundred four Greek immigrants living in Birmingham in 1900 and only two hundred ninety-eight in 1910. Nevertheless, it is clear that a significantly smaller percentage of Greek immigrants moved south. Despite these small southern populations, because a significant portion of them entered the food service industry, the Greek immigrant community had a disproportional influence on public food culture in the twentieth-century South.

Greek immigrants generally did not come to America in large groups. Usually individual men immigrated to the city to join a brother, cousin, or fellow villager who was already established and in business. Those who ended up in the South often took a circuitous route. Nicholas Christu immigrated from Castelrelorigon, Greece, to Ellis Island on October 30, 1910. Immigration officials sent him to Ashland, Ohio, to meet a friend from his home village who had immigrated earlier. In Ohio, Christu worked at his friend’s candy store and soda fountain. After a few months, he moved to another Ohio city where another friend hired him. After two years of hard work, Christu purchased his own business, but lost his investment when he joined the United States military during World War I. When he returned with his new Greek wife, Christu went to Columbus, Ohio, to work at another friend’s restaurant. In Columbus, his wife heard that many immigrants from their village had settled in Birmingham, Alabama. The couple moved to

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Birmingham where Christu worked at a restaurant until he purchased his own small sandwich shop.239

Christu’s experiences resemble those of many other Greeks in the southern food service industry—often moving around to get experience and make contacts before settling in one place and more often working for friends or relatives before purchasing or building their own business. As a community, Greek immigrants valued the camaraderie of their extended family and compatriots as well as the personal independence of owning their own businesses. Dino Thompson’s father was moving his family south to Florida looking for new opportunities when he pulled over at a small cafe in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, for lunch and ended up buying the entire restaurant. Thompson’s father agreed to stay in Myrtle Beach when he learned that the small southern beach town already had a Greek community, many of whom worked in food service.240 In Birmingham, Christu too found a vibrant Greek community comprised to a significant extent of restaurateurs or cafe proprietors. He recalls that approximately ninety percent of the city’s restaurants in the 1920s were owned by Greek immigrants.241


Even if Christu exaggerated in this estimation, Greeks certainly owned a significant portion of eating places in Birmingham and across the South. Wherever they settled, Greeks opened their own businesses because it provided more financial and personal independence than wage work. In establishing eateries, the Greek colonies helped to build southern urban areas. More specifically, they helped to define how food would be prepared and served in the public sphere irrespective of the designs of the predominantly native-born, middle-class urban developers. Their presence ensured that public spaces where food was served, regardless of the exact nature of the establishment, would represent more diverse venues where people of different backgrounds and life experiences would meet and intermingle.

At the turn of the twentieth century, early Greek entrepreneurs opened fruit stands because they required little capital or knowledge. In Birmingham and Atlanta, Greeks virtually controlled the fruit business. These vendors located their stands outside along city sidewalks and offered a variety of products for sale including fruits, nuts, and grocery items. They sold many items, such as roasted peanuts, watermelon slices, and iced lemonade, intended for immediate consumption. Other Greek vendors opened stands and lunch wagons specializing in hot dogs and other quick fare. As the Greek communities in these cities grew and prospered, many immigrants moved their businesses inside and opened sit-down eateries, primarily “short order” or “quick order” establishments called cafes or lunch rooms. Such operations offered more convenient and less expensive fare than finer urban restaurants.

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Greeks settled in small communities across the South and, unlike their countrymen who settled in the North, generally mixed in with the native white population. In a 1913 study entitled *Greeks in America*, Thomas Burgess identified Birmingham as a “typical” representation of “Greek colonies of the [American] South.” The Greeks failed to congregate in any one community, “but they own or rent their houses or lodgings anywhere” in the city. Also, unlike the larger Greek communities in northern cities, Birmingham’s Greeks failed to establish any ethnic institutions other than the Orthodox Church. Burgess notes, “[T]here is…not one single coffee house! Nor are there any Greek stores for exclusively Greek trade.”

In Birmingham, the first Greek-owned eating place was the People’s Cafe opened in 1890 and located on the corner of Second Avenue and Eighteenth Street. A decade later, other Greek-owned lunch places followed: The Hobson Cafe in 1900 and P. Papageorge’s lunch room in 1901. By the 1910s, Birmingham’s population of around five hundred Greek immigrants owned almost one hundred food-related businesses of various sorts including three fruit

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wholesalers, forty fruit stands, eight bakeries or confectionaries, twelve “high-class restaurants or lunch rooms,” thirty-four “smaller lunch rooms,” and one fish market.247

A similar phenomenon occurred in Atlanta and cities and towns across the South. In Bessemer, Alabama; Danville, Virginia; Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; Manning, South Carolina; Charleston, South Carolina; and other locations, Greeks settled and opened food service businesses.248 The explosion of public eating places in Atlanta, which occurred just after the turn of the century, coincides roughly with the end of the free lunch saloon. Many of the quick-order eateries established to fill this void were operated by Greek immigrants. The earliest Greek-owned cafe in Atlanta was operated by Charles Demas in 1900. By 1903, C. Chockakos, Pete Carolee, and Nicholas Colis owned eating places.249

Many Greek operations served as family businesses. The Poulos family had a long history in Atlanta food service starting in 1904 when Pete Poulos (listed as “P. Poolas” in the city directory) operated a lunch establishment at 22 West Alabama Street.250 In 1910, George Poulos


249 *Atlanta City Directory* (Atlanta: Foote & Davies Co. and Joseph W. Hill, 1900), 1522; *Atlanta City Directory* (1903), 1547-1548.

250 *Atlanta City Directory* (1904), 1315. It is difficult to know exactly which individuals in Atlanta named Poulos were related to each other. Many certainly were close relatives. Others may have been distantly related. Still others may have shortened a longer name and therefore represent another family entirely. This dissertation assumes that all Poulos in Atlanta were related. Even if this is not entirely true, the Greek community in Atlanta generally stuck together to support each other’s interests.
owned an Atlanta sidewalk fruit stand on the corner of Broad and Marietta. By 1920, the extended family owned a variety of different businesses, all related in some way to food consumption. George A. Poulos owned a cigar and soda stand across the street from C. Poulos’s lunch establishment and next door to George D. Poulos’s restaurant. Other Poulos extended family members who kept restaurants or lunch rooms in Atlanta included Thomas, Nick, Pete, and Jim, and many others worked in these establishments.

The place of these immigrants in the early-twentieth-century South was a complicated one. Their success in the food business brought Greek immigrants a great deal of acceptance from native-born whites, but they also faced discrimination. Greeks typically received the benefits of their European origin, meaning that white southerners considered them to be white. Also, their achievements in commerce caused many native-born whites to stress the Greek community’s commitment to American ideals as well as its fitness to live here and pursue the American dream. In 1914, the Atlanta Constitution called Greek businessmen “welcome invaders” of the city and considered them as a group to be “rabidly patriotic” more so than some native-born Atlantans. The most American of the traits exhibited by Greeks, according to this article, was their embrace of capitalism: “In the restaurants, the soda fountains, the fruit stands…the Greeks have taken their place and by the rating of the world—which judges a man

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more or less by his bank account—the welcome strangers here have put themselves in an
eNViable position.”

By this measure, the success of their sidewalk stands and quick-order cafes qualified
Greeks as fit to live in America and to receive the benefits of American freedom. Interestingly,
the Atlanta Constitution article also seems to conflate patriotism with southern nationalism by
calling these “patriotic” immigrants “true sons of the South.” Two years later, the Atlanta
Constitution once again praised the patriotism of the city’s Greek community for its “splendid
showing” at a nationalistic preparedness parade. This type of praise highlights the fact that, at
a time of increasing xenophobia nationwide especially toward southern European immigrants,
many white American southerners recognized Greeks as sharing economic and nationalist values
typically defined as “American” and, even more importantly perhaps, as “Southern.”

Greeks living in southern cities reinforced this view by emphasizing their own
commitment to American culture and values. Before World War I, three young Greek soldiers
from Atlanta who had recently returned from fighting for their homeland in the Balkan Wars
made headlines when they volunteered to serve in the American armed forces at that time
fighting in Mexico. Shortly after the war, Greek immigrants in Atlanta formed a fraternal

253 “Greeks are Welcome Invader in City Business World: Men who Vanquished
Bulgarians have Proven Themselves True Sons of the South,” Atlanta Constitution, May 12,

254 “Greeks are Welcome Invader,” Atlanta Constitution, May 12, 1914,

255 “Atlanta’s Patriotism,” Atlanta Constitution, July 5, 1916,

256 “Atlanta Greeks Wire to Secretary Bryan Offering to Enlist,” Atlanta Constitution,
organization called the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (Ahepa) with the objective “of advancing and promoting pure and undefiled Americanism among the Greeks of the United States…to educate Greeks of the United States in the matter of democracy, and of the government of the United States, and to instill the deepest loyalty and allegiance of the Greeks of this country to the United States…and to promote the highest type of American citizenship among the Greeks.”

In addition to celebrating American values in their fraternal organizations, Greek restaurateurs and cafe owners served a variety of different “American” or “Southern” foods, such as sandwiches, hot dogs, barbecue, or country cooking. They scrupulously avoided Mediterranean fare.

Despite widespread acceptance, Greek-born residents of the American South nevertheless suffered the effects of discrimination. Nicholas Christu, who resided in the Midwest before settling in Birmingham, recalls that discrimination against Greeks was worse in the South than in other parts of the country. Newspaper accounts of discrimination and harassment against Greeks in Birmingham and Atlanta prove the existence of some nativist sentiment. In Atlanta, Greek restaurant owner Jim Brown objected to the use of the ethnic slur “dago” to describe his fellow countrymen. The offensive term was used in newspaper accounts of a fight between two fruit sellers over an American flag. Brown stated that “his countrymen are not ‘dagos’ in any sense of the word, and wants the public notified of that fact.” Because this derogatory term was


259 Christu interview, 10.
more often used to describe Italians, it was not clear from the newspaper report whether Brown opposed use of the offensive word in all circumstances or just as it applied to Greeks.260

Ethnic slurs haunted the Greek sidewalk stand operators in Birmingham during a licensing controversy as well. In 1902, the Birmingham Commercial Club, a forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce, petitioned the city council to refuse business licenses to the fruit stand dealers that lined Birmingham’s sidewalks. George H. Estes, a local insurance manager and chair of the Commercial Club’s grievances committee, led the charge against the predominately Greek fruit vendors. In pursuing a resolution in favor of the petition, Estes sidestepped racial and ethnic considerations arguing instead that the stands were unsanitary, operated on Sundays circumventing local blue laws, blocked the city sidewalks to pedestrian traffic, and unfairly competed with city grocers. At the city council meeting, however, Estes expressed visceral nativist sentiment against the stands and their operators. He argued that the Greek businessmen did not use their profits to contribute to the local community because “similar to the Chinaman” they sent their earnings abroad. He concluded his statement to the council by suggesting, to a round of applause from the gathered audience, that “it is a case of chosing [sic] between John Smith, Bill Jones, and Harry Williams and Demosthenes, Thucidides [sic], and Aristotle.”261


When the city council rejected the club’s petition and allowed the stands to remain on city sidewalks, Estes complained, “The council’s action clearly showed a reversal of the old proverb, ‘vox populi, vox dei,’ making it the voice of the Dago is the voice of the council.”

The council’s decision reveals the complicated position of Greek businessmen in Birmingham. The Commercial Club, reportedly composed of “the leading lights of the local business community” questioned not only the way that Greek immigrants conducted their businesses, but also their commitment to the New South initiative because they failed to re-invest in the community. On the other hand, the majority of the council members disagreed. They voted to save the sidewalk stands because of the significant revenue that these small businesses contributed to the city. The licensing fee for outdoor stands in Birmingham was more than double that of the same business conducted inside. The Birmingham mayor estimated that the city received roughly $3600 in licensing revenue from the outdoor stands. The mayor further supported the stands by arguing that the people of Birmingham enjoyed the convenience of sidewalk markets. Atlanta fruit stand dealers did not receive this type of support and


promotion in their licensing battle eight years later. In 1910, the Atlanta city council passed a city ordinance requiring street vendors to move their operations inside. As in Birmingham, the fact that such legislation affected an industry composed almost entirely of Greek immigrants suggests an attempt by nativist businessmen and legislators to attack their economic interests based on ethnic and cultural difference and perhaps financial competition.

Greek entrepreneurs faced incidents of discrimination in other parts of the South as well. Reports of Greek immigrants being treated as “black” and subjected to southern segregation laws are mostly unsubstantiated. However, in Danville, Virginia, restrictive covenants barred Greeks, along with people of “Turkish, Asiatic, or African descent” from living in certain parts of the city. Growing up in Danville as the son of a cafe owner, Albert Maurakis recalls discrimination based upon his ethnicity, but also because his family moved from Pittsburgh. He and his brothers were called “Yankees” by fellow classmates, and Maurakis suffered discrimination at the hands of a teacher at Robert E. Lee Grammar School who separated him from the rest of the class by an empty row of seats and held him back a year in school. Such actions might have represented distaste for his northern upbringing as much as his ethnicity. Because Greek immigrants tended to move around the country before settling in the South, this

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267 Maurakis, Never Saw Sunset, 100, 121, 168.
type of regional discrimination must have been a shared experience of many Greek immigrants living in the early-twentieth-century South.

In most cases, however, native-born white southerners did not treat Greeks with outright hostility, but nevertheless recognized their difference from other white southerners. This was especially true when it came to religion where, as members of the Greek Orthodox Church living among southern Protestants, their ethnic distinction was most pronounced. Because Protestantism underlay many of the more significant moral precepts that the white southern middle class upheld—against alcohol and gambling, for instance—religious difference mattered to the Progressive social reform that many southern urban leaders tried to implement. The fact that a significant portion of the population shaping early southern eating places did not necessarily share these same moral imperatives contributed to the cultural conflict that took shape in these spaces.

Greek efforts to express their commitment to their new country may have represented tactics to avoid such perceptions of difference even in the absence of outright discrimination and to prove the immigrant ability and desire to conform to American mores. In the case of Ahepa, the hyper-national, patriotic Greek-American association, not only did this organization form in a southern city, but twenty-nine of the thirty-two new chapters formed during its first year opened in southern cities and towns (or border states), such as Birmingham, Alabama; Wilson, North Carolina; Shreveport, Louisiana; Memphis, Tennessee; Jacksonville, Florida; and Muskogee, Oklahoma.268 The formation of so many Americanized Greek fraternal organizations in a region where a much lower percentage of immigrants settled suggests an attempt on the part of the Greek community in the South to prove their commitment to the United States in a time of

renewed nativist sentiment. Greeks living in the South made efforts to avoid any public notice of difference. Unlike other areas of the country, Greeks did not open coffee houses or operate stores that specialized in Greek trade.\textsuperscript{269} This practice differed from Greek colonies in the North. In New York, for example, Greek restaurants served foreign foods including roast lamb and Greek pudding.\textsuperscript{270} The strict avoidance of Greek fare in southern cafes and restaurants in the South, even though they continued to prepare ethnic food for their own families, may reflect the smaller ethnic customer based in the city, but it also suggests an attempt to avoid the perception of difference.

Despite these efforts, the public visibility of Greek food service entrepreneurs and their employees often brought them at odds with other black and white southerners or civic authorities. Sometimes this conflict took a very active form, such as criminal activities. Their public positions as entrepreneurs in business enterprises that saw significant walk-in trade throughout the course of any given day made the Greek community particularly vulnerable crime victims. Although criminal activity no doubt occurred in any public or private space where money or property was known to be kept, urban eating establishments were particularly vulnerable to crime and violence because of the variety of the urban population that gathered in these spaces as well as the questionable nature of the activities that often took place.

Greek immigrants often served as central figures in these crime dramas. On November 21, 1922, two masked intruders shot and killed Peter G. Poulos, part owner of the Forsythe Restaurant in downtown Atlanta. The motive was unclear. Investigators assumed the killers were seeking money; the family suspected that the murderers, employees who had recently been

\textsuperscript{269} Burgess, \textit{Greeks in America}, 173.

\textsuperscript{270} Fairchild, \textit{Greek Immigration to the United States}, 152.
dismissed, were seeking revenge; and although it was not mentioned at the time, it is also possible that the killers were involved in illegal gambling or alcohol, both well-known illicit activities of restaurants in the 1920s.

As he lay dying, Poulos wrote a note identifying his killer as former African American employee Will Johnson. Authorities arrested and convicted Johnson and two other ex-employees shortly after the crime. A judge sentenced Johnson to hang, and his co-conspirators, Chester Johnson and Cliff Walker, to life in prison. Two years after the crime, despite the active opposition of Atlanta’s Greek immigrant community, Georgia’s governor commuted Will Johnson’s sentence to life in prison because it was commensurate with the sentences handed down to his supposedly older and wiser co-conspirators.271

For the extended Poulos family, the 1922 crime represented one more tragic incident in a year that had begun with physical violence at another Poulos-owned restaurant. In January, intruders reportedly trying to steal money from the restaurant located at 20 West Alabama Street beat employee Sam Angelaides and fractured his skull. In February, a second attack left Angelaides with a bullet in his leg.272 It seems unlikely that the same restaurant, owned by the

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same family, and then the same individual would become victim so often in so short a time by
mere happenstance.

This enigma becomes clearer by accounting for the more questionable activities other
than eating that took place in urban cafes and lunch rooms. In her study of the Birmingham
Greek community, Sophia Petrou quotes a judge as saying, “[I]f all America was like the Greek,
I wouldn’t have a job.”273 Petrou does not elaborate on where and when this judge worked, but
he probably did not work in early-twentieth-century Atlanta when Greek restaurant owners and
their employees made regular appearances before the local Recorder’s Court. Mostly these
immigrants faced charges related to non-violent morals crimes such as illegal gambling and
alcohol. In April 1909, for example, Atlanta authorities arrested Jim and Tom Poulos, along with
two other Greek restaurant owners or employees, Jim Hanjaras and Charlie Dordas for gambling
in the basement of Hanjaras’s restaurant located at 16 ½ North Broad Street. In addition to
running his business here, Hanjaras reportedly lived at the same address.274

In February 1912, John Poulos, an employee at a restaurant located at 13 ½ North Broad
Street, was arrested for selling whiskey in contravention of local prohibition laws. His employer,
Jim Favors, was convicted of running a “blind tiger,” a slang term used to describe a lower-class
establishment selling illegal liquor.275 In May 1914, two individuals named Jim Poulos and one

273 Sophia Petrou, “A History of Greeks in Birmingham,” 10. The original quote was
from an oral interview the author conducted with Tom Economopoulos in Birmingham in June
1979.

274 “Negro Thief Escapes,” Atlanta Constitution, April 6, 1909,

275 “Three Blind Tigers Get Limit of the Law,” Atlanta Constitution, February 7, 1912,
named George Poulos were arrested along with six others for gambling in the basement of an eating establishment owned by another Greek immigrant, Nick Caccans.  

Such arrests and convictions say more about the place of Greek restaurant owners and the role of public eateries in southern society than they do about the alleged morality of any particular Greek immigrant. As sites of legal consumption with a regular urban customer base, cafes and lunch rooms made excellent locations for offering extra-legal goods and services as well. Much of the urban dining environment was controlled by an ethnic group with cultural standards that sometimes diverged from those of the native-born elite controlling city government. This situation served to position early-twentieth-century public eating places as sites of cultural conflict between what activities would and would not be considered appropriate in public spaces. The public nature of cafes and lunch rooms, their long hours (lunchrooms often stayed open well past lunchtime), and the diversity of the urban population that frequented these places caused public eating spaces to be places of public amusement as much as places to find a good meal.

In southern cities and towns tempered by regulation against conducting trade on Sundays, consuming alcohol, mingling with the opposite sex, and gambling, among other alleged vices, restaurants provided space for all of these activities to take place. The fact these spaces were dominated by a population of people who, because of their different history, experiences, and religious traditions, were not necessarily burdened by the same moralistic standards of the native-born, middle-class, white population that controlled city governments and police forces contributed to the cultural conflict that occurred in these public spaces.

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Cultural diversity in urban public eating places as well as their novelty caused much concern about whether these spaces were good for society. As food practices evolved to fit the different pace of an urban environment, those who had plenty wondered if their overabundance and overindulgence might lead to sickness of the body. Southerners who were experiencing new modes of sustenance offered in urban shops as well as cafes worried incessantly about how to avoid or alleviate indigestion caused by eating too quickly or eating the wrong types of foods. Meanwhile, modern industry offered new products that were advertised to cure such digestive problems from special elixirs to vegetable oils to breakfast cereals.\(^{277}\)

In their original eighteenth-century French derivation, restaurants had as their primary purpose to sustain customers whose gastro-intestinal tract could not handle the rigors of modern city life. As a matter of fact, the French term “restaurant” originally referred specifically to a thick meat broth served to invalids whose weak constitutions could not handle heavier foods and only later came to apply to the public spaces where such fare could be consumed.\(^{278}\) But two centuries later in the American South, new urbanites accused public eating places of causing their chronic dyspepsia. One Galveston, Texas, newspaper article suggested that constantly eating out caused a myriad of contradictory digestive problems such as overeating, under-eating, extravagance, frugality, indigestion, eating at odd hours, eating too quickly, eating too much


meat, and unwise food choices.\textsuperscript{279} Such accusations could not be taken lightly by a society that increasingly identified itself by what food it consumed and under what conditions such consumption took place. Modern industry offered solutions for chronic indigestion in new food products specifically designed for the working man forced to take lunch out. The Natural Food Company, for example, advertised shredded wheat as the solution to fast meals at the lunch counter by cautioning, “Quick eating causes slow thinking.”\textsuperscript{280}

Public anxieties about eating out extended beyond the body, however, and permeated very basic concerns about the soul. Southerners worried that eating places might serve as potential sites for activities considered immoral and that bodily pollution that might result. Eating establishments were supposed to uphold the same moral standards expected of the southern home, but because they were public facilities, cafe operators either could not or would not limit and control the activities of his employees and customers in the way deemed proper at that time for a white middle-class home. Moreover, the amusements found in public eating places, as well as the opportunities for profit, often attracted the unrulier elements of the urban population even in finer establishments. In January 1874, the upscale Thompson’s Restaurant was the scene of a violent fracas when several of its cooks reportedly engaged in a drunken brawl. The police arrived and arrested two employees, Cicero Peak and Julia Brinkly. Police


\textsuperscript{280}“Classified Ad 1—No Title,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, August 5, 1903, http://proquest.umi.com.libdata.lib.ua.edu/.
later found that Peak had stolen “a miscellaneous assortment of venison, beef, and fish, showing that this gentleman contemplated having a Sunday dinner at his employer’s expense.”

This event did not mark the first time that Thompson’s suffered employee theft. The luxury that surrounded nicer restaurants offered opportunities for illicit financial profit and often proved too tempting for some employees who may have struggled to afford their Sunday dinner. Shortly after Thompson opened his cafe in 1869, authorities prosecuted an African American employee, Isaiah Harris, for reportedly stealing linens, various types of cups, claret wine, and champagne. The evidence against Harris came from a search of his room during which police found tumblers, goblets, and towels under his bed. At an African American fair on Broad Street, they found three bottles of claret selling for 10 cents a glass. The sellers testified that they received the wine from Harris. The judge sentenced Harris to six months on the chain gang.

City officials had good reason to fear crime and disputes that started in public eating houses because such altercations often turned into violence in the city streets. The small town of Decatur, Alabama, set the scene for a fatal confrontation between Samuel Weaver and a companion named Crenshaw. Crenshaw shot Weaver, presumably in self-defense, after Weaver pulled a knife on his opponent and ripped open his jaw in an effort to cut Crenshaw’s throat. The deadly fight had started at the Bismarck Restaurant where the two men were dining when an argument broke out. The scene turned deadly when it spilled out into the city streets. Although


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the fatal shot had not occurred at the Bismarck, public spaces with a diverse urban customer base and intoxicating beverages no doubt served as a theater in which violent fights often began.²⁸³

Physical altercation and robbery aside, urban authorities also worried that eating places might provide public space for less violent acts of supposed moral degradation, such as drinking. After Atlanta’s city council ended the practice of serving meals in local saloons, restaurant proprietors began sending out for beer to serve to their patrons. Eating places often set up beside saloons and established a system whereby the restaurant keeper or patron might order drinks from the saloon to be delivered to the customer in the restaurant. Jim Brown, a Greek immigrant who owned a cafe at 120 Decatur Street in Atlanta, established a “push button” system with the saloon next door. When he wanted to order drinks for a patron, he simply pushed a button and placed the order. This system was similar to one used by every restaurant in the city until 1906 when the city council prohibited restaurants from serving alcohol.²⁸⁴ One way that the city enforced this ordinance was to refuse business licenses to restaurants located too close to saloons.²⁸⁵

The struggle that southern cities undertook to reconcile eating and drinking in public places reveals the complicated merger of various different value systems in a diverse urban environment. The governing salaried classes worried that working-class whites, African


Americans, and foreigners might use these spaces more as saloons than restaurants thereby bypassing many of the regulations that specifically applied to saloons, such as the absence of women. If drinking was allowed, patrons might linger in restaurants, getting drunk, and providing one more space for public immorality to occur. This was particularly true in African American neighborhoods where the white power structure thought social control was particularly necessary.

The desire to separate eating and drinking by refusing to serve alcohol in restaurants was inherently racist. The city council admitted that the regulation targeted African American eating places, but the ordinance was written broadly enough to apply to white restaurants as well. This general construction caused some white councilmen to initially oppose the law. One council member argued that men who did not frequent saloons nevertheless drank alcohol with their meals and joked that restaurant service “was the only way the prohibitionists could get a drink.” The mayor opposed its wide applicability stating that “there can be no harm in serving beer in such [eating] places as are in the center of the city [where the white restaurants are located].” Despite such protest, the council managed to pass the law unanimously.  

One solution to the matter of drinking was to do away with alcohol consumption within the city altogether. Atlanta implemented prohibition in 1906 before passage of the federal amendment banning the manufacture and sale of alcohol. For Atlanta, prohibition represented only the latest in a series of legislative attempts to govern the use and sale of inebriants in the city. “[T]he council recently refused to license certain restaurants because they were next door to

saloons,” the mayor commented late in 1906, “and then later closed up the very saloons which adjoined the objectionable restaurants.” 287 Despite their best efforts, closing the saloons failed to solve the problem of drinking in public eating places.

Before and after local prohibition, Atlanta authorities spent quite a bit of time and energy regulating the sale and consumption of alcohol in public spaces designated at least in part for eating. The city continued to allow the sale of “near beer,” a low alcohol content beverage, but regulated its consumption with special licensing provisions and other blue laws. The question of alcohol merged with concerns about other types of supposed immoral behavior in southern eating places. Atlanta went through various stages of prohibition and temperance in trying to stem the crime and disorder that occurred in public places. During times of temperance and in the absence of traditional saloons, many observers considered eating places to be fronts for alcoholic beverages, either those that were illegal or those that contained such small amounts of alcohol that they remained a legal alternative to liquor.

The middle classes, most of which could no doubt afford to serve good bootleg whisky, thought that these alleged eating places would attract lower-class elements that would inherently cause trouble. In 1908, during a time of temperance in Atlanta, J. Francis Keeley noted that he would rather see “a respectable saloon than a so-called cafe, selling ‘near beer’ and given to rowdyism [sic].” 288 The end of legalized alcohol in Atlanta did not mean the end to controversies over drinking and saloons. After the city passed local prohibition laws, authorities continued to


struggle with eating places and “near beer saloons” that continued to sale alcohol illegally or served near beer to their customers in contravention to local licensing provisions.

The consumption of meals and alcohol simultaneously at public places in the city had a long connection. In Montgomery, Alabama, the connection was so common that proprietors assumed having a business license to serve meals allowed them to serve alcoholic beverages as well. City authorities convicted a Montgomery confectioner and restaurant keeper named Nicrosi for selling alcoholic beverages without the requisite retail business license allowing him to do so. Nicrosi, who only sold the drinks to his dining customers to be consumed on the premises, argued that his license to keep a restaurant implied the ability to serve drinks with their meals. The Supreme Court of Alabama disagreed and affirmed Nicrosi’s conviction.289 Decades later, Montgomery’s chief of police complained that the city’s law allowing restaurants to open on Sundays made it impossible to prevent the Sunday sale of alcohol. The connection between the sale of food and drink was so strong that the chief could not prevent the sale of alcohol “where saloons are allowed to have restaurants attached and keep open all day Sunday to serve meals.”290 This case reveals the strong connection between food and drink in public places and the difficulty that southern urban authorities would have to ban one of these two practices.

Drinking in public spaces, illegal or otherwise, implicated other alleged moral infractions as well. Drinking often coincided with sexualized conduct between men and women in public spaces. Unlike the higher-class restaurants and their “ladies cafes,” lower-class eateries made no attempt to separate men and women. As a result, these establishments offered public space for


men and women to intermingle and engage in sexualized activity that encompassed anything from drinking together to sitting on laps to actual intercourse. Police raided eating places to end contact between men and women that was considered inappropriate. The College Inn in Atlanta suffered such a raid in May 1914, and its proprietors faced charges related to illegal drinking and sexual mingling. The judge accused the cafe of circumventing local prohibition laws by purchasing “near beer” from local African American merchants who then delivered the drinks to the College Inn in violation of city ordinances. In this way, eateries without the appropriate licenses nevertheless served alcoholic beverages, or their low-alcohol-content alternatives, to their patrons. The sexual mingling charges arose because “women and men habitually met in the restaurant at night time for the purpose of drinking beer and engaging in disorderly conduct. Witnesses stated that women had been sitting in the laps of men, and that men often embraced their female companions while drinking with them at the place.”291

In addition to the relatively innocent intermixing of the genders in legitimate eating places, southern authorities worried that an eatery could serve as a front for a brothel. In 1903, black prostitutes arrested on vagrancy charges in Atlanta inevitably reported that they worked at “Old Lady Brown’s Restaurant.” Sarah Brown, a sixty year old African-American woman, operated a cafe that authorities assumed was a front for prostitution. Police often visited her establishment for unspecified complaints of “disorder,” and reportedly “[d]runken men [visited] at all hours of the day and night.” Brown’s cafe was located on Decatur Street, an area of Atlanta that was notorious for crime, drinking, prostitution, and other vices. She hired around forty women to work at her restaurant. In 1900, Brown had been brought up on charges for running a

disorderly establishment, but the judge let her go with the promise that she would keep her customers in line. Despite this warning and the apparent illegal activities undertaken at Brown’s cafe, there is no evidence that police shut her down. But city police did begin arresting any woman who reported working for Brown on “vagrancy” or prostitution charges.\textsuperscript{292}

The connection between restaurants and prostitution existed outside of Atlanta. In 1913, Waynesboro, Georgia, police arrested a white man named Bailey on charges of adultery and fornication for allegedly sharing the bed of a black prostitute named Lottie Tilson. Tilson allegedly ran a restaurant at her house. Bailey had been seen going into the restaurant late in the afternoon and not emerging until the next morning. His horse and buggy remained outside of the restaurant all night. When police arrested him, Bailey was found at Tilson’s home at eleven o’clock at night wearing only his underwear. The suggestion in this case was that Tilson’s “restaurant” was merely a front for her prostitution activities.\textsuperscript{293}

Brown and Tilson, both African American restaurant operators, illuminates race as a complicating factor in evolving southern food mores. The issue of race and the potential for race-mixing in lower-class public eating establishments increased the potential threat of illegal


\textsuperscript{293} \textit{Bailey v. the State}, 12 Ga. App. 529 (Ga. Ct. App. 1913). The Court of Appeals of Georgia reversed Bailey’s conviction because of testimony from Bailey’s doctor who stated that Bailey suffered from syphilis and “in his opinion, the disease had made such inroads upon the functional organ, and had so wasted the vital organs and ‘wrecked his general condition,’ that Bailey was entirely too weak to perform sexual intercourse during that period.” But this reversal does not change the general opinion of authorities at that time that Tilson was providing prostitution services instead of, or in addition to, meals.
drinking and illicit sexual interaction for southern white authorities. Although southern eating places tended to implement some form of racial segregation even before formal Jim Crow laws took hold, the owners of many early cafes and lunch rooms often came to the South unfamiliar with the region’s racial mores. Greek native Albert Maurikis recalls his confusion over racial segregation when he moved from Pittsburgh to Danville, Virginia: “Uncle Steve explained the Southern Jim Crow practice of segregating the races in the use of all public facilities and that the ‘colored’ must enter back doors to eat in restaurant kitchens.”294

The Maurikis family acquiesced to segregation culture. Although his uncle had no rear entrance, he served black customers through a small opening in the window. In 1929, Maurikis’s father opened the Central Cafe with an eight-foot partition separating the white and black dining areas and a separate entrance for both.295 Despite such concessions, evidence reveals that Greek immigrants, perhaps because of their own experiences as objects of discrimination or their own darker pigmented skin, never entirely accepted southern racial mores as thoroughly as native-born southern whites. In Durham, North Carolina, the Lincoln Cafe, an African American eating place operated by Greek immigrants, reportedly received a threatening letter from the Ku Klux Klan alleging that white men and black women were meeting at the cafe and leaving together in automobiles. Specifically, the letter stated, “You are fraternizing with the Negroes and allowing a low element of whites to meet Nigger women in your place.” In this letter, the Klan expresses their concerns that Greek immigrants were socializing with African Americans and that lower-

294 Maurikis, Never Saw Sunset, 98.
295 Maurikis, Never Saw Sunset, 98, 131.
class white men and black women were using the cafe as a meeting place for dates or sexual liaisons.  

These overt anxieties were complicated by less discernible issues. As an organization, the Klan in the 1920s was known for its nativist, as well as its racist, ideology. In this case, the apparent financial success of the immigrants may have provided fodder for the organization’s xenophobic beliefs. Additionally, the name of the cafe represents an explicit reference to Abraham Lincoln and, by implication, to black emancipation. Collectively, the notion that immigrants and African Americans had the freedom to act independently in space open to the public may have exacerbated white anxieties that the Klan expressed through concerns about miscegenation and morality. The memories of Greek immigrant cafe owners also reveal a certain amount of ambivalence toward southern racial mores during the era of Jim Crow. In his memoir, Greek immigrant and South Carolina restaurateur, John Katsos, recalls an African American acquaintance asking him if he was Jewish. Katsos responded, “No. I thought you knew I was a Greek.” The African American man answered that he was not aware of Katsos’s ethnicity, “but I figured you ain’t been no white man.” This story, assuming its authenticity, suggests that Greek immigrants may have treated African Americans subtly better or with more respect than native-born southern whites. If so, the important status of Greek immigrants within public food culture in the South might have served as a threat to the cultural system of racial segregation.  

For southern white authorities, a potentially volatile situation ignited when illegal drinking and illicit sexual activity combined with race in the public sphere. City authorities in

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Atlanta and other parts of the South implemented programs in the early twentieth century to do away with so-called “negro dives”—lower-class African American establishments—in the city. In Atlanta, such establishments generally took the form of a restaurant, but white authorities saw this status as a front for otherwise illegal or immoral activities. According to the *Atlanta Constitution*, owners of these establishments received a business license to run a restaurant, but set up shop near a saloon. Then, throughout the day and night, men and women could hang out at the “restaurant” supposedly to eat but with the real purpose to drink and carouse. The *Constitution* noted that this marked one way black women got around the city prohibition against women going into saloons. City authorities also complained about the crime they associated with black restaurants.298

The question of “black dives” in early-twentieth-century southern cities implicated many of the race, class, and gender issues that existed in the broader society. Southern white authorities took issue with several aspects of these inexpensive restaurants. First, although some black restaurants may have in fact been operated by whites, these establishments provided public space for poor African Americans to congregate without the oversight of a white employer or white authorities. A generation or more away from slavery, African American men and women living and working in urban areas of the New South could choose to spend their wages and leisure time securing food and drink in public places, but white authorities struggled with how to effectively regulate such choices. The loss of social control over a portion of the black population in an urban environment where more opportunities existed threatened white supremacy.

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Second, these public spaces implicated much broader concerns about social control in the urban environment. By their very nature, cities begot anonymity. New people came into town on a regular basis who did not have any history in the area and about whom city authorities had no knowledge. Urban lifestyles ran on different rhythms than the more traditional, agricultural routines. The urban workforce maintained different labor routines and wage schedules than their rural counterparts. Unlike the black sharecropper in the southern countryside, whose existence forced him into constant penury, an urban African American wage laborer had money in his pocket and longed to share in the consumer experiences of the city. At the turn of the twentieth century, urban areas still represented a novelty to the primarily rural and agricultural South. For African Americans, negotiating the urban consumer landscape often brought escape from the normality of racial difference and discrimination. For their part, white urban authorities sought to ensure that consumer networks incorporated this same difference and discrimination.

Third, unlike saloons, establishments licensed as inexpensive restaurants could accept the patronage of women. In higher class restaurants, common practice separated female patrons from the general population of men by establishing ladies cafes generally run by the proprietors’ wives. But in lower-class establishments, no such segregation existed. City authorities worried about sexualized activities that might occur in restaurants or at least start out at such establishments. The notion of gender intermingling occurring in public spaces over which white authorities had very little control implicated these same moral precepts.

Atlanta police made a regular practice of raiding “negro dives” to put them out of business and to send a message to similar establishments located nearby. Originally, the decision to raid a business was made by the white police officer on duty. As a result, many black cafes operated peacefully for years without any raids. The Atlanta Constitution reported that African
American restaurants or “dives are tolerated simply because the negroes must have somewhere to congregate, but at times tolerance ceases to be a police virtue and a raid is made.” The article did not explain what circumstances triggered police raids, but periodic, individual crack-downs of specific cafes seemed to have been used to serve as examples to neighboring establishments. Such incidents might also have been used to impress the significance and arbitrary nature of white supremacy upon African American urban populations.

In the early twentieth century, black cafes were generally not large or fancy affairs. On May 3, 1900, the Atlanta police raided a black cafe located in the cellar of an African American store on Decatur and Butler streets. The cafe normally served an African American crowd for eating, drinking, and smoking. The *Atlanta Constitution* reporting the raid noted that more drinking, and therefore more fighting, than usual took place that night. A police captain charged with monitoring the neighborhood called the station to request reinforcements and a police wagon. Police blockaded the establishments’ front and back doors and when patrons began to stream out as a result of the raid, policemen stopped their progress with clubs if necessary and arrested them. In all, forty-four men and women were arrested. Thereafter, people began to flee neighboring restaurants, saloons, and stores out of fear that they too may be subject to arrest.299

In 1906, in the wake of the city’s race riot, targeting black restaurants for raids and closure became more systematic. The police established a plain clothes squad of white policemen to round up “all of the negroes who were idling about the city” believing that this would reduce the patronage of local African American restaurants.300 They also targeted the establishments

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with the police chief and several city commissioners personally inspecting the city’s African American neighborhood for “dives, saloons, restaurants, and other places of suspicion.” This inspection resulted in raids on several so-called “dives” to round up any African Americans considered to be “idle.”

In August and September 1906, Atlanta’s chief of police, with help from the city council, set out to close these “negro dives” for good by refusing new business licenses to inexpensive black restaurants. The city council responded by passing an ordinance requiring all restaurants to go through a special licensing process. As a result, twenty-two “cheap restaurants” in the city, which the police chief designated as “very bad” were set on the chopping block. Most of these restaurants were owned by African American men or women, but a couple belonged to Greek men. Within days, the number had increased to fifty-seven, and the city council refused business licenses to all of these establishments. After closing down the restaurants in Atlanta’s


African American neighborhood, white authorities immediately began targeting black saloons in the area.\textsuperscript{306}

Atlanta was not the only southern urban area dealing with black restaurants that acted as a challenge to white authority in the city. This was a problem experienced by urban authorities as they attempted to make newer consumer establishments coincide with older norms. In Montgomery, some local citizens complained about “negro dives” operating just outside the city limits and violating Sunday liquor laws. These “dives” were variously described as saloons, stores, and “cookshops” (cafes operated by African American women). According to reports, all such establishments located in what the \textit{Montgomery Advertiser} referred to as the “dive district” ran good businesses on Sunday with patronage from African American men and women and white men—implicating fears of racial mixing. Like Atlanta, the city considered several alternatives to close down such businesses including passing a law that would make liquor sales illegal in the county or annexing the area into the city so that these businesses would be subject to municipal codes and regulations.\textsuperscript{307}

As more women began to patronize and work at public eating establishments, the opportunity for racial intermixing and violence became more acute because black men came into contact with white women. In 1924, a judge dropped murder charges against a white Atlanta restaurant proprietor, Pete Garakitiz, who hit a black man named Nathaniel Johnson. Reportedly,


Garakitiz had ordered Johnson to leave the restaurant after Johnson used a curse word in front of a white woman. When Johnson refused to leave, Garakitiz hit him. Then, parties unknown to the court murdered Johnson when he went out into the street. In this case, an African American man was apparently lynched, or at least murdered, for supposedly inappropriate conduct in front of a white woman dining or working at a café.308

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The twentieth century found the American South in transition. Although the region remained predominantly rural, more southerners began to live apart from traditional agricultural routines and customs. In towns and cities across the region, new lifestyles necessitated different eating habits with people eating different foods, moderating the amounts of food they ate at different times of the day, and finding new consumer outlets for their dining convenience and pleasure. Among these developments was the need for the ease and convenience of the midday lunch, as compared to a more leisurely dinner, as well as the appearance of lunch rooms and cafes capable of serving quick meals.

As more public consumer places opened to serve growing urban appetites, customers and civic authorities realized that eating might not be the only activity that took place in these spaces. Regulation was difficult because unlike finer establishments, lower-class eating places attracted a wide variety of people—a population that represented people of different ethnicities, races, classes, genders, marital statuses, backgrounds and occupations—with cultural mores that differed from those of the predominantly middle-class urban governments. Moreover, such places were not as strictly controlled or constructed as the places frequented by higher-end

cliente. The cultural conflict that ensued in the saloons, cafes, and lunch rooms where the lower classes dined made these places contested spaces.

Regulation against alcohol, gambling, and sexual improprieties among others often put city officials at odds with cafe regulars of different genders, ethnicities, and races. The most significant public regulations that cafe patrons faced were racial segregation codes that often prohibited African Americans from eating in the public sphere. For their part, African Americans responded to racial segregation laws in many ways. A small number of black entrepreneurs reacted to Jim Crow by creating opportunities for themselves. Despite the negative feelings that white urban authorities had against these spaces, in most cities and towns, black cafes emerged that provided financial profit and enhanced social standing for the proprietors as well as opportunity for obtaining food and drink and social interaction for the patrons.
CHAPTER FOUR: Eating Jim Crow: 
African American Eating Practices in the Twentieth-Century South

In 1947, brothers Robert and James Paschal opened a small sandwich shop on West Hunter Street in Atlanta, Georgia, that catered to black customers. The Paschals’ initial location was so small that it did not have a kitchen. Robert Paschal cooked his special-recipe fried chicken at home and transported the sandwiches to their tiny shop in a taxi. Within two decades, the Paschal brothers’ business had grown and prospered to the point that it took up an entire city block on the re-named Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and included a fine restaurant still specializing in Robert’s fried chicken, a nightclub, and a hotel.

Along the road to success, Robert and James carried much of Atlanta’s African American community with them. In addition to serving good food in a respectful atmosphere, they focused on community building and racial progress. They offered jobs to African American college students who went on to become business and civic leaders. They provided meeting space for church and community groups, fraternal organizations, and civil rights organizers. They gave support and sustenance to grass-roots activists in the struggle for desegregation and equal opportunity. Most importantly, they offered a public space for black college students, families, and other individuals to find a respectful place in which to build a lifetime of memories of food and fellowship.309

Paschal’s Restaurant illustrates important elements of African American food culture in the twentieth-century South. The most important was self-reliance. In the era of Jim Crow, black southerners attempted to establish self-contained family and community structures intended to protect members from the harsher realities of the white world. The institutions that they created enabled them to subsist but also motivated many African Americans to thrive and succeed despite institutional and legal barriers. Foodways provide a good vehicle for studying this process. Black southerners had long-lasting associations with food because as a race they bore almost sole responsibility for cultivating, harvesting, preparing, cooking, and serving much of the food that sustained southern bodies. For their part, white southerners attempted to use these associations to denigrate African Americans by limiting them to low-paid and inferior positions as farm laborers and domestic servants. Black women’s association with cooking often put them in difficult, and even dangerous, situations because they had to work in white homes where they were vulnerable to long hours, low wages, grim working conditions, personal insult, and sexual abuse.

Despite institutional barriers, many black women found creative ways to use their culinary skills to better their circumstances and those of their family.310 Despite the belief

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common among white, middle-class women that a scientific understanding of food represented an inherently white value, many African American women studied and valued domestic science. Those who did not have this opportunity nevertheless developed reputations as skilled cooks. Black women used this knowledge to improve housekeeping in their own homes, to acquire positions as cooks for white families, to start their own businesses, and to spread knowledge to younger generations.

Their role as cooks and domestic servants placed many black women in degrading and even dangerous positions. Still, many African American women used their knowledge of food and cooking to carve out areas of autonomy for themselves to better their circumstances. They opened pie stands, catering businesses, and lunch rooms using skills routinely misappropriated by white employers paying insufficient wages to create financial security for themselves and their families. Similarly, many African American men, whose skill set and experiences often consisted of cooking and serving food in the public sphere, opened cafes and restaurants transforming a previously demeaning and subservient role into a skill that facilitated profit, social mobility, and community-building.

The public eating places that African Americans built in the twentieth century created self-contained protective environments for the black community and offered public space for activities that African Americans could not do elsewhere. Like Paschal’s Restaurant, such spaces served roles in the community that extended beyond purveying food. The community gathered to eat, drink, work, listen to music, dance, play cards, discuss business and politics, and participate in a variety of other leisure activities. Such community-building activities were important to a population that was generally excluded from consumption and leisure activities in southern public space. In the often harsh urban environment, southern blacks formed cafes and restaurants
to liberate themselves, their employees, and their customers, at least temporarily, from the degrading and humiliating experiences of the Jim Crow South. For proprietors and employees, they offered opportunities for profit, community interaction, and social mobility. For customers, they provided public spaces for social interaction, entertainment, and sustenance.

Most significantly, however, these public spaces provided forums for African Americans to set the stage for their own liberation. The community- and identity-building activities that took place in public eating spaces were important to developing an activist environment within the southern black community. As Paschal’s Restaurant illustrates, black eating places played significant roles in the civil rights movement as meeting places for activists, the staging ground for protests, a means for providing sustenance to activists, and safe spaces for inter-racial activities that represented a hallmark of the early years of the movement.

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The self-reliance that African Americans were forced to adopt in twentieth-century urban areas did not represent a new value. In the countryside, African American farm families strove to be self-sufficient with regard to food. Unlike their urban contemporaries who obtained much of their sustenance through markets, rural southerners raised many foodstuffs including corn, vegetables, lard, molasses, pork, and chicken. They tried to purchase only those goods that could not be easily cultivated in the South especially wheat and sugar. In a New Deal interview, Katy Brumpy recalls her father’s farm in Mt. Meigs, Alabama: “We raised everything to eat but grain. Great big onions, and greens, and rutabagas and all. My Daddy banked turnip roots and
rutabagas jus’ like potatoes.” Mattie Hammond Harrell, an African American farm wife near Columbia, South Carolina, grew acres of corn, peas, sweet potatoes, millet, turnips, and collards and raised goats and chickens for meat. Mandie Johnson, who grew up in Holmes County, Mississippi, recalls raising almost everything she needed in the country including peas, butter beans, okra, sweet potatoes, white potatoes, popcorn, greens, molasses, and pork products. Annual hog killings produced enough lard for the entire year, around one hundred pounds, which farm families kept in large canisters. Like other farmers, Johnson’s family still purchased those items that the farm did not produce including wheat flour, sugar, rice, coffee, salt, soda, and baking powder.

Early-twentieth-century food studies of rural people in general and African Americans in particular confirm that many southern farms tried to remain self-sufficient. Dorothy Dickins, a home economist at the state agricultural college in Mississippi conducted many such studies in the 1920s. In a 1927 agricultural bulletin comparing the food habits of people living in two different regions of the state, Dickins concludes, “There is evidently a close relation between

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314 Dorothy Dickins, A Study of Food Habits of People in Two Contrasting Areas of Mississippi (Agricultural College: Mississippi Agricultural Experiment Station, 1927), 29; Dorothy Dickins, A Nutrition Investigation of Negro Tenants in the Yazoo Mississippi Delta (Agricultural College: Mississippi Agricultural Experiment Station, 1928), 43; Susan Josephine Mathews, Food Habits of Georgia Rural People (Experiment: Georgia State College of Agriculture, 1929), 24.
consumption and production,” meaning that farming families tended to use more of the products that they produced at home. Dickins writes, “[I]f the farm does not provide milk, if the farm does not provide vegetables, if the farm does not provide poultry, then not as many of these foods will be used.”\(^{315}\) Although Dickins’s study applied to Mississippi, such findings were consistent with similar studies in other states. In 1929, for example, a study of rural Georgia diets found, “[p]roduction of food [on the farm] leads to a more adequate diet.”\(^{316}\) The Georgia study went further to find that land owners typically had better diets because they were able to cultivate greater foodstuffs.\(^{317}\) This implies that, in the countryside, African Americans were already at a nutritional disadvantage because they did not necessarily own the land they worked.

Although rural southerners attempted to be self-sufficient, this was not entirely possible especially with wheat. Southern farms did not grow wheat, but rural southerners consumed flour in sizeable amounts. In her 1927 study, Dickins found that farm families used on average about thirty pounds of flour every two weeks compared to twenty pounds of cornmeal. Biscuits, which rural southerners consumed at breakfast and supper, accounted for this difference. Southerners tended to eat cornbread only at midday. The following year, Dickins found that rural African Americans also consumed more flour than cornmeal because of a preference for biscuits.\(^{318}\) These studies conform to the memories of many rural southerners of purchasing large quantities of wheat flour.

\(^{315}\) Dickins, *Study of Food Habits*, 29.

\(^{316}\) Mathews, *Food Habits of Georgia Rural People*, 26.

\(^{317}\) Mathews, *Food Habits of Georgia Rural People*, 21-22.

Not all memories can be similarly confirmed. Despite black recollections of farm abundance, early home economics studies reveal that African Americans tended to fail in their efforts to meet their needs through self-provision. The earliest professional study of African American foodways was conducted in Alabama in 1895 and found that most rural black farming families subsisted on a diet of hoe cakes (cornmeal and water baked on a flat griddle), thinly-sliced fried salt pork, sap (molasses and fat served with corn bread), and hot water sweetened with molasses. The early twentieth century saw improvement to this subsistence fare. In 1928, Dickins discovered that black Mississippi farmers regularly incorporated eggs, flour biscuits, potatoes, and greens into their diets. Nevertheless, unlike white Mississippi farming families, African Americans failed to subsist on what they produced. Less than half of the food of African American farm families came from the farm; by contrast, over seventy percent of white farm family’s diet came from the farm. As a result, rural African Americans had less access to fruits, vegetables, and milk because they did not grow this produce and because they did not own cows in significant numbers, all of which home economists considered vital to overall health and well-being.

The difference in the cultivation of food products contributed to a significant distinction in the amount of calories consumed on a daily basis by rural African Americans. Black farmers living in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta consumed fewer calories than rural whites living in other parts of the state and thereby received less nutrition than their white counterparts. In their consumption of protein, calcium, and iron, all necessary components to building the strong, healthy bodies needed for agricultural labor, a majority of black families were significantly


below the standard. This was not the case with white farming families.\textsuperscript{321} Even before moving into cities governed by Jim Crow culture, African Americans had significant disadvantages in food consumption. Because of this difference, African Americans suffered the effects of hunger and malnutrition in numbers greatly exceeding those for whites well into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{322}

Dickins attributed this difference in large part “to negligence of the negro,” although she hesitantly admitted that many white land owners refused to allow their tenants to grow food crops.\textsuperscript{323} Dickins’s reaction reveals the importance of these nutritional differences to the construction of race in the early twentieth century South. Like Dickins, most white southerners interpreted poor nutrition to laziness and ignorance which they saw as inherent racial traits. Moreover, the lack of proper nutrition undermined the physical and mental development of rural black southerners, exacerbating racial inequities that were built into the South’s labor system and through dietary distinctions built into the very molecules of life and human flesh. Educated white southerners, like Dickins, with an exaggerated appreciation for science, inevitably undervalued the effect of socio-economic differences borne by discrimination in favor of constructing negative racial traits to explain the nutritional deficiencies of rural blacks. In this way, differences in the southern diet based on race served to justify their pre-conceived and prejudiced views of African Americans. Despite Dickins’s racialized interpretation, it is clear that the basis of these differences is the lack of African American property ownership.

\textsuperscript{321} Dickins, \textit{Nutrition Investigation of Negro Tenants}, 15-17, 25.

\textsuperscript{322} Dickins, \textit{Nutrition Investigation of Negro Tenants}, 29-33.

\textsuperscript{323} Dickins, \textit{Nutrition Investigation of Negro Tenants}, 15-17, 25.
As black farmers and their families left the land for new opportunity in cities and towns, they continued to have poor access to healthy foods. Like their lower-class white contemporaries, African American laborers brought some of their rural food practices into the cities. In Alabama, Blanche Davis, who had grown up in Montgomery County, brought chickens and a cow when she moved to Birmingham. She also cultivated a home garden. These resources, along with her hard work in white kitchens, allowed her own family to eat regularly. Davis recalls, "We had plenty to eat, because we had to raise all that kind of stuff." In a study of four small towns in Mississippi, seventy-eight percent of African Americans, the vast majority of whom were listed as wage earners (including unskilled and skilled laborers), produced home-grown vegetables; twenty-four percent slaughtered hogs for meat; and a majority of families owned chickens. It was not uncommon to see chickens, cows, and gardens in early southern cities as residents with rural roots, especially African Americans, attempted to subsidize their low incomes and integrate into a more consumer-oriented society.

In the cities, black men often escaped their rural connection with food provision and agriculture by engaging in industrial work, but black women had fewer opportunities. Since the antebellum period, black women had been associated with food and cooking because they assumed highly visible roles in plantation kitchens. This association continued and strengthened into the twentieth century because one of the few employment opportunities for black women was in domestic service. Black women continued to be defined by their role in preparing and serving food for the sustenance of white families.

324 Valk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*, 84.

325 Dorothy Dickins, *Changing Pattern of Food Preparation of Small Town Families in Mississippi* (State College, MS: Agricultural Experiment Station, 1945), 7.
Despite the long-held lore of many white families about the dearness of their black cooks, the automatic connection between black women and food service was used to denigrate African American women. It linked the black race to subservient positions within white households; it limited black women to low-paid domestic labor; and it subjected them to sometimes hostile and dangerous work environments. Black women worked hard to keep house and cook for their own families and for those of their white employers. Mandie Johnson of Holmes County, Mississippi, recalls, “Sometimes I had to cook three meals at [her white employers’] house—breakfast, dinner, and supper—and then come home and cook supper.” Domestic servants across the South have similar memories. Blanche Davis, who worked as a domestic in Birmingham, recalls having breakfast on the table at seven o’clock six mornings a week and then continuing in the kitchen until seven o’clock at night.

The white women in whose homes black servants labored often demonstrated disrespect for the women who cooked and served the food that their families consumed. Although many black women, like their white employers, recall relatively pleasant relationships, a close reading of the memories of black domestic servants suggests that the employer-employee relationship was less than satisfying. Blanche Davis describes her relationship with a long-time employer as follows:

[They] were very good to me….I didn’t have any trouble wherever I worked. I give that to them. They just didn’t pay any money. But they were very good to me, very good. I tried to treat them like I wanted them to treat me, and so everything went along pretty good when it came to being on the job.

326 Valk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*, 89.
327 Valk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*, 84.
328 Valk and Brown, *Living with Jim Crow*, 84.
Here, Davis strives to describe an amiable relationship with her white employers, but at the same time, she hints that things were not always good for her or for other laborers. First, Davis’s white employers did not pay her sufficiently signifying that they, much like other white employers, undervalued her skills and long hours. Second, she praises her employers because she did not have any “trouble” with them establishing a particularly low standard for a good employment relationship and suggesting that “trouble” might have been the norm. Davis fails to define the term “trouble,” but based on the experiences of others, the term could include anything from accusations of theft to sexual assault. Third, Davis specifies that her own behavior and how she treated her white employers played an important role in how they treated her. A careful reading of Davis’s description of her relationship with her white employers reveals the tenuous position that many black cooks held in white southern homes.

The black woman’s role in food provision in the South placed many domestics in particularly difficult positions in the New South. The family cook played a simultaneously conspicuous and lowly role in white households. They were visible among the family and in the community, but they were also marginalized. This made them vulnerable at work and in the wider white community to which they gained access. Walter White recalls a childhood memory of a black cook trying to negotiate the physical landscape of Atlanta during the 1906 race riot. The corpulent older woman ran only a few yards ahead of a mob as she tried to escape the white

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downtown area where she worked. Many black cooks would have been physically vulnerable in times of racial conflict as well as in the ordinary course of their day.

This vulnerability extended into the white households in which they worked. In the ordinary course of their day-to-day existence, black females were subject to emotional, physical, and sexual attack by their white employers. Emotional abuse stemmed from the sometime subtle ways that employees devalued their cooks’ skills and individuality. For example, white women might unilaterally rename a servant whose given name inconvenienced the employer for some reason. Black cooks and other servants might be “renamed” because their name sounded too much like a white name, because it was too long for the employer to say quickly, or because the employer could not remember the name.

Writer and Arkansas native Maya Angelou experienced this phenomenon when she started her working life as a young domestic servant in a white household. Although Angelou’s given name was Marguerite, a white female employer rechristened her Mary because the employer considered Angelou’s given name to be too long. The same employer unceremoniously gave the name Glory to the family cook, whose real name was Hallelujah. Angelou resented the fact that she could be renamed so easily. Another domestic servant, Olivia Cherry, who worked in the home of a white Virginia family, recalls that her employer refused to use her given name because Olivia was what she had considered naming her own daughter. Presumably, the employer considered the name to sound too “white” for a domestic servant so she used the name


Susie instead. Like Angelou, Cherry resented the practice and resisted by refusing to respond.\footnote{Valk and Brown, \textit{Living with Jim Crow}, 86.} The disrespect that white employers demonstrated in unilaterally renaming their black servants to fit their own needs belies white memories of the beloved black family cook because it reveals the little regard that white employers held for an individual black domestic’s personhood.

Another common and inherently more hurtful practice was the subjection of black cooks and other domestics to sexual abuse. To compound this tragedy, young girls usually entered domestic service during adolescence to supplement a meager family income. Endesha Ida Mae Holland recalls being raped by the husband of her white employer when she was only eleven years old.\footnote{Holland, \textit{From the Mississippi Delta}, 90-91.} Such stories were not uncommon in black communities, and the risks that black women faced by working in white kitchens became notorious. So much so that if the family’s financial situation allowed it, fathers refused to let their daughters take domestic jobs. When Mississippi’s Anne Moody moved in with her father, he gave her an allowance so that she would not have to work in a white man’s home. With more than a little anger, her father told her that the white men “do nothing but mess” with the African American girls who worked for them.\footnote{Moody, \textit{Coming of Age in Mississippi}, 177.} Bessie Delany, an African American woman who grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina, fifty years earlier recalls a similar experience. When Delany asked her parents to let her work in the home of a neighboring white family, they refused. Delany’s father, a school administrator and Episcopal bishop who had been born into slavery, could afford to keep his daughters out of domestic service. Delany assumed that her parents did not want her working in a white home.
because it was a lower-class occupation. More likely, they wanted to protect their daughters from possible sexual abuse at the hands of a white employer.\footnote{Sarah Delaney, A. Elizabeth Delany, and Amy Hill Hearth, \textit{Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years} (New York: Kodansha International, 1993), 76.}

In addition to emotional and sexual abuse, white women often degraded the skill set of their black cooks. The increasing knowledge of white urban club women in domestic science principles encouraged them to belittle the more artistic, oral traditions that they saw as characterizing black cookery. Although they continued to employ black cooks as a means of demonstrating their participation in the white middle class and because of a lack of any practical alternatives, white women did not think that their domestic servants could master the concepts of scientific cookery necessary to prepare contemporary fare without white oversight. They also considered the work ethic of twentieth-century black cooks to be substandard compared to those of their enslaved forebears.

In the white home, low wages and a belittling and dangerous work environment kept skilled black cooks demeaned and subordinate. At a time when cooking was considered to be a science, the classification of African American cooks as artists in the kitchen was used to make their cooking seem less than sufficient and out of step with contemporary southern mores, at least from the perspective of the urban white middle class. In the 1930s, a WPA interviewer in Birmingham, Alabama, described her African American cook, Katy Brumpy, as having a “talent...in cooking plain food deliciously.” Despite Brumphy’s skill in the kitchen as well as her literacy, she failed to follow recipes, cooking instead by “instinct.”\footnote{“The Story of Katy Brumby, Alabama,” by Mary Chappell, \textit{American Life Histories: Manuscript from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1940}, accessed January 8, 2008, http://memory.loc.gov/} Such descriptions are
back-handed compliments intended to set Brumpy, and other black cooks, apart from what might be expected of an educated white woman. Despite their common presence in white kitchens, African American cooks of the early twentieth century inevitably failed to live up to contemporary standards as established by their white employers.

In addition to food service, African American foods failed to live up to the white standard and thus served as another source of degradation by white southerners. One white WPA interviewer criticized George Brown and his family in Edisto Island, South Carolina, because they did not plan their meals scientifically. “They buy what their appetites call for if they have the money,” the interviewer wrote. “If the money is lacking they make out with the second or third choice.” In reality, such decisions as to what food to purchase and when to serve certain foods was driven primarily by poorer socio-economic circumstances and insufficient access to education and consumer markets. African Americans could not afford to purchase a variety of different foods or had to rely on what white shopkeepers would sell to them. Most often, they had to take whatever foods were available to them either through cultivation or purchase. In many cases, they lacked knowledge of proper nutrition because of an unequal educational system. But once again, white southerners interpreted food choice as a default inherent in blackness.

Despite the many degradations and dangers inherent in cooking in white households, black southern women often endured the burdens of domestic service because they had to work and had few other employment opportunities. Some made the oppressive system work for the betterment of their families. Despite their employers’ beliefs to the contrary, many black women

became skilled cooks either through the old method of training, at their mothers’ sides, or by studying domestic science. By the early twentieth century, home economic instruction was available to many young black women either in school, at a club, or through extension work. In 1943, Dorothy Dickins found that eighteen percent of African American families living in one of four selected small Mississippi towns had a female member with some domestic science training. A much higher percentage of black families, forty-three percent, had some type of home economics reading material such as food and nutrition leaflets, recipe clippings, magazines with food sections, or cookbooks. 338 Although this percentage would likely be higher in larger urban areas, the study reveals that, despite popular white myth to the contrary, home economics knowledge influenced African American women in the South.

Like her contemporary at white schools, the black woman who studied domestic science tended to be from a professional family. During the first decade of the twentieth century, Sadie Delaney, the daughter of an African American school administrator and Episcopal bishop, studied scientific cooking at Saint Augustine’s School in Raleigh, North Carolina. After graduation, she worked as a Jeanes Supervisor teaching home economics in black southern schools. 339 Black domestic science classes adopted the same standards as those taught at white schools. In Alabama, African American students at Tuskegee learned scientific cooking before the white industrial school at Montevallo started its home economics program. According to the 1895 program, Tuskegee’s cooking program educated students in everything from proper table settings, to the preparation of various meals, to the chemical processes of food and digestion,

338 Dickins, Changing Pattern of Food Preparation, 4. Dickins conducted this study in the summer of 1943, by examining the Mississippi towns of Tunica, Marks, Eupora, and Ackerman.

339 Delany, Delany, and Hearth, Having Our Say, 79.
curriculum similar to that which Montevallo would offer to white students three years later.\textsuperscript{340} In addition, also similar to the approach that Montevallo and other white industrial schools would adopt, all female Tuskegee students took courses in housekeeping to learn “how to make a comfortable, Christian home.”\textsuperscript{341} In 1897, at Atlanta University, instructor Emma L. Theall reported that her Senior Normal students studied cookery and home management where they learned appropriate scientific approaches to cooking a wide variety of dishes from yeast breads to meat and fish. Theall noted, “[I]t is with great care that the spoonful of salt and the speck of pepper are measured.” Like the white students at GNIC, Atlanta University’s black students learned how to follow a recipe and how to properly serve a tea and luncheon.\textsuperscript{342}

Black women with formal educations in domestic science found public outlets for their cooking skills as extension agents and teachers. Although state extension services provided fewer funds for black extension work, even limited monies gave African American women educated in domestic science the opportunity to use their expertise to improve themselves and their communities. The work of black home demonstration agents involved disseminating home economics knowledge in the southern hinterlands. For the most part, black agents performed the same work as white agents. Ralph Eubanks, who authored a memoir about growing up in rural Mississippi, recalls a black home demonstration agent who worked at his father’s extension office:

\textsuperscript{340} Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, \textit{Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1895-96} (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1895), 57, http://hdl.handle.net/123456789/380.

\textsuperscript{341} Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, \textit{Catalogue...1895-96}, 59.

[Mrs. Annie Barron] was a nutritionist and home economist who advised women throughout the county on proper nutrition and food safety. The home economists showed people how to improve their diets through farming. This meant that her work centered on doing in-home demonstrations with women on canning, freezing, cooking, and nutrition in clubs she organized throughout the county. Mrs. Barron had a real gift for teaching others to cook. For that reason, she developed a strong network of ‘club ladies,’ as she called them, throughout the county with whom she regularly cooked, canned, and made jellies and preserves. Almost every day, she had a demonstration either with her club ladies or in one of the schools around the county, where she organized 4-H Clubs, so she was rarely in the office.\footnote{W. Ralph Eubanks, \textit{Ever Is a Long Time: A Journey Into Mississippi’s Dark Past, A Memoir} (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 48-49.}

Eubanks’s description of Mrs. Barron reveals her involvement in the same type of activity as Dorothy Dickins and the white home demonstration agents that she supervised.

In addition to extension work, educated black women used their knowledge to teach home economics. By the turn of the twentieth century, southern schools that catered to black students generally incorporated an industrial arts program similar to those geared toward whites although generally inferior in terms of facilities and resources. By 1907, the Industrial High School in Birmingham hired a teacher trained in domestic science. Previously, the school made do with a general education teacher who taught cooking as one of many different academic and industrial subjects.\footnote{Arthur Harold Parker, \textit{A Dream that Came True: Autobiography of Arthur Harold Parker} (Birmingham: Industrial High School, 1933), 45, http://www.bplonline.org/.

\footnote{Delany, Delany, and Hearth, \textit{Having Our Say}, 79.}} Granted, black schools received less funding for such enterprises. In her time as a Jeanes home economics teacher, Delaney recalls borrowing a private kitchen because the schools in which she worked had no appropriate facilities.\footnote{W. Ralph Eubanks, \textit{Ever Is a Long Time: A Journey Into Mississippi’s Dark Past, A Memoir} (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 48-49.}
Although African American women served as home demonstration agents and teachers, the most popular outlet for black women to profit from their culinary skills was to cook for white women. In urban environments where skilled cooks were often in demand, but black service was often demeaning and dangerous, some black women found respect, professional freedom, and financial profit by offering specialized catering services. Unlike the more common domestic servant, professional caterers could be more selective about their work to earn higher wages, to achieve greater job satisfaction, and to have more time for their own domestic obligations.

Skilled black caterers came from a variety of backgrounds. Some represented well-educated black women who realized that they could make more money catering than through other endeavors for which they were qualified. Alice Jones, an African American caterer in Guilford, North Carolina, recognized that her cooking skills provided the best opportunity to support her family despite her university education. Jones had been the daughter of a white man and a black cook, and her mother had struggled to send her to school. At Bennett College in North Carolina and Columbia University in New York, Jones studied foreign languages and music. Her knowledge in these areas far exceeded that of the southern whites she served. At one catered meal, a white male guest spoke to her in elementary Spanish and French. When she replied to his comments with fluency in both languages, the surprised guest could not translate her response. Despite her advanced education, Jones’s opportunities in the South remained limited. After her husband became disabled, catering for white dinners offered her the best opportunity to support a family and send her own daughters to college.  

Other black caterers developed their skill through old-fashioned means by learning from their mothers or grandmothers. Yet they found a market for their services with urban white women who required additional help and expertise on special occasions. Arthur G. Gaston’s mother learned how to cook in the countryside. When she moved to Birmingham, she originally worked for the wealthy white Loveman family. As Mrs. Gaston’s culinary skills gained a reputation among the Loveman’s social circle, other Birmingham families sought her assistance for their specialized culinary needs. Gaston recalls that his mother catered “fashionable luncheons” for two hundred people that featured live orchestras and necessitated “the finest cooking.” By 1919, Mrs. Gaston started her own catering business. Relying on the patronage of the Lovemans and their friends, she could control her own schedule and services.347

Black women across the South found similar opportunities. In Stamps, Arkansas, Maya Angelou’s grandmother supported herself by selling lunches to local workmen. She opened a shop between the local lumber mill and the cotton gin and sold meat pies and lemonade at lunch time.348 Mary Jordan left a sharecropper’s life to work in Atlanta in the 1920s as the cook for a white family. When she later decided to become a caterer, she took home economics classes at Booker T. Washington High School. Among other things, her sacrifices enabled her to send son, Vernon Jordan Jr., to college where he would become an attorney, businessman, and public servant.349


Another Atlanta caterer, Willie Daniel, created quite a demand among the city’s white matriarchs. According to Atlanta Constitution woman’s page editor Isma Dooly, Daniel possessed domestic science knowledge and implemented these skills to the benefit of her white patrons. “She…not only knows how to prepare the best dishes, but knows how to plan a menu for any season and for any occasion,” Dooly writes. “[Daniel] knows the science of food values, their market prices, and the women who entertain in Atlanta find her services indispensable.”

Dooly’s acclaim suggests that Daniel had some sort of scientific cooking training and was intended to communicate her commitment to these values to her white audience. The ability to cater allowed some black women to use their culinary skills to support their families and to maintain their own dignity by operating a business.

In addition to catering, African American women often found less overt ways to exploit the dependence of white women on their kitchen services to improve their financial and family circumstances. In spite of low wages and other disadvantages, cooking in white kitchens represented an important source of the black family’s income and often supplemented meager family supplies through the common practice of “pan-toting”—bringing left-overs from work home to their own families. This practice not only helped black mothers put more food on the table despite low wages, but it improved the quality of the food consumed by many black families. Anne Moody recalls that the food her mother brought home from her employer’s home was better than she had ever had before primarily because it involved more variety than her normal diet. One day, her mother allowed Moody to eat at the employers’ home. She and her sister waited on the back porch until the white family finished their meal. Then, they sat at the

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kitchen table to finish the remainder of the food. The quality of the food her mother cooked at the white home surprised Moody compared to the food she served at home.\textsuperscript{351}

In addition to supplementing the black family larder, white employers might bestow other beneficial favors on preferred cooks, such as finding employment or schooling for a servant’s children. For African American daughters, this often meant hiring on as a domestic servant for another white family and thereby receiving her own small paycheck and valuable on-the-job training. The luckier children of black domestics might use their mother’s income and influence to gain a better education. Arthur G. Gaston’s mother used her employer’s influence to secure her son a place at a private black school before public black secondary education became available in Birmingham. This opportunity helped establish a foundation for Gaston’s future, and he would later become a successful businessman and multi-millionaire.\textsuperscript{352}

In the twentieth century, black southerners had a growing presence in expanding urban areas, but they failed to receive equal access to the consumer markets that started to define the urban environment. Many facilities barred their participation in consumption entirely. For black travelers, an invisible line marked the border between North and South where food culture on trains automatically changed. Essie Mae Washington-Williams recalls her trip from Pennsylvania to South Carolina in the 1930s. They traveled in an integrated “fancy parlor car” until they arrived in Washington DC. At Union Station, they transferred to a segregated car with “tattered seats” and an unspecified odor. When the young Pennsylvania native wanted to eat on

\textsuperscript{351} Moody, \textit{Coming of Age in Mississippi}, 23. In \textit{To ‘Joy My Freedom}, Hunter describes pan-toting as a “strategy” that black servants used to “reappropriate[e] the material assets of their employers for their own use” and thereby receive a more just compensation for their services (60-61).

board, her southern companion stopped her stating, “‘This is a southern train’…meaning that blacks…weren’t allowed in the dining car.” Later, she drank soft drinks and ate sandwiches sold by a porter. Having a more limited experience with segregation, Washington-Williams recalls how the event undermined her own feelings of self-worth. At the time, she recalled the Glenn Miller song, “Chattanooga Choo Choo,” writing: “‘Nothing could be finer, when you’re in the diner, than to have your ham and eggs in Carolina.’ This was almost like that, except we couldn’t go into the diner. Well, nothing was perfect.”353 Black southerners had long lived with this less-than-perfect situation.

Washington-Williams’ experience reveals that black train passengers coped with segregated travel in many ways. They purchased food to eat at their seats. They also carried lunches from home. Fried chicken and potato salad seemed to be a standard in home-prepared train fare. Maya Angelou recalls traveling with “loaded lunch boxes” filled with both items.354 Henry Louis Gates Jr. felt sorry for the white passengers eating in the dining car because the food he and other African American passengers carried “was better [including] [f]ried chicken, baked beans, and potato salad.” He imagined that the food served in the dining car could never have been as good.355 On his first train trip traveling from his home in the country to Birmingham, Arthur G. Gaston took great pleasure in the boxed fried chicken he carried. “I took a big, juicy bite,” Gaston recalls. “It was mighty good. The drumstick flashed gold, brown, gold, brown as the train rolled through the tall pine trees. On my lap the shoebox of fried chicken was


354 Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, 5.

still warm against my thighs.” At home, black children received inferior cuts of chicken so that the best pieces could be reserved for adults and guests. For the young Gaston to have an entire chicken to himself, therefore, was considered a treat. Like Gates, he found solace in the assumption that his meal, prepared at the hands of his grandmother, was better than any food served in the dining car from which he and his mother were barred. Although humiliation at being excluded from places of consumption no doubt played a role in the creation of African American identity, black southerners found ways to convert discrimination into self-reliance that boosted their connection to family and community.

Once in the cities, by the second decade of the twentieth century, African Americans found eateries regulated by race either through the exercise of custom or city ordinance. There were several different patterns of racially segregated eating. Atlanta’s ordinance related to the business licensing for restaurants. Restaurateurs purchased a license to serve either white or black patrons. The law excluded each race from eating establishments licensed to serve the other. In practice, however, black restaurants often served white patrons. During World War II, for example, it was widely known that Ma Sutton’s, a black cafe on Auburn Avenue, served white servicemen. White soldiers from outside of the South who were stationed in or traveling through Atlanta sometimes ate there, especially to accompany an African American comrade

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whose choices were more limited. In its effect, the law served only to exclude black Atlantans from eating at restaurants licensed for whites.

Birmingham represented a different model for legal, systematic racial segregation. Its law permitted restaurants to serve both races, but limited service to each race to separate dining rooms. A later version of the law required the two dining rooms to be separated by a seven-foot wall. There does not seem to be any justification for this particular height except that most people would not be able to see over such a wall. Unlike Atlanta, white restaurateurs in Birmingham could serve African American customers only not in the same room as whites. Because many restaurants did not have more than one dining room, this effectively excluded African Americans from eating inside the restaurant. White restaurants generally served African Americans at a separate take-out counter. Under this system, African Americans received substandard service in every respect. In practice, white restaurateurs no doubt seated and served white patrons before waiting on the black customers at the take-out counter. While they waited, African Americans had no place to sit, socialize, or otherwise enjoy the leisure experience of dining out. Such circumstances ensured that African Americans remained inferior in consumer exchanges involving food.

In Virginia, an interracial group of servicemen encountered such a restaurant when they tried to grab lunch during World War I. When the restaurateur refused to serve them all equally, the group took their order, dishes and all, outside to eat on the sidewalk. According to the black

359 Kuhn, Joye, and West, Living Atlanta, 354.

360 “An Ordinance to Prohibit the Conducting of Restaurants or Lunch Counters for White and Colored Persons in the Same Room,” Ordinance No. 276-C, Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the City of Birmingham, SP-33, December 15, 1914, Birmingham Archives, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama; Birmingham General Code §1130 (1917); Birmingham General Code §5288 (1930).
newspaper reporting this event, some passersby interpreted the incident as “a new illustration of the democratic spirit.”\textsuperscript{361} Most white southerners, no doubt, failed to share this opinion. Those white southern restaurants that did serve African Americans in a separate dining room also ensured the continued inferiority of the African American consumer in the region’s racial hierarchy. Such practices robbed African Americans not just of the ability to obtain sustenance at a public eating facility, but also of the leisure experience of dining out and the social interaction that went along with it.

As they did in train travel, African Americans coped with uncertain consumer markets that were designed to humiliate them by relying on resources they found in their families and communities. In his memoir about growing up in segregated Mississippi, W. Ralph Eubanks describes this process more generally: “All families structured a world around themselves, designed to keep unwanted influences out….We were exposed to it only when we read the newspaper, went to town on a Saturday, or went shopping in Jackson or Hattiesburg. Then we saw the segregated bathrooms, water fountains, waiting rooms, the neighborhood dividing lines that could not be crossed, and the racially prescribed codes of behavior.”\textsuperscript{362} In the public sphere, black cafes offered a type of sanctuary similar to that provided by the black family at home. African Americans gathered in black restaurants and cafes for physical and emotional sustenance. They received food in a respectful atmosphere and, for a limited time, protection from the harsh realities of the outside world.


\textsuperscript{362} Eubanks, \textit{Ever Is a Long Time}, 36.
Like their white contemporaries, black restaurants in the South varied from fine dining establishments to hole-in-the-wall cafes. The finer establishments that catered to the black middle class advertised their facilities, similar to white dining establishments, by emphasizing cleanliness, fine foods, and the separation of ladies’ dining. In Savannah, Georgia, the Waldorf advertised itself as “first class,” “beautiful,” and “the neatest, cleanest and best Restaurant for colored people in Savannah.” The Waldorf also offered a private dining room for the ladies.\footnote{Savannah Tribune, December 20, 1902, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libdata.lib.ua.edu/; Savannah Tribune, April 4, 1903, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libdata.lib.ua.edu/;}

The Waldorf also offered a private dining room for the ladies.\footnote{Savannah Tribune, October 5, 1912, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libdata.lib.ua.edu/;}

The Pink Rose Cafe on Taylor Street in Savannah also promised “a first-class cafe.”\footnote{“Local Brevities,” Savannah Tribune, April 25, 1903, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libdata.lib.ua.edu/;}

In its restaurant advertising, the turn-of-the-century black middle class in Savannah reveals itself to share many of the same values as white professionals.

The black middle class realized that all black eating spaces did not live up to the elegance advertised in Savannah’s enterprises. In Savannah, for example, the black 	extit{Tribune} decried the existence of lower-class black restaurants in which patrons participated in less-than-respectable behavior. The 	extit{Tribune} nevertheless recognized an inherent racism in how white authorities dealt with lower-class black establishments compared to their white counterparts: “The 	extit{Tribune} is not averse to the raiding of blind tigers and gambling dens operated by our people, but [that] the police would not overlook similar lawlessness indulged in by the opposite race.”\footnote{“Local Brevities,” Savannah Tribune, April 25, 1903, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libdata.lib.ua.edu/;} The black middle class identified discrimination even in the way that white authorities dealt with low-end
restaurants they did not frequent. They clearly resented these rowdier establishments but
 demanded that all such establishments, black and white, receive similar treatment.

For the black middle class, which also offered ladies’ cafes in its establishments, the
lower-class “dives” represented places where illicit sexual interaction and racial mixing took
place. They were disturbed by this situation but in a different way than white commentators.
Whereas white newspapers often called for an end to interaction between white men and black
women in public cafes, the Tribune called for authorities to separate “bawdy white women from
among the respectable colored citizens.” The Tribune continued by insisting that “[t]he
disgraceful orgies performed by this class of women and the men who frequent these resorts,
should be prevented.”366 This comment reveals much about public eating space as sites for racial
intermixing. In this case, low-end cafes apparently served as spaces for black men to come into
illicit contact with white women. African Americans of all classes had legitimate reasons to
worry about such interactions because they could lead to racial conflict and threaten the mobility
and security of the black citizenry at large. Nevertheless, this also reveals a black middle class
that wanted to model their restaurants in the ways of more respectable white establishments.

Although many of these spaces, especially in older southern urban areas, resembled white
spaces of public accommodation, twentieth-century white urban authorities nevertheless
interpreted black eateries to be qualitatively different than white establishments. In the late
nineteenth century, the Birmingham City Directory tended to include African American
restaurants and cafes alphabetically within the listing of white establishments. In the 1884
dition, for example, Nancy Miller, Mattie Robinson, and Sam Scoggins, among others, are
listed as black restaurateurs and mixed in alphabetically with the list of white restaurants. The

only indication of their race was a small letter “c,” which stood for “colored,” listed in parentheses after the name (consistent with the same symbol used throughout the directory to indicate a black resident or business).

This practice continued until 1902 when the restaurant listing failed to include any African American enterprises, although the “lunch rooms” section of the business directory included many black businesses (intermixed with white establishments). In 1904, the business directory specifically began segregating black eateries. In the listing of restaurants and lunch rooms, the business directory enumerated white establishments first. Black listings followed starting over again alphabetically with the cafe owned by G. W. Ammons on Twenty-first Street South and placing an asterisk prominently before the name of the black businesses. This continued to be the practice in the years that followed.367 In this way, Birmingham restaurants were segregated in the city directory ten years before municipal ordinance required physical segregation. The *Atlanta City Directory* indicated a similar need to separate black and white eating places by listing most white establishments as “restaurants” and all black establishments as “lunch rooms” regardless of their hours of operation or style of service.368 Such practices

367 See the business listings in the *Birmingham City Directory* for the year starting 1884/1885 and continuing through 1905 to see this shift. *Birmingham City Directory*, vols. 1-18 (Birmingham, 1884/85-1905).

368 See the *Atlanta City Directory* for the years 1884, 1885, and 1886 in which black and white proprietors are included alphabetically in the “Restaurant” listing and the *Atlanta City Directory* for 1901, 1902, and 1903 in which all “Restaurant” listings are white and most “Lunch Rooms” listings are black. *Weatherbe’s Atlanta, Ga. Duplex City Directory* (Atlanta: Ch. F. Weatherbe and Dunlop & Cohen, 1884), 92; *Weatherbe’s Atlanta, Ga. Duplex City Directory* (Atlanta: Ch. F. Weatherbe and Dunlop & Cohen, 1885), 93; *Weatherbe’s Atlanta, Ga. Duplex City Directory* (Atlanta: Ch. F. Weatherbe and Dunlop & Cohen, 1886), 91-92; *Atlanta City Directory* (Atlanta: Thomas J. Maloney, 1901), 1579, 1598; *Atlanta City Directory* (Atlanta: Thomas J. Maloney, 1902), 1756, 1783-84; *Atlanta City Directory* (1903), 1547-1548, 1572.
reveal a significant shift in the way that white city authorities (and white publishers) viewed black restaurants by the early twentieth century.

The terms applied to black eateries also revealed a tendency for white authorities to degrade or at least separate them from the supposedly more respectable white establishments. In Montgomery, Alabama, the *Advertiser* referred to cafes owned by African American women as *cook shops*. This term actually has a long history. Originally used in Europe, it referred to an establishment where cooked food could be purchased. In this case, it was very literally the “cook’s shop.” In the American South, the term took on its eventual meaning in the antebellum period as a place where any African American might cook food for public service. In the New South, the term came to refer more specifically to cafes owned and operated by African American women. In this derivation, the name denoted race and gender in a way that was not intended to be positive. It very specifically identified any African American woman as the inferior role of “cook” even if she owned the establishment, rather than characterizing her as a restaurateur, entrepreneur, or even cafe owner as a white or black man would most likely have been identified.

Despite twentieth-century attempts to degrade black eateries and their owners as inherently inferior, African American businesses in general and restaurants in particular fostered self-reliance for the improvement of the whole community. Black restaurants employed members

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of the community, encouraged black patronage, and offered a respectful atmosphere in which African Americans could consume food. In 1905, the *Birmingham Wide Awake*, an African American newspaper, republished an article from a Kansas newspaper that criticized those in the black community who failed to patronize black businesses: “A Negro who will insist upon spending his money with mean and prejudiced white people is a fool, a deceiver, and is unfit for citizenship.” Although this article did not discuss restaurants in particular, it reveals that African Americans consciously connected consumption practices at the turn of the twentieth century with larger American ideals of democracy and citizenship. It also shows a black community at the dawn of Jim Crow forcefully encouraging self-reliance to generate opportunity and fight discrimination.

Twentieth-century black restaurant entrepreneurs absorbed this philosophy. They took advantage of opportunities to start their own businesses so that they could improve their own circumstances, those of the families, and those of the black community. Underneath the “race enterprises” article in the *Birmingham Wide Awake*, Mitchell Edwards advertised his eatery, called Mitchell’s Cafe, as “absolutely the finest Cafe in the South run by colored men,” emphasizing his race as a selling point. Cafe ownership propelled Edwards, part of the first generation of black southerners to be born into freedom, to a prominent position in Birmingham’s black business community. The son of a sharecropper in Greensboro, Alabama, from a very young age, Edwards and his siblings worked as farm laborers. As a young man, he moved to Birmingham where he found work for the railroad. By 1889, Edwards had taken advantage of opportunities in the city to open a public eating place, probably in the form of a

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sidewalk stand. His road to success encountered some obstructions. The 1893 *Birmingham City Directory* describes Edwards as a waiter for a white restaurant. But his persistence paid off. By 1900, Edwards was not only the proprietor of Mitchell’s Café, but he was also a shareholder in the Alabama Penny Saving Bank, a dealer in local real estate, and an officer for several fraternal organizations. In 1906, he constructed a new building to house his restaurant and other ventures. He was widely recognized as the wealthiest black man in Birmingham.\(^{372}\)

Many African Americans managed to tread Edwards’s path to emerge from a life of service to entrepreneurship through foodways. In 1900, Dora Edwards opened a lunch room at her home on Twentieth Street South in Birmingham. Before that time, Dora had served as a cook for prominent white families. In 1898, she worked for John O. Cross who served as a manager for the Birmingham Brokerage Company. The following year, in 1899, she cooked for James D. Moore, president of Moore & Handley Hardware Company, and his family. In both cases, she lived at the home of her white employer.\(^{373}\) Of course, we do not know Dora’s exact experiences working for white families in Birmingham, but her frequent relocation suggests that the work was unsatisfactory. The opportunity to open her own eating house at her own home no doubt offered tremendous opportunities that cooking for white families did not. She had her own space free from white domination both in her living and working arrangements. She could more easily


\(^{373}\) *Birmingham City Directory* (Birmingham, 1900), 839, 1087; *Birmingham City Directory* (Birmingham, 1898), 388, 791; *Birmingham City Directory* (Birmingham, 1899), 473, 643. There is no known family relationship between Mitchell Edwards and Dora Edwards.
take care of any children or other family members. She could profit from her own enterprise and take advantage of the financial and personal rewards such profit offered. In Beaufort, South Carolina, C. H. Singleton followed a similar path when he left his job as a livery man to open a “first-class cafe” at the site of a former eatery on West Street. For Mitchell Edwards, Dora Edwards, C. H. Singleton, and other African American entrepreneurs, cafe ownership offered opportunities for wealth, independence, and social advancement.

Such opportunities arose because of the important role that the cafe played in the black southern community. Although there was limited black access to most consumer outlets in the urban South—they could not try on clothes or shoes at a department store, for example—they were often excluded entirely from the social space of white restaurants. Exclusion made racial enterprises like Mitchell’s Cafe more necessary. In some southern towns, black cafes became the center of social activity in the community on certain nights, especially weekends. Several decades later, Anne Moody recalls Saturday night as “Nigger Night” in Mississippi when African Americans came to town to eat, drink, and socialize. The popular “Negro cafes” set the scene for much of this activity. At a family cafe, Moody recalls dancing, drinking, telling dirty jokes, and playing cards. In larger cities like Birmingham, African Americans would no doubt crowd such spaces on a more frequent basis. The food and drink served in such spaces helped build black bodies, but the socialization built black families and communities.

In Macon, Georgia, Charles Henry Douglass Jr. found success in business after World War I starting with a small soda fountain. His account books for the years 1919-1921 indicate

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375 Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 180, 261.
that he ordered cherry cola, Coca Cola, cream, and milk on a daily basis. He ordered snack food items, such as pre-made sandwiches, peanuts, bananas, chips, and candy, less frequently. He also made cigarettes available to his customers.\(^{376}\) By the mid-1920s, Douglass’s soda fountain had evolved into a cafe. He ordered more substantial food, perhaps constructing his own sandwiches with ingredients such as rolls, meat, and ketchup.\(^{377}\) By the mid-1930s, he ran a full-service restaurant. He regularly ordered eggs, cabbage, fish, bread, ham, pork chops, fryers, liver, steak, fresh fruits and vegetables, and spaghetti as well as seasonings like nutmeg and vanilla extract indicating that he cooked food at his establishment.\(^{378}\)

Moreover, Douglass’s provisions for 1935-1936 suggest that he catered to an African American community that consumed “racialized” foods, as part of a large array of other fare, to connect them with an ethnic identity. From October 1935 to January 1936, he ordered sweet potatoes, greens, chitterlings, and spare ribs—foods commonly associated with rural African American foodways.\(^{379}\) In his analysis of North Carolina eating patterns, Tony Larry Whitehead found that southerners make a connection between food and ethnic identity. The middle-class

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blacks and lower-class whites in his study associated certain inexpensive meats, such as fatback and chicken giblets, as “black people’s food.” This represented a positive association for middle-class blacks, and consuming such foods connected them with their ethnic community.\footnote{Tony Larry Whitehead, “Sociocultural Dynamics and Food Habits in a Southern Community” in \textit{Food in the Social Order: Studies of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities}, ed. Mary Douglas (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984), 115-116.}

Douglass’s restaurant confirms these findings for Macon. His success in food service helped finance his many other business ventures that catered to a segregated Macon community. He owned and operated a theater near his restaurant where he featured black vaudeville acts. Eventually, his holdings also included a hotel and bank.\footnote{Sam E. Reevin to Charles Henry Douglass Jr., December 15, 1924, Folder 209, Box 21, Charles Henry Douglass Jr. Business Records, 1906-67, Middle Georgia Archives, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, Georgia.}

The opportunities for restaurant ownership increased later in the twentieth century as consumer culture in the South expanded. Robert and James Paschal share a similar story with Mitchell Edwards, however, they grew up a generation later when segregation culture had become more entrenched. They grew up the sons of a sharecropper in Thomson, Georgia, a small town about one hundred twenty miles east of Atlanta. Their father, Henry Paschal, taught them the value of hard work and determination. Despite suffering from painful arthritis, Henry worked in cotton fields during the morning and waited tables at a local hotel in the afternoon. As an African American man trying to earn a living for his family in the segregated South, Henry suffered numerous indignities. He labored in a dining room where his own family could not eat and where white customers tended to treat black waiters as if they were not even there. When he became old enough to join his father as a server in the hotel dining room, James recalls learning
to contain his anger over such injustices in favor of improving his circumstances and those of his family.  

In 1934, the elder brother Robert moved to Atlanta where the urban environment offered more opportunities for an ambitious young man. Robert worked in Atlanta’s white-owned food service industry—first waiting tables at a downtown cafeteria and later serving at a drug-store soda fountain. Robert reportedly excelled at his job and held some managerial power at the soda fountain, but his race prevented him from progressing any further. Despite limited job prospects, Robert reveled in the black middle-class lifestyle offered by the city. He and his wife participated in community clubs and frequented social events. In May 1936, Robert won the honorary title of “Mayor of West Hunter Street.” A local black high school sponsored the “election” as a fundraiser. Although the position held no real power, it revealed that Robert had made a name for himself socially as well as professionally. Atlanta’s African American community feted “Mayor” Paschal at an inaugural ball where the high school presented him with a gold medal.

Meanwhile, younger brother James stayed in Thomson where at fourteen he already demonstrated the attributes of a budding businessman. With the help of his many siblings who still lived at home, James operated a paper route, a vegetable market, several shoe-shine stands, mail-order cosmetics sales, and a small convenience store. At the same time, he attended high

382 Paschal and Kendall, Paschal, 72.

school, played basketball, and helped his ailing father at the hotel. James considered his job at
the hotel to be part of his business education. He listened to the white businessmen who
frequented its dining room paying rapt attention to how they conducted business. Despite his
hard work, segregation culture limited James’s opportunities in Thomson, and he dreamed of
joining Robert in the city and opening his own restaurant.\textsuperscript{384}

In 1947, the brothers realized this dream when James moved to Atlanta, and they opened
a small sandwich shop. Although both brothers pitched in to get the business started, Robert took
charge of the kitchen while James primarily controlled business and financial matters. Initially,
the brothers sold cold-cut sandwiches and sodas in a space so small that it did not even have a
kitchen. When Robert developed his special fried chicken recipe—for which their restaurant
would come to be known—they prepared chicken sandwiches at Robert’s house and carried the
food to the shop in a taxi. This first location sat forty customers at eight tables. When those seats
filled, patrons stood at the walk-up window to order. Within two years, the brothers built a
kitchen and enlarged their dining room to seat an additional forty people. They expanded their
hours and menu offering breakfast at 7:00 a.m.; a midday lunch with fried chicken and a
selection of vegetables; and dinner including veal cutlets and oysters.\textsuperscript{385}

The phrase “stopping by Paschal’s” became a familiar refrain across black Atlanta.
Located at the Atlanta University Center among several historically black universities, the
restaurant became a favorite hang-out for young college students. When she attended nearby
Spelman College in the 1950s, Marian Wright Edelman recalls “sneak[ing] off campus to

\textsuperscript{384} Paschal and Kendall, \textit{Paschal}, 70-85.

\textsuperscript{385} Paschal and Kendall, \textit{Paschal}, 97-98, 100, 105; “Paschal Bros. Soda Enlarged as
Trade Grows,” \textit{Atlanta Daily World}, December 19, 1948,
Paschal’s Restaurant for its addictively good fried chicken.” James Paschal also regularly hired young African American college students and gave a first job to many men and women who would later become business and government leaders.  

In addition to the college crowd, the restaurant attracted families, social groups, religious organizations, civic clubs, and businessmen. Many groups held monthly meetings or special receptions at Paschal’s. Every morning, a group of African American civic leaders and businessmen started their day at the restaurant with breakfast and coffee. Of the regular breakfast club, Julian Bond recalls, “No morning was ever complete without a meeting of the Paschal’s Precinct, a gathering of wannabe politicos, has-beens, might-bes, and is-toos!” In 1959, success compelled Robert and James to expand their operations once again. They moved the restaurant across the street where they built a larger facility and added a night club and hotel. Many black urban restaurateurs had experiences similar to those of the Paschal brothers. The desire to open a restaurant stemmed from the hardships and degradation that African Americans experienced in public consumption during the era of Jim Crow.

For a community suffering the injustices and brutality of segregation, Paschal’s Restaurant served as a vehicle for self-reliance and provided a platform from which the fight for equal opportunity could take place. During the civil rights movement, Paschal’s served as the “unofficial headquarters of the [civil rights] movement.” During the trying days of 1960s activism, many entrepreneurs feared hosting civil rights gatherings, but the Paschal brothers

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welcomed the opportunity. Atlanta’s civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Andrew Young, Julian Bond, and John Lewis, most of whom were already Paschal’s regulars, planned many well-known campaigns in back-room booths. King’s sister recalls the restaurant as “the scene of late-night planning meetings and strategy sessions as ML [King] and [SCLC] prepared for their battles for justice all across the nation.”389

It is not a stretch to say that Paschal’s Restaurant fed the civil rights movement—both figuratively and literally. Not only did the facility serve as the location of high-level strategy meetings, but the owners sustained the movement’s ground troops as well. The headquarters of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was located across the street, and young activists regularly ate at Paschal’s where they could get a couple of pieces of chicken, two vegetables, a roll, and sweet tea for about a dollar in 1960. Understanding their meager finances, Robert and James frequently gave out free meals. The brothers also posted bail and stayed open late so that jailed protestors could reunite with their families.390

At the height of civil rights violence, Paschal’s Restaurant represented one of Atlanta’s few public venues where whites and blacks could get together on an equal basis. Moderate and liberal whites challenged racial mores by patronizing the restaurant to dine and socialize with African American friends and colleagues. At the adjoining nightclub, long-time hostess Ora B. Sherman often seated patrons in integrated groups providing one of the few opportunities for the

389 Arrington, Making His Mark, 28; Sara Mitchell Parsons, From Southern Wrongs to Civil Rights: The Memoir of a White Civil Rights Activist (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000) 141-142; Farris, Through it All, 61.

races to meet and mingle in an increasingly divided region. James recalls, “They [white customers] knew they were welcome to come and enjoy good food and excellent service, even though blacks were not allowed to patronize their eating places.” Paschal’s fame spread across the nation, and white stars such as actress Jayne Mansfield stopped there while in Atlanta.391

Although whites could more safely patronize black eating establishments, Paschal’s recognized the potential danger associated with interracial eating during this volatile period. In southern restaurants, segregation seldom meant actual separation of the races because whites and blacks constantly intermingled in eating situations. Most commonly, African Americans worked in white restaurants—cooking, serving, and busing tables. In this way, African Americans interacted with white owners and white customers but in a servile position that accommodated preconceived white cultural constructions of race. Paschal’s contravened this familiar cultural ritual, as well as Atlanta law, by allowing the races to mingle on an equal footing as consumers. This action placed the restaurant, its employees, and its customers at some risk, and they took reasonable precautions. Frances Pauley, a white liberal in Atlanta, recalls eating dinner at Paschal’s with civil rights attorney Don Hollowell when someone asked them to move away from the window. Despite the threat posed by police or white-supremacist intervention, black restaurants such as Paschal’s played a significant role as one of the few public places where black and white leaders could meet to discuss the important issues of the day.392

391 “Movement’s Meeting Place Fortified the Famous: Banquet at Paschal’s Stirs Memories of Civil Rights Era,” Atlanta Constitution, February 20, 1992; Paschal and Kendall, Paschal, 110, 196.

Other black eating places served a similar role. In Anne Moody’s memoir of working in the civil rights movement in Mississippi, she recalls that the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) established its headquarters in Canton, Mississippi, beside a local black cafe. The local cafe owner, a man named C.O. Chinn, welcomed the activists, and they often met at the cafe to eat and make plans for the movement. Within weeks of CORE’s arrival in Canton, local white authorities began to punish Chinn for receiving the activists by pulling his liquor license. Soon, Chinn was forced to close his cafe.393

In the wake of desegregation, African American restaurants continued to transgress white southern cultural barriers. In 1965, Paschal’s became Atlanta’s first black restaurant to employ a white waitress when Susan Bady, a student at Ohio’s Antioch College, waited tables during a school break. Although Bady apparently became something of a curiosity in Atlanta’s African American community—“[e]veryone wanted to know…‘why would a white girl want to work in a Negro restaurant’”—she describes the Paschal brothers as gracious and helpful and their customers as friendly and welcoming.394

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Food practices in the twentieth-century South contributed to the construction of race in a variety of ways. Whites used differences in food practices, especially those borne of socio-economic differences, to justify their preconceived notions of the supposed racial inferiority of the black race by assuming that the lower nutritional standards of the black community justified common accusations of laziness and ignorance. White southerners also used the labor and

393 Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 257, 281.

consumption systems developing in urban areas to further discriminate against and denigrate African American communities. They limited black women to working in white kitchens where they received low pay and were subject to degrading and dangerous treatment. They limited African Americans to second-class status in the growing consumer markets where urban dwellers primarily gained their food, either through stores or sidewalk carts where African Americans had to defer to white shopkeepers and wait until white customers had been served or in the growing number of cafes and restaurants where black customers were often excluded or where city officials targeted black restaurants for closure.

Despite such degradation on the part of white southerners, African Americans used food practices as a vehicle for self-reliance and racial uplift. In the cities, black women found opportunities to use their culinary skills for their own improvement. Men and women opened food-service enterprises for their own profit and for the betterment of their communities. These public places provided space for African Americans to benefit financially, to consume food in a respectful environment, and to participate in the leisure experience of dining out. They also provided the foundation for civil rights activity that took place later in the twentieth century. In a sad irony, the civil rights movement represented the end to many of these spaces that had thrived under the constraints of Jim Crow. Although some black restaurants, such as Paschal’s, continued to thrive in the new racial environment, many other black-only establishments went under after public eating space opened to all races.
CHAPTER FIVE: Making the McSouth: Southern Foodways in National Culture

Ollie’s Barbecue was a family-owned restaurant in Birmingham, Alabama. By 1964, the restaurant had been in business for thirty-seven years and passed down through three generations of the McClung family. Current owners Ollie W. McClung Sr. and his son operated the restaurant as a legal partnership. The restaurant specialized in barbecue, homemade pies, and non-alcoholic beverages. White customers dined in the establishment’s large dining room or purchased take-out near the cash register. African Americans could not eat in the dining room. Ollie’s featured a separate take-out station at the far end of the counter where black customers placed and picked up orders. The McClungs considered their establishment to be a local family restaurant. They tolerated neither inebriation nor profanity. Placards on each table read, “No Profanity, Please. Ladies and Children Are Usually Present.” They welcomed regular customers daily; they engaged no off-site advertising; they purchased all foodstuffs from local suppliers; they were located many blocks away from highways, airports, and train or bus stations; and they never actively solicited travelers.395

Despite the apparently local nature of the McClungs’ business, in *Katzenbach v. McClung* (1964) the United States Supreme Court ruled that Ollie’s Barbecue was involved in interstate commerce and, as a result, was subject to the provisions of Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibited racial discrimination in places of public accommodation. Because

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Congress passed the Civil Rights Act based on its power to regulate interstate commerce, the
determination that Ollie’s Barbecue was involved as such represented the pivotal factor in the
case. The Court based its decision on the fact that the McClungs’ primary supplier, George A.
Hormel Company, received its meat from outside the state of Alabama. According to the Act, a
restaurant was engaged in interstate commerce “if…a substantial portion of the food which it
serves…has moved [across state lines].” Because approximately fifty-five percent of the
McClungs’ purchases involved meat and roughly eighty-five percent of their meat purchases
came from the Hormel Company, the Court ruled that Ollie’s Barbecue satisfied this standard.
The Court’s decision required Ollie’s Barbecue, and most other southern restaurants, to serve
black customers equally.396

The desegregation provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 applied to all places of
public accommodation including restaurants, soda fountains, hotels, gas stations, theaters,
stadiums, and other arenas of entertainment and leisure. The Supreme Court heard arguments in
Katzenbach v. McClung alongside another case, Heart of Atlanta v. United States, in which the
Court held that an Atlanta hotel could not discriminate based on race.397 It is significant that the
Court heard and decided both cases, instead of deciding the constitutionality of the Act by
considering just one factual situation, because it reflects a difference of perception between
hotels and restaurants in terms of their effect on and participation in interstate commerce. In
Heart of Atlanta, the hotel admitted that it actively advertised outside the state, it accepted

396 Katzenbach v. McClung, 379 U.S. 294 (1964); Affidavit of Weaver Saterbak at 31-32,
88-352, §201(c)(2), July 2, 1964; Transcript of Record at 75, Katzenbach v. McClung, 379 U.S.
294 (1964) (No. 64-448).

national convention business, and about seventy-five percent of its guests came from outside Georgia. By its nature, a hotel caters to out-of-town trade, and many guests inevitably cross state lines. Similarly, there is an intrinsic interstate component to gas stations, theaters, stadiums, and similar leisure enterprises because automobiles, movies, sports teams, and entertainment troupes regularly travel to other states in the ordinary course of business. It is inconceivable that any of these industries could remain in business in the South, or any other region, without becoming involved in interstate trade.

Restaurants, on the other hand, represent a different experience because there is nothing inherently transient about the nature of food or its service in the public domain. In 1963, Ollie’s Barbecue served approximately 536,000 meals to a primarily white customer base that consisted to a large extent of locals who ate there on a daily basis. They served barbecue and homemade pies, two essentially southern specialties. The McClungs knew their customers, recognizing most of them by face, if not by name. Ollie’s was not located near an interstate highway or train or bus terminal and did not actively solicit out-of-town trade. They made all of their purchases from local salesmen who took orders and accepted payment at the restaurant and made deliveries from a Birmingham distributor. The McClungs believed that their business represented a purely local enterprise and, in fact, initiated the court case to avoid being included in a regulatory process with larger national chains. Ollie McClung Sr. testified that he filed suit within days of federal action against several Tuscaloosa restaurants that refused to treat African American customers equally “because I felt like if I were grouped with Howard Johnsons and Holiday Inn and other restaurants of that nature that I would have no opportunity at all to present my case as a local
Despite these circumstances, the nationalized basis of southern foodways by the second half of the twentieth century ensured that even “local” family-owned restaurants were, almost against their will, inextricably connected to the broader nation.

Ollie’s Barbecue is merely representative of the many ways that southern foodways came to resemble and be connected to those of other regions. The processes that conspired to place this relatively nondescript southern barbecue joint as a conduit of interstate commerce developed throughout the twentieth century, but the most influential decades connecting southern food culture to national markets occurred after World War II. The evolution of southern foodways in the post-war period reflects broader cultural and demographic changes that affected both the nation and region. The expansion of national consumer networks, continued federal funding for extension services, national migrations to the Sunbelt, the expansion of national chain stores, and the creation of the modern fast food concept were only some of the factors that collaborated to change the southern landscape with regard to food. For a variety of reasons, as the Ollie’s Barbecue case demonstrates, these changes threatened the solid white supremacy in food practices that white southerners had carefully constructed during the first part of the century.

White southerners responded to these changes by intermittently rejecting and embracing national norms. At home, white women continued to respect national standards related to obtaining, preparing, cooking, and serving food to their families. Starting around 1930, although the fundamental features of scientific cooking remained standard and continued to spread to lower socio-economic classes through education and federal extension services, many women began to criticize and reject it as the essence of home life. Such women reminisced nostalgically

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for the time when cooking was considered to be an art and not diminished by scientific
progressivism. Most white women who experienced such regretful longings did not have to look
beyond their own kitchens to find their image of the new ideal in domesticity. Although African
American women were exposed in larger numbers to home economics instruction, white women
continued to connect food prepared by black hands to the intuitive and artistic. Instead of
condemning black women for these representations as their mothers and grandmothers might
have done when home economics was still relatively new, white women tended to praise black
artistry in the kitchen. The result, however, was the same: to denigrate African American women
and thereby validate the common white trope that connected blackness to service and common
labor.

This subtle change in the characterization of various types of cooking skill by white
women reveals a difference in theory from that necessary for the creation of a white supremacist
society based on segregation culture to its maintenance and defense. In another subtle change,
the depictions of actual black cooks by white southern women began to resemble more closely
the images that national retailers had long constructed to sell products associated with food. By
this time, for example, the Aunt Jemima character had long been used to sell pancakes to a
national audience of consumers based on the positive connotation that white Americans in
general made between home-cooked foods and black women.399 Starting in the 1930s and
continuing through the 1960s, white southern women began making this same connection by
featuring “mammy” characters in cookbooks, newspapers, and other resources used to
disseminate homemaking and cooking knowledge.

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White women used such culinary resources less to spread science and more often to communicate cultural and historical memory in an attempt to bolster a regional distinctiveness that was eroding in the consumer sphere as the result of national markets. This erosion was most apparent in the public eateries that grew exponentially in the post-war period. As was the case in Ollie’s Barbecue, foods consumed in southern restaurants often traveled through national markets to get to local suppliers, restaurateurs, and ultimately diners. Increasingly after World War II, however, the presence of national chain stores and restaurants became standard features of the southern landscape. National chains that originated in other regions fed southern appetites and imaginations. Southern consumers began to rely on chain stores and fast-food restaurants for their sustenance. Southern entrepreneurs, influenced by the emergence of fast food in other parts of the country, opened and operated similar home-grown businesses, many of which have since become household names.

The emergence of fast-food in the South after World War II, from the spread of western chains like McDonald’s to the creation of southern copies like Hardee’s and Burger King, created new democratized public spaces in which the cooking, serving, and eating of food took place. Unlike any type of eating place that had come before, fast-food chains represented spectacles of modernity which irrevocably tied southern consumers economically and culturally to the nation at large. Moreover, with their simplistic designs and inexpensive fare, the nature of fast food threatened white supremacy. In its earliest years, however, fast food chains managed to uphold local cultural standards that espoused racial discrimination and reinforced southern white supremacy by enabling local control of customer service policies and adopting nationwide imagery that identified white, middle-class Protestants as the target consumer.

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The tendency toward nationalized foodways could be seen in the domestic and public sphere in the South starting in the 1930s. A variety of different forces drove this process. Depression and war encouraged the movement of peoples and ideas, the modernization of homes and kitchens, and continued federal funding for extension and other services that spread national standards from the cities into the southern hinterlands. The post-war period brought even more change to the South because Cold War spending, among other factors, encouraged the movement of people into the West and the South where suburbs and automobiles became the norm for most white Americans. All of these changes enabled and encouraged southerners, especially whites, to consume foods in new and different ways starting in the home with a new commitment to the reliance on black labor and bridging into the public sphere with new modes of consumption.

At home, economic and technological changes enabled women of different lifestyles and socio-economic levels to access more modern culinary techniques. New Deal projects encouraged funding for electricity, indoor plumbing, modern homes, and extension services for southerners who had previously been deprived of modern amenities. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration sponsored many building projects that enabled disadvantaged white and black southerners to move into homes that boasted modern kitchens. In Atlanta, the Public Works Administration (PWA) constructed the region’s first public housing projects, one for whites and one for blacks, to replace the “ramshackle hovels” in which the city’s lower classes lived. The federally funded apartment buildings and homes, intended for lower-income workers of both races, included indoor plumbing and electricity, access to which many of its residents did not
have previously. Such amenities no doubt allowed its residents to implement more modern food preparation practices by use of electric stoves and other appliances.

Other New Deal projects, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which had its most immediate impact on the infrastructure of several southern states, allowed rural women to access electricity and its associated kitchen appliances. Lower-class rural women responded by acquiring these modern kitchen accoutrements both voluntarily and under compulsion by government administrators. Tressa Waters, a Tennessee homemaker, recalls that the TVA required her family to get an electric stove: “When we got electricity….I got my stove right away….every family had to sign up for so many appliances….we just got what we had to have in order to get the electricity.” Despite the economic hardship and physical dislocations of the period, the changes fashioned by New Deal financial, technological, and government expansion allowed, and even required, access to more modern systems of procuring and preparing food for many who had previously been deprived.

Greater access to modern food preparation methods, as well as the end of the Progressive period, changed the white female commitment to domestic science. Although home economics education had become broader than ever before and its fundamental principles were widely accepted, the late 1930s witnessed a visible rejection of the understanding of cooking as a science even among higher-status southerners. In 1938, Alabama native and New Yorker


magazine culinary writer Sheila Hibben announced, “Cookbooks aren’t Sacred!” a statement which might have been considered heretical among culinary experts of the Progressive period. In an *Atlanta Constitution* article of that title, Hibben considered it “humiliating [and] aggravating…never to be trusted with the amount of parsley or pepper or salt” to use in preparing a dish. Despite her own position as a well-known food expert and author, she suggested that “taste and imagination” as well as “guess or inspiration” must play a significant role in the everyday preparation of food. Hibben’s own recipes illustrated this point. She created “imitations” of quality restaurant meals and encouraged her readers to experiment in a similar manner.  

Southern cookbooks published during and after this decade reveal this same attempt to deviate away from the use of cooking to spread scientific dictates and toward an understanding of southern foods to transmit cultural and historical memory. In 1938, white southerner Kay Burdette published a cookbook, entitled *Cookery of the Old South (Translated from Southern Lore)*, that made no claim to scientific underpinnings or endorsements from home economists. Instead, Burdette attributed her recipes to the personal “hand printed guides” that southern women might have once kept in their kitchens. The cookbook’s design conveys this image. The publishers used a font that resembled handwriting, paper that looked yellowed with age, and a woven homemade-looking cover bound by leather ties. The text romanticizes the antebellum kitchen where, Burdette explains, recipes had been carefully-guarded secrets handed down orally through generations of “artistic” cooks.

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403 Kay Burdette, *Cookery of the Old South* (Glendale, CA, 1938). These ideas and quotations come from the introduction for which there are no page numbers.
Whereas cookbooks inspired by domestic science focused on a commitment to standardized principles and conformity among households, towns, and regions, Burdette’s contribution to culinary literature encouraged the independent judgment of individual cooks. Each recipe lists the spices that should be used but, as Sheila Hibben suggested, Burdette trusts her readers to use spices according to their own tastes and imaginations. Burdette also presents southern foodways as distinct from other regions in a way that scientific cookbooks fail to capture. She even suggests that the root cause of the Civil War related to cooking: “It was more than likely because the South wanted hot breads and the North insisted upon cold light breads.” In food, Burdette insists that “a vast difference [exists] between the two sections” and pledges her allegiance to the South.404

In addition to creating myth that perpetuated the distinctiveness of the southern region, Burdette’s cookbook is myth itself. She claims, “Every detail of this edition has been designed to conform with the antiquity of the recipes.”405 But the recipes are not genuine. At the very least, Burdette relies on the standardized measurements and recipe formats (with ingredient listings up front) propagated by home economics suggesting, despite Burdette’s claims otherwise, an underlying acceptance of the movement’s most fundamental concepts.

The attempt to generate and perpetuate myth through foodways can be seen in southern woman’s club cookbooks of the period as well. In 1935 and 1941, the Ginter Park Woman’s Club issued two slightly different versions of their cookbook entitled Famous Recipes from Old Virginia, which communicated cooking as a feature of cultural memory instead of science. Organized in the 1890s, Ginter Park was one of the South’s earliest suburban areas. In 1895, an

404 Burdette, Cookery of the Old South, 99.

405 Burdette, Cookery of the Old South, 153.
extended streetcar line connected the neighborhood to Richmond, Virginia. Early residents, including doctors, lawyers, executives, and other high-salaried professionals, left their offices in the city each evening to return to their homes in a safe, clean, and attractive community. These white families were among the first southerners to disconnect themselves from both rural and urban lifestyles by settling into an early suburban area—a setting which would become normalized for white southerners after World War II. Unlike the Old South elite, those who lived in Ginter Park no longer relied upon the plantation for both sustenance and extravagance. Yet by the mid-1930s when New Deal programs were modernizing the region, the wives of Ginter Park professionals looked back to the plantation, and not forward to science and progress, as the proper standard by which cooking and homemaking should be judged.

The cookbooks prepared by the Ginter Park Woman’s Club look different from that of the Atlanta Woman’s Club published roughly fifteen years earlier. Instead of using the cookbook as a forum to spread domestic science principles, the Ginter Park women attempted to disseminate their idealized understanding of historical and cultural memory through the use of recipes and food-related images. The title, *Famous Recipes from Old Virginia*, establishes the theme of the cookbook as a tribute to early Virginia history. In the first chapter, the club offers recipes copied from very early southern cookbooks that would have been of little practical use to white women living in an upper-middle-class suburb during the Great Depression. Recipes included “To Make Excellent Bread Without Yeast,” originally published in the 1795 Virginia almanac, and instructions for roasting a pig or turkey over a spit from Mary Randolph’s 1828

household manual. All of these instructions were provided directly from the original source with no attempt to update them with standardized measurements.407

By contrast, in the more modern sections of the cookbook, editors used precise measurements and included a discussion of proper meal planning and nutrition called “Needful Knowledge.” These features demonstrate that the club, like Kay Burdette, bought into more modern modes of cooking and communicating recipes. The primary purpose of the cookbook, however, was not to spread this scientific knowledge. Instead, this group of white Richmond women desired to transmit their understanding of Virginia’s place in the nation’s culture and history. In one chapter, they include recipes from important national and international figures, such as First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and several foreign ambassadors to the United States.408 Such inclusions reflect a cosmopolitan, politically oriented, well-placed group of women living in a new type of American community—a suburb—but still immediately connected to the rest of the nation.

Some of the more important contributions, however, are not the recipes but the accompanying notes and comments emphasizing the importance of instinct, experience, or simple trial-and-error in the kitchen. A memo accompanying the recipe for “Lydia’s Wine Jelly,” contributed by pianist John Powell, reads, “You have to know just how Mr. Powell likes it to get it right. Some lemons are more sour than others, and the sweet must agree with the sour. Better taste it often.” 409 Powell’s cook Lydia, who wrote the note and the recipe, clearly did not rely

407 Ginter Park Woman’s Club, Famous Recipes from Old Virginia (Richmond: Richmond Press, 1935), 9-12.

408 Ginter Park Woman’s Club, Famous Recipes from Old Virginia, 24-58.

409 Ginter Park Woman’s Club, Famous Recipes from Old Virginia, 54.
upon scientific precision to prepare the wine jelly to her employer’s taste. Instead, she depended upon experimentation and an intimate knowledge of Powell’s palate. By including her note, the women of Ginter Park recognize Lydia as an expert in preparing wine jelly and respect her opinion on this point. This reflects a tendency, much changed from the first two decades of the twentieth century, of white women to attribute natural cooking ability to black cooks. By 1935, segregation culture had become established across the South. White women, like those who belonged to the Ginter Park Woman’s Club, no longer had to fear that the black presence in white kitchens threatened racial purity or white supremacy because a set of well-established rituals, customs, and laws regulated racial interactions in the home and public sphere.

By this time, cooking instinct was often attributed to black cooks as an organic part of their nature. Although white women might lay claim to this talent as well, they did so in ways that did not diminish the notion that a black woman’s natural place was in kitchen service. In another note, Mrs. Robert B. Tunstall, a white woman and self-described poet, explained that her recipe for almond cake came from her cousin who “had an especial ‘knack’ which is the extra touch that all recipes need.” Tunstall also included the following excerpt from a nineteenth-century poem written by Alabama author Howard Weeden:

Kaze cooking’s like religion is—
Some’s ‘lected, and some ain’t!
And rules doan no mo mek a cook
Dan sermons mek a saint!410

Although Tunstall’s cousin was most certainly a white women, Tunstall relied upon this poem, written in a stereotypical African American dialect, to express the importance of intuition and talent in the kitchen. The poem compares a good cook to one of John Calvin’s “elect” suggesting

410 Ginter Park Woman’s Club, Famous Recipes from Old Virginia, 54.
that this status had already been decided regardless of the person’s actions or knowledge. The stanza also suggests that cooking talent was bequeathed by God not an industrial school or domestic science degree. By affirming her understanding of cooking as a creature of instinct and artistry, Tunstall rejects the rigidity of domestic science that had dominated the culinary discourse of the previous two decades. By referencing a poem written by a white woman with the supposed articulation of a black cook, she also reinforced the widespread notion that African American culinary skills fell into the “artistic” category. The common white perception that African Americans had organic cooking skills fostered a broader white understanding of black cooks and other African Americans as inherently servile and helped to maintain white supremacy and segregation culture.

In addition to recipes and their accompanying comments, the Ginter Park Woman’s Club reinforced white supremacy through images that revealed racial interactions within and without southern homes. These images, sketched by Richmond artist Margaret Dashiell, complemented the cookbooks’ text by displaying allegedly typical scenes of Richmond life that set forth supposedly appropriate racial patterns in the home and on the streets. Every chapter of the 1935 edition opens with a small image that sets forth certain racial interactions. The section containing colonial recipes opens with a picture of the “Kitchen at Stratford,” the ancestral home of the Lees of Virginia. An older, bow-backed African American woman greets two finely attired white women and a white girl in front of a large cooking hearth. The black woman wears a plain, undistinguished dress and turban; the white women wear large-hooped colonial dresses; and the caption reads, “Ash cake, sweet ‘taters, an’ meat on de spit, In de ole Lee kitchen dey sur’ did cook a bit.” Both the image of the black cook in the Lee kitchen and the use of stereotypical African American dialect reinforce the notion of black southern women as “natural” cooks.
The 1941 edition of *Famous Recipes from Old Virginia* relies more heavily on these images and uses them along with the text to construct historical memory in order to reinforce racial interactions considered to be appropriate in contemporary segregated Richmond. In this edition, the editors added a chapter that featured antebellum recipes. The image that Dashiell drew to represent the antebellum period reveals old Confederate veterans milling about a park dressed in uniforms and propped up with canes. Several young white girls enthusiastically greet them. A rebel battle flag hangs in the background, and an old African American woman stands in the foreground to watch over the white children. "'Fore de war on de ole plantation, mammy was de cook," the caption reads. "She give 'em den de bestest food and never used a book." Although the image reveres the Confederate veteran, the caption memorializes the old plantation cook who learned her craft orally and did not rely on written recipes.

According to the chapter introduction, the editors wanted to include a section of Civil War recipes, but the scarcities and substitutions of the war made that objective difficult. Instead, they focused on recipes popular prior to 1861 “when cooking in the South was such an art” with the desire to resurrect “a glorious period” of Richmond’s past. The Ginter Park Woman’s Club used an imagined historical past to manage the homogenizing effect of modernization on regional identity and to emphasize their understanding of the servile nature of black women to aid in the maintenance of segregation culture.

Although the exaltation of the South’s antebellum and Civil War history was not entirely unknown in earlier twentieth-century cookbooks, the Ginter Park Woman’s Club uses images and recipes from a past era to preserve and impart the region’s “history” in a way that served the

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411 Ginter Park Woman’s Club, *Famous Recipes from Old Virginia*, 2nd ed. (Richmond: Clyde W. Saunders and Sons, 1941), 21.
interests of a segregated Richmond. The recipes supposedly represented the antebellum period, but individual foods or contributors proudly displayed their Confederate credentials. Several of the recipes reportedly hailed from the Lee kitchen at Stratford including one for an orange and coconut sponge cake that “[t]radition says…was the favorite recipe of General Robert E. Lee.” To highlight this connection, the recipe is simply named “Lee’s Favorite Dessert” with no indication as to whether it is a cake, pie, or some other sweet. Contributors are variously described as the “Wife of Confederate soldier,” “Wife of General Pegram who was fatally wounded at the Battle of Hatcher’s Run,” or “Daughter of Mrs. Norman Randolph, one vitally interested in the Confederate Cause and the days that followed.” Another contributor is described as the wife of a cousin to General Lee. Testimony to the contributors’ Confederate bona fides is intended to situate them as appropriate conduits of an antebellum history preserved through the recipes and memories of the white elite.

In addition to communicating memories of the South’s Confederate “tradition,” the 1941 edition of the Ginter Park cookbook uses foodways to describe a more recent imagined past based on dependable black servants and knowledgeable white women. Dashiell drew a new image for the 1941 cookbook that reveals the construction of a Christmas pudding. “The mixing of the Christmas puddings,” the caption explains, “was for many years a ritual in the South.” The image reveals a kitchen full of activity and people. An old black woman sits with a large bowl on her lap and stirs the pudding while white children hang over her. In another chair across the kitchen another black servant holds a young white toddler. Standing in the center of her kitchen with a commanding air, a white woman reads from a book, presumably a cookbook, to instruct the servant on the proper preparation of the pudding. The white children surround the black domestic servants, but their attention is riveted on their mother in the center of the kitchen.
Dashiell has illustrated the supposedly “appropriate” domestic roles for each woman based on her race. The black women perform the manual labor associated with feeding and otherwise caring for healthy white children. The white woman provides the leadership and knowledge necessary for this endeavor. The image’s presumptuous title, “Any Richmond Kitchen of not Many Years Ago,” assumes that every kitchen in the city belonged to an upper-middle-class white woman who could afford several servants and had the time to personally oversee and instruct her kitchen help as they worked.412

The images and history supposedly preserved in the two editions of the Ginter Park cookbook reveals more about elite white Richmond in the 1930s and 1940s than they reveal about “Old Virginia.” The cookbooks expose a white female population comfortable with their understanding of black service as a static institution intrinsic to the foundations of southern domesticity. They are unlike the southern white middle-class women two decades earlier who worried about the quality of their servants and sought alternatives to the black domestic. In Dashiell’s drawings, the images of white women change across time. For the colonial picture of the Lee’s kitchen, the white women wear low-bodiced, hoop skirt dresses. Images set in later time periods reveal more contemporary styles on the white women and children. But the images of black women remain constant and timeless. They wear plain dresses and turbans. They work in white kitchens or urban marketplaces and constantly mind white children. The images reveal many healthy, rambunctious white children who are always the center of the black servant’s attention. Many images reveal one African American girl as well, but she is always off to the

412 Ginter Park Woman’s Club, Famous Recipes from Old Virginia, 2nd ed., 277.
side and never the focus of anyone’s attention. Her only role in the images is to wait and watch as she learns about her own future position as a domestic servant.

The southern distinctiveness that such approaches to cooking in the home represented coincided with the nationalization of southern foodways, which was particularly noticeable among public eateries. The period following World War II saw a variety of different types of eating places invade the South. Many of these forms had their genesis as chain stores originating in other parts of the country, but they nevertheless found a willing consumer base among southern urbanites and, increasingly, suburbanites. A key feature in the development of a prosperous post-World War II public dining sphere was the automobile, which enabled consumers to patronize eating establishments away from the city center. The wider availability of automobiles and the expansion of southern roadways encouraged the construction of eateries in the South’s emerging suburbs as well as the countryside.

This also helped to connect a broader and even more mobile population of southern consumers to national food markets changing the nature of public food consumption in broader areas of the South. Automobiles provided a new type of mobility for American consumers. They were not restricted by train schedules, Jim Crow cars, or rail availability. For those who could afford transport by automobile, new types of consumer sites emerged in the form of roadside cafes and food-service stands. By one estimate, tens of thousands of stands existed along the nation’s roadways by the 1930s. These stands were particularly popular in the South where temperate weather allowed for outdoor service and dining throughout much of the year. Southern
roadside stands often specialized in barbecue, a regional specialty that thrived especially in more rural areas.⁴¹³

Barbecue stands took many different forms. Some, modeled after urban cafes, allowed for customers to sit-down at counters or tables. Roadside eateries might have also taken the form of a drive in whereby “car hops” served customers in their cars. Others more closely resembled a city sidewalk stand with no interior seating or car service. Architecture varied as well because some proprietors created elaborate, decorative exteriors intended to attract the attention of drivers.⁴¹⁴ The entrance to a barbecue roadside cafe located near Harlington, Texas, during World War II, took the form of a large black-spotted pig. Patrons entered through a doorway under the pig’s massive snout. Despite the elaborate entryway, parking consisted of a simple gravel lot with no landscaping or gardening out front.⁴¹⁵

Other roadside stands and cafes represented functionality over spectacle. A stand near Corpus Christie, Texas, circa 1939, was made of corrugated metal and had the word Barbecue emblazoned in large, capital letters at the top. Signs advertising soda indicated that 7-Up and Royal Crown Cola were also served.⁴¹⁶ Big Chief Barbecue, located near Fort Benning, in Columbus, Georgia, around 1940, allowed for sit-down customers in a simple structure

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constructed of cement blocks. The outside was also covered in signs advertising, among other products, Dr. Pepper and Atlantic Ale and Beer.\textsuperscript{417} Large signs by national advertisers allowed roadside cafes to advertise their wares in a way that would be noticeable to passers-by and also gave independent eateries a more common appearance from one region to another. They allowed consumers, even in the absence of national chains, to participate in the national consumption of popular soft drink brands even at the most out-of-the-way places.

Early roadside cafes were often attached to gas stations or hotels providing one-stop accommodations for the needs of travelers.\textsuperscript{418} A Texaco station near Yulee, Florida, in 1941, featured a wooden building behind the pumps where patrons could grab a quick lunch.\textsuperscript{419} Southern farmers suffering low crop prices in the 1920s and 1930s, coinciding with a national increase in automobile ownership, could operate such establishments to supplement lower family incomes. They could open or purchase simple structures with minimal investment and without having to leave the countryside. In this way, southern farm families helped themselves toward recovery through entrepreneurship. In 1937, the proprietor of a small roadside cafe/gas station near Ennis, Texas, celebrated the optimism that his new brick establishment engendered with the name “Nu Deel Sandwich Shoppe.”\textsuperscript{420} Wilber Hardee’s family took a similar route after several


\textsuperscript{418} Jakle and Sculle, \textit{Fast Food}, 46.


bad harvests forced them into sharecropping. In the late 1930s, his father opened a gas station. Hardee, who would later found the Hardee’s fast food chain, began his entrepreneurial career in food service by operating the attached quick-order grill which specialized in hamburgers, hot dogs, and pork chop sandwiches.421

The menu at Hardee’s small grill identifies a second key ingredient to the future of public dining in the South and across the nation: the common hamburger. Although regional barbecue remained popular, most national “quick order” (later known as “fast food”) establishments came to depend on the hamburger, a product which developed into its full potential in the early 1920s. Edgar Waldo Ingram, who founded the modern hamburger stand, recalls that early twentieth-century American consumers distrusted hamburger meat. “[W]hen Mother wanted hamburger,” Ingram recalls, “she would innocently buy a pound or two of a certain cut of beef and then, as the butcher started to wrap it up, say, ‘Would you mind grinding it for me?’ and stand and watch him do it.” In the aftermath of the muckraking novel, *The Jungle*, which brought about change to the U.S. meat-packing industry, the nation understandably remained wary about a product composed of an unidentifiable meat and any number of unknown additives or impurities.422

In 1921, Ingram and his business partner Walter Anderson set out to change the negative image of the hamburger sandwich, referring to hamburger steak served between two pieces of bread. They stocked their stand in Wichita, Kansas, with the same type of beef they imagined American mothers buying and had it ground to their specifications. They encouraged confidence in the quality, purity, and sanitation of their kitchens and pantries by arranging tours for local

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women’s clubs. They selected the name of their new hamburger chain, White Castle, to symbolize sanitation and trustworthiness: “‘White’ signifies purity and cleanliness and ‘Castle’ represents strength, permanence and stability.” The phrase “White Castle” could also represent the fortress of white supremacy that, through symbolism and imagery, American foodways had come to embody and to reinvigorate the contemporary national myth of the superiority of Anglo-Saxon culture in an increasingly non-Anglo-Saxon nation. In this way, the modern hamburger immediately communicated to and connected with an increasingly white supremacist and nativist American, and southern, consumer base. Hamburgers became standard fare across the country in quick-order establishments. In the years following World War II, this simple, inexpensive product would help to connect southern food consumers to national consumption markets with the introduction of “fast food” to the South.

A final, important ingredient to post-World War II dining in the South was the national chain. National chain stores and restaurants standardized most everything from the structure of the building to the food served. The first chain eateries probably entered the South through the five-and-dime variety stores. Frank Winfield Woolworth originated this low cost, high volume store concept with his first successful shop opened in 1879 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Woolworth instituted food service in all of his stores between the years 1910 and 1925 with so-called “refreshment rooms” that mostly resembled high-end restaurants in their look and service. Later these rather elaborate affairs took on the appearance of a modern lunch counter with Formica counters and vinyl bar stools. White waitresses wore uniforms, aprons, and caps and

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423 Ingram, *All This from a 5-cent Hamburger*, 10.
handled large crowds at lunch time. Woolworth entered the Atlanta market in 1915 marking the entrance of national chain food service in the city. Woolworth and its competitors in the variety store lunch counter business represented only the first wave of chain restaurants to hit the South. After World War II, chains would become a significant part of the southern dining landscape.

Although they had pre-war antecedents in Woolworth lunch counters, chain restaurants expanded across the nation and the South after World War II. Automobiles, suburbanization, and, because many new chains targeted their fare toward children and families, the Baby Boom represented only some of the demographic factors that encouraged both the success of “quick lunch” chains and their evolution into modern “fast food.” The fast food concept was designed to feed people cheaply and efficiently. The chain that epitomized the post-World War II incarnation of fast food was McDonald’s. Two brothers, Richard and Maurice McDonald, developed the concept in San Bernardino, California. Initially, they operated a traditional drive-in with car-hops serving barbecue, hamburgers, and a variety of other menu items to a customer base dominated by teenagers. In 1948, in an effort to increase their sales volume, the McDonald brothers streamlined their operations. They eliminated the car-hops, popularizing a new style of self-service drive-in, and reduced the menu to five items: hamburgers, cheeseburgers, french fries,

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The new McDonald’s Hamburgers focused on sanitation, affordability, and speed. The brothers arranged their kitchen so that customers could view the clean, tiled interior. White male cooks wore crisp uniforms and paper hats. They worked at a grill and on other preparation surfaces that were arranged for maximum efficiency. They cooked hamburgers by hand, but using “a specially built polished steel griddle,” they could prepare forty hamburgers in just one hundred and ten seconds. They served hamburgers with mustard, catsup, chopped onions, and pickles and allowed no substitutions or special orders. They peeled and cut potatoes to make french fries, but peelers and slicers eased the labor involved. They created an “assembly line” to manufacture milk shakes. Standardization in product and preparation allowed the brothers to keep prices down, to work efficiently, and to serve the lines of customers who gathered in front of their establishment. Despite long queues, customers only had to wait a short amount of time for service. That time could be spent admiring the new spectacle of modern, efficient, inexpensive food service developed by the McDonald brothers.\footnote{12 by 16 Foot Restaurant Space,” American Restaurant Magazine, 44-45; Kroc and Anderson, Grinding It Out, 5-11, 65-68; McLamore, The Burger King, 15-18.}

In 1954, Illinois businessman Ray Kroc sealed McDonald’s future as the standard for fast food franchising when he visited the San Bernardino drive-in. At that time, Kroc traveled the country selling milkshake machines, each with the capacity to mix five shakes simultaneously.
The McDonald brothers owned eight machines for their little hamburger stand causing Kroc to wonder why any one restaurant, especially one located in the “quiet town” of San Bernardino, needed to make forty milkshakes at the same time. Once there, he witnessed the crowds that gathered to consume the McDonalds’ hamburgers. Kroc recalls in his memoir, “Soon the parking lot was full and people were marching up to the windows and back to their cars with bags full of hamburgers.” In particular, he noticed the variety of clientele attracted to the stand—from the construction workers who ate lunch there every day to the “demure” young blonde lunching on a hamburger in her convertible automobile. Kroc left California with a contract to franchise the brothers’ operations. In April 1955, Kroc opened the first national franchise in Des Plaines, Illinois. The McDonald’s franchise became an immediate sensation. Restaurateurs from all over the country traveled to California to copy the original design and to carry the modern fast food concept home.428

Over the next decade, McDonald’s spread across the country and throughout the southern states. As the population growth shifted from the Northeast to the South and Southwest, Kroc recognized the potential of the Sunbelt for the success of the national chain.429 By 1963, one hundred and twenty-two out of McDonald’s roughly five hundred and fifty locations were in the South with the largest southern presence in the states of Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and Alabama.430 One of the earliest McDonald’s franchises in the region may


430 McDonald’s Corporation, McDonald’s First Annual Report (Chicago: McDonald’s Corporation, 1963). Annual reports for the McDonald’s Corporation for the years 1963-1973 (excluding 1964) were located at Purdue University.
have been in Sarasota, Florida, where builders struggled with local health officials. The standardized McDonald’s structure, covered with red and white tile and dominated by two parallel golden arches on each side, failed to gain approval because the local health department refused to allow McDonald’s to prepare milk shakes and hamburgers in the same room. The issue may have been a deal killer. Fast food existed on the notion of efficiency and economy, and McDonald’s kitchens had been designed very specifically toward achieving an efficient workspace. The company and local officials compromised on a simple redesign, but the incident reveals the challenges inherent when a national chain restaurant moved into a new region with different interpretations of health and sanitation.431

The Sarasota incident failed to inhibit the chain’s movement south. In 1965, the corporation opened a regional office in Atlanta, Georgia.432 McDonald’s influence on public dining in southern eating places, however, greatly exceeded its own presence in the region. From the very beginning McDonald’s served as a model for fast food.433 In the South, several home-grown fast food chains explicitly modeled the McDonald’s design. Among others, Burger King developed in Florida after its founders visited the McDonalds’ San Bernardino operations, and Hardees opened in North Carolina when Wilber Hardee witnessed the Greensboro franchise.434

Despite the growing popularity of McDonald’s and other fast food chains across the country, Burger King encountered significant difficulties. Founded in 1953 with the use of two

431 Kroc and Anderson, Grinding It Out, 89.


433 Kroc and Anderson, Grinding It Out, 6, 108.

434 McLamore, Burger King, 21; Hardee, Life and Times of Wilber Hardee, 58.
devices intended to automate food service, founder Matthew L. Burns experienced trouble when he attempted to duplicate and improve upon the McDonald’s brothers’ success. Burns discovered fast food on a trip to California where he witnessed McDonald’s Hamburgers in San Bernardino and identified two machines, the Insta broiler and Insta shake machine, intended to bring food service into the factory age. Burns carried all of his discoveries back to Jacksonville, Florida, where he and his father-in-law, Keith G. Cramer, opened the first Insta Burger King expecting the “Insta” devices to make the fast food system more efficient. The Insta broiler simultaneously cooked twelve hamburger patties in individual baskets that carried the raw meat through two electrical heating units. A wire screen kept the patties in place until the baskets rotated back to the operator and then a stainless steel slide pushed each cooked patty into a pan filled with a special-recipe sauce. Hamburger buns ran along a conveyor belt below the cooking patties where they collected juices from the meat cooking above. Similarly, the Insta shake machine automated the preparation of milk shakes. With the flip of a switch, an ice-milk mix of either chocolate or vanilla froze instantly into a shake so thick that customers had to eat it with a wooden spoon.

A year after Cramer and Burns opened the first “Insta” Burger King in Jacksonville, two Miami entrepreneurs, David Edgerton and James McLamore, opened four franchises. Despite the success of fast food in general, “Insta” Burger King never appealed to the Florida populace and suffered financially. McLamore recalls several Florida chains, including Golden Point, Henry’s, Red Barn, Burger Castle, and Biff Burger, that failed in fast food’s early years. Lack of enthusiasm from Florida customers and lack of experience on the part of the proprietors

435 McLamore, Burger King, 18-21.
436 McLamore, Burger King, 18-21.
437 McLamore, Burger King, 15, 21-22, 28-29.
contributed to these failures. “In 1954 Miami,” McLamore recalls in his autobiography, “[fast food service] was unproven, unfamiliar, and unpopular.” Continued concern over the quality of hamburgers may have plagued these chains as well. McLamore recalls that Floridians believed “an inexpensive hamburger couldn’t possibly be wholesome.”

In Burger King’s case, the “Insta” devices, intended to be an improvement on the McDonald’s system, were unreliable and contributed to consumer dissatisfaction. In attempting to automate the system with undependable machinery, Burger King’s founders had weakened a key ingredient in fast food success—the ability to serve customers quickly and efficiently. The franchisees, Edgerton and McLamore, saved Burger King from failure by replacing the inefficient “Insta” machines with new flame broilers. The new broilers continued to automate the process of cooking hamburgers but with a newfound speed and efficiency that enabled Burger King to gain the confidence of south Florida consumers. All Burger King franchises implemented these changes. In 1957, Burger King added the Whopper made with a quarter pound of meat, which turned the typical fast-food hamburger into a larger, heartier meal.

Wilber Hardee faced none of these problems when he founded the self-named fast food chain in Greenville, North Carolina. Hardee initiated his new business enterprise in 1960 after witnessing the McDonald’s concept. At that time, Hardee was forty-two years old and had been in the restaurant business for most of his working life. He had opened and operated several successful ventures starting with the grill at his family’s gas station before World War II and, more recently, a combination drive-in/sit-down restaurant that served Carolina barbecue, steaks, seafood, fried chicken, and charbroiled hamburgers. When North Carolina’s first McDonald’s


franchise opened in Greensboro, a four hour drive from Greenville, Hardee recalls, “Probably everyone in the restaurant business began about the same time to hear stories of the new hamburger chain that served hamburgers instantly for only 15 cents.” Hardee’s curiosity encouraged him to make the eight-hour round trip and visit the new restaurant. Just as Ray Kroc had done in San Bernardino six years earlier, Hardee sat in the drive-in’s parking lot for hours to witness the crowds that lined up at the service window and left minutes later with bagfuls of fifteen-cent hamburgers. Within an hour, Hardee estimated that the small drive-in took in about one hundred and forty dollars. He spent the long drive back to Greenville planning how he could duplicate McDonald’s success.440

On September 3, 1960, the new Hardee’s Restaurant opened in Greenville. Hardee selected the site based on its proximity to East Carolina University and the availability of parking. Modeled after McDonald’s, Hardee paneled the building with tile to give the restaurant “a clean, modernistic and distinctive appearance.” Like the early McDonald’s franchises, Hardee’s did not have a dining room. He arranged the small interior space to make preparing, cooking, and serving hamburgers efficient and quick. Customers drove to the restaurant, parked in the lot, walked to the service window to place their order, paid for the food upon receipt, and took their meal back to their cars. Many customers ate their hamburgers in the car. Because there were no other fast food restaurants in the immediate area, opening day was “an event,” and customer traveled as much as fifty miles “to see the new restaurant and to buy their first 15-cent hamburger.” The first Hardee’s apparently did not experience the growing pains that Burger King had encountered in Florida six years earlier. Hardee recalls long lines at the service window

440 Hardee, Life and Times of Wilber Hardee, 55-58.
and traffic jams in the parking lot as North Carolinians embraced this new product and form of service.441

By its nature, fast food had the potential to be a more democratic mode of consumption. The food was inexpensive. The McDonald brothers and Kroc purposefully established the McDonald’s system to scale down the process of eating out. “What we have attempted to do is eliminate those things that people don’t eat,” Kroc explains in a 1961 Time magazine article. “You can’t eat a 20% tip, a perfumed finger bowl or a waitress.”442 Kroc’s philosophy theoretically equalized access for all. There was no drive-in; no drive-thru; no dining room; no waiters or waitresses. Everyone walked up to the window and ordered. Then, customers took their order to the car or elsewhere to eat. McDonald’s did not implement indoor seating until 1963 when the corporation enclosed the buildings to provide for air conditioning, heating, and small dining areas in an effort to increase sales.443 Increasing sales was all-important to an industry that operated on low prices and high volume. For many reasons, it was not in the nature of fast food enterprises to discourage consumption.

What’s more, unlike the restaurants and cafes of an earlier time, which were controlled by individuals, these new spaces relied on franchises by regional or national corporations. By definition, individual franchises were mired in corporate identity and economics. Again leading the pack, McDonald’s became the first fast food chain to engage in national advertising campaigns. The chain placed its first national ad in Reader’s Digest in October 1963, which featured a half-page advertisement showing a typical McDonald’s structure at top and promising

441 Hardee, Life and Times of Wilber Hardee, 58-59.
443 McDonald’s Corporation, McDonald’s First Annual Report, 4.
that McDonald’s is “Everybody’s Favorite! Coast to Coast.” In the same year, a national public relations campaign celebrated the chain’s billionth hamburger sold including newspaper articles and television appearances. In 1965, McDonald’s featured a float in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade and hired a national agency to oversee its print, radio, and television advertising. National advertising helped to build a uniform public identity for these spaces and to familiarize potential customers with the chain’s iconic structure for easy recognition.

Fast food thrived on uniformity in their food and their operations. From the beginning, the existence of national chains depended upon standardization. “Our aim,” Kroc recalls, “was to insure repeat business based on the system’s reputation rather than on the quality of a single store or operator.” Signs, architecture, logos, and other identifiable symbols required homogeneity and consistency so that potential consumers could recognize the business from one location to another. Food, service, and similar features of hospitality also demanded regular standards to ensure brand loyalty. When a customer became familiar with a particular chain, they could expect the same products and quality in Columbus, Georgia, that they received in Springfield, Massachusetts, and everywhere in between. In theory, creating a national corporate identity for one chain should make the existence of varied service policies, especially discriminatory policies, difficult, unreasonable, and embarrassing. White southerners should have had to work hard to maintain white supremacy and segregation in these public spaces.

444 McDonald’s advertisement, Readers’ Digest, October 1963, 297; McDonald’s Corporation, McDonald’s First Annual Report, 5-6.


446 Kroc and Anderson, Grinding it Out, 81-82.
White supremacy and racial segregation nevertheless prevailed, especially in the South, in the earliest years of fast food. In part, this can be attributed to the tendency for the national corporations to leave policies related to the human interactions within these public spaces to the discretion of the local manager or franchisee and community law or custom. In his contemporary critique, *Fast Food Nation*, Eric Schlosser points out that today McDonald’s regulates all aspects of its operations down to the diameter of the pickles on the hamburgers but nevertheless allows local managers to handle employee-related issues such as salary, hours, and benefits. According to Schlosser, this lenience allows local wage rates to prevail, virtually eliminates overtime for most hourly workers, and inhibits union influence.447

In the 1950s and 1960s, the chain used the same laissez-faire approach to customer service allowing local law, custom, and manager preference to dictate service to African Americans. There is little evidence of how black southerners might have negotiated the walk-up service windows that all customers used in the early years of fast food service. But discriminatory customs that had prevailed for decades within southern stores, dictating that whites be served before black customers, may have served to regulate racial interactions at the McDonald’s service counter.448 Also, automobiles and suburban shopping centers encouraged proprietors to build away from downtown areas. Restaurant location and residential segregation may have limited black access to these public spaces. Wilber Hardee located his first Hardee’s

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448 Growing up in small-town Arkansas, for example, Maya Angelou recalls that the butcher put the orders of black customers aside if a white person entered the shop. *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes* (New York: Random House, 2004), 46.
hamburger restaurant near the whites-only East Carolina University.\textsuperscript{449} From the beginning of Kroc’s expansion, McDonald’s focused on suburban areas for franchise locations.\textsuperscript{450}

There is no doubt that segregation and discrimination existed at McDonald’s locations and other chains in the South. When McDonald’s implemented indoor seating, in the midst of civil rights “sit-in” activism, many southern franchisees instigated racial segregation even when other local eateries had abolished the practice. In Pine Bluff, Arkansas, during the summer of 1963, local civil rights activists called for a national boycott of McDonald’s when the local franchisee requested and received a restraining order requiring them to desist direct action campaigns at the restaurant. According to the civil rights periodical, the \textit{Student Voice}, most local business leaders had already integrated downtown lunch counters.\textsuperscript{451}

Segregation had been a feature of chain dining across the country as Woolworth’s and other variety store lunch counters demonstrate. These spaces undoubtedly created a conundrum for the well-established segregation laws and racial customs that governed dining in public places in the South. By the 1960’s Woolworth’s slogan was “Everybody’s Store,” and in fact the retailer did allow African Americans to shop in its stores.\textsuperscript{452} Black southerners spent their hard-earned money on toiletry items, home décor, and similar low-cost products at Woolworth and other five-and-dimes. Yet they could not dine at the lunch counter alongside white customers. Black money was good in these stores, but it only went so far. If black customers wanted to eat,

\textsuperscript{449} Hardee, \textit{Life and Times of Wilber Hardee}, 58.

\textsuperscript{450} Kroc and Anderson, \textit{Grinding it Out}, 81.


\textsuperscript{452} Plunkett-Powell, \textit{Remembering Woolworth’s}, 159.
they had to purchase food to go or stand at designated “colored” sections. In these chains, local control over service policies allowed segregation to prevail wherever it was provided for by law, custom, or the discretion of local management. As early as the 1940s, the civil rights group, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), attempted to use the national presence of these lunch counters to force desegregation in areas outside of the Deep South, but soon recognized the strength of local custom.

In Baltimore, CORE tried to influence racial policies by pressuring stockholders and officers of national chains and by encouraging picketing at locations in African American neighborhoods. In 1953, CORE conducted months of sit-ins at the lunch counter at Grant’s variety store in Baltimore. Several Grant’s locations changed their policies in light of the protests, and apparently with some interference from the national offices, but the manager of at least one location remained “hostile.” In an effort to end the stalemate, Bayard Rustin met with a corporate officer who maintained that lunch counter service was “completely a local matter.” Rustin also suggested a sympathy boycott of Grant’s in Harlem to support the Baltimore desegregation effort.453 Efforts such as these were slow and pain-staking, and contacting national offices had little impact on desegregation efforts. Like the earlier five-and-dime lunch counters, local franchises of modern fast food franchises retained autonomy over service issues that allowed segregation to continue.

Exacerbating the discriminatory effect of laissez-faire policies at the national level, many chain restaurants constructed national identities that supported the maintenance of white

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supremacy. McDonald’s, for example, represented its target customer as a white, middle-class, Protestant family. At the beginning of his operations, Kroc prohibited pay telephones, juke boxes, and vending machines to discourage loitering or disruptions that he thought would “downgrade the family image.” Corporate portraits illustrating McDonald’s idealized operations reveal the significance of the white middle-class family to the company’s identity. In 1963, the inside cover of McDonald’s first annual report depicted a colored drawing of the original drive-in as conceived by the brothers in the 1950s. The image portrays the red and white tiled structure with large over-hanging golden arches on either side of the facility. Customers, consisting entirely of white, well-dressed, well-behaved families, parked their modern automobiles to the side of the building and walked to the service window. In 1966, the chain increased the family feel of the company by introducing the new slogan, “The Closest Thing to Home.”

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A more nationalized southern food culture, combined with a population mobilized increasingly by automobiles, could have contributed to more democratic foodways even in the South. But instead, white southerners worked to maintain segregation culture in spite of these changes. Domestic imagery in cookbooks and culinary literature attempted to define southern distinctiveness in terms of a unique food tradition. White southern women created an imagined antebellum past of black women as artists in the kitchen preparing meals based on proprietary


455 McDonald’s Corporation, *McDonald’s First Annual Report*.

recipes handed down across the generations. African American cooks served important roles in these myths as the inheritors of innate culinary talents and, by implication, as “natural” servants to whites. These myths helped to sustain white supremacy and segregation culture.

Instead of diminishing white supremacy and segregation, chain restaurants and roadside stands added a new danger for black southerners. The automobile freed African Americans from the Jim Crow car on southern trains but also exposed them to other, sometimes more insidious dangers, on the roadways. Unlike in railroad dining cars, in which the rules were more or less understood, African Americans looking for a meal along southern highways stood in a much more perilous situation. Around 1954, Barbee William Durham, an African American man from Columbus, Ohio, wrote about traveling in the South. “The most difficult problem that confronts Negro American citizens when they travel by automobile,” Durham explained, “is finding a place to stop for the night and a place to eat.”457 The rules along unknown roadside cafes were much less reliable. A more mobile African American population faced significant troubles when they traveled away from areas they knew and where racial policies were well understood. These dangers as well as the more general desire to spread American democratic consumption practices to African Americans contributed to the rise of civil rights activism in southern eating places.

457 “Tired; Hungry and Angry,” ca. 1954, in Reel 8, CORE Papers.
CHAPTER SIX: “The Customer is Always ‘White’”: Racial Purity and the Civil Rights Movement

On February 1, 1960, four young male students at Greensboro’s historically black North Carolina Agricultural & Technical College entered a local Woolworth’s five and dime. After purchasing toothpaste and other toiletry items, the men sat down at the lunch counter and ordered coffee. The white waitresses refused to serve the students and directed them to a stand-up counter. The students remained seated. Feeling an “[i]ntense sense of pride, [and] a bit of trepidation,” the students remained seated until closing and returned the next day. A group of students continued to demonstrate for months at the local Woolworth’s. When Woolworth’s closed its counter, they moved to the Kress department store down the street. They peacefully endured abusive and violent resistance from the local white population as the Ku Klux Klan, Citizen’s Council, and other white supremacists staged counter protests and dumped condiments and water on them.458

The Greensboro sit-in was not the first direct-action protest against segregated lunch counters. CORE had been involved in similar activity since 1942. But the Greensboro Four—as they have come to be called—stand out because they ignited a movement of southern youth dedicated to ending discrimination in public accommodations. James McNeil, one of the

Greensboro Four, recalls feeling surprised but encouraged when sit-ins engaged students across the South. In the two month period that followed his foray into Woolworth, communities from Richmond to Miami to Austin witnessed sit-in activity. Ella Baker, an older female activist who worked with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), encouraged the students to coordinate their activities. In April 1960, she gathered with more than two hundred students at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. This conference witnessed the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Famously describing student activism as “bigger than a hamburger,” Baker reminded the students that sit-ins could lead to the end of segregation “not only at lunch counters, but in every aspect of life.” SNCC activists took Baker’s statements to heart, using the lunch counter movement as a launching pad for other significant goals, especially increasing black suffrage.

The civil rights movement involved the on-going quest of African Americans for full participation in American citizenship. Voter registration drives, for example, represented direct

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463 At future meetings, SNCC activists debated the proper role for the organization—whether they should continue focusing on public accommodations or turn their attention to black suffrage. Once again, Baker came to the rescue by suggesting that they do both. Despite the controversy, at least one SNCC activist recalls a connection between lunch counter sit-ins and voter registration: “The vote as a white institution was protected by guns and law as surely as were segregated public accommodations.” Casey Hayden, “Fields of Blue,” in Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 354.
challenges to the white monopoly on southern democracy. Yet in the post-World War II era, American citizenship became increasingly identified with consumerism. For this reason, equality within the consumer sphere, represented by the lunch counters, embodied the means for African Americans to claim their rights as Americans. Sit-ins illuminated a significant conflict between two different visions of citizenship and two opposing views of southern culture. Civil rights activists (along with some other white and black southerners) believed in a common humanity that gave all Americans the right to participate in consumerism and politics, both of which they connected to democracy. White supremacists, on the other hand, internalized an understanding of African Americans as inherently different and violently resisted any action that disavowed the racial hierarchy upon which this difference was constructed.

By 1960, this conflict had already played out in other contexts—with school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, and equality on buses in Montgomery, Alabama, to name a few. As two of the earliest southern institutions to experience formal or de jure segregation, education and transportation represented two important points of departure for segregation culture. But the attempt to desegregate public eating places moved African Americans forward in the quest for equal access to southern space and consumer culture. Sit-ins represented a relatively spontaneous uprising of southern youth, those who would gain the most benefit at least in terms of years, from this effort. Admittedly, the first Greensboro sit-in was not entirely impulsive. The four students planned the event with a local white merchant who had

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been trying to trigger desegregation of local lunch counters for years.\textsuperscript{466} But the reaction of students across the South occurred swiftly, spontaneously, and unconstrained by well-established rules or the risks involved in breaking them.

Desegregating lunch counters signified the importance of consumerism to the lifestyles of black southerners and the now ubiquitous nature of public eating places. In previous decades, most southerners would never encounter a public eatery either because they did not live near the city or could not afford to eat out. By 1960, although a significant number of southerners continued to live in poverty, more people had access to places of public accommodation. The factors that encouraged public dining establishments to expand—national markets, automobiles, greater financial security—made eating places an obvious and popular civil rights target. A large number of black and white southern students identified lunch counter sit-ins as a valuable exercise for the spread of American democracy.

Lunch counters sit-ins implicated an important aspect of southern culture for white supremacists as well, specifically the maintenance of racial purity. Many of those who defended restaurant segregation most voraciously, such as Atlanta restaurateur Lester Maddox, actively connected it to notions of miscegenation and racial purity. The white supremacists that held out the longest for segregation tended to own and operate family restaurants that they treated like their own homes. For this reason, distinctions between the public and private were vague in their minds and ignored in their business practices. They interpreted civil rights victories as personal assaults on the white southern home and as a threat to the nature of whiteness. For civil rights activists, attacking segregation at lunch counters and other public eateries confronted the decades-long connection between food consumption and whiteness.

\textsuperscript{466} Frank Johns, interview by Eugene Pfaff, \textit{Greensboro Voices Collection}.  

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Although the Greensboro sit-in spawned an excitement among university students toward equal rights, the sit-in movement had earlier antecedents. Starting in the 1940s, CORE triggered a similar, albeit less publicized, direct action campaign targeted in segregated restaurants primarily located outside of the South. Although northern states generally lacked formal racial segregation laws, segregated eating emerged as African Americans migrated to northern cities. A combination of local management, community custom, and general apathy supported segregation outside of the southern states. Without the same history of vicious racism and the urgent need to uphold white supremacy at all costs, as existed in the South, northern eating places generally revealed more fluidity in the application of racial segregation.

In 1949, white students investigating the dining situation in Appleton, Wisconsin, identified many segregated eating places. In an effort to boost their local CORE chapter, the students called downtown cafes to ascertain each eatery’s policy regarding the service of black customers. Every cafe in Appleton practiced some sort of discrimination although no absolute rule prevailed. Some places refused to serve African Americans altogether; one cafe offered to serve black customers at the back door; and others agreed to serve some black customers conditioning their acceptance upon the manner and occupation of the individual in question. In the latter situation, the potential customer had to seem “well-bred…such as a member of an orchestra” to receive service.\(^{467}\) In some ways, Appleton resembled a southern town because its cafe operators recognized racial difference and identified such diversity as an important point of distinction within the consumer sphere. But the flexibility represented by the latter group of cafe owners in this survey would have not existed in the South at this time. This pliancy, common in

\(^{467}\) Phyllis Haeger to Catherine Raymond, June 10, 1949, Reel 8, CORE Papers.
many northern communities, allowed CORE to pursue equality with some success, but relatively little publicity, in the immediate post-war period.

CORE formulated many different forms of direct action campaigns, more common to labor disputes up until that point, toward the problem of civil rights in public spaces. These actions provided important precedents for SNCC and later civil rights activism. The first step taken in CORE’s direct action campaigns included “testing” local restaurants by use of integrated groups of customers. CORE might bring two or three different groups into a restaurant with different combinations of black and white, male and female to ascertain whether a particular eatery would serve the group. A single white customer or white group usually followed integrated groups to act as observers. If the testing revealed racial discrimination, CORE attempted direct negotiations with the owner or manager and, as a last resort, sit-ins (also referred to as “sit-downs”), boycotts, and pickets. SNCC would later adopt all of these techniques to pursue equal opportunity in the consumer sphere further south.

Although the organization was committed to ending racial segregation wherever it existed, CORE’s annual surveys reveal that local affiliates became involved mostly in the desegregation of public eating places. A CORE affiliate in Denver, Colorado, reported, “Most of our work had been concentrated on breaking racial discrimination in restaurants.”

Philadelphia CORE identified as that year’s “greatest specific accomplishment” the testing of fifty restaurants in the city center and the “distribution of the results.” Despite these examples of discrimination in northern cities, southern segregation, and therefore southern civil rights

\[468\] Colorado Committee of Racial Equality, [Affiliation Blank], ca. 1953, Reel 8, CORE Papers.

\[469\] Philadelphia CORE, [Affiliation Blank], ca. 1953, Reel 8, CORE Papers.
activism, was quantitatively and qualitatively different. Because a larger African American population existed in the southern states, desegregation created a more significant impact. Because of the solidity of white supremacy, more restaurants in the South practiced segregation and would be affected. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, for example, CORE tested about sixty downtown restaurants and identified only one case of discrimination. Desegregation certainly would have greater meaning in Birmingham than in Minneapolis in terms of sheer numbers.470

CORE’s experiences also illustrate important qualitative differences of desegregation efforts in southern cities. Because no consistent patterns of segregation existed in northern eateries, the possibilities were broader. CORE activists might encounter any number of eating places that practiced no discernable discrimination; they might encounter a segregation stronghold; or, more likely, the circumstances fell somewhere in between. In Columbus, Ohio, for example, a group of three African Americans and seven whites tested two restaurants. They encountered no discrimination in the first, but the second eatery refused to serve the black customers. The waiter attempted to close the restaurant. When the group protested and refused to leave, the waiter called the police. Two black police officers responded to the call. Instead of arresting the protestors, the policemen listened to their story and suggested that they sue the restaurant for discrimination.471

Possibilities for negotiation with local business owners were greater in the North. CORE always attempted negotiation as a first step in the process of desegregation. Describing efforts to integrate the White Coffee Pot chain, Helen W. Brown explained, “In accordance with our usual

470 Minneapolis CORE, [Affiliation Blank], ca. 1953, Reel 8, CORE Papers.

471 Warren Baumann and Lawrence Gorham to George M. Houser, November 12, 1949, Reel 8, CORE Papers.
practice, we first met with Myles Katz, the owner of the chain to try to effect a change in policy through negations.” When this attempt proved unsuccessful, as it did with Katz, CORE began a series of sit-ins and pickets in and around the restaurant’s locations.472 Sometimes negotiation and reasoning worked. In 1948, the Berkeley, California, affiliate integrated the Teacup, a local Chinese-American restaurant. In conversations with the manager, CORE activists realized that he refused to serve African Americans because he worried about losing white trade. After two months of negotiation and testing with varying degrees of success, the manager capitulated. The process took the concerted time and effort of dedicated activists but no mass demonstrations. CORE focused on communicating with the manager and ensuring him through a combination of reason, demonstration, and persistence that he could maintain his business with an integrated customer base.473

Although civil rights activists demonstrating at southern eating places also attempted negotiation, it did not occur quite as smoothly or in such a cooperative atmosphere. As direct action campaigns moved south, CORE and later SNCC met with local business owners and government officials to attempt peaceful desegregation. But the actions of white and black mediators were more inhibited. The threat of violence against activists and retaliation against white moderates or liberals often constrained negotiations in the South. In 1960, activists attempted to meet with Birmingham mayor James Morgan to discuss lunch counter

472 Helen W. Brown to Friend, April 25, 1958, Reel 8, CORE Papers.

desegregation. City officials ejected them from the city hall before they could state their case.\textsuperscript{474} After months or years of dedicated sit-in activism in southern localities, negotiation often helped to ameliorate discrimination in isolated situations and led to localized desegregation. In October 1960, after more than six months of active demonstrations in downtown lunch counters and grills, student activists and Atlanta mayor William B. Hartsfield agreed to a thirty-day “truce” during which time the mayor agreed to work with store managers to come to “an ultimate solution” to the problem of segregated eateries.\textsuperscript{475} But the mediated desegregation of southern eating places often took place quietly with little advertisement or publicity to avoid counter-demonstrations and violence.

Even in the case of CORE’s early activities, the further south civil rights efforts took place, the more antagonistic the situation became. By 1950, a CORE affiliate had been working toward greater employment opportunities for African Americans in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. A small cadre, including the city’s white librarian Ruth W. Brown and two African American friends, decided to integrate the drug store’s lunch counter. The waitress refused to serve the group, and they left peacefully. Only a few CORE members agreed to participate in the “drugstore project,” as Brown termed it, likely because they feared retribution. After the attempt, CORE’s Bartlesville membership decreased to only five white members. They had good justification for their fears. Town commissioners called Brown to a meeting and asked, “Did you

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take two young colored women with you to a drugstore where they weren’t supposed to be?” As a result of this event, Brown lost her job as city librarian.476

Although violence did not occur in the Bartlesville project, activism further north did not seem to put CORE members in the same type of jeopardy. Brown’s firing foreshadowed the types of struggles that activists would face when southern engagement bourgeoned after the Greensboro sit-ins. Everywhere in the South, activists risked their educations, positions, and physical security as the result of direct action campaigns. Black college students participating in sit-ins and demonstrations to open public eating space risked expulsion. On February 25, 1960, twenty-nine students at the historically black Alabama State College requested service at the Montgomery County Courthouse Grill. The grill refused to serve the students and closed for the day. Later, these twenty-nine students reportedly organized mass demonstrations of hundreds of students in Montgomery and Tuskegee to protest racial segregation. John Patterson, governor of Alabama, called for the university to expel the student leaders. The school expelled nine students and placed the other twenty on probation for their actions related to the desegregation attempt. In a resulting court decision, Dixon v. Alabama Board of Education, a federal court ordered that Alabama State College should have held a hearing before expelling the nine students.477

Despite the holding in Dixon, southern states continued to punish students for their activism, deny due process, and threaten the existence and funding of black educational


institutions. In December 1961, Baton Rouge authorities made mass arrests of activists demonstrating against local segregated lunch counters. Among those arrested included several students enrolled at Southern University. Officials at the historically black college wavered on expelling the students in part because the ruling in *Dixon* required a hearing first. The white-dominated Louisiana State Board of Education responded with a harsh and far-reaching tactic designed to circumvent this federal requirement. The Board of Education ordered that Southern University be closed until an unspecified date at which time all students would be required to apply for re-admission. This drastic measure represented a round-about way to expel the activists without a legal process and an attempt to generate general student aversion toward further activism. The state forced every student off campus by five o’clock in the afternoon on the day of the announcement leaving thousands of Southern University students with no food, lodging, or transportation. The university reopened a month later and denied re-admission to the student activist leaders.478

In addition to expulsion, SNCC activists faced other risks in lunch counter campaigns. Arrest and physical harm constituted the two most significant threats. From March to October 1960, students from the Atlanta University Center sought the desegregation of downtown eateries. In March and April eighty-three students were arrested in seven different establishments. In October, another seventy-five students were arrested at restaurants located at Atlanta’s department stores, including the Magnolia Grill, the Cockerel Grill, and the Barbecue Grill. Atlanta police arrested Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. along with several of the students at the

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478 James Farmer to Friends of CORE, March 22, 1962, Reel 26, CORE Papers.
entrance to the Magnolia Grill. In Jackson, Mississippi, Tougaloo College student Anne Moody led a sit-in at the local Woolworth’s lunch counter. The store closed the counter, but white supremacists appeared and made a hangman’s noose out of the rope used to close the counter. As Moody and the other activists bowed their heads in prayer, white supremacists pushed them off the stools onto the floor, hit and kicked them, and covered them with condiments, food products, and spray paint. Police arrested the peaceful activists.

Arrests of civil rights activists conducting sit-ins occurred on a regular basis, but the practice was complicated by the variety of different laws and jurisdictions at issue. The earliest sit-ins tended to take place at national chains and local department stores, such as Woolworth’s, S. H. Kress, Howard Johnson’s, or Rich’s, in which store managers had no proprietary interest. The managers generally refused to serve African Americans based on community custom and local law. Most managers responded to sit-ins by closing the counter, ordering all customers to leave the premises, and calling the police. At that point, local authorities often charged the non-violent activists with criminal trespass. On August 9, 1960, the arrest of ten black students at the local Kress department store in Greenville, South Carolina, followed this model. The students requested service at the lunch counter and refused to leave when the


480 Moody, Coming of Age in Mississippi, 235-239.

manager closed the area. When the police arrived they arrested the activists and charged them with violating Greenville’s trespass ordinance which prohibited anyone from “[e]ntering premises after warned not to do so or failing to leave after requested.” Unlike racial segregation laws, criminal trespass did not explicitly refer to race. Authorities probably chose this approach because of the greater penalties associated with trespass. Convictions under Greenville’s trespass law subjected violators to thirty days in jail or a hundred dollar fine.482 Racial segregation laws, on the other hand, were generally categorized as business licensing ordinances or health codes, not criminal violations.

Sit-in arrests were also problematic in the South because racial segregation ordinances represented “state action” which, unlike the private action of individual restaurant owners, implicated the Fourteenth Amendment. The distinction between state action and private conduct stems from the *Civil Rights Cases* (1883) that invalidated the Civil Rights Act of 1875. This Reconstruction-era law had been passed by Congress under the auspices of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Supreme Court invalidated the law because it prohibited the “private conduct” of independent business owners, which was not governed by constitutional principles.483 In 1961, in a case brought by an African American customer against a Delaware eatery, the Court applied this distinction to restaurant discrimination and held that only state action, and not private conduct, violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.484 Two years later, in *Peterson v. City of Greenville*, a case related to the Greenville trespass charges, the Court further clarified that the existence of a city ordinance requiring the racial segregation of


483 *Civil Rights Cases*, 109 U.S. 3 (1883).

public eating space was sufficient to categorize any such discrimination by local restaurants as “state action,” and therefore unconstitutional, because the proprietors could not act on the basis of their personal discretion.\footnote{Peterson, 373 U.S. at 244.} This decision effectively dismantled legally sanctioned racial segregation in southern restaurants.

Individual restaurant proprietors, however, remained free to discriminate based on race so long as no state or local law compelled the practice. Some southern municipalities moved quickly to repeal their ordinances depending upon a strong segregation culture to preserve racial discrimination at local eateries. The Court issued the decision in \textit{Peterson v. City of Greenville} on May 20, 1963. Three days later, Birmingham city attorney J. M. Breckenridge recommended repealing the restaurant ordinance “so it cannot be used to take away from private cafe, restaurant and lunch stand operators their freedom of choice in the selection of customers.”\footnote{J. M. Breckenridge to Mayor Albert Boutwell, May 23, 1963, Collection 987.1.30, Birmingham, Alabama, Law Department, Civil Rights Files and Related Materials, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama. The Birmingham racial segregation ordinance, Birmingham City Code §369, had already been invalidated by \textit{Gober v. City of Birmingham}, 373 U.S. 374 (1963) (per curiam) (holding, pursuant to \textit{Peterson}, that the Birmingham segregation ordinance represented an unconstitutional violation of the Fourteenth Amendment).} On July 23, 1963, Birmingham repealed its segregation ordinances. This action primarily represented a last-ditch effort to sustain the practice of racial segregation in some local eating places.\footnote{Glenn T. Eskew, \textit{But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 294n37. Eskew interprets the repeal as an attempt to work toward desegregation. He does, in fact, describe many cooperative efforts among black activists and white moderates that led to the slow, and sometimes awkward, desegregation of many eateries in and around Birmingham (317). But the process of desegregation was difficult and uncertain. Breckenridge’s memo identifies another, more insidious, motive for repealing the ordinance. The actions of Birmingham restaurateurs like}
The Birmingham city council, and other southern cities, could rely on many white restaurant owners who desired to retain racial segregation at almost any cost. The most virulent defenders of racial segregation within public eating places were independent white restaurant proprietors, like Ollie W. McClung Sr. and his son, who conducted business outside of the city center. The proprietors of Ollie’s Barbecue continued their practice of racial segregation after Birmingham repealed its ordinance and after Congress specifically prohibited racial discrimination. The McClungs resemble other notorious restaurant proprietors who served as staunch defenders of racial segregation in public eating places, such as Lester Maddox, a high-school drop-out who used the infamy he gained by opposing the federal law to catapult himself to the office of governor of Georgia, and Maurice Bessinger, whose flamboyant resistance to federal power continues to sell barbecue in South Carolina.

A brief description of their lives and businesses illustrates these similarities. James Ollie McClung, a Birmingham salesman, opened Ollie’s Barbecue in 1926. In 1937, James’s son, Ollie W. McClung Sr., joined his father in the business. Four years later, James McClung died, and Ollie Sr. took sole ownership of the restaurant. In 1958, Ollie W. McClung Jr. joined his father as a full partner. Although the restaurant moved several times, the 1964 location sat in a light industrial area surrounded to a large extent by African American residences. Ollie’s Barbecue employed thirty-five workers including twenty-five African Americans and ten whites. The McClungs attempted to control the human interactions within their restaurant as “stewards” for their white patrons. Their target customer base included white “business people and family trade.” They did not allow alcohol or profanity on the premises and did not open on Sundays.

Ollie W. McClung, who refused to desegregate without federal compulsion, reveals that the repeal of Birmingham’s ordinance served Breckenridge’s stated purpose of placing the decision, at least temporarily, in the hands of white restaurant owners.
McClung Sr. testified that he tried to maintain “a religious environment” within his premises. He expressed his refusal to provide equal service to African Americans in terms of a moral issue similar to these other precepts. “I would refuse to serve a drunken man or a profane man or a colored man or anyone who I felt would damage my business,” McClung Sr. testified at trial, “and I run a good, clean place there.”

In Atlanta, Lester Maddox professed a similar commitment to religious imperatives as justification for refusing to serve African Americans. Maddox grew up in a working-class section of Atlanta. When the Great Depression hit, Maddox dropped out of high school and picked up various odd jobs to help support the family. He worked as a delivery boy, soda jerk, dental technician, and steel worker before deciding that his future lay in entrepreneurship. During World War II, he opened his first small cafe, Lester’s Grill, where he served ice cream, sandwiches, soft drinks, and candy. He sold the grill for a profit and, in 1947, opened a cafeteria, which he named the Pickrick, in a “blue collar” area of Atlanta. The specialty of the house was fried chicken. Maddox hired sixty-five employees including forty-five African Americans. The Pickrick was located along a federal highway. In its early years, Maddox recalls that the cafeteria survived only by the patronage of highway travelers. When the state proposed rerouting the highway, Maddox battled Georgia officials to halt the plans. His actions saved the highway route and his restaurant business.

Maddox refused to serve African Americans in his restaurant. For its white customers, the Pickrick represented an odd combination of impersonal cafeteria self-service with homey

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conviviality and welcome. Customers stood in line and placed their orders as they passed by employees who loaded the food onto trays. Sitting in the dining room, patrons might meet Maddox personally as he drifted around to refill coffee cups and iced tea glasses and to talk casually with his customers. Long-time patrons recall Maddox sitting down at dining room tables to visit personally with his customers. After the midday rush, he and his wife Virginia ate lunch in the dining room. Maddox sponsored games and contests to encourage business and to make his customers feel at home. One time, he offered a fifty dollar prize to the family who brought the youngest baby to the Pickrick. A young couple won when they stopped to eat at the Pickrick with their three-week-old daughter.490

Throughout his career with the Pickrick, Maddox made little distinction between his personal political beliefs and his restaurant business. In 1949, he began running ads in the Saturday newspaper that he described as “a mix of commentary, political observations, opinions, and, of course, the Pickrick’s menu and prices.” He received both compliments and criticism for these ads, which he entitled “Pickrick Says,” the latter coming often from the newspaper’s editors who found them to be controversial. Maddox saved his most vehement ads for his fight against desegregation. Most of the downtown eateries were already integrated when the Pickrick experienced its first bout with activism in the spring of 1964. Seven activists, three white and four black, attempted to enter the Pickrick. Maddox physically manhandled one of the activists who, in accordance with non-violent principles, did not resist but went limp and dropped to the


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floor. Maddox paid his employees twenty dollars for each of the activists they could physically remove from the premises.  

Ironically, Maddox imagined himself as a freedom fighter in his battle against civil rights. He actively compared himself to the nation’s Founding Fathers. “The men who framed our Constitution had to fight for their freedom,” Maddox recalls in his autobiography, “and I was ready to fight for mine.” Like the McClungs, he positioned his fight as one in favor of private property rights and free enterprise, but he was not satisfied to pursue this contest only within the court system. On the afternoon of July 3, 1964, the day that President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, three African American ministers attempted to exercise their right to eat at the Pickrick. Lester Maddox and his son ran the activists off the restaurant’s property with a gun and pick handle. Ever the salesman, after this incident, Maddox began selling pick handles for two dollars each. In an odd twist on reality, Maddox recalls the incident as one in which he protected the rights of “every citizen, including the three men I chased off my property.”  

Later he attempted to circumvent the federal law by closing the Pickrick and reopening as a “new” business, the Lester Maddox Cafeteria, that discriminated based on political philosophy instead of race. Maddox claimed that his “new” restaurant did not serve “integrationists.” Of course, by definition, any African American who attempted to patronize his “white” cafeteria was considered to be an integrationist. Ultimately, Maddox closed his restaurant business

491 Maddox, Speaking Out, 30-32, 54-57.


entirely. In his typical ostentatious fashion, he announced the closure with a display in front of the restaurant that featured an empty coffin and a large sign reading, “Closed, Put to Death by: My President, My Government, The Communist, the Left Wing News Media, Weak and Cowardly Business Leaders, Christian Ministers who Teach Social Salvation Rather Than Christ…”

South Carolina barbecue master, Maurice Bessinger, equaled Maddox in both his flair for salesmanship and his contempt for desegregation. Bessinger was born on a family farm in rural South Carolina at the start of the Great Depression. In 1939, his father sold the family cow and used the proceeds to purchase an established cafe in Holly Hill, South Carolina. From the time Bessinger was twelve years old, he recalls working full time at his father’s cafe. He opened the cafe at five o’clock in the morning and served customers until it was time for him to go to school at eight. After school, he worked again until they closed somewhere between nine o’clock and midnight. Bessinger recalls, “[Daddy] believed that running a business was the same as running a home…that the Constitution of our country gave him the right to treat his home and his business alike: namely, he was king of both….he would not hesitate to protect his customers, his family and his business from any outside threat.” He professed religious imperatives similar to those of the McClungs and Maddox. Although the Holly Hill Cafe served beer, his


495 “In front of the Pickrick after the closing” in Maddox, Speaking Out, picture 6.


497 Bessinger, Defending My Heritage, 15.
father refused to serve “drunks.” Later, the Bessingers stopped serving alcohol entirely and displayed a sign that read, “No Drinking, No Profanity.”

The Bessingers’ cafe served African Americans only on a segregated basis, although he employed many black workers. Bessinger understood his African American employees only as common American stereotypes. He describes Martha, an African American woman who washed dishes and cooked part-time at his father’s cafe as “the spitting image of the woman on the Aunt Jemima boxes.” Bessinger’s father also interrelated with his black employees much like white employers commonly interacted with African American domestic laborers. His employees made a regular practice of “pan-toting” because Bessinger’s father gave them food that he did not think was suitable to serve his white customers. His father fired one black cook after accusing her of theft. Bessinger recalls that his father regularly gave the woman pans full of used grease with which she made soap. One day, his father noticed that she had hidden a good center ham within the grease and fired her.

In the 1950s, after his father’s death and his own stint in the army, Bessinger opened a small chain of restaurants in South Carolina that specialized in barbecue starting with the Piggie Park Drive-in, named after his central ingredient. The building included a large, upright pig wearing a chef’s hat. By the 1960s, Piggie Park Enterprises consisted of five barbecue restaurants in various locations across the state and a small sandwich shop in Columbia. Other

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500 Bessinger, *Defending My Heritage*, 69.

locations included a sign in large letters on the rooftop “Old South Barbeque.” In that year, when many other establishments in downtown Columbia desegregated, Bessinger refused to do so, asserting his father’s belief that his business is the same as his home. In response, activists targeted his sandwich shop and picketed for weeks along the street in front of his shop. Even after passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Bessinger refused to comply with the federal law and, like McClung and Maddox, brought suit. The Supreme Court ordered Piggie Park Enterprises to desegregate in compliance with federal law.502

The McClungs, Lester Maddox, and Maurice Bessinger bore many similarities. They specialized in foods considered to be local specialties and prepared according to proprietary recipes. The fare served by their establishments—barbecue in the case of the McClungs and Bessinger and fried chicken in the case of Maddox—held contradictory cultural meanings for southerners. Traditionally, barbecue and fried chicken represented rural foods consumed by both races. It was not uncommon for African American cooks to prepare both dishes for white and black consumption or for white homemakers to serve these dishes to their families. Black entrepreneurs often profited financially from these dishes by serving them in their own stands and cafes. Black communities found empowerment in these foods by celebrating meaningful holidays with a barbecue or serving fried chicken as a special meal on Sundays after church. Within the black community, chicken is often referred to as the “gospel bird.” Yet, despite the fact that both races consumed these dishes, white southerners conjured anomalous negative stereotypes surrounding black consumption of barbecue and fried chicken that served to degrade

African Americans. The McClungs, Maddox, Bessinger, and other white southern entrepreneurs repackaged these rural foods, identified them as house specialties, and sold them for consumption by white urban professionals and their families.

In addition to the similarity of their foods and service, these proprietors shared similar backgrounds and world views. They were white male entrepreneurs who owned restaurants oriented toward white families. They attributed their success solely to their own hard work and business acumen with no consideration as to how their family resources or white skin might have contributed. Ollie W. McClung Jr. and his son, for example, inherited a successful enterprise. Maddox and Bessinger moved up from poor roots, although Bessinger’s father had been a successful businessman at the time of his death. Only Maddox represented a first-generation businessman, but he no doubt received financing, leasing, licensing, or other factors necessary to establish a successful restaurant in part based on his white skin. In short, their hard work and commitment to private enterprise can be said to account for their success as two of many other factors in their favor.

All three men refused to serve African Americans equally in their restaurants and attributed their refusal to a commitment to God, country, and private enterprise. In this regard, they treated their business establishments much like their own domestic space with a proprietary air of ownership over the physical features of the space and the profits derived therefrom, both of which they did possess, and the human interactions that occurred within these public spaces, which they did not necessarily possess. Many of their actions, such as personally refilling cups, chatting with customers, and ejecting guests, resemble actions that they might take in their own

home. The McClungs claimed the right to eject customers who uttered profanity or acted inebriated. Bessinger asserted a similar policy. In his memoir, he reaches back to an incident that took place sometime before 1941 when his father expelled a wealthy white patron from his cafe for drunkenness in order to support his claim.504

With these statements, they attempted to convince themselves, the press, the legislatures, the courts, and the general population that racial segregation was only one of a variety of selective seating policies they employed in their private space. As proprietors, they insisted they had such rights because they controlled everything that went on within their restaurants in the same way that they controlled what went on inside their homes. The McClungs were more subtle on this point. They claimed to be “stewards” responsible for the comfort of their white customers and implied that the presence of black customers in the dining room threatened the well-being of whites. Maddox and Bessinger made direct connections between their rights within their public eating place and their rights within their homes. Maddox attempted to “defend” his place of business with a gun. Bessinger expressed his belief that he had the exact rights over his place of business as he had over his home as a core value passed on from his father during their early years as cafe proprietors together.

By the 1950s and 1960s, however, the notion that private owners controlled these public spaces absolutely was mere fiction. In fact, public eating places were subject to a wide range of regulations, some of which applied more broadly to all business owners and some of which were tailored more specifically to the food-service industry. A combination of federal, state, and local laws required restaurants to obtain business licenses, submit to health inspections, follow standardized wage and hour requirements, make monthly tax payments, and, not insignificantly,

respect laws that required racial segregation. There is no indication that the McClungs, Maddox, Bessinger, or any other white restaurant operator ever challenged the right of any state or locality to mandate racial segregation in these spaces that they now claimed were beyond such regulation, a point that Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy made during Senate hearings for the civil rights bill. Despite this myriad of regulation, white proprietors used the fiction that these establishments represented their own private space to justify discrimination and segregation.

This recognition, however, fails to reach the essential question as to why these white proprietors desired so fervently to exclude African American customers from equal access to public space dedicated to food consumption. The answers to this question reveals important clues about white constructions of race and its connection to public dining in the mid-twentieth century. White-supremacist restaurant owners compared the condition of race to profanity or drunkenness, all of which in their opinions served as appropriate bases for ejecting customers. These three conditions are similar in that they are all culturally constructed to some extent. There are no universal standards that determine which expressions are considered to be profane, how much drink serves to inebriate, or which persons are considered to be black. These determinations, much like segregation itself, are creatures of community custom, law, and (to a lesser extent) independent judgment. As constructions, these determinations are subject to change over space and time. But within any specific location or time period, they serve to place a particular status on any individual who is considered to fall into one of these constructed categories. The accused individual is marked as profane, as drunk, as black and is categorized for

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all to recognize as such. Profane and drunk also contain a certain moral judgment. By including “black” among this list, these proprietors assigned a similar moral judgment to this status as well.

Status played a significant role in the strength of racial segregation in southern eating places. The McClungs, Maddox, and Bessinger hired many African Americans to work in their restaurants, as did many white restaurant owners. African Americans served a variety of roles within these establishments, modeling the positions that black laborers served in white southern homes, as cooks, servers, dishwashers, and bus boys. Maddox believed that the fact that he employed forty-five African Americans to cook, clean, and serve in his restaurant proved that he was not a racist. In his memoir, he recalls a visit to the offices of the *Atlanta Constitution* where he witnessed no African American workers with the exception of the janitorial staff.506

Yet Maddox’s hiring of African Americans to cook, serve, clean, and bus tables perpetuated the white supremacist image of the servile black. The same situation existed at Ollie’s Barbecue. African Americans helped to cook the barbecue that he served to white customers. Black women took primary responsibility for serving the food. Yet, whereas his white employees could eat in the dining room alongside white customers, his black employees ate “in their own room” on the premises. Black customers could not eat on the premises at all.507 This contributed to the widespread white construction that situated white Americans as proper consumers and African Americans as proper servers of food.

The fact that these foods, specifically barbecue and fried chicken, have long histories among black and white southerners complicated the issue further. White southerners desired to

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506 Maddox, *Speaking Out*, 34.

consume the same foods that they negatively derided African Americans for eating. One way for white southerners to do so without actively connecting themselves to “black” foodways would be to physically separate themselves from the black consumption of these same foods. Black and white southerners could eat the same foods, prepared by the same black hands, but they could not do so together thereby preserving the status of the white consumer and the sanctity of the white body.

The white body remained significant within white-supremacist ideology as well, and its purity was an important element to campaigns to continue racial segregation in public eating spaces. White opponents of restaurant desegregation continued to relate the consumption of food to racial purity and demonstrated concerns over the protection of white women. In response to the rising tide of civil rights activism, Georgia passed an anti-sit-in law. Defending the law in an appeal filed by convicted demonstrators, the state argued that restaurant owners could discriminate in any way they saw fit—“evict[ing] wearers of shorts, swimming suits or unescorted females.”508 The Georgia Solicitor General’s words here are revealing because they suggest a continuing concern about the many imagined threats that white women faced in public eating places. The parallel to the image of the white woman in need of protection was the racist stereotype of the black male bent upon ravishment. In correspondence opposing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, pending at the time before Congress, former Alabama resident Lallage Longshore returned to the common white southern trope that linked black men to violence and savagery against white women. She referred to the college-educated, Christian minister Dr. Martin Luther

King Jr. as a “savage” and informed Alabama Senator Lister Hill that she would not bring him into her home.  

Many intractable white restaurant owners picked up on a similar theme. When Ollie McClung Sr. testified, “I would refuse to serve…anyone who I felt would damage my business and I run a good, clean place there,” he certainly did not think that African Americans threatened his “clean” restaurant in a literal, hygienic sense. Otherwise, he would not hire them to work in his restaurant and to serve barbecue to his white customers. Allowing whites and blacks to eat together in the same dining room violated the McClungs’ sense of proper racial mores. Ollie McClung Sr. did not want to transgress racial customs in his restaurant any more than he would have in his own affluent Mountain Brook home. Ollie McClung Sr. refused to serve “profane” men in his dining room, as his signs indicated, because they would offend the white women and children – the white families – who frequented his restaurant. He refused to serve African Americans in his dining room for the same reason. In his mind, eating with African Americans represented a threat to the white family.

Lester Maddox feared the interaction of African American men and white women in his establishment so much that he called the police on a black employee who allegedly asked a white waitress for a date. In 1962, in the midst of southern sit-in activism, Atlanta police arrested Tommy Lee Jordan, an African American employee at the Pickrick, after Jordan allegedly “tried


511 Transcript of Record at 70, Katzenbach v. McClung, 379 U.S. 294 (1964) (No. 64-448).
to date” two white waitresses. Reportedly, Jordan had followed a Pickrick waitress into the ladies room to ask her out. When she refused, he “had ‘pulled on her coat’…when she brushed past him on her way out.” Three weeks later, another waitress reported that Jordan had asked her to go to a nightclub with him. Atlanta police charged Jordan with disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, and molestation. A year earlier, Maddox had accused Jordan of stealing a lady’s purse, but he had not called the police at that time.512

Maddox only contacted authorities when Jordan challenged Maddox’s understanding of proper racial and gender conventions even when no crime had occurred. In a politically charged newspaper ad for his restaurant, Maddox directly connects the desegregation of eating places with the desegregation of southern bedrooms, writing, “I do hope you’ll get your integration wishes—a stomach full of race mixing, and a lap full of little mulatto grandchildren.”513 Maddox aims this statement primarily at white moderates who negotiated with activists to desegregate downtown lunch counters and cafes. His statement makes a direct connection between eating and sexuality by implying that desegregating southern eating places would result in miscegenation.

Maurice Bessinger makes a similar connection when he expresses what he considers to be the logical conclusion to the new civil rights law. “It might be possible for a black man to try and marry a white woman,” Bessinger muses in his autobiography, “and if she turns him down, he can sue for discrimination.”514 Here, Bessinger completes Maddox’s thought by suggesting, not just that miscegenation will result, but that it will occur between black males and white


514 Bessinger, Defending My Heritage, 73.

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females and will be against the wishes of white women. This notion is another manifestation of
the white supremacist myth that consumption, like marriage, is a purely private transaction and
that if compulsion can be applied in one case, it can be applied in the other as well. Bessinger’s
“forced” marriage example implicates another well-recognized white supremacist image by
implying that the federal government might support the alleged atrocities of the mythical “black
beast rapist.”

Although it was not explicitly connected to the issue of eating place desegregation, the
white-supremacist image of the black rapist threatening white female purity was not far away
during this debate. In December 1964, while the Supreme Court was considering their decision
in Katzenbach v. McClung, The Citizen, a national magazine published by the white supremacist
Citizens’ Council, made no mention of the public accommodations section of the civil rights act
or of the Ollie’s Barbecue case. Instead the magazine devoted that month’s edition to the
imagined threats that white women faced in the event of so-called “race mixing.” The common
“black rapist” trope predominated. One editorial warned that “some drastic action is needed to
protect whites from colored criminals—especially rapists” and continued by describing hundreds
of alleged violent crimes committed by black men against white women.

The list included the following examples: a “Negro gang” raped a white nurse in New
Jersey; “a gang of about 10 Negro youths” raped white teenage girls in Memphis; “eight Negro

515 The white southern myth that assumed white women faced imminent threats of rape
from black men developed after Reconstruction as a method to limit black political power and
peaked during the first part of the twentieth century. In actuality, white female accusations of
rape were complicated by competing racial, class, and gender considerations. Nevertheless, the
image of the black rapist continued to influence white supremacist rhetoric. Lindquist-Dorr,
White Women, Rape, and the Power of Race, 7-10.

youths…gang-raped” a white mother in Knoxville; “a Negro raped and murdered a young white housewife when she returned home from an early afternoon trip to the grocery store” in New Orleans; and in Mississippi “several white homemakers have been terrorized on their own premises by colored intruders evidently bent on rape.” There is no indication that any of these alleged (and unsupported) atrocities occurred in public eating places or even occurred at all, but the timing makes the connection clear. While the eyes of the country focused on the Supreme Court as it decided the Ollie’s Barbecue case, the Citizens’ Councils of America focused on the so-called “dangers” of “race mixing” and all supposed threats involved the well-being and racial purity of white women and by extension white families.

Some white supremacists reacted to this culture of hyperbole with actions intended to protect white women. When Jimmy’s Restaurant in Montgomery desegregated, the white owner reportedly fired the white waitresses and hired black men to wait tables because he did not think that it was proper for white women to serve black men. In a more violent incident in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a white man shot and killed a black patron who allegedly “called a white waitress ‘baby doll’…in a recently desegregated restaurant.” Like Lester Maddox’s call for racial purity, these incidents demonstrate the white paranoia that interaction between blacks and whites in southern restaurants might lead to sexual relations between the white women and black men. Because southern white supremacists could not comprehend that such interactions could be consensual, this ideology reinvigorated the notion of the black rapist.


CONCLUSION: Cooking up Controversy: Contemporary Discourses on Southern Foodways

Despite the contrived concern that the southern food service industry would falter with the demise of segregation, both Ollie’s Barbecue and Piggie Park continued to do business into the twenty-first century. Ollie W. McClung Jr. closed Ollie’s Barbecue on September 4, 2001, not as the result of any overbearing federal obligations, but because business declined when the restaurant moved to the suburbs in 1999 and because McClung’s sons did not intend to go into the family business.\(^{520}\) But Piggie Park remains an ongoing concern with thirteen restaurants in and around Columbia, South Carolina, managed by Bessinger’s children and grandchildren. Although Maurice Bessinger retired from the restaurant business, he continues to cook up controversy. His most recent bout with infamy came in 2000 when he hoisted a Confederate battle flag over each of his restaurants to protest the flag’s removal from the South Carolina state capitol.\(^{521}\)

Today, in addition to barbecue, Piggie Park customers can reportedly pick up various assortments of neo-Confederate souvenirs and literature, including pseudo-historical/biblical tracts describing the benefits of slavery to the African American population. In response to Bessinger’s political philosophies, several major super market chains discontinued the sale of Carolina Gold, his brand of mustard-based barbecue sauce. “Buying a barbecue sandwich is now


a political act,” a New York Times article announced in response to the Piggie Park controversy. “You have to declare which side you’re on.”522 An obvious response to this observation is, “Where have you been?” The act of consuming food has been a political act for much of our history. In many ways, the history of foodways in the twentieth-century South is the history of complicated political discourses related to food and race as well as class, gender, and ethnicity. Bessinger’s polemics only serve as a reminder that what we eat continues to matter and to communicate information about southern society and culture as well as the individuals who make up that society.

Following the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the culture of segregation proved harder to break than the legal structures that had undergirded it. Some southern restaurants continued to interpret themselves as “white” and took a quiet pride in remaining unreconstructed rebels against what they saw in the 1960s and 1970s as an over-reaching federal government. In Shreveport, Louisiana, the white restaurants formed the Northwest Louisiana Restaurant Club in a vain attempt to take advantage of the federal law’s “private club” exemption. Several ethnic restaurateurs served as voting members of the club, including Luis Trujillo, who owned a Mexican cuisine restaurant, and Lee Foo whose establishment specialized in Chinese cuisine, indicating that by the late 1960s, these owners connected themselves with whiteness. White restaurant patrons received “membership cards” that supposedly allowed them to eat at the “white” restaurants. African Americans could not receive cards. The federal court recognized this club for what it was: “a sham organization [that] exist[ed] for no other purpose

than to act as a device through which affiliated restaurants [could exclude] on the basis of race or color.” 523

Some recalcitrant eateries resembled Ollie’s Barbecue and Piggie Park in that they were long-standing family restaurants specializing in fare interpreted to be traditionally southern and were located in “blue collar” areas of town. They also continued to try to conceal their interstate connections. As late as 1970, Vandy’s Bar-B-Q in Statesboro, Georgia, continued to maintain two dining rooms, the “front” room for whites and the “back” room for black customers. Although the restaurant posted no signs to this effect, locals understood the separate spaces, and owner Don E. Boyd continued to use nonverbal clues to keep patrons in the space considered to be appropriate according to their race. Boyd testified that on the one occasion when an African American man sat in the front dining room, Boyd overcharged him for his soft drink “to discourage him.” African Americans who lived in Statesboro and understood Vandy’s continued commitment to segregated culture were afraid to sit in the front room. In 1967, the establishment made an attempt to buttress their claims that the federal law did not apply by removing signage displayed along a federal highway. Nevertheless, many of the food products it purchased came from outside Georgia, and the restaurant had a history of serving interstate travelers. In 1970, a federal court ordered Vandy’s to cease discriminating against black patrons. 524

Despite some lingering white animosity toward the Civil Rights Act, white supremacists have not necessarily controlled the racial discourse of an evolving southern food culture. Starting in the late 1960s, the evolution of the civil rights movement to emphasize black power and


African American achievement included food as an important element of its new cultural emphasis. Frederick Douglass Opie explains that “soul food” was created as an African American cultural articulation that could be separated from that of whites.\textsuperscript{525} Soul food, with such fare as chitterlings, black-eyed peas, and collard greens, consisted primarily of the poorer-quality meats and vegetables that lower-class southerners of both races historically consumed as the result of poverty. But the history and purposes of soul food made it the province of African Americans as well as a celebration of black distinctiveness.

Soul food was largely the creation of African Americans who had left the South and migrated to northern cities. Black musicians touring a series of low-end cafes, referred to as the “chitlin circuit,” during the Jim Crow era consumed this fare out of necessity. They could not eat anywhere else. The association between fried chicken and waffles, common fare in many soul food cafes, originated in northern cities when black musicians, having been up all night playing, ordered this combination for breakfast. By the 1960s and 1970s, middle-class African Americans consumed “soul” culture, including food and music, to remain connected to an ethnic community and “to ‘say no’ to the impulse to assimilate into white society.”\textsuperscript{526} Despite the popularity of much “soul” cuisine among white southerners, African American cooks and cookbook writers justifiably lay claim to the cuisine as a black creation and prepare it in honor of the black women who labored in black and white kitchens for years preparing such fare.\textsuperscript{527} Its popularity represented the greater consumer power of black Americans after the civil rights movement and

\textsuperscript{525} Frederick Douglass Opie, \textit{Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 125.

\textsuperscript{526} Opie, \textit{Hog and Hominy}, 128.

\textsuperscript{527} Opie, \textit{Hog and Hominy}, 133-135.
reinterpreted foodways that had originally emerged as a signal of poverty, discrimination, and despair into a symbol of ethnic community, consciousness, and control.

Soul food as an ethnic creation, however, has also become mired in controversy that implicates race, class, and gender especially with regard to its impact on health. According to its critics, soul food’s heavy emphasis on salt, pork, sugar, boiled vegetables, and fried foods, and its inattention to fresh fruits and vegetables, contributes to dietary and health problems among African Americans. Diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, among other ailments, have strong connections with a traditional soul food diet. African American women represented a population that was particularly at risk. Most of these concerns originated, not with the medical community, but with black Muslims, college-educated African Americans, and natural-diet advocates. With their religious aversion to pork, the Nation of Islam was particularly hard on southern cuisine, even suggesting that poor food habits were imposed on the black community by whites as a way to regenerate white supremacy.528

Although many of these commentators recommended discarding the soul food diet, contemporary black cookbook authors attempt to accommodate soul food tastes with healthier preparation methods.529 In a way, these debates reflect the early-twentieth-century white discourse over the suitability of foods interpreted as “black.” But, unlike this earlier derogatory dialogue, contemporary discussions are not dominated by white voices. This discourse is driven largely by black academics addressing health and cultural crises within black communities.

528 Opie, Hog and Hominy, 155-173.

The question of food and race in contemporary society also has important political and economic consequences. A recent White House task force charged with the responsibility to study childhood obesity introduced the concept of a “food desert” to the broader American public. A “food desert” is described as “neighborhoods that lack convenient access to affordable and healthy food….these communities often have an abundance of fast-food restaurants and convenience stores….stores in low-income communities…stock fewer and lower quality healthy foods.”530 Across the country, these communities have significant class and race implications because they tend to be located in lower-income, black neighborhoods.

In the South, this problem takes on an additional ironic tragedy, because it is most prevalent in rural areas with high African American populations, such as Alabama’s Black Belt. In a region with some of the world’s most agriculturally fertile land, poverty, lack of access to transportation and marketplaces, inadequate education, and a history of discrimination contributes to malnutrition, obesity, and disease.531 In a way, the conclusion of this dissertation marks the beginning of this new disturbing period in southern foodways because the prevalence and persistence of fast food, fare that is as inexpensive and easily accessible as it is nutritionally deficient, in poverty-stricken areas is largely to blame.

Just as the connection between food, race, class, gender, and ethnicity is not likely to disappear, neither is the continued integration of southern foodways into the national narrative. Not only do national chains continue to imprint on southern consumption practices, but as Food


Network star Paula Deen illustrates, southern cooking has become a part of the American consciousness. In addition to her nationally televised show, the Savannah, Georgia, cook opened a new buffet at an Indiana casino and schedules regular appearances in northern markets like New York City. Another Food Network star, Sunny Anderson, interprets contemporary soul food cooking in her show, *Cooking for Real.*532 The continued integration of southern foodways into the economy and culture of the broader nation implicates the significant historiographical question as to whether the South, as a distinctive region, continues to exist and be worthy of scholarship.

At the 1994 annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Numan Bartley adopted this topic as the subject of his presidential address. In his published paper, Bartley concludes that, despite half a century of premature epitaphs, “[t]he South…is not apt to vanish” and not only because his organization had a “vested interest” in its survival. But, Bartley suggests, “declining regional differences” necessitate new “interpretive” analyses.533 This dissertation agrees with Bartley’s summation and identifies foodways as one regional feature that, despite increasing nationalization, southerners of both races continue to construct as particularly distinct. This is evident in the 1930s when national norms really began to permeate into and become a part of southern lifestyles. White and black southerners accepted the changes wrought by the New Deal, primarily out of financial necessity, but white southern women also began to actively interpret southern cooking and foods as distinctively different in a way that was

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not as evident in previous decades. The notion that southern foodways flowed from the plantation hearth directly to the electric stove constituted their central theme.

A distinctive South based on its food culture, however, is not, nor has it ever been, the sole province of white southerners. Identification with region through foodways is evident in the ways that black southern university students complained about the bad food in college cafeterias. One of Ralph David Abernathy’s initial forays into activism involved leading a student strike against the poor food that students received compared to their professors.\textsuperscript{534} SNCC activist Anne Moody also participated in similar activism by boycotting the cafeteria when students noticed sanitary problems in the kitchen and pantry.\textsuperscript{535} In border areas, like Virginia and the District of Columbia, where students came from different regions, southern students noticed a difference between their interpretation of cafeteria food and that of their northern classmates. Students from the South missed the seasonings that their mothers used to make poorer quality foods tasty. They also had a difficult time eating foods, such as pasta, not generally prepared in southern households. Students from the North, on the other hand, did not seem to complain. The southerners interpreted this perceived silence to mean that their northern classmates were not used to eating good food at home.\textsuperscript{536} In this way, black southerners’ sense of place was tied very directly to their foodways.

The myth and reality of southern foodways has both united and divided this fractious region at various times throughout history. It continues to do so today. But neo-Confederates like Maurice Bessinger do not control this discourse. In academic circles, the writers, historians,

\textsuperscript{534} Opie, \textit{Hog and Hominy}, 109-110.

\textsuperscript{535} Moody, \textit{Coming of Age in Mississippi}, 208-212.

\textsuperscript{536} Opie, \textit{Hog and Hominy}, 110-111.
anthropologists, oral historians, and culinary experts who seek to identify, categorize, and
preserve the sights, aromas, and tastes of the South sustain a distinctive regional culinary culture.
These scholars successfully straddle the line of academia and popular culture to take a more
realistic look at food history, contemporary mores, and their connection to southern culture more
generally. These academics span the region—from Austin, Texas, where American Studies
Professor Elizabeth Engelhardt explores the cultural implications of southern foodways in
barbecue joints and private kitchens, to Oxford, Mississippi, where the Southern Foodways
Alliance documents the region’s diverse culinary culture in book, music, oral history, film, and
symposium.\textsuperscript{537} In short, the distinctive South lives on, much like southern foodways in general,
because southerners constantly create a distinguishing culture and continue to will that it be so.

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