

#FOODHERSTORY: FOOD AND AMERICAN WOMEN'S POLITICAL RESISTANCE  
FROM SUFFRAGE TO THE DIGITAL AGE

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## **ABSTRACT**

Katherine C. Hysmith: #FOODHERSTORY: Food and American Women's Political Resistance  
from Suffrage to the Digital Age  
(Under the direction of Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt)

Throughout the American experience, women have activated food as a feminist expression of resistance, inverting histories of oppression to empowerment as they campaigned for enfranchisement at the turn of the nineteenth century and used social media feeds as platforms in twenty-first century political protest movements. This dissertation investigates the role of food-related resistance in the long women's movement in the United States by critically analyzing how women used material culture and technologies to build networks of empowerment and community. Relying on a diverse set of evidence from food-informed material culture to archival research, ethnography, oral history, and social media analysis, this work is grounded in feminist scholarship, food studies, American studies, and the digital humanities. Thinking about American women's history not in waves, but as an additive national recipe in which ingredients, flavors, and methodologies change throughout time reflects both the successes and failures of American women's political work overtime. Building on my concurrent work in the food media industry, I utilize first-person participant observation methods (autoethnography) to unpack the largely white-centered legacy of America's women's movements, their complicated relationship with food and food production, the sexism, racism, and classism that remain in the fields of food and digital media, and incessant examples of food-related appropriation, exploitation, and profit. Through the analysis of analog food-related literature, including cookbooks, zines, and recipes,

this research examines how publication technologies from printing to distribution, amplified women's voices across the nation. Investigation of the current food-related women's movements on social media underscores the importance of community building and "born-digital" technologies. Focusing on several case studies of women food entrepreneurs and activists from suffrage to the second feminist movement and the post-Roe v. Wade protest of today, reveals a complex landscape of women's food-related resistance. The boundaries shaped by privilege and access between virtual/digital technologies and physical, tangible spaces of labor and protest lead to critical discussions regarding American women's food-related work particularly working class and working poor women of color in a post-pandemic, politically fractured, economically fraught America.

To my mom, who wouldn't let me go to culinary school and advised me to find a different way to work with food. She was right. I wish she could read this now.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AAHPER	American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation
NAWSA	National American Woman Suffrage Association
NAGWS	National Association of Girls and Women in Sports
NOW	National Organization for Women
WCPU	Women's Co-Operative Printing Union
WCTU	Women's Christian Temperance Union

## **INTRODUCTION: #STICKTOBAKING: WHY WOMEN'S FOOD RESISTANCE MATTERS**

My grandmother keeps texting me poorly lit pictures of cake pans from her kitchen in North Texas. She's decluttering, an undiagnosed symptom of late-age grief for a life that didn't quite turn out as she hoped. Her cake baking tools are the first to go. My grandmother was a professional cake baker and, while it wasn't a full-time job, the work helped put my grandfather through graduate school, feed and clothe four children, and keep the family firmly in a middle-class lifestyle for decades. She had clients across the state and across the Red River in Oklahoma. She made birthday cakes smothered in brightly hued buttercream, cakes for baptisms and other celebratory life moments, and giant, multi-tiered wedding cakes, delicately arranged with overpiping (an intricate decorating technique that layers frosting over frosting), molded chocolates, and anything a bride could dream up. I was in awe of her butter and sugar skills, naively believing my grandmother had figured out what so many women struggled to achieve as mothers and homemakers in the 1970s and 1980s, an era when society convinced women that they could have it all. I thought the cakes bought her freedom.

The cakes were one of my first experiences with the potential power and agency of food. My grandmother, I would realize much later, was part of a long legacy of women who have used food and baking as a technology of resistance against systemic oppression. As a white woman, her place in this legacy is complicated: white women are both important players in this food history, but also part of the oppressive power structures that severely limited the rights of women of color. Reexamining this legacy and integrating the contemporary digital landscape necessitates a new way of thinking about women's food-related labor and the resistance it

supported. While historical waves once categorized the ups and downs of women's fight against oppression, I propose a new metaphor—an evolving national 'recipe' of changing ingredients, flavors, and methodologies which demonstrates the messy progress of American feminism. I argue that food and food labor are critical lenses for understanding the everchanging state of American women over time.

When I visited during the summers, the peak of wedding season, my grandmother and I hauled bricks of unsalted butter from the grocery store, tempered chocolate, and swaddled warm cake layers in plastic wrap. We stacked them in the work refrigerator she kept in the garage. An industrial-sized steel stand mixer, nearly as big as my grandmother, sat next to the refrigerator. When she mixed up buckets of buttercream for a wedding cake, she let me carefully add a drop of blue food coloring to offset the yellow in the butter for the perfect bridal white. Cake scraps went into an orange Tupperware container she kept on the back counter for hungry grandchildren always in need of a snack. When it was time to deliver a cake, we'd pack the layers individually in the back of her car and slowly drive through town, avoiding fast turns and bumps at any cost. Later on, she bought a special magnetic sign she affixed to the bumper that read "Slow: Wedding Cake." She stored the magnet on the front of her washer in the garage and beamed whenever she used it for a delivery. With a cake safely in its place, we'd return home to wash everything—the waxed fabric piping bags, the once-transparent chocolate molds, endless off-set spatulas, and more—all by hand. Her cake tools never went in the dishwasher.

While I was planning my own wedding a decade ago, my grandmother pulled out several large plastic three-ring-binders stuffed with pictures, notes, and wedding programs from cakes she created throughout her career as a baker. She planned to retire from the business soon and hoped to only bake cakes for family occasions. From the other room, I heard my grandfather

grumbling about the quantity of her baking equipment and sighing about her constant baking. Since I could remember, my grandfather approved of her homemade biscuits in the morning and the dinners put on the table each night, but the cakes that she sold *outside* the home required her mental and physical time, crossing a line into the complicated territory of women's empowerment, agency, and financial independence.

I now recognize my grandfather's frustration with my grandmother's ability to achieve by herself. Her work linked her to a world of young brides, mothers, and a larger community of women who deeply respected her craft and recognized its worth. The cakes provided her with a professional network of bakers and special event creators who further spread word of her skill. Professional baking enabled my grandmother to create an important identity alongside wife and mother. Following the powerful social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, including the civil rights movement for Black Americans and women's rights, the academy saw the rise of social history, women and gender studies, and folklore and material culture, including foodways. In these fields, largely women scholars increasingly examined women's economic and creative activity first outside the domestic 'sphere' and later, within the home as they recognized the significance of women's cultural production, including food-related labor like baking.<sup>1</sup> Today, as I follow in those scholars' footsteps, I connect my grandmother's baking with my research on the cultural capital and expressive power of cakes, including my own baking.

### **Men Master the Craft, Women Bake Cakes**

I find it particularly frustrating that the most ornate and involved technique for frosting a cake is named after a man. Popularized in the 1930s by a British baker named Joseph Lambeth,

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<sup>1</sup>In her latest book, *Grain and Fire: A History of Baking in the American South* (UNC Press 2022), historian Rebecca Sharpless chronicles the economic, cultural, and historical southern baking tradition. Sharpless argues that baking in the South serves as a source of identity and entrepreneurship.

the method, also known as overpiping, involves the delicate layering of frosting to create intricate—one might even say feminine—designs. Akin to lace or ruffles you might find on the edges and hems of fine garments, overpiping creates dainty knit-like swoops, swirls, and fine-lines. Lambeth published *The Lambeth Method of Cake Decorating and Practical Pastries* in 1934, and the Lambeth name stuck despite being common practice for generations of bakers before him. And while Lambeth never claimed to have invented overpiping, the fact remains that his name is attached to it. Though he was a talented baker who wanted to share his skill with the world, it is hard for me to separate his role in the legacy of systemic discrimination I have inherited from women bakers before me, my grandmother chief among them. Men and women baked equally spectacular cakes throughout history, but women were seen as hobbyists, homemakers, and enthusiasts. Men mastered the craft. Women baked cakes.

At the original Hyde Park, New York campus of the Culinary Institute of America, the nation's leading culinary school, women outnumbered men (51.6 percent to 48.4 percent) for the first time in the school's history in the fall of 2016. Founded in 1946 as a vocational training school for returning World War II veterans, the school slowly closed the gender gap.<sup>2</sup> This gap was tied to the male-dominated culinary profession. One exception, however, was baking and pastry, a “pink ghetto” of the culinary world in which women remain in the majority. Until recently, pastry programs at culinary schools like the CIA and Le Cordon Bleu took less time to complete, and were thus perceived as less rigorous.<sup>3</sup> These programs produced chefs who could make precision baked goods that adhered to standardized recipes, rather than the more expansive

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<sup>2</sup>Mike Pomranz, “For the First Time Ever the Culinary Institute of America Has More Female Than Male Students,” *Food & Wine*, May 24, 2017, <https://www.foodandwine.com/news/more-women-at-cia-than-men>.

<sup>3</sup>Karen Stabiner, “Yes, pastry chefs are real chefs and women are leading the baking revolution,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/food/story/2019-07-31/women-pastry-chefs-baking-revolution>.

culinary experimentation and creativity afforded chefs who graduated with a culinary arts or Le Grand Diplôme® degree. Moreover, baking and pastry arts reinforced inaccurate stereotypes that women were more patient, precise, and genetically disposed for delicate work like cake decorating.<sup>4</sup> While this divide is slowly shifting and respect for pastry chefs continues to grow, men still control most professional kitchens.

For the last two or three years, buttercream closeups and contemporary takes on the Lambeth method have monopolized my Instagram feed. Highly decorated cakes never really disappeared; even the minimally frosted naked-cake craze of the early aughts, partially popularized by celebrity chef Christina Tosi of Momofuku Milk Bar, carried its own context about frugality, minimalism, and the gendered connection between sweetness and femininity.<sup>5</sup> Where the heavily frosted Lambeth method implied opulence, a lack of frosting suggested the opposite (even when purchased from a high-end bakery). At the height of the “naked cake” trend in the aughts and 2010s, wedding websites and bridal bloggers recommended the barely-there-frosted bake as a frugal, easy option for DIY brides. The absence of frosting gave the perception of thrift despite the fact that most naked cakes call for double the amount of frosting between each layer to compensate for the lack of outside coverage. Moreover, naked cakes, appearing to require little to no professional cake-decorating skills, carried an allure of democratized DIY accessibility. Wedding cakes in particular are telling expressions of society at a particular

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<sup>4</sup>Christina Troitino, “Less Than 7% Of U.S. Restaurants Are Led By Women—One Director Wants To Change That,” *Forbes*, February 29, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/christinatroitino/2020/02/29/less-than-7-of-us-restaurants-are-led-by-women-one-director-wants-to-change-that/?sh=533776e12060>; Marian Burros, “‘Why I Am a Pastry Chef,’ by Women Who Know,” *The New York Times*, May 6, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/06/garden/why-i-am-a-pastry-chef-by-women-who-know.html#:~:text=Many%20chefs%20believed%20that%20pastry,of%20the%20kitchen%2C%22%20Ms.>

<sup>5</sup>Tessa Huff, “How to Ditch the Fondant and Make Your Own Naked Wedding Cake,” *Brit + Co*, March 11, 2016, <https://www.brit.co/naked-wedding-cake/>.



moment, the thickness of the frosting and the number of layers waxing or waning with inflation, the maker's time and skill, and a baker's politic leanings.<sup>6</sup> Overpiping returned in full force in 2017, a year after the highly conservative federal administration threatened access to women's healthcare, caged immigrants sought asylum, and legislators sympathized with white nationalists and the preservation of Confederate statues. I watched Tina Fey, a University of Virginia alumna, on *Saturday Night Live* in August 2017 as she shoved forkfuls of prettily frosted store-bought sheet cake into her mouth, calling it "sheetcaking," a new "grassroots movement" in response to the alt-right protests just a few days earlier in Charlottesville, Virginia that led to three deaths.<sup>7</sup> Instead of participating in the political violence or the increasingly hostile rhetoric sweeping the nation, Fey stifled her screams with cake. Feminist scholars, the media, and even Fey herself critiqued the skit, equating it to Marie Antoinette's wrongly remembered phrase "let them eat cake"—another example of white women's privilege and our historical tendency to look the other way. Many in the baking community interpreted the skit differently, surprised by the trope of cake as a desperate escape from reality. I, too, recognized the skit as an opportunity to instead demonstrate the cultural power of cake. Fey's joke flopped, but would it had the icing on the cake stated "THIS BUTTERCREAM KILLS FACISTS"?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>While many factors—including long-standing traditions, budget, and the number of guests—contribute to a wedding cake choice, additional influence can come from numerous sources.

<sup>7</sup>The Unite the Right rally took place in Charlottesville, VA from August 11-12, 2017 and included members of white supremacist organizations. On August 12, white supremacist James Alex Fields Jr. deliberately drove his car into a crowd of counter-protesters, killing one woman and injuring 35 other people. Later that week on August 18, 2017, comedian Tina Fey was a guest on the Weekend Update segment of *Saturday Night Live* where she spoke about counter-protesting at future alt-right gatherings. Dara Lind, "Unite the Right, the violent white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, explained," *Vox*, August 14, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/2017/8/12/16138246/charlottesville-nazi-rally-right-uva>; "Weekend Update: Tina Fey on Protesting After Charlottesville – SNL," *Saturday Night Live*, August 18, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVvpXZxXWZU>.

<sup>8</sup>Food writer Helen Rosner discusses Fey's cake skit and the power of buttercream messaging in her article, "This Buttercream Kills Fascists," *Eater*, August 25, 2017, <https://www.eater.com/2017/8/25/16198164/protest-cake-tina-fey-pastry-activism>.

## Rereading the Cakes

Social media's community-building possibilities means bakers can make decent money from their cakes. Depending on how the cottage industry laws work in a specific state, bakers sell slices of their cakes along with other baked goods through digital pop-ups on Instagram, raffle whole cakes to their social media followers for causes ranging from natural disaster relief to emergency funds for Ukrainian mothers and children. They market virtual classes of their decorating methods. Bakers can monetize their social media feeds, through sponsorship or in-app creator funds, and others are lucky enough to secure cookbook and other media deals based on their cake baking abilities. We use our skills, passed down from our mothers and grandmothers. We observe collaborators in cookbooks published by cake supply companies like Wilton. We study magazine articles, social media, cooking shows, including the great cake diva Martha Stewart. Though a number of members of the baking community monetize their industry knowledge, they also share what they know. It is never "just cake."<sup>9</sup> There is always a deeper message. Historian Ann Romines argues that cake is a method of communication, or rather, an extension of the "limits of written language" in women's literature. Consider Eudora Welty's 1946 domestic drama *Delta Wedding* and its many emblematic baked goods.

I see these cakes every day on my phone. Scrolling through social media, a liminal space somewhere between reality and fiction, women routinely post images and recipes for cakes not unlike those demonstrated in Lambeth's manual. With their multihued overpiping, delicately placed sugar pearls, and increasingly socio-political messages inscribed in buttercream, these cakes are the digital descendants of a long line of women's shared domestic labor. Ann Romines notes that the change from oracular tradition (word-of-mouth) to written and printed methods

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<sup>9</sup>Ann Romines, "Reading the Cakes: 'Delta Wedding' and the Texts of Southern Women's Culture," *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 50, no. 4, (1997): 601-616. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26476899>.

“raised important questions about the implications of going public with women’s traditional domestic culture.”<sup>10</sup> The nineteenth century publication of women-authored cookbooks blurred lines between the “separate spheres” that presumably kept women and their domestic knowledge isolated, even invisible. Today, women chefs, cookbook authors, editors, journalists, food photographers, and stylists are proof of the fluidity of gendered spaces. But these twenty-first-century cakes tell a different story, requiring, in Romines’ words, a rereading for the digital age<sup>11</sup>.

Much like reading cakes in literature or contextualizing recipes in cookbooks, women’s digital food media similarly provides opportunities for critical analysis. In the digital landscape, however, the messages within cakes are no longer hidden. Creators use textual features like captions and more subversive details delicately buried in a post (like a shredded root vegetable in an otherwise sugary cake) and outside the viewer’s immediate focus, such as metadata in handles, hashtags, and user metrics.<sup>12</sup> In the past, shared domestic culture sustained personal, familial, and communal networks; the introduction of the digital landscape reinforced these associations and created new opportunities for women to use feminist food interventions.

While digital realms present new and exciting opportunities for women to gain agency, financial independence, and empowerment, they also present numerous obstacles that contribute

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<sup>10</sup>Romines, “Reading the Cakes.”

<sup>11</sup>In *The Culinaricians: Lives and Careers from the First Age of American Fine Dining* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), historian David S. Shields looks at the work of numerous women who brought their culinary skills and expertise to the food industry between 1790 and 1919. Shields argues that the late-nineteenth-century cooking schools launched culinary careers for some women while other women “championed” regional cooking and foodways through cookbook publications (pp. 58, 462).

<sup>12</sup>Itai Himelboim and Guy J. Golan, “A Social Networks Approach to Viral Advertising: The Role of Primary, Contextual, and Low Influencers,” *Social Media + Society* 5, no. 3 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119847516>; Heather L. Storer and Maria Rodriguez, “#Mapping a movement: social media, feminist hashtags, and movement building in the digital age,” *Journal of Community Practice* 28, no. 2 (2020): 160-176, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2020.1757541>.

to women's systemic disenfranchisement. The digital world offers flexible employment for mothers who must navigate difficult childcare schedules. More recently, professional women bakers and chefs laid off and furloughed during the global pandemic turned to social media to showcase and monetize their skills through pop-up bake sales and small-batch home-cooked meals.<sup>13</sup> Building a business on a rapidly changing and fickle digital platform takes significant time, effort, and virtual expertise. Knowing that these obstacles exist, why would women want to digitize their domestic expertise? What is there to gain? And what is the impact of using this expertise in "radical" resistant ways? Feminist literary scholar Jane Marcus suggests that women's culture adheres to an aesthetic that does not wish to compete, is anti-hierarchical, anti-theoretical, not aggressively exclusionary. A real woman's poetics is a poetics of commitment, not a poetics of abandonment. Above all, it does not separate art from work and daily life.<sup>14</sup>

### **Feminist Interventions**

The "women's culture" Marcus describes centers on products that are used or consumed and occupy space temporarily due to their perishable nature. To be clear, this interpretation does not devalue women's contributions; rather, it underlines the importance of celebrating the domestic and the everyday, the "food that is eaten," the "cloth that is worn," and the "houses that are dirtied." Romines uses Marcus's claim that "culture consists in passing on the technique of its making" to explain how culture "consists in recipes."<sup>15</sup> Recipes that have evolved generation after generation, simultaneously provide the reader with instructions, but also a means to

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<sup>13</sup>Tejal Rao, "Cooks Turned Instagram Into the World's Greatest Takeout Menu," *The New York Times*, January 26, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/26/dining/instagram-chefs-takeout-menus.html>.

<sup>14</sup>Jane Marcus, "Still Practice, A/Wrested Alphabet: Toward a Feminist Aesthetic," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 3, no. 1/2, Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship (Spring - Autumn, 1984): 79-97, <https://doi.org/10.2307/463826>.

<sup>15</sup>Romines, "Reading the Cakes."

contribute to the evolution of women's culture and for some, a means of expressing their politics and voice. This dissertation investigates the role of food-related resistance in the long women's movement in the United States by critically analyzing how women used material culture and technologies to build networks of empowerment and community.

### Recipes and other Material Cultures

Material culture is the study of the relationships between people and things. This interdisciplinary field helps us understand what things—like cookbooks, restaurant equipment, and cakes—mean within their historical context, but also *why* they were important to the people who used them.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the study of material culture can help us unpack larger issues of class, race, and gender and demonstrate the ways in which those social constructs were created, upheld, or resisted through material objects. To continue with cookbooks as an example, food scholar Ken Albala explains that a scholar of material culture can look at a historical cookbook and “give a fairly accurate description of the kinds of [cooking] tools that would have been available and used at least by some in a given time period.”<sup>17</sup> There is other information to learn from cookbooks, too, Albala says, to understand topics not explicitly related to food or cooking, but concepts “such as politics, religion, and world views.” In her book, *Food on the Page: Cookbooks and American Culture*, food studies scholar Megan Elias describes how eighteenth-century readers of Mary Randolph's *The Virginia Housewife* (1824) had access to recipes, in addition to advice on table settings, menus, seasonable goods, and more which provided “a

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<sup>16</sup>Jules David Prown, “Mind in matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (1982): 1 -19; De Cunzo, Lu Ann, and Catharine Dann Roeber, eds. Half-title-page. In *The Cambridge Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, i-i. Cambridge Handbooks in Anthropology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022; Thomas J. Schlereth, ed., *Material Cultures Studies in America*, Nashville, TN: American Association of State and Local History, 1982.

<sup>17</sup>Ken Albala, “Cookbooks as Historical Documents,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Jeffrey M. Pilcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

material culture that extended out of the kitchen into the marketplace for domestic goods.”<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, the suffrage cookbooks gave readers recipes and menus, as well as essays on women’s liberation and the names and sometimes even biographies of other suffrage activists, creating a foundation of “material culture” that connected women, food, and resistance on and off the pages of the cookbooks.

In our current digital culture, we talk about food and cooking online and through apps on our phones and other digital devices. In light of this shift, and for the digitally-focused chapters in this dissertation, it is imperative to discuss how material culture works in these digital spaces and *how* these digital objects have evolved and continue to exist alongside their analog counterparts. We can read cookbooks online, share recipes through texts, and share images (and related metadata) of ingredients, dishes, kitchens, and more through social media platforms including Instagram and TikTok. We can curate collections of these materials in digital folders of information, design virtual art galleries open to the public and our followers, and we can fill up gigabytes of hardware with digital data. While scholars were dubious at first, the field of material studies has extended its scholarly reach into the digital world. According to Vili Lehdonvirta, the existence of digital material culture is obvious as humans assign “cultural meanings to tangible features of digital architecture.”<sup>19</sup> The digital world does not exist in a vacuum and requires human interaction and while humans use the internet and other digital spaces in many different ways—for work, fun, research, art—each instance is imbued with cultural significance. American Studies and material studies scholar Bernie Herman argues that material

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<sup>18</sup>Megan Elias, *Food on the Page: Cookbooks and American Culture*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.

<sup>19</sup>Vili Lehdonvirta, “Online spaces have material culture: goodbye to digital post-materialism and hello to virtual consumption,” *Media Culture and Society* 32, no. 5 (2010): 883-889.

culture is made up of objects both “tangible and imagined.”<sup>20</sup> The digital food world deals with a mixture of materials: tangible ingredients, dishes, phones, and computers and, not necessarily imagined, but rather *intangible* bits of code, digital copy, metadata such as hashtags and hyperlinks, and digital photography. Lehdonvirta similarly argues that virtual spaces contain and produce “real artefacts that are experienced through the senses” regardless of their physical tangibility.<sup>21</sup> With these definitions and possibilities in mind, my research addresses the importance and activation of both the material and digital cultures—the generations of cookbooks, the women-owned restaurants, the digitally-born, anti-racist bake sale marketing materials, the Instagram cakes—created by American women. Altogether, these tools, symbols, artifacts, and spaces form the material culture of a long women’s movement of resistance through food.

### On Resistance

One term that requires further definition within the context of my research is the concept of resistance. Scholars have struggled to define resistance and for a long time solely considered it in context to power, another concept that was understood as “military strength of the state” or “capacity of individuals and groups to persuade others to act on their will.”<sup>22</sup> This narrow scope produced a similarly narrow understanding of the possibilities of resistance, instead situating it as a simple binary to domination, a “relatively fixed and institutionalized form of power.”<sup>23</sup> But resistance does not exist in a vacuum and relies on a multitude of contexts, influences, and power

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<sup>20</sup>Bernie Herman, “Asked to define material culture,” *Bernie Herman’s Blog: Meditations on the worlds of things*, June 3, 2012, <https://blherman.wordpress.com/2012/06/03/asked-to-define-material-culture/>.

<sup>21</sup>Lehdonvirta, 886.

<sup>22</sup>Mona Lilja, “The definition of resistance,” *Journal of Political Power* 15, no. 2 (2022): 202-220.

<sup>23</sup>Sherry B. Ortner, “Resistance and the problem of ethnographic refusal,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 173–193.

relationships, a situation which more contemporary scholars describe as “entangled.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the focus on “collective dissent” has been expanded to incorporate what scholar Mona Lilja calls “hidden agency” or everyday resistance.<sup>25</sup>

As much of the study of resistance is built upon military and capitalist examples, and thus centered around the experiences of men and male-dominated cultures, feminist studies provides new conceptualizations of resistance, what “counts,” and *who* gets to resist.<sup>26</sup> Turning again to “the cult of True Womanhood,” Welter defined resistance in terms of two types of women: “some challenged the standard” and “some tried to keep the virtues and enlarge the scope of womanhood,” and “somehow through this mixture of challenge and acceptance, or change and continuity, the True Woman evolved into the New Woman.”<sup>27</sup> These nuances are important and powerful in their own way, allowing for more opportunities for participation and more people, especially women, to take part in both collective and individual forms of resistance. For suffrage activists, like those who worked in the suffrage restaurants or contributed recipes to the suffrage cookbooks, using their preexisting food-related knowledge allowed them to challenge the standard expectations of womanhood while keeping the vestiges of domestic virtues close by. That said, much like the “cult of True Womanhood” excludes many women who aren’t middle and upper-class white women, early feminist models of resistance required further revisions and demonstrate the complex entangling of oppression and “hidden agency.”

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<sup>24</sup>Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, “Introduction: The Entanglement of Power and Resistance,” in *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, edited by D. Haynes and G. Prakash, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

<sup>25</sup>Lilja, 202.

<sup>26</sup>Robyn Thomas and Annette Davies, “What Have the Feminists Done for Us? Feminist Theory and Organizational Resistance” *Organization Articles* 12, no. 5 (2005): 711-740.

<sup>27</sup>Welter, 174.



Wading through these complexities and tackling the issues of “entanglement” is the work of Black feminist scholars who are “not only concerned with oppression, but equally concerned with resistance, activism and politics of empowerment.”<sup>28</sup> While many of the subjects discussed in my research, especially in the first two chapters, are white women, I rely on the inclusive definitions and frameworks of resistance found in Black Feminism that underscore the importance of finding political and cultural agency in the everyday. Particularly poignant in the contemporary digital era of activism, and the final two digitally-focused chapters of this dissertation, are emerging questions of “whether resistance must be recognized by others and whether it must be intentional.”<sup>29</sup> If a cake piped with a political message isn’t posted on Instagram, does it make a difference? What about a bakery who bakes a whole case-ful of cakes piped with political messages, never intending to display them online, but selling them to their local community? As Hollander and Einwohner explain through the creation of a working typology of resistance, the “wide range (as well as the mutual contradiction) of the definitions of resistance” ultimately illustrate “the fact that the concept of resistance is socially constructed and that resisters” and the targets of that resistance and the others who happen to observe them “all participate in this construction.”<sup>30</sup> Building on these foundations and keeping in mind the new “entangled” relationships of power created as a result of our evolving society, definitions of gender, and the digital age, in this research, I define resistance as a range of large and small,

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<sup>28</sup>Minoo Alinia, “On Black Feminist Thought: thinking oppression and resistance through intersectional paradigm,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 13 (2015): 2334-2340; Patricia Hill Collins, “The Difference That Power Makes: Intersectionality and Participatory Democracy,” in Hankivsky, O., Jordan-Zachery, J.S. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Intersectionality in Public Policy*. The Politics of Intersectionality. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019: 167-192.

<sup>29</sup>Jocelyn Hollander and Rachel Einwohner, “Conceptualizing Resistance,” *Sociological Forum* 19, no. 4 (2004): 533-554.

<sup>30</sup>Hollander and Einwohner, 534.

radical and subversive, visible and invisible actions that separate women from the standard social, political, and cultural expectations within their own era.

### Technology as Tool for Resistance

There are many definitions of technology (the Oxford English Dictionary lists seven).<sup>31</sup> And scholars, argues historian of technology Carroll W. Pursell, Jr., each tend to use those definitions differently depending upon their focus and also like to apply the term to “things” as well as “to disembodied ‘knowledge’ and ‘systems’.”<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the study of technology provides a critical lens to view specific moments of American women's history and their food cultures. In an increasingly digital world, paying attention to the way technology impacts access to knowledge, community, and power allows us to see how presumably fixed things, like instructions to bake a cake or the meaning of a cake evolves. Technology scholars like Safiya Noble (*Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, 2018) and Mar Hicks (*Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost Its Edge in Computing*, 2017) demonstrate how technology and the digital world are inherently biased. Technology requires human intervention, and therefore can also be disrupted.<sup>33</sup>

What connects the different generations of food-focused women activists in this work and their “technologies” over time is a shared material culture. These technologies take many forms—suffragist cookbooks, protest signs, women-owned restaurants, menus, posters, Instagram posts, bake sales, cakes, and more—broadening our understanding of the definition of technologies and

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<sup>31</sup>"technology, n.". OED Online. December 2022. Oxford University Press. <https://www-oed-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/Entry/198469?redirectedFrom=technology&>.

<sup>32</sup>Carroll W. Pursell, Jr. “The History of Technology and the Study of Material Culture,” *American Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1983): 308.

<sup>33</sup>Safiya Noble’s *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, New York: New York University Press, 2018; Mar Hicks, *Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost Its Edge in Computing*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017.

the male-centered histories and cultures in which they are most often discussed. I maintain that the term “technology” is central to this study, not simply because the second two chapters focus heavily on role of digital technologies in food-related resistance, but because technology is “an expression of our culture, encoded with our dreams, purposes, environment, insights, and limitations.”<sup>34</sup> It is, according Pursell, Jr., “those things with which Americans do their work and, to a large extent, define themselves as Americans.”<sup>35</sup>

I am not the first to suggest the feminist possibilities of technology or its role in the study of American women’s material culture. Architectural historian Dolores Hayden (who is discussed further as a co-founder of the feminist restaurant Bread and Roses in Chapter 2), wrote about “material feminists” and the importance of technology in women’s history in her book *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (MIT Press, 1981). In *More Work For Mother: The Ironies Of Household Technology From The Open Hearth To The Microwave* (1985), social historian and technology scholar Ruth Schwartz Cowan demonstrated the important, and often problematic, role of technology in the study of domestic labor. And in her exploratory essay on the state of the field, Judith A. McGaw details how scholars of women’s history and culture “although not primarily concerned with technology, have nonetheless increased our awareness of technology’s relationship to women’s industrial, commercial, and domestic labor.”<sup>36</sup> Again in an article “From Virginia Dare to Virginia Slims: Women and Technology in American Life,” Cowan explains

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<sup>34</sup>Pursell, 304.

<sup>35</sup>Pursell, 304.

<sup>36</sup>Judith A. McGaw, “Women and the History of American Technology,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7, no. 4 (1982): 798-828.

how “technological change has been, at best, a mixed blessing” for women and women’s progress.<sup>37</sup>

These histories show in clear, undeniable ways how our relationships with technology differ by gender with women’s lives and labor suffering disproportionately from this disparity. Despite the fact that an overwhelming array of technology is central to American women’s lives and labor, Cowan argues that “we have trained our women to opt out of the technological order as much as we have trained our men to opt into” it.<sup>38</sup> This intentionally gendered social division has led many women to resent being excluded from the “burgeoning capitalist economy” of technology and eschew the field entirely.<sup>39</sup> We can still see similar examples of this today, from low female representation in professional tech-sectors to the gendered language used to differentiate social media content creators. In many ways, this resentment parallels the numerous pushbacks against food and kitchen labor that occurred throughout the women’s movement, most notably in the 1960s and 1970s, when women’s efforts in the world of food, both at home in professional kitchens, were largely invisible. My work builds upon this scholarship, carrying Cowan, McGaw, and Hayden’s frameworks up to the contemporary digital age, and firmly grounding technology in the field of material culture and its inalienably connection to the study of women and food.

### **The Field of Women’s Studies**

The women featured throughout this dissertation—from the nineteenth-century suffrage activists publishing campaign cookbooks to the pastry chefs organizing multimillion dollar

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<sup>37</sup>Ruth Schwartz Cowan, “From Virginia Dare to Virginia Slims: Women and Technology in American Life,” *Technology and Culture* 20, no. 1 (1979): 51–63.

<sup>38</sup>Cowan, 62.

<sup>39</sup>Cowan, 63.

digital charity bake sales today—are all part of a long, shared history. A complex history of ups and downs, wins and losses, resistance and oppression that varies wildly from woman to woman. In the study of that history, investigating what separates some women is just as critical as understanding what connects them. The following sections provide a brief overview of the social, political, and cultural issues that had significant impact in American women’s history and long-lasting effects on the experiences of contemporary American women today.

### Citizenship in the Cult of Womanhood

Race and class have long defined and limited who can claim the “privileges” of womanhood. Parameters for entry into the “cult of True Womanhood,” a term coined by scholar Barbara Welter to describe the nineteenth-century social construction of gender in an article for *American Quarterly* in 1966, drew on prescribed representations of women featured in women’s magazines, religious texts, and other gendered literature.<sup>40</sup> The qualifications for “womanhood” were likened to virtues including “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” each of which translated to a social role: “mother, daughter, sister, wife.”<sup>41</sup> According to Welter, any deviation from these virtues problematized a woman’s claim to womanhood. As one might expect, only a small sliver of society actually checked all these boxes. True women did not work outside the home or in other women’s homes, a qualification that stripped many American and immigrant working class women and girls of their “womanhood.” Women of color were also disqualified, not exclusively on the issue of work, but due to nineteenth-century social definitions of *who* counted as American women. Welter alludes to this when she describes the work of the

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<sup>40</sup>Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 151-174.

<sup>41</sup>Welter, 152.

nineteenth-century True Woman who was obliged to “uphold the pillars of the temple with her frail white hand.”<sup>42</sup> Shirley Yee explains that the influence of the cult of True Womanhood extended to free Black society, though the virtues instead “represented the antithesis of the slave experience” particularly for Black women who had to contend with normalized stereotypes of enslaved women being “sexually promiscuous.”<sup>43</sup> The virtues of True Womanhood ultimately served as a media-driven technology to maintain social order and further create class and race-based divisions throughout the nation.

Over the decades, scholars have revisited Welter’s “cult of True Womanhood,” or the “cult of domesticity” as others have called it, and found that the social expectations of nineteenth-century women were far more complex than the concept of the Cult could fully capture. Historian Mary Louise Roberts explains that while Welter’s use of satire and clear pejoratives (such as the use of the term “cult”) failed to critically analyze the political and cultural impacts of True Womanhood the ideology of female culture.<sup>44</sup> Just a few years after Welter published her article, Gerda Lerner argued that the “cult of true womanhood” served as a vehicle for the elevation of middle-class women in her study of mill factory workers.<sup>45</sup> In her work on the widespread and reciprocal use of the concept of “separate spheres” in history and by historians, Linda Kerber believes that Welter’s work served to reinforce this practice.<sup>46</sup> Studying the writings of middle-class women in nineteenth-century New England, not just what was

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<sup>42</sup>Welter, 152.

<sup>43</sup>Shirley Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860*, Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992.

<sup>44</sup>Mary Louise Roberts, “True Womanhood Revisited,” *Journal of Women’s History* 14, no. 1 (2002): 150-155.

<sup>45</sup>Gerda Lerner, “The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson,” *Midcontinent American Studies Journal*, 10 (1969): 5-15.

<sup>46</sup>Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 9-39.

written *about* them, historian Nancy Cott argued that the “ideology of woman’s sphere formed a necessary stage in the process of shattering the hierarchy of sex” and the a kind of early-feminist consciousness rising that ultimately led to suffrage.<sup>47</sup>

The socioeconomically exclusive “cult” rebranded over the years such as Traditional Womanhood, a concept explored by Amelie Ribieras her research on the rhetoric of anti-ERA activist Phyllis Schlafly, and developed branches like the “cult of motherhood,” another social construction derived from women’s magazines of the nineteenth-century.<sup>48</sup> Another kind of cult for the “New Woman” rose up in response to the conservative ideals of earlier nineteenth-century womanhood. New Women were independent, active in both society and the workforce (especially as more employment opportunities for women opened up), and highly educated.<sup>49</sup> Despite these freedoms, nineteenth-century New Women still lacked enfranchisement, the expectations of sexual purity remained, and the same ideological pitfalls that left out many immigrants, working-class, and women of color endured.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

<sup>48</sup>Amelie Ribieras, “‘Stop Taking Our Privileges’: Phyllis Schlafly’s Narrative of Traditional Womanhood and the Fight for Socioeconomic Hegemony in the 1970s–1980s,” *Journal of American History and Politics* 4 (2021): 37–50; Beth Fowkes Tobin, “‘The tender mother’: The social construction of motherhood and the lady’s magazine,” *Women’s Studies* 18, no. 2-3 (1990): 205-221.

<sup>49</sup>Martha H. Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited, 1894-1930*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008.

<sup>50</sup>A more contemporary instance of the rebranding of “the cult of True Womanhood” is the use of the term “trad wife” which refers to “traditional wife.” While the virtues associated with “trad” wifery are couched in historically conservative gender expectations and domestic responsibilities, the origins of the term are entirely digital born with “trad wife” often taking the form of a hyperlinked hashtag. Devin Proctor explores the rise of this “new” domestic online persona and use of empowered feminist rhetoric within #tradwife communities (“The #Tradwife Persona and the Rise of Radicalized Domesticity,” *Persona Studies* 8, no. 2 (2022): 7-26). It is important to note that while not all “trad wives” identify as alt-right or as white nationalists, the community is deeply connected to these conservative hate groups. This complex intersection is explored further by Proctor in addition to Ashley A. Mattheis in her chapter “#TradCulture: Reproducing whiteness and neo-fascism through gendered discourse online,” in the *Routledge Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness* (Routledge 2021).

## Whiteness

My work focuses on a historical narrative in which the power of whiteness and white supremacy has long excluded women of color. In *Reading Appalachia from left to right: conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County textbook controversy*, Carol Mason traces the evolution of whiteness through the study of white women engaged in resistance. Though Mason's subjects were far-right, conservative counterparts to many of the women I write about, understanding their actions and motivations help unpack the complex landscape of women's resistance and food. Underscoring the fact that whiteness is a cultural construct, Mason explains that "race becomes a matter of character, and less a matter of melanin."<sup>51</sup>

Rafia Zakaria examines both the narrow historical scope of feminism and its whiteness and argues that "this habit of centering the white woman when talking about the emancipation of women of color has a genealogy."<sup>52</sup> Zakaria pokes at this central history by unpacking the cultural discourses and rhetoric that legitimize white women's perceived right to privilege and power. In the landscape of food, white supremacy is reframed in key ways including the use of 'pure' and "refined" ingredients. In *A Mess of Greens* (2011), Elizabeth Engelhardt discusses how Appalachian women with little means were chided by urban, female leaders of settlement schools for using cornmeal in their cornbread and taught instead to use white flour in biscuits and other light breads. Charlotte Biltekoff examines the evolution of food morality and the national politics of defining a 'healthy' meal in *Eating Right in America* (2013). Rebecca Sharpless

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<sup>51</sup>Carol Mason, *Reading Appalachia from left to right: conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County textbook controversy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.

<sup>52</sup>Rafia Zakaria, *Against White Feminism: Notes on Disruption*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2021; Elizabeth Engelhardt, *A Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011; Charlotte Biltekoff, *Eating Right in America: The Cultural Politics of Food and Health*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013; Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.



studies the racial history of domestic work in the American South in *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens* (2013). Zakaria argues that feminists “must work to develop their own genealogies.” An exploration of genealogies, like those that start in home kitchens, local canning groups, and recipe swaps, beyond the picket lines and protests and far from legislating bodies deserves more attention, too. These stories inform the larger body of feminist history and create as Zakaria states, more “robust accounts of other feminisms.”<sup>53</sup>

I also turn to Zakaria's definition of white feminism, a contemporary term to speak about both past and evolving feminist movements:

A white feminist is someone who refuses to consider the role that whiteness and the racial privilege attached to it have played and continue to play in universalizing white feminist concerns, agendas, and beliefs as being those of all of feminism and all of feminists. You do not have to be white to be a white feminist. It is also perfectly possible to be white and feminist and not be a white feminist. The term describes a set of assumptions and behaviors which have been baked into mainstream Western feminism, rather than describing the racial identity of its subjects. At the same time, it is true that most white feminists are indeed white, and that whiteness itself is at the core of white feminism.<sup>54</sup>

This definition addresses the important complexities of feminism, including the obstacle of whiteness and white supremacy.

A crucial subfield to my work on women's labor in both the digital and culinary worlds is feminist geographies, a field of study which seeks to improve women's lives by understanding the sources and spaces of women's oppression. Born of the broader feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, feminist geographies “sought to understand the relationship between gender divisions and spatial divisions, and to challenge their supposed naturalness and

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<sup>53</sup>Rafia Zakaria, *Against White Feminism: Notes on Disruption*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2021.

<sup>54</sup>Rafia Zakaria, *Against White Feminism*, author's note.

legitimacy.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, feminist geographers push back against the idea that places are static with fixed boundaries and the concept of neutral or “natural” spaces. Instead, through a feminist lens, places are dynamic and experienced differently by each person and spaces are products of multiple spheres of influence.<sup>56</sup> While feminist interventions to human geography spanned many spaces and places, one regular site of research was the household and other gendered domestic spheres. Early feminist studies believed that “gendered social relations contributed to the construction of the home as a ‘woman’s place’” and, consequently, formed a “restrictive and oppressive” site as they “reproduce patriarchal norms and social relations.”<sup>57</sup> A feminist geographical approach pushes against the conventional understanding of these feminized spaces, instead believing these to be complex sites of “multiple experiences and expressions,” good and bad, oppression and resistance.<sup>58</sup>

#### Other Women-led Movements of the Nineteenth-Century

A large portion of my research centers on events and movements—specifically, the American suffrage campaigns—of the nineteenth-century. There were, of course, other women-led social reform movements that happened before and alongside suffrage, impacting the campaign for enfranchisement along with the efforts of other movements.<sup>59</sup> The nineteenth-

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<sup>55</sup>A. Rogers, N. Castree, and R. Kitchin, "Feminist geography," In *A Dictionary of Human Geography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>56</sup>Joni Seager and Mona Domosh, *Putting women in place: feminist geographers make sense of the world*, New York: Guilford Publications, 2001; Doreen Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labor: Social Structures and the Geography of Production*, New York: Routledge, 1995; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

<sup>57</sup>Ann M. Oberhauser, Jennifer L. Fluri, Risa Whitson, and Sharlene Mollett, *Feminist Spaces: Gender and Geography in a Global Context*, London: Routledge, 2017.

<sup>58</sup>Oberhauser.

<sup>59</sup>The smaller, however historically important food safety reform movement occurred at the turn of the twentieth-century. Initially started in England a few decades prior in the nineteenth-century, it would take until the first Pure Food and Drugs Act of 1906 for the United States to socially and politically focus on food safety as a national issue.

century temperance movement was closely intertwined with women's fight for suffrage (as detailed further in Chapters 1 and 2) as the anti-alcohol organizations believed that more women would vote for prohibition.<sup>60</sup> Similarly entwined with the campaign for women's rights was the early American labor movement. A complex convergence of issues including rapid industrialization, increased immigration, and growing social disparities threw the US labor movement into action. Some of the first American labor organizing efforts were centered around young women working in mills and other unsafe work environments.<sup>61</sup> Seeking safe working conditions and fair compensation, several of these major nineteenth-century labor movement moments—including the later 1912 immigrant-women led Bread and Roses strike in Lawrence, MA were foundational to feminist movements in the second half of the twentieth-century (see more in Chapter 2). Another women-led cause was the abolition movement, arguably the most impactful social reform movement of the nineteenth-century, which started in the late 1700s. Similar to other nineteenth-century reform movements, abolition was transnational issue, though the United States continued to fight internally over the Atlantic slave trade until the Emancipation Proclamation of 1865 and continues to reckon with the legacy of slavery to this day.<sup>62</sup> Historians Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne argue that a nineteenth-century

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While not nearly as socially impactful as the end of slavery in addition to being a few decades late, the issue of food and drink safety was central to early twentieth-century suffrage movement campaigns and bears a moment here. For more see: Jeffrey Haydu and Tad Skotnicki, *Three layers of history in recurrent social movements: the case of food reform*. *Social Movement Studies* 15, 4 (2016): 345-360.

<sup>60</sup>Holly Berkley Fletcher, *Gender and the American Temperance Movement of the Nineteenth-Century*, London: Routledge, 2008; Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism*, Woodbridge, CT: Macmillan/Twayne Publishers, 1995.

<sup>61</sup>Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

<sup>62</sup>Susan Dudley Gold, *The Women's Rights Movement and Abolitionism*, New York: Cavendish Square Publishing, 2015.

evangelical “belief in the moral salvation of America” brought together antislavery feminists and “traditional abolitionist sisters” in a complex women-led movement.<sup>63</sup>

### Feminist Movement in Metaphors

Like others who write about feminist histories, these complex stories underscore the fact that feminism existed beyond a movement or a particular (and largely arbitrary) beginning and end date. In earlier decades, scholars and activists relied on a “wave” model (hence, first, second...) to describe the ebb and flow of the women's movement over time. While this model helped identify and highlight important movements throughout US history, it proved reductive.<sup>64</sup> The wave model presumed a centralized feminist agenda, that all women from the suffrage era to contemporary feminist activists wanted the same things. This model also flattened the timeline as women and allies were still fighting for their lives and their rights regardless of media coverage.

Many have tried to capture the complexities of American feminist history by creating alternatives to the "wave" metaphor. A decade ago, Nancy Hewitt, feminist scholar and editor of *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, proposed a radio wave served as a better metaphor for women's resistance. Hewitt argued that the earlier wave metaphor failed to capture intersectional experiences and instead "collectively lumped" early feminists and poorly "shaped understandings of the movement in the media and among scholars."<sup>65</sup> It forced women's

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<sup>63</sup>Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2018.

<sup>64</sup>In the article “Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor,” Kathleen A. Laughlin, Julie Gallagher, Dorothy Sue Cobble, Eileen Boris, Premilla Nadasen, Stephanie Gilmore and Leandra Zarnow discuss this “troublesome” metaphor and how it fails to fully capture the “experiences of women of color, men, young people, and others” working in feminism. Kathleen A. Laughlin et al, “Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor,” *Feminist Formations* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 76-135, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40835345>.

<sup>65</sup>Nancy A. Hewitt, *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 2010; Jo Reger, “Finding a Place in History: The Discursive Legacy of the Wave Metaphor and Contemporary Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 43, no. 1 (2017): 193-221; Rahel Kunz, “Windows of Opportunity, Trojan Horses, and Waves of Women on the Move: De-colonizing the Circulation of Feminist Knowledges through Metaphors?” in *The*

experiential narratives into "discrete and separate" parts which were, in reality, connecting, even overlapping. This separation, Hewitt argues, reaffirms the assumption that times between waves were "feminist-free zones" when we know women's work for equality and basic rights never stopped. Radio waves moving at different lengths and frequencies, explained Hewitt, with a "messy multiplicity" of different stations that allow for different feminist perspectives was more accurate. This metaphor works, she argues, because radio waves "coexist, overlap, and intersect."<sup>66</sup> Hewitt's intervention and its connection to technology serves as an intriguing entry point for my own research. I return to Hewitt's radio waves here because the "messy multiplicity" of this metaphor also points to the diverse group of women who engage food as a means of resistance.

### **The Ongoing Women's Movement**

I am writing at this moment when food photos and social media don't really seem all that important. In this past month or so, they were train car derailments in the Ohio River Valley spreading hazardous materials into populated areas as well as the wide-reaching water supply.<sup>67</sup> Eight-months after the reversal of Roe vs. Wade, and many abortion bans across the nation, conservatives in the North Carolina legislature are now attempting to restrict access to federally approved and life-saving abortion pills.<sup>68</sup> There have been over 70 mass shootings across the

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*Politics of Feminist Knowledge Transfer*, eds. Maria Bustelo, Lucy Ferguson, and Maxime Forest, London: Palgrave MacMillan (2019): 99-117; Stefan Helmreich, "The Genders of Waves," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 45, no 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2017): 29-51. In "The Genders of Waves" Helmreich unpacks the oceanic-inspiration for the wave metaphor and how the ocean has been gendered and naturalized as both a feminine and feminist symbol.

<sup>66</sup>Hewitt, *No Permanent Waves*, 7-8.

<sup>67</sup>Simon Ducroquet, Niko Kommenda, and John Muyskens, "Here's what the derailed Ohio train was carrying — and what was burned," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2023/02/18/ohio-train-derailment-visual-timeline/>.

<sup>68</sup>Jennifer Shutt, "Attorneys general from 23 GOP-led states back suit seeking to block abortion pill," *NC Policy Watch*, February 14, 2023, <https://ncpolicywatch.com/2023/02/14/attorneys-general-from-23-gop-led-states-back-suit-seeking-to-block-abortion-pill/>.

nation since the start of 2023 and three more Black men have been shot and killed by police.<sup>69</sup> Across the nation, food prices rose over 10% in the fall of 2022 and continued to rise despite the slow of inflation.<sup>70</sup> And Twitter, which was bought by billionaire business magnate Elon Musk in the fall of 2022, is slowly burning from the inside thanks to corporate and algorithmic changes resulting in massive security breaches, user migration, and the degradation of the apps functionality. Obviously, these events are not equal in their concern, but are nonetheless real aspects of a very shifted society. Attending to the one event within my expertise, the slow death of Twitter has resulted in a kind of digital renovation as users flee the app and seek shelter in other virtual landscapes (of which there are too many to list, especially as many of them will not survive the crush of new users who only want for Twitter 2.0).<sup>71</sup> This has, however, also encouraged users to rethink their relationships with other existing platforms, including Instagram, or dive into new virtual media like the video-rich world of TikTok.<sup>72</sup> It is, honestly, a very strange and scary time to study women's resistance through the lens of food.

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<sup>69</sup>Daniel Victor, "U.S. Mass Shootings in 2023: A Partial List," *The New York Times*, last updated February 20, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/mass-shootings-2023.html>; "Police Shootings Database," *The Washington Post*, last updated February 15, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/>.

<sup>70</sup>Kelly Anne Smith, "Why Are Food Prices Still Rising?" *Forbes*, September 21, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/personal-finance/why-are-food-prices-still-rising/>.

<sup>71</sup>Rumman Chowdhury, "I Watched Elon Musk Kill Twitter's Culture From the Inside," *The Atlantic*, February 17, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2023/02/elon-musk-twitter-ethics-algorithm-biases/673110/>.

<sup>72</sup>Following in Twitter (i.e., Elon Musk's) capitalistic footsteps, Meta has just announced that it will also start charging users on Instagram and Facebook a monthly fee for "blue check" verification status. The coveted blue check has several purposes, including the verification of credentialed journalists, government accounts, and persons of authority, but it also provides a level of impersonation protection for accounts that have it. The cultural clout of the blue check is now in question if users will be forced to pay for the service. Armando Tinoco, "Meta Verified: Paid Verification Service For Instagram & Facebook Rolling Out Following Twitter's Footsteps," *Deadline*, February 19, 2023, <https://deadline.com/2023/02/meta-verified-paid-verification-service-instagram-facebook-rolling-out-twitter-blue-1235265302/>.

## From where I stand

My decision to be a better participant in the contemporary women's movements and a scholar of other women and allies, too, was largely influenced by growing up in a landscape of resistance. I was born and raised in a conservative town in Texas driven and dedicated by the conservative Reconstruction-era land-grant university for which it was named. I now work in Chapel Hill, North Carolina where centuries of systemic racism came to a head as my graduate program began in the fall of 2016. I've seen Confederate statues fall and my peers attacked and surveilled by police. We have witnessed rising gun violence and domestic terrorism encouraged by a dangerous and oppressive U.S. president with lasting sociopolitical impacts. These fractures lay atop a strong patriarchal foundation of oppression based on race, gender, and class that has troubled the American South since the first European colonizers reached its shores. My dissertation research does not focus on the South, but as I studied how women use food as a technology of power, I was constantly reminded of the generations of women who built the South. The Black and Indigenous women whose hands and minds shaped southern foodways, and the white women born and raised under white male supremacy who used food to support their own activism. Today, women in the South who work at the intersection of food, media, and feminism argue the South's problems are national, even global problems. This isn't a dissertation solely about the South, but it was written with historic southern working women in mind, those who endured and resisted while making sure their families and communities were fed by foods from daily cornbread to memorable cakes.

Before returning to graduate school and starting the research that would become my dissertation project, I spent five years working in the food media industry as a food writer, recipe developer, and photographer for national print and digital publications as well as various brands

and organizations. At the same time, I was attending the Gastronomy Program at Boston University to obtain my MLA in Gastronomy and Food Studies. Starting in 2014, I was working at the intersections of the burgeoning field of food media and social media, focusing primarily on the visual platform of Instagram. As I explain more in Chapter 3, my identity as an Instagram “influencer”, and subsequent deep dive into the logistical nuances and culture of Instagram, officially launched. Almost simultaneously, my new very influential Instagram status was met with my very intense curiosity for why it happened and what cultural, social, and gender implications it might hold. Over the past decade, I have honed my experience as a food journalist with numerous bylines and assignments combining my academic training with my previous experiences in the field. My archival work and previous historical training give me the ability to identify, analyze, and speculate on historical recipes from numerous texts as well as their contemporary evolutions. Upon returning to graduate school, my work in social media has pivoted from strategic management for myself and other clients to better understanding what these platforms mean for culture and society and how we can use them as researchers in academia and in journalism. Altogether, these professional and academic experiences allow me to critically analyze the history and ongoing digitally refocused legacy of women’s resistance through food.

### The Changing Digital Landscape

The "digital turn" of the early 2000s resulted in an exponentially dynamic shift in how Americans interact with digital technology on a daily basis.<sup>73</sup> We learned to participate in the

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<sup>73</sup>Barbara Junge, *The Digital Turn: design in the era of interactive technologies*, Zurich, Germany: Park Books, 2012; Yvonne Liebermann, “Born digital: The Black lives matter movement and memory after the digital turn,” *Memory Studies* 14, no. 4 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/175069802095979>; John Given, “Narrating the Digital Turn: data deluge, technomethodology, and other likely tales,” *Qualitative Sociology Review* 2, no. 1 (2006): 54-65, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.2.1.05>.



digital landscape to both collaborate and create businesses. Women-centered food entrepreneurship is central to this digital landscape. After a decade-long move into the digital era, the 2020 pandemic immersed much of our nation into a near-complete digitized world. Thousands of Americans became more technologically tethered than ever. Overnight, schools, workplaces, and many methods of socialization moved online. The popular video teleconferencing software program Zoom, used for work, school, and informal virtual gatherings alike, acquired more than 2 million users in the first few months of the pandemic versus the 1.9 million downloads from the entire year of 2019.<sup>74</sup> Pre-pandemic food delivery apps such as Grubhub, DoorDash, and Uber Eats more than doubled their business during 2020 and many restaurants and grocery stores revamped or initiated delivery and curbside service options managed through various digital platforms.<sup>75</sup> The pandemic also caused a sharp increase in household purchases of technology and techcessories such as new computers and smartphones, selfie-lights, greenscreens, and specially-made tripods. This consumer wave created more "first adopters" of technology than ever before.<sup>76</sup>

As digital technologies replaced high-rise office buildings and empty schoolrooms, our relationship with social media and new technologies offered by pandemic-boosted platforms changed, too. Social media became a lifeline for isolated and locked down Americans. The average screen time increased across the nation, bringing relevancy back to platforms such as

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<sup>74</sup>Jordan Novet, "Zoom has added more videoconferencing users this year than in all of 2019 thanks to coronavirus, Bernstein says," *CNBC*, February 26, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/02/26/zoom-has-added-more-users-so-far-this-year-than-in-2019-bernstein.html>.

<sup>75</sup>Levi Sumagaysay, "The pandemic has more than doubled food-delivery apps' business. Now what?" *MarketWatch*, November 27, 2020, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/the-pandemic-has-more-than-doubled-americans-use-of-food-delivery-apps-but-that-doesnt-mean-the-companies-are-making-money-11606340169>.

<sup>76</sup>Mojo Vision, "New Report: Spike in Consumer Tech Use During COVID is Accelerating Tech Adoption," *Business Wire*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20200715005252/en/New-Report-Spike-in-Consumer-Tech-Use-During-COVID-is-Accelerating-Tech-Adoption>.

Facebook whose user base declined in the previous year.<sup>77</sup> Facebook and Instagram saw significant changes in user interactions and rolled out new features as well as "safety measures"—hashtag censorship and built-in flags for political and pandemic-related topics—in attempts to counter the simultaneous deluge of false and problematic content. Newer platforms like TikTok quickly dominated the social media landscape, luring millions of new users (mostly from generation z) to a space that both operated and *felt* different than other traditional forms of social media.<sup>78</sup>

This massive shift in the digital landscape inspired a chain reaction of at home creativity and the revival of self-sufficiency skills, as well a rise in digital social activism. From political debates in quarantine cooking groups on Facebook to sourdough baking classes and a world-wide digital bake sale started in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter demonstrations, locked down Americans with the privilege to stay home (rather than essential and front-line workers) increasingly recognized the power of food and used digital platforms to wield it.

### The State of American Women

As the nation abruptly shut down due to the global pandemic in the spring of 2020, women were more likely than men to upend their work schedules to accommodate new domestic needs including childcare as well as home or virtual school.<sup>79</sup> Job sectors that were

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<sup>77</sup>Rani Molla, "Posting less, posting more, and tired of it all: How the pandemic has changed social media," *Vox*, March 1, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/recode/22295131/social-media-use-pandemic-covid-19-instagram-tiktok>.

<sup>78</sup>Ingrid Volkmer, "Social Media and Covid-19: A global study of digital crisis interaction among Gen Z and millennials," University of Melbourne, Australia and World Health Organization, 2021, [https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/3958684/Volkmer-Social-Media-and-COVID.pdf](https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/3958684/Volkmer-Social-Media-and-COVID.pdf).

<sup>79</sup>Nicole Bateman and Martha Ross, "Why has COVID-19 been especially harmful for working women?" *The Brookings Institution*, October 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/why-has-covid-19-been-especially-harmful-for-working-women/>.

overwhelmingly staffed by women, most notably women of color, were also more likely to significantly reduce workers, available shifts, or shut their doors completely.<sup>80</sup> In February 2020, more than 2 million women left the labor force. Women of color overwhelmingly accounted for this decrease with nearly 600,000 Hispanic women and over 500,000 Black women for close to half the total job loss.<sup>81</sup> Compared to previous recessions and historic declines in the labor sector, this national decrease most impacted service sectors including food-related jobs in restaurants, grocery stores, institutional food service, tourism, and hospitality in which women account for the majority of employees.<sup>82</sup> Women cooking our food, serving drinks, staffing grocery store tills, and working in food-related industry were forced from their jobs due to a lack of childcare, restaurant and bar closures, or dangerous workplaces that failed to prioritize women's health long before the pandemic. The digital landscape offered a work solution for many women, making space for new entrepreneurial ventures and a community of shared grief, frustration, and possibility. The pandemic starkly revealed, again, that women, especially women of color, remain disadvantaged as mothers and as essential workers. In what follows, I bridge

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<sup>80</sup>Rakesh Kochhar and Jesse Bennett, "U.S. labor market inches back from the COVID-19 shock, but recovery is far from complete," *Pew Research Center*, April 14, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/14/u-s-labor-market-inches-back-from-the-covid-19-shock-but-recovery-is-far-from-complete/>; Rakesh Kochhar, "Unemployment rose higher in three months of COVID-19 than it did in two years of the Great Recession," *Pew Research Center*, June 11, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/11/unemployment-rose-higher-in-three-months-of-covid-19-than-it-did-in-two-years-of-the-great-recession/>.

<sup>81</sup>Kochhar and Bennett, "U.S. labor market inches back from the COVID-19 shock."

<sup>82</sup>According to a 2022 study by the National Restaurant Association, 63% of entry-level restaurant workers are women (Jonathan Maze, "Women Dominate the Restaurant Workforce, Except at the Top," *Restaurant Business*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/workforce/women-dominate-restaurant-workforce-except-top>); A survey of essential workers conducted by *The New York Times* shortly after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 showed that "more than two-thirds of the workers at grocery store checkouts and fast food counters are women" (Campbell Robertson and Robert Gebeloff, "How Millions of Women Became the Most Essential Workers in America," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/18/us/coronavirus-women-essential-workers.html>); and a 2020 review from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics found that women accounted for 53% of the hospitality workforce (Michelle Russen, Mary Dawson, and Juan M. Madera, "Gender diversity in hospitality and tourism top management teams: A systematic review of the last 10 years," *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 95 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2021.102942>).

women's food-related technologies from the past to the present to examine how this story continues to evolve within and without the digital landscape.

## **Mixed Methods**

For this interdisciplinary dissertation combining feminist studies, food studies, American studies, and digital humanities, I relied on archival work, literary and media analysis, oral histories, first-person participant observation (autoethnography), and digital ethnography. This research was conducted across three time periods.

The first was in 2018, during which I learned that my main archive, the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College at Harvard University would undergo renovations and severe archival restrictions. This same year, Instagram (my biggest source of original digital data) shut down its public API (Application Programming Interface). APIs are how different apps talk to each other. Access now required not only the right tools for parsing and understanding the API, but permission, too. That permission was largely reserved for big businesses and corporations (not individual researchers like me). This now required data collection align with more participant observation style methods (which, of course, is slower and manual). I did request and was granted access to Twitter's API under the Twitter Developer Platform that is available for programmers as well as researchers. I started collecting data on specific hashtags, but the process was very buggy and didn't really capture the qualitative data I had hoped to incorporate. Additionally, the access kept changing and my specific case studies use of Twitter proved to be less substantial compared to Instagram. In order to parse this data through the access I was allowed, I realized I would have needed to employ problematic ethnographic practices, keywords and hashtags that triggered certain responses. This process of getting data from the API using a coded script is called data scraping, the code literally scrapes through the data to get one specific

instance largely dismissing and throwing away contextual data that informs the whole. With all these things in mind, I started questioning the need for this kind of technological intervention in my research. Access to this data was steeped in capitalist rhetoric and upheld anti-feminist systems that were the antithesis to what I intended to use it for. This data wasn't appropriate for my research question. This research period also ended with the birth of my second child and the beginning of maternity leave from my research project and my PhD program.

The second period of research involved another trip to the now-renovated Schlesinger Library. This fruitful visit provided numerous historical communication materials, publications, cookbooks, zines, and private papers which supplemented the first two chapters discussing the long women's movement, suffrage, and the history of women-owned restaurants. Literary and media analysis of these materials allowed me to gather a large quantity of written and visual messaging related to resistance and women's empowerment across several decades and regions. Being in the archives also gave me a delightful foil to the digital data, individual's public curated archives, I was analyzing on social media. Though the sources differ wildly in both historic scope and rigor, this juxtaposition helped me think through what traditional archives might be missing and what will be saved from these "digital archives" we store in our pockets and contribute to nearly every day. I conducted several oral history interviews with members of the food media community that ultimately could not be shared publicly due to unforeseen conflicts of interest. One interview proved ethically concerning for my future employment in the food media industry and I chose not to share it. I conducted another interview with two authors of an activism-centered baking cookbook released in 2020. Shortly after release, their cookbook received substantial criticism from women in the food community and I was asked not to share substantial parts our interview, which ultimately rendered the oral history unusable for my

current research. On social media platforms including Instagram and Twitter, I conducted digital media analysis of users' feeds, posts, captions, metadata including hashtags and engagement analytics, and comments. This analysis was combined with first-person participant observation (digital autoethnography) while managing my own social media feeds, interacting with other users in the digital food media community, and moderating and/or reading comments on my own posts or others. This second period of research was cut short by global pandemic starting in March 2020. Between March 2020 and August 2021, public schools were closed and I was forced to take a leave-of-absence from my PhD program in order to stay home with my two small children.

My third period of research began in August 2021 and involved a very different social media landscape than the one I started with back in 2018. APIs were closed, metadata practices changed, and algorithmic shifts had created new obstacles (i.e., feeds were no longer chronological and hashtags links often failed to register) for ethnographic observation. TikTok, a relatively new platform, was growing in popularity. I conducted one final almost serendipitous oral history after returning to original archival materials sourced back in 2018 and finding the name of a fellow food scholar hidden between menu listings. Parts of her interview are shared in Chapter 2. I share these anecdotal details of my methodological process to make clear that the accumulation of information was not straightforward or linear and required numerous pivots along the way. Ultimately these obstacles impressed the importance of thorough qualitative and quantitative methods when and wherever possible.

## **Foundations & Moving Forward**

This dissertation builds on the foundational work of scholars who center women's voices and their food-related labor. Women studies scholar Ann Romines' *The Home Plot: Women,*

*Writing, and Domestic Ritual* (1992) underscore the role of women's literature and the power of communication within and throughout the female network. American studies scholar Psyche Williams-Forsen, whose text *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, & Power* (2006) was my first introduction to food studies as a junior scholar, and a groundbreaking study of the power of Black women's food centered labor and the possibilities of women-led resistance.<sup>83</sup>

The field of food studies has rapidly grown and matured since its inception in the 1960s and 1970s. My work is indebted to the scholars who came before me and from their diverse fields paved a path through the academic world for the study of food and all it entails. As food scholars Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik discuss in their text *Food and Culture: A Reader* (3rd edition, Routledge, 2013), food studies scholars once had to defend their research and justify the study of food and foodways, similar to the trials many women and gender scholars faced when researching domestic life and other topics that were once considered antithetical to the advancement of women's studies. Additional important texts in the study of foodways include Paul Freedman's *Why Food Matters* (Yale University Press 2021), the edited collection *American Appetites: A Documentary Reader* (University of Arkansas 2014) edited by Jennifer Jensen Wallach and Lindsey R. Swindall, Lauren F. Klein's *An Archive of Taste: Race and Eating in the Early United States* (University of Minnesota Press 2020), and the foundational text *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Pantheon Books 1989) by Susan Strasser. Social perspectives on food in the United States are similarly

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<sup>83</sup>Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work For Mother: The Ironies Of Household Technology From The Open Hearth To The Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Ann Romines, *The Home Plot: Women, Writing, and Domestic Ritual* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); Psyche Williams-Forsen, whose text *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, & Power* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

useful to this work including Donovan Conley and Justine Eckstein's *Cookery: Food Rhetorics and Social Production* (University of Alabama Press 2020), Jeffrey Haydu's *Upsetting Food: Three Eras of Food Protest in the United States* (Temple University Press 2021), and Jennifer Jensen Wallach's *How America Eats: A Social History of U.S. Food and Culture* (Rowman & Littlefield 2012).

Though my research extends beyond the American south, many of the issues discussed throughout these chapters, including the 2022 reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and the subsequent abortion bans that followed, impact southern women more directly than others across the nation. I rely on the works of Marcie Cohen Ferris including both *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (UNC Press 2014) and *Edible North Carolina: A Journey Across a State of Flavor* (UNC Press 2022), Carrie Helms Tippen's *Inventing Authenticity: How Cookbook Writers Redefine Southern Identity* (University of Arkansas Press 2018), and Rebecca Sharpless' *Grain and Fire: A History of Baking in the American South* (UNC Press 2022) to better understand women's experiences in southern food history.

Other important texts at the intersection of gender studies and food studies include Emily Contois' *Diners, Dudes, and Diets: How Gender and Power Collide in Food Media and Culture* (UNC Press 2020) and the essay collection *Women on Food* edited by food journalist Charlotte Druckman (Abrams 2019). Women's food-related labor is central to the texts *Front of the House, Back of the House: Race and Inequality in the Lives of Restaurant Workers* (New York University Press 2020) by Eli Revelle Yano Wilson and Susan Strasser's *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (Henry Holt and Company 2000). Kyla Tompkins' *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (New York University Press 2012) and Jennifer Jensen Wallach's *Dethroning the Deceitful Pork Chop: Rethinking African American Foodways from*



*Slavery to Obama* (University of Arkansas Press 2015) also address gender through the lens of African American experiences in United States food history.

Also, beyond the scope of my immediate research, but nevertheless important to our evolving understanding of food studies and food history in the United States, is a robust new category of work addressing Black Food Geographies. This includes Monica White's *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement* (UNC Press 2018), Ashanté M. Reese's *Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access in Washington, D.C.* (UNC Press 2019), *Everybody Eats: Communication and the Paths to Food Justice* (University of California Press 2021) by Marianne LeGreco and Niesha Douglas, Natalie Baszile's public-facing text *We are Each Others' Harvest: Celebrating African American Farmers, Land, and Legacy* (Harper Collins 2021), and Psyche Williams-Forsen highly anticipated *Eating While Black: Food Shaming and Race in America* (UNC Press 2022). Adjacent to my study of women's food history and technology are a variety of other landscapes in which similar forms of resistance and agency occurred. These fields include home economics, agricultural extension, blogging, newspapers, and radio.<sup>84</sup>

Because this research spans several centuries, with specific moments highlighted as informative case studies, I use a variety of sources from nineteenth-century cookbooks and private correspondence to digital-first visuals and hyperlinked hashtags. The chapters that follow

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<sup>84</sup>For more on these other well-studied landscapes, see: Danielle Dreilinger, *The Secret History of Home Economics: How Trailblazing Women Harnessed the Power of Home and Changed the Way We Live*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2021; Lynne Anderson Rieff, "Rousing the people of the land": Home demonstration work in the deep South, 1914-1950, Auburn, AL: Auburn University, 1995; Elzbieta Lepkowska-White, "The business of blogging: Effective approaches of women food bloggers," *Journal of Foodservice Business Research* 21, no. 3 (2018): 257-279; Tisha DeJmanee, "Food Porn" as Postfeminist Play: Digital Femininity and the Female Body on Food Blogs," *Television & New Media* 17, no. 5 (2015): 429-448; Kimberly Wilmot Voss, *The Food Section: Newspaper Women and the Culinary Community*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014; Kristin Skoog and Alexander Badenoch, "Women and radio: sounding out new paths in women's history," *Women's History Review* 29, no. 2 (2020): 177-182; Rachel Seidman, *Speaking of Feminism: Today's Activists on the Past, Present, and Future of the U.S. Women's Movement*, Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2019.

traverse the legacy of women's complex relationship to food as they turned disempowerment to enfranchisement through technologies and other structures of resistance.

The first chapter, "'Sure-fire vote-getter food:' Sister Suffrage Cookbooks, Commodified Feminism, and the Empowering Infrastructure of Publication Technologies," examines the history of the early stages of the feminist movement and food-related publications. Through the analysis of analog food-related literature, including cookbooks, zines, and recipe pamphlets, I look at how publication technologies from printing to distribution empowered and amplify women's voices.

Chapter 2, "'Where men go, women are crowded out': The Evolution of Power and Resistance of Women-owned Restaurants" I argue that, in addition to print and digital publications, women use the occupation of space as a means of resistance. This study begins with suffrage-era food pop-ups before the digital turn and then shifts to women-owned restaurants and how these spaces became centers for social and political resistance. This chapter also serves as a historic overview of food-related activism which laid the groundwork for the food-centric digital resistance movements to come. The public-centered history discussed in this chapter serves as a helpful foil in the subsequent fourth chapter which unpacks home and digital-based food labor.

In Chapter 3, "Digitizing Domesticity: Instagram Influencer turned Instagram Scholar," jumps into contemporary food-related resistance involving a variety of digital technologies including several social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. This section also establishes a short glossary of terms with explanations of concepts including "born-digital," as well as an in-depth analysis of the hashtag (#) as it relates to the contemporary digital world and a discussion on how this technology has allowed women a new means of community

building, communication, and influence. A unifying theme throughout this section is the sophistication of women's labor, how this interpretation has evolved over time, and the ways in which society evaluates this labor when in digital form.

The fourth and final chapter, “Cupcake feminism: How Cottage Industry Reform, Radical Bake Sales, and Repackaging Baked Goods Create New Forms of Digital and IRL Resistance” pulls together women's resistance movements throughout American history, focusing on the ways women navigate the liminal space between virtual and physical and the use of food as a form of community building and organizing in both the digital and real worlds. This chapter explores the evolution of the legal and logistical implications of cottage industry in relation to food production and how this home-based economy shifted dramatically during the global pandemic in 2020. While these events and acts of resistance might ultimately occur in real life, their efficacy and impact heavily relied on the use of digital spaces and technologies. This discussion of the contemporary moment of food resistance situated in the digital landscape carries through to the conclusion where the focus recenters on the precarities of women's food resistance.

In the conclusion, “Pretty Shitty Cakes: On Baking Forward Out of the Past and Updating the Feminist Recipe” I reflect on this long cultural study and look forward, to new virtual spaces and approaches, as well as the limitations these landscapes still face. Together, these chapters demonstrate the importance of studying women's food work into and beyond the digital age. As women continue to fight different forms of oppression that cross lines of color, class, and gender identity in America and throughout the world, food-related activism and economies will grow as cross-cultural tools of resistance and empowerment.

## CHAPTER 1: "SURE-FIRE VOTE-GETTER FOOD:" SISTER SUFFRAGE COOKBOOKS, COMMODIFIED FEMINISM, AND THE EMPOWERING INFRASTRUCTURE OF PUBLICATION TECHNOLOGIES

The well-studied nineteenth-century cookbook *What Mrs. Fisher knows about old southern cooking* (1881), written by Abby Fisher, a formerly enslaved woman from Mobile, Alabama, and later a respected chef and caterer, was published by the Women's Co-Operative Printing Office based in San Francisco, California.<sup>85</sup> Long considered the first cookbook written by an African-American, we now know that Malinda Russell's *Domestic Cook Book* debuted several decades earlier in 1866. In her preface, Fisher admitted her hesitation to writing a cookbook in which she discusses that her inability to read or write caused her "to doubt whether [she] would be able to present a book that would give perfect satisfaction."<sup>86</sup> Fisher dictated most of the book but details and investigations about the collaborative effort of the cookbook cease there.<sup>87</sup> If we instead start with the publisher's details, we learn that the Women's Co-Operative Printing Union (WCPU) opened up a printing office in 1868 under the direction of Mrs. Agnes B. Peterson. The WCPU published "large quantities of ephemera, billheads, legal briefs, and books," including a journal called *Sunday Evening Mercury* which was edited by Mrs. Emily A. Pitts.<sup>88</sup> After purchasing the journal, Pitts changed its name to *The Pioneer* and refocused the publication on

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<sup>85</sup>Publisher's details and address include: San Francisco: Women's Co-Operative Printing Office, 420, 424 & 430 Montgomery Street. (Additional location details: [http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Historical\\_Locations\\_of\\_San\\_Francisco\\_Women\\_Printers](http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Historical_Locations_of_San_Francisco_Women_Printers)).

<sup>86</sup>Abby Fisher and Katherine Golden Bitting Collection on Gastronomy, *What Mrs. Fisher knows about old southern cooking*, San Francisco: Women's Co-operative Printing Office, 1881. Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/08023680/>.

<sup>87</sup>The majority of what we know about Abby Fisher is thanks to the work of historian Karen Hess and food writer Toni Tipton-Martin (*Jubilee: Two Centuries of African American Cookbooks*, University of Texas Press, 2015). Hess edited the modern edition of *What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking* (Applewood Books 1995).

<sup>88</sup>Roger Levenson, *Women in Printing: Northern California, 1857-1890* (Santa Barbara, CA: Capra Press, 1994).

issues related to women's suffrage.<sup>89</sup> She later handed leadership over to another editor and became an advocate for the women's movement, creating The Woman's Pacific Coast Publishing Company, which provided training and employment to women.<sup>90</sup> Editor Mrs. ~~Mrs.~~ Lizzie G. Richmond took over in the 1870s and was soon aided by her sons. During her tenure, Richmond relocated the WCPU to rooms on the second floors of 420-424 Montgomery Street.<sup>91</sup>

In addition to *What Mrs. Fisher knows about old southern cooking*, other notable books published by Richmond include *Clayton's Quaker Cook-Book Being a Practical Treatise on the Culinary Art Adapted to the Tastes and Wants of all Classes* by H.J. Clayton in 1883, *Healing Power of Mind: a treatise on mind-cure : with original views on the subject : and complete instructions for practice, and self-treatment* by Julia Anderson Root in 1884, and *Life and adventures of James Williams, a fugitive slave, with a full description of the Underground railroad* by another former enslaved person named James Williams in 1873.

With these important contextual details, we can connect *What Mrs. Fisher knows about old southern cooking* with other critical efforts of women's resistance during the same time frame. The fact that WCPU published the work of an African American woman indicates that the publishing house was not only pro-suffrage, but advocated for equal suffrage for all women, rather than the single-issue platform that prioritized white women's ability to vote. While Fisher

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<sup>89</sup>The reference to "pioneers" here is part of a larger patriotic narrative used to reinforce white supremacy. Within the context of suffrage, this rhetoric helped alienate women of color from the work towards enfranchisement. See more in Brenda Rink, "Pioneers and Patriots: Race, Gender, and Historical Memory in California, 1875-1915." Order No. 3415579, Stanford University, 2010, <http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/pioneers-patriots-race-gender-historical-memory/docview/734653809/se-2>.

<sup>90</sup>In 1869, Wells Fargo banker JKS Lantham, who had a history of helping women become business owners, "co-signed incorporation documents" for the Women's Co-Operative Printing Union and that "the Co-operative then got Wells Fargo business, printing checks for the bank." Wells Fargo, "History," <https://www.wellsfargohistory.com/timeline/>.

<sup>91</sup>This same location is the site of a historic branch of Wells Fargo Bank.

avoids any direct language related to women's empowerment or the suffrage movement, that she, a formerly enslaved person, published a cookbook at all is in itself a radical and profound action of resistance. Coupling this cookbook with their numerous printed materials related to suffrage, the WCPU demonstrated how publication infrastructures were useful technologies for spreading messages of resistance to multiple demographics, namely the majority of women whose time and work was focused on domestic spaces.

### **Publication Technologies**

This chapter investigates the technologies women used to publish and profit from, be it financially or by another lucrative means, their food-centric messages of resistance. One of the major examples in this chapter is community cookbooks, specifically those related to particular social movements as opposed to those that merely raised funds for a community project, such as cookbooks produced and published by church groups.<sup>92</sup> The communities in this research range from atheist communes to national women's organizations and extend from the earliest publication technologies of a newly established United States to contemporary twenty-first century female-forward cookbooks which were published as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump and a response to his actions and policies regarding women, immigrants, and disenfranchised communities.

Another focal point of this chapter highlights the publications and their corresponding technologies that marked and continue to mark major flashpoints in the long women's movement, starting with the earliest cookbook related to American suffrage, the numerous sister-

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<sup>92</sup>This differentiation is not to diminish the importance of church-related community cookbooks, but rather to focus on a different and less studied set of texts that gather around particular social and political movements rather than religious efforts. That said, religion still plays a significant role in this discussion and was often historically entwined with issues of sexuality, health, womanhood, and domesticity.

publications that were compiled under the same political duress, and how these communities utilized similar or different publication technologies to suit the particular needs of their community.<sup>93</sup>

Understanding the infrastructure of publication technologies is equally as important as unpacking the language, ingredients, and recipes written within these cookbooks. This chapter looks at individual publishers, publication houses, and distribution methods, as well as the potential sponsors and investors that enable cookbooks to reach their specific audiences. These details inform a broader and historically relevant understanding of the long women's movement and the genre of women's domestic writing through the publishing technologies used to share their food-related messages of resistance.

### **Commodity Feminism**

These historical antecedents are similarly important for understanding the foundations upon which contemporary movements of commodified feminisms are built. The term *commodity feminism*, while plausibly applicable to generations of women's resistance efforts and related material objects and events, has only recently become a named concept by which we can further critically analyze feminist movements. The digital turn has given birth to new interpretations of feminism as well as subsequent social and material goods that reinforce and communicate the various messages of resistance. Other important relevant terms in this discussion include “#femvertising,” “marketplace feminism,” and “commodity feminism,” each describing the production and consumption of feminism. As defined by Goldman, Heath, and Smith in their

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<sup>93</sup>Unlike like *The Woman suffrage cook book*, a publication associated with the national women's movement, other cookbooks, such as *The Original Washington Women's Cook Book* which is discussed at length later in this chapter, included specific sections suited to the particular needs of their demographic and geographic community. In addition to specialized chapters on "Sailor's Recipes" and "Mountaineer's Recipes," *The Original Washington Women's Cook Book* also included a section on traditional German cuisine featuring recipes donated by the area's numerous German immigrants, a cultural group that played a pivotal role in the region's foodways.

1991 journal article, “commodity feminism presents feminism as a style—a semiotic abstraction—a set of visual sign values that say who you are” which aim to capitalize on the feminist discourse of the current social culture.<sup>94</sup> Applied to both historical and contemporary examples, this interpretation of feminism is purposeful, curated, and can be argued as a superficial packaging of a social movement to appease both advertisers and consumers alike. While there are numerous instances that prove the insincerity of commodified feminism, I argue that it can serve as a strategic tool within a society that limits the economic and cultural mobility of women. Historically, commodifying feminism through the mass-publication of suffrage cookbooks allowed activists to operate in a space already made more hospitable to women and access to an untapped market of potential supporters. Using food as a medium also allowed women to demonstrate their expertise, their extensive knowledge of food safety and nutrition, and their agility in speaking to public consumers about these issues.<sup>95</sup>

Throughout the long nineteenth-century and into the contemporary era, this commodification includes numerous interpretations on feminist discourse ranging from failed attempts at the political relevancy of women’s social clubs to modern cookbooks whose proceeds are donated to women’s health-focused groups such as Planned Parenthood. This long history demonstrates the complexity of commodified feminism and the role that publication technologies played in further expanding the definition of what it means to be a feminist and the messages of women’s resistance.

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<sup>94</sup>Robert Goldman, Deborah Heath, and Sharon L. Smith, “Commodity Feminism,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 8, no. 3 (1991): 337, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039109366801>.

<sup>95</sup>Jessica Derleth, “‘Kneading Politics’: Cookery and the American Woman Suffrage Movement,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 17, no. 3 (2018): 450-474).



## Mass Messaging

These messages began to appear in mass publication during the early stages of the American suffrage movement. Suffrage organizers were eager to highlight how joining or supporting the movement did not necessarily require women to abandon their femininity. Anti-suffragists specifically targeted the movement and what they interpreted as a purposeful distancing from traditional domestic roles, arguing that the vote would destroy the sanctity of the American household. This concern for the domestic ideal was largely limited to white, affluent families—reiterated endlessly through anti-suffrage ephemera including postcards, political cartoons, and packaged goods advertisements that featured white women, white men, and white children. People of color, working-class whites, and immigrants had long been integral members of the domestic and industrial labor forces and knew too well the complications of resistance and their lack of political agency. Suffrage movements were similarly complicated and often lacked integrated membership let alone meaningful platforms that addressed racism and classism. Nevertheless, studying suffrage activists' efforts to change the political and social landscape and the technology utilized to those ends is useful for understanding their larger influence on women's resistance throughout history.

Long before the suffrage efforts of the latter half of the nineteenth-century, movements related to equal rights and women's liberation were already making noise in state and federal legislatures. In the 1770s, white women lost the right to vote in New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. The first official women's rights convention, the Seneca Falls Convention, was held in 1838. Activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton proposed women's suffrage to an excited and receptive crowd of women. This initial movement looked quite different than the later suffrage movements that developed throughout the rest of the century, ultimately creating the National American

Woman Suffrage Association in the 1890s and powerful changes in mission statements and political agendas, including race and class.

Gaining the right to vote was the overarching goal of the suffrage movement, but not the sole driver of the campaign. Enfranchisement held the promise of other potential entrepreneurial, employment, educational, and self-liberational opportunities and put women one step closer to gender equity. The fact that white women of means were the only intended benefactors of this campaign makes it hard to ignore the suffrage movement's unspoken goal to further bolster class and race divisions between themselves and other women, especially women of color.

### **Food as a Weapon**

Food, an area of domesticity traditionally associated with womanhood, has been used as both a literal and metaphorical weapon against women. A historically important instance of the gendered weaponization of food is the force-feeding of imprisoned American suffrage protesters. One of the first documented examples of this force feeding occurred after a hunger strike led by American suffrage movement leader Alice Paul and fellow detainees at the Occoquan Workhouse in 1917.<sup>96</sup> This was not the first instance of force-feeding for Paul, who wrote about her previous hunger strike at Holloway jail in London after being arrested for suffrage protests alongside British activists. Food, likely a slurry of raw eggs, was “injected” through Paul’s nostrils while “the largest Wardress in Holloway” sat on top of her knees and held her shoulders.<sup>97</sup> The 1917 Occoquan Workhouse hunger strike was documented by fellow activist and legal rights advocate Doris Stevens in her book *Jailed for Freedom* (first published in 1920).

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<sup>96</sup>Katherine H. Adams and Michael L. Keene, *Alice Paul and the American Suffrage Campaign*, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010.

<sup>97</sup>*Alice Paul Describes Force Feeding*, London, England, Dec-09, 1909, Manuscript/Mixed Material, <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbcmiller003904/>.

Transcribed from notes and narratives from the other imprisoned suffrage activists, Stevens details how they were force fed with tubes and when they refused to stop the hunger strike were taunted by the sound of “cracking eggs” outside their cells.<sup>98</sup>

The weaponization of food works both ways, though, and can also serve as a type of resistance. The hunger strike, an action that led to the forced-feeding of imprisoned suffrage activists, was also a calculated method of food-related resistance outlined in chapter 10 “The Hunger Strike— A Weapon” of Doris Stevens’ book. Later in the 1960s, food was weaponized for resistance once again by activists in the civil rights movement. Inspired by Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. 's practice of nonviolent protest, Black students, and later white students and other community members, staged sit-ins at their local segregated eating establishments.<sup>99</sup> The first was on February 1, 1960, when four Black college students sat down and asked for coffee at the Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, NC, and the movement soon spread across the south and to other segregated public spaces. While the Greensboro sit-in remained peaceful, some, like the one at another Woolworth’s in Jackson, MS in 1963, were met with violence as an angry white mob poured sugar, mustard, ketchup, and vinegar on the seated protesters.<sup>100</sup>

### **Domestic Rhetoric**

Throughout the evolution of the women's suffrage movement, food served as a political bargaining tool for the suffrage movement. In a 1913 letter sent to the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage in Washington, D.C., Mrs. Emily Herey Denison of Butte, Montana enclosed

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<sup>98</sup>Doris Stevens, *Jailed for Freedom*, New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920.

<sup>99</sup>Christopher W. Schmidt, *The Sit-Ins: Protest and Legal Change in the Civil Rights Era*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

<sup>100</sup>M.J. O’Brien, *We Shall Not Be Moved: The Jackson Woolworth's Sit-In and the Movement It Inspired*, Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013.

fifty cents for one year's subscription to the union's publication, *The Suffragist*, as well as information concerning the organization of the Montana Franchise League. Attached to her letter is a copy of her introductory speech, heavily hand-edited, which she read aloud at the initial meeting of the Montana organization. The essay champions the cause of suffrage in flowing rhetoric; however, the final few paragraphs turn to the promise of domestic duty,

We shall continue to cook for our husbands, fathers, brothers, and sweethearts, but we shall also engage them in controversy if they do not let us be co-laborers in the affairs of the state. We shall follow the advice of the greatest student of men, the renowned Shakespeare who counseled,-

'Do as adversaries do in law-  
Strive mightily, but eat and drink as friends.'<sup>101</sup>

While these promises appear to be sincere, at least in part, they form an integral part of the rhetoric used throughout suffrage literature and letter campaigns related to the issue of domesticity and food-related labor. A form letter from the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage was sent to various women across the country, asking for their support, financial donations, as well as their labor as committee members and chairs for a Suffrage Luncheon scheduled for the first week of October 1913. In one letter, addressed to a Mrs. B.A. Leavell of Chevy Chase, Maryland, the writer explains that the movement is "ambitious to establish a reputation as good housekeepers" and was recruiting the cooperation of "our suffrage friends in this undertaking."<sup>102</sup> The letter then asks for a specific donation of "a baked ham" or a financial contribution to the fried oysters and ice cream fund. Drawing on their nationwide ranks of

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<sup>101</sup>Mrs. Emily Herey Denison to Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage in Washington, D.C., 1913, National Woman's Party suffrage correspondence, *National Woman's Party Papers, Part II: The Suffrage Years, 1913-1920*, Series 1: Correspondence, 1891-1940: Section A, 1891-1915, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University, Series 1: Correspondence, 1891-1940: Section A, 1891-1915, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University.

<sup>102</sup>Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage to Mrs. B.A. Leavell, 1913, National Woman's Party suffrage correspondence, *National Woman's Party Papers, Part II: The Suffrage Years, 1913-1920*, Series 1: Correspondence, 1891-1940: Section A, 1891-1915, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University.

housewives and domestic workers, the suffrage movement mobilized and leveraged women's traditional roles as food-laborers in order to placate anxious patriarchal legal structures. By presenting themselves as good housekeepers and guardians of the kitchen, suffragists appeared less threatening as they fought for equal rights as a natural extension of their home-related work.

In 1917, the National Woman Suffrage Publishing Company issued various iterations of purposefully tailored and targeted campaign literature with the title "Women in the Home," arguing that women "should have" the vote because they "must care for the health and welfare, moral as well as physical of her family."<sup>103</sup> A list follows this headline explaining how "SHE is responsible for the wholesomeness of the food" in addition to other domestic duties. The literature explains that "she can cook her food well, but if dealers are permitted to sell adulterated food, unclean milk, or short weight or measure, she cannot provide either wholesome or sufficient feeding for her family." The right to vote will not remove her from this traditional duty but allow her the agency—though not in such radical terms—to advocate for the domestic bliss of her family.<sup>104</sup>

Another advert published in May 1917 led with the phrase "Careful Housekeeping: Don't Th[r]ow Away a Scrap of Food" under which several frugal recipes and kitchen tips were listed.<sup>105</sup> These tips included a recipe for cheese pudding as a means to use up stale bread; another suggested making a meat souffle to use leftover meat scraps; other tips stretched the use

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<sup>103</sup>"Women in the Home," Women's suffrage flyers, Jan 01, 1904 - Dec 31, 1919, *Women's Studies Manuscript Collections* from The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University. (Hereafter cited as Women's suffrage flyers, 1904 – 1919, *Women's Studies Manuscript Collections*).

<sup>104</sup>Food and food-related language was also central to the banners and mottos carried in suffrage parades throughout the country. These included phrases such as "The feeders of mankind want votes to help lower the cost of food," "Women need votes to get stringent pure-food laws," and "Politics governs even the purity of the milk supply. It is not outside the home, but inside the baby," an issue that continues to plague U.S. politics. "Banners and Mottos," Women's suffrage flyers, 1904 – 1919, *Women's Studies Manuscript Collections*.

<sup>105</sup>"Careful Housekeeping," Women's suffrage flyers, 1904 – 1919, *Women's Studies Manuscript Collections*.

of a ham bone and instructed how to make an inexpensive pot roast. These recipes and tips read like other prescriptive advice manuals and cookbooks of the era, as if they had been and appropriated for this pointed political use. The instructions are similarly standard for the time period: most home cooks would understand the implication of what it means to "bake in a moderate oven," yet the ingredients are relatively wholesome and nutritious, a subtle nod to the National Woman Suffrage's efforts for food safety and political agency within that federal realm. Only in the last few lines of text are the words "women" or "vote" ever mentioned. In bolded text, the script argues that "**The price of food is woman's business. Give her the vote so she can attend to it.**"<sup>106</sup> The message is reiterated again in this phrase: "Votes for Women Will Reduce the Cost of Living," mirroring the earlier campaign advert that situated women within the domestic sphere, mitigating any threat the vote might pose to more conservative readers.

A third undated advert from the same campaign explained the importance of women's suffrage by splitting the concept into two columns listing the realities of living with and without the vote.<sup>107</sup> On the left, "WITHOUT THE VOTE," the text argues "All That Women Can Do NOW to Reduce the High Cost of Living is to ELIMINATE WASTE IN THEIR OWN KITCHENS." Additional details listed below, including statistics and examples, help further this argument. A citation from the Department of Agriculture leads the list, explaining that "there is a waste of \$700,000,000 in the kitchens of the United States." Before outlining steps for how to reduce this waste, the text appeals to "most housewives" who "do their own cooking," arguing that this group does not waste much food, "but she will find the following an **aid to more economical housekeeping.**" These steps include a careful plan for the "Household Budget" with

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<sup>106</sup>"Careful Housekeeping," Women's suffrage flyers, 1904 – 1919, *Women's Studies Manuscript Collections*.

<sup>107</sup>"WITHOUT THE VOTE," Women's suffrage flyers, 1904 – 1919, *Women's Studies Manuscript Collections*.

a breakdown of percentages (35% dedicated to food alone), a full week of "Careful Planning of Meals," tips for "Careful Buying" such as buying in weight and bulk "whenever possible," and a note to "Cut Out ALL Waste" by using "left-overs" and specifically "dried peas, beans, lentils, rice, and hominy." While all these tips *are* helpful methods for eliminating kitchen waste, they demonstrate the herculean and daily efforts this process required of housewives. Moreover, the food and ingredients outlined in the text did not portray a stereotypically abundant American table, suggesting that without the vote, women would rely on dried pantry staples and foods bought in bulk.

On the right side, the text lists the results of living "WITH THE VOTE," which chiefly involve "EFFECTIVE Methods of Reducing the High Cost of Living."<sup>108</sup> The statistic heavy language and subtle political rhetoric are eschewed for straightforward statements arguing that "All those who want to **keep** the cost of living high are **voters**. Many of those who want to reduce the high cost of living are **forbidden the vote**."<sup>109</sup> While this first line avoids any mention of gender, the paragraph that follows pointedly implicates "the men who dishonestly corner the supply of food for speculation and hold up the public for high prices." The remainder of the advert is dedicated to actionable steps—"First: Demand Government Aid and Protection," "Second: Get Better Market Facilities," "Third: Stop Gambling in Foodstuffs"—plainly mapped out for the targeted reader, which was, undoubtedly, housewives and other women involved in kitchen management.<sup>110</sup> The final fourth step reiterates the language on the left side regarding food waste, citing the example of California women who, after they got the vote in 1911, "made

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<sup>108</sup>"WITHOUT THE VOTE," Women's suffrage flyers, 1904 – 1919, *Women's Studies Manuscript Collections*.

<sup>109</sup>"WITHOUT THE VOTE," Women's suffrage flyers, 1904 – 1919, *Women's Studies Manuscript Collections*.

<sup>110</sup>"WITHOUT THE VOTE," Women's suffrage flyers, 1904 – 1919, *Women's Studies Manuscript Collections*.

it a legal offense to destroy any kind of foodstuff for the purpose of keeping up the price."<sup>111</sup>

Where the other campaign adverts spoke to a range of readers, aiming to persuade both men and women, this third advert directly addresses women and more specifically housewives in more modest, servant-less homes.

### **Cookbooks on Campaign**

Late nineteenth century women's organizations specifically those unified around political issues such as suffrage, were experts in subversive resistance. Though many of these women possessed extensive educations, including a number who held medical and secondary degrees, and a few noteworthy women in high-ranking business positions, newspapers, and publishing—fields typically dominated by men—they continued to draw on domestic tropes that appealed to all women and appeased a patriarchal society. A widespread example of this resistance was the publication of issued-focused cookbooks. Centered on a specific theme and causes, these cookbooks served three main purposes: to raise funds, to network with allies, and to spread messages of resistance both subservice and benign to the organization, potential supporters, and the larger public.

One of the earliest examples of this strategic rhetoric was the publication of America's first suffrage cookbook, *The Woman's Suffrage Cook Book: conta[i]ning thoroughly tested and reliable recipes for cooking, directions for the care of the sick, and practical suggestions, contributed especially for this work* (1886).<sup>112</sup> Edited and published by Mrs. Hattie A. Burr, the cookbook was originally printed and sold at the Woman Suffrage Festival and Bazaar organized

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<sup>111</sup>"WITHOUT THE VOTE," Women's suffrage flyers, 1904 – 1919, *Women's Studies Manuscript Collections*.

<sup>112</sup>Hattie A. Burr, *The Woman's Suffrage Cook Book: conta[i]ning thoroughly tested and reliable recipes for cooking, directions for the care of the sick, and practical suggestions, contributed especially for this work* (Boston: Published in aid of the festival and bazaar, C.H. Simonds, Printers, 1886).



by the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association at the Music Hall in Boston in December 1886.<sup>113</sup> A second edition was printed in 1890 and sold at the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association "Country Store," another fundraising pop-up shop that ran from April 21-26, 1890 in Boston.

The cookbook was published and printed by C.H. Simonds & Co, a Boston publishing company known for other progressive works such as a text by famous suffragist Lucy Stone entitled *Woman Suffrage in New Jersey* (1867), a biographic-styled book on *Julia Ward Howe and the woman suffrage movement : a selection from her speeches and essays* (1913), a series on women authors called *Little pilgrimages among the women who have written famous books* (1902) and another on *Famous actresses of the day in America* (1899). Established in 1850 by Charles H. Simonds, the company quickly gained a reputation in New England and across the nation for "first-class work" and "high grade books," earning the "confidence of many of the leading publishers of books in Boston" and beyond.<sup>114</sup> Beginning in 1880, the company was inherited by the founder's son, George W. Simonds, who oversaw the printing of *The Woman's Suffrage Cook Book* in 1886.

The Massachusetts Association was aligned with the American Woman Suffrage Association, a newer branch of suffrage efforts founded by Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, and Julia Ward Howe, which campaigned for individual state voting rights as opposed to the national constitutional amendment favored by earlier suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony who formed the National Woman Suffrage Association. Despite this split, *The Woman's Suffrage Cook Book* included recipes from members in both associations, including a poetic

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<sup>113</sup>"Festival and Bazaar: Extensive Preparations by the Woman Suffrage Association," *The Boston Globe* Boston, Massachusetts, Friday, November 26, 1886.

<sup>114</sup>*Commercial and Financial New England Illustrated* (Boston: The Boston Herald, 1906).

breakfast recipe of milk, eggs, bread, and codfish from Elizabeth Stanton. Other notable contributions included a recipe for lobster soup from Mary C. Ames, the highest paid woman journalist of her time and famous for regular installments of "A Woman's Letter from Washington," several recipes from well-known Massachusetts abolitionist Mrs. Sarah R. Bowditch, and instructions for "Baked Pie-Plant"(rhubarb) submitted by Dr. Alice Bunker Stockham, an obstetrician, gynecologist, supporter of birth control and masturbation, and the fifth woman to become a doctor in the United States.

Although the cookbook was published in Boston by the Massachusetts branch of the NAWSA, it served as a networking tool for women across the nation. The contributor list, featuring a mix of famous suffragists and their lesser-known supporters, included women from Portland, Oregon to Lyndon, Vermont with additional representation from Kansas, Washington D.C., New Jersey, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Florida, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Montana, New York, and San Antonio, Texas. After debuting at the Bazaar in 1886, other suffrage associations publicized *The Woman's Suffrage Cook Book*.

The success of *The Woman's Suffrage Cook Book* inspired *The Holiday Gift Cook Book* (1891) which was published by the Equal Suffrage Association of Rockford, Illinois. A note from the president of the association promoting the new book in the February, 20, 1892 issue of *The Woman's Journal*, a weekly publication focused on suffrage news, explained that "the object of the book was to get those women who think they have 'all the rights they want' to read upon the subject, knowing that a woman will read a cook-book when she will not read anything else."<sup>115</sup> Later that same year, the Wimodaughsis Club promoted the publication of another

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<sup>115</sup>*The Woman's Journal*, first edited by Lucy Stone and later by Alice Stone Blackwell, was published in Boston, MA and distributed throughout the nation. Alice Stone Blackwell, *The Woman's Journal*, February 20, 1892, Boston, MA: American Woman Suffrage Association.

fundraising cookbook. Its name representing the first letters from "wives," "mothers," "daughters," and "sisters, the Wimodaughsis Club (founded 1890) was a national organization "of women for women" headquartered in Washington D.C. The club's motto read "we are all workers in the same vineyard, but we must see that our work is well done," was founded by Emma Gillett, but was more well-known under the leadership of established suffragist Anna Howard Shaw who served as its president for a number of years.<sup>116</sup> The main attraction of the club, aside from the obvious sociocultural markers of "the cult of True Womanhood," was the home purchased by its members as a meeting space for women, especially women's suffrage related gatherings, which included a classroom for women learning to type and cook, and a salon for gathering for guest lectures. After this significant expenditure, Wimodaughsis struggled to pay its housing debts and quickly made plans for "meeting incidental expenses" by publishing a club cookbook, a strategic move the group observed as a successful fundraising tactic by other women's organizations.<sup>117</sup> Aside from this initial reference in the *Proceedings of the Twenty-sixth Annual Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association*, held in Washington DC, February 15-20, 1894, the promised Wimodaughsis Club Cook Book vanished from public record. Despite this potential setback, Wimodaughsis continued to emphasize the domestic environment in which their suffrage work took place. A November 23, 1890 article in *The Sunday Herald* describes the Wimodaughsis Club as a "home-like, quiet place" located at

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<sup>116</sup>"Wimodaughsis: The New Club for Women." *The Sunday Herald*, Washington, November 23, 1890. For a full bio of Anna Howard Shaw see Trisha Franzen, *Anna Howard Shaw: The Work of Woman Suffrage*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014.

<sup>117</sup>Proceedings of the Twenty-sixth Annual Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, held in Washington DC, February 15-20, 1894, by National American Woman Suffrage Association. Convention (edited by Harriet Taylor Upton), National Woman's Party suffrage correspondence, *National Woman's Party Papers, Part II: The Suffrage Years, 1913-1920*, Series 1: Correspondence, 1891-1940: Section A, 1891-1915, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University.

1406 G Street NW Washington, DC ("near the US Treasury"), the exact type of space women were expected to be.<sup>118</sup> A description of the clubhouse layout follows, describing the first-floor space already as "engaged by Miss Anthony as the headquarters of the National Woman's Suffrage Association" and the second-floor for "the headquarters of the W.C.T.U. (Women's Christian Temperance Union)."<sup>119</sup>

As was popular for many women's social clubs of the era, Wimodaughsis often held exhibits and lectures on various topics related to women and traditional domestic life. On October 12, 1899, the club hosted US Department of Agriculture chemist and "pure-food exponent" Dr. H.W. Wiley for a lecture on food adulterations. This lecture was the first of a series scheduled for the winter of 1899.<sup>120</sup> His lecture touched on controversial topics like food fillers, added acids, and food preservatives which were being added to packaged foods including syrups "made of saccharine," butter and oleomargarine "colored with coal tar," and ketchups dyed and thickened with "turmeric and flour."<sup>121</sup> He claimed "water has killed more people than have succumbed to King Alcohol;" a bold statement with the Women's Christian Temperance Union just upstairs.<sup>122</sup> These issues were at the forefront of the suffrage platform and part of the larger national effort to expand women's agency throughout the federal government; more importantly, these food-focused topics were part of the calculated campaign pro-suffrage activists utilized to connect themselves, if only by appearance, to the domestic responsibilities

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<sup>118</sup>"Wimodaughsis," *The Sunday Herald*.

<sup>119</sup>"Wimodaughsis," *The Sunday Herald*.

<sup>120</sup>"LECTURE ON PURE FOOD: Dr. Wiley, of the Agricultural Department, States Some Interesting Facts," *The Washington Post*, October 12, 1899.

<sup>121</sup>"LECTURE ON PURE FOOD," *The Washington Post*.

<sup>122</sup>"LECTURE ON PURE FOOD," *The Washington Post*.

they were still socially required to uphold. Despite its tenuous connection with the suffrage movement, Wimodaughsis cleverly capitalized on these concerns, including it alongside less controversial domestic demonstrations and themed dinners.

These themed dinners demonstrated the club's ability to operate within the larger world of women's social organizations and carve out a position as the "it" event planner for Women's Suffrage. In April of 1891 Wimodaughsis hosted a "yellow tea," the campaign trail color of choice for women's enfranchisement, for the District Woman Suffrage Association complete with a "musical and literary programme" and parlors "handsomely decorated with yellow roses, jonquils, tulips, pansies, and other yellow flowers."<sup>123</sup> An article reporting on the event explained that the tea was "a secondary matter," focusing on the literary pieces, packed halls, and yellow decorations. Despite their initial attempt to position the club as a political ally, Wimodaughsis failed to garner any real progress for the movement, focusing their efforts on publicity, and a rather robust side table, rather than resistance.

In the spring of 1893, Wimodaughsis organized a "Martha Washington Lunch" with a menu including "seven turkeys, quails, fried oysters, salads, ham, tongue, jellies, pickles, cake and ice cream." Due to an unexpected number of guests, or perhaps another example of poor planning, the buffet was quickly emptied and so "a committee was sent out to forage."<sup>124</sup> Despite it being a "great success" with six-hundred tickets sold, details related its theme, or how the lunch profits were directed, have disappeared. Reported in *The Washington Times* on April 22, 1895, another event featured "the possibilities of a dining-room" with an exhibit including "loaned articles of

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<sup>123</sup>"CHARMING YELLOW TEA: Enjoyed by the District Woman's Suffrage Association and Wimodaughsis," *The Washington Post*, April 24, 1891.

<sup>124</sup>"Great Success of the Wimodaughsis," *The Washington Post*, February 23, 1893.

historic value...beautiful China, linen, and household decorations" donated by "many prominent ladies" of the club, including a "tablecloth used on the table at which Gen. Grant was seated at his second inaugural ball."<sup>125</sup> A special assortment of food accompanied the exhibit to "demonstrate the housewifely ability of the Wimodaughsis women," and an decoratively outfitted fleet of

Pretty girls will preside at the dairy maid's, lemonade, priscilla, ice cream, and candy tables. Milkmaids in caps and kerchiefs with decorations of cowslips and buttercups will serve milk. One of the ladies has designed a large apron, which, from its capacious pockets and general adaptability to studio, sewing, or general use, has been designated, quite according to the prevailing fad, the Trilby, or altogether apron.<sup>126</sup>

The term Trilby referred to the character Trilby O'Ferrall, the working-girl, artists' model, laundress, and frequent love-interest heroine of the novel by the same name by French author George du Maurier. Published serially in *Harper's Monthly* from January to August 1894 (and later published as a full book in 1895), the novel was widely popular in the United States, spurring a sort of "Trilbyana" or "Trilby-Mania," an instrumental element in the larger national obsession with the romanticized world of Bohemianism.<sup>127</sup> As part of her laundress' kit, Trilby wears a "snowy frilled cap, a neat black gown and white apron, pretty faded, well-darned."<sup>128</sup> Described as an "altogether apron" in the Wimodaughsis interpretation, its creators applauded

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<sup>125</sup>"Alike in Parlor and Kitchen: Ladies of Wimodaughsis Present a Novel and Interesting Exhibit," *The Washington Times*, April 24, 1895; "Tribly Aprons on Girls: They Will Be Seen at the Exhibit Wimodaughsis Will Make," *The Washington Times*, 22 April 1895.

<sup>126</sup>"Alike in Parlor and Kitchen," *The Washington Times*. "Priscilla" refers to a type of small, movable sewing table that held sewing notions including thread, fabric, and embroidery hoops. The table was named after Priscilla Alden (born Mullins) who was one of the original passengers on the Mayflower in 1620. Colonial Revival furniture, loosely styled after early American designs, became the dominant furniture style of the early twentieth-century. Beverly Gordon, "Spinning Wheels, Samplers, and the Modern Priscilla: The Images and Paradoxes of Colonial Revival Needlework," *Winterthur Portfolio* 33, no.2/3 (1998), <https://doi.org/10.1086/496744>; "Sewing Tables" advertisement for Hoffmeier Bros. in Pennsylvania, *Lancaster New Era*, Lancaster, PA, December 9, 1919, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/legacy/559677976/?terms=%22priscilla%20table%22&match=1#>.

<sup>127</sup>Luc Sante, *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1991), 331.

<sup>128</sup>George Du Maurier, *Trilby* (New York: International Book and Publishing Company, 1899), "part first."

Trilby's ability to oscillate between various roles—domestic laborer, traditional woman, and romantic muse—an example of modern and progressive femininity. The Trilby apron also implied a fetishism of the character's working-class labor and status. Increasingly, Wimodaughsis' attempts to challenge the standards of gendered expectations fell short and soon veered into far more problematic territory as the club soon found itself at the center of a racist suffrage controversy.

Shaw, who routinely prioritized white women's suffrage, "threatened to resign as national president of Wimodaughsis when the Kentucky branch of the club refused to admit an African American applicant."<sup>129</sup> Despite the numerous national branches of the organization, the original Wimodaughsis Club in Washington DC slowly faded out of history. Its club members may have joined the Daughters of the American Revolution, a club founded the same year in Washington DC, which remains today as a women's service and historical preservation society). The promised Wimodaughsis Club Cook Book, though promoted and modeled after financially successful suffrage cookbooks that came before it, was never published and other food-related efforts organized by the club were less than progressive.

In the decades leading up to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, a handful of suffrage related cookbooks were published for national and local markets, including the *Virginia Cookery Book: traditional recipes* (1900) compiled and published by the Virginia League of Women Voters, the *Suffrage Cook Book: A Collection of Recipes* issued by the Equal Suffrage League of Wayne County, Michigan and published in Detroit, and *Enfranchised cookery: an offering from the enfranchised women whose names appear within to the Committee*

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<sup>129</sup>"NO COLOR LINE DRAWN: Dissensions in Wimodaughsis Result in Miss Desha's Resignation," *The Washington Post*, March 7, 1891.

*on Arrangements for the Forty-Seventh Annual Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Enfranchised cookery*, edited by May Bartlett Shawhan Hoar and published after the December 1915 suffrage convention, was promoted in newspapers across the nation, claimed to include recipes that were "good but inexpensive" — "a sure-fire vote-getter"<sup>130</sup>."

Unlike *The Woman Suffrage Cook Book*, a publication associated with the national women's movement, *The Original Washington Women's Cook Book* (1909) included chapters suited to the particular needs of their demographic and community in the Pacific Northwest region. Edited by Linda Dezhiah Jennings and published by The Washington Equal Suffrage Association, the cookbook contained familiar sections filled with recipes on breads, desserts, meats, and vegetables, as well as entire chapters dedicated to "Sailor's Recipes" and "Mountaineer's Recipes" with instructions for foods women could prepare while sailing, hiking, and camping. The cookbook debuted at Washington's first World Fair and at the Washington Equal Suffrage Association's permanent booth at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. Its authors asserted that "good cooking and sure voting went hand in hand," and opened with the couplet: "Give us the vote and we will cook, The Better for a wide outlook."<sup>131</sup> Unlike the earlier suffrage cookbooks, this work avoided overly pandering speech to rationalize women's roles

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<sup>130</sup>Interestingly, though not necessarily surprising, the *Virginia Cookery Book* included drastically conflicting messages about women's suffrage and racial equality. The foreword is a testament to the important role of housewives and how voting was a crucial element of "good citizenship." Purchased quarter-sheet ads at the back of the cookbook feature an assortment of suffrage language including one from Mass Mutual Life Insurance Co. that exclaims "Equal Rights, Equal Rates!" However, the rest of the book contains problematic representations of black bodies in both sponsored advertisements as well as recipes, like the one for "Robert E. Lee Cake." The cover of the cookbook features an embossed scene of a white woman and child sitting near an open hearth as a black woman dressed in servant's (or more likely an enslaved person's) clothing attends to them; "Keeping An Eye on Women Folks," *Lansing State Journal*, Lansing, MI, August 19, 1919.

<sup>131</sup>Linda Dezhiah Jennings, *The Original Washington Women's Cook Book* (Seattle, WA: Trade Register Print, 1909), cover page.



beyond the home. Its dedication page recognized “the first woman who realized that half of the human race were not getting a square deal, and who had the courage to voice a protest.”<sup>132</sup> Each chapter opened with a short quote, many proverbial and anonymous (“What is politics? Why, it’s housekeeping on a big scale. The government is in a muddle, because it has been trying to do the housekeeping without the women”), other quotes are attributed to noteworthy intellectuals and activists including Ralph Waldo Emerson (“It is cheap wit that finds it so amusing that women should vote”), Lucretia Mott (“So far from woman’s ambition leading her to attempt to act the man, she needs all the encouragement she can receive by the removal of obstacles from her path...”), and Susan B. Anthony (“Failure is impossible”) whose words proceeded the chapter on “Canning, Preserves, Pickles, Etc.”<sup>133</sup> A special section dedicated to the “Vegetarian Department” featured recipes for “Curried Rice and Tomatoes” and “Nut Roast with Lentils,” and a note referred readers with questions about a vegetable-based diet to the Editor who has “twelve years’ experience as a vegetarian.”<sup>134</sup>

While the entire tone of the suffrage-focused cookbook engenders a different relationship with domestic ideals, the unique enfranchisement of Washington women readers arguably begins in the “Mountaineers’ Chapter: Cooking Camp.” Written for “campers, prospectors, hunting parties and mountain climbers,” this section included no gendered designation in its instructions; though more men were typically the main participants in these activities, this section does not provide details to cook explicitly *for men*, rather for whomever is in need of nourishment.<sup>135</sup> This

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<sup>132</sup>Jennings, *The Original Washington Women’s Cook Book*, 7.

<sup>133</sup>Jennings, *The Original Washington Women’s Cook Book*, 41, 13, 100, and 108.

<sup>134</sup>Jennings, *The Original Washington Women’s Cook Book*, 123-124.

<sup>135</sup>Jennings, *The Original Washington Women’s Cook Book*, 127.

section was compiled, in part, by Dr. Cora Smith Eaton, the first woman to practice medicine in the state of North Dakota. Smith later established her medical practice in Seattle, where she took up mountaineering in Washington state, and served as the treasurer of the Washington Equal Suffrage Association.<sup>136</sup> The chapter provided instructions to build a campfire, to order and prepare provisions for multiple people (ingredients in various weights included items such as hardtack, dried fruits, salt pork, pickles, dried beef, sweet chocolate, and Erbswurst), and a check list of necessary items for a well-outfitted kitchen mess kit.<sup>137</sup> Similar instructions are outlined in the following chapter on "Sailors Recipes" compiled with the counsel of Robert Carr, a former cook and steward for sailing vessels.<sup>138</sup> Instructions included how to test dolphin or bonita for poison (the flesh of these large fish are typically high in mercury), how to "make fresh water 'spin out' when supply is limited," another list of provisions and seasonings, as well as steps on butchering and cooking seals, shark, and porpoise.<sup>139</sup>

A final chapter included "Hints for Beauty and Hygiene" featuring instructions for skin whiteners and hair removers alongside pages of daily exercise recommendations and testimonials to "science in the kitchen."<sup>140</sup> The final pages of the text, "How Washington Women Lost the Vote" was written by Adella M. Parker, a lawyer, suffrage activist, and executive board member

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<sup>136</sup>"Mountaineers Are Back From Rainier," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, August 8, 1909, Section II, p. 3; *Pots And Politics: An Historical Cookbook, From The Suffragists To The Equal Rights Amendment*, ed. Shirly Kaplan (Tacoma: Washington State Women's Political Caucus, 1976); In July 1909, Smith and other members of The Mountaineers club summited Mount Rainier at the top of which Smith planted a pennant bearing the motto "Votes for Women." That same pennant is featured on the cover of *The Original Washington Women's Cook Book* along with another that reads "Good Things to Eat."

<sup>137</sup>Jennings, *The Original Washington Women's Cook Book*, 128.

<sup>138</sup>Jennings, *The Original Washington Women's Cook Book*, 142.

<sup>139</sup>Jennings, *The Original Washington Women's Cook Book*, 142-143.

<sup>140</sup>Jennings, *The Original Washington Women's Cook Book*, 190-201.

of the Washington Equal Suffrage Association.<sup>141</sup> Unlike other suffrage cookbooks which either glossed over political agendas, tucked issues between chapters, and cloaked causes in recipe titles, this final essay was a clear call-to-action. Subtly tucked as an endnote to the larger cookbook, this crucial essay provided the tools and information needed by the larger association to educate an untapped group of activists. This tactic was made clear a year after publication when the cookbook was deployed on the 1910 Washington campaign trail. A column from the July 1, 1910 issue of *The Colfax Gazette* (Colfax, Washington) explains how the fight for equal suffrage was "being busily waged by a well-organized force of women here and all over the state" and each member was outfitted with a stack of cookbooks:<sup>142</sup>

This week the Washington Equal Suffrage Association is starting its workers out without expense money, but with a bundle of cook books under each arm to pay their expenses. The cook books were printed especially for the suffrage workers, and they are sold at one dollar each., the funds being used to finance the campaign. Dr. Cora Smith Eaton, treasurer of the Washington association, declares that the cook books are not only valuable in raising campaign funds, but they serve to illustrate the fact that women who are asking the ballot are home-makers.<sup>143</sup>

Not only did the cookbooks help raise campaign funds, but they simultaneously promoted the history of women's suffrage in the state. Later that year, Washington became the fifth state in the United States to legalize women's suffrage, ultimately inspiring the national campaign that culminated in the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920.

### **The Suffrage Cook Book**

Arguably one of the best known of all the sister suffrage publications, the *Suffrage Cook Book* (1915) was compiled by Mrs. L.O. Kleber and published by the Equal Franchise Federation

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<sup>141</sup>Jennings, *The Original Washington Women's Cook Book*, 204-212.

<sup>142</sup>"TAXATION, EXPENSE, POLITICS AT SEATTLE: The Senatorial Campaign," *The Colfax Gazette*, Colfax, WA, July 1, 1910.

<sup>143</sup>"TAXATION, EXPENSE, POLITICS AT SEATTLE," *The Colfax Gazette*.

of Western Pennsylvania and took an aggressive stance on women's domestic roles. In the opening preface, the editor explains that,

It being a human Cook Book there will likely be some errors, but as correcting errors is the chief duty and occupation of Suffrage Women, I shall accept gratefully whatever criticisms these good women may have to offer. The cook book of the past was filled mainly with recipes for dainties rather than sane and wholesome dishes; the aim being to please the taste for the moment rather than to feed the body and the brain.<sup>144</sup>

The cover of the cookbook is equally striking, featuring a silhouette of Uncle Sam steering a large wheel with twelve and a half spokes. The spokes represented the twelve states where women could vote before the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment (notably all Western states) and the half spoke was stamped with the word Illinois, which then only allowed women to vote in school-related elections.

Notable recipes include short instructions for "Suffrage Salad Dressing," a recipe for "Suffrage Angel Cake" that calls for eleven eggs, and a faux-recipe for "Hymen Bread" that called for:

"1 lb. genuine old love  
7/8 lb. common sense  
¾ lb. generosity  
½ lb. toleration  
½ lb. charity  
1 pinch humor  
(always to be taken with a grain of salt.)

Good for 365 days in the year."<sup>145</sup>

In this case, "Hymen" refers to the ancient Greek and Roman god of marriage, thus the allusions to ingredients such as "old love" and "toleration" that help make a successfully romantic

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<sup>144</sup>L.O. Kleber, *The Suffrage Cook Book* (Pittsburgh: The Equal Franchise Federation of Western Pennsylvania, 1915), 10.

<sup>145</sup>Kleber, *The Suffrage Cook Book*, 107.

relationship. However, understanding the early twentieth-century expectations of the ideal wife as a woman who was chaste, pure, and pious, the other anatomical definition of the term "hymen," the virginal membrane stretched across the external portion of the vagina, is difficult to dismiss.

Two other recipes follow similar poetic license. Instructions for "Pie for a Suffragist's Doubting Husband" calls for a single ingredient—"1 qt. milk human kindness"—followed by eight reasons why, including "War, White Slavery, Child Labor, 8,000,000 Working Women, Bad Roads, Poisonous Water, and Impure Food."<sup>146</sup> Clear in their messages of political concerns, the instructions that follow are even more blatant about the systemic issue of socio-economic class: "Mix the crust with tact and velvet gloves, using no sarcasm, especially with the upper crust. Upper crusts must be handled with extreme care for they quickly sour if manipulated roughly."<sup>147</sup> Similar issues are raised in the recipe for "Anti's Favorite Hash" which claims that "Unless you wear dark glasses you cannot make a success of Anti's Favorite Hash." Again, campaign topics and past injustices of the suffrage movement are listed in lieu of edible ingredients:

1 lb. truth thoroughly mangled  
1 generous handful of injustice.  
(Sprinkle over everything in the pan)  
1 tumbler acetic acid (well shaken)  
A little vitriol will add a delightful tang and a string of nonsense should be dropped in at the last as if by accident. Stir all together with a sharp knife because some of the tid bits will be tough propositions.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>Kleber, *The Suffrage Cook Book*, 147.

<sup>147</sup>Kleber, *The Suffrage Cook Book*, 147.

<sup>148</sup>Kleber, *The Suffrage Cook Book*, 56.

As the suffrage movement moved closer to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, concern for domestic sentiments waned. The soft and subtle language used in previous cookbooks was abandoned for direct messages of resistance. The fact that this language was placed within the pages and context of cookbooks, however, does not diminish its importance or its effect. As previous suffrage movements and organizations had shown, cookbooks proved to be a strategic method for reaching broader groups of women, especially those that had yet to determine their own personal opinions on the concept of suffrage. Moreover, cookbooks were easier for women to get published. From the funding process to the editorial byline, women had already paved a path into print through the genre of domestic literature. Well-organized groups, including the many women's suffrage associations across the nation, understood this process and had likely worked on other fundraising publications for churches and community charities. These methods continued to prove useful after the ratification, as the Nineteenth Amendment only legalized voting rights for affluent white American women. While suffrage activists were justifiably pleased with the successful legal outcome of securing the vote for women many societal issues remain to be addressed, most unrecognized and certainly unregulated by the federal government.

After the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, cookbooks promoting women's political and social agency fell out of mass publication. The enduring issues of racial equality, labor regulations, childcare, and food safety were catalysts for future iterations of local and national feminist discourse. Little attention has been given to the food-related messages tied to these issues, especially those that leveraged the political power of women such as childcare and food safety. Looking beyond suffrage and more broadly at the larger historical timeline of the long women's movement, corresponding flashpoints of feminist discourse and feminist food-related publications occur for the next century. These corresponding flashpoints from 1920 to

2020 are not coincidence; and while examples of commodified feminism exist throughout this era, women continued to use their entrepreneurial skills and commodity-focused technologies to further the reach of women's resistance.

### **Feeding the Next Generation**

Towards the end of the feminist period that extended from the 1960s through the 1980s, a wave of fundraising cookbooks was published by both national and local women's political organizations. This moment in feminist history focused on a wider range of issues including sexuality, childcare, equal pay, reproductive rights, domestic violence including marital rape, and the explosion in identity politics and creative expression. This second women's movement was a direct, although slightly delayed, reaction to the post-World War II bookmarked by unprecedented economic growth and women's return to the home from the industrial jobs they temporarily held during the war. Characterized by nuclear families, suburban living, and stay-at-home housewives, this era repackaged the antiquated notions of True Womanhood to fit a twentieth-century female ideal complete with new state-of-the-art kitchens. These cultural forces were fuel for the second iteration of the feminist movement and its platforms that frequently push-back against food as an oppressive issue in women's lives.

Stereotypes of the era argued that feminists "never set foot in the kitchen" and were responsible for everything from the rise of fast-food culture to the demise of home cooking.<sup>149</sup> Contemporary evaluations of the food industry during the 1960s and 1970s have since proved that advertising firms capitalized on this feminist movement—another historic instance of commodified feminism in action—selling convenience products as "pro-feminist" and liberating tools for the modern woman. Nonetheless, certain feminists of this era did distance themselves

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<sup>149</sup>Stacy J. Williams, "A Feminist Guide to Cooking," *American Sociological Association* 13, no. 3 (2014): 59-61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504214545763>.

and their fight for equality from the domestic work and values associated with at-home mothers and housewives. A popular feminist slogan at the time exclaimed: “Don’t Assume I Cook!” These public protests aimed to demonstrate that women did not belong in the kitchen and could and did succeed outside of it; however, many feminists still recognized the power of food to spread their messages of resistance.

Using a move from their foremothers’ playbook, several national and local organizations found various financial and campaign successes by publishing fundraising cookbooks. In 1977, the National Association of Girls and Women in Sports published *NAGWS Guide: Cookies (and punch, too!)* as a “fond and public farewell...to the tradition of selling ‘cookies and punch’ to support sport and athletic programs for girls and women.”<sup>150</sup> Written as a parody of old NAGWS Sports Guides (usually covering topics such as “Track and Field,” “Basketball,” and “Tennis”), this guide purposefully distanced the organization from domestic rituals while simultaneously embracing a relationship with food and their members who still enjoyed cooking and baking. The publication coincided with the allegorical “The Last Great Cookie Sale” whose proceeds were donated to the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (AAHPER) and other NAGWS projects. Like other NAGWS Guides, it included sections on “Rules and Regulations,” lists of necessary equipment, “Health and Safety Standards” (for Cookie Walkers), as well as official rules and violations organized by the fictional “National Cookie Walk Institute.”<sup>151</sup> Despite the ironic tone, the cookbook included a selection of recipes. Bad limericks about bad cooks and excitement for store-bought prepared cookie dough existed alongside recipes were contributed by nationally-known women including “Mrs. Johnson’s Lace

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<sup>150</sup>National Association for Girls & Women in Sport, *NAGWS Guide: Cookies (and Punch, Too!): 1899-1977: Official Rules and Recipes* (Washington, D.C.: NAGWS, 1977).

<sup>151</sup>National Association of Girls and Women in Sports, *NAGWS Guide: Cookies (and punch, too!)*.



Cookies” from Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson, “Swedish Almond Wafers” from feminist Betty Friedan, “Chocolate Mousse” from comedian Carol Burnett, and Giant Polka Dot Cookies from Billie Jean King, tennis’ “Battle-of-the-Sexes” legendary player.

National organizations with explicit political agendas also published cookbooks, including the various chapters of the National Organization for Women (NOW) founded in 1966 by a large collective of women including Shirley Chisholm, Betty Freidan, and Pauli Murray. One of their earliest and most prolific cookbooks associated with organization was *NOW We're Cooking* which was compiled by the Greater Champaign Area Chapter (Champaign, IL) in 1979.<sup>152</sup> A small, spiral-bound book, *NOW We're Cooking* featured a white paper cover with bold green type with the official NOW logo and the o's in “cooking” replaced with two Venus symbols. Dedicated to “all those who are working for equality,” the cookbook featured a standard selection of recipes indicative of the current culinary trends of the era. Beyond the association with NOW, the cookbook presents a neutral approach to women's roles as related to food and the home—an arguably milquetoast tactic compared to the fiery recipes included in the early suffrage cookbooks earlier in the century. One recipe contributed by Illinois State Representative Helen Satterthwaite, however, hints at the still complicated roles women assume in the political sphere. Her self-named recipe for “Sustaining Stew” featuring a mixture of lean stewing beef, tomato juice, onion, celery, quick cooking barley, and frozen mixed vegetables was originally included on the back of the campaign card during her successful run for State Representative in 1975.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>National Organization for Women. Greater Champaign Area Chapter, *NOW We're Cooking* (Champaign, Ill.]: National Organization for Women, Greater Champaign Area Chapter, 1979). other chapter cookbooks were published over the decades. Other cookbooks were commissioned by the larger national organization including *Don't Assume I Don't Cook!: Recipes for Women's Lives* by Jane Evershed (1998) and *Tofu NOW* written by Susan Lebow (2004).

<sup>153</sup>National Organization for Women. Greater Champaign Area Chapter, *NOW We're Cooking*, 63.

## Chapter Cookbooks

Another national organization that continued to foster a working relationship with food was the League of Women Voters. Founded after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, the League of Women Voters was formed from a merger of the National Council of Women Voters (originally founded by Emma Smith DeVoe, a mentee of Susan B. Anthony and one of the founders of women's suffrage in the United States) and the National American Woman Suffrage Association (led by suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt). Operating at the national, state, and local level, the organization supported women in exercising their newly won right to vote. Today, the League of Women Voters is officially non-partisan, though it has supported a variety of progressive public policies throughout its history, including campaign finance reform, voter ID laws, the DREAM Act, and abortion rights.

While large organizations such as NOW and the League of Women Voters possessed national political leverage and served as unified mouthpieces for women's issues broadly, smaller chapters and organizations maintained their own relevance and financial means through the publication of cookbooks.

Published by the Great Neck (NY) chapter of the League of Women Voters in 1977, *Desserts that make a difference* compiled a selection of recipes "lovingly collected from League women...recipes which belonged to our grandmothers and great aunts."<sup>154</sup> A small, thin paperback with a red cardstock cover, filled with hand-typed recipes and sketches of plated desserts, the cookbook never explains what difference it hopes to make or who it hopes to enfranchise with its contents.

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<sup>154</sup>League of Women Voters of Great Neck, *Desserts That Make a Difference* (Great Neck, NY: League of Women Voters of Great Neck, 1977).

Another chapter cookbook compiled by the Cuyahoga County League of Women Voters took a different approach. Printed on the inside cover, *Political toasts & roasts: as mixed, tossed and turned over* (1976), explains that “the proceeds from the sale of this cookbook will be used to help finance the work of the Cuyahoga Counter Inter League Organization of the League of Women Voters.”<sup>155</sup> In lieu of traditional categories, the table of contents is organized into typical political events that feature food: cocktail parties, coffees, breakfasts, brunches and late night suppers, buffets, quick meals for forgotten families, everyone's just desserts. Recipe contributions are noted with women's titles (councilwoman, mayor, senator) and each section of the cookbook is separated with a blue cardstock cover with the heading and related drawing. The “Cocktail Parties” section features an illustration of a gelatin mold and two stemmed drinking glasses garnished with an olive and onion pierced with a toothpick topped by a small elephant or donkey, representing the GOP and Democratic parties respectively. A clear nod to the tireless work of women campaign and voter volunteers and the blurry divide between work and home, the section on “Breakfasts and Brunches and Late Night Suppers” features a drawing of two women seated at a kitchen table—one holding a calculator and the other with the phone to her ear while she sips a cup of coffee. A coffee pot and an assortment of baked goods sit (untouched) on the table and a bulletin on the wall lists “Election Returns.”. Perhaps the most indicative of all the section cover pages, “Quick Meals for Forgotten Families” shows a mother clad in an apron with a pencil tucked behind her ear ceremoniously pulling a tea towel off a large platter of ambiguous-looking meat. Two small children look up at her smiling. Interestingly, one of the first recipes in this section includes instructions for a 30-minute “Rice and Meat Skillet Dinner” using leftover meat and packaged Rice-a-Roni. This recipe was contributed by Dianne Dallos,

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<sup>155</sup>League of Women Voters of Cuyahoga County, Ohio, *Political Toasts & Roasts: as Mixed, Tossed and Turned Over* (Cleveland: [League of Women Voters of Cuyahoga County], 1976).

wife of Councilman Joseph Dallos, who included a personal quote in lieu of a recipe: “cooking does not fall under a councilman’s duties; only eating is mandatory as an elected official.” How the inclusion of this misogynistic quote furthers the aims of the cookbook is unclear, but the overall message remains: food was a clear and central tool of women’s everyday resistance and larger political activism.

Chapter cookbooks held great political and social power in their respective communities, allowing women to pool their skills and talents to create both a collection of enjoyable recipes and a symbol of feminist resistance. The creation of these cookbooks required women’s collaboration, from contributing recipes to the physical act of assembling the book, which involved (at least for many self-published books before the proliferation of cheap printing technologies) a Ford-like assembly of proofing, typing, hole-punching, and binding. This grass-roots infrastructure evolved overtime to incorporate new methods of communication, printing, and publication and ultimately became a model for other women’s groups to share their own food-related messages of resistance.

### **Politicizing Food Writing**

For feminists operating during and immediately after the 1970s, a purposeful endorsement of food and food-related writing provided the opportunity to demonstrate new methods and approaches to cooking, eating, and resisting. *The Commune Cookbook*, published in 1972 by well-known publishing house Simon and Schuster, was written by James Beard Award-Winning author and then commune-member, Crescent Dragonwagon.<sup>156</sup> In the memoir-style book, Dragonwagon described her experience cooking and eating in a Brooklyn commune during the height of the counterculture movement in the 1960s. Sections of the book include a

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<sup>156</sup>Crescent Dragonwagon, *The commune cookbook* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).

“Philosophy of Healthy Food” as well as traditional categories of recipes such as meat, fowl, salads, breads, and desserts each with a short preface on issues including slaughtering house conditions in the United States or the frugality of soup dinners. Other topics covered in Dragonwagon’s philosophy include food shopping (and food “liberating,” or stealing from the ‘system’), food as medicine, and women’s oppression in traditional domestic roles. According to Dragonwagon, the same capitalism that is responsible for the patriarchal oppression of women also pervades our relationship with eating and cooking, ultimately resulting in the conception of “cooking as inferior work, fit only for inferior persons, “unrefined” persons, women and nonwhite women especially.”<sup>157</sup> Liberated and unliberated women alike understand that

Women know that cooking is work, that it is something that must be done every day, and the dishes washed afterwards. It is a chore, something to be done quickly to get it over with (though some women are so thoroughly brainwashed-bored that they will spend all day every day cooking for their families, something I would never do), something to hate doing...the end result of such a system...mean and women both lose out on something deeply important, and that is the great sensual pleasure in cooking.<sup>158</sup>

Dragonwagon expressed her passion for cooking and drew connections to its inherent role in women’s liberation; however, her capitalistic relationship with a large, national publishing house undermined the food activism and outlined in her cookbook. After writing her *The Commune Cookbook*, Dragonwagon used her advance from Simon and Schuster to start a group farm in the Arkansas Ozarks.<sup>159</sup> She later went on to author numerous award-winning and widely-popular cookbooks including *The Dairy Hollow House Cookbook* (Macmillan Publishing Company,

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<sup>157</sup>Dragonwagon, *The commune cookbook*, 18.

<sup>158</sup>Dragonwagon, *The commune cookbook*, 19-20.

<sup>159</sup>In his book *Appetites for Change* (Cornell University Press, 2006), food studies scholar Warren Belasco continues with a discussion of communal-restaurants and the purposeful moves made by their owners (including Mollie Katzen of Moosewood Restaurant). Similar examples will be discussed further in the fourth chapter of my dissertation on women-owned-and-operated restaurants.

1986), *Dairy Hollow House Soup and Bread: A Country Inn Cookbook* (Workman Publishing Company, 1992), *Passionate Vegetarian* (Workman Publishing Company, 2002), *The Cornbread Gospels* (Workman Publishing Company, 2007), and *Bean by Bean* (Workman Publishing Company, 2012).<sup>160</sup>

The majority of Dragonwagon's works were published by the independently owned family of publishers known as Workman Publishing Company located in Greenwich Village in New York.<sup>161</sup> Workman Publishing Company also published several feminist and counterculture-related titles including *The Noma Guide to Fermentation* (2018), immigrant-food focused *You and I Eat the Same: On the Countless Ways Food and Cooking Connect Us to One Another* (2018), plant-based *Unicorn Food* (2018), a look inside prison life in *Prison Ramen: Recipes and Stories from Behind Bars* (2015), *Native American Food Plants: An Ethnobotanical Dictionary* (2010), and a long list of 'alternative' cookbooks focused on vegetarian and veganism, zero-waste cooking, preservation, and herbalism. The publishing company outlined its history and guiding principles, to publish books that were "accessible, not elitist; open, not snobbish...useful, practical, give good value, and respect the reader's intelligence—and wallet."<sup>162</sup> Although not a woman-owned company nor explicitly feminist, Workman's followed in the historical footsteps of many of the early women-owned publishing houses that committed to women's progress and self-education.

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<sup>160</sup>Dragonwagon has also published a number of children's books, including one called *Alligator Arrived with Apples: A potluck Alphabet Feast* (1992). She also publishes recipes and other writings on her website and blog (<http://dragonwagon.com/blog/>) and is active on Instagram using bespoke hashtags such as #dinnerwithdragonwagon).

<sup>161</sup>Workman's first publication was *The Yoga 28-Day Exercise Program* (1968).

<sup>162</sup>Workman's Publishing Company, "History," <https://www.workman.com/company/history>.

## The Political Palate

Riding a wave of women-owned restaurants in the 1970s and 1980s that followed Dragonwagon's counterculture era, the exclusively female Bloodroot Collective published a cookbook called *The Political Palate: a feminist vegetarian cookbook* based on dishes made in their restaurant, The Bloodroot Restaurant and Bookstore in Bridgeport, Connecticut.<sup>163</sup> Written, compiled, and photographed by the Bloodroot Collective restaurateurs including Betsey Beaven, Noel Giordano, Selma Miriam, Pat Shea, and Buffy Parker, the 300-plus page paperback featured green and black type and a botanical image of a bloodroot—a flowering plant also known as *Sanguinaria canadensis*, native to North America historically used by various indigenous groups as an emetic and aid for respiratory ailments—on the cover.<sup>164</sup> Relying on each other's various organizational and industry skills and networks, the collective self-published the book under their own name, Sanguinaria Publishing. Named, not for the medicinal or edible uses of the plant, but rather its "habit of growth," the Bloodroot Collective (and the Sanguinaria Publishing) considered the flower "symbolic in its slow spreading rhizomatous root system" and an appropriate representation to the methods of collaboration used by the group.<sup>165</sup> To this end, a notice at the bottom of the copyright page includes instructions for how to foster further collaboration,

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<sup>163</sup>Bloodroot Collective, *The political palate: a feminist vegetarian cookbook* (Bridgeport, CT: Sanguinaria Publishing, 1980).

<sup>164</sup>Bloodroot, also known as *Sanguinaria canadensis*, have been promoted as an alternative cure for certain cancers, but has been denounced by the USDA. Additional commercial uses include the use of bloodroot extract in dental hygiene products as an anti-plaque agent and as a popular natural dye using the reddish, blood-like sap. Andrew Croaker, Graham J. King, John H. Pyne, Shailendra Anoopkumar-Dukie, and Lei Liu, "Sanguinaria canadensis: Traditional Medicine, Phytochemical Composition, Biological Activities and Current Uses," *International Journal of Molecular Sciences* 17 (9), 2016.

<sup>165</sup>Bloodroot Collective, *The political palate*, xi.

we encourage the reproduction of up to five recipes and any of the introductory material, properly credited, for feminist and vegetarian purposes. Please write us for more information and/or recipe exchange.<sup>166</sup>

Unlike previous publications, *The Political Palate* does not try to situate itself within the traditionally domestic confines of women's work, but the book does not take an oppositional stance by distancing its authors or its contents from the importance of femininity and motherhood either. Four pictures, each from different eras, feature women of varying ages and dress in soft, feminine poses above the caption that reads "Our Mothers." According to the group, the bloodroot possessed a "special beauty" as a "wildflower with a tough root system that is nevertheless so delicate."<sup>167</sup> The intricate root system known as the rhizome is a historic symbol of Deleuzean pedagogy and was later adopted as an integral structure for feminist collaborative learning.<sup>168</sup>

The theme of collaboration is carried throughout the cookbook as the authors explain that feminist food is made in a collective method,

That means each of us does what she can do best and that we learn from and teach each other. It means that, because we are working at what we want to be doing (which is to make a women's space, informed by women's values), we care very much about what we produce. Our food is our art. That means we are very particular, that continuity is important to us, that we all taste and discuss the final seasoning of a soup. It means we admire the simplicity of quick breads, puddings, or boiled greens and that we also appreciate the richness of a quiche or the elegance of an endive salad.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup>Bloodroot Collective, *The political palate*, copyright notice.

<sup>167</sup>Bloodroot Collective, *The political palate*, ix.

<sup>168</sup>The approach to pedagogy is specially interested in new approaches to the humanities and digital humanities. A contemporary academic journal focusing on feminist cultural studies is named "RHIZOMES" and publishes articles under a manifesto that opposes "the idea that knowledge must grow in a tree structure from previously accepted ideas. New thinking need not follow established patterns." RHIZOMES, "The Rhizomes Manifesto," *Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, <http://www.rhizomes.net/files/manifesto.html>.

<sup>169</sup>Bloodroot Collective, *The political palate*, xiii.



Similar to the early suffrage cookbooks which featured lengthy introductory or supplementary essays related to equity, food safety, and women's roles, *The Political Palate* also includes a detailed introduction that explains their stance as a feminist cookbook. Arguing that "feminism is not a part-time attitude...it is how we live all day, everyday," the Collective demonstrates the ubiquity of commonplace choices, including "the food we cook," as expressions of feminism.<sup>170</sup> This introduction is heavily cited with additional resources and references that are all women-authored and notably includes a footnote citing Gerda Lerner, well-known feminist historian, and her book *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (OUP, 1979). Employing another theme also used by early suffragists, the Bloodroot Collective follows vegetarian practices (with the occasional foray into local fish dishes), citing their food choices as a direct opposition "to the exploitation, domination, and destruction which come from factory farming and the hunter with the gun."<sup>171</sup> Likening the killing of animals for food to the oppression of women through male-controlled abortion and sterilization, the Collective demonstrate how vegetarianism serves as a method of political resistance to a patriarchal legal system. In the forty years since the organization of the Bloodroot Collective, the group published two sequel cookbooks including the *Second Seasonal Political Palate: A Feminist Vegetarian Cookbook* (1984) and *The Perennial Political Palate: The Third Feminist Vegetarian Cookbook* (1993). The restaurant, which is discussed further in Chapter 4 on women-owned-and-operated eating

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<sup>170</sup>Bloodroot Collective, *The political palate*. Included at the back of the cookbook is a "feminist bibliography" (organized as "food for thought: a subjective list") and features categories of resources such as "poetry," "music," "science fiction," "children," and "periodicals."

<sup>171</sup>Bloodroot Collective, *The political palate*, xi and xviii. Other feminist elements include a distancing from traditional Judeo-Christian holidays, instead focusing on earlier holy and high holidays that are more in line with the pagan and Celtic calendars and the natural ebb and flow of the seasons; Another common element is the exclusion of diet language, though they do focus on "healthy" ingredients, many of which are up for subjective and scientific interpretation ("As for counting calories and watching the waistline, we're not interested. Dieting has been an especially oppressive masochism expected of women in recent years.").

establishments, still serves exclusively vegan and vegetarian dishes, but continues to adapt their menu to suit changing contemporary tastes, like vegan-friendly dairy substitutes.<sup>172</sup> In addition to feminist principles, the restaurant supports pro-immigration policies by employing immigrant women in the restaurant, many of whom contributed to Bloodroot's international menu and the deeply rooted rhizome-like network of feminist resistance through food.

### **Twenty-first-century Cookbooks**

These historical antecedents, many of which still exist in various analog and digital forms today, helped establish a subversive publication infrastructure within the complex genre of women-authored domestic literature. These technologies continue to be a useful means of resistance for an expanding demographic of women who want to educate others or learn through the medium of food and recipes. After the 2016 election of President Donald Trump, food became a central rallying point for many Americans, around which issues of immigration, healthcare, trade, economic stability, and women's rights could all be discussed. At the center of these discussions were women, many of whom were empowered by their established expertise in food and cooking.

Two major cookbooks that came from this political change were *Feed the Resistance: Recipes and Ideas for Getting Involved* (2017) by Julia Turshen, an established cookbook author and recipe tester, and *Cooking Up Trouble: Recipes to Nourish Women* (2017) by Leela Cyd and Anne Parker, food photographers and activists with substantial followings on Instagram.<sup>173</sup> Unlike *Feed the Resistance*, which was published by a well-established publisher Chronicle

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<sup>172</sup>Tejal Rao, "Mixing Food and Feminism, Bloodroot Is 40 and Still Cooking," *New York Times*, March 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/dining/bloodroot-feminist-restaurant.html>.

<sup>173</sup>Julia Turshen, *Feed the Resistance: Recipes and Ideas for Getting Involved* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2017); Leela Cyd and Anne Parker, *Cooking Up Trouble: Recipes to Nourish Women* (Self-published, 2017).

Books, Cyd and Parker's *Cooking Up Trouble* was self-published and follows the general spiral-bound and paperback aesthetic and publication technologies of traditional community cookbooks.

*Feed the Resistance*, a “practical and inspiring handbook for feeding your political activism—and your appetite,” features recipes from many famous chefs and food influencers including Tunde Wey, Bill Smith, Antonio Lopez, Erika Council, and the People’s Kitchen Collective. Recipes in the cookbook are divided into categories of resistance: “Easy Meals for Folks Who Are Too Busy Resisting to Cook,” “Feeding the Masses: Food for Crowds,” and “Baked Goods & Portable Snacks.” Short essays break up the sections and cover topics such as “How Food Can Help End Recidivism” and “Ground Rules to Organized Activism.” A nod to early 20<sup>th</sup> century suffrage cookbooks with not-so-subtly subversive recipe titles, the cookbook contains equally pithy recipes for dishes including “The People’s Grits” (a recipe pulled from the historic Black Panther Party’s Free Breakfast for School Children Program) and “Persistence Biscuits” (a recipe Erika Council uses to fund computer science programs for underserved children in Atlanta).<sup>174</sup> Additional materials at the back of the book provide resources for getting involved and easy calls-to-action, several of which center on making food for others.

It is interesting to note Turshen's extensive tenure as a cookbook writer and editor, including her time co-authoring controversial celebrity Gwyneth Paltrow's two cookbooks, *My Father’s Daughter* (2011) and *It's All Good* (2013). Since writing *Feed the Resistance*, Turshen also established the highly lauded digital directory, Equity at the Table (EATT), which is described as

A practical and proactive response to the blatant gender and racial discrimination that plagues the food industry. EATT is an easy-to-navigate database for food industry

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<sup>174</sup>Turshen, *Feed the Resistance*, 96 and 108.

professionals featuring only women/gender non-conforming individuals and focusing primarily on POC and the LGBTQ community.<sup>175</sup>

While earlier activist cookbooks mentioned in this chapter featured recipes from both men and women, the diversity in both gender identity and ethnic background represented in Turshen's work speaks to the evolution of feminism and women's rights as a human issue rather than just a woman's issue.

A similar thread of inclusivity is woven throughout *Cooking Up Trouble*, which features a wide range of demographics and sexual orientations. The cookbook opens with a narrative, written by the founder and editor of *Mold Magazine* Linyee Yuan, and her experience at the Women's March on Washington in 2016. She explains her motivations and the world-wide collaborative efforts for sending messages about women's rights and follows with details about how they "were being powered by raw cacao truffles made by a mother, granola provided by a wife, and gingerbread cookies tucked away for the march by a sister."<sup>176</sup> She shares a call to action, arguing that "the kitchen table needs to become the site for work—both political and celebratory" and advises readers to "pack your snack bags."<sup>177</sup> A second short essay from the editors, signed Anne and Leela, echoes introductory remarks from a long line of feminist cookbooks arguing for vegetarian food, "conscientious and pleasurable" eating, and recipes to "stir the pot." Those recipes include breakfast salads, smoothies, and warm skillet of tomato shakshuka with feta, bone broths, and a "bolstering soup," and the secret for those raw cacao truffles that helped fuel the contributors for the Women's March.

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<sup>175</sup>Equality at the Table (EATT), "About," <https://equityatthetable.com/about/>.

<sup>176</sup>Cyd and Parker, *Cooking up Trouble*, introduction.

<sup>177</sup>Cyd and Parker, *Cooking up Trouble*, introduction.

While their historical antecedents often raised funds for bipartisan political organizations or general national aid advocacies, *Feed the Resistance* and *Cooking up Trouble* demonstrate contemporary methods of crowdsourced fundraising in the digital era. The cookbooks' relationships and targeted financial donations serve as important points in the long argument of women's resistance through food. All of the proceeds from *Feed the Resistance*, which recently totaled \$19,000 according to Julia Turshen, were donated to the American Civil Liberties Union (this is made clear to the consumer with a line printed on the top of the cover, above the book title, in bright red print).<sup>178</sup> The profits from *Cooking up Trouble* were sent to Planned Parenthood to help fund the numerous women's healthcare initiatives threatened by Trump's policies. Both cookbooks similarly utilized contemporary advertising methods, using social media platforms including Twitter and Instagram, to spread the word about their publications to interested readers. Leading the way with a custom hashtag #cookinguptrouble, authors Cyd and Parker advertised the cookbook in multiple posts on their respective Instagram feeds. Soon other contributors, followers, and readers styled the cover and recipes by posting images on their own Instagram feeds. In a similar fashion, Turshen used Twitter and the hashtag #feedtheresistance to share details about her forthcoming cookbook. The tag was quickly picked up by other Twitter-users who shared additional details about the book, including their favorite recipes, how they planned on using it, and the ways in which it had motivated them to action. Even though it was published in the winter of 2017, #feedtheresistance continued to trend on Twitter, spiking once again in November 2018 in anticipation of the midterm elections.

These contemporary publication technologies—including crowdsourced recipes, the ease and empowerment of self-publication, digital public relations, and the ability to access the

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<sup>178</sup>Shira Feder, "Cooking Food With A Side Of Activism," *Forward*, December 4, 2018, <https://forward.com/news/415144/julia-turshen/>.

community through grassroots approaches using social media—have broadened the field of what resistance cookbooks can and should look like. The concept of the community cookbook has evolved into an entirely new technology for collective feminist resistance and has the potential to reach a readership beyond early suffragists’ wildest imaginations. Mapping the historical foundations for these tools of feminist activism and how they have impacted one flashpoint after another is critical for understanding how these technologies change over time and how they might provide further opportunity for women’s resistance and empowerment going forward.

## CHAPTER 2: "WHERE MEN GO, WOMEN ARE CROWDED OUT": THE EVOLUTION OF POWER AND RESISTANCE OF WOMEN-OWNED RESTAURANTS

In the fall of 1974, a new restaurant called Bread and Roses was preparing to open near Inman Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The restaurant posted flyers and sent invites for an open house and "a taste of things to come." The flyers also instructed guests to bring a gift and provided a long list of suggestions: water and wine glasses, bread pans, pie plates, soup spoons, "good kitchen knives," water pitchers, "sturdy plastic freezer containers," ashtrays and bud vases, dining chairs, bar stools, "beautiful old mirrors," pepper mills, "feminist posters" and records ("especially women's music"), and a cash register.<sup>179</sup> Bread and Roses was a women's restaurant and everything from the walls to the dinner tables was built by the same women who would become its customers.

As we'll see through three case studies spanning from the early twentieth-century to present day, women have long used the occupation of physical food-related space as an expression of social and political resistance. Owning and occupying space within the American business landscape allowed women to participate in and ultimately disrupt traditional methods of capitalism. Food scholars, myself included, rely too much on the indefinite concept that all food is political—a statement that derives from the feminist concept that the "personal is political" and nothing could be so politically tumultuous as one's particular dealings with food. This chapter

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<sup>179</sup>"A Taste of Things to Come," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge, Mass, <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990120477650203941/catalog>. (Hereafter cited as *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*).

looks at how women take up physical space in the food world and the impact of women-owned eating establishments on the social and political empowerment of American women today. I focus on several important flashpoints of resistance within the larger timeline of American women's public eating experiences, including moments of occupation, ownership, and, lastly, online-organizing within the food industry. The first flashpoint, occupation, deserves clarification. The term "occupation" brings to mind the occupy movements of the early twenty-first century, especially within the context of social movements. While those movements are important aspects in the study of activism and social movements, the central connection between these contemporary occupations and the efforts of women nearly a hundred years prior is the "core claim to space."<sup>180</sup> More pointedly, I use this term within the context of women's relationships to restaurants to demonstrate their power within a space that deliberately excluded them. We begin briefly with the sexist constructs of suffrage-era restaurant dining culture. Next, we explore women-owned restaurants established during the feminist movement between the 1970s and 1980s. This historical context helps us understand the evolution of restaurant ownership in today's digital world and the technologies women use to claim agency in their own physical spaces.

### **Taking Up Space**

The concept of "taking up space" is not unique to my research and exists at the foundation of many existing fields of scholarship including gender and sexuality studies, geography, as well as digital media studies. Together, these fields help us understand the complexities of women's lived experiences involving food and dining in the public landscape and how the concept of "taking up space" evolved over time. Substantial scholarship exists on

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<sup>180</sup>Jenny Pickerill and John Krinsky. "Why Does Occupy Matter?" *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3-4 (2012): 279-287, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.708923>.



women's restaurant ownership and public dining experiences throughout the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. In *The Culinaricians: Lives and Careers from the First Age of American Fine Dining*, historian David Shields chronicles the lives of 175 chefs, caterers, and restaurateurs from 1793 to 1919, including the work of eighteen women. While this gender disparity is drastic, Shields' research highlights a prestigious group of women who were widely considered experts in their respective fields, including Ann Poppleton, one of America's first formally-trained pastry chefs, Nellie Murray, a celebrated caterer who was born into slavery, and Louise Volkmann, founder of New York's first vegetarian restaurant.<sup>181</sup> In *Turning the Tables: Restaurants and the Rise of the American Middle Class, 1880-1920*, historian Andrew Haley examines the transformation of American public dining by examining culinary magazines, menus, restaurant journals, and newspapers that charted the influence of middle-class consumers. One chapter explores the influence of middle-class women on restaurant culture.<sup>182</sup> While my research focuses mainly on restaurants, many food scholars and cultural historians have studied the significance of other eating establishments— including boarding houses (Elizabeth Engelhardt), tea rooms (Jan Whitaker), and "ice cream saloons" (Paul Freedman)—within American women's socioeconomic empowerment.<sup>183</sup>

While the female restaurateur remains relatively unstudied, the historic plight and resistance of waitresses is well documented. Part of a larger discussion of American labor

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<sup>181</sup>David S. Shields, *The Culinaricians*.

<sup>182</sup>Andrew P. Haley, *Turning the Tables: Restaurants and the Rise of the American Middle Class, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>183</sup>Elizabeth Engelhardt, "A Meal at Della's Place: Local Foodways and Entrepreneurship at a Raleigh boardinghouse," *Gravy* (Winter 2016), <https://www.southernfoodways.org/a-meal-at-dellas-place/>; Jan Whitaker, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn: A Social History of the Tea Room Craze in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015); Paul Freedman, "Women and Restaurants in the Nineteenth-Century United States," *Journal of Social History* 48, 1 (fall 2014): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shu042>.

history, historian Dorothy Sue Cobble traces the separate unionization efforts of black and white waitresses in the 1930s to the "feminization of the industry."<sup>184</sup> Central to this investigation of restaurant culture and women's experiences is Greta Foff Paules and her book *Dishing it Out: Power and Resistance among Waitresses in a New Jersey Restaurant* (1991).<sup>185</sup> Drawing on dozens of interviews with waitresses from across the nation, writer Alison Owings work *Hey Waitress! The USA from the Other Side of the Tray* documents the evolution, or rather stagnation, of restaurant culture into the late-twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>186</sup> Understanding the experiences of American waitresses and women's employment in the food industry helps us understand how contemporary eating establishments manage internal labor hierarchies and foster feminist cultures within their own communities

### **The Landscape of Women-Owned Restaurants**

Until recently, however, women-owned restaurants, specifically those that identified as feminist, have been overlooked by academic scholarship. If referenced, these restaurants were relegated to the footnotes or as brief examples as part of a larger work about food or women's culture. In *Finding the Movement* (2007), historian A. Rinn Enke writes about feminist restaurants and their role in the women's movement in the American Midwest.<sup>187</sup> Food scholar

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<sup>184</sup>Dorothy Sue Cobble, "'Drawing the Line': The Construction of a Gendered Work Force in the Food Service Industry," in *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, edited by Ava Baron, 216-242, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). Cobble expands on this history of women's labor in her own book, *Dishing it Out: Waitresses and their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

<sup>185</sup>Greta Foff Paules, *Dishing it Out: Power and Resistance Among Waitresses in a New Jersey Restaurant*, (Philadelphia, PN: Temple University Press, 1991).

<sup>186</sup>Alison Owings, *Hey, Waitress! The USA from the Other Side of the Tray* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004). Owings's interview recordings and other manuscript materials are now housed at the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University. While conducting archival research during the summers of 2018 and 2019, I briefly reviewed these materials for background research, but ultimately chose to focus on restaurant ownership culture instead of internal labor hierarchies.

<sup>187</sup>A. Finn Enke, *Finding the Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

Warren Belasco briefly mentions the New York feminist restaurant Mother Courage in his discussion of counterculture enterprise in *Appetite for Change* (2007).<sup>188</sup> In recent publications, women and gender scholar Alexandra Ketchum investigates feminist restaurants and other eating establishments from the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>189</sup> Based in Canada, much of Ketchum's scholarship focuses on the Canadian feminist movement that simultaneously existed with the women's movement in the United States. Ketchum centers her research upon the business politics and feminist ethics surrounding feminist restaurants between the 1960s and 1980s. While she does not call herself an activist scholar, I interpret Ketchum's recent work as such, specifically her zine, "How to Start a Feminist Restaurant" which provides a "DIY/DIT (together) guide for creating your own feminist restaurant, cafe, or coffeehouse."<sup>190</sup> Ketchum's scholarship also utilizes contemporary digital methodologies, including virtual mapping, that help visualize the geographic and community networks created and utilized by feminist restaurants since the 1970s.<sup>191</sup>

Many women's restaurants established during and immediately after the second iteration of feminism between the 1960s and 1980s were owned by women who identified as lesbian feminists. While the majority of my research does not center around sexuality, this particular chapter speaks to the history and significant impact of queer and lesbian history in United States

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<sup>188</sup>Warren Belasco, *Appetite for Change*.

<sup>189</sup>Alexandra Ketchum, "Cooking the books: Feminist restaurant owners' relationships with banks, loans and taxes," *Business History*, 2019; "Counter Culture: The Making of Feminist Food in Feminist Restaurants, Cafes, and Coffeehouses," *Cuizine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures* 7, 2 (2016); "Memory has added seasoning: The legacy of feminist restaurants and cafes in the United-States," *Anthropology of Food* [Online], December 2019, <http://journals.openedition.org/aof/9904>.

<sup>190</sup>Alexandra Ketchum, "How to Start a Feminist Restaurant," Micocosm Publishing (2018), <https://microcosmpublishing.com/catalog/zines/9138>.

<sup>191</sup>Alexandra Ketchum, "The Feminist Restaurant Project," <http://www.thefeministrestaurantproject.com>.

food culture. Historian Barbara Love points to two women, Fran Windant and Flavia Rando, founders of the 1970s food coop, The Lesbian Food Conspiracy, which sold food at-cost to women-owned restaurants and credit unions.<sup>192</sup> Recent doctoral projects on lesbian food culture include Gwendolyn Stegall's work on the spatial and political history of lesbian bars in New York.<sup>193</sup> While less research has been dedicated to feminist and lesbian-owned restaurants, scholars have highlighted the importance of geographies, particularly those involving food, activism, community-building, and resistance. Much of this scholarship focused on the construction of women-only or *womyn*-only space by separatist and extreme feminists who sought to challenge the traditions of patriarchal and man-made geographies.<sup>194</sup> Historically, women-only spaces shouldered significant legal challenges (including discrimination claims) in addition to ethical and moral concerns about the goals of feminism and who it does and does not allow to participate.<sup>195</sup> In her article *Kitchen Dramas*, architecture historian Nan Bauer Maglin demonstrated how geographic space can literally construct and reinforce gender, concepts that helped design the contemporary kitchen.<sup>196</sup> Understanding the role of geographic (and later

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<sup>192</sup>Barbara J. Love, ed., "Lesbian Food Conspiracy," *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975*, " (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 373, 496.

<sup>193</sup>Gwendolyn Stegall, "A Spatial History of Lesbian Bars in New York City," Master's thesis, Columbia University, 2019, <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/d8-k46h-fa23>.

<sup>194</sup>The use of the term *womyn* was a deliberate choice by certain feminist groups during the second-wave to denote a separation from men. This linguistic choice also typically referred to a type of feminism that favored a "womyn-born womyn" policy, barring everyone except cisgender women. Understandably, this policy posed serious concerns for transgender individuals and other feminists who operated outside of a binary gender construct. Lisa Jane Disch and M.E. Hawkesworth, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>195</sup>See Sine Anahita, "Nestled into Niches: Prefigurative Communities on Lesbian Land," *Journal of Homosexuality* 56, 6 (2009): 719-737; Kath Browne, "Womyn's Separatist Spaces: Rethinking Spaces of Difference and Exclusion," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 34, 4 (2009): 541-556.

<sup>196</sup>Nan Bauer Maglin, "Kitchen Dramas," in special issue "Making Room: Women and Architecture," *Heresies* 11, 3, no. 3 (1981): 42-46, <http://heresiesfilmproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/heresies11.pdf>.

virtual) space in the creation of power relations helps us understand the way women use food landscapes as a form of resistance.

While the landscape of the American restaurant industry evolved over time, the culture that excluded and challenged women's participation endured into the twenty-first century. We can see this articulated through the food-related media of the #metoo movement. Since 2017, the social media-based #metoo movement, a social movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault, shined a light on systemic and gendered problems within the food industry. Focusing specifically on restaurants and other eating establishments, the food world's #metoo movement was led primarily by women food journalists who had long observed and experienced these injustices alongside the female chefs, cooks, restaurant-owners, and waitstaff that were the subjects of their writing. In a long piece that hyperlinks to other related articles published between 2017-2018, the height of the #metoo movement in the food industry, food writer Helen Rosner chronicled the history of the submovement and proposed methods to combat sexual harassment.<sup>197</sup> As part of a larger team that won a Pulitzer Prize in 2018 for public service for reporting on workplace sexual harassment issues, *The New York Times* correspondents Kim Severson and Julia Moskin published dozens of articles on sexist restaurant culture and named chefs, owners, and sommeliers accused of various forms of sexual harassment.<sup>198</sup> Scholars have begun to incorporate these events and investigations into their research on women's historic and

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<sup>197</sup>Helen Rosner, "One Year of #MeToo: A Modest Proposal to Help Combat Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry," *The New Yorker*, October 10, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-gastronomy/one-year-of-metoo-a-modest-proposal-to-help-dismantle-the-restaurant-industrys-culture-of-sexual-harassment?verso=true>.

<sup>198</sup>Michael M. Grynbau, "New York Times and New Yorker Share Pulitzer for Public Service," *The New York Times*, April 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/16/business/media/pulitzer-prizes.html>; Julia Moskin and Kim Severson, "April Bloomfield Breaks Her Silence About Harassment at Her Restaurants," *The New York Times*, October 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/16/dining/april-bloomfield-spotted-pig-ken-friedman.html>; Kim Severson, "How #MeToo Changed Your Lunch," *The New York Times*, September 27, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/27/us/how-metoo-changed-your-lunch.html>.

contemporary experiences in the food industry. I join this effort by adding my own work on the legacy of women's resistance through food.

The research for this chapter relies on archival sources, discourse and literary analysis, informational interviews, and digital ethnography. I conducted in-person research in the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University in addition to significant digital archival work through several online databases. I sourced archival materials including periodicals, diaries and personal papers, day planners, notebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, menus, recipe cards, promotional materials, photographs, advertisements, and numerous cookbooks. My archival work builds upon the scholars who made the digital archival of feminist and lesbian restaurants their academic focus, including the extensive research of Alex Ketchum. My aim is not to repeat those efforts, but to add new insights using their interpretation of these historic materials and participating in a collaborative movement of telling untold stories about women and food.

While I aim to chronicle an informative, though not exhaustive, legacy of women's experiences in public food spaces, the majority of my research focuses on contemporary women-owned restaurants and the digital technologies they utilize in their businesses. The process of digital ethnography and becoming a member of these digital spaces was crucial for learning more about the importance of social media, technology, and virtual geographies for women's professional food work. I monitored social media pages across a variety of platforms, tracked social trends including hashtags, and participated in the community-supported communication efforts of several restaurants. I visited one establishment, *Rebel* in Somerville, Massachusetts, while I was conducting archival research in Boston. While physical visits to these establishments would be an exciting addition to my research, they are not necessary as the second part of this

chapter investigates the geographic evolution of contemporary restaurants and the changing concept of what it means to "take up space."

Numerous restaurants, and many establishments and women in the industry went unrecognized due to their class or more often due to their skin color.<sup>199</sup> This research does not ignore their efforts but unpacks the most public displays of resistance and the evolution of women's use of food-focused spaces in the name of enfranchisement. It's important to acknowledge the difference between restaurants that welcomed women and those that set themselves apart as masters of the culinary profession and therefore were exclusively male-spaces, like the high-end Delmonico's in New York City.<sup>200</sup> This gendered inequity and separation is important.

### **Occupying The Male Space**

"It does seem strange that women, whose respectability is apparent, may not satisfy their hunger, unless they are accompanied by men, while men, no matter what their characters may be, are admitted anywhere," argued Mrs. Harriot Stanton Blatch, daughter of noted suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton and up-and-coming leader of the women's movement in the summer of 1907.<sup>201</sup> After a long day at the Women's University Club in New York, Blatch and a female friend decided to dine at the Hoffman House, a fashionable hotel with a rooftop restaurant. Well aware of the dining policies of the era that barred unaccompanied women from restaurants, the

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<sup>199</sup>Angela Jill Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie: Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015.

<sup>200</sup>Established in the 1820s, Delmonico's brought French haute cuisine to the United States and established itself as an "aristocratic restaurant." For many years, it provided patrons with menus in either French or English, but as the association between France and fashionable society grew, the restaurant switched exclusively to French. The menu was likewise tailored to include only French dishes. Haley, *Turning the Tables*; "Suffrage Workers at Lunch," *The New York Times*, September 17, 1909.

<sup>201</sup>"Mrs. Blatch to Sue the Hoffman House," *The New York Times*, August 6, 1907, 1.

two women checked in at the front desk before taking the elevator to the rooftop. The desk clerk gave them no indication that they would be unwelcome. As they made their way to a table, a waiter asked Blatch if they had an escort. When Blatch replied that they did not, the waiter refused to serve them and passed the issue on to the head waiter who ultimately asked the women to leave. Blatch demanded to speak with a manager who then reiterated "the regulation of the house" put in place "for the protection of just such ladies" as Blatch and her dining partner. The policy, the manager claimed, kept "objectionable women" from dining in the restaurant. "I have never been bothered by objectionable women, when I have been annoyed it has been by men. I do not suppose you make any effort to keep *objectionable* men out," said Blatch.

Blatch levied a suit against the Hoffman House, not for money, but "for the purpose of establishing the right of women to dine in the public restaurants of the city when and how they deserved." The court ultimately ruled against Blatch, determining that restaurants held the right to refuse unaccompanied women diners so long as they offered alternative accommodations in private dining rooms first.<sup>202</sup> Women were allowed to dine in public spaces, but had to follow a set of rules that privileged male diners and supported the oversight of women dining in the company of men. Women could frequent the same restaurants, but were forced to eat in separate, private dining rooms. Nineteenth-century restaurants, the jury upheld, were not spaces meant for women.

Nineteenth-century restaurants' separation policies stemmed from an antiquated Victorian-era ideology of gendered spaces, a concept commonly called "separate spheres," that enforced moral expectations on American women. In reality, these expectations only applied to

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<sup>202</sup>"Hotels May Bar Lone Women Diners," *The New York Times*, February 6, 1908, 14; "Suffragists Aid Mrs. Blatch's Suit," *The New York Times*, October 5, 1907; "Mrs. Blatch Loses Her Suit," *The Sun* (New York, NY), February 6, 1908.



and were predominantly achievable by upper-class, non-working, white women. While women of all classes regularly navigated public dining spaces, especially as more women worked outside of the home, rules reinforced class differences between female diners. In his research on nineteenth-century women, social historian Paul Freedman demonstrates the complexity of these separate spaces and how these policies reinforced organization rather than exclusion.<sup>203</sup> After 1850, Freedman explains, "more accommodation was made for women shopping and later for working women," with the establishment of "protected dining" places such as "Ladies' Ordinaries," "ice cream saloons," women's luncheons, and tea rooms. Respectable women's dining establishments tended to not serve alcohol, which "guaranteed a sober, refined and tranquil atmosphere" (a concept that appears again in women-owned restaurants established between the 1960s and 1980s).<sup>204</sup> While alcohol-free eating establishments did not directly imply an affiliation or moral standing with the anti-alcohol Temperance Movement that was gaining ground in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, many women-owned and suffrage-related restaurants pointedly excluded alcohol from their menus.<sup>205</sup>

### **The Suffrage Cafeteria**

During the early twentieth-century, occupying public food-related spaces became a tool for the suffrage movement. Relying on the financial and societal connections of wealthy upper-class suffragists, activists who also supported women's ability to dine in public spaces, the suffrage movement helped establish several of the first restaurants friendly to white women of

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<sup>203</sup>Freedman, "Women and Restaurants in the Nineteenth-Century United States."

<sup>204</sup>Freedman, "Women and Restaurants in the Nineteenth-Century United States."

<sup>205</sup>Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995); Holly Berkley Fletcher, *Gender and the American Temperance Movement of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Jack S. Blocker, Jr. "Separate Paths: Suffragists and the Women's Temperance Crusade," *Signs* 10, 3 (Spring 1985): 460-476.

means in the United States. Alva Vanderbilt Belmont was a prominent wealthy American socialite who married into two even more prominent multi-millionaire families. After the death of her second husband, Belmont became a "militant woman's rights advocate" and founded one first suffrage restaurants in the United States. Located at 140 East 34th Street in New York, the lunchroom also served as a space for the Political Equality League, an organization Belmont founded to gain votes for suffrage throughout the district. While the combination of food and suffrage campaigns was nothing new, Belmont explained that,

The whole idea of the lunch room started from the wail of a man who complained that the suffragists were so busy taking care of themselves that they forgot all about the needs of the other sex and who declared that for his part he believe that if they would get busy and open a place where a man could get pies like those mother used to make and a few other hard and soft necessities of existence, such as crullers and clam chowder, they wouldn't have to ask for the vote, it would be handed to them so quickly that they wouldn't know what had happened.<sup>206</sup>

Every day between the hours of 11:30 AM and 2:30 PM, the establishment served "a hot buffet luncheon" and welcomed as "heterogeneous an assembly as you could find from the Battery to the Bronx."<sup>207</sup> Patrons were particularly intrigued at the "feminine ingenuity" of the table arrangements, which could be hooked together to form a platform at one end of the room.<sup>208</sup>

Unexpectedly, Belmont decided to close the lunchroom and relocate her suffrage efforts a few blocks north to No. 13 and No. 15 East 41st Street, dubbing her new restaurant, The Suffrage Cafeteria.<sup>209</sup> This new location could serve more patrons during the lunch rush and

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<sup>206</sup>"Home Cooking Making Converts to Woman Suffrage: Mrs. Belmont's Lunch Room Proves a Strong Appeal to Men," *The Sun* (New York, NY), January 22, 1911.

<sup>207</sup>"Home Cooking Making Converts to Woman Suffrage," *The Sun*.

<sup>208</sup>According to one report, when an Anti-suffragist came into the lunch room he was won over by the food and exclaimed that he "never expected to eat off a suffrage platform." "Home Cooking Making Converts to Woman Suffrage," *The Sun*.

<sup>209</sup>Sylvia D. Hoffert, *Alva Vanderbilt Belmont: Unlikely Champion of Women's Rights* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), ix.

provided diners with "a fine feast for 40 cents" with suffrage literature for dessert.<sup>210</sup> Both women and men dined at the restaurant, though men "unprotected by a woman" could choose to dine in a separate room with other lunchtime bachelors; all diners ate from the same set of white China stamped in gold with the phrase: "Votes for Women."<sup>211</sup>

Despite The Suffrage Cafeteria's explicit political agenda—the "suffrage literature room" was located immediately next to the front door"—several newspaper reports argued that the lunchroom's popularity hinged on its construction as a safe space for men.<sup>212</sup> One newspaper described "the food is good to eat" and that the appeals for suffrage "are made only in the eye and do not reach the talking stage."<sup>213</sup> Other reports credit the abundance of male customers as an indication of the restaurant's success, claiming that the "proof of the pudding is that men buy it."<sup>214</sup> An article in *The Sun* opened with the line: "trust a man for finding out where there are good things to eat."<sup>215</sup> A restaurant, even one built by women and for women, could not be deemed a success unless a man declared it one first.

### **Identity Crisis in The Lunchroom**

Shortly after moving to its new location on 41st Street, The Suffrage Cafeteria added a hygiene department above the restaurant and replaced "cozy sitting rooms and reading tables"

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<sup>210</sup>"Ting-A-Ling! Luncheon's on at Mrs. Belmont's," *New York Tribune*, September 30, 1913.

<sup>211</sup>"Ting-A-Ling! Luncheon's on at Mrs. Belmont's," *New York Tribune*.

<sup>212</sup>"Ting-A-Ling! Luncheon's on at Mrs. Belmont's," *New York Tribune*.

<sup>213</sup>"Suffrage Cafeteria," *The Bellman*, October 19, 1912.

<sup>214</sup>"Suffrage Cafeteria," *The Bellman*.

<sup>215</sup>"Home Cooking Making Converts to Woman Suffrage," *The Sun*.

with "soap counters and shelves" filled with beauty supplies."<sup>216</sup> When sales in the hygiene department began to wane, Belmont stationed "beauty barkers" by the front door who greeted customers not with questions about suffrage issues, but about the latest "hair tonics and pink pills."<sup>217</sup> The barkers hounded men, too, offering more manly options including "corn plasters and dandruff cures."<sup>218</sup> Mary Donneley, the lunchroom's veteran manager (who first worked at the 34th Street location), complained about the loss of "old neighborly hospitality" for "society methods" and eventually resigned. She argued that shop girls did not want or need to be marketed the latest beauty products since they often sold the same items in their own workplaces, and talking to men about personal hygiene left little time for the more important suffrage causes.

Donneley explained her concern over The Suffrage Cafeteria's problematic workplace culture in a tell-all opinion piece that circulated through newspapers across the nation.<sup>219</sup> While she believed that there was "a close connection between suffrage and food, "the overly industrious methods employed by Belmont exhausted her workers and obfuscated the underlying

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<sup>216</sup>"My Experiences with a Society Suffragette' The Intimate Anecdotes of Mrs. O.H.P. Belmont's ex-first Aidess, who quit because she couldn't approve of fashion, food, beauty and 'Votes for Women' as Team Workers," *El Paso Herald*, Friday, March 8, 1912.

<sup>217</sup>"My Experiences with a Society Suffragette,'" *El Paso Herald*.

<sup>218</sup>"My Experiences with a Society Suffragette,'" *El Paso Herald*.

<sup>219</sup>Ran in newspapers from the San Francisco Examiner to the El Paso Herald to The Tennessean; published by the American-Examiner (Great Britain Rights Reserved).

message of suffrage.<sup>220</sup> "The combination of society, suffrage, food, and hygiene," she explained "is terribly indigestible for our cause."<sup>221</sup>

While Donneley's concerns were valid, so was Belmont's push to connect suffrage with traditional femininity. For years, anti-suffrage campaigns relied on cartoons and caricatures in which women possessed oversized or manly features, dirty and exaggeratedly aged faces, and often veered into racist tropes with slanted eyes or darkened skin.<sup>222</sup> Using food as a medium for the suffrage message demonstrated a commitment to society's expectations of a wife and mother, but layering that message with traditional elements of white femininity—through beauty products and feminine hygiene—showed that suffrage did not deprive suffragists of their "womanhood" either. Where food was once used as a method for turning curious and undecided voters into sympathizers, Belmont's lunchroom lost focus and soon after its diners. Whether Belmont feared that suffrage might suffer without the support of female consumer sales, the lunchroom's mixed messaging about enfranchisement *and* capitalistic beauty enhancements hurt

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<sup>220</sup>Belmont created plans for a number of schemes in support of suffrage including a "suffrage bank and newspaper" that would run out of the same building as the lunchroom. The bank was styled as the "Political Equality Association Bank" and planned to only employ women tellers, bookkeepers, and "women or little girl bank messengers, armed to the teeth against would-be robbers." Belmont hoped this would encourage women workers to put any money leftover from their lunchroom purchases and beauty counter buys into bank savings ("LUNCHROOM QUEEN QUITs MRS. BELMONT," *The New York Times*, 30 January 1912). Belmont also operated a "Suffrage Farm" at her Long Island estate, Brookholt. There she established an agricultural school for young women with the aim of educating them in the latest farming practices and offering them a small farm upon completion of the program. "To be a good farmer," said Belmont, "is only another way of working out the votes-for-women problem." "Farmerettes in A No-Adam Eden: Mrs. Belmont to Colonize Women on 200 Acres (Must be City Girls and Desirous of Voting; Will Get Chance to Buy Farm for Themselves After They Become Expert," *The Twice-A-Week Messenger*, Owensboro, KY, 15 March 1911.

<sup>221</sup>"My Experiences with a Society Suffragette," *El Paso Herald*.

<sup>222</sup>Allison K. Lange, *Picturing Political Power: Images in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

workers and diners alike. In her tell-all, Donneley argued that "how-to-be-beautiful ideas, or pink pills" would not lead to the vote and, ultimately, she was right.<sup>223</sup>

In addition to the complicated messaging, the Suffrage Cafeteria's downfall was partially due to Belmont's role in New York's high society, a group of mostly white, wealthy families. While Belmont championed the poor, her socialite connections and desire to turn a profit lost focus on the lower working classes who would most benefit from suffrage reforms. Like many other suffrage efforts of the era, Belmont failed to make room for women of color in her food-related campaigns. When eight black suffragists attempted to dine in the lunchroom, staff offered the women boxed lunches instead and asked them to eat somewhere else.<sup>224</sup> While the lunchroom catered to a range of working classes, the restaurant and its adjoining women-run offices were also called "The Suffrage White House" and Belmont, or sometimes Donneley, designated as "Lunchroom Queen."<sup>225</sup> Before she opened her eating establishments, Belmont hosted a luncheon at Delmonico's, a high-end restaurant and a "social institution" for the New York elite, honoring the heads of local suffrage organizations and special guests including the Rev. Anna Howard Shaw.<sup>226</sup> In Belmont's attempts to take up physical space in the name of suffrage, she repeatedly occupied places that historically and systematically excluded a large portion of American women.

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<sup>223</sup>No information exist about Mary Donneley's next occupation or what she did after working in The Suffrage Cafeteria. While she experienced a significant amount of press during her time with Belmont, her status as a working-class individual presumably led to her disappearance from the larger narrative surrounding her former employer, her previous workplace, and the history of suffrage altogether. Sadly, her experience is not unique and is one of the many aspects of women's history scholars need to reckon with as we unpack these problematic ramifications of our inherited society.

<sup>224</sup>Johanna Neuman, *Gilded Suffragists: The New York Socialites who Fought for Women's Right to Vote* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

<sup>225</sup>"Lunchroom Queen Quits Mrs. Belmont," *The New York Times*.

## Votes for Women Restaurant

Shortly after Belmont closed her cafeteria, another suffrage dining option opened across town in the bustling Financial District. Located at 70 Wall Street, the Votes for Women Restaurant, alternatively and confusingly called the Suffrage Lunch Room by a few media reports, opened on February 15, 1915. Owned and operated by the Empire State Campaign Committee, the restaurant also served as the organization's political headquarters. Organized in 1913, the Empire State Campaign Committee was a coalition of women's suffrage organizations across New York and led by Carrie Chapman Catt. Catt served as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) president in 1900 and again from 1915 to 1920. After helping secure the vote via the Nineteenth Amendment, Catt founded the League of Women Voters. The restaurant promised "first-class cooking and quick-service," and scheduled special speakers as a "daily cabaret feature."<sup>227</sup>

Their location on Wall Street was deliberate. As an article in *The New York Times* exclaimed, the women were there to make a "Plea for Wall St. Votes" from the large—and hungry—population of eligible male voters.<sup>228</sup> During the work day in between mealtimes, women held talks outside on the sidewalk, handing out suffrage literature and telling Wall Street workers to come by for "homemade food" including on-the-nose menu items such as "Votes-for-women salad" and a "Victory sundae."<sup>229</sup> Much like Belmont's cafeteria, this new lunchroom utilized its extensive political and social network by hosting socialites and government officials, which ultimately led to write-ups in newspapers across the region. Even the mayor's wife, Mrs.

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<sup>227</sup>"House-Warming Week on Wall Street." *The Ithaca Journal* (Ithaca, NY 15), February 1915.

<sup>228</sup>"Women Make Plea for Wall St. Votes," *The New York Times*, September 16, 1915.

<sup>229</sup>"Suffs' Homemade Food Pleases Wall St.; Brokers Listen Attentively to Talks," *The Sun* (New York, NY), September 16, 1915.

Olive Mitchel, visited the restaurant during the opening day celebration and was "among those who ate prunes for suffrage."<sup>230</sup> Where Belmont pushed a secondary agenda of beauty and feminine ideals, the Votes for Women Restaurant focused solely on suffrage. While additional issues might have been on the menu, enfranchisement remained central enough that media coverage of the restaurant failed to highlight any other causes, resulting in a powerful campaign.

### **Lunch Wagons for Suffrage**

To counter the elite displays like those of the original Suffrage Cafeteria and to cater to different demographics, a handful of suffrage organizers utilized more democratic food spaces—such as lunch wagons—to better connect with the working classes. After launching on Wall Street, the Votes for Women Restaurant relied on this tactic to reach blue-collar workers and the boroughs beyond Manhattan. A precursor to contemporary food trucks, the first lunch wagons were four-wheeled motorized or horse-drawn vehicles that offered quick, affordable meals to workers at or near their workplaces including "factories, office buildings, and construction sites."<sup>231</sup> Lunch wagons were also a tactic employed by the temperance movement in the early twentieth-century. During this time, bars and saloons often gave away free meals to patrons drinking at their establishments. While these free meals presumably helped many low-income people, temperance activists considered this a problematic form of social relief. To counter these "free lunches," temperance activists set up lunch wagons directly outside drinking establishments and provided free or cheap food offerings. Across the nation, both men and women owned and operated lunch wagons, which served meals at all times of the day despite their name, and the business was particularly appealing to recent immigrants looking for work in the food industry.

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<sup>230</sup>"Votes for Women Lunch Room in Wall Street," *Passaic Daily News* (Passaic, NJ), February 18, 1915.

<sup>231</sup>Helen Tangires, "American Lunch Wagons," *Journal of American Culture* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 91-108.



While lunch wagons still required substantial permits and licensing, not to mention initial operating costs, these burdens were far less than those associated with typical brick-and-mortar restaurants. In the south, lunch wagons were more commonly known as dope wagons, named for the “dopes” or colas peddled to workers needing sugary, caffeinated pick-me-ups.<sup>232</sup> Eugenia Duke (who created Duke mayonnaise and other inexpensive sandwich spreads) operated one such dope wagon stocked with "candies, sodas, sandwiches...and other portable, high-calorie" foods.<sup>233</sup> These carbohydrate and sugar-packed snacks were both popular and essential to workers with little time for breaks.

At the turn of the century, temperance activists employed lunch wagons as a tactic in their efforts to discourage alcohol consumption. Bars and saloons often gave away free meals to patrons who purchased drinks at their establishments. While these free meals presumably helped many low-wage workers and other people in need of food assistance, temperance activists considered this a problematic form of social relief since the transaction promoted the consumption of alcohol. To counter these "free lunches," temperance activists set up lunch wagons directly outside drinking establishments and provided free or cheap food offerings to would-be bar patrons and anyone else seeking a meal. By the time suffrage organizers occupied the lunch wagon as a campaign space, society had already stereotyped these mobile eateries as unappetizing, lesser, and unsanitary. These negative associations stemmed from the lunch wagon's connection with immigrant groups, a social hang-up that we see repeated time and again

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<sup>232</sup>Elizabeth Engelhardt, "Beyond Grits and Gravy: Appalachian Chicken and Waffles: Countering Southern Food Fetishism," *Southern Cultures* 21, no. 1 Food (Spring 2015): 80.

<sup>233</sup>Engelhardt, "Beyond Grits and Gravy," 80 and Emily Wallace, "Duke's Mayonnaise: The Southern spread with a cult following," *The Washington Post*, November 5, 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/food/dukes-mayonnaise-the-southern-spread-with-a-cult-following/2013/11/04/90f508a2-40e5-11e3-a624-41d661b0bb78\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/food/dukes-mayonnaise-the-southern-spread-with-a-cult-following/2013/11/04/90f508a2-40e5-11e3-a624-41d661b0bb78_story.html).

through American food history, as well as their relationship with the temperance movement just a few years before.<sup>234</sup>

In 1911, members of the Woman Suffrage Party operated a lunch wagon at Fordham Square corner, dispensing literature and sandwiches and "striving for the vote by way of the stomach."<sup>235</sup> Food quality, as well as "pure" food, sanitary working conditions, and the cost-of-living, were central issues of the suffrage movement. Suffrage activists hoped to highlight these issues (and reach more people) through the use of lunch wagons. Betting on the existing negative stereotypes of these mobile eateries, the movement aimed to "make the unthinking mass of citizens see the connection between the ballot and the cost-of-living."<sup>236</sup> To this end, suffragists showed how women's involvement could "clean up" food as they sold slices of pie, cups of coffee, and "suffrage lemonade" from their specially decorated lunch wagons. Women yelled "have a Suffrage Sandwich!" and "Drink a glass of Suffrage Lemonade" to curious passersby.<sup>237</sup> While suffrage efforts attempted to show the necessity of women's voting power, news reports from the era focused instead on the old stereotypes, claiming that the women "courageously ate" from the wagons and that the public is "dared to eat," too. Unhindered by the press, the Woman Suffrage Party made plans to "put a suffrage lunch wagon in every borough" by the end of the year.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup>Helen Tangires covers the negative stereotypes of nineteenth-century wholesalers, who were often immigrants, and food purity in her book *Moveable Markets*. In 2015, food writer Lavanya Ramanathan wrote about the problematic practice of calling immigrant food "ethnic" and the longstanding associations between cost, sanitation, and speed with immigrant foodways in the United States ("Why everyone should stop calling immigrant food 'ethnic'," *Washington Post*, July 21, 2015).

<sup>235</sup>"Suffrage Lunch Wagon the Latest," *The Pittsburg Press* (Pittsburgh, PA), May 23, 1911 and "Lunch in Colors on Suffrage Cart," *The New York Times*, July 11, 1911.

<sup>236</sup>"Lunch in Colors on Suffrage Cart," *The New York Times*.

<sup>237</sup>"Lunch in Colors on Suffrage Cart," *The New York Times*.

<sup>238</sup>"Lunch in Colors on Suffrage Cart," *The New York Times*.

In 1915, another lunch wagon, drawn by Votes, the aptly named horse, caused a stir on Wall Street as it provided suffragists the space and mobility to reach new groups of constituents. Instead of cheap meals, the suffrage wagon sold "brain food for voters" and traveled around the streets of New York "stocked with all kinds of printed matter for distribution."<sup>239</sup> While a few reports argued that the lunch wagon's popularity was due to the "pretty girls" driving the vehicle, the suffragists' broader success stemmed from reaching out to working-class voters in familiar and accessible ways. Distancing suffrage from the stuffy leisure of the restaurant world showed voters that women knew the value of workers' time and acknowledged the widening class-divide that limited many voters' ability to patronize places like the suffrage lunchroom.

### **Closing Up Shop**

By the time white women gained the vote in 1920, suffrage luncheons, pointedly political dining rooms, and lunch wagons stuffed with enfranchisement literature had run their course. The women who occupied the traditionally male-dominated world of restaurants had made their point and no longer relied on this public-platform for political gains. Many women involved in the suffrage lunchrooms, predominantly white, affluent women like Blatch and Belmont, never required the financial agency that restaurant work could provide. While women continued to work in restaurants, and a few even owned their own establishments, the exit of the suffrage campaigns allowed the industry to return to its default settings: a physical space for men.

After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and for several long decades, women's roles in the restaurant world remained largely the same. Women served as waitresses, helped support family restaurants, ran boarding houses, and created a number of restaurant food products and ingredients. When women owned or managed an eating establishment it was often

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<sup>239</sup>"Brain Food for Voters from New Suffrage Lunch Wagon," *Brooklyn Times Union* (Brooklyn, NY), April 15, 1915.

a tea room or a cafeteria, both spaces that either catered to other women or were socially approved endeavors for women working in the food industry. Food scholar Jan Whitaker unpacks the subversive agendas of early twentieth-century tea rooms and the subtle feminism of communal dining and shared spaces.<sup>240</sup>

Women in the twentieth-century restaurant world existed primarily as laborers and semi-invested owners. And while tea rooms and cafeterias and the labor of waitresses, as well as women food entrepreneurs, such as cooks and bakers, each possessed their own complex histories and place within the larger scope of American women's history, their messaging about women's rights was, on the surface, apolitical. Progressing through the immediate and post-suffrage era, there were slightly more political food spaces, including cooking schools in the 1890s, home economists driven by social missions, shared kitchen spaces built under ideals of communal work and equity, and blatantly patriotic Victory Gardens tended to by women aiding the war efforts in the 1930s and 1940s. All of these important food spaces can be studied through a political lens, but their focus was not necessarily women's rights. Nevertheless, these historic spaces each contributed to the evolving role of women in society and bring us to a new moment shortly after the 1980s, when the restaurant world began to change again.

### **Bread and Roses**

On Sunday, October 9, 1977, Bread and Roses hosted Norma Swenson and Judy Norsigian, two of the co-authors of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.<sup>241</sup> A month later, proceeds from a Mexican themed dinner benefited the local Woman Against Violence Against Women

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<sup>240</sup>Whitaker, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn*.

<sup>241</sup>*Our Bodies, Ourselves* was first independently published with the New England Free Press in 1971 by a group of women in the Boston area. After significant, but mostly underground success, the group incorporated as the Boston Women's Health Book Collective and re-published with the mainstream publisher Simon & Schuster. "Day planner for 1977-1978," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

organization.<sup>242</sup> And on Sunday, March 2, 1978, Audre Lorde came to dinner. Patricia Hynes, one of the founding members of the Bread and Roses restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts, listed each of these events in her *the liberated woman's appointment calendar* day planner along with grocery lists for sesame seeds, Worcestershire sauce, raisins, and rolled oats, cooking and recipe notes about pressure cookers, and incomplete thoughts about potential women of interest like the "one who made feminist films".<sup>243</sup> Bread and Roses started with these notes scattered throughout Hynes's day planners, a strategic restaurant proposal, and a vision of "a place where women and their friends can get together and eat in a feminist atmosphere." But what made a restaurant a place for women? How was it different from all the other women-centered places that came before? And what did it take to create a "feminist atmosphere"?

### **A Feminist Atmosphere, a Feminist Mission**

In their initial prospectus, Hynes and the other co-founders wanted their then-unnamed women's restaurant to be a "community center where there will be a range of entertainments and activities for the women of Boston" and "a place where any women can feel comfortable, whether she comes on her own or with friends."<sup>244</sup> The feminist mission was clear as Hynes and her fellow restaurateurs stated that they were "naturally opposed to capitalism" and planned to operate "an alternative to business institutions" as they had known them. Understanding that they still had to rely on this enterprise in order to make a living, they outlined a plan for the financial

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<sup>242</sup>"Day planner for 1977-1978," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>243</sup>*The liberated woman's appointment calendar* included weekly anecdotes from women's history across the globe. One page featured a black and white image of three British women who tried to celebrate the passage of the Sex Discrimination Act by "invading El Vino's, a popular Fleet Street bar that had always excluded unescorted women." Each day of the week had a little factoid about that day in history. For example, Sunday March 2 (the day Audre Lorde came to speak at the restaurant) was also the day that Jeannette Rankin of Montana became the first U.S. congresswoman in 1917. "Day planner for 1977-1978," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>244</sup>"Women's Restaurant Initial Prospectus," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

health of the restaurant. This plan included avenues for both profits and donations. The former would go towards the running of the business, "reasonable returns" to their shareholders ("not more than 10% a year"), and any surplus would go towards feminist causes. An early adopter of a no-tipping policy, the restaurant planned to ask customers to instead "give donations to various causes" including local women's shelters, feminist bookstores, the Boston Movement Bail Fund, the Women's Cooperative, Families and Friends of Prisoners, and LIBERA ("a consciousness-raising program which will explore and celebrate woman's struggle to be a whole human being in a patriarchal society that aired on WBUR at 8:00 PM on Thursdays").<sup>245</sup> Lacking the funds to outright open the restaurant, Hynes and co-founders sent these business plans to potential investors. The document listed restaurant shares for \$100 apiece and finished with a final call to action: "INVEST IN WOMEN (or, put your money where your mouth is going to be)."

The founders were not only dedicated feminists, but highly educated women who had keenly observed the many pitfalls of more traditional and capitalistic businesses. Styling themselves as The Women's Restaurant, Inc., the founders included Patricia (Patsy) Hynes, Ann Kendall, Gill Gane, and Gloria Bernheim. Hynes served as president of the corporation, Gane as the Vice President, Treasurer, and Clerk, and Kendall and Bernheim as Directors. Hynes held an MA in Feminist Studies from the Cambridge-Goddard Graduate School. Gane taught courses on women and literature at the Graduate School as well as at Tufts University and at the Cambridge Women's Center near the proposed restaurant site. Gane also worked as a coordinator of a women's studies conference at Northeastern University in the spring of 1974. Bernheim and Kendall held advanced degrees in higher education. In addition to their proposal, the founders also produced a set of restaurant bylaws that outlined the role of its board of directors,

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<sup>245</sup>"Bread and Roses Menus," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

shareholders, and their management plans. While consisting mostly of boilerplate information, the document contains several feminist amendments including the restructured hierarchy of roles, as well as the handwritten edit of "Chairman" to "Chairwoman" and the correction of several nearby pronouns from "he" to "she" and "his" to "hers." The focus on gender and explicit shift from male to female would ultimately serve as the foundation for all feminist acts at Bread and Roses.

Gender also proved to be a central theme in the renovation of the proposed location for the restaurant, which formerly housed a bar and was in a substantial state of disrepair. Physical location was key as the restaurant aimed to support women's needs and concerns as well as their nourishment, especially as the future restaurant sat directly across the road from a new Women's Community Health Clinic. Though not fully realized in the early stages of the restaurant, this location, between Inman and Prospect Streets, was known as "Feminist Row" and would expand to eventually include another restaurant in addition to "a bookstore, a credit union, clothing and craft shop, pottery store, lawyers' offices, health clinic, child care center and a counseling service" all run by women.<sup>246</sup> This proposed space was described as a "man's space" and the founders intended to revitalize it with women's labor and a feminist atmosphere. To complete this transformation, co-founders needed at least \$15,000 for renovations as well as equipment to subsidize the restaurant during the first year.<sup>247</sup> With funds secured and permits in hand, the restaurant was transformed into two rooms in addition to the kitchen, the larger of which served

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<sup>246</sup>"JUST WOMEN," *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT), January 24, 1978, *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>247</sup>They ultimately raised \$17,000. Gale Goldberg, "Feminism and Food: An Alternative to Restaurants," Final paper for *Sexual Politics and Design* taught by Dolores Hayden, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1976, *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

as a meeting space for women's groups and entertainment, a safe place for women to "play cards and other games, read, talk, and relax."

### **Feminist Labor Practices**

The Bread and Roses vision of a feminist restaurant prioritized the use of women's labor, especially in fields, such as construction and law, in which women continued to suffer from marginalization. They engaged women architects from the all-women Open Design Office to draw up blueprints, women lawyers from the Women's Law Collective in Cambridge, Massachusetts to help work out the corporate structure and file with the SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission), and a team of women carpenters to work on renovating the space. One of the carpenters, Gale B. Goldberg, wrote a paper on the restaurant (from which many of these facts are taken) for a course on Sexual Politics and Design taught by restaurant co-founder and then-MIT architecture professor Dolores Hayden in the fall of 1976.<sup>248</sup>

The next step in creating the ideal "feminist atmosphere" involved the restaurant's interior decor. Walls were hung with feminist posters, new soft lighting glowed over the renovated bar, and "candles and roses" topped each table, according to Goldberg. Recordings of women's music played throughout the space and guests routinely commented that Bread and Roses was "one of the few good restaurants where 'unescorted' women are made to feel welcome."<sup>249</sup> The space allowed women to eat and, perhaps more importantly, exist without scrutiny over their solitude. One article entitled "Eating Alone and Liking It" by Marilyn Schugar for *Equal Times* featured

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<sup>248</sup>Hayden also taught at UC Berkeley, UCLA, and Yale. She is the author of numerous books on urban history, gender, and architecture including *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (MIT Press, 1981).

<sup>249</sup>Jeanne Tedesco, "Bread and Roses, retrospective," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.



the restaurant as a great option for solo female diners.<sup>250</sup> And though not explicitly a lesbian bar or restaurant, though many did exist before, during, and after Bread and Roses time, the Cambridge restaurant demonstrated its support of same-sex relationships through the various LGBTQ-focused initiatives and scheduled programming listed on their monthly menus.<sup>251</sup>

Labor divisions inside the restaurant also underwent a feminist restructuring. As part of their business plan, Hynes and co-founders eschewed the traditional roles of waiters, front-of-house staff, cooks, dishwashers, and other necessary positions that allow a restaurant to operate. Instead, "each woman working at the restaurant shares the responsibility of setting the tables, planning the meals and doing the cooking, washing the dishes, as well as general cleanup and maintenance."<sup>252</sup> Even restaurant guests were expected to perform a small share of the labor by picking up their food once it was ready and serving themselves freshly baked bread at the counter. This self-service approach streamlined the restaurant's workflow, reduced costs, and, most importantly, eliminated "girls waiting on tables"—a political move in response to the historically unfair labor practices of waitressing.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup>Marilyn Schugar, "Eating Out...Alone and liking it," *Equal Times*, August 21, 1977, *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>251</sup>A further environmental study of the impact and significance of lesbian bars in Canada can be found in Maxine Wolfe's article "Invisible Women in Invisible Places: Lesbians, Lesbian Bars, and the Social Production of People/Environment Relationships," *Architecture and Behavior* 8, no. 2 (1992): 137-158; Kelly Hankin's book *The Girls in the Back Room: Looking at the Lesbian Bar* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002) provides additional insight into lesbian-friendly spaces represented in media and in real life; and The Lesbian Bar Project, launched in 2020 during an unprecedented year of restaurant and bar closures due to the global pandemic, with the intention to celebrate and support lesbian bars across the nation, "Hinge Partners with The Lesbian Bar Project to Save Lesbian Bars Across the Country: The dating app 'designed to be deleted' is offering 'stimulus checks' to support the bars and encouraging LGBTQIA+ singles to go on a date at select establishments," *PR Newswire, New York, August 5, 2021*.

<sup>252</sup>Goldberg, "Feminism and Food," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>253</sup>Susan Trausch, "Women at work," *The Boston Globe*, June 27, 1976. In addition to Alison Owings's book *Hey, waitress!: the USA from the other side of the tray* (University of California Press, 2002) Dorothy Sue Cobble unpacks the gendered and racialized labor history of waitressing in her book *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (University of Illinois Press, 1991). Owings papers and recordings related to this research are housed, alongside the Bread and Roses papers, at the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute.

## The Power of Bread

The bread held meaning. It was a way for customers to participate, beyond spending their money, in the feminist principles of Bread and Roses. Bread was not only the symbol of the restaurant, their logo featured a silhouetted slice of sandwich bread with a rose design cut out of the middle, but of the larger legacy of feminist activism, too. The phrase was first used in a speech by American suffrage activist Helen Todd and later served as the inspiration of the poem "Bread and Roses" written by James Oppenheim and published in *The American Magazine* in 1911.<sup>254</sup> The phrase's most common association, however, is with the 1912 textile mill strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts.<sup>255</sup> The historic "Bread and Roses Strike" involved the largely immigrant woman workforce of the American Woolen Company factories and the Industrial Workers of the World who called for a boycott and subsequent picket against their employers due to unsafe conditions, long hours, and subpar pay. The women's call for "bread and roses," a metaphor for fair compensation, but also the dignity of creative pursuits, became a rallying cry for women across the nation who faced obstacles due to gender discrimination. A women-owned restaurant operating under the same name further highlights the power of the metaphor.

Bread and Roses' freshly baked bread garnered the attention of *Gourmet* magazine. Less than a year after opening, the restaurant received a letter from the editors of *Gourmet* asking for the bread recipe on behalf of the magazine's readers. It was a standard form letter sent to restaurants and cafes all over the world, and so formulaic that it started with "Dear Sir" and

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<sup>254</sup>Helen Todd, "Getting Out the Vote: An Account of a Week's Automobile Campaign by Women Suffragists," *American Magazine* 72 (1911): 611-619; James Oppenheim, "Bread and Roses," *American Magazine* 73 (1911): 214.

<sup>255</sup>Bruce Watson, *Bread and roses: mills, migrants, and the struggle for the American dream* (New York: Viking, 2005) and Ardis Cameron, "Bread and roses revisited: Women's culture and working-class activism in the Lawrence strike of 1912," in *Women, Work, and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History*, ed. Ruth Milkman (London: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

ended with a signature from "Ann Hall," the editors' secretary. The requested recipe was typed in the bottom left corner of the letter: "white bread." Never mind that the restaurant rarely, if ever, baked plain white bread and tended to serve loaves made with honey and whole wheat or traditional New England-style corn and molasses "anadama" bread. Between the gendered language, one can imagine the pride of the women of Bread and Roses for their tasty bread and their perceived success in creating a space for women. Helping to further affirm that pride, articles about the restaurant always mentioned the bread along with anecdotal evidence of its taste and popularity including descriptors such as "excellent" and "fantastic."<sup>256</sup> The bread was "all-you-can eat" and a loaf could also be purchased for \$1.00 to take home.

### **The Power of Food**

From the earliest conception of the restaurant, Bread and Roses planned to serve simple food with a goal of three entrees each dinner service, two of them vegetarian, one of them labeled as "the poor women's special" to accommodate guests who were more financially insecure, as well as "one meat or fish dish." The business plan further outlined a menu of soups, breads, and salads. Menus varied from month to month with dishes such as "clam dip with fresh vegetables" for 65 cents, "fruit cheese kuchen (whole wheat honey cake with peach and cheese filling)" for 75 cents, a "feast of crepes," "enchilada casserole," and countless quiches, salads, and vegetarian curries. Special occasions and holidays had celebratory foods including a "sour cream fudge cake in honor of Susan B. Anthony's birthday" and a Christmas day "reservation-only dinner" with a list of fanciful dishes ending with "&, of course, BREAD."<sup>257</sup> The restaurant

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<sup>256</sup>Schugar, "Eating Out...Alone," and Sally Bonwitt, "the feminist alternative," *NOW News*, Newsletter of Eastern Mass. Chapter, 1975.

<sup>257</sup>NEBJ - Business and Industry, Jo Ann Passariello, February 1975, Issue 2, page 9, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*. Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge, Mass.  
<https://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990120477650203941/catalog>.

even held two special dinners in June of 1975 to provide a dining opportunity for women attending the National Women's Political Caucus Convention held in Boston.<sup>258</sup> Dinner was by reservation only with an hefty price of \$5 for a full meal. In celebration of International Women's Year, the second dinner included a global array of dishes including "Mexican enchilada casserole, ratatouille Provençale, Cuban black beans, Chinese broccoli, and American cheesecake."<sup>259</sup>

The food, though it was deemed "simple" by the founders and even occasionally heckled by the local media as "not great food — *alternative* food," was a deliberate calculation of feminist understandings of the era.<sup>260</sup> For many feminists, vegetarianism was a central tenet of women's empowerment and part of the work, described in a restaurant flyer for a 5-week course on feminism and food, to "end connections between war on animals/peoples/planet, meat-eating, sexism and rape."<sup>261</sup> Co-founder Hynes taught the course which engaged attendees in meal preparation "using the principles of complementary protein" as well as a discussion on "nutritional content and cost, as well as possible variations on meal."<sup>262</sup> One Sunday in October, Carol Adams spoke on the theoretical connection of vegetarianism and feminism after a special dinner of a "vegetarian casserole and salad."<sup>263</sup> Oversimplifying the gendered history of

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<sup>258</sup>According to the National Women's Political Caucus's website, the second national Caucus convention was held in Boston, Massachusetts in 1975 and the "election of pro-ERA women candidates in unratified states [was] established as top priority, and black Republican Audrey Rowe [was] elected national chair." National Women's Political Caucus, "Early History," <https://www.nwpc.org/history/>.

<sup>259</sup>"Dinner at Bread & Roses," flyer, n.d., *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>260</sup>Laura Shapiro, "You Are What You Eat," *The Real Paper* (Cambridge, MA), July 23, 1975. *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>261</sup>"5 Week Course on FEMINISM - FOOD - FEEDING THE WORLD," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>262</sup>"5 Week Course on FEMINISM - FOOD - FEEDING THE WORLD," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>263</sup>"Bread & Roses October Calendar," n.d., *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

vegetarianism, a staff reporter for *The Boston Globe* explained that the restaurant followed "a philosophy that 'meat is macho'" and that a vegetable-based diet better aligned with the feminist principles to which Bread and Roses strived to uphold.<sup>264</sup> Despite the progressive efforts of a vegetarian-focused menu, the restaurant for women still revealed a preoccupation with their bodies. The original business plan included a line about body-conscious foods, pacifying potential investors that "the needs of women who want to lose weight" would also factor into the menu planning. Though not explicitly about weight-loss or diet foods, one article described Bread and Roses as a "soup and salad place" designed "with women in mind" and with "just enough food for the female appetite."<sup>265</sup> This description failed to ruffle Bread and Roses who proudly stood by their nourishing foods and all-you-can-eat bread.

Between dinner specials and new dishes, the menus listed monthly entertainment at the restaurant included events such as special guest lectures, film screenings, musical performances, presentations from political organizations, and poetry readings. One Sunday in May, Bread and Roses hosted a teach-in on the Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA garnered renewed federal interest and support a few years before the restaurant opened in 1971 and successfully passed through both the U.S. House and Senate. Between 1972 and 1977, 35 states ratified the article as the federally appointed deadline of March 22, 1979 rapidly approached.<sup>266</sup> Although Massachusetts had already ratified the amendment, the movement was publicly opposed by

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<sup>264</sup>Trausch, "Women at work."

<sup>265</sup>Schugar, "Eating Out...Alone," 7.

<sup>266</sup>Jessica Neuwirth, *Equal Means Equal* (New York: The New Press, 2015); Rebecca DeWolf, *Gendered Citizenship: The Original Conflict over the Equal Rights Amendment, 1920-1963* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2021).

Phyllis Schlafly as well as socialist feminists who felt that equating the genders would ultimately harm the gains made by women in society and the workplace.

### **Building a Community for a New Restaurant Customer**

Another significant difference between Bread and Roses and the politically-focused restaurants opened during the early twentieth-century was the expectation of how long they would remain open and exist within the larger restaurant world. Historically speaking, it would be inaccurate to call the suffrage era restaurants pop-ups, but they effectively functioned in a similar, temporary way. The suffrage restaurants, much like their political agenda, focused on a single issue and existed solely to bolster American women's campaign for the right to vote. While few of the restaurants lasted through the passage of the 19th Amendment, they were never meant to last; restaurants like the Suffrage Cafeteria existed for the issue, rather than the myriad women it affected. Sixty years later, explicitly political restaurants, including Bread and Roses, opened with the intention of becoming part of the restaurant community and serving as a space for women as well as place to address issues that continued to impact their everyday lives.

In addition to the physical space and the constructed feminist atmosphere, one of the major evolutions of the women's political restaurant was the customer. The original suffrage restaurants sought out male customers and purposefully positioned themselves (through both the location of the restaurant as well as through the actions of women out on the sidewalks inviting unsuspecting men in for lunch) to attract the attention of undecided men who could help women gain the vote. Bread and Roses, and many of the feminist and women-specific restaurants between the 1960s and 1980s intentionally distanced themselves from serving or allowing men in their spaces.

While several restaurants did explicitly exclude men, Bread and Roses had no such rule. The restaurant did pride itself on being "A Woman's Place" and occasionally held women-only events or performances, but general dining was never officially restricted. In Goldberg's 1976 paper on the restaurant, she stated that Bread and Roses "actively discourage[d] men's presence at the restaurant" and emphasized the importance of the "need for womanspace."<sup>267</sup> The co-founders intended to create a feminist space in opposition to the general "male tone of a restaurant business" which was more commonly directed at "profit making, commercialism, and hierarchical structure of organization."<sup>268</sup> Bread and Roses understood their profits would be marginal, used their platform (including their own monthly menus) to share about other women-centered issues, and created rotating work assignments to aid in the flattening of the traditional workplace hierarchy. The shift to a more feminist framework did not require the exclusion of men, but not everyone agreed to this element of feminism in practice. Early in the restaurant's life, Bread and Roses felt obliged to print a note on their March menu: "We want Bread & Roses to be a place for women. This does not mean that men should be excluded, simply that we feel the need to stress our commitment to maintaining a women's environment. We hope our customers share our sense of need for women's space."<sup>269</sup> And for a while it seemed to work, until this ambiguous approach to gender exclusivity proved to be a catalyst for the restaurant's eventual downfall.

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<sup>267</sup>Goldberg, "Feminism and Food," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>268</sup>Goldberg, "Feminism and Food," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>269</sup>"Bread and Roses menu, March," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

## Identity Crisis in The Restaurant

In May 1975, after reports of multiple alienating interactions with customers, Hynes fired Bread and Roses staff member Claudia Leed. Two other staff members, Jane Selegson and Janet Stambolian, tried to speak on Leed's behalf, but Hynes remained unmoved. All three staff members walked out together. According to Hynes, Leed's "bad vibes" and attitude against men and women she didn't feel fit the feminist "look" led to a group of patrons telling Hynes they would no longer frequent the restaurant.<sup>270</sup> In response, the three former staff members organized a meeting at the Cambridge Women's Center (across the street from the restaurant) and sent out "AN OPEN MESSAGE TO THE WOMEN IN THE BOSTON AREA" declaring that Bread and Roses operated in direct contradiction to its original restaurant prospectus "as a cooperative venture and one responsive to the needs of our community" and labeled Hynes a "patriarch."<sup>271</sup> In addition to calling the restaurant a capitalist enterprise, the former staff members demanded that Bread and Roses broaden its base of power and share "hiring-firing powers with the workers."<sup>272</sup> Overnight the issue evolved from "lesbian exclusivity to labor relations."<sup>273</sup>

The restaurant's evolving "political crisis" caught the attention of young dance critic and women's movement writer Laura Shapiro, the same woman who would go on to be one of the foremost food studies scholars on domesticity and women's food culture in the United States a

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<sup>270</sup>"TO THE WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY," May 21, 1975, *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>271</sup>"AN OPEN MESSAGE TO THE WOMEN IN THE BOSTON AREA," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>272</sup>"AN OPEN MESSAGE TO THE WOMEN IN THE BOSTON AREA," *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>273</sup>Shapiro, "You Are What You Eat."



few decades later.<sup>274</sup> Shapiro came and sampled the food, experienced the atmosphere, spoke to all the parties involved, and ultimately declared that "perhaps even a feminist business shouldn't depend on individual morality."<sup>275</sup> In her article for *The Real Paper*, an alternative community-focused weekly newspaper published in Cambridge, MA from 1972 to 1981, Shapiro explained that nineteen year-old Leed identified as a lesbian feminist.<sup>276</sup> This fact was, Shapiro said, a "catalyst for the unavoidable and explosive question: what about men? And its corollary, what about straight women?"<sup>277</sup> How does a women's restaurant accommodate the other half of society and, more importantly, should it? While women customers in heterosexual relationships were certainly part of this theoretical discussion, the question also extended to other potential customers including sons, brothers, fathers, as well as gay men and trans individuals. Leed's firing prompted a host of complex questions that neither party seemed eager to answer, most especially the former employees who pivoted to turn the conflict into a disagreement on restaurant management.

Like any other restaurant, Bread and Roses had to operate within a larger capitalist framework. Good food and morals only go so far when permits, licenses, and other logistical red tape are required to open the front door let alone serve food. While Bread and Roses aimed to differentiate itself by carving out a more feminist niche within the larger restaurant industry, Hynes believed that *collectivism* (referring to the request to restructure the restaurant

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<sup>274</sup>Gill Gane, letter to the friends and supporters of Bread and Roses, October 4, 1975, *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>275</sup>Shapiro, "You Are What You Eat."

<sup>276</sup>Shapiro, "You Are What You Eat." For more history on the weekly newspaper see: Alan Lewis, "The Real Paper (1972-1981)," *New England Music Scrapbook*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20091027043152/http://www.geocities.com/uridfm/r/realpaper.htm>.

<sup>277</sup>Shapiro, "You Are What You Eat."

management) was too often implemented as the binary answer to the problematic hierarchy of capitalism. Collectivism cannot work if the collective remains exclusive. Across the nation, in restaurants and in more explicitly political spaces, this same binary thinking limited feminist progress by leaving out anyone who wasn't a woman.

In a 1981 reflection written six years after the incident and three years after the restaurant's closure, Hynes further theorized on these binaries, including male vs. female, which were often used in anti-feminist rhetoric.<sup>278</sup> She argued that language "like 'capitalist' and 'socialist'" limited society to "male-originated models" and systems derived from "male theories and male fantasies." This binary thinking further complicated the restaurants' goal of creating an inclusive feminist atmosphere, by bringing in opposing views of subcategories of feminist factions including socialist feminism, which was known for opposing the Equal Rights Amendment and women's financial dependence on men, and radical feminism, which was also known as being trans-exclusionary.<sup>279</sup> Both of these feminisms are historically associated with white women of social and economic privilege, qualities of exclusion that further problematize the restaurant's goals. The restaurant aimed to exist as a women's space, but wanted room for allies and women's friends, too. The women who founded Bread and Roses, while taking calculated measures to evenly divide labor and collaborate with the community, also intended to

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<sup>278</sup>In this reflection, Hynes also describes how Selegson and Stambol, the former employees who originally brought the complaint against Bread and Roses, had been previously fired from "large, successful male businesses, but neither woman had publicly picketed those establishments." *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>279</sup>Justin A. Gutzwa, "Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs)" in *Encyclopedia of Queer Studies in Education*, edited by Kamden K. Strunk and Stephanie Anne Shelton, 695–698 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2021). First recorded in 2008 by radical feminist blogger Viv Smythe, the term TERF has a contentious and contemporary history. While used to refer to previous generations of radical feminists during the second wave era who typically excluded cisgender AND transgender women, the newness of the term allowed it to be taken up in contemporary cultural zeitgeist and "TERFy" is often used to label anything that relates to women and women's issues. Culture writer Lena Wilson expanded on this contemporary use in "Do I Have to Give Up Lesbian History to Participate in Queer Culture?" for *Slate*, August 16, 2018, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2018/08/lesbian-history-terfs-and-queer-culture-do-queer-women-have-to-reject-all-second-wave-feminism-to-be-inclusive.html>.

earn a living through the restaurant and keep the space afloat despite the heavy financial burdens new restaurants often incur. Throughout its short lifespan, the restaurant and its founders were constantly navigating the fine line between feminism and capitalism, begging the question: can they exist together?

A few months after the "political crisis," co-founder Gill Gane resigned.<sup>280</sup> The following spring, a regular customer sent Hynes a letter detailing another incident in which their mixed dining party was told to "come back sometime when you can bring your women friends with you." The restaurant endured two more years, but under the shadow of its previous social and political uncertainty, leaving the founders to wonder what kind of feminist does a feminist restaurant cater to? In the Spring of 1978, Bread and Roses was sold to three women who soon reopened another restaurant for women under the name Amaranth.<sup>281</sup> The restaurant quickly fell into its own crisis after a male diner filed a sexual discrimination case against the establishment's "reluctance to serve men."<sup>282</sup> The diner spoke with the Cambridge Licensing Board and the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination arguing that "men should be able to go in any place and feel comfortable. I don't like to feel there is a place I can't go."<sup>283</sup> The similarity and the irony of this sentiment clearly remained misunderstood, despite the fact that Amaranth, Bread and Roses, and the dozens of other sister restaurants of the same era only existed because there wasn't a safe place for women to go.

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<sup>280</sup>Gill Gane, letter to the friends and supporters of Bread and Roses, October 4, 1975, *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>281</sup>The location now houses Oleana, a Middle East and Turkish inspired restaurant run by celebrated and James Beard award-winning chef Ana Sortun and a mostly women-led kitchen.

<sup>282</sup>"Women's Restaurant reprimanded," *Daily Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton, MA), June 27, 1979, *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

<sup>283</sup>"Restaurant prefers to exclude men," *Bennington Banner*, Bennington, VT, May 18, 1979, *Papers of H. Patricia Hynes, 1974-2022*.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the feminist restaurant experiment continued across the nation with a variety of success, partly due to their exclusive audience and to the precarious nature of new restaurants. Owning a stake in the food world remained as important as creating and holding a public space for women; the former allowed for financial security in a field historically associated with women's labor, though predominantly run by men, and the latter demonstrated the power of a women-centered reality.

### **Feminist Restaurants in The Digital Age**

Few of the original feminist or women-centered restaurants of the 1970s remain, but one has managed to outlive its cohort. Bloodroot, a feminist restaurant and bookstore, first opened in 1977 in Bridgeport, Connecticut and continues to operate in its original space. Founded by Noel Furie and Selma Miriam, the restaurant mapped out similar intentions and planned to follow the same feminist practices as Bread and Roses one state over in Massachusetts. In the restaurant, these practices looked like a seasonal, mostly vegetarian, and ethnically diverse menu written out on blackboards, no wait staff, receptacles for patrons to bus their own tables, and a collection of upcycled and donated furniture and decor. From their first cookbook published in 1980 and now on their website "about page," Bloodroot argued that "Feminism is not a part-time attitude for us; it is how we live all day, every day. Our choices in furniture, pictures, the music we play, the books we sell, and the food we cook all reflect and express our feminism." In practice, Bloodroot's early acts of feminism included the exclusion of male patrons and eschewing technology (especially technology they viewed as connected to capitalism, including a cash register). Eventually, the restaurant changed its policies about men and even started an Instagram account, though it only has eleven posts.<sup>284</sup> In order to survive, the restaurant had to evolve, its

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<sup>284</sup>The Bloodroot Instagram account (@bloodrootrestaurant) has eleven 2018 posts. The posts include close-ups of dishes, a menu, a group photo at a political march, and a picture of Bloodroot branded vegan burgers that patrons

feminism had to evolve, too. Bloodroot offers the unique opportunity to study the connection between eras of the women's movement and how restaurants adapt under the evolving pressures of feminism, capitalism, and their dangerous intersections.

The fact that Bloodroot continues to exist and even thrive in a food world so dominated by digital media calls for a more critical analysis of the digital and its role in the practice of feminist organizing. Contemporary restaurants that operate under feminist agendas, regardless of who they serve, the food they make, or the people in charge, all exist due to the labor and hard lessons learned from the restaurants that came before them. Since most contemporary restaurants identify with a more progressive form of feminism, the lack of specificity and labels is common practice. Furie, Miriam, and the women who founded Bloodroot represent a generation of women who worked in a world that denied them basic rights. The moment they fought back for those rights—through the ownership of the restaurant and the creation of a women-centered space—they were forced to reckon with their privilege. They were challenged by how Bloodroot would balance occupying, owning, and organizing as a feminist entity under capitalism. In this pivotal moment of the women's movement and an unprecedented era of oppression of women, persons of color, and the LGBTQIA community, the legacy of power in women-owned restaurants reveals the precarities of "taking up space" in public food landscapes.

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can buy to take home. Bloodroot Collective (@bloodrootrestaurant), "Bloodroot's vegan burgers to go!" Instagram, October 7, 2018. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BopQV3GF6-H/>.

### CHAPTER 3: DIGITIZING DOMESTICITY: INSTAGRAM INFLUENCER TURNED INSTAGRAM SCHOLAR<sup>285</sup>

I check the calendar and settle on a chocolate layer cake. My next paid Instagram campaign starts in two weeks and I have three other recipe shoots in the queue. I make a list of ingredients and check the pantry to see if I have open containers of chocolate chips, flour, or sugar. A glance in the fridge to check on the status of unsalted butter, milk, and eggs. If I'm working for a big client, I'll get new versions of everything on the list and expense them. If not, these pre-shopping calculations keep my profit margins high. Most of the time, there is no direct client, so waste not want not is key in my little kitchen business. I pocket my list and drive to the grocery store. If I need fresh, photogenic produce, herbs, or other seasonal ingredients, I also stop at the local farmers' market. Bags full, I rush back home before the light begins to shift away from the big windows that line one side of my kitchen. Notepad and pen out, I prep the cake batter, jotting down changes to the recipe as I work. I've already figured out the recipe ratios, but I keep my notes handy for any last-minute changes. I add a bit of cinnamon and make a note. While the cake bakes, I make use of that fading light and style a few props—spoons, linens, small plates, a silver cake cutter—and snap a few photos. If I didn't already have these props, I would have run to one of my preferred antique shops or home goods stores that let me buy a

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<sup>285</sup>This chapter previously appeared in part as a chapter in *Food Instagram: Identity, Influence, and Negotiation*. The original citation is as follows: KC Hysmith, "My Life and Labor as an Instagram Influencer Turned Instagram Scholar," in *Food Instagram: Identity, Influence, and Negotiation*, edited by Emily Contois and Zenia Kish (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2022) 191-201.

single dish or two spoons at a time. An entire armoire stores all my photo props and a two-drawer filing cabinet holds linens. With a few minutes to spare before the cake is finished baking, I wash the chocolate-covered dishes and ready the sink for the next round of recipe testing. I wash most dishes by hand because the dishwasher ruins the hard-earned patina that forms on old metal utensils and serving dishes. Plus, it simply isn't quick enough to keep pace with the timing of my photo shoots. While the cake cools, I make buttercream frosting. I set up my camera and gear. Depending upon the subject, my mood, or the day's light, I might use my smartphone instead, one I've carefully researched and selected primarily for its superior camera and internal storage. Scene set, cake styled, I snap at least a dozen photos from various angles. Next, I edit. Whether captured on my phone or my camera, I crop the image to size and add editorial features like filters or lighting adjustments. Once the image is on my phone, I pass it through an Instagram planning app that shows me a preview of my current feed along with upcoming images. After making sure it fits into my feed and the other planned images, I upload the image to Instagram along with a carefully crafted caption and any relevant hashtags and handles. The work continues after posting. There are emails from sponsors about collaborations and campaigns, hashtags to research, comments and likes waiting for replies, online classes on new photo or digital software, finances to monitor, and then it starts all over again tomorrow morning. If there's time, I'll eat a slice of cake.

### **All for the 'Gram**

Despite its name, Instagram is not instantaneous. The publication of a single post can require dozens of steps, days, weeks, or months of planning, and the application of a myriad of digital and analog skills. Even images that require far less work and happen more organically—

like those taken while dining at restaurants, scenes of open-air markets, or more casual dishes that need less set-up—go through a similarly exhaustive editorial process. In the end, however, all we see are the perfectly framed pictures of food.

In January 2015, I woke up with over 200k Instagram followers.<sup>286</sup> I am, according to the numbers, an Instagram Influencer. This is the only time I will ever identify as such in print. If you approach me in person and mention my Instagram account, I will very likely blush and try to change the subject. This reaction made me wonder: why am I embarrassed of my digital work? Why do I struggle to acknowledge the skills that such work requires, such as social media management, culinary technique, as well as photography and photo editing? Instagram, while once a significant portion of my bread-and-butter, has now become a focus of my scholarly attention.

This chapter examines the personal, political, and professional intersections of being Instafamous.<sup>287</sup> It also unpacks the careful and necessary construction of an Instagram identity and how food-focused Influencers navigate the spectacular and the mediated. I use my life—as a woman, food professional, and now, as an academic studying the intersections of women's foodways, media, and technology—as a case study. I argue that while Influencers cultivate forms of celebrity capital and contrived authenticity through their social platforms, their efforts can also be interpreted as acts of feminist collaboration and subversive resistance to commodity culture—

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<sup>286</sup>Since returning to academia and starting my study of Instagram, even though I spend even more time on the platform, my follower count has dropped significantly.

<sup>287</sup>The term “instafamous” has been used colloquially both on and off Instagram shortly after the app first launched. In 2016, the term became the name of [www.instafamous.pro](http://www.instafamous.pro), a company that allows users to pay money for new Instagram followers, and spread through the company’s hashtag #instafamous. The practice of buying followers is seen as disingenuous and avoided by most Instagram users. Elmira Djafarova and Oxana Trofimenko, “‘Instafamous’ – credibility and self-presentation of micro-celebrities on social media,” *Information, Communication & Society* 22, no. 10 (2019): 1432-1446. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1438491>; Rico Piehler et al., “Traditional or ‘instafamous’ celebrity? Role of origin of fame in social media influencer marketing,” *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 30, no. 4 (2022): 408-420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2021.1909107>.



especially for women who have been historically and systemically disenfranchised through traditional capitalist economies. Through a combination of personal reflections, digital ethnographic observations, and cultural critique, this chapter considers how and why the presence and labor of Instagram Influencers and the Instafamous has become ubiquitous in the world of food.

## **Digital Glossary**

It is important to acknowledge the messiness of the digital world and the resulting mess that comes from its analysis. The digital is replete with undefined boundaries and users who routinely and unwittingly move between the digital world and real life. For this study of domestic resistance, three big terms and concepts are helpful, including the digital turn, born-digital, hashtag, and influencer.

### The Digital Turn

Digital food communities often engage their users online as well as in real world settings. A woman might go by her real name on the internet, but use her Instagram handle in real life. Hashtags appear offline with increasing frequency, despite the fact that they lose all trackable capabilities when used outside the algorithms that give them life. In order to better understand these blurry boundaries and begin to formalize the characteristics that define the digital world, we must first understand when digital became so normal.

For the last three decades, scholars have used the term "digital turn" to describe digital changes in their fields. Despite the varied and interdisciplinary application of the term, there are two ways to interpret what the digital turn actually means. The first is straightforward and refers to the advent and implementation of new digital tools in a field, such as digital archives, specific software and applications, and online pedagogical methods. The second is the way scholars use

the "digital turn" to refer to an epistemological shift in how we think about the work we do in an increasingly digital world.

Because of this variation, pinpointing the historical conception of the digital turn is tricky. Several scholars, such as digital media scholar Wim Westera, argue that the digital turn began with the first programmable computer or when the world wide web first launched.<sup>288</sup> We could similarly assert that the digital turn started after the invention of the digital camera or maybe the digital watch. Scholars can point to the founding of Apple or Microsoft, email, word processing, digital illustration tools, DVD, CD, smart phones, wi-fi, bitcoin, social media, a never-ending virtual laundry list of examples that demonstrate the ambiguous and messy world that makes up the digital.<sup>289</sup> The chronology of the digital turn ultimately depends on what you are studying and how you hope to interpret your subject. And like many other lenses, how you interpret the digital turn can impact the way your interpretation handles larger social issues like race, gender, class, and sexuality.

Feminist scholars, including historians Paula Hamilton and Mary Spongberg, argued that the digital turn was another trend, "a fashion that [would] pass."<sup>290</sup> Others launched headfirst into the new realm, hoping to create new ways of thinking and new fields of thought from and with the tools the digital turn provided. Feminist scholars working in the field of technology,

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<sup>288</sup>Wim Westera, *The Digital Turn: How the Internet Transforms Our Existence*, UK: AuthorHouse, 2012.

<sup>289</sup>Edward L. Ayers, "The Pasts and Futures of Digital History," University of Virginia (1999), <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/PastsFutures.html>; Joline Blais, Jon Ippolito, and Owen Smith, *New Criteria for New Media* (New Media Department, University of Maine, January 2007), [http://newmedia.umaine.edu/interarchive/new\\_criteria\\_for\\_new\\_media.html](http://newmedia.umaine.edu/interarchive/new_criteria_for_new_media.html); John Given, "Narrating the Digital Turn: data deluge, technomethodology, and other likely tales," *Qualitative Sociology Review* 2, no. 1 (2006), [http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/Volume3/QSR\\_2\\_1\\_Given.pdf](http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/Volume3/QSR_2_1_Given.pdf); William Uricchio, "The algorithmic turn: photosynth, augmented reality and the changing implications of the image," *Visual Studies* 26, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>290</sup>Paula Hamilton and Mary Spongberg, "Twenty Years On: Feminist Histories and Digital Media," *Women's History Review* 26, no. 5 (2016): 671-677.

including Jacqueline Wernimont and Deborah Withers, believe that the "radical possibilities" of the digital turn exist through "epistemological" avenues.<sup>291</sup> For my purposes, I utilize the digital turn to focus less on the generations of technology and more on the feminist implications of the democratization of technology and the growing importance of digital literacy and agency.

The democratization of the digital is partially due to access. As of 2019, 81% of Americans owned a smartphone and nearly three-quarters of adults owned a range of other digital devices including desktop and laptop computers, tablets, and e-readers.<sup>292</sup> Around 72% of Americans across a range of ages and demographics use some type of social media "to connect with one another, engage with news content, share information and entertain themselves."<sup>293</sup> Despite these high figures, access to the digital world still largely depends on several key socioeconomic factors including race, age, class, and where you physically live. As the grid expands and technology becomes more affordable, more Americans have access to better internet services and smartphones, but a digital gap between rural and nonrural America persists.<sup>294</sup> A similar gap exists between white Americans versus Americans of color. In 2017,

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<sup>291</sup>Deborah Withers, *Feminism, Digital Culture and the Politics of Transmission: theory, practice and cultural heritage* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015), 8.

<sup>292</sup>Pew Research Center, "Mobile Fact Sheet," <https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/mobile/>, June 12, 2019.

<sup>293</sup>Pew Research Center, "Social Media Fact Sheet," <https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/>, June 12, 2019.

<sup>294</sup>Andrew Perrin, "Digital gap between rural and nonrural America persists," <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/31/digital-gap-between-rural-and-nonrural-america-persists/>. "Roughly two-thirds of rural Americans (63%) say they have a broadband internet connection at home, up from about a third (35%) in 2007, according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in early 2019. Rural Americans are now 12 percentage points less likely than Americans overall to have home broadband; in 2007, there was a 16-point gap between rural Americans (35%) and all U.S. adults (51%) on this question."

only 66% of black and 60% of Hispanic homes owned computers, compared to 83% of whites.<sup>295</sup>

Access is only part of the issue, as feminist scholars question whether digital literacy reinforces socioeconomic inequities, creating "another kind of western cultural hegemony."<sup>296</sup> Early in the digital turn, knowing coded computer languages and having a general familiarity with how digital technology functioned was all but necessary. As the digital evolved and access was redesigned to be more user-friendly, the learning curve skewed to understanding how to apply the digital to your real-world needs rather than fitting yourself into the digital framework. Other feminist scholars argued that the digital world actually "increases access" for traditionally excluded and marginalized groups, providing new opportunities for meaning- and history-making.<sup>297</sup> Understanding the shortcomings and limitations of the digital world allows us to realize the ways in which the digital turn can be interpreted based upon the groups it impacts. For women and other marginalized groups, the digital turn has been instrumental in helping disrupt the narrative of domestic expectations.

To understand how the digitization of domestic food practices relates to resistance efforts, we must look at the media, the message, and the women who are behind it. Digital food

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<sup>295</sup>Sara Atske and Andrew Perrin, "Home broadband adoption, computer ownership vary by race, ethnicity in the U.S.," *Pew Research Center*, July 16, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/31/smartphones-help-blacks-hispanics-bridge-some-but-not-all-digital-gaps-with-whites/>.

<sup>296</sup>Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: the political grammar of feminist theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Deborah Withers, *Feminism, Digital Culture and the Politics of Transmission*, 8.

<sup>297</sup>Paula Hamilton and Mary Spongberg, "Twenty Years On: Feminist Histories and Digital Media," *Women's History Review* 26, no. 5 (2016): 671-677. Communications scholar Megan Fitzmaurice argues that it would be more equitable to create an online and interactive National Women's History Cybermuseum. The digital museum would allow a greater participation from marginalized groups, specifically those who would not have the means to travel to a traditional brick-and-mortar museum. Megan Irene Fitzmaurice, "Re(place)ing Space: Privilege and Public Memory in the National Women's History Cybermuseum," *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 3 (2014): 520-523.

media requires a digitally mindful methodological approach. An investigation of digital food media as a means of resistance and empowerment requires an additional layer of humanistic inquiry. The practice of digital ethnography brings these two investigations together, emphasizing the idea that "digital media and technologies are part of the everyday and more spectacular worlds that people inhabit."<sup>298</sup> Unlike more traditional digital methodologies, which take a digital-centric approach and focus on specific digital items (such as metadata or website analytics), digital ethnography also accounts for the "digital intangible—those elements of digital environments or worlds that we can sense but not necessarily see, as well as those aspects that researchers cannot see or sense until they are made aware of them by research participants."<sup>299</sup> This approach considers the relationship between the digital media, the message, the message-maker, and the larger social world they inhabit. Most importantly, digital ethnography accommodates the mess of the digital world and when the boundaries between the digital and real life begin to blur.

### Born-digital

The term *born-digital* refers to materials that originate and are managed, predominantly, in digital form.<sup>300</sup> Originally used by digital libraries and archives as a term to describe materials that would require digital-specific preservation methods, as the digital shift progressed, the term

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<sup>298</sup>Sarah Pink, "Experience" in *Innovative Methods in Media and Communication Research*, eds. Sebastian Kubitschko and Anne Kaun (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 161-165.

<sup>299</sup>Sarah Pink, "Experience."

<sup>300</sup>Born digital, *Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative*, <http://digitizationguidelines.gov/term.php?term=borndigital>. Other related terms include "natively-digital" (a reference to the term "digital native" which describes a person born in the perceived age of digital technology and should therefore be familiar with a variety of technologies including computers and the Internet from an early age; this term is ableist and has problematic connotations related to indigeneity) and "digital-first" and "digital-exclusive" which are predominantly used in news websites when releasing digital content that exists exclusively on the internet or as an accompaniment to a print publication.

has been applied to a wider range of materials including e-books, audio and visual recordings, as well as digital art and photography. This also incorporates any other material that originated in a digitally networked world such as the majority of the content produced and shared on social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. As print media became less lucrative, more news websites redesigned themselves as born-digital publications. Born-digital materials are diverse and do not always utilize the same technology or sync together in realistic ways, though these roadblocks are quickly disappearing as technologies evolve and technological devices become multipurpose.<sup>301</sup> As more of the workforce trends towards born-digital content creation and digital skill sets, understanding this concept is essential for evaluating digital labor. Much like the range of technologies that support these born-digital materials, a diverse set of fields—from computer science to social media management—employ people to produce and manage this content. As one would expect, these fields are influenced by the same societal pressures that create gender bias and discrimination in other workplaces.

### The hashtag

The Oxford English Dictionary added the term *hashtag* to the official roster of contemporary vocabulary over seven years after its first use on August 25, 2007—a date we can accurately trace thanks to a digital timestamp on the first tweet that ever used one.<sup>302</sup> No longer relegated to Twitter, let alone any digital confine, hashtags now serve as another form of

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<sup>301</sup>A good example of this evolution is the swift redundancy of the e-reader device as cell phones became "smart" and synced with e-book retailers and the physical size of cell phone screens increased to accommodate similar e-reader styled "pages."

<sup>302</sup>"hashtag n. (on social media web sites and applications) a word or phrase preceded by a hash and used to identify messages relating to a specific topic; (also) the hash symbol itself, when used in this way. Hashtags originated on, and are chiefly associated with, the social networking service Twitter." "hashtag, n.", *OED Online*, September 2022. *Oxford University Press*, <https://www-oed-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/Entry/59371427?rskey=MO8oLw&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed September 23, 2022).

communication both online and in the physical world and can be found in every instance that utilizes the written word.<sup>303</sup> Linguist Peter Wikström defines the hashtag as a "multifunctional linguistic device" that possesses the potential for numerous communicative functions, including a range of cultural implications that deal with complex issues such as race, gender, and class.<sup>304</sup> In order to fully appreciate the social impact of the hashtag, it is helpful to understand how a hashtag works both in computer-mediated communication (CMC) methods, such as those used on social media platforms, as well as how people use the symbol offline. In technical terms, adding the hash symbol (#) to a word or phrase, for example *#food* or *#whatsfordinner*, turns those characters into a piece of metadata that social networks can then index and users can search. These two actions happen as soon as a tweet or Instagram post are published. Behind the scenes, the social media platform performs a series of programmed commands that recognize a user's intent to turn characters into a hashtag, parses that text, and then adds that tag to an ever-growing index of metadata. Back on their digital device, a user can then click on their newly generated hashtag, which functions as a hyperlink connecting it to a timeline of other digital mentions of the same tag.

Traditional tags are meant to gain influence (measured with social media metrics including "follows," "likes," and shares) and connect with a broader audience. While the initial intent of the hashtag was organization, sociolinguistics scholars argue that the tags also contain

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<sup>303</sup>It is worth noting the growing use of verbal or spoken hashtags (ex: when a person says aloud, "hashtag blessed" or "hashtag goals"), though these instances are often used in sarcastic or meme-like situations. Kate Scott, "Hashtags work everywhere": The pragmatic functions of spoken hashtags," *Discourse, Context & Media* 22 (2018): 57-64, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2017.07.002>.

<sup>304</sup>Peter Wikström, "Srynotfunny: Communicative functions of hashtags on twitter," *SKY Journal of Linguistics*, 27 (2014): 127-152.

qualitative connotations and are often used to convey context.<sup>305</sup> Users can tag their posts to join a conversation or align or affiliate themselves in a particular way. Others use tags conversationally to provide commentary, humor, and descriptive observations and feelings. According to linguist, Allison Shapp, hashtags "have come to serve functions beyond their original use as data and discussion organizers," with women as the primary users of these expressive "commentary" tags.<sup>306</sup> These expressive tags, Shapp argues, while linguistically interesting, actually damage a tweet's influential power. The study of gendered variation in language is nothing new and has been the subject of sociolinguistic and other related fields of study since the 1970s, starting in earnest with the work of Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place*. Lakoff's work describes a set of features that are ideologically associated with women's American English speech such as "evaluative adjectives," lexicon disparities related to subjectively "feminine topics," and "polite" syntax that turns statements into questions. The results of this investigation spurred Lakoff to point out a long-standing form of discrimination that systematically denies women "access to power, on the grounds that they are not capable of holding it as demonstrated by their linguistic behavior."<sup>307</sup> Decades later, this same learned behavior, according to Shapp, occurs with striking similarity with women and the hashtags they use across a wide range of contemporary digital platforms. Shapp argues that Twitter is another narrative tool which allows people to "express themselves and tell other people about events in

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<sup>305</sup>Wikström, "Srynotfunny: Communicative functions of hashtags on twitter."; Allison Shapp, "Gender Variation in the Pragmatic Uses of Twitter Hashtags," Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, poster at the Portland, OR annual conference in 2015, [https://s18798.pcdn.co/shapp/wp-content/uploads/sites/18562/2020/09/LSA2015\\_Hashtags\\_Poster.pdf](https://s18798.pcdn.co/shapp/wp-content/uploads/sites/18562/2020/09/LSA2015_Hashtags_Poster.pdf).

<sup>306</sup>Shapp, "Gender Variation in the Pragmatic Uses of Twitter Hashtags."

<sup>307</sup>Robin Lakoff, "Language and Woman's Place," *Language in Society* 2, no. 1 (1973): 48, [https://web.stanford.edu/class/linguist156/Lakoff\\_1973.pdf](https://web.stanford.edu/class/linguist156/Lakoff_1973.pdf).



their lives."<sup>308</sup> Analyzing these tags within the context of their accompanying narratives is crucial for understanding the intent of women's messages. And this is where the study of language (as well as its emerging digital evolutions) and food parallel: a complete study of either requires a thorough investigation of the society that produces it.

### The Influencer

When I first gained what we now call "Influencer status," I had recently graduated with a degree in gastronomy and worked as a freelance food writer, recipe tester, and photographer. Until that time, my personal Instagram feed was a mix of over-filtered squares featuring my life as a southerner living in New England and the recipes that I tested for national publications and my own social media feeds in my awkward, but light-filled rental kitchen. Then one morning, my follower count exploded. One of my first images to break 1,000 likes was a shot of an ancho pepper-spiked hot chocolate recipe.<sup>309</sup> Why did this particular image take off? I have a couple of theories. First, a logistical one: a horrible blizzard had just swept over the Boston-area and the rate of snow-bound Instagram use increased in response. Next, an explanation that relies on Instagram's focus on visuality: the aerial angle of the photo and the careful balance between clean, negative space and "lived-in" messiness were all characteristics of a growing food-photography trend. I look at it now and notice its faults: too blurry, the linens are overexposed, and the dried peppers look like little indiscernible brown lumps. You can even see the lines connecting the four faux-marble floor tiles I glued together to look like a lavish tabletop. Over the next several days my follower count crept upward, reaching over two-hundred thousand at

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<sup>308</sup>Shapp, "Gender Variation in the Pragmatic Uses of Twitter Hashtags."

<sup>309</sup>KC Hysmith (@kchysmith) "Taking a poll: Do y'all find that hot beverages taste better out of enamel camp mugs or is it just me?" Instagram, January 9, 2015, <https://www.instagram.com/p/xpRRp5Lmf7/>.

one point. I kept waiting for it to disappear, for the glitch to be corrected and my fifteen minutes of fame to be over, but it never happened.

Instagram, the company, does not use the term Influencer. The app refers to users who aim to turn their content into a living as “creators.”<sup>310</sup> The term “Influencer” is user-generated, platform-agnostic, and applies to users who gain celebrity and maintain influence through those platforms and retain a large number of followers. The term “Influencer” is also subjective as there is no set number of followers that make a user influential. Despite their digital fame, Influencers differ from celebrities who gained their fame offline and whose status directly correlates with a career or set of actions not directly tied to social media. While Influencers become popular through social media, regular celebrities already possess a following in real life (or IRL, as they say). Consider a food photographer who starts their career on Instagram versus a chef who already had a TV show and several award-winning cookbooks. Social media offers similar tools to both kinds of users, but IRL celebrities bring a higher level of clout (which typically correlates to a higher number of initial followers) than digitally native Influencers. This point is significant when it comes to understanding the socioeconomic implications of digital labor. For this study, I rely on Tiziana Terranova’s definition of digital labor, or immaterial labor, which sets no parameters for what constitutes knowledge or who, regardless of their perceived influence, can create it.<sup>311</sup>

Before Influencers, though, there were popular users with significant followings. Instead of gaining celebrity through crowd-sourcing, these popular users were, for lack of a better term,

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<sup>310</sup>Creators (@creators), Instagram, [www.instagram.com/creators](https://www.instagram.com/creators).

<sup>311</sup>Tiziana Terranova, “Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy,” *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 33-58, [https://read.dukeupress.edu/social-text/article-abstract/18/2/20\(63\)/33/33433/Free-LaborPRODUCING-CULTURE-FOR-THE-DIGITAL?redirectedFrom=fulltext](https://read.dukeupress.edu/social-text/article-abstract/18/2/20(63)/33/33433/Free-LaborPRODUCING-CULTURE-FOR-THE-DIGITAL?redirectedFrom=fulltext).

peer-reviewed. An early element of Instagram included a "suggested user list" featuring a curated collection of popular users vetted by Instagram officials.<sup>312</sup> When new users downloaded and first signed up for the app, this list would appear and offer suggestions for discovering new feeds. In addition to Instagram's internal selection, popular users with significant followings could also nominate other users for this list. In 2015, I learned that I was nominated by one of my food-photographer peers (I still don't know who) and that their influence helped me gain my own. Before Instagram allowed explicit advertising and promoted posts, popular users with large followings did not necessarily partake in what is now known as "Influencer marketing" and instead participated in "collaborations" with brands and companies that offered free products and sometimes money in exchange for promotion.<sup>313</sup> My non-monetary collaborations included posts in exchange for bottles of olive oil, coupons for free yogurt, table linens, and a giant box of enamel dinnerware. As Instagram continued to wrestle with regulation, I and many other popular users turned to the freelance contract model to create contracts, set rates, and outline publication agreements. While the collaboration method still exists (I recently made a deal to post images in exchange for free kid-friendly cooking kits), these self-enforced forms of regulation allow popular users, whether they identify as influencers or not, agency over their digital labor.

### **Kitchen Sink Realism 2.0**

Part of what Betty Friedan called the "problem that has no name," housework—including kitchen labor—was often isolating for women. While Friedan centered her analysis around the experiences of white affluent American housewives in the 1960s, we know this isolation

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<sup>312</sup>Trisha Hughes, "How to Get on Instagram's Suggested User List," *Eat Your Beets*, <https://www.eatyourbeets.com/instagram/suggested-user-list/>.

<sup>313</sup>Mona Hellenkemper, "State of the Industry: Influencer Marketing in 2019," *InfluencerDB*, January 14, 2019, <https://blog.influencerdb.com/state-of-the-industry-influencer-marketing-2019/>.

extended to the less affluent and largely Black and brown women who were hired to perform this household labor in their stead.<sup>314</sup> In many ways, the digital spaces discussed in this research—the blogs, social media platforms, and other messaging apps—appear to depict a similar isolation with women laboring alone behind screens instead of kitchen appliances. At the intersection of virtual food spaces, women (now predominantly affluent and white) perform and document their domestic labor in a type of digital “kitchen-sink realism” for the 21st century. Originally used as a reference to an era of British post-war expressionist painting that featured banal depictions of everyday life, and what we might consider material culture, such as kitchen sinks and cluttered kitchens.<sup>315</sup> Social critics also applied this term to plays and later films that developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, first in Great Britain and later in the United States, that similarly portrayed social realism through working class domesticity.<sup>316</sup> Theatre scholar, Dorothy Chansky traces the lasting impact of “kitchen sink realism” movement up to the 1990s and early 2000s along with its role in American third wave feminism. While American women now had more opportunities than ever before, social structures that continued to benefit white, affluent men (and some women) ensured that domestic duties—and the isolation that came with them—remained a central aspect of women’s labor.

Despite this legacy of isolation, contemporary women working in the intersections of digital food spaces and activism find ways to counter the silofication of their labors. Kitchens—and kitchen sinks—are simultaneously sites of fraught domestic labor and resistance.

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<sup>314</sup>Phyllis Palmer, *Domesticity And Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920-1945*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010, p. 157.

<sup>315</sup>Amy Dempsey, *Art in the Modern Era: A Guide to Styles, Schools & Movements*, New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., Pub., 2002.

<sup>316</sup>Dorothy Chansky, *Kitchen Sink Realisms: Domestic Labor, Dining, and Drama in American Theatre*, Studies in Theatre History and Culture series, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015.

Transparency about this labor, who is doing it, how and when it is performed, and how much it costs, is key to navigating the messiness of these spaces. There are aspects of the labor and the space that require individual work. A significant portion of the labor happens offline in kitchens (some shared in physical companionship or through digital connection), in markets and grocery stores, and in other creative collaboration with fellow bakers or food creators. And that's just the food element. For the women discussed in my dissertation, many of them use their digital food spaces as platforms for larger issues like abortion access and equal pay. Offline, they are connected to communities that fight for those issues in other ways. And even when the work is virtual, the space itself is part of their collaborative community with consistent engagement and messaging through likes, comments, direct messages and more. This type of virtual community isn't a replacement for an in-real-life one, but is helpful for mitigating the potential effects of further isolation in another field prone to silofication.

### **Digital Labor, Emotional Labor**

The digital nature of Instagram serves as a sort of smoke screen, blurring the people and the labor that make its endless stream of content possible. Many in the community strive for transparency in their digital labor with actions such as clearly marked sponsored posts and behind-the-scenes stories that give users insights into the real-life happenings of their favorite Instagrammers. Despite such efforts, Instagram remains a precarious and unregulated digital landscape for all levels and category of Influencer. The subjective qualifications of being an Influencer make it difficult to determine the gender demographics of food Influencers.

According to a 2019 report, women make up 77% of the total number of Influencers across all social media platforms.<sup>317</sup> Another report identifies ten of the most-followed food Influencers on

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<sup>317</sup>Lena Young, "How Much Do Influencers Charge?" *Klear*, May 16, 2019, <https://blog.klear.com/influencer-pricing-2019/>.

Instagram, seven of which are women.<sup>318</sup> Compounding the subjectivity, market research indicates women are more often called Influencers, while men style themselves as “digital content creators” or other industry-specific terms.<sup>319</sup> The food Influencers in my community, including myself, eschew these terms, instead selecting titles that accurately describe our labor like “blogger,” “author,” or “photographer.” This gendered dichotomy, even if perceived, disparages the term “Influencer,” valuing masculinized creation over feminized influence and obfuscating the fact that Influencers do indeed produce content.

Women who manage influential food-focused Instagram feeds labor at the intersection of the digital sector and the food industry, two traditionally male-dominated fields. Unpacking the masculinized narratives that are foundational to both culinary and digital history helps us understand the precarity women face when working in either field. In their book, *Taking the Heat*, food scholars Deborah Harris and Patti Giuffre investigate why women have “lagged so far behind men in professional kitchens” and how the traditionally feminized fields of food and cooking are masculinized in professional settings.<sup>320</sup> Throughout American history, food-related labor has been categorized under traditional gender roles: women cooked domestically, men cooked professionally.

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<sup>318</sup>Though it is important to point out that at least three of these Influencers had gained various levels of celebrity prior to their joining Instagram. This statistic is another example of the subjectivity of influence and who qualifies as an influencer. J. Clement, “Most popular food influencers on Instagram in the U.S. 2019,” *Statista*, October 8, 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/785894/most-followers-instagram-food-usa/>.

<sup>319</sup>Emma Grey Ellis, “Why Women Are Called 'Influencers' and Men 'Creators',” *WIRED*, May 29, 2019, <https://www.wired.com/story/influencers-creators-gender-divide/>.

<sup>320</sup>Deborah Harris and Patti Giuffre, *Taking the Heat, Women Chefs and Gender Inequality in the Professional Kitchen* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 2.

Due to industry-wide structural inequality, women who work in digital spaces also suffer from the devaluation of their digital labor.<sup>321</sup> While a handful of the earliest computer programmers and pioneers in the modern technological world were women, today's digital landscape favors male workers. The problem is not a lack of women working in digital spaces, but a narrative that supports men and overlooks women. This narrative also defends itself against gender discrimination by arguing for more professionalization of the female workforce in the form of additional skillsets like learning how to code. Programs aimed at teaching such skills specifically to women, such as Girls Who Code, understand that access is only part of the issue and offer a "supportive sisterhood of peers and role models" to help students "persist and succeed."<sup>322</sup> Looking specifically at digital content creation and management, the bulk of food Influencers' work, this disparity centers on a gendered perception of digital labor. Feminist media scholars Brooke Erin Duffy and Becca Schwartz investigated this constructed divide through job recruitment ads and social media employment. Their research found that the ideal digital social media worker possesses a set of features including "sociability and leisure; emotional management; and various types of flexibility."<sup>323</sup> These expectations, they argued, inform and influence the "increasingly feminized nature of social media employment with its characteristic invisibility, lower pay, and marginal status within the technology field."<sup>324</sup> Social media work carries an assumption of being "fun" and "hobby-like," in turn marginalizing the

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<sup>321</sup>Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression* takes a broader and intersectional look at industry-wide inequality across the digital landscape.

<sup>322</sup>Girls Who Code, "About Us," <https://girlswhocode.com/about-us/>.

<sup>323</sup>Brooke Erin Duffy and Becca Schwartz, "Digital 'Women's Work?': Job Recruitment Ads and the Feminization of Social Media Employment," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 8 (2017).

<sup>324</sup>Duffy and Schwartz, "Digital 'Women's Work?'"

predominantly female workforce and their labor.<sup>325</sup> This marginalization reinforces the invisibility of women's digital labor, a move that fits well within a larger capitalistic economy that devalues and delegitimizes other work, including food labor, traditionally associated with women.

In practice, this gendered perception results in the expectation that food Influencers will produce content—including photos and recipes—for free (or at a lower rate) and perform emotional work on behalf of their followers. Women who produce content that pushes the limits of these feminized expectations are often met with scrutiny. And in the digital market, this scrutiny can cost an Influencer their livelihood. Sarah Crawford, a blogger and food Influencer known as @bromabakery, frequently posts about other food Instagrammers who plagiarize her work. In a post accompanying a photo of cranberry meringue pie, she discussed the issue of “accountability” and how the theft of intellectual property devalues the work and damages the collective labor of the Instagram food community.<sup>326</sup> Multiple comments underneath Crawford’s post questioned her complaint, arguing that recipes and food photography form a body of work that other users continuously recreate as their own. Other commenters justified Crawford’s grievance and suggested practicing proper citation to avoid the issue entirely. Plagiarism occurs across all categories of creative content on Instagram, but the fact that users dismissed Crawford’s concerns since her work involved food demonstrate systemic expectations of gendered labor. Similar gendered comments followed multiple posts by baker Becca Rea-Tucker, also known as @thesweetfeminist, who manages a feed full of baked goods decorated

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<sup>325</sup>Duffy and Schwartz, “Digital ‘Women’s Work?’”

<sup>326</sup>Sarah Crawford (@bromabakery), “Let's talk integrity for sec, shall we? i can't tell you how many times i've seen my images plagiarized down to the same linen, same props, and same position of each individual cookie,” Instagram, November 9, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4pjaGonT8e/?hl=en>.



with feminist messages. This scrutiny encouraged Rea-Tucker to create a cake decorated with alternating blue and pink letters that read “You don't need to know what I do with the cakes.”<sup>327</sup> A few users wondered about Rea-Tucker recipes (whether she used boxed cake mixes to save time and money), others worried about food waste, and many questioned and threatened her for her use of cakes as a platform for political messaging. This prompted Rea-Tucker to bake yet another cake that spelled out the importance of women’s food labor in buttercream frosting: “it's not 'just a cake'.”<sup>328</sup>

### **Building an Identity, Reconstructing Gendered Economies**

In building a media identity, Banet-Weiser explains that

the product in gendered economies of visibility is the feminine body. Its value is constantly deliberated over, evaluated, judged, and scrutinized through media discourses, law, and policy. The dual dynamic of regulating and producing the visible self-work is to not only serve up bodies as commodities but also create the body and the self as a brand.<sup>329</sup>

While several scholars argue this economy is simply part of the larger corporate consumer culture, it also highlights the possibility for individual empowerment.<sup>330</sup> Influencers maintain visual lives through the way they curate themselves and their surroundings in order to perform and preserve their influence. Food Influencers curate with food and food-related imagery. Shifting the economy of visibility, at least in part, from the body to food forces us to reckon with

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<sup>327</sup>Becca Rea-Tucker (@thesweetfeminist), “they’re art 🍰,” Instagram, November 13, 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BqIstwwBcgq/>.

<sup>328</sup>Becca Rea-Tucker (@thesweetfeminist), “One of the most frustrating parts of this past week (other than the death threats) has been the repeated phrase “it’s just a cake, [+ insert dismissive phrase, like: get over it/yourself, it’s not that serious,” Instagram, June 10, 2019, [https://www.instagram.com/p/ByjLYWdBW\\_q/](https://www.instagram.com/p/ByjLYWdBW_q/).

<sup>329</sup>Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Media, Markets, Gender: Economies of Visibility in a Neoliberal Moment,” *The Communication Review* 18, no. 1 (2015): 57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2015.996398>.

<sup>330</sup>Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd., 2009), 158.

constructions of gender in different ways. Female food influencers force this shift by using parts of our bodies, specifically our hands, in a calculated performance of femininity that leverages social expectations with feminist agency. While the food and the body remain linked through (mostly) “appropriate” feminine aesthetics—hands gentling cupping mugs, touching ornate cakes, cradling delicate produce—this shift allows female food Influencers the ability to create our own identity, maintain bodily agency, and navigate labor issues on our own terms.<sup>331</sup>

Female food Influencers can be simultaneously empowered and objectified through their relationships with food, all while working to reconstruct the gendered economy in which they operate. And while a picture of a cake posted to Instagram can be both a transaction of digital labor and a feminist act, it can never be “just a cake.” In the next and final chapter, we’ll return to the discussion of the sophistication of women’s labor and how women navigate the liminal space between virtual and physical and the use of food as a form of community building and economic enterprise in both the digital and real worlds.

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<sup>331</sup>Tisha DeJmanee, “‘Food Porn’ as Postfeminist Play: Digital Femininity and the Female Body on Food Blogs,” *Television and New Media* 17, no. 5 (July 2016): 429-448. Appropriate feminine aesthetics can also be interpreted differently. For example, the gesture Becca Rea-Tucker makes in her Instagram post from June 10, 2019.

## CHAPTER 4: CUPCAKE FEMINISM: HOW COTTAGE INDUSTRY REFORM, RADICAL BAKE SALES, AND REPACKAGING BAKED GOODS CREATE NEW FORMS OF DIGITAL AND IRL RESISTANCE

*"America is an enormous cupcake in the middle of millions of starving people."*

*Gloria Steinem*

"Packaged" was how the male reporter described Gloria Steinem in 1980 with her long, "blonde hair, tapered nails, high cheekbones, seductive eyes and Grable-ish legs."<sup>332</sup> To use a metaphor frequently employed in the description of women: she was packaged like a frosted cupcake in a bakery window. She was a perfectly accessible, quotable, and, most importantly, attractive activist that was made for the media and, according to the reporter, the only kind of woman activist worthy of attention. A few powerful quotes about Steinem's activist thoughts were scattered between gendered, misogynistic descriptions of her appearance and personal life, though they were quickly glossed over for men's opinions on the feminist and her work. The reporter did not actually compare Steinem to baked goods, but her metaphor was positioned in a feature more focused on Steinem's relationships with well-to-do, suggesting she is pretty and she can bake, too.

The fetishization and objectification of women through food metaphors is old news (despite the fact that it keeps happening). From cuts of meat to enclosed verdant gardens, women have heard and have been described by it all. When the women are judged by their looks, linguistics scholar Caitlin Hines explains that there is a consistent metaphor "equating women-as-sex-objects with desserts, manifested both in linguistic expressions (such as *cheesecake*,

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<sup>332</sup>Gene-Gabriel Moore, "The Gloria Steinem Mystique is Alive," *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 23, 1980, F1 and F-14.

cookie, tart, and so on) and in customs (such as women jumping out of cakes).”<sup>333</sup> Hines goes on to argue that as baked goods, “women can be bought and sold, eaten, elaborately decorated (as in the use of frosting to describe the makeup of beauty pageant contestants), admired for their outward appearance, dismissed as sinful and decadent—or, in the ultimate degradation, simply done without: desserts are optional/inessential/frivolous, perhaps even a waste of time.”<sup>334</sup> These metaphors become deeply embedded into our language and eventually form belief systems within our society, creating a kind of systemic, unconscious, and problematic connection between women and baked goods. It’s easy to see why so many feminists in the 1960s and 1970s avoided food as an avenue for their resistance and raised the alarm when later generations of women tried to radicalize baking for the women’s movement in the twenty-first century. This chapter explores the contemporary concept of cupcake feminism, an expression of the women’s movement. Here we see how cottage industry reforms spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic helped the bake sale evolve as both a subversive and radical act for women across the nation.

### **Cupcake Feminism**

The term “cupcake feminism” was coined in the early aughts to describe the resurgence of the 1950s housewife aesthetic—complete with domestic arts and identity performances including attire, craft, and baking—the cupcake served as a symbol of the movement. Members of the movement argued that the aesthetic simultaneously uplifted femininity and provided avenues for subversive feminist resistance. Recalling how actual 1950s housewives were limited in creative and professional pursuits and often forced into gendered domestic duties, many

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<sup>333</sup>Caitlin Hines, “Rebaking the Pie: The Woman as Dessert Metaphor” in *Reinventing Identities: The Gendered Self in Discourse*, eds. Michelle Cox, Jay Jordan, Christina Ortmeier-Hooper, and Gwen Gray Schwartz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 146.

<sup>334</sup>Hines, “Rebaking the Pie,” 148.

feminists consider this trend, and the cupcake that represents it, a type of fetishization.<sup>335</sup> In her article, "Not All Feminist Ideas Are Equal: Anti-Capitalist Feminism and Female Complicity," scholar Giuliana Monteverde goes a step further and calls the "glamorization of 1950s housewives" and cupcake baking a "worrying retro-sexist trend."<sup>336</sup> Never mind that the cupcake predates this mid-century aesthetic and was largely part of the mid-2000s zeitgeist thanks to celebrity bakeries such as Magnolia Bakery in New York City which was further popularized in a famous episode of the arguably explicitly feminist television series *Sex and the City*.<sup>337</sup> In addition to the lack of reckoning with the gendered aesthetic of the past, this version of "cupcake feminism" also, perhaps inadvertently, reaffirms systemic gender biases associated with domesticity. Members of the movement argued that cupcake feminism is a reclamation of domesticity, arguing that tasks, or rather creative crafts, like baking are both inherently feminine and feminist.

This aesthetic also represents the direct opposite of the second "wave" stereotype that often-portrayed feminists as angry and masculine.<sup>338</sup> Feminist literature scholar Meryl Trussler describes the cupcake feminist as a "sophisticated invention,"

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<sup>335</sup>Viv Groskop, "Do good feminists bake cupcakes?" *The Guardian*, August 21, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/aug/22/women>.

<sup>336</sup>Giuliana Monteverde, "Not All Feminist Ideas Are Equal: Anti-Capitalist Feminism and Female Complicity," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 16, no. 1 (November 2014): 72, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1778&context=jiws>.

<sup>337</sup>Magnolia Bakery opened in 1996 with a single location in New York City's West Village. Famous for their cupcakes, the bakery used gourmet flavor combinations and priced their cupcakes at \$3 a piece (now over \$4 each as of 2022). Magnolia's cupcakes were featured on a third season episode of *Sex and the City* in 2000, which started a national (and later global) cupcake trend and even led to the formation of new gourmet cupcake bakery chains.

<sup>338</sup>Both sides of the suffrage campaign utilized stereotypes in cartoons as part of their campaign for or against women's enfranchisement. Pro-suffrage artists developed imagery—such as Nina Allender's "Allender Girl"—to subvert negative stereotypes. Allender Girls were stylish, youthful, and feminine, drawn in the style similar to Gibson Girls. To subvert attention from the movement's more radical tactics (including picketing the White House), pro-suffrage artists also relied on domestic stereotypes, drawing women in the home or holding children. All pro-suffrage portrayals were of white women. On the other side, predominantly male anti-suffrage artists aimed to create negative portrayals of suffragists and their cause by focusing on her appearance and often veered into stereotypically

Rouged, lipsticked, cinched at the waist, she performs big-F Femininity as the drag-show that it is. Her 50s-housewife schtick sets off everything about her that is radicalised and new. And, importantly, she emphasises that typically 'feminine' pursuits are no less worthy or important than their 'masculine' counterparts.<sup>339</sup>

Culture writer Emily Matchar similarly describes this movement as contemporary feminists "reclaiming women's work."<sup>340</sup> Matchar calls this movement the New Domesticity of the twenty-first century; a movement intent on restoring the respect and value in traditional "women's work" while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of historically limiting patriarchal gender lines. The danger, Trussler warns, is that with continued inequality, between genders as well as across racial intersections, this aesthetic can veer too close to "blissful ignorance."<sup>341</sup> This ignorance becomes even more fraught when corporations capitalize on the trending aesthetic. Monteverde worries about this connection, too, and argues the trend is especially concerning for "anti-capitalist feminism" (which seems like an odd modifier to put in front of feminism, since feminism is inherently anti-capitalist), pointing to the discrepancy between white women and

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racist caricature. Anti-suffrage cartoons depicted women as excessively fat or extremely thin and with unkempt hair, tiny eyes, giant mouths, covered in wrinkles, and with missing or oversized teeth. Several artists also added dirt or unstylish clothing to imply that suffragists were lower-class or masculine features to suggest a lack of femininity. Similar tactics were employed once again during between the 1960s and 1980s, although the stereotype—often an unshaved, academic-type, bra-burner—tended to take form in print or film rather than cartoon. Linda J. Lumsden, "Historiography: Woman Suffrage and the Media," *American Journalism*, 36 (2019): 4-31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08821127.2019.1572405>; Katharina Hundhammer, *American Women in Cartoons 1890-1920, Female Representation and the Changing Concepts of Femininity During the American Woman Suffrage Movement: An Empirical Analysis.*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012; "Women's Suffrage: Pictures of Suffragists and their Activities," *Library of Congress*, <https://guides.loc.gov/womens-suffrage-pictures/scenes-cartoons-ephemera>; Catherine Helen Palczewski, "Postcard History," Palczewski Suffrage Postcard Archive, University of Northern Iowa. Cedar Falls, IA, [https://sites.uni.edu/palczezs/postcard\\_archive.html#fn4](https://sites.uni.edu/palczezs/postcard_archive.html#fn4); Hilary Hinds and Jackie Stacey, "Imaging Feminism, Imaging Femininity: The Bra-Burner, Diana, and the Woman Who Kills," *Feminist Media Studies*, 1 (2001): 153-177, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680770120062114>.

<sup>339</sup>Meryl Trussler, "Half Baked: The Trouble With Cupcake Feminism," *The Quietus*, February 13, 2012, <https://thequietus.com/articles/07962-cupcake-feminism>.

<sup>340</sup>Emily Matchar, *Homeward Bound: Why Women are Embracing the New Domesticity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 101.

<sup>341</sup>Trussler, "Half Baked."

women of color in the workforce and the types of employment, public-facing versus domestic-related, they tend to hold.

### **Cake and Hyper-Femininity**

Even as the cupcake fell out of fashion over the next decade, the term continued to represent the latest iteration of the women's movement and spur questions of whether it counted as *real* feminism.<sup>342</sup> Speaking in advance of International Women's Day in 2017, feminist scholars Natalie Jovanovski and Meagan Tyler felt particularly troubled by the connection between cupcakes and feminism, arguing that they "scream infantilized hyper-femininity," especially considering the cupcake's role within consumer culture (Magnolia Bakery's popularity spurred several other cupcake chains) and capitalism.<sup>343</sup> Leading to the belief that it's one thing to bake the cupcake at home, it's another to buy a cupcake from a bakery (especially a chain) and associate it with a feminist lifestyle. Not only does the cupcake historically, though I would still argue erroneously, represent white, middle-class, post-war American housewives, Jovanovski and Tyler argue that "cupcakes are also a convenient way to promote individualist consumer sentiments that are the antithesis of collective action. They are a treat to be indulged in alone. While a nice big Bundt can be shared in sisterhood, the solitary cupcake is the epitome of contemporary "me culture" and an empty liberal feminism where women's decontextualized individual choices are emphasized over everything else."<sup>344</sup> A few months later in the fall of 2017, Tina Fey performed her sheetcaking skit on SNL in response to alt-right protests in

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<sup>342</sup>One of the latest articles on "cupcake feminism" came out in 2019 in the well-read digital platform, *The Kitchn*, Anna Brones, "Cupcake Feminism: Is What We Bake A Matter of Gender?" *The Kitchn*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.thekitchn.com/cupcakes-and-feminism-is-what-we-make-a-matter-of-gender-219424>.

<sup>343</sup>Natalie Jovanovski and Meagan Tyler, "No more cupcakes! A call to action on International Women's Day," *Feminist Current*, March 7, 2017, <https://www.feministcurrent.com/2017/03/07/no-cupcakes-call-action-international-womens-day/>.

<sup>344</sup>Jovanovski and Tyler, "No more cupcakes!"

Charlottesville, Virginia. Alone on camera and armed with just a single fork, Fey's performance dismissed the idea that a large cake is inherently meant for sharing. I argue that the cupcake, while problematic, doesn't inherently serve as a symbol of "individualism, feminized consumption, and style over substance," but instead upholds what Gloria Steinem described as a dismantling of the system: "It's not about a piece of the existing pie; there are too many of us for that. It's about baking a new pie."<sup>345</sup> And while Steinem uses pie in her metaphor, we can easily substitute cake. Keeping with this analogy, a single Bundt cake requires unbiased slicing, but even then, there can be margins of error, and it has the same flavor and ingredients throughout. A Bundt is collective yes but lacks intersectional consideration. Cupcakes, however, are baked equitably, but can be flavored individually to accommodate the needs and preferences of the consumer. They are rarely baked in singles, but instead in collective dozens, and considered the most practical baked good when feeding a crowd. In many cases, a cupcake doesn't even require the use of a plate or utensils, further democratizing its consumption. The cupcake is not the problem; how society repackaged, individually sold, and told us how to eat the cupcake is the reason why the current feminist movement keeps failing to progress.

Emily Matchar examines the concept of cupcake feminism and the rise of DIY food culture in the late 2000s. While she agrees with other scholars about the subversive potential of cupcakes, Matchar also underscores the roles identity and individualism played in the baking-as-feminism trend of the aughts. The phrase "opening a bakery," Matchar explains, "has become pop culture shorthand for 'creative woman seeking personal transformation.'"<sup>346</sup> Finding oneself through food, though not in the visceral way as it relates to the body, was a common trope in the

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<sup>345</sup>Gloria Steinem, "Palin: wrong woman, wrong message," *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 2008, <https://www.latimes.com/la-oe-steinem4-2008sep04-story.html>.

<sup>346</sup>Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 101.



late 2000s and early 2010s. In particular, white women were learning to live (and love) through food across all types of media, including the 2006 *New York Times* bestseller *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia* by American author Elizabeth Gilbert (which was later turned into a film in 2010 starring Julia Roberts) to the dramedy-hit *Bridesmaids* in 2011 which featured a main character down on her luck (and love) after her bakery, aptly named Cake Baby, closed during the recession.<sup>347</sup> In food-related media, the cultural climate empowered British food writer Nigella Lawson to describe her latest cookbook, *How to Be a Domestic Goddess*, as "a feminist tract."<sup>348</sup> Cooking, Matchar explains, underwent a rebrand and "made it possible for a new generation of women to embrace cookery with few qualms about being labeled a Suzy Homemaker."<sup>349</sup>

### **Reclaiming the Cottage Industry**

The cottage industry is a crucial concept in this study of women's food labor. Practiced for centuries, the term originated in the late eighteenth-century and referred to "a variety of commercial activity or trade, esp. manufacturing, which is carried out partly or wholly in people's homes, rather than in a factory, communal, workshop, etc."<sup>350</sup> The earliest uses of the term imply a kind of quaint, home-based craft, often described in the past tense and steeped in respectful nostalgia. Half a century later, the term "cottage industry" was used in contextual opposition to mass production and industrial settings. Although these two forms of industry are

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<sup>347</sup>The recession referenced in the film is The Great Recession that occurred between 2007-2009.

<sup>348</sup>Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 101.

<sup>349</sup>Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 101.

<sup>350</sup>"cottage industry, n.", OED Online, June 2022. *Oxford University Press*, <https://www-oed-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/Entry/61343304?redirectedFrom=cottage+industry> (accessed June 20, 2022).

diametrically opposed, they both acquired significant and unnecessary gendering through this evolution.

Many areas of home-based labor were performed by women with skill sets and knowledge bases passed down via gender through the generations. Home-based labor allowed women to participate in an economy built for the men and ensured other prescribed domestic duties, such as childcare and housework, could be done simultaneously. While the cottage industry provided many women with entrepreneurial opportunities, it also came with numerous problems including precarious wages, unstable work hours, as well as a lack of many other fundamental workers' rights that are now protected under various state and federal laws.<sup>351</sup> The cottage industry also operates within a bubble of obfuscation. With workers outside the workplace there is little external oversight on the conditions of those workers and their potentially harmful workplaces. Further complicating home-based labor is the concept of physically “going to work” at a workplace that is not the home. Not going to work is associated with women who remain in the home and thus all the labor women do at not-workplaces is deemed inferior if acknowledged at all. This gendered separation in turn renders the entire notion of the cottage industry and its historically and predominantly female workforce as less than.<sup>352</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, "cottage industry" took on new linguistic meaning with connotations of disorganization and unofficial status as well as pejorative and demeaning uses. For example, the *New York Times* ran a piece which used the term in reference to

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<sup>351</sup>Many industries would not see any formalization of workers' rights until the late nineteenth-century.

<sup>352</sup>It is important to note and differentiate from other terms that exist in this field. The term cottage industry exists alongside other terms for home-based labor including piecework, work that is paid a fixed rate per piece, and outwork, a general label that applies to work done outside the place of employment. While several of these terms technically apply to the cottage food industry, they largely refer to other aspects of home-based labor and aren't entirely helpful in this study.

historians: "Truth is elusive if it exists at all; history, which is supposed to be truth, is the construct of those who record events. The idea of truth no longer has the power it once had over men's minds; it has ceased to be seen as immutable or absolute. Revisionism has become the cottage industry of historians."<sup>353</sup> According to this linguistic interpretation, revision is not only antithetical to the field of history, it is a feminine action and therefore unprofessional practice.

## **Cottage Food Laws 2.0**

In response to the ongoing pandemic and the nationwide closures throughout the restaurant and hospitality industry, state legislators began to rewrite old cottage food laws. In 2020, there were a record-setting fifty-one unique pieces of legislation related to cottage food operations and home kitchens across that nation in thirty-one states and the District of Columbia. The following year saw even more policy change. A brief issued by the Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation at Harvard Law School details this trend citing that "state legislators have recognized the importance of the economic opportunity to start and run flexible, small businesses from home."<sup>354</sup> Beyond merely allowing cottage food production, these new policies included the expansion of the types of foods allowed to be produced at home and raised or lifted gross sales caps for producers.

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<sup>353</sup>Ada Louise Huxtable, "Avery Library Shows Off Its Riches," *New York Times*, July 6, 1980, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1980/07/06/112153287.html?pageNumber=73>. The term is further used in disparaging ways in reference to all sorts of nefarious activities including illegal drug trafficking, embezzlement, and migrant smuggling.

<sup>354</sup>Regina Paparo, "FLPC Releases Issue Brief on 2021 State Policy Trends in Cottage Food and Home Kitchen Legislation," *Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation*, Harvard Law School, January 10, 2022, <https://chlp.org/news-and-events/news-and-commentary/commentary/flpc-releases-issue-brief-on-2021-state-policy-trends-in-cottage-food-and-home-kitchen-legislation/>; Patrick Montgomery, Regina Paparo, and Emily M. Broad Leib, "COTTAGE FOODS AND HOME KITCHENS: 2021 State Policy Trends," *Food Law and Policy Clinic*, Harvard Law School, January 2022, <https://chlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Home-kitchen-issue-brief-2021-final-1.pdf>.

Currently, forty-nine states have cottage food laws. California and Utah have the most flexible policy called "microenterprise home kitchens" allowing individuals to sell full meals. Wyoming and North Dakota allow home cooks additional flexibility with "food freedom" laws.<sup>355</sup> Recent policy changes in many states now allow cottage food producers to sell online in addition to phone and mail orders and in-person sales. Traditionally, cottage food laws removed barriers to entrepreneurship, such as licensing, permitting, and undue inspection, for producers of low-risk foods (items that do not require temperature control). Policy changes expanded this list of food items and made the legalities around the sale of other foods—like baked goods made with dairy products—easier to navigate.

Most importantly this latest research acknowledged the inequitable impact the pandemic had on women and persons of color who would now stand to "gain the most from new cottage food and home kitchen laws."<sup>356</sup> These new policies not only addressed the fact that cottage food producers and home cooks are primarily women, but that the excuse for prohibiting cottage food production in the past for reasons of food safety were largely overstated.<sup>357</sup> Harvard's report showed that "there have been few, if any, reports of foodborne illness related to the consumption of foods produced at home, and the Centers for Disease Control reported that foodborne illness

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<sup>355</sup>Brianna Johnson and Vrushab Gowda, "From Cottage Foods to Home Cooks: Recent Legislative Trends for Kitchen Micropreneurs," *Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation*, Harvard Law School, April 23, 2021, <https://clinics.law.harvard.edu/blog/2021/04/from-cottage-foods-to-home-cooks-recent-legislative-trends-for-kitchen-micropreneurs/>.

<sup>356</sup>Paparo, "FLPC Releases Issue Brief on 2021 State Policy Trends."

<sup>357</sup>Notably, Harvard's acknowledgement of women as primary users of these cottage food policies has also changed (despite the fact that the primary users have always been women). Their 2013 report looked at the years 2010-2013, another moment that saw an increase in homemade foodstuffs and interest in farmers' markets, never mentioned women. In the portion of the report that speaks to the potential positive ramifications of expanded cottage food laws, all discussion is related to economic benefits, local foods, and education of consumers about their local foodways. Similarly, discussion of persons of color, immigrant, or multicultural food communities is also missing. Alli Condra and Emily Broad Leib, "Cottage Food Laws in the United States," *Food Law and Policy Clinic*, Harvard Law School, August 2013, [https://chlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/FINAL\\_Cottage-Food-Laws-Report\\_2013.pdf](https://chlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/FINAL_Cottage-Food-Laws-Report_2013.pdf).

dropped by 26% in 2020, as more people cooked at home."<sup>358</sup> Another previous complaint against the expansion of cottage food production was the possibility that home cooks could take customers from brick-and-mortar businesses who were held to different permitting and inspection standards. Comparison of these two types of businesses is an apples to oranges situation as most home cooks were making unique items unlikely to be sourced in stores, served far fewer customers, maintained the required health and safety standards, and lacked the state and federal resources that many brick-and-mortars had access to through small business programs. Both men and women own and operate small food businesses, the majority of home cooks, upwards of 83%, navigating the cottage-food industry are women.<sup>359</sup> While it's not fair to call previous cottage food laws sexist, the policies and the powers that put them into place did systematically disenfranchise women. Fast forward to 2020, and updates to the policies now "support individuals in sharing their culinary traditions, but also provide them with income streams" helping to mitigate the record high unemployment rate of 14.7 percent shortly after the pandemic started.<sup>360</sup> Unsurprisingly, those most affected by COVID-19 related unemployment were women, people of color, and immigrants, especially in the restaurant industry. Harvard's study found that not only have these groups "historically faced barriers to launching businesses or accessing equitable economic opportunity," but these updated policies would now benefit

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<sup>358</sup>Paparo, "FLPC Releases Issue Brief on 2021 State Policy Trends."

<sup>359</sup>Jennifer McDonald, "The relationship between cottage food laws and business outcomes: A quantitative study of cottage food producers in the United States," *Food Policy* 84 (2019): 21 -34, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2019.01.012>.

<sup>360</sup>Brianna Johnson and Vrushab Gowda, "Unemployment rate rises to record high 14.7 percent in April 2020," *TED: The Economics Daily*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 13, 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/unemployment-rate-rises-to-record-high-14-point-7-percent-in-april-2020.htm>.

these groups with impacts that are forecasted to be "felt for years, far beyond the current pandemic."<sup>361</sup>

### **The Great Labor Pivot**

The first few weeks of the global pandemic in Chapel Hill, NC were a whirlwind of unknowns. Can we leave the house? Do we need to sanitize our groceries (cut to me wiping down bags of tortilla chips, yogurt cups, and porous cardboard boxes of granola bars)? Do we mask? There are no masks. What do we do if we can't get masks? Is this person in my safety bubble? Can we ever see other people again? We also had no concept of the expected timeline. Public schools were shut for a couple weeks, many extended or released early for their already scheduled spring breaks. Stores and dining establishments closed hoping to slow the spread of the virus. The world seemed to come to a complete halt. The weeks started to add up. People who couldn't work from home needed to go back into the world. Some businesses slowly opened back up with reduced hours or curb-side services. Restaurants did the same, frequently offering limited menus or significantly altered staples (supply chain issues were another result of a workerless or short-staffed society). Due to these changes, many restaurants—from Michelin starred eateries to mom-and-pop spots—were forced to lay off workers including. The restaurant industry was facing complete ruin.

A number of establishments worked to mitigate the impact with support from limited resources such as the federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which helped keep workers employed through long term closures related to the pandemic, and other financial relief made possible by the Independent Restaurant Coalition.<sup>362</sup> Ultimately, the restaurant industry lost

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<sup>361</sup>Johnson and Gowda, "From Cottage Foods to Home Cooks."

<sup>362</sup>Independent Restaurant Coalition, "Our Mission," <https://www.independentrestaurantcoalition.com/mission/>. Founded in March 2020, the Independent Restaurant Coalition was a response to the nationwide digital movement

about 5.5 million jobs in April 2020.<sup>363</sup> While many of the job losses were supposed to be temporary, the pandemic continues to spread and impact daily life now over two years later. Though many workplaces returned to normal or almost-normal capacity, restaurants lagged behind. This was partly due to the fact that women make up a significant portion of the restaurant industry workforce. The same women who tend to be the primary caregivers at home, especially to small children who remained unvaccinated until June 2022 (when children under five-years-old were finally permitted to receive a COVID-19 vaccine) and potentially further impacted by the compounding issue of a nationwide childcare shortage. We know that restaurant workers were some of those most impacted by unemployment related to the pandemic, but they were “also among those most likely to have skills applicable” to the cottage food industry.<sup>364</sup> It isn’t surprising, then, to see those same workers turn to that untapped skillset to provide for their families, respond to the ongoing socioeconomic pressures further intensified by the pandemic, and find ways to use food, especially baking, as a tool for resistance.

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#SaveRestaurants. A group of 18 people from the food industry (mostly members of the small, local restaurant and bar community) convened and proposed a plan called the RESTAURANTS Act to present to Congress. The RESTAURANTS Act was presented to Congress in June 2020 with bipartisan support. By July the act gained major corporate support including Coca-Cola, Resy, and US Foods. Over the next few months additional congressional support included Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. A year later in March 2021, a \$28.6 billion restaurant and bar relief package was passed into law. While not a primary focus of my research, I was lucky to be connected to Cheetie Kumar, North Carolina restaurateur and co-founder and IRC board director, who shared her work with the #SaveRestaurants movement in *Edible North Carolina* (UNC Press 2022) for which I served as the associate editor and recipe developer. We worked together on her essay and recipe throughout the pandemic, while she also navigated restaurant closures, financial uncertainty, and working with the IRC. I include this detail to demonstrate the power of women in the restaurant world, the efficacy of digital communication, and the interconnectedness of my fields of work and study.

<sup>363</sup>"The Employment Situation - June 2022," Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, News Release, USDL-22-1443, [https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empst\\_07082022.htm](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empst_07082022.htm).

<sup>364</sup>Johnson and Gowda, "From Cottage Foods to Home Cooks."

## Baking Under Duress

Of course, baking wasn't invented during the pandemic (though, for the first time in their lives, many Americans tried their hand at various types of bakes during the early stages of the global crisis).<sup>365</sup> Similarly, no one will claim that they invented the concept of the bake sale for raise funds and awareness around issues exacerbated by the spread of COVID-19. Yet, baking and bake sales quickly became repeat subjects of discussion at major news media outlets and on social media platforms across the nation and the globe. Amidst the crisis, some found solace in the comforts of combining flour, sugar, and butter and others saw an opportunity to support their community through the act of baking, a form of activism they had undoubtedly seen succeed before.

For generations, women have used food, especially baking, as a tool for resistance and community building. Bake sales, also known throughout history as sweet cake auctions and cake raffles, were organized for many reasons: Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) labor campaigns, suffrage, seasonal church and school district fundraisers, March of Dimes drives, the promotion of war bond purchases during the World Wars, and all sorts of political causes. The civil rights movement was frequently sustained by numerous Black women-organized bake sales, perhaps most notably Georgia Gilmore's sweet potato pies and her Club from Nowhere. Proceeds from what the club sold went directly to the MIA (Montgomery Improvement Association, an organization formed following the arrest of Rosa Parks and helmed by Martin Luther King, Jr.). Gilmore and many of the club members were domestic laborers and prepared food to feed marchers and protesters in the community. After the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s

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<sup>365</sup>Amanda Mull, "Americans Have Baked All the Flour Away: The pandemic is reintroducing the nation to its kitchens," *The Atlantic*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/05/why-theres-no-flour-during-coronavirus/611527/>.



and renewed efforts to extend the deadline for the ratification for the Equal Rights Amendment, women organized bake sales to mobilize voters and spread awareness about an issue that had been languishing in Congress for decades.

For many women, food and baking were not only fields of expertise and comfort, but also safe spaces in which to operate in public. Suffragists often used food items and baked goods to convince men that if women were granted the vote, they would maintain their "womanly duties" of the home and hearth. Their campaigns were focused on women skills and knowledge in food management and food purity. These intentional optics maintained the gendered connection between women and domesticity, creating a culinary alibi that enabled women to use their food labor for a bigger agenda.. Women can't be rebelling if they're busy baking, right? And since 2016, both home and professional bakers across the nation have hosted digital bake sales and pop-ups benefiting various women's rights organizations. The bakes have become more explicit in their messaging, too, with phrases and calls-to-action spelled out plainly in buttercream or baked pie crust.

### **Cupcake Feminism 2.0?**

Austin, Texas-based Becca Rea-Tucker, who goes by the handle @thesweetfeminist on Instagram (where she has 245k followers), expresses her political thoughts in layers of cake, buttercream, and sprinkles. On her feed, Rea-Tucker typically shares photos of herself with a big smile and bubblegum pink highlights in her hair and her cakes are always brightly decorated, styled with confetti or sprinkles even when discussing complex topics. For example, one cake reads "ABORTION IS HEALTHCARE" in pink bordered by a circle of matching pink piped

buttercream peaks and multicolored nonpareils.<sup>366</sup> Another cake, with a frantic swirl of pink and blue frosting, reads, “RAGE IS A RATIONAL REACTION.”<sup>367</sup> Thanks to her platform, Rea-Tucker nabbed a cookbook deal, presented her work in a special museum exhibit, and is frequently interviewed by the media. Rea-Tucker is also a young, pretty, white woman afforded the systemic privileges those qualities entail (though she addresses her whiteness in numerous posts about systemic racism and oppression, too).<sup>368</sup> At first glance, we might label Rea-Tucker and her cakes as cupcake feminism 2.0. In reality, @thesweetfeminist feed full of pretty baked goods serves as example platform for women’s resistance with posts pointing followers to ongoing raffles or auctions benefiting abortion rights efforts and lengthy captions dedicated to educating readers about topics including abortions, for-profit prisons, and consent.

Other bakers who are less explicit about their political beliefs use their platforms in similar ways. In Richmond, Virginia, Arley Arrington, who goes by @arley.cakes on Instagram, includes both the words “baker” and “rebel” in her bio. Arrington uses her baking to speak on a number of issues, but the majority of her cakes focus on the systemic racism experienced by Black Americans (Arrington is a Black woman). Her most recent post is a sheet cake styled in the design of Kristen Green’s recently published *The Devil’s Half Acre: The Untold Story of How One Woman Liberated the South’s Most Notorious Slave Jail*.<sup>369</sup> The book, and Arrington’s

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<sup>366</sup>Becca Rea-Tucker (@thesweetfeminist), “Last night, HB314 passed Alabama’s Senate. It is now the most restrictive anti-abortion law in the country - it makes abortion a felony at conception, punishable by up to 99 years imprisonment,” Instagram, May 15, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bxe7IjohY1X/>.

<sup>367</sup>Becca Rea-Tucker (@thesweetfeminist), “PSA: it’s okay to be angry today (and every day, actually)!” Instagram, May 17, 2019, [https://www.instagram.com/p/Bxkk0NJB7\\_p/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bxkk0NJB7_p/).

<sup>368</sup>Becca Rea-Tucker (@thesweetfeminist), “On any given day, 465,000 people are held in local jails even though they have not been convicted of a crime (source: Prison Policy Initiative 2018),” Instagram, April 28, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/COOgzMGBQqt/>.

<sup>369</sup>Arley Arrington (@arley.cakes), “Happy book launch day,” Instagram, April 12, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CcQgdfE15JY/>.

cake, centers on Mary Lumpkin, a formerly enslaved woman who was raped by her enslaver. Arrington posted a video of a rainbow cake with the phrase “trans rights ARE human rights” and the caption “👩🏽 BAKE SALE ALERT! 👩🏽” alerting her followers to find details for her latest cake raffle benefiting LGBTQIA+ organization Nationz Foundation.<sup>370</sup>

Elana Berusch, a trained food scientist and recipe developer who goes by @lanibakes on Instagram, intersperses posts of baked goods like marbled shortbread cookies (a bake that went instantly viral back in November 2020 and earned a spot in the *Washington Post*’s holiday cookie roundup the following year) with colorful cakes piped with phrases including “I will aid + abet abortion” and “protect kids not guns.”<sup>371</sup> Through her feed, Berusch routinely hosts raffles for virtual baking classes and prepares “weekend treat boxes” (for local pick-up in her Denver, CO area) with slices and portions of whatever she bakes that week with proceeds going to whatever cause is relevant at the time. With a sizeable following of more than 37,000 followers, Berusch’s digital bake sales are far reaching and consistently bring in significant funds. Her most recent bake sale on July 3, 2022 raised \$2100 for Colorado abortion funds.<sup>372</sup> The combination of digital communication and real-life action has proven to be a powerful path of resistance as well as a significant disruption of the criticism of the concept of cupcake feminism.

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<sup>370</sup>Arley Arrington, (@arley.cakes), “👩🏽 BAKE SALE ALERT! 👩🏽” Instagram, June 30, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cfbd9mWAXnX/>.

<sup>371</sup>Recipes from twelve baking experts—including bloggers, bakers, and recipe editors—were included in this special holiday baking issue. “Marbled Shortbread Cookies,” *The Washington Post*, December 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/recipes/marbled-shortbread/18060/>; Elana Berusch, @lanibakes Instagram, June 25, 2022, [https://www.instagram.com/p/CfPPe\\_9FO4v/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CfPPe_9FO4v/); Elana Berusch, (@lanibakes), “Shouldn’t safe kids vs guns be an easy choice?” Instagram, May 25, 2022, [https://www.instagram.com/p/Cd\\_OgEOfMaE/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cd_OgEOfMaE/).

<sup>372</sup>Other bakers, myself included, participate in fundraisers directly through Instagram with the in-app fundraiser feature, asking followers to donate via posts, though these numbers are hard to track as the fundraiser bar disappears once the drive is complete.

Nevertheless, individual actors can only achieve so much within the dizzyingly vast and complex network of the digital world. But when bakers work together, that changes.

### **#BakersAgainstRacism**

According to chef Paola Velez and co-founder of #BakersAgainstRacism, the movement's success comes down to "pastry math." Since the first activation of Bakers Against Racism, first launched in response to the racially-charged murder of George Floyd by white police officers in May 2020, more than 3,000 professional and home bakers from over 40 states and four continents have participated in the movement.<sup>373</sup> Starting as a hashtag as a grassroots communication method, the foundations of the movement were built on both virtual participation and decentralized collaboration, two factors that could help scale a solo-baker bake sale from \$1,000 dollars of fundraising to hundreds of thousands if not more. And it was much more. Over all, #BakersAgainstRacism bakers have raised over \$2.5 million dollars.

Several important factors led to this financial and communication success, including, first and foremost, the work of the Bakers Against Racism founders, chefs Paola Velez, Willa Pelini, and Rob Rubba. As chefs, Velez, Pelini, and Rubba were dealing with the growing precarity of the restaurant and hospitality industry. Velez had been furloughed from her job as a pastry chef at Kith/Kin in Washington, DC at the beginning of the global pandemic. At the same time, Cottage Food Laws across the nation were amending to keep up the changing needs of home bakers and newly unemployed restaurant professionals. And in March 2020, the "Cottage Food

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<sup>373</sup>"Who We Are," *Bakers Against Racism*, <https://www.bakersagainstracism.com/>; Meghan McCarron, "Bakers Against Racism Is Just the Beginning," *Eater*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.eater.com/2020/6/18/21295842/bakers-against-racism-bake-sale-instagram-movement-black-lives-matter>; Julia Moskin, "When the Bake Sale Goes Global, Millions Are Raised to Fight Injustice," *The New York Times*, July 21, 2020.

Expansion Amendment Act,” passed in Washington, DC.<sup>374</sup> All the ingredients were prepped for a purposeful bake sale. The final task was finding more bakers. The hashtag #BakersAgainstRacism called them to action.

Decentralizing the #BakersAgainstRacism sale was key to spreading its message and involving more bakers. While it makes sense that Velez, a woman of color, would largely serve as the face of the Bakers Against Racism movement, she recognized the need to make space for all bakers. The movement needed to also connect with home bakers, who wouldn’t necessarily have the same experience in scaling recipes or familiarity navigating ordering systems. To achieve this, the founders first put out a call on social media, focusing on Instagram through their account @BakersAgainstRacism, which quickly gained over 54 thousand followers. As other bakers signed up to bake, subaccounts including @bakersagainstracismsandiego, @bakersagainstracisto (Toronto), and @bakersagainstracismnyc started to organize in their respective areas.<sup>375</sup> Resources stored in a shared public Google Drive on the movement’s website advised bakers how to manage orders with Google forms, provided tips for setting up a successful bake sale, and pointed towards helpful anti-bias training-style literature and media for non-BIPOC bakers.<sup>376</sup> Rubba created colorful graphics featuring frosted cakes and a raised fist clutching a whisk and shared them online for other bakers to use. Since bakers were organizing during the middle of the pandemic, additional concern for health and safety were addressed in post captions and the founders urged participants to rely on virtual orders, digital payment and

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<sup>374</sup>Cottage Food Expansion Amendment Act of 2019, B23-0192 (March 10, 2020), <https://lims.dccouncil.us/Legislation/B23-0192>.

<sup>375</sup>Together with two of my fellow food industry friends, Lauren Vied Allen and Kendall Vanderslice, I helped organize a #BakersAgainstRacism bake sale at East Durham Bake Shop in Durham, NC in June, 2020.

<sup>376</sup>Bakers Against Racism Resources, Google Drive, created June 2, 2020, <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RbZSYESnoe91uN76NXMxilZJe0eTYx7W>.

donations, and socially distant pick-ups. Since the first activation in the summer of 2020, Bakers Against Racism has since called on its extensive network to fundraise for a number of intersectional causes including the 2020 election, #StopAsianHate (spurred by the ongoing pandemic and its connection to China) in 2021, the Russian invasion and subsequent humanitarian crisis in Ukraine in early 2022, and the overturning of Roe vs. Wade and the loss of reproductive rights across the nation in the summer of 2022. Through community organizing and the use of easily accessible digital tools, Velez and the #BakersAgainstRacism created a new precedent for the potential power of bake sales. Most significantly, the baking-centered movement reclaimed and underscored the radical connection between food and feminist activism.

While Bakers Against Racism was “unofficially” the world’s biggest bake sale, acknowledging the many intersections of systemic racism through their baking-focused community actions, there are plenty of other bakers working towards similar goals. Since 2016, Natasha Pickowicz, a New York City based pastry chef, has hosted a charity bake sale for Planned Parenthood. The first year, hosted at Café Altro Paradiso, gathered top pastry chefs from across the city raised thousands of dollars. A year later, they raised over \$22,000.<sup>377</sup> Since then, Pickowicz, together with fellow food industry veterans Lindsey Peckham and Tina Bryne, launched The Bake Sale Project (TBSP), an initiative “that aims to explore and document the radical potential of the bake sale.”<sup>378</sup> In addition to resources and strategies, The Bake Sale Project intends to “disrupt normative (aka rich white cis-het male) definitions of

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<sup>377</sup>Natasha Pickowicz, “How I Protest with Pastries,” *Bon Appetit*, May 13, 2019, <https://www.bonappetit.com/story/bake-sale-ideas-natasha-pickowicz>.

<sup>378</sup>Natasha Pickowicz, (@natashapickowicz), “The Bake Sale Project (TBSP!) is a new project started by service industry vets,” Instagram, June 12, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CBVofaYjC-e/?hl=en>.

‘professionalism’ and ‘success,’” issues that have plagued women in the food industry and cottage industry food producers for generations.<sup>379</sup> While The Bake Sale Project and #BakersAgainstRacism will undoubtedly have more obstacles to overcome and bake for, the connection between women, baking, and resistance is the strongest it has ever been. This turning point has even caught the attention of corporations, like King Arthur Baking Company, an employee-owned and baker favorite flour and baking supply company. The company has a track record of embracing grassroots organizations and showcasing diverse voices on its website through guest blogs and recipes. In the summer of 2022, after bake sales like #BakersAgainstRacism began to prepare for another activation, King Arthur Baking Company hired freelance food writer Pooja Makhijani (who has previously written on feminism and food) for a piece on “How to host a fundraising bake sale.”<sup>380</sup> The article provides a brief background of the history of bake sales, noting their significance as an avenue for fundraising for resistance movements, and then shares “everything you need to organize a baking fundraiser and raise a lot of dough.” Featuring multiple women of color, including the author, the article doesn’t shy away from connecting baking with complex political issues like race and reproductive agency. Nevertheless, the article is on a corporation’s website, includes links to suggested recipes and other King Arthur articles on topics such as “how to pack and ship baked goods.” Promotional links for recommended products like SAF Red Instant Yeast, Cranberry-Orange Scone Mix, and Unbleached All-Purpose 5-lb bags of flour with “ADD TO CART” buttons under each wait just

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<sup>379</sup>Natasha Pickowicz, (@natashapickowicz), “The Bake Sale Project (TBSP!)” Instagram.

<sup>380</sup>Full disclosure, I am quoted in this article. Pooja Makhijani, “How to host a fundraising bake sale,” *King Arthur Baking Company*, July 25, 2022, <https://www.kingarthurbaking.com/blog/2022/07/25/how-to-host-a-fundraising-bake-sale>. Makhijani’s previous work includes “After a Year of Pandemic Living, I Baked a Wedding Cake (Just for Me)” for *The Kitchn*, <https://www.thekitchn.com/wedding-cake-for-me-23125507>; “India’s Partition Displaced Millions. For Hindu Sindhis, Food Replaced Home,” for *Food52*, <https://food52.com/blog/20309-sindhi-food-history-partition-of-india>, and “How My Mother’s Sai Bhaji Helped Put Our Family Back Together” for *Bon Appetit*, <https://www.bonappetit.com/story/sindhi-sai-bhaji-family-history>.

a few scrolls down the page. King Arthur Baking Company might pass ethical and anti-racism scrutiny, but does such a connection between food, activism, and capitalism invite other less-critically-minded companies to do the same? The cupcake no longer need exclusively reflect the experiences of white women or women at all for that matter, but what about a cupcake that is sponsored by a corporation seeking to *appear* good, applying feminism like egg-wash to give that patriarchy pastry shine. This precarious intersection is where women's food-labor must continue to resist.



## **CONCLUSION: PRETTY SHITTY CAKES: ON BAKING FORWARD OUT OF THE PAST AND UPDATING THE FEMINIST RECIPE**

I didn't explain to my grandmother *why* I wanted the back issues of her beloved *Wilton Cake Decorating Yearbooks* in the winter of 2020. As much as she always supported my career and academic endeavors, I knew she was thankful that the past year gave me more time to be with my children and to "mother." Her collection dates back to the 1970s, but I wanted the issue from 1989, the year I was born—over a decade after the first official International Women's Year in 1975 and well into the era of "women can have it all." I needed this issue for a buttercream-message topped layer cake I planned for International Women's Day in March 2021. My contemporary version of the cake featured the same buttercream elements including piped chocolate lines overlapped to resemble a grapevine wreath, dainty dusky blue flowers, a pale 90's pink ribbon, as well as iconic white chocolate Country Goose geese adorned with little blue bows (just like my mom and countless other moms had in their 1990s kitchens). The inspirational cake featured on the 1989 cover read "Welcome Friends." With room to spare on my own cake top, I piped a few more words so it read: "Welcome to the Eighties, Ladies." That day marked the first anniversary of the start of the global pandemic, the shutdown of childcare and schools, and the catastrophic setbacks for women that followed. We pivoted from "having it all" to "doing it all." In less than a year, as employment rates plummeted to numbers not seen

since the late 1980s, reports of domestic abuse and restrictions on women's access to healthcare resources steadily rose.<sup>381</sup>

Readable cakes exploded on social media and, as evident through the drastic approval of cottage industry laws across the nation starting in 2020, women who had lost their brick-and-mortar baking jobs or pivoted to baking from home as a new source of financial revenue increased.<sup>382</sup> In December 2020, a woman-owned, Austin, Texas-based brand called Pretty Shitty Cakes sidestepped the legal concerns entirely by making retro-piped cakes out of cardboard, paint, and piping bags filled with colored spackle and fitted with real piping tips.<sup>383</sup> Owner Jasmine Archie typically finishes her cakes with brazen color combinations and one-too-many layers of “frosting,” as well as a smattering of impudent phrases such as “sexy,” “fuck,” and “chill the hell out.”<sup>384</sup> While Archie's cakes are designed to be traditionally dainty (though purposefully irreverent) decorations, they also serve as enduring examples of how women use cake (even inedible versions) as a form of communication. Rather than an act of celebration, my Women's Day cake was a creative call-to-action spelled out in buttercream. A call that rang out far beyond my kitchen and joined together with women throughout the nation, especially here in

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<sup>381</sup>“A Year of Strength and Loss: The Pandemic, the Economy, and the Value of Women's Work,” *National Women's Law Center*, March 2021, [https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Final\\_NWLC\\_Press\\_CovidStats.pdf](https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Final_NWLC_Press_CovidStats.pdf); “The Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women During Covid-19,” *UN Women*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>.

<sup>382</sup>Southern states with relatively new Cottage Food laws, many which feature incredibly important higher revenue caps, include Washington DC (March 2020), Mississippi (June 2020), Arkansas (April 2021), Alabama (May 2021), and Florida (June 2021). “Recent State Reforms for Homemade Food Businesses,” *Institute for Justice*, <https://ij.org/legislative-advocacy/state-reforms-for-cottage-food-and-food-freedom-laws/>.

<sup>383</sup>Bettina Makalintal, “For a Sugar Rush That Lasts Forever, Get a Fake Cake,” *Munchies*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wx8wd4/instagram-retro-inspired-fake-cake-decor-trend>.

<sup>384</sup>Pretty Shitty Cakes (@prettyshittycakes), “💎 GIVEAWAY ALERT 💎,” Instagram, February 2, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CZfAS87OQkW/>.

the South. Thanks to my grandmother's mentorship and my careful practice with the piping bag, there was no misreading it.

This legacy of women using food as a means of resistance is a complex mouthful: fraught, sticky, beautiful, connective, and empowering. From the problematically narrow-minded agenda of the suffragist cookbook writers to the inclusive and digitally-born efforts of the #BakersAgainstRacism, women's food labor has a proven track record of producing enfranchisement and creating networks of community support. We saw this labor in action in Chapter 1 through the publication of women's cookbooks in the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries. While white women who led the food-related actions of the suffrage movement failed to include their sisters of color, they modeled the use of cooking and recipes to create agency and awareness of women's domestic labor. We next turned to the evolution of power and resistance of women-owned restaurants from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1970s in Chapter 2. The occupation and later ownership of physical space helped lay the groundwork for women's food-related resistance that would continue well into the twenty-first century. In Chapter 3, we jumped forward in time to investigate the digitized version of that domesticity, only to learn that women, especially women of color, are still fighting for equality at the intersections of food and the digital landscape. In Chapter 4, we return to the present day where cupcake feminism threatens to dismantle the long legacy of women's food related labor. We worked to disrupt this concept through the intervention of the contemporary digital bake sale organized by women chefs and home bakers who share resources, platforms, and recipes for resistance. But as I write this, I'm prepping for yet another bake sale.

## Never Just About Food

The food-related work undertaken by each of the women discussed in this dissertation counts as resistance, but it is also important to acknowledge the other ways these same women connect with the larger women's movements of their eras. For some women, their allies outside of food-related spaces remain unclear, whether by choice or simply due to lack of public information. For others, their non-food-related forms of activism help us understand why food became their chosen medium for resistance.

Before she opened The Suffrage Cafeteria, activist Alva Vanderbilt Belmont was the founder of the Political Equality League, a subgroup of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, which focused on securing votes for pro-suffrage politicians in New York. She later became one of the founders of the National Woman's Party.<sup>385</sup> Though Belmont lived and centered her work in New York, she was born in Alabama and utilized her southern roots to support the creation of additional southern suffrage conferences.<sup>386</sup> In 1917, Belmont was elected president of the National Women's Party and held the office until her death. Belmont's biographer, Sylvia Hoffert explains that though "it is difficult to determine the exact value of Alva Belmont's contributions to the woman's rights movement between 1909 and her death in 1933," we know that she gave immense amounts of time and money to the cause. To help fill the in the gaps left by incomplete organizational records, Hoffert provides examples of Belmont's personal financial contributions to the early twentieth-century women's movements in an appendix to her biography. These contributions, which included housing and gathering spaces for

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<sup>385</sup>Arthur T. Vanderbilt, *Fortune's Children: The Fall of the House of Vanderbilt* (New York: William Morrow, 1989).

<sup>386</sup>Sylvia D. Hoffert, *Alva Vanderbilt Belmont: Unlikely Champion of Women's Rights* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 102

the organizations, various legal fees and other bills, in addition to fundraising dollars from her own pocket, totaled well over one million dollars.<sup>387</sup>

Women active in the women-led restaurant movement, including Patricia Hynes, Dolores Hayden, and Carol J. Adams, went on to obtain various secondary degrees and apply their experiences and education towards the larger feminist movements. After selling Bread and Roses to another women's collective, Hynes "completed her graduate studies and became a renowned environmental activist, professor, and author."<sup>388</sup> In addition to being a co-founder of the Bread and Roses restaurant, Dolores Hayden was also a professor of architecture, focusing in feminist spaces, at MIT. Hayden would go on to hold academic appointments at UC Berkeley, UCLA, and Yale and work to center and celebrate women's spaces through the non-profit *The Power of Place*. Upon finishing her Masters of Divinity at Yale University, Carol J. Adams went on to start a hotline for battered women in upstate New York.<sup>389</sup> While she is most known for her foundational food studies text *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (Bloomsbury 1990), she also published numerous works on domestic violence prevention and care manuals in addition to further ecofeminist explorations including *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* (Bloomsbury 2014).

And then there are more contemporary examples, such as Chef Paola Velez and writer and content creator Becca Rea-Tucker (also known as @thesweetfeminist), who not only paved new paths for themselves in their respective male-dominated fields, but also connect their work with larger feminist and women-supporting organizations including Planned Parenthood and

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<sup>387</sup>Hoffert, 201-204.

<sup>388</sup>Alex Ketchum, *Ingredients for Revolution: A History of American Feminist Restaurants, Cafes, and Coffeehouses* (Montreal: Concordia University Press, 2022).

<sup>389</sup>Carol J. Adams, "bio," *Carol J. Adams*, accessed February 20, 2023, <https://caroljadams.com/cja-bio>.

Black Lives Matter. While there's no direct food-related activist to position of power pipeline, the impact of women who use food as a medium for resistance is clear and significant.

## **The Recipe**

Throughout the research for my dissertation, as I studied the intersection of women's resistance, food, and technology, I sought a tech-focused framework to help explore the evolution of the women's movements. As an American Studies scholar, I also wanted to push a bit against chronology, a sometimes useful but more often too restrictive historical tool. I believed that a model deeply rooted in technology, something repeatable and responsive (or rather triggered) when prompted, that relied on a set of commands and code would illustrate the never-ending ebb and flow of women's resistance beyond the confines of waves or even radio waves.

Looking for a model in the world of digital technology, a male-dominated industry with a long history of marginalizing women, was my first mistake. Instead, I needed to return to women's material culture, fields that aren't technically male or female, but prescribed through gendered stereotypes over time and, in the case of food and cooking, co-opted and embraced by women who realized their potential power. Consider the recipe as a metaphor for the long women's movement. A recipe that has always been there, in constant use, frequently updated, sometime after each use, other times by new cooks. A recipe that has been passed down through the generations and evolves as it goes. The ingredients do not appeal to all but can be changed as needed. Like a recipe, the women's movement can be appropriated, stolen, reworked and repackaged as another's, ascribed a singular origin, and sometimes used for profit. Like the results of any real-life recipe, the women's movement has the potential to nourish, but is just as susceptible to rot.

Think about devil's food cake. Each person thinks of a different recipe, ---maybe one your family gave you or it was from a cookbook or an online blog. Perhaps you cannot recall a recipe for devil's food, but you do have a recipe for a chocolate cake. Each recipe likely has similar, but slightly different ingredients . In the end, the devil's food cakes will not look exactly alike or even taste alike but they are still devil's food cake.

Now replace this recipe for feminism. We each come to it from different standpoints, to build on feminist standpoint theory, a feminist theoretical perspective that argues that knowledge stems from social position.<sup>390</sup> These recipes demonstrate our simultaneous, intersectional, and individual interpretations of feminism, how it serves us and others, and how it changes over time. There is no ebb or flow of recipes, but rather an evolution. We see that recipe recreated in digital spaces, carrying hallmarks of earlier generations of women, old methods and new ingredients, different versions of a basic recipe—good and bad. I understand that not everyone will be pleased with the recipe as a model for feminist movements, least of all the feminist anti-cooking activists of the 1970s, but I'm having a hard time finding a metaphor that is equally rooted in women's material culture, able to demonstrate the unending efforts of women through history, *and* a documented tool of both women's oppression and resistance.<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>390</sup>Sandra G. Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>391</sup>Stacy J. Williams, "A Feminist Guide to Cooking," *American Sociological Association* 13, no. 3 (2014): 59-61.

## The Never-ending Women's Movement

Just when it feels like I should stop collecting data for this project, white supremacy and the American patriarchy threw another pie at women. On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in addition to *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, two landmark cases that guaranteed federal constitutional protections of abortion rights in 1973 and a subsequent 1992 decision that reinforced the former. I headed back into the world of digital bake sales and #protestcakes. This dissertation was never meant to be about *Roe v. Wade* or abortion access. I started this project to talk about a legacy seemingly headed towards justice. But since I started thinking (in 2016) and writing (in 2018) society shaped my project for me. Once Trump was voted out of office, I thought, surely, my dissertation has an end in sight. But then COVID-19 spread across the globe sending women into a gendered regression unseen since before I was born in the 1980s. I did not set out to be a scholar-activist, but the present forced me into action.

In academia, scholars are often told to value distance from your research subject or time period. Avoiding bias is one goal, but obtaining perspective, the kind that is usually gained with time is another. My scholarship required a circuitous path because of the global pandemic that sent millions of women, myself included, into unplanned situations of domestic labor. The COVID-19 pandemic spurred other expressions of civil unrest, primarily Black Lives Matters. For me that became work with the Bakers Against Racism movement and serving as a scholarly resource for others hoping to learn more about the intersections of women's food labor and resistance. When I finish writing this, I'll return to creating resources for the latest Bakers Against Racism bake sale activation focuses on abortion rights across the nation.

As a woman working within this largely digital space of food and resistance, I am frequently asked what are the most important accomplishments of this contemporary feminist



movement and where are its fractures. Today's feminism continues to privilege white-centered narratives and still struggles to separate itself from capitalism. The movement succeeds, however, by using its voice in new ways and with new tools that our predecessors could never dream of, by taking up space—in real life and throughout the digital landscape, and by raising consciousness through the most human of needs: food.

The contemporary feminist movement has made it clearer than ever that food is an important subject of study, a lens and mouthpiece for local, regional, national, and global issues, and a critical way for all people—scholars to bakers—to understand our rapidly changing world. When thinking about the next chapter of women's resistance through food and what the next version of the feminist recipe might look like, I consider the new spaces we “consume” food. I think about digital spaces like TikTok and other up and coming social media and communication platforms.<sup>392</sup> But the reality is that these spaces are complicated spaces of capitalism that demand content, give little in return, and require constant vigilance. In addition to creating graphics about how to scale up recipes for big-batch baking, the latest Bakers Against Racism bake sale includes information on how to stay safe if approached by dangerous individuals, advice to set up sales in well-lit public spaces, and to always be accompanied by a “baking buddy.” Earlier this summer, Becca Rea-Tucker's post of a pretty pink cake decorated with pink, white, and gold sprinkles and frosted with the phrase “pro-abortion” was flagged by Instagram's parent company Meta for “sensitive content” and made users verify their age before uncovering the blurred image.<sup>393</sup> Such a flag, often used on the app for nudity or by media outlets when

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<sup>392</sup>Evelyn Douek, “1 Billion TikTok Users Understand What Congress Doesn't,” *The Atlantic*, October 10, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/10/problem-underestimating-tiktok/620354/?scrolla=5eb6d68b7fedc32c19ef33b4>.

<sup>393</sup>Becca Rea-Tucker (@thesweetfeminist), “Shout out to @meta who has deemed my recent post of a pink cake that has the words ‘pro-abortion’ written in frosting on it ‘Sensitive Content’ (and has made users verify their age before uncovering the image),” Instagram, June 28, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CfXIfwsuy-X/>.

posting graphic images, included the warning: “this photo may contain graphic or violent content. This post doesn’t go against our Community Standards, but may contain images that some people might find upsetting. We cover sensitive or potentially graphic content so people can choose whether to see it.”<sup>394</sup> These flags don’t just happen. The algorithm can’t read the word abortion piped in buttercream and the platform certainly isn’t flagging all pictures of cakes. An Instagram employee or an Instagram user reported Rea-Tucker’s post to censor her cake. As long as women are told to “stick to baking” in comments on their social posts, disparity endures across the food landscape, and bakers are forced to create safety procedures alongside pastry menus for their charity bake sales, the latest recipe for the current women’s movement will require more testing.

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<sup>394</sup>Rea-Tucker (@thesweetfeminist), “Shout out to [@meta](#),” Instagram.

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