

Women and Southern Food

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When people think of the South, it is almost inevitable that they think of its food because of how important it is to its culture. Truth be told, fried chicken and macaroni and cheese are delicious dishes and wonderful to think about. But how often do we stop to consider who made the dishes? Who invested their time to make presentable and tasty delicacies? Who spent the amount of money required



Grits are believed to have originated in the American Indian times. Today three quarters of grits sold in America are sold in the South, with Georgia being the most prominent of all the Southern states. The colors of these grits are determined by the type of corn used.

Ingredients: 3 cups water, 1/2 tea spoon salt, 1 cup hominy grits, freshly ground black pepper, 1 table spoon butter. 1/2 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese

Directions:

1. Bring the water and salt to a boil in a saucepan. Whisk in the grits and continue to whisk for 1 minute. When the mixture comes to a boil again, turn the heat to low. Stir frequently, cook for 10 to 15 minutes.
2. Remove the grits from the heat and add pepper, butter and cheese; mix well. Stir until the butter and cheese are melted.

to make the dish? Who put in the vast amount of effort only to see the food devoured within a few minutes? Though of course the answer varies, it is important to realize that in the majority of these situations, women are the ones cooking this food. Indeed, women are the backbone of Southern foodways in many ways, reflected in cookbook traditions, commercial cooking, race, and the home.

The South today has been shaped by many different factors of the past. One factor, used mainly by women, that has had a very significant role in the development of the South today is a “simple” cookbook.

Cookbooks are known to many stereotypically as a simple book of recipes. This is not the case under any circumstance. There are millions in circulation today and they are present in many houses all over the world. They consist of thousands of recipes and come in different sizes, shapes and from different authors. Some of these cookbooks like *“A guide to modern cookery”* can cost up to \$5000. They are truly intricate reference books which contain valuable recipes and different dishes.

Janet Theophano is a strong believer of the important roles of cookbooks in the South. She writes in her book about cookbooks that they are “maps of the social and cultural world they inhabit” (4). She goes into detail about a cookbook written by Frieda DeKnight which lists how to create various types of Southern foods as well as gives special information about how and where the dishes originated. Theophano also praises these marvelous cookbooks by adding that cookbooks in the South were a means of education for people (mostly African American women) who could not afford to pay for reading or literacy lessons. Theophano is one of the many people who have credible knowledge on cookbooks in respects to the South.

Lynne Ireland agrees that cookbooks are a major part of development in the South. She elaborates on how cookbooks were used by women in the South as a way of raising money. Ireland states “Ladies Aid Societies, not content with mere bandage-rolling, gathered together favorite recipes of their members and sold the collections at sanitary Fairs (fund raising bazaars for war relief) throughout the union” (107). This method of selling cookbooks was common during the Civil War time period. In today’s society these cookbooks are used even more widely in the commercial South than ever before. Cookbooks are very good sources of raising money, and they are also history books which preserve many significant dishes and recipes that played an important role in the past

In every cookbook, there is a list of recipes for numerous dishes both simple and exotic. These recipes are complemented by comments as well as background information on the dish. This information given by cookbooks tends to be very valuable to its readers. People sometimes overlook the important stories behind many dishes, but these cookbooks, which have been a part of the South from the early 1800s, help to preserve them. Some great examples of simple dishes which are preserved in Southern cookbooks include fried chicken, barbecue pork sandwiches, grits, and collard greens.

Cookbooks as a genre for both men and women have an important role in the formation of the South. They have been very influential to people in the South and they continue to carry out important duties today. These recipe books serve as a means of raising capital, teaching people how to create various dishes, and they also serve as history books which preserve the identity of different dishes in the South.



Braised Collards

Ingredients: 6 bunches collard greens (stems removed), ½ pound applewood-smoked bacon, 2 medium Vidalia onions, ½ stick unsalted butter, ½ cup white vinegar, ½ pound dark brown sugar, 4 tbsp of your favorite hot sauce, 1 cup chicken stock, salt and pepper to taste

First melt butter in medium to large pot. Render bacon till crisp. Halfway through cooking bacon, add both onions. Add collard greens to hot bacon-onion mixture. Braise till slightly wilted, about 15 minutes. Add all other ingredients and cook for approximately 1 hour. Finish with salt and pepper to taste. Greens should be tender and not chewy. Serve and enjoy.

In the twentieth century, women in the American South had more options than ever before about how and where to purchase and make food for their families. One of the key factors in their decisions was the influence of cookbooks. Even though it may seem trivial, the impact of cookbooks was far-reaching, as they gave instruction on how to complete any and every sort of activity that had to do with the home



Coca-Cola Cake

Ingredients: 1 cup cola flavored drink, 1 cup buttermilk, 1 cup butter or margarine, melted, 1 ½ cups sugar, 2 large eggs, lightly beaten, 2 teaspoons vanilla extract, 2 cups all-purpose flour, ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa, 1 teaspoon baking soda, 1 ½ bags miniature marshmallows

For Garnish: ¼ cup chopped pecans, toasted

Combine cola and buttermilk; set aside.

Beat butter at low speed with an electric mixer until creamy. Gradually add sugar; beat until blended. Add eggs and vanilla; beat at low speed until blended.

Combine flour, cocoa, and baking soda.

Add to butter mixture alternately with cola mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Beat at low speed until just blended.

Stir in marshmallows. Pour butter into a greased and floured 13- x 9-inch pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 to 35 minutes. Remove from oven; cool 10 minutes. Spread cola frosting over warm cake. Garnish, if desired. Yield: 12 servings.

Cola Frosting

Ingredients: ½ cup butter or margarine, ½ cup cola-flavored drink, 3 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa, 1 (16-ounce) package powdered sugar, 1 tablespoon vanilla extract

Steps:

Bring first three ingredients to a boil in a large saucepan over medium heat, stirring until butter melts. Remove from heat; whisk in eggs and vanilla. Yield: 2 ¼ cups.

Spread over cake while still warm.

and the work required to maintain it. In the American South, women learned what to buy, who should cook, and how to feel about other races and cultures. Though it is difficult to determine to what extent cookbooks impacted women, the messages they preached are important to understand because they were often contrary to what society taught.

Cookbooks first became prominent in the early twentieth century, and upon first glance, they seem to hold little beside recipes. This is not the case, however, with careful examination. According to Rebecca Sharpless, women during the Depression era in the

South consistently bought products (such as milk, vegetables, or even baked goods) from women who

handmade them in rural areas. The women who usually bought these products were middle-class women who could afford them but may not have the time to put into making the products. What Sharpless questions is why these women decided to do this. The first self-service grocery store, Piggly Wiggly, came about during this time, and at this time these stores often sold local goods (Sharpless, "Cakes" 49). To answer this question, we turn to cookbooks. Cookbooks did not give any specific instructions on how or what to buy, but with analysis they did give ideas as to where goods should be bought. Home demonstration agents, popular at this time, pushed their goods with the idea that their quality would bring about success (Sharpless, "Cakes" 55). Cookbooks also pushed the importance of rural products with their ingredient lists. One particular cookbook described a cake as needing "white country butter" in order to have "that rich old pound cake flavor" (Sharpless, "Cakes" 56). Cookbooks gave women direction in where to buy their goods, but not in explicit ways. Rather, their recipes gave ideas that helped promote actions. This would prove critical as cookbooks continued to develop and promote revolutionary ideas.

Throughout time, women have consistently been identified with the kitchen. Though this may be a poor stereotype at its finest, it nonetheless is a representative part of American culture. According to a Gallup poll, consumers who buy cookbooks are two thirds female (Inness, *Dinner* 10). Women, generally speaking, have endured a great deal of oppression from the opposite sex in the context of history. Though this is slowly changing, it is difficult to tell in what ways and how quickly it is changing. As noted by Inness, "Cookbooks...need to be studied because they are barometers of changing gender roles" (*Dinner* 10). Cooking literature, intentionally and unintentionally, markets to women, because they are the consumers more likely to purchase them. Thus, they direct who should cook and shop, and reflect how gender roles change. This applies to not only cookbooks in general, but especially cookbooks in the American South. The American South is a region in the United States that has resisted change the most throughout history and this applies to changes in gender roles as well. Southern cookbooks reveal who cooks and shops in the family context, which is important to understand because of the overlap between food and culture in this region.

Cookbooks are also important because they can literally sway public opinion about important matters. This has been important as social and cultural conflict has risen in society, because, whether overtly or subtly, cookbooks can give messages that can help change what people think. Without a doubt, one of the biggest conflicts in the American South is that of race. In fact, the concept of racial conflict is usually the first thing people think of when considering the South. African-Americans have been integral to Southern life since the region's existence, but have failed to receive recognition in the majority of historical records. When white Southerners think of African-Americans in relation to food, they inevitably think of Mammy. Mammy is the stereotypical African American figure found in many tales of the South who is the centerpiece of the household. She is constantly taking care of her white charges; in particular, she feeds them. Mammy represents all that white people want her to be. She has no personality, no sensuality, and ultimately no desires beyond serving her superior whites (Inness, *Secret* 107). Cookbooks throughout the twentieth century, however, attempted to change this stereotype. Instead of presenting African-American women as one-dimensional, they presented the rich culture that this race displays. Recipes unique to the African-American race were emphasized to display

a culture that not only existed, but flourished (Inness, *Secret* 113). By proving the existence of said culture, the cookbooks also revealed the humanity and dreams that individuals possessed inside and outside the kitchen. By proclaiming these messages, cookbooks helped to change social norms prevalent in Southern culture.

Class conflict is another issue found in the American South, although perhaps less recognized than that of race. Whites who live in trailer parks or in other low-income areas are generally perceived to be low-class. Sometimes called “white trash,” they are generally discredited as people and viewed as cultureless (Inness, *Secret* 129). However, cookbooks again sought to change this image beginning in the late twentieth century through early twenty-first century. Through humor, the authors showed that a “white trash” culture existed, even though it may not be what people necessarily thought of as cultured (Inness, *Secret* 135). The cookbooks showed ingenious ways to make food out of cheap ingredients for hungry people. Even though the foods may not necessarily be representative of all lower-class whites, they showed how people who may not have a lot could still make a lot out of nothing (Inness, *Secret* 139). Overall, cookbooks made the “white trash” culture public, and even made it socially acceptable to be a lower-class white (Inness, *Secret* 147). Popular opinion surrounding “white trash” has changed considerably in recent years, and this is certainly owed in part to the messages from cookbooks.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that it is nearly impossible to tell how much of an impact cookbooks have on the public. Cookbooks can show us the problems that society faced perhaps better than any other historical record. Many cookbooks, especially those written and designed by women in Southern towns, reveal how class and race strata functioned in the area. We can acknowledge their messages and analyze the impact of these messages, but it is almost impossible to distinguish their limitations (176). Engelhardt states, “...we cannot know the color (or religion, or gender) of the hands that paged through and cooked from the finished cookbook” (177). There is no way to determine the

Chicken and Dumplings

Ingredients: 2 whole chickens, salt and pepper, canned chicken broth. 2 pkgs frozen dumplings

Steps: Cook two whole chickens overnight in crock pot. Fill halfway with water after adding chickens and add 1 teaspoon salt. Remove chickens and allow to cool. Refrigerate broth overnight and skim fat off broth. Debone chicken in a large stock pot. Put chicken broth from chickens, add canned chicken broth until stock pot is three quarters full and bring to boil. Slowly add dumplings three to four at a time; let pot return to boil after every three or four dumplings are added. Cook 30-45 min on low-medium stirring slightly. Do so occasionally to avoid sticking. Finally, add deboned chicken to dumplings; salt and pepper to taste. Heat another 15 minutes on low and add additional broth if needed.



identity of each individual who used the cookbook and her motivation behind it. Though we can look at how popular a particular cookbook was or examine who made it and why, it is impossible to understand the importance of it to each woman who used it (179). There is also the possibility that it was never used; Engelhardt points out “we do not know how often they cooked the recipes included” (178). Essentially, we must recognize that cookbooks show messages that doubtless had a profound impact on its readers, but we have to understand that these messages were limited. However, it is evident that they made somewhat of an impact based on the ability of women to pursue careers and desires, without necessarily a man by their side.

Household Responsibilities

Farming in the early twentieth century was laborious. Most people, due to the Depression after World War I, did not have much money. Instead of owning their own land, they relied on share cropping and renting. Sharecroppers had to grow and harvest all the crops but only were able to keep about two thirds of the product. The rest of the crops would be used as a form of payment to the landowner. Cash renters, on the other hand, paid a fixed rate to use the land. Melissa Walker writes in *All We Knew Was to Farm* about two women who lived on these types of farms. Mobile Moss Brown, an African American cash tenant, was the mother of twelve children. She, along with her husband, raised tobacco, soybeans, and truck crops to make a living. Because money was tight, Mobile Moss Brown had to work right alongside of her husband in the fields. She had to plant, harvest and process the crops. Not only did she work in the fields, but she also had to do all the housework. Brown was required to take care of her twelve children, cook, clean, preserve food, sew, and wash all the families' clothes.

Like Mobile Moss Brown, Sally Turner Page also had a difficult life. She was a sharecropper and a mother of nine children. When she was not working in the fields, she gardened and watched over her children. Even though she picked cotton, hoed corn, and helped with the cows, nothing was enough to keep her family out of poverty. Sally Turner Page was forced to raise her children in homes that were falling apart and even lacked a proper foundation.

These women worked hours on end. Men planted gardens while the women tended to them. Both men and women helped with the barnyard duties but women took on feeding the cows and chickens as well. When harvest time rolled around, Southern women aided the men in the fields as well as chopped wood, and carried water to allow their husbands more time in the fields. On top of all the farm duties, women still cared for the home by cleaning, cooking, and taking care of the children.

Although it was difficult, women were able to live and survive without a husband. Journalist Ben Roberston Jr. describes his great Aunt Narcissa in *Red Hills and Cotton*. She alone farmed land inherited from her parents except for the help of one hired man. Roberston noted that she hated domestic work and refused to do any of it. He claims that she never cleaned, cooked, or sewed like a typical woman of her time. Despite the challenges, women persevered and were able to live on their own.

Even with all the work on the farm, families usually were stretched for money. Women were forced to figure out other ways to earn money in the little free time they had. Women sold eggs, did laundry for other people and ran boarding houses to earn whatever money they could. Women also sold dairy products at the market if they could afford a cow. Substance farmers were being pushed into

commercial agriculture or off their land, so family income was at an all time low. These women selling at the market had the power to keep their families afloat. Even elite women would succumb to selling products at the market to help their families any way they could. The support of the market could not help everyone however. Black women were forced out of the market place partly because they lacked the proper amount of capital to purchase chickens or cows. However, the African American women hurt for business because no one wanted to buy products from a colored woman.

Social Enterprises

Tomato clubs were an organization for young girls to can tomatoes and sell their wares. The club was meant to empower those who are usually disenfranchised. Young girls were able to make money by selling tomatoes they grew on a plot of land and learning skills to can and market their product. This popular program introduced farm girls to capitalist markets where corporate food companies both embraced and belittled them (Engelhardt 17).

Aside from the work on the farm, most women held jobs. They desired to control a portion of the families spending. If they earned at least part of the family's income, the women felt the right to be able to spend some of it. By working off the farm, women earned up to twenty percent of the family's income. After World War I, women obtained jobs in factories such as textile mills. Along

with helping the family, these women enjoyed having a life beyond the farm. They liked having a break from the hectic life that the farm brought upon them.

With women being such an important factor in life on Southern farms, the government felt it necessary to provide the women with somewhat of an education. The government aimed to teach the women how to live the proper life as a farmer's wife. Home Extension Work taught women the appropriate behavior according to their class and race. They instructed women how to properly farm, cook and clean. The agents who educated these women were torn between two views of the ideal farm wife. One view thought of women as the farm homemaker. These types of women only took care of the household duties. The second view saw women as farm producers and expected women to work in the fields and do physical labor. Because of the conflicting views, most women did not participate in home extension work. African American women received government assistance but only after the program had helped all the white women it aimed to assist. The government program promoted the gender division of farm labor by teaching the women what to do and what not to do.

In the 1930s, the Tennessee Valley Authority was created. This government program relocated families and put them all closer together in cities and towns. Although they took people away from their land, the families were placed in new homes with electricity. Because of the new technology, household appliances, lights and power to pump water were all possibilities. The advancements improved the infrastructure of rural communities. The technology gave women more time to do other things although many did not take full advantage of it. The time it took to learn how to use the electricity was too much for most women to handle. The TVA realized this and provided an education program for the women. The program coached the women in agriculture and family life. Along with aiding the women, the TVA also improved the economy. Families struggling to maintain their farms could sell their land to TVA and buy a new house in the city. Nancy Grant writes how the TVA affected the African Americans living

experience. She argues that the African Americans during the mid-twentieth century were not treated fairly when it came to the government hiring for TVA projects. When the blacks were hired, they were given jobs that required no skill and that were usually temporary. The black women had to cope with an even rougher life than the white women. Often times, the African American women were not even recognized by the TVA workers and were thought of as not “part of the community” (Walker 203).

After the Great Depression, the United States transitioned into a cash economy. Many farms were changing into commercial farms. The wives of the commercial farmers embraced the material improvements brought by the shift to commercial farming. They saw themselves as key players in this new industry. The new industry allowed families to gain middle class status. The industry gave women and families more money for their labor giving women more time to focus on enhancing the lives of their children. In all of this however, the women lost the central role in their families. They stopped earning a large percentage of the family’s income and the men were once again the main breadwinners of the family. Formal organizations separated male and female work on the new farms. Men were required to do the physical labor while women were relied on for household work only.

The Shift from Home to Business

Historically women’s work has been confined to service occupations. Starting in the early eighteenth century women developed services such as dressmaking, hairdressing, and domestic work. As the women’s movement became stronger, the labor force of service sector jobs increased. Industrialization also sparked some women’s entrepreneurial spirit (Kwolek-Folland 2). It is not surprising that the jobs that most women held were providing service to others. In addition to servicing others, women began selling home goods and materials for profit. They were already responsible for a majority of the domestic labor in their households and expanding these services outside of the home provided some women with a source of income. In the early eighteenth century it was difficult for women to have their own businesses since they were seen as the property of their husband or father (if unmarried). There were a few exceptional cases when some women were “allowed” to inherit the business of their husband in the event of death or illness.

On the night of October 7, 1761, two men broke in to a Newport business. Although she could not stop the thieves, Sarah Rumreil, a successful businesswoman who had carried on her husband’s business after his death, provided precise lists for the courts of what the men had made off with. The final tally testified to her thriving business and cosmopolitan connections:

- a “work’d pocket book” with £53 in old tenor bills
- 16 shillings in lawful money of the colony of RI
- £0.2.9 in lawful money of Connecticut
- £9.4 in New Hampshire old tenor
- several pieces of O.T. Bills
- a silk purse with
- 32 small pieces of silver
- 13 pistereens
- 31/2 Spanish milled dollars

1 cobb silver
(Hartigan-O'Connor)

Women of the late eighteenth century had knowledge of money as seen in the case of Rumreil.

Before World War II, both black and white women were responsible for all cooking. As the main preparers of food they had a major influence on the development of Southern cuisine and soon began to profit off their dishes. Commercial cooking is generally defined as any cooking or food production that occurs on a large scale with the intention of selling the product. Some early forms of commercial cooking occurred during the creation of boardinghouses in the 1830s. Boardinghouses played an important role in turning American cities into the metropolises they are today.

These boardinghouses were mostly family-owned by husband and wife with the wife being responsible for the preparation of meals. The popularity of boarding houses began to decline in the early 1900s but many visitors and occupants of the boardinghouses still wished to consume the dishes prepared by the women of the boarding houses. Mrs. Wilkes' Boarding House of Savannah, Georgia no longer functions as a boarding house, but it is still a very popular destination for both tourists and locals to consume Southern cuisine. Many of the first restaurants were started out of hotels and inns.

Many people traveled far distances in these times, and due to the lack of technology, these trips often lasted many days. It was expected that a stranger could in theory walk up to a home and ask for sustenance and be given food and or shelter for the night (Kierner). Hospitality was a must in deciding the benevolence of each host. Women who were independently wealthy or widowed and endowed with land also opened up their homes to passing travelers. Some women, whom were married, opened up their homes in the absence of their husbands, they were adeptly coined "deputy husbands" (Kierner). Thanks to the ingenuity of housewives, the homes ran smoothly and could take on passing travelers. The women of this era were not only good for hospitality reasons; they also became important in the notion of laying a gentler hand on social gatherings.

Profile of a Modern Day Business Woman

More women are becoming entrepreneurs now than ever before (Forbes). Still women have many obstacles to overcome. Jeneane Barber of Macon faced many difficulties when she opened her first restaurant in 1989. She was unable to get a bank to loan her money so she had to find other ways to acquire the funds.

"Let me tell you I was not real happy at that [not receiving the bank loan]. I had been in the business but I had been a waitress... I did not make enough money so I had to borrow from people who knew I could do it. I painted houses. I was so driven and knew that I could do this."-Jeneane Barber

Ms. Barber overcame these obstacles and is now running two successful family restaurants in Macon, GA.

Not everyone is able to afford to start a restaurant or business to sell their food wares but smaller venues such as curb markets and farmers markets allow many women to profit from their skills. Curb markets became popular around the time of boarding houses decline. These markets occurred once a week and allowed countrywomen to sell extra produce, flowers, and homemade goods on the "curbs" of their town. Soon curb markets moved to more permanent locations. These markets had a big impact on women both financially and socially. Women from the city and countryside were able to

interact together, exchanging ideas and forming friendships. On the financial side, curb markets were in direct opposition to capitalist markets. Curb markets allowed for anyone to sell rather than limiting the sellers to a select few (Engelhardt).

Women continue to struggle today with the division of labor in their households and balancing that with the pursuit of a career. Some though are able to break away from this and pursue outside business ventures where they can profit from many skills including cooking.

African American Women in the 20th Century

The timeline of African-American women between slavery to the civil rights movement highlights an individual story unique to that of women as a whole, so when observing women's influence in the progression of southern food and southern culture, black women must be examined separately.

In the early-to-mid nineteenth century, female slaves were assigned to cook because it was seen as sign of low status due to its direct relation with raw, natural elements. These slaves also often took care of other roles in the house such as cleaning, washing clothes, and taking care of the children. These tasks forced them to develop an intense level of work ethic, as the roles most of the time spanned beyond the usual limits of human energy. Simply performing the duties as a cook proved to be an



overwhelming task, as it would take hours (and sometimes days) for food to be prepared for each and every meal. The cooks were often limited to a very small amount of ingredients: corn, wheat, eggs, milk, sugar, and (sometimes) meat. As the time of slavery came to a close, the work level remained the same.

In the post-Civil War south, black women continued to act as the cooks and servants for the white households, as these were the only skills they possessed after they were given freedom. The conditions changed minimally between these two periods, as they were often treated as a lower class with little say in their schedules and little mobility for higher wages. Cecilia Rio describes the south during the Reconstruction as a “feudal era,” and compares freed blacks to medieval serfs (Katzman 10). There was clear exploitation

by white families with these African-American workers. However, African-American women were determined to support their families and to slowly gain the means to be independent. One account in Rebecca Sharpless' book details the life of a freed black cook who walked miles upon miles in freezing weather just to get to work at four in the morning, so she could begin the cooking for the day (Sharpless 41). Due to the minimal technological achievements of the South, these cooks continued to work under an enormous amount of pressure to keep the house functioning. There were no real descriptions of the jobs they endured, and there was no definitive wage based on skill or experience. If they spoke against their employers or made the most minimal of mistakes, they were often fired and rehired quickly—as the jobs were in high demand by black women. As the twentieth century approached, many black

women attempted to gain more control in their field, especially as technology slowly progressed. They would often clash with both the men and women of the house about how much say they had with what they cooked and how they cooked it, which eventually resulted in a great deal of black families moving North in hopes of finding more respect in the workplace (Katzman). This eventually resulted in better working conditions for the black women of the South, however, the amount of jobs that existed for them were incredibly low.

In the pre-twentieth century south, black women were incredibly influential in the development of Southern food because they were the ones cooking for the white families. While the cooks at first were limited to a small amount of ingredients, many of these cooks were often used as gatekeepers, or those who were in charge of buying supplies and deciding how to utilize them. This gave black women a lot more freedom in how they cooked the food, and based on the time limits they had, what exactly they cooked. While grits, cornbread, pork, and vegetables were the main-stay products, variations began to pop up in regards to how these were cooked. While many of the recipes described in this paper might have been created or designed by whites; they were perfected by black women.

Black women in the early twentieth century continued to take jobs to support their families, which ranged from cooking, housekeeping, or hairdressing. However, in “Reconstructing Free Woman” Karin Zipf presents the theory that being a homemaker in these white households was empowering. As time pressed on, black women became more and more demanding in their roles as workers, although comparatively to that of whites, it was still an oppressed role. To counteract this, many families were sending their children to become educated. Young black girls would stay in boardinghouses, typically with widows, and find small work as hairdressers or cooks while they attended school. At this point, it seemed as though mobility was a viable option for blacks in the South. Many older cooks who had previously worked in plantation houses now found themselves looking to be professionally trained, and soon, there was an empathetic association with black women in cooking. Camille Bégin shows that the image of “Aunt Jemima” became collinear with famous cooks like Idella Parker, and encompassed a passionate and amicable Southern black cook. Inversely, this stereotype perpetuated segregation and the idea of a distinct feudal system between races. While black women still were cooks in the South, and throughout America, they lived in “separate but equal” conditions. Some (mostly black men) proved to gain mobility, and some were able to become rich, but this was mostly unheard of. Still, black women were determined to work hard and make a better means for their children. Black women were much more likely to go back to work after having children, showing a divide between black and white women in terms of occupation (workers versus homemakers). Black women and white women, still, were able to find a certain commonality in cooking. Black women were often invited to the “tomato clubs,” and would even have their recipes featured. One of the most interesting of these, as Engelhardt points out

Civil Rights Cake

Ingredients: 1 pound of sugar, 1 pound of flour, ½ pound of butter, whites of 12 eggs, ½ cup sweet milk, 1 ½ teaspoon of baking powder, 1 pound seeded raisins, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, 1 teaspoon cloves, 1 teaspoon nutmeg, 1 teaspoon spice

Steps: Take one half of batter (first six ingredients) and bake in layers. Then add to the other half one the remaining ingredients. Bake in layers same as white and put all together with very stiff icing. This makes a delicious cake.

in *Mess of Greens*, is the Civil Rights Cake- that highlights the delusional “separate but equal” mentality of the time, and shows that black women wanted a better life.

Women during the World Wars

During World War I and World War II, white women took over the jobs of men while they went to war, and black women took over the jobs that white women had. This appropriate work seemed to carry over into “peacetime” America in which, unfortunately, African American women continued to act as maids and cooks. While they were able to carry out their own lives in a certain amount of freedom, they were still ultimately indentured servants to the white households. So, from the mid nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century, almost one hundred years, black women were the main preparers and cooks of the traditional Southern meal. After integration and the Civil Rights Movement, southern food has continued to be a staple that has connected both black and white women in the South.



Ingredients:

Bananas
 Vanilla Wafers
 3 small pkgs instant vanilla pudding
 Whole Milk to make pudding
 1 tsp vanilla extract
 1 large container Cool Whip

Steps:

Make pudding according to directions on box. Add vanilla extract & fold in cool whip. In a 9 x 13 pan layer vanilla wafers then sliced bananas, then pudding, repeat & top with vanilla wafers.

Southern homes often required a strong female backbone. As a wife, a woman was expected to maintain the home and all that went on in it. These duties ranged from housekeeping to feeding the family to making sure the children received a proper education. From the mid eighteenth century to today, women’s roles in the home have changed dramatically. They have evolved from the typical housewife to the strong, independent woman in a matter of years. The evolution can be seen clearly through time.

In the mid eighteenth century, women were the traditional house wives. Maintaining the home was a full time job. Cleaning the home, laundry, mending clothes, childcare, cooking all the meals, gardening, and caring for the animals were what topped many to-do lists back then. “A really good housekeeper is almost always unhappy. While she does so much for the comfort of others, she nearly ruins her own health and life. It is because she cannot be easy and comfortable when there is the least disorder or dirt to be seen.” *The Household*, January 1884 (Hartman). These women rarely rested and that was life. The lower class women who could not afford paid services had it much harder than those of the upper crust.

Gentle women often had hired hands however; the sole duty of overseeing these hired hands fell on the women (Kierner). Just because these women were of higher birth did not mean they were



"Whatever have been the cares of the day, greet your husband with a smile when he returns. Make your personal appearance just as beautiful as possible. Let him enter rooms so attractive and sunny that all the recollections of his home, when away from the same, shall attract him back."

Hill's Manual of Social and Business Forms, 1888

incompetent in the least. Nearly every upper class wife could produce a formal meal replete with full courses. In a way, these gentle women had more power in the home than their "superior" spouse. During these days, a common measurement of the efficiency of homes depended on their hospitality.

Many gentle women not only oversaw the house work but partook in it as well. A great deal of them were able to cook a meal just fine on their own. When it came to social gatherings, such as balls held by the gentry or simple festivals hosted by the village or town, the matrons of the area usually oversaw every detail. From dishes prepared to décor, the women folk had no issues in attaining what they desired. In all households, women kept up with the current culinary changes by observing the formal dinners and reading cook books. By the end of the colonial period, women had established themselves as much more than just a pretty ornament to be shown about. These ladies had proved themselves capable of much more than society reckoned.

Entering the mid nineteenth century, families had started to move into the urban areas. This changed the entire dynamic of the family and how it functioned. Not only were women just housewives now but they were starting to branch

out into the spheres of men (Marsh). The same could be said about men venturing into the home-sphere of women, but this is much harder to see. Women who willingly came to the cities loved it. Not only were domestic helpers easier to come by, if the income allowed it, education for children, social life, and materialistic goods were easier to come by (Marsh). For women of well-off families, this meant the freeing up of their own time. For the first time, women had free time to themselves and they did not have to devote a hundred percent of their time to domestic labor. More and more families moved into the suburbs causing the rural base of society to move.

By the turn of the twentieth century, women had ventured into male spheres out of necessity. Thanks to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's apartment design, cooking, cleaning, and childcare could be taken care of with the use of trained people (Marsh). The integration of women into male spheres caused men to also tap into female spheres. They began to become content with a quiet life. Not only did work schedules become steadier, careers became more secure in that a man would actually take on a single job instead of drifting from job to job (Marsh). This provided wives a firm basis on which they built their lives and the lives of their family members. As the new era progressed in the mid twentieth century, housewives began acquiring jobs of their own. They were not dependent on male support but could

now help financially. This was critical for the feminist movement that occurred in the late twentieth century and helped to create an idea of independence for women in general, especially in the South.

To argue that women were the backbone of Southern food and culture is perhaps too simple. After all, history itself has been continually written with the male gender as the shining star. As time has continued and people have become more aware of women's activity within history, men almost naturally take a backseat. This idea describes not only the South, but history in and of itself in the broadest sense. Southern culture and its food undoubtedly would not be the same without the dedication of women.

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