TURNING THE TABLES: AMERICAN RESTAURANT CULTURE AND THE
RISE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS, 1880-1920

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This dissertation examines changes in restaurant dining during the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era as a means of understanding the growing influence of the middle-class consumer. It is about class, consumption and culture; it is also about food and identity.

In the mid-nineteenth century, restaurants served French food prepared by European chefs to elite Americans with aristocratic pretensions. "Turning the Tables" explores the subsequent transformation of aristocratic restaurants into public spaces where the middle classes could feel comfortable dining. Digging deeply into the changes restaurants underwent at the turn of the century, I argue that the struggles over restaurant culture—the battles over the French-language menu, the scientific eating movement, the celebration of cosmopolitan cuisines, the growing acceptance of unescorted women diners, the failed attempts to eliminate tipping—offer evidence that the urban middle class would play a central role in the construction of twentieth-century American culture.

Economic development in the late nineteenth century created the necessary conditions for the growth of a professional and managerial class, but it was consumption that shaped these urbanites into a coherent class. Lacking the cultural capital necessary to emulate the elite, the middle class distanced themselves from an aristocratic culture they deemed too French and came to patronize restaurants—some featuring ethnic

cuisine—that reflected their own cosmopolitan values. Ultimately, this patronage created a middle-class culture that challenged traditional notions of public dining. Taking issue with cultural theorists who argue that class hierarchies are unassailable, I contend that the collective purchasing power of the middle class effected a cultural coup that changed future generations understanding of national identity, gender and ethnicity.

The emergence of a middle-class consuming public had far-reaching ramifications. Not only did the middle classes demonstrate their agency in choosing to patronize restaurants that catered to their tastes, but they also established an institutional basis for asserting their cultural influence. In the nineteenth century, the middle classes imitated the rich; in the twentieth century, the middle classes became the nation's cultural arbiters.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

and a remarkable scholar who now teaches at Georgia Tech, debated my all too quirky ideas on class, culture and capitalism, and constantly reminded me, with characteristic grace, that the facts don't always speak for themselves.

But no one has suffered more for this dissertation than Danielle Sypher-Haley, my spouse and most ardent advisor. As an accomplished chef, she financially supported my work and intellectually nourished it. As a gifted writer, she has served as my tutor and editor. As a brilliant thinker, she has helped me to refine the ideas that underlie this study. I recall, during my first year of graduate school when money was scarce, Danielle and I would occasionally treat ourselves to an expensive espresso or cappuccino at one of Pittsburgh's coffee roasters. When asked to explain the luxury, Danielle argued that we were not purchasing coffee but reaffirming class. "Just because we don't have the money doesn't mean we aren't the type of people who drink cappuccino." It is now ten years later and I have not formulated a more succinct theoretical explanation of class and consumption than she, to use a bit of restaurant slang, produced "on the fly."

Most of my friends and advisors will have a chance to read this work. One will not. To Chris S. Caforio (1969-2004), whose spirit remains unbound, this work is dedicated.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND PUNCTUATION

The use of foreign terms in the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was extremely imprecise. Menus regularly contained misspellings and accents were misplaced; primitive typefaces used in some menus and in newspapers often did not accommodate correct punctuation. No effort has been made to correct these irregularities and all spellings are from the original.

To reduce clutter, the names of menu items have been italicized and have not been placed in quotation marks. Unless noted otherwise, italicized dishes (both English and foreign-language) should be considered as direct quotes from sources and have been cited accordingly.

PROLOGUE

In 1936, the Ohio Society of New York reenacted a banquet first held at Delmonico's fifty years earlier. The Society's banquet was intended to be a faithful reproduction of the original fête featuring multiple courses of French cuisine. But the twentieth-century dinner differed from its nineteenth-century prototype. The "leisurely affair" of 1886 could not be reconciled with the modern requirements of radio-broadcasted banquet speeches so the food was served earlier. Two courses were eliminated, only one soup was offered, and the elaborate dessert pastries of 1886 were "telescoped into the dual items of fancy ice cream and little cakes."[1] But the most significant change was in the language of the menu; since modern middle-class diners could not be expected to understand a French-language menu typical of an elite nineteenth-century restaurant, the menu was in English. As a local newspaper reported it: "The oysters, soup, fish and duckling of the old menu all came out from behind their linguistic disguises."[2]

The Ohio Society's decision to accommodate its largely middle-class guest list by simplifying the menu, eliminating courses and substituting English for French acknowledged the death of the aristocratic restaurant with its European trappings and marked the cultural ascendance of the American middle class. In 1886, when the original dinner was held at Delmonico's, restaurants were urban enclaves of the American aristocracy. While no establishment embodied the tradition of the "expensive and aristocratic restaurant" as staunchly and completely as Delmonico's—the pinnacle of fine dining in America since it opened in the 1830s—influential restaurants throughout the United States catered to wealthy Americans'

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[1] Catherine Mackensie, "From Kitchen to Banquet Tables," *New York Times*, 16 February 1936, VII16.
[2] Ibid.

insatiable appetite for French food and luxurious surroundings.[3] Employing French chefs to cook French dishes with French names, elite restaurants celebrated a deep-rooted mythic tradition that traced the origin of the restaurant to Bourbon kings and flattered the aristocratic pretensions of wealthy diners.

When, in the twentieth century, elite restaurants replaced French dishes with cosmopolitan and American dishes, French-language menus with English, and elaborate courses with the plate dinner, they substituted a middle-class market democracy for the nineteenth century's aristocratic conventions. Middle-class restaurant-goers, once excluded, were now embraced by restaurateurs eager to cater to the mass purchasing power of the burgeoning middle classes and, as this middle-class patronage was cultivated, the restaurant was transformed. By the 1920s, Delmonico's had closed, dinner jackets were passé, French cuisine was considered by many a snobbish luxury, and the French-language menu was as likely to trigger impatience as respect. The modern restaurant patron, observed restaurateur Alice Foote MacDougall in 1929, may "go at times to the hotel *de luxe*" for a French meal but prefers restaurants that offer "home conditions and home produce."[4]

The cultural ascendance of the modern American middle-class diner is a twentieth-century phenomenon. Following the Civil War, the embryonic white-collared middle classes looked to the nation's wealthiest families as social role models, embracing the rules propagated by the upper-class authors of etiquette guides.[5] But the era of imitation was short-lived and when the middle classes abandoned aristocratic institutions, they discovered that their collective

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[3] George G. Foster and Stuart M. Blumin, *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 219.

[4] Alice Foote MacDougall, *The Secret of Successful Restaurants* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929), 127.

[5] John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990); Susan Williams and Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum., *Savory Suppers & Fashionable Feasts: Dining in Victorian America*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books in association with the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1985).

wealth commanded the respect of the turn-of-the-century urban entrepreneur whether it be the

small immigrant restaurateur or a leading hotelier. Successful restaurants, shops and

entertainments chased middle-class dollars, accommodated middle-class tastes and reinforced the

middle classes' sense of their own public identity. By 1920, as one contemporary observer

noted, the middle classes were "the dominant social body" in America, determining the contours

of American culture.[6] This dissertation traces the middle classes' growing independence and

influence at the turn of the century as it manifest itself in the development of a modern American

restaurant culture.

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[6] Gilbert Seldes, "Bourgeois Not Meant as Term of Contempt," *Denton Journal*, 17 December 1927, 1.

Chapter 1: "THE TRUE STATUS OF A NATION'S CIVILIZATION": AN INTRODUCTION

> From time immemorial, "breaking bread" together has been a sign sacred to hospitality and friendship. While one is about it there is surely no harm in breaking a little turkey and perhaps a dish or two of ice cream at the same time. It is unfortunate that history deals almost entirely with the so-called large events of life leaving the social pleasures to the imagination of posterity. . . . No man should aspire to be an historian until he has first served an apprenticeship as an editor and learned what people really care to read.
>
> Whether we discuss the immortality of the soul or a fricasseed chicken, the difference is in degree, not in kind; the one sharpens the appetite, the other promotes sociability. The true status of a nation's civilization will be found in its entertaining qualities, rather than in wars and diplomacy. What a man or woman or nation does in the leisure hours is the test.[1]
>
> <div align="right">Charles P. Burton, 1897</div>

Charles P. Burton overstated his case; wars and diplomacy played a greater role in twentieth century America than Burton, or anyone in 1897, could have imagined. World Wars I and II, the Cold War and Vietnam, tragically challenged the most basic values of American civilization. But Burton was not all wrong. Fricasseed chicken has mattered as well.

As an old middle class of producers and professionals gave way to new middle classes of white-collar workers in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the emergent middle classes—finding little unity in their relationship to work—constructed class identities from the purchase of the surplus goods and services that the new economy provided in abundance. Opposing the aristocratic pretensions of the past, the middle classes crafted their leisure and their shopping into a quest for self-discovery and self-promotion, exploiting the burgeoning

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[1] Charles P. Burton, "Social Side of Eating," *What to Eat*, March 1897, 169.

commercial culture, as Katherine Grier has observed, to "move symbolic values throughout the culture."[2] What one ate and where one ate became marks of distinction, defining the boundaries of what it meant to be middle class.

"Turning the Tables: American Restaurant Culture and the Rise of the Middle Class, 1880-1920" is about class, consumption and culture. In the cuisine, service and décor of the restaurant, the middle class revealed the contours of a new class identity which would become an increasingly coherent and effective force for change. The story is set in restaurants, for restaurants offer an unusually revealing glance at the emergence of the modern middle class, but it is not about restaurants. The transformation of public dining from 1870 to 1920 mirrors the development of the middle class. Studying the lived life of the middle class reveals the power and agency of this class, and suggests the importance of the middle class's mastery in the framing of American culture in the twentieth century.

FROM PRODUCERS TO CONSUMERS

For the middle class at the turn of the century, income and occupation were significant but uncertain indicators of social status. Rapid economic expansion following the American Civil War eviscerated the nineteenth-century middle class's producer ethic and the new economy of abundance guaranteed that the culture of consumption would have a growing role in the middle class's collective identity. Always a factor in the development of the middle classes, culture became the determining factor in the twentieth century.

Following the Civil War, the United States underwent a phenomenal economic expansion. Despite brief if sometime severe recessions, the nation's prosperity grew. The rise of

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[2] Katherine C. Grier, *Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 9.

big business, organizational consolidation, technological innovation and government investments in transportation spurred new capital investments in commercial enterprises. Richard Ohmann estimates that manufacturing capital increased tenfold from 1859 to 1899, actually doubling in the 1880s.[3] New capital and new technology meant more production, a greater variety of goods and lower prices. A man's plain wool suit advertised for $8.00 in 1875; in 1911, with productivity increases matching inflation, a more elaborate three piece, olive striped worsted wool suit could be purchased for $7.98.[4]

Burgeoning big business—one percent of the corporations in America in the late nineteenth century controlled nearly thirty-three percent of production—and lower prices decimated the early nineteenth-century American middle class. Until the Civil War, small-scale, self-employed producers, retailers, professionals and skilled workers constituted the backbone of the middle class. These non-manual urban businessmen, as Stuart Blumin argues in *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, forged local identities around their experiences of work and the interpersonal contacts of a small business community.[5] Economic consolidation and the rise of national business monopolies threatened these traditional business relationships. Although the actual decline in small-scale business was not great, mass production lowered prices and profits, and eroded the status of local entrepreneurs as well as the status of the professionals who provided legal, clerical and other institutional supports. While some middle-class merchants and retailers responded to the new challenges by investing in technology and expanding their enterprises—and a few became millionaires—most lost customers, profits and status.

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[3] Richard M. Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996), 51.

[4] Scott Derks, *The Value of a Dollar: Prices and Incomes in the United States, 1860-1999*, 2nd ed. (Lakeville, CT: Grey House, 1999), 22, 131. See also Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 6.

[5] Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900*, *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Modern History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

As their businesses failed, the nineteenth-century middle class's civic and community presence faltered. The nineteenth-century middle class of small merchants, factory owners and retailers drew its public authority from its occupational roles. John Gilkeson, looking closely at Providence, Rhode Island, argues that a "producer's morality" invigorated the middle class shaping civic participation, building political coalitions and influencing leisure activities during the middle third of the nineteenth century. However, the rapid growth of mass production, distribution and marketing, as Gilkeson discovered, challenged the local bonds forged around a producer identity. In the post Civil War era, the middle class—"no longer coextensive with the producer's community"—"fell victim to segmentation" and the once "inclusive civic culture also fragmented."[6] For a beleaguered old middle class, cultural expressions of middle-class identity took on greater importance. Historians of the middle class have mapped the growing importance of consumer goods, genteel manners and domestic rituals in bolstering the middle class's sense of its own identity.[7]

As devastating as the economic upheaval was for the old middle class, it proved a boon for a new group of middle-income managers and professionals. Industrial development and commercial expansion required organizational minions: white-collar clerks, managers, salespeople, lawyers and advertising executives.

The rise of the white-collar labor force further marginalized the old middle class and obscured the American middle class's relationship to the producer ethic.[8] The new middle class

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[6] John S. Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence, 1820-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 301; Clarence Dickinson Long and National Bureau of Economic Research, *Wages and Earnings in the United States, 1860-1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 353.

[7] On consumer goods, see Bushman, *The Refinement of America*. On manners and mores, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870, Yale Historical Publications. V.129* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). and Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*. On domestic rituals, see Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865, Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Modern History* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[8] Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, 291.

managed; they did not produce. As C. Wright Mills wrote, "White-collar people help turn what someone else has made into profit for still another . . ."[9] While the new middle class could rightfully claim to be a vital cog in the new economy, they had few direct ties to production. They worked in office buildings, lived in the suburbs, and traveled to work in trolley cars or, later, automobiles. Some, like the previous generation of middle-class men and women, participated in fraternal organizations or dedicated themselves to civic causes; many did not. The new generation of middle-class managers, professionals and bureaucrats, better educated and wealthier than their parents, may have been the rightful inheritors of the old middle class's urban culture, but they built on it, developing a distinct notion of what it meant to be middle class. They sought out the enlightenment and entertainment that the modern city promised. They vacationed at resorts, dined in restaurants, laughed at comic films and took their children to amusement parks. Ethnically diverse, occupationally dissimilar, and residentially sprawled, they met each other in department stores and restaurants, and shared ideas in the editorial pages of the daily newspaper.

The Importance of Culture

Sociologists and historians—from C. Wright Mills to Robert Wiebe—have long acknowledged the development of a new middle class at the turn of the century and twentieth-century surveys have consistently demonstrated the existence of this self-described middle class, but historians continue to struggle to apply traditional historical techniques to a group that defies occupation and income categorization.[10] For while it is possible to say that the middle class, as a

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[9] C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951; reprint, 1981), 65-66.

[10] The notion of a "new" American middle class first appears in Mills. See also Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914*, 2nd ed., *The Chicago History of American Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago

whole, were the white-collar workers that populated urban America, the closer one looks the less coherent and more diverse the group appears.[11]

In the early nineteenth century, class was largely determined by what one did for a living. Stuart Blumin, in his study of the middle class, argues that for the early nineteenth-century middle class, class was "social differentiation" (without requiring class consciousness) stemming from "work, consumption, residential location, formal and informal voluntary association, and family organization and strategy."[12] But work was still paramount. Despite Blumin's efforts to follow Anthony Gidden's "attempts to leaven Marxist theories of class with a Weberian yeast,"[13] class is ultimately a relationship to production. As Blumin concedes, the cultural aspects of class are "useful . . . as ways of adding flesh to the theoretical skeleton" when primacy is still given to "changes in work, to the economic and social relations of the workplace, and to the social identities that arose from, and were most generally framed in terms of, economic activity."[14]

Blumin's definition of class cannot work for the late nineteenth-century middle class because traditional categories of class—occupation and income—provided less of a sense of identity as the century progressed. The historical circumstances of economic development at the turn of the century blurred the middle class's relationship to the modes of production. White-collar workers were neither the capitalists who owned the means of production nor the laborers who were alienated from production. As managers and bureaucrats, as well as consumers and investors, middle-class Americans influenced the flow of capital while laboring for the ruling class. This vague relationship to production did not readily translate into class unity. "The

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Press, 1995); Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, 1st ed., *The Making of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).
[11] Val Burris, "The Discovery of the New Middle Class," *Theory and Society* 15, no. 3 (1986): 317; Peter N. Stearns, "The Middle Class: Toward a Precise Definition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 21, no. 3 (19179).
[12] Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, 12,11.
[13] Ibid., 8.
[14] Ibid., 11.

Corporation Executive," C. Wright Mills wrote in 1951, "has never been a popular middle-class idol; as part of an impersonal corporation, he is too aloof to have a friendly reputation among smaller men. As an engineer he is part of inexorable science, and no economic hero; as a businessman he is part of the hidden world of finance, where all the big money mysteriously ends up."[15]

As income and occupation lost their importance as marks of class in the late nineteenth century, cultural distinctions grew in importance. The economic revolution that produced the middle class flooded the market with inexpensive goods, each potential signifiers of class.[16] In *Ladies and Gentleman of the Civil Service,* Cindy Aron reports that male clerks working for the federal government in the late nineteenth century routinely borrowed money or bought on credit in order "to maintain a middle-class standard of living on their substantial government salaries."[17] For these men, it was not their white-collar jobs or their "substantial" incomes that made them middle class, it was the lifestyle they achieved. As Kenneth Cmiel observed in his study of language, *Democratic Eloquence*:

> Class categories—those based on occupational or economic stratification—make sense to us but violate other assumptions that were still remarkably important in the late nineteenth century. To those schooled in humanistic canons, culture created the social order. One did not speak in a certain way because one belonged to a particular socioeconomic class. One found a place in the social order by one's cultural attainments. Language was not a reflex of class but a determinant.[18]

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[15] Mills, *White Collar*, 22.
[16] Walter Nugent, "Tocqueville, Marx and American Class Structure," *Social Science History* 12, no. 4 (1988).
[17] Cindy Sondik Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service: Middle-Class Workers in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 24.
[18] Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*, 199-200.

What was true of language was also true of other cultural attainments whether they were abstract, such as language and education, or concrete, such as food and furnishings. The consumption of culture allowed the middle class to distinguish itself.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

The limits of either income or occupation to fully determine late nineteenth-century class has led historians to look at other, culturally constructed, means of determining membership in the middle class.[19] These studies have generally focused on association and consumerism.

The associational approach to studying the middle classes has the longer history. Since 1955 when Richard Hofstadter's *Age of Reform* argued that the Progressive Movement was led by middle-class men and women, progressivism has been shorthand for middle class and the concerns of the Progressives have become the concerns of the middle class.[20] Regrettably, this notion has persisted long after its empirical basis has been challenged. Voting studies, for example, suggest that middle-class progressive reformers did not always win the backing of middle-class voters.[21] Moreover, where support for progressive reforms did exist, the interplay of class interests, pragmatic considerations, religion and ethnicity cautions against equating the

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[19] See Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston, *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class* (New York: Routledge, 2001), esp. introduction. See also Melanie Archer and Judith R. Blau, "Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: The Case of the Middle Class," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993); Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service*; Cindy Sondik Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1976); Nugent, "Tocqueville, Marx and American Class Structure."; Stearns, "The Middle Class: Toward a Precise Definition."

[20] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform from Bryan to F.D.R.*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1955). For a more recent account, see Michael E. McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 40-74.

[21] For progressive voting in California, see Michael P. Rogan, "Progressivism and the California Electorate," in *Political Change in California: Critical Elections and Social Movements, 1890-1966*, ed. Michael Paul Rogin and John L. Shover, *Contributions in American History; No. 5* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1970), 35-61. For progressive voting in Wisconsin, see Roger E. Wyman, "Middle-Class Voters and Progressive Reform: The Conflict of Class and Culture," *The American Political Science Review* 68, no. 2 (1974): 488-504.

progressive agenda with middle-class ideology.[22] Reform movements in the early twentieth

century were often as divisive as they were unifying.

John Gilkeson's struggle to demonstrate the historical legacy of the nineteenth-century

middle class in Providence illustrates the difficulties of using associational histories as a basis for

describing sources of middle-class unity at the turn of the century. Gilkeson examined

Providence from 1820 to 1940. He found a mid nineteenth-century middle class of small

manufacturers who had developed a "producer's morality" that characterized their participation

in early nineteenth-century civic affairs. As the century progressed, however, civic organizations

grounded in the "producer's morality" were eviscerated by the economic revolution that

followed the Civil War and in their place new organizations emerged. Although Gilkeson

valiantly suggests that the drive for association itself—even if it manifested itself in support for

diverse and even contradictory causes—represents the persistence of the producer ethic, he

demonstrates the fracturing of the middle class far more convincingly than its coalescence.

Despite careful research, Gilkeson could not show mass support for either middle-class led clubs

or reform movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While some studies

have had more success demonstrating the reconstruction of middle-class associations at the turn

of the century, these emphasize the growing primacy of lifestyle and downplay strictly political

or associational unity.[23]

An alternative approach to studying the cultural unity of the middle class has been to look

at commercial consumption. Following Toqueville's observation that "[t]he passion for physical

comforts is essentially a passion of the middle classes," historians have looked to consumption as

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[22] David F. Labaree, "Curriculum, Credentials, and the Middle Class: A Case Study of a Nineteenth Century High School," *Sociology of Education* 29, no. 1 (1986): 56.

[23] Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). In addition, Bledstein offers a narrow but convincing argument that college-inspired professionalism helped form the middle class. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism*.

a means of understanding the middle class.[24] Studies of middle-class patterns of consumption

credit the growing leisure and wealth of the middle class with initiating a new era of

consumerism. With a larger membership than the upper class, and more money than the working

class, the middle classes were the nation's premier consumers. This was how America's

corporations at the end of the nineteenth century saw it: they viewed the middle class as the

turbine of future economic growth.[25] And this was how the middle class saw it as well. If the

reports of early twentieth-century budget experts are to be trusted, it seems middle-class

Americans dedicated increasing portions of their household budgets to cultural pastimes,

amusements and vacations.[26]

The body of historical literature on consumption is large and a significant portion has

addressed the role of the middle-class family as consumers in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century. William Leech, for example, argues that department stores were built on the

notion that middle-class consumers could absorb America's growing surplus production.

Richard Ohmann has shown how the middle class found itself reflected in the ever-expanding

magazine industry. These studies supplement the broad spectrum of scholarship that examines

the development of advertising and the role of mass marketing in constructing the modern

consumer economy.[27]

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[24] Alexis de Toqueville, *Of the Taste for Physical Well-Being in America* (Henry Reeve translation, 1839) [Web site] (American Studies Programs at the University of Virginia, June 1, 1997 1839 [cited December 1 2004]); available from http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/ch2_10.htm.

[25] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 36-7.

[26] Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940*, *New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). For working class seeking to construct a middle class lifestyle, see John Model, "Patterns of Consumption, Acculturation, and Family Income Strategies in Late Nineteenth-Century America," in *Family and Population in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Tamara K. Hareven and Maris Vinovskis, *Quantative Studies in History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 213-14.

[27] See also Aron, *Working at Play*; Louise L. Stevenson, *The Victorian Homefront: American Thought and Culture, 1860-1880*, *Twayne's American Thought and Culture Series* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991); Williams and Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum., *Savory Suppers & Fashionable Feasts*.

It is difficult to characterize such a vast literature collectively, but these studies—to varying degrees—emphasize the inherent economic power of corporations over the autonomy of the middle class. Whereas studies of the old nineteenth-century middle class have granted extensive agency to this class, studies of the twentieth-century middle class tend to strip them of that freedom. Advertising scholarship in particular has depicted a pliant middle class that, once devoid of the nineteenth century's "producer's morality," increasingly found a sad existence in fruitless consumption. At best, the middle classes are portrayed as pawns; at worse, they are hollow men wallowing in the false promise of consumer luxury.

The persistence of studies that describe the middle class as dupes in a corporate world is surprising given the widespread recognition of agency in less privileged and less empowered groups. Since E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963, working class and subaltern historians have looked at class as constructed by the full range of life experiences, shaped but not determined by the dominant ideology. In recent years, studies of the American working class—from Roy Rosenzweig's *Eight Hours for What We Will* to Christine Stansell's *City of Women*—have emphasized the self-determination of working class men and women.[28] Rosenzweig, for example, concluded that Worchester Massachusetts' working class created an "alternative" culture embodying its own modes of "mutuality, conviviality, and collectivity."[29] Yet this sensitivity to a class's ability to shape its own experience has rarely been acknowledged for the middle class.[30] The exceptions, and there have been exceptions, tend to focus on marginal activities (such as vacationing) without relating these areas of middle-class autonomy to the larger development of a modern consumer culture or broad-based class

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[28] Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920, Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Modern History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[29] Ibid., 223.
[30] REVIEW STEARNS AND CITE. Stearns, "The Middle Class: Toward a Precise Definition."

identity.[31] More often, scholars have viewed the middle class as an insecure mass paralyzed by status anxiety and the ravages of advertising, unable to exert their will over the dominant culture of consumption or to find genuine meaning in a world replete with corporate images.[32] Stuart Ewen, for example, writes, "The stylish ephemera of the new 'middle class' existence was more of a symbolic fringe benefit, a *cultural wage*, which permitted its recipients to identify with the interests of the upper classes, while occupying a relationship to power that was more akin to that of the working classes."[33]

CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION AS CLASS

The failure of the historical approach to middle-class consumption has been the failure to examine lived life as a meaningful source of middle-class cohesion. Consumerism seems dishonest, Epicureanism unholy. Since the 1950s, criticism of middle-class culture has largely supplanted efforts to understand its historical dynamic. In this study, culture is treated as power. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the middle class appropriated the tools that mass production made available—abundant goods and services—as the signifiers of class distinction and the basis of cultural agency. "Turning the Tables" is about the construction of middle-class identity and the power that a coherent middle class wielded.

Cultural signifiers allowed a middle class that lacked a material claim to class unity to develop a shared identity. E. P. Thompson, in the now famous preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*, argued that "class happens when some men, as a result of common

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[31] For example, Aron, *Working at Play*. Aron argues that growth of vacationing came as the middle class shed puritanical loyalties to work. This psychological approach explains why the middle class sought out entertainments, but dodges, to a degree, the question how consumerist vacations served the middle class's identity.

[32] Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 66-70.

[33] Ibid., 64. Emphasis in original.

experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of those interests as between

themselves, and as against other men whose interest is different from (and usually opposed) to

theirs."[34] At the turn of the century, the middle class articulated an "identity of interests"

through the shared experience of purchasing symbolic goods, mastering common cultural codes

and opposing an aristocratic elite.[35] This creation of a distinct middle class was, as Thompson

insists it must be, shaped by "productive relations" in that it was a product of income and the

power to purchase, but it was, as Thompson allows, class consciousness "handled in cultural

terms."[36]

Culture produces unity when goods and services come to signify class membership. In

the simplest sense, the ability to purchase goods and services is tangible evidence of success.

This is what Thornston Veblen termed honorific value. In purchasing goods that were not

strictly necessary or services that illustrated the middle class's command of leisure time, the

middle class distinguished itself from the lower class. Conspicuous consumption and

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[34] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 9-10.

[35] The term aristocratic is used throughout this work to refer to wealthy Americans with leading positions in what was often termed "Society." In the United States, the aristocracy was not a product of royal lineage but rather wealth, especially hereditary wealth, and social jockeying. I have used the term for two reasons. First, as argued in this chapter, America's elites intentionally modeled themselves after Europe's hereditary aristocrats. Not only did they embrace French food, they bought European clothes and art, paid genealogists to trace their lineages to Europe's first families, sought marriages with European royalty, and emulated European manners. Second, I use the term because it was regularly employed in contemporary accounts of the wealthy in the United States. For a broad selection of examples, see Foster and Blumin, *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches*, 219; William Dean Howells, *A Modern Instance*, *The Penguin American Library* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin Books, 1984), 178; Ethel Spencer et al., *The Spencers of Amberson Avenue: A Turn-of-the Century Memoir* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983)., and Edmund Wrigley, *The Workingman's Way to Wealth: A Practical Treatise on Building Associaitons; What They Are and How to Use Them* (Philadelphia: James K. Simon, 1869). (I want to thank Elaine Lewinnek at Yale University for calling attention to this work.) Although the term is less commonly applied to wealthy Americans today, it was still in common usage in the 1930s. (For an example, see Jeanette MacDonald description of a wealthy San Francisco family in the 1936 film "San Francisco" directed by W. S. Van Dyke (set in 1906).) W. S. Van Dyke, "San Francisco," (United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1936). Finally, the term has been embraced by scholars of elite America. Eric Homberger defines aristocracy as "a group of high status possessing a conscious sense of shared rituals, identity, and organization." Eric Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York: Money and Social Power in a Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 3. For an opposing view (and an argument for using the term bourgeoisie), cf. Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6.

[36] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 10.

conspicuous leisure, as Veblen termed them, were demonstrations of class aspirations. Culture

also produces unity when the act of creating or endorsing cultural symbols is oppositional.

Although the middle class was not always self-consciously engaged in the process of developing

a unique class culture, the development of a middle-class restaurant culture was grounded in

opposition to the elite Europeanism of America's aristocrats and their exclusivity of that culture.

Following the Civil War, the American middle class invested in aristocratic culture—the

goods and services deemed valuable by their association with America's ruling elite. In an

optimistic age when popular myth held that anyone could be a millionaire, the middle class

believed, to borrow a term from Norbert Elias, in the "civilizing process."[37] The acquisition of

aristocratic culture promised to democratize refinement. Even if economic class did not

disappear, the middle class believed that the cultural distinctions of class could be minimized.

Taking advantage of the ability of mass production to lower the prices of the fancy, the frilly and

the wasteful, the middle class bought cheap imitations of the European furniture coveted by the

ruling class and ate French cuisine in aristocratic restaurants with imported French chefs. Miles

Orvell in *The Real Thing* argues that "imitation became the foundation of middle-class culture"

in the mid-nineteenth century as "individuals sought an elevation of status through the purchase

and display of goods whose appearance counted for more than their substance,"[38] and other

historians have dedicated substantial resources to cataloging this age of imitation. Richard

Bushman and Katherine Greir have described the middle class's growing interest in refined

furnishings and genteel manners. Karen Halttunen has written about the middle class's imitation

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[37] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1982). For a application of Elias' theory to the study of food and manner, see Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1985).
[38] Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 50, 49.

of aristocratic sentiment. John Kasson has documented the growing popularity of etiquette guides and the opera in the nineteenth century.[39]

The era of imitation ended with disenchantment. As Richard Bushman notes "[t]he middle-class adoption of an aristocratic culture led to innumerable discomforts and discontinuities in the experience of everyday life."[40] The failure of imitation was the favorite subject of America's naturalist writers. Howells, Wharton, Dreiser and Tarkington, leaders of an aesthetic call for authenticity, portrayed the cultural barriers that class erected as insurmountable. Their protagonists not only failed to achieve membership in aristocratic circles, but betrayed themselves and their values as they strove to mimic elites.[41] Despite the advice manuals and gentility guides, middle-class imitation of the rich did not open the doors of society; it merely created aspirations that could not be achieved. Imitation failed to impress the gatekeepers of aristocratic society, who recognized it for what it was, and a disappointed middle class came to view imitation as snobbery.

The end of imitation freed the middle class to construct its own cultural identity in opposition to the cultural superstructure of the nation's elites. "Turning the Tables" examines this process of cultural exploration and discovery as it manifests itself in restaurant culture at the turn of the century. The construction of a new middle-class identity, crafted from the culture of commerce, stemmed from the rejection of upper-class culture, and was reinforced in public displays of middle-class consumption. The nascent middle class sought out restaurants where their influence could be exerted and through their collective purchasing power they transformed

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[39] Bushman, *The Refinement of America*; Grier, *Culture & Comfort*; Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*; Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*.
[40] Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, xvi.
[41] Theodore Dreiser, *An American Tragedy*, 2 vols. (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925); William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1885); Booth Tarkington, *Alice Adams* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1921); Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (New York: Macmillan, 1905).

small eating establishments—from quick lunch establishments to ethnic *table d'hôtes*—into urban institutions that embodied middle-class values. Colonized, these restaurants became advertisements for what it meant to be middle class; a process that was fundamentally economic had dramatic cultural consequences.

While this construction of class identity was spurred by disdain for the rich, its limits were set by the middle class's eagerness to maintain social and cultural distance between themselves and the poor. Although critical of the excesses of the upper class, members of the middle class never viewed themselves as part of a broad anti-elite coalition that embraced the working class. The center, refined but not pretentious, was superiour to both extremes. Excellent volumes on the middle class, consumption and the Progressive movement have demonstrated middle-class anxieties concerning the poor and thus, in "Turning the Tables," I have focused on the other half of that equation, the rejection of aristocratic culture.

The emergence of a culturally constructed middle class also signaled the emergence of a new cultural order. The middle class, given their numbers and incomes, influenced the market of cultural products. The restaurant culture that the middle class embraced became the accepted culture of dining in the United States and its influence was felt even in the old aristocratic establishments. Restaurants that once disdained anything but French cuisine experimented with Asian and Italian foods, simplified their menus and opened their doors to women and families. Restaurants that had served as bastions of aristocratic culture and guardians of elite etiquette either adapted or closed.

To understand how American culture was revalued by the emergent middle class, it is useful to employ, if only in lay terms, Pierre Bourdieu's concept: cultural capital. Bourdieu argues that cultural knowledge, like paper currency, has a corporeal value. Knowing which wine

to order is evidence of cultural capital; having the money to pay the bill evidence of economic capital. Although cultural knowledge can be acquired, it takes time as well as access to education, and is kept dear by those who possess it.[42]

Cultural capital, Bourdieu contended, is relatively conservative. Institutional cultural capital, education for example, tends to have a constant value. So does incorporated capital, our inheritance, the understanding of the cultural landscape that is passed down from parents, adapted by experience and reflected in our dispositions. But some Bourdieu scholars have suggested that objectivated cultural capital, the cultural value assigned to consumables, is sensitive to the market's demand for that knowledge. As one admirer of Bourdieu writes: "[T]he objectivated cultural stock accumulated in one generation can crash in the next. The value of the objectivated cultural capital of the past has constantly to be renewed and reactivated in the contemporary market."[43] While Bourdieu maintains that those who control the wealth have successfully maintained the value of the objectivated cultural capital and the poorer classes have, at best, mimicked and imitated the wealthy, "Turning the Tables" argues that this revaluing of culture has transformative potential. The numerical strength of the urban middle class and their significant mass purchasing power made it possible for the middle classes to exercise agency and revalue the objectivated culture of the United States in terms that benefited their aspirations. In this dissertation, I seek to demonstrate that the failure of imitation was the genesis of a new restaurant culture and to describe that culture as it was manifested in concrete changes in restaurant cuisine, service and patronage. This is not an account of intellectual musings or

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[42] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
[43] Derek Robbins, *Bourdieu and Culture* (London: SAGE, 2000), 35. Robbins attributes his views on objectivated cultural capital to Bourdieu, but his reading of Bourdieu is generous. Generally, Bourdieu argues that cultural capital is so ingrained in our social structures that it can not be shifted, and he specifically rules out the possibility of a class capturing and exploiting a new order of cultural capital as a means of revolutionary change. This is discussed further in chapter 3.

disembodied discourses, but the story of small acts of individual consumer preference that over time produced observable changes in restaurant dining. C. Wright Mills, contemptuous as he was of middle-class culture, concedes in *White Collar* the middle class's success in transforming American society. "[I]t is," Mills writes, "to this white-collar world that one must look for much that is characteristic of twentieth-century existence. By their rise to numerical importance, the white-collar people have upset the nineteenth-century expectation that society would be divided between entrepreneurs and wage workers. By their mass way of life, they have transformed the tang and feel of the American experience."[44]

The process of cultural construction and recognition, enacted in public spaces and journalistic media, was a messy organic process rather than a movement. Entrepreneurs experimented, critics griped, restaurant patrons flocked and fled. Nonetheless, if the new middle class idea of dining appeared in fits and starts, small preferences were far from meaningless and by the late 1910s, the middle class's predilections had changed how urban Americans dined in public. This dissertation seeks to sort some of those contradictions and to reveal that culture which "transformed the tang and feel of the American experience."

Historians have tended to be dismissive of the cultural and economic choices the middle class made, not because these choices failed to influence American culture, but because the critics disapprove of them. These critics argue that the middle class made a Faustian bargain at the turn of the century in which they traded acceptance of the ruling order, the capitalist system, for a few banal creature comforts. In *No Place of Grace*, T. J. Jackson Lears argues that the cultural revolution "has done little or nothing to alter the structure of social relations. Despite

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[44] Mills, *White Collar*, ix.

momentous changes in manners and morals, wealth and power remain in the hands of a few. Everything has changed, yet nothing has changed."[45]

This dissertation treats culture as powerful without claiming that it was political. Middle-class dominance of American culture has altered the structure of social relations and has changed the meaning of everyday experiences in the United States. The middle class did not oppose the capitalist order, but they restructured life as Americans lived it. That is sufficient justification for studying the middle class on its own terms.

LOCATING RESTAURANTS

Restaurants are the focus of this dissertation. While no one should claim that there is only one way to view the development of the middle class at the turn of the century, restaurants offer unique opportunities for the historian. Restaurants, as late as 1880, were still virgin ground for cultural imperialism. Although the first restaurants were founded in the United States in the 1820s and 30s, restaurant-going was, until after the Civil War, an uncommon event. In the middle of the century, restaurants were located in urban business districts, transportation centers and hotels and patronized by travelers and businessmen. Only the elite, America's aristocratic class, dined out for pleasure and it was the aristocratic restaurant, Delmonico's in New York in particular, that embodied America's idea of public dining.

The upper class's domination of the American restaurant ended at the turn of the century. From about 1870, when newspaper accounts first noted the growing number of middle-class restaurant patrons to 1920, when many of the great aristocratic restaurants closed their doors, middle-class patronage undermined the aristocratic restaurant. Restaurants in the late nineteenth

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[45] T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920,* University of Chicago Press ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 25.

century and early twentieth century redefined their cuisine and their service in response to these new patrons.

Why were restaurants responsive to the new middle class? Restaurants, unlike the department stores and magazines studied in other histories of consumption, were typically small entrepreneurial enterprises. Although some local chains emerged in the late 1880s and the Harvey restaurant provided lunches to rail travelers in the southwest as early as 1875, the vast majority of America's restaurants in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were operated by individual entrepreneurs.[46] The records of the R. G. Dun & Company, a nineteenth-century credit rating service, universally credit a restaurant's success to the owner's "connections" and the loyalty of customers.[47] And as late as World War I, economists continued to note the particularly entrepreneurial nature of the restaurant business and its remarkable sensitivity to change.[48]

The small scale of restaurants and the low cost of opening a restaurant meant that large numbers were built and competition was stiff. The number of restaurants in the United States grew dramatically in the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth; national employment statistics, adjusted for increases in population, suggest restaurant, café and lunchroom employment grew over 400% between 1880 and 1930, dwarfing the expansion of other service industries such as saloons and hotels.[49] To succeed in this competitive market, restaurants needed to be sensitive to customers' expectations and desires.

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[46] Lesley Poling-Kempes, *The Harvey Girls: Women Who Opened the West*, 1st ed. (New York: Paragon House, 1989).
[47] See for example, "Daniel Sweeny-- May 9, 1884," New York, Vol. 267, p. 500A36, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School. Quoted without permission for publication or presentation.
[48] Ralph C. Epstein, "Industrial Profits in 1917," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 39, no. 2 (1925): 241-66.
[49] These numbers are based on occupational data in the United States census. A full report and explanation appears in chapter three.

Restaurant journals in the nineteenth and twentieth century consistently preached adaptation and innovation, from decorative menus to automated kitchens.

The low cost of making changes in service or cuisine further encouraged innovation. Unlike a department store which might require months and a substantial investment to develop a new clothing line, a restaurant could introduce new menus, hire an orchestra or change its waiters' uniforms with little planning or expense. The ease of innovation encouraged restaurants to respond to demand, not to create demand. Restaurants rarely advertised in the nineteenth century and when they did it was merely to create name recognition. Not until the founding of the National Restaurant Association in the late nineteen teens did restaurant journals regularly advocate advertising as a means of developing patronage; before then they emphasized cultivating a word-of-mouth reputation.

The rapid growth and entrepreneurial nature of restaurants allowed for the colonization of restaurant culture by the middle class and makes it possible for the historical investigator to demonstrate the effects of middle-class patronage. Situated at the intersection of the private, eating, and the public, sociability, restaurants exemplify the middle class's engagement with culture, revealing the contours of both the middle class and the culture at large. And in contrast to intellectual histories—valuable as they are—that cobble together class identity from the words of a few engaged spokesmen, the material changes in restaurant culture are concrete, demonstrating not only the emergence of class identity but the cultural efficacy of that identity.

Restaurants were not isolated examples of the growing role of the middle class in urban American culture. Innovations in restaurants were closely tied to all aspects of public life. Debates about the role of women, public smoking, relationships between patrons and servers, America's contribution to world culture and healthy lifestyles accompanied the growth of

restaurants in the twentieth century. If restaurants demonstrate the emergence of a new urban middle-class culture more starkly than some other American institutions, they are nonetheless only one exemplar. Institutional changes in all areas of cultural consumption and patronage may, with further research, reveal similar changes at the turn of the century that can be attributed to the middle class.

Nonetheless, one should not overestimate what restaurants can tell us about the middle class or the turn of the century. Restaurants do not directly reveal the feelings and dispositions of the middle class and restaurant-goers have left only limited impressions of dining. Restaurant dining was so quickly accepted that it was generally taken for granted and received scant attention in memoirs and surprisingly commonplace coverage in newspapers. While we can see the changes, we can only speculate on the meaning of those changes as the middle class experienced the restaurant.

Restaurants were also an urban phenomenon leaving their most visible historical record in America's largest cities. Although there was a national restaurant culture in the nineteenth century, transmitted in journals, by traveling chefs and in the exchange of menus, New York was America's restaurant capital and its experiences, the primary focus of this study, were at times unique even if they were prophetic. New York's restaurants were more worldly, more concerned about European opinion and, with moneyed socialites in abundance and a steady stream of well-heeled tourists, less concerned with the middle class than the restaurants of smaller cities. When possible, this study seeks to show how what happened in New York was reflected in the hinterland, but that will not always be possible.

THE STORY

The dissertation consists of nine chapters divided into three sections, an introduction and a conclusion. The first section examines the mid-nineteenth century dominance of the aristocratic restaurant. Chapter two describes the aristocratic restaurant of the nineteenth century and offers an explanation for wealthy Americans' fascination with European culture. Chapter three recounts the frustrated experiences of the emergent middle class as they sought to imitate elites by embracing aristocratic culture. It argues that the process of imitation was inextricably doomed to failure.

The second section of the dissertation examines the development of eating establishments that catered specifically to middle-class families in urban America. The failure of imitation spurred the search for restaurants that were more accommodating to the middle class. Chapter four looks at the discovery of small city restaurants and the economic process by which a cultural beachhead for the middle class was established. Chapter five examines ethnic restaurants and argues that the middle class's influence over ethnic restaurants emerged as a public celebration of American cosmopolitanism.

In the final section of the dissertation, the influence of an emergent middle-class culture is measured by examining the transformation of the aristocratic restaurant. Chapter six explores the shift away from French cuisine and the French-language menu as well as efforts to simplify restaurant fare. Chapters seven and eight examine the possibilities and limits of the middle class's democracy of dining. Although not every effort at change advocated by the middle class was successful, the democratizing standard they advanced remained influential. In particular, middle-class women were able to seize upon the changes the restaurant was undergoing to advance parallel interests.

Collectively, these chapters take us from 1870, when the restaurant was still largely an aristocratic institution to the 1920s, when the middle class's dominance of restaurant culture and public dining seemed assured. The conclusion provides a summary and offers a brief glimpse at the next stage in the development of restaurant life in the United States, the systematization of middle-class dining.

CONCLUSIONS

In English, the phrase "middle class" has been used to designate the social strata between the upper and lower classes since at least 1766 (although it was not used in the United States until sometime later). But when used as an adjective, the hyphenated "middle-class" is a much more modern evolution of the language.[50] Middle-class was first used as a modifier by John Stuart Mill in 1848, but the adjective, as Mill and his contemporaries used it, had a very restricted meaning. In the mid-nineteenth century, "middle-class" denoted a material relationship between the middle class and the modified term. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains, "middle-class schools [were] schools established for the education of the middle classes …;" in 1848, in other words, for something to be middle class it had to be made up almost entirely of members of the middle class.

By the late nineteenth century, the adjectival middle-class had acquired a more expansive meaning. The *Saturday Review*, in 1887, used the word in a broader, cultural sense when it referred to the "slovenly middle-classness" of Dublin. The *Saturday Review* was certainly not claiming that everyone in Dublin was middle-class but rather that the city's particular brand of slovenliness felt middle-class. With the suffix "-ness" dropped a few years later, "middle-class"

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[50] "Middle Class," J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

now referred to anything "having the characteristics of the middle classes." "Middle-class" had, at least linguistically, shed its material relationship to the middle class and had taken on a broader cultural meaning.

Although one must be careful in applying the British usage suggested by the *Oxford English Dictionary* to American practice, the shifting meaning of the adjective "middle-class" paralleled the experiences of America's burgeoning white-collar middle class and provided the linguistic tool needed to describe the new restaurant culture the middle class championed. In 1848, to be a middle-class American was a material relationship; the middle class were those situated in an occupational hierarchy between the wealthiest Americans and the working class, and the culture of the middle class was derivative of this material relationship. By 1893, however, a structural shift in the economy had given birth to a new middle class of managers and professionals whose relationship to their work and the capitalist economy did not easily translate into class identity. For this new middle class, being "middle class" meant adopting the cultural "characteristics" of the middle class. It meant embracing "middle-classness." Public spaces, including the middle-class restaurant, embodied middle-class values and served the middle class as places where this new culture could be discovered, shared and refined.

The middle-class restaurant was a manifestation of the rise of a new middle class. "Turning the Tables: American Restaurant Culture and the Rise of the Middle Class, 1880-1920" interprets changes in restaurant culture to discover a middle class with agency and power in the process of defining not only themselves but also the American experience.

Chapter 2: "TERRAPIN À LA MARYLAND": THE ERA OF THE ARISTOCRATIC RESTAURANT

Mark Twain was offended.   The French novelist Paul Bourget visited the United States

in 1893 and had the audacity to write about it. What could a Frenchman tell Americans about

the United States in the Gilded Age?

> M. Bourget, as teacher, would simply be France teaching America.
> It seemed to me that the outlook was dark-- almost Egyptian, in
> fact. What would the new teacher, representing France, teach us?
> Railroading? No. France knows nothing valuable about
> railroading. Steamshipping? No. France has no superiorities over
> us in that matter. Steamboating? No. French steamboating is still of
> Fulton's date--1809. Postal service? No. France is a back number
> there. Telegraphy? No, we taught her that ourselves. Journalism?
> No. Magazining? No, that is our own specialty. Government? No;
> Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Nobility, Democracy, Adultery, the
> system is too variegated for our climate. Religion? No, not
> variegated enough for our climate. Morals? No, we cannot rob the
> poor to enrich ourselves. Novel-writing? No. M. Bourget and the
> others know only one plan, and when that is expurgated there is
> nothing left of the book.[1]

Accepting Twain's complaint as more than the professional jealousy of a man who had built his

career on satirizing Americans, there was one thing that Monsieur Bourget could teach America

about itself. Bourget, more than Twain, could remind wealthy Americans of how thoroughly

obsessed with France—and the opinions of Europe—they had become. And it is these passages

from Bourget's *Outre-Mer: Impressions of America* that rung most true.

> In America all men in society have been and still are business men.
> They were not born to social station; they have achieved it. . . .
> These millionaires do not entirely accept themselves...They do not
> admit that they are thus different from the Old World, or if they

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[1] Mark Twain, "Essays on Paul Bourget," (1895).

admit it, it is to insist that if they chose they could equal the Old World, or, at least, enjoy it.[2]

Even before he had written a word, Bourget raised the ire of the wealthy American elite. Fearing what the French writer might pen, meetings were held and hands were wrung, but, as the *Washington Post* noted: "Literary warfare is not the strong point of the Four Hundred."[3]   And outside of Newport and New York (and even possibly for Twain), Bourget's observations about the elite were among the least controversial of his "impressions." As the New York Times conceded:

> There is little doubt that M. Bourget's picture of society, as it exists at Newport and similar localities, is a fairly correct one; but those are hardly the places to which to go for what he calls the "American spirit," and of which he says that he is in search. The true spirit of America is not fostered in people who are bending every energy to envelop themselves in a London or Parisian or other foreign air.[4]

The *Time's* comments force us to consider the end of the story before we have even begun. By 1895, middle-class Americans were actively engaged in a rebellion against America's wealthy aristocrats for the right to define the "true spirit of American" and the wealthy were retreating from the public sphere to isolated localities such as Newport. But twenty-five years earlier, when Twain was writing his own account of the Gilded Age, America was a very different place.

AN AMERICAN ARISTOCRACY

It was a good time to be rich. By the mid-nineteenth century, the aristocratic American had come of age. The growth of large cities, arrival of cheap immigrant labor, and concentration

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[2] Paul Bourget, *Outre-Mer: Impressions of America* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1895), 50, 54.
[3] "Gossip About Gotham," *Washington Post*, 28 January 1894. The "Four Hundred" was the term widely used to describe New York's social leaders in the late nineteenth century.
[4] "New Publications: Paul Bourget's Book About Us," *New York Times*, 19 May 1895, 31. See also "Women Who Smoke Rare," *New York Times*, 9 December 1894, 18.

of large-scale business enterprises in the hands of a few, made luxury possible. The dour ideals that had suppressed extravagant displays of wealth in the early Republic were as distant a memory as the Puritan hat. The Gilded Age was a period of "conspicuous consumption," the heyday of America's aristocratic culture.

Only one or two percent of the population, America's four thousand millionaires, were rich, but these "capitalists, manufacturers, merchants, landowners, executives, professionals and their families" controlled twenty seven percent of the nation's wealth by 1870.[5] Capital undoubtedly made the capitalists, but wealth was not the only trait shared by America's aristocrats. As the historian Michael McGerr has argued: "Wealthy Americans shared several attributes that made them a homogenous and distinctive group, similar to one another and different from the rest of the population." In the second half of the nineteenth century, America's richest citizens "came mostly from English stock," belonged "by birth or conversion to the smaller, most fashionable Protestant denominations," were children of middle- and upper-income families, and were college or professional school graduates.[6] "Above all," McGerr observed, "the upper ten shared a fundamental understanding about the nature of the individual. Glorifying the power of the individual will, the wealthy held to an uncompromising belief in the necessity of individual freedom."[7]

The wealthy justified this individual freedom with Horatio Alger stories and the philosophy of social Darwinism. They exercised it through the amassing of fortunes and the breaking of strikes. And they celebrated it through a new and extravagant willingness to spend.

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[5] McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 7. Although the wealthy were often referred to as the upper ten, McGerr argues that only one or two percent of the population had the resources necessary to be considered extremely wealthy. See also James L. Huston, *Securing the Fruits of Labor: The American Concept of Wealth Distribution, 1765-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 84 [Table 1]. Huston's numbers are based on an estimate of wealth for the top one percent of the population.
[6] McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 7.
[7] Ibid.

In the years that followed the Civil War, American elites modeled themselves after European aristocrats and invested their surplus wealth in mansions, fancy balls, extravagant dinners, elaborate carriages and collections of European paintings.[8] These were investments in social reputations, efforts to seek membership in elite society through the purchase of the right address, the right clothes and the right table at a restaurant. While not every newly minted wealthy businessman sought the social sanction that prodigal spending might bring, a significant number—calling themselves Society—did, and once Society had taken root, it inspired further imitation and more extravagant acts of splendor.

Lavish consumption, and the standards of refined tastes and imposed exclusivity that accompanied it, cemented together men and women of old wealth and pedigree (in their vernacular, the "nobs") with the industrial magnates whose fortunes were less than a generation old (the "swells").[9] In their private dining rooms, these wealthy Americans enacted daily the intricate parlor games that sustained their social prestige and insured their place in the local blue books. But extravagant spending was also about purchasing a public validation of power and prestige. As chronicled in Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, this conspicuous consumption was never merely about the goods, it was about the social value of the goods. A rich New Yorker bought a fine home, furnished it well, and then dressed his wife in French fashions in order to impress upon those lacking the means to acquire luxuries the degree to which he had acquired and secured wealth. As an early historian of society life noted, New York (and, for that matter, Pittsburgh, Chicago and San Francisco) "was frantically eager to adopt any

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[8] Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 211.

[9] Sven Beckert argues that while new wealth constituted an important part of Society (particularly in New York), two-thirds of elites acquired their fortunes through inheritance. Ibid., 238. The terms "nobs" and "swells" were coined by Ward McAllister. Ward McAllister, *Society as I Have Found It* (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1890), 246.

earmarks of social distinction."[10] Lacking a hereditary aristocracy, wealthy Americans required

public confirmation to legitimize their internecine claim to a hegemonic and superior aristocratic

culture.[11]

Ostentatious homes and carriages projected a grand image to other urban dwellers, but it

was in public venues—opera houses, restaurants, the theatre—that subtle distinctions became

social walls. The few parvenus with aspirations who failed to receive an invitation to the Astor's

annual ball paled in number to the larger public, the consuming middle classes, which

experienced aristocratic dominance of the culture more persistently and subtly. The middle

classes, as employees, aspirants, and followers of society columns, at first sustained the claim of

aristocratic superiority by patronizing and emulating elite culture in an effort to gain membership

in the upper class.

The rapid growth of the ranks of America's millionaires, however, posed a challenge for

any aristocrat seeking to demonstrate his success through conspicuous consumption. A

relatively young nation without a history of aristocracy, America had failed to develop

homegrown accoutrements of wealth, the socially-certified markers of aristocracy. American

fashions, paintings, architecture and cuisine, the traditional markers of economic and social

success were, at best, in their infancy. For those Americans who chose to be conspicuous in their

consumption of material goods, it was necessary to look to Europe where authentic nobility had

set the standard for what constituted enviable wealth. By the late nineteenth century, aristocratic

Americans were purchasing dresses in France, paintings in England and Italy, and titles, via

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[10] Dixon Wecter, *The Saga of American Society: A Record of Social Aspiration, 1607-1937* (New York: Scribner, 1970), 183.

[11] See for example Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 246-56; Albin Pasteur Dearing, *The Elegant Inn: The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, 1893-1929* (Secaucus, N.J.: L. Stuart, 1986). Beckert, whose classical Marxism inspires an uneasiness with the possibility of a middle class culturally independent of the elite, argues that openness was necessary in order to incorporate both the nouveau riche and the professionals and managers into bourgeois society. In my own work, I have seen no evidence that upper-class culture was truly inclusive. The appearance of being inclusive, however, served the interests of building consensus support for the superiority of elite culture.

marriage, across the Continent. Eager to associate themselves with Europe's hereditary elite, wealthy Americans adopted European manners and European cuisines.[12] Among the European markers of aristocracy that elites imported and appropriated was the French restaurant.

THE FRENCH ARISTOCRATIC RESTAURANT

In the mid-nineteenth century, one could find rough taverns serving beefsteaks, pie and beer and exotic Italian restaurants nestled in ethnic enclaves offering spaghetti, olive oil and—most shocking to provincial American tastes—garlic. Yet this limited diversity belied America's culinary orthodoxy. Like their counterparts throughout Europe, wealthy Americans demanded French cuisine prepared by French chefs and served by professional waiters who knew how to flatter their patrons.

In the Gilded Age, the cultural claims of aristocracy were negotiated, at least in part, in the nation's restaurants and hotel dining rooms. Public dining, a relatively uncommon and most often pragmatic experience prior to the Civil War, was transformed into an act of class construction in the late nineteenth century. Unlike the businessman who ate out because a trip home for a midday meal was too time consuming or the traveler who dined in hotels out of necessity, wealthy Americans dined out in order publicly to demonstrate their mastery of leisure and culture. For the great aristocratic hotels and restaurants this required a wholesale importation of European luxury enhanced, when possible, by American technology. Paintings, chairs, porcelain, crests and dress, were measured against what was considered fashionable in London and Paris. In 1842 Charles Dickens visited the United States and left decidedly unimpressed by the food and eating habits of Americans; when he returned in 1869 every effort

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[12] Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 258.

was made to insure he found European luxury in America's democratic cities. Not surprisingly, he was feted at the nation's most celebrated and most European restaurant, Delmonico's, where French cuisine and only French cuisine was served.[13] Needless to say, this time Dickens was impressed.

French Cuisine

French cuisine had not always been the hallmark of excellence in the United States. Historian Dixon Wecter noted that in the 1780s Philadelphia society was "startled" by Mrs. William Bingham's Francophile "innovations" at dinner parties.[14] As late as the 1820s and 1830s, Americans looked to England more than France for guidance regarding correct fashions (ignoring, apparently, the growing importance of French cuisine in London) and French restaurants were familiar only to the most fastidious residents of a few American cities including New York, Philadelphia and New Orleans.[15] But in the years just prior to and immediately following the Civil War, as the industrial revolution churned out steel, jute and new millionaires, French cuisine transformed the American restaurant menu. In 1857, August Belmont, the wealthiest of New York's parvenus, caused a sensation when he hired a French chef for his private home.[16] And a few years later, Pierre Blot—a transplanted Frenchman and author of *What to Eat and How to Cook It*—opened a cooking academy in New York dedicated to

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[13] City elders in New York arranged for a French meal at the City Hotel during Dickens's first visit to the United States but the hodgepodge menu of over sixty dishes was more impressive for its size than the dishes offered. During his second visit, New York dignitaries prudently decided to have Delmonico's (where Dickens regularly ate during his stay in the city) cater the event. At the dinner, Dickens noted that both he and America had undergone significant changes since his previous visit and promised to include a supplementary note in future printings of his two "American" works noting the improvements he had found in American life. Lately Thomas, *Delmonico's: A Century of Splendor* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), 108-16.

[14] Wecter, *The Saga of American Society*, 306-7.

[15] Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 5.

[16] Ibid., 176.

spreading the gospel of French cuisine among the city's fashionable families.[17] Trips to Europe

on the "grand tour" by America's richest further stimulated interest in French fashions and

cuisine and soon New York's millionaires were offering $10,000 a year salaries to lure French

chefs (many of whom were actually Swiss or Austrian) to the United States.[18] As Ward

McAllister, New York's late-nineteenth-century cultural arbiter wrote in *Society as I Have*

Known It, "The French *chef* then literally, for the first time, made his appearance, and artistic

dinners replaced the old-fashioned, solid repasts of the earlier period."[19]

Delmonico's in New York set the national standard.[20] Founded by Swiss immigrants in

the 1820s, Delmonico's brought French restaurant cuisine to the United States. Sam Ward, the

banker and bon vivant, recalled the first Delmonico's restaurant, located on William Street in the

business district, as a "primitive little café" with excellent food and "prompt and deferential

attendance, unlike the democratic nonchalance of [its rivals]."[21] Yet if the atmosphere was

"primitive," the menu was not. An 1838 menu—printed in both French and English—was ten

pages long (excluding the wine menu) and featured such dishes as *Pâté de volaille aux truffes*

(described as Chicken Pie with Truffles) and *Salmi de becasse* (Woodcock salmi).[22]

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[17] "Blot's Cooking Academy," *New York Times*, 3 October 1865. "A New School of Art," *New York Times*, 9 February 1865. Some contemporaries dismissed Blot's efforts noting that his pupils did not necessarily go home and put his teaching into practice. Nonetheless, Blot's fleeting popularity gives evidence of a changing attitude toward French food among America's elites. For a positive account of Blot's influence from a food reformer, see Dio Lewis, *Talks About People's Stomachs* (Boston: Fields, Osgood and company, 1870), 180. See also Jan Longone, "Professor Blot and the First French Cooking School in New York (Part 2)," *Gastronomica* 1, no. 3 (2001): 53-59; Jan Longone, "Professor Blot and the First French Cooking School in New York, Part I," *Gastronomica* 1, no. 2 (2001): 65-71.

[18] On travel, see Harvey A. Levenstein, *Seductive Journey: American Tourists in France from Jefferson to the Jazz Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 81; "Passing of French Cookery," *Washington Post*, 18 September 1912, 6.

[19] McAllister, *Society as I Have Found It*, 126-7. [Italics in original.] McAllister's chronology is erratic but it appears he is talking about the period between 1860 and 1870.

[20] For a full discussion of the history of Delmonico's, see Thomas, *Delmonico's*.

[21] Ibid., 15.

[22] A salmi is a spiced dish consisting of game bird and wine.

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"Del's," as the restaurant was affectionately known, grew in pretension as New York grew to be the nation's capital of capitalists. By mid-century, Delmonico's was known throughout the United States and in Europe. In an 1848 *New York Tribune* article extolling the virtues of Delmonico's (at a time when French food was still a novelty), the reporter George Foster remarked that Delmonico's was the "only complete specimen" of the "expansive and aristocratic *restaurant*" in the United States, an "equal in every respect, in its appointments and attendance as well as the quality and execution of its dishes, to any similar establishment in Paris itself."[23] Many European visitors to the United States agreed. The British illustrator and travel writer George Augustus Henry Sala claimed Delmonico's was the best French restaurant in the world.[24]

As fashionable New York moved uptown, Delmonino's moved with them and its reputation and its commitment to French cuisine continued to grow.[25] In 1862, the restaurant moved to Fifth Avenue, abandoned the two-language menu for a French-only

Figure 1: Delmonico's 1908 (Hecla Iron Works, New York Public Library Digital Collection)

menu and acquired the services of Charles Ranhofer, a French-born and Paris-trained chef who would soon become America's most celebrated cook.[26] "The opening of the Fifth Avenue

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[23] Foster and Blumin, *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches*.

[24] George Augustus Sala, "Chats About Cookery: The American Cuisine," *Table Talk*, February 1908, 85.

[25] "Delmonico's New Restaurant," *New York Times*, 7 April 1862, 5. Referring to the 1897 move to Fifth and 44th Street, Brown commented: "Here the traditional splendor increased." Henry Collins Brown, *Delmonico's a Story of Old New York* (New York: Valentine's Manual, 1928), 60.

[26] Ranhofer was born in 1836 in St. Denis, France and began his study of cooking in Paris at the age of 12. In 1856 he traveled to the United States but he returned to France in 1860 to work for the court of Napoleon III. In 1861 he again traveled to the United States taking a job at the Maison Doree in New York until Lorenzo Delmonico acquired

restaurant," Delmonico family biographer Thomas Lately wrote, "marked the dividing line between Delmonico's as purely a restaurant—foremost of its class, which was the foremost— and Delmonico's as a social institution, influencing the manners, tastes, and customs not only of the city but of the nation for decades to come."[27]

Following the Civil War, Delmonico's established itself as the city's premier aristocratic institution. Wealthy New Yorkers increasingly entertained outside their homes and "Del's" was the site of many of the formal and informal gatherings of New York's rich and famous. It hosted the select Patriarch Balls, the gatherings of clubs and business associations, and the private dinners of the Astors and the Vanderbilts—and each event was French to a fault. As one patron recalled, Delmonico's "afforded a Parisian aspect" to New York.[28] Even when a banquet or event did not seem to warrant it, Delmonico's anointed it with the prestige that French cuisine conveyed. Celebrating St. Patrick's Day in 1884, the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick ate *poularde braisée, Montpensier* and *croquetees de Ris de Veau, Parisienne*. The menu was decorated with green ribbons but the cuisine was unmistakably French.[29] Likewise, the American centennial celebrations in 1876 were marked by Delmonico's with dishes titled "a la Centennial." If the dishes owed their genesis to America's birthday, in an unconscious repetition of the American Revolution, they owed at least as much to France.[30]

Delmonico's influence on American dining extended beyond New York. The restaurant's kitchens served as a training ground for some of America's more elite chefs and stewards, and its menus were passed along by patrons and reprinted in magazines and

his services in 1862. Ranhofer briefly left Delmonico's in the late 1870s, but returned and stayed with the restaurant until his retirement in 1898. He died a year later.

[27] Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 90. See also Brown, *Delmonico's a Story of Old New York*, 49.

[28] Brown, *Delmonico's a Story of Old New York*, 59.

[29] Menu, "Menu," Delmonico's, New York, N.Y, March 17, 1884, Box 3 (1884-55a [a-b]), Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library, New York. Spelling in original.

[30] Menu, "Complimentary Banquet to the National Board of Trade by the Commerical Associations of the City of New York," Delmonico's, New York, N.Y, June 29, 1876, Box 1 (1876-77-30), Buttolph Menu Collection.

newspapers.[31] Dishes created at Delmonico's (such as Lobster Newburg) were imitated

throughout the nation. America's first culinary "brand name," the "Delmonico" sobriquet was

borrowed by dozens of restaurants throughout the country. [32] The first dining car on an

American railroad was named "Delmonico;" restaurants in New Orleans, Chicago and San

Francisco were called Delmonico's (although they were not owned by the Delmonico family),

and almost any restaurant known for excellence might informally earn the title.[33] In New York

in the early twentieth century, the best Chinese and Jewish restaurants in the city were called the

"Chinese Delmonico's" and the "Yiddish Delmonico's."[34] In 1895 the historian James Ford

Rhodes wrote in his *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*: "Any person

who considers the difference between the cooking and service of a dinner at a hotel or restaurant

before the Civil war and now, will appreciate what a practical apostle of health and decent living

has been Delmonico, who deserves canonization in the American calendar."[35]

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[31] It's impossible to know how often Delmonico's menus were copied. However, recipes from Delmonico's appear in both *What to Eat* and *Table Talk*, two influential culinary magazines, at the turn of the century, as well as the New York-based restaurant journal, *The Steward*. In 1889, Alessandro Filippini published *The Table*, a collection of Delmonico's recipes intended for home use. In 1894, Charles Ranhofer published his encyclopedic *The Epicurean*, a nearly complete list of his recipes and menus. Alexander Filippini, *The Table: How to Buy Food, How to Cook It, and How to Serve It*, Rev. ed. (New York: The Baker & Taylor, 1895); Charles Ranhofer, *The Epicurean: A Complete Treatise of Analytical and Practical Studies on the Culinary Art, Including Table and Wine Service, How to Prepare and Cook Dishes. Etc.; Making a Franco-American Culinary Encyclopedia* (New York: C Ranhofer, 1894). For a discussion, see Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 261.

[32] The United States did not have a trademark law until 1881 and then only for foreign commerce. The first domestic trademark legislation was approved in 1905. The Delmonico family did try to control the use of the family name and sued a Paris restaurateur by the name of Gailliard in 1889 for naming his restaurant "Delmonico" after a number of patrons visiting France claimed they had gone to the restaurant mistakenly thinking it was run by the New York family and found the food disappointing. "The Paris "Delmonico"," *New York Times*, 8 November 1889, 8.

[33] Dining car reference, Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 149. "Delmonican" was sometimes used as an adjective to indicate a particularly elaborate meal. For an example of Delmonican as an adjective, see Mrs. Frank Leslie [Miriam Leslie], *California: A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate* (New York: G.W. Carleton, 1877), 36.

[34] On the influence of Delmonico's in New York, see Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 279. On the other "Delmonicos" see, Frances de Talavera Berger and John Parke Custis, *Sumptuous Dining in Gaslight San Francisco*, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 132-3; Perry Duis, *Challenging Chicago: Coping with Everyday Life, 1837-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 147. Delmonico's in New Orleans is still in business. None of these "Delmonico's" was owned by the Delmonico family of New York. Jessup Whitehead, *The Steward's Handbook and Guide to Party Catering* (Chicago: J. Anderson, 1889), 379; Jeannette Young, "The Famous "Yiddish Delmonico's"," *Table Talk*, January 1911, 23-25.

[35] Quoted in Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 175.

Yet in the early 1870s, many respectable restaurants still offered traditional Anglo-American menus printed predominantly in English. The Falmouth Hotel in Portland Maine used no French in its September 1870 menu. The courses were listed in English (entrées were referred to as "side dishes") and even the most exotic item on the menu, rice croquettes, was simply described as *Rice Balls with Jelly*.[36] The Oceanic, a resort hotel on Star Island in New Hampshire's Isles of Shoals, featured an 1874 menu that seemed insulated from the growing trend towards French cuisine with entrees that included *Stewed Lamb, Country Style*; *Lobster Salad* and *Fricassee of Chicken*.[37] In New York and Chicago, however, French terms and French dishes were beginning to appear on the menus of respectable establishments. A November 1873 menu at the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York, a favorite meeting place for New York's Republican Party, prominently featured corned beef and cabbage, beef tongue, roast beef, mutton, Mallard duck and chicken pie "American Style," but a growing number of items on the menu were sauced: the pig's feet were served with Madeira sauce, the turkeys' livers were served with Champagne sauce, and the rice croquettes "à la crème."[38] Similarly, the Gardner House in Chicago in 1873 used the term entrée on its menu and along with baked pork and beans, turkey with cranberry sauce and smoked beef tongue, offered dishes with French names including *fried pickerel, a la Tartare* and *croquettes au chocolate*.[39] With the exception of a few vanguard

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[36] Menu, "Dinner, Friday, September 9, 1870," Fifth Avenue Restaurant, New York, N.Y, September 9, 1870, Box 1 (1870-38), Buttolph Menu Collection.
[37] Menu, "The Oceanic," The Oceanic, Star Island, N.H., August 19, 1874, Box 2 (1875-80-35), Buttolph Menu Collection. Although the French-derived term "fricassee" was used, it was used without an accent.
[38] Menu, "Dinner on Friday, November 21, 1873," Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York, N.Y, November 21, 1873, Box 1 (1871-73-27), Buttolph Menu Collection. On a French menu and on most American menus of the nineteenth century, an entrée course was a "prepared" dish served as a side, or as a light course. Since meat, chicken or fish were typically served at the other main courses, the entrée course was the most likely to contain a crafted French dish. Americans began to refer to daily specials and later any main course as entrees in the early twentieth century.
[39] Menu, "Gardner House," Gardner House, Chicago, Ill., May 6, 1873, Box 2 (1871-73-42), Buttolph Menu Collection.

French restaurants like Delmonico's and the Brunswick (both in New York), the menus at the Fifth Avenue and the Gardner House were typical of fashionable hotels in the early 1870s.

By the end of the 1870s, however, every major city, and a good many small towns, was home to a French restaurant. While no American restaurant would rival Delmonico's reputation in the nineteenth century, restaurants across the country Gallicized their bill of fare, serving French food—or at least dishes with French-sounding names—to a public that was beginning to consider French cuisine a mark of high culture. In the Gilded Age, one could join a physician for *Ris de Veau Braise, aux petits pois nouveaux* at the New Willard Hotel in the nation's capital; meet a brewer for *Pompano au beurre de Montpellier* at the St. Nicholas Hotel in St. Louis; enjoy the company of a southern gentleman over *Filet de Bœuf, Pique aux Champignons* at the St. Charles Hotel in New Orleans or join a tailor for *Timbale de volaille à la reine* at the Hotel Iroquois in Buffalo.[40] New York, Philadelphia, Jacksonville, St. Louis, Denver, and San Francisco all hosted well-known restaurants that served French food, as did resort locations like Saratoga, St. Augustine and Portsmouth, N.H.[41] Wherever wealth gathered, French food was served.

Although the Anglo-American menu did not disappear entirely, French dishes described with French terms appeared with increasing regularity on American menus as the century closed. The fashionable Brevoort House in New York featured entrees such as *ris de veau piqué aux*

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[40] Menu, "Banquet, Annual Dinner by the Association of American Physicians," New Willard Hotel, Washington, D.C., May 16, 1905, Box 124 (1905-399), Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library, New York; Menu, "Banquet for the Commercial Clubs of Boston, Chicago and St. Louis," St. Nicholas Hotel, St. Louis, Mo., October 24, 1895, Box 22 (1895-170) or (1895-171), Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library, New York; Menu, "St. Charles Hotel," St. Charles Hotel, New Orleans, La., April 11, 1875, Box 2 (1875-80-16), Buttolph Menu Collection. Menu, "The Annual Meeting Merchant Tailors National Exchange Banquet given at the Hotel Iroquois," Hotel Iroquois, Buffalo, N.Y., February 7, 1895, Box 20 (1895-243 or 1895-032), Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library.

[41] Menu, various, Boxes 1-20, Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library. There were exceptions. Dixon Wecter exempted "conservative Boston, threadbare Charleston, and a few other cities." Wecter, *The Saga of American Society*, 182.

épinards, *côtelettes of slamon* [sic] *à la Victoria* and *salmi of partridge au chasseur* (alongside

Irish stew and fried halibut with salt pork) on its 1886 "Carte du Jour."[42] Nor was the adoption

of French cuisine and French culinary terms limited to New York. Ten years earlier, The

Oceanic in New Hampshire had featured stewed lamb and lobster salad, but in 1884, influenced

by the changes already underway in cosmopolitan cities like New York and Chicago, even this

isolated tourist destination provided *Beef a la Mode with Noodles*; *Chicken Livers Sauté, Fine

Herbs* and *Tripe Stew a la Lyonnaise* to visitors.[43] Similarly, Sunday dinner at the West Hotel in

Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1886 included *tenderloin of beef, larded, a la Lucullus*, *sweet breads

en caisses a la Reine, cutlets of lobster a la Genoise* and *pate de foie gras* washed down with

punch a la Cardinal and followed by *carlotte russe a la vanilla* [sic] and *petit four Melis*.[44] In

fact, it was nearly impossible to find a respectable restaurant after 1880 that did not serve at least

a few French entrees with French sauces and French cuisine—particularly the expensive and

exacting cuisine of Paris—had become *de rigueur* for any exclusive party or banquet.[45] One wit

claimed that a California mining boomtown was not complete until it had a saloon, a billiards

hall and a French restaurant.[46]

Despite the enthusiasm for French food, the shared ideal of an elite cuisine did not ensure

that every respectable restaurant in the country could find the staff, ingredients and patrons to

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[42] Menu, "Carte du Jour," Brevoort House, New York, N.Y., November 10, 1886, Box 4 (1886-76a [a-b]), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[43] Menu, "The Oceanic," The Oceanic, Star Island, N.H., August 30, 1884, Box 4 (1884-27 or 1884-16), Buttolph Menu Collection. Although the French-derived term "fricassee" was used, it was used without an accent.

[44] Menu, "Dinner," West Hotel, Minneapolis, Minn., February 21, 1886, Box 4 (1886-09 or 1886-24), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[45] Later commentators would remark on the economy of French cooking, but the economic frugality of the peasant was not what the wealthy embraced. Comparing Southern black cooks to the French chef, Ward McAllister wrote: "Take for instance, soup; give a colored cook a shin of beef and a bunch of carrots and turnips, and of this he makes a soup. A Frenchman, to give you a consommé royale, requires a knuckle of veal, a shin of beef, two fat fowls, and every vegetable known to man. The materials are more than double the expense, but then you have a delicacy of flavor, and a sifting out of everything that is coarse and gross." McAllister, *Society as I Have Found It*, 100-1. See also A. L. Shand, "Art of Dining," *Living Age*, 14 October 1899, 75.

[46] Noah Brooks, "Restaurant Life of San Francisco," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, November 1868, 467.

support a Parisian-style French restaurant. The rigorous training that French chefs received kept

the number of genuine French-trained chefs cooking in the United States low for much of the

nineteenth century. Only at the very end of the century as travel costs decreased and the general

prosperity of America drew the attention of European chefs completing their apprenticeships did

the number of chefs begin to meet demand. [47] In the meantime, restaurateurs made

compromises. Many of these restaurants Gallicized their menus even when French names did not

always indicate genuine French cuisine; as a result, the menus of the nineteenth century are

sometimes a hodgepodge of culinary traditions, part Southern plantation, part English tavern and

part French restaurant. Yet the effort to appear French was nearly universal among the better

class of restaurants and the efforts restaurants exerted to appear French, no matter what was

being served, suggests the cachet that French cuisine had achieved in the United States. In 1885,

vacationers at the The Antlers in Colorado Springs were offered a curiously "American" dinner

featuring *consommé a la Cleveland*, *sweet breads braise a la Tilden*, *turkey wings stuffed a la

Harrison*, and, for dessert, *inauguration pudding with reform sauce, a la Cleveland and

Hendricks*.[48] Even distinctly American dishes were given French names. Although no effort

was made to use French terms to describe the vegetables, the United States Hotel was so

determined to enhance its status by the repeated use of French terms that even the turtle soup was

transformed into the French-styled *terrapin stew à la Maryland*.[49]

Restaurants that sought an elite patronage attracted wealthy customers with elaborate

rules about dress and manners, attentive service and an elegant décor, but more than anything

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[47] As late as 1933, the Waldorf-Astoria's Oscar Tschirky wrote French chef Escoffier expressing relief he had been able to find a French chef to staff the famous hotel's dining room. "It saved us much trouble, because here in America chefs are very rare; I don't know where to find them." Quoted in Amanda Watson Schnetzer, "The Golden Age of Cooking," *Policy Review* 97 (1999): page.

[48] Menu, "The Antlers," The Antlers, Colorado Springs, Colo., March 4, 1885, Box 4 (1885-58b [a-b] or 1885-010), Buttolph Menu Collection. Note that the pudding, an English dish, was also described in French.

[49] Menu, "Dinner," United States Hotel, Saratoga Springs, N.Y., August 15, 1880, Box 4 (1880-5), Buttolph Menu Collection.

else it was the menu that established a restaurant's reputation. French menus augured European distinction. They promised that the restaurant was exclusive and that the restaurant's patrons were sophisticated. In 1893 when New York's social gadfly Ward McAllister recommended in an open letter that "Chicago society import a number of fine French chefs" in advance of the World's Fair, Chicago newspapers lashed out at his presumption that New York had a right to dictate fashion to the Midwest, but few denied the underlying assumption that the formal test of American civilization would be its command of French cuisine.[50]

The appeal of the French menu rested on its mythic origins and the widely held belief that the first French restaurants were established in Paris by private French chefs reduced to commercial pursuits when the French revolution deprived them of aristocratic estates on which to earn a living.[51] A 1900 textbook used by primary school teachers to teach domestic science repeated the well-worn tale.

> The era of fine cookery in France began during the reign of Louis XIV., in [the] seventeenth century, when the nobles vied with each other in compounding delicate dishes. . . . After the Revolution, the cooks of the nobles, being obliged to provide for themselves, established restaurants where the most delicate and elaborate products of their skill were at the service of the one who could pay the price. The world has adopted the restaurant system, and French cookery is the standard of excellence.[52]

There was no truth to the legend. Rebecca Spang has demonstrated that the restaurant, ironically, owed its origin to France's pretentious pre-Revolution bourgeoisie who sought to demonstrate their sensitivity by taking restorative soups in public (the word restaurant, in French,

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[50] Emmett Dedmon, *Fabulous Chicago* (New York: Random House, 1953), 223-4.

[51] Helen S. Conant, "Kitchen and Dining Room," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, February 1877, 427.

[52] Lucy Langdon Wilson, *Handbook of Domestic Science and Household Arts for Use in Elementary Schools: A Manual for Teachers* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1900), 70. The myth of the French revolution serving as a spark for restaurants remained popular into the twentieth century. See Henri Gault and Christian Millau, *A Parisian's Guide to Paris* (New York: Random House, 1969); Barbara Ketcham Wheaton, *Savoring the Past: The French Kitchen and Table from 1300 to 1789* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

is derived from the word for restorative) and not to roving bands of unemployed chefs set adrift

by the Revolution.[53] Nor was the restaurant uniquely French. The Chinese, as early as the

thirteenth century, had restaurants that served customers individual dishes made to order. [54]

Nonetheless, this august, albeit mythic tradition, stamped French cuisine with the imprimatur of

aristocracy. Tropes of kings, courtiers and cooking, when repeated in the United States,

bestowed honorary praise on those who could now command the services of French chefs.[55]

Thorstein Veblen argued that conspicuous consumption was not about taste or utility, but

rather the honorific value a purchase embodied. In the matter of French cuisine, this was literally

true. Nineteenth-century accounts of elaborate and expensive meals made only passing reference

to physical taste or a culinary aesthetic. Etiquette guides emphasized table decorations, flower

displays, and china; menus were elaborately decorated with ribbons, art and calligraphy; dishes

were named in honor of famous Europeans. The Gallicizing of the American menu mattered not

because it guaranteed flavor—there was no standard by which one judged whether a particular

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[53] Rebecca L. Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000). Jean-Robert Pitte, in a work first published in French in 1991, continues to maintain that the French restaurant is the legacy of the aristocratic chefs. Even if that is not true, it is important to note, as Pitte argues, that French gastronomy benefited from the support of the aristocracy and, after the Revolution, the state. Jean-Robert Pitte, *French Gastronomy: The History and Geography of a Passion*, trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 102-9, 18-9.

[54] Nicholas M. Kiefer, "Economics and the Origins of the Restaurant," *Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Administration Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2002).

[55] Tales of the aristocratic origins of dining regularly appeared at the turn of the century. The story of Vatel, the loyal cook who fell on his sword when the fish did not arrive for dinner appeared in dozens of nineteenth-century food writings. In 1907, George Ellwinger in his painstaking review of the origins of French cooking (an account that correctly distinguishes between the aristocratic and bourgeois origins of the restaurants), declined to retell the story of Vatel because he was so sure his audience already knew it. "The tragic death of Vatel by his own hand, owing to the non-arrival of the sea-fish at Chantilly, is too well known to need narrating." George H. Ellwanger, *The Pleasures of the Table: An Account of Gastronomy from Ancient Days to Present Times* (New York: Doubleday Page, 1902), 59. While stories of the Revolutionary chefs founding restaurants and Vatel's sacrifice were the most oft repeated tales, the story of the Chevalier d'Albignac, as reported in *What to Eat* 1:3 October 1896, 69, demonstrates the breath of the genre. According to *What to Eat*, "In the evil days of the French Revolution, the Chevalier d'Albignac escaped from Paris to London, where he subsisted painfully, if not miserably, on a small pittance allowed him by the English government until accident afforded him a field for the profitable exercise of the only art which he could turn to money." The "accident," an invitation to prepare a salad in the "French fashion" when dining at a London hotel, led to a profitable request that he make salads for wealthy Londoners. In time, he became known as the "The Gentleman Salad Maker."

French meal was more satisfying than another—but because it promised status, a guarantee that by ordering the dish the restaurant patron would acquire honorific status. In 1902, when rumors of a decline in Parisian standards of cooking reached the United States, the American food historian George Ellwanger confidently concluded that the French-language menu would never disappear because "French cookery has been tacitly accepted as unparalleled on the same principle that a titled personage is supposed to possess superior accomplishments."[56] The American aristocracy had banked its reputation on it.

The French Chef

The honorific value of French cuisine and its aristocratic associations were enhanced by myth, but derived also from the strict standards that French chefs maintained and the elaborate training they endured. As one culinary historian conceded at the turn of the century, the "championship of gastronomy has for centuries been held by French chefs."[57] In America in the nineteenth century, native-born chefs—even the best—learned their trade haphazardly without formal training or an organized system of apprenticeship. In contrast, a chef trained in France underwent a well-choreographed training that might include formal schooling and typically culminated in an apprenticeship that might last twenty years. As described in the *New York Sun*, French culinary training was an excruciating process subject to the elaborate oversight of a French bureaucracy.

> Since the day of Napoleon I. the Académie de Cuisine has
> regulated the art of the French kitchen just as the forty Immortals
> look after the language of the French nation. The cookery
> academy conducts classes, has its big corps of apprentices, sits in
> solemn conclave, for instance, on whether wax flowers can be
> legitimately used in the decoration of banquet pieces, decorates its

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[56] Ibid., 259.

[57] Felix L. Oswald, "International Food Studies: France," *What to Eat*, May 1901, 145. See also A. Kenney-Herbert, "The Art of Cooking," *19th Century*, November 1892, 764.

members and bestows medals and diplomas that mean everything to the ambitious and artistic French cook. . . .

That is one of the reasons why French cookery is kept up to its present lofty standard, and why it is taken so seriously by its pupils and master workmen. It is on the whole a very big thing to be a first-class cook in Paris . . . [58]

This training made the French chef, as M. E. Carter told readers of *What to Eat*, "a personage of consequence."[59]   At a time when wealthy Americans were establishing their reputations by purchasing European art and marrying daughters to money-poor sons of European royalty, the ability to command the labor of a French chef was another means of enhancing one's reputation and some wealthy Americans were reported to have paid exorbitant salaries, as much as $10,000 a year (nearly ten times a modest middle-class salary), to their chefs. Restaurants seeking to attract a well-heeled clientele were compelled to compete.[60]

Civilized man cannot live without civilized cooks; and a cook who knows his business can command a higher salary in New-York to-day than a man who is equipped to take the Chair of Languages and Literature in a college. To say nothing of rich men in private life who pay competent cooks astonishing sums to manage their kitchens, there are at least five hotels and restaurants in this city where chief cooks draw a salary of $6,000 a year, with perquisites that will easily net $10,000 a year more. In most of the first-class hotels and restaurants the head cook is the most expensive and most dictatorial man on the pay roll.[61]

The large salaries paid to French chefs were in recognition of the French chef's mastery of culinary alchemy, the ability to transform a basic human activity, eating, into something luxurious and exclusive. Although some foods cost more than others, in the end, a potato is a

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[58] R. Burns, "Art of the Paris Cook," *Current Literature*, December 1900, 688. Originally published in the *New York Sun*.

[59] M. E. Carter, "The Chef," *What to Eat*, January 1901, 19.

[60] Frank G. Carpenter, "Washington Dinners," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 July 1887; "Dishes for the Million: Good Things to Tempt Hungry Men at Hotels and Clubs, Elaborate Menus for New Year's," *New York Times*, 1 January 1895, 6.

[61] "Dishes for the Million," 6.

merely a potato and its flavor is the same for the king as it is for the pauper. The French chef

defied this apparent truism. The "veritable chef," "French to his finger tips," transformed the

common article of food into an aristocratic dish.[62] "The plebeian potatoes likewise, through

chef's transforming wand, will seem to belong to the elite vegetable," Carter wrote in 1901.[63]

Ward McAllister, the majordomo of elite New York Society, compared the French chef

to a novelist, "an educated, cultivated artist" "in every way almost as much inspired as writers."[64]

The metaphor McAllister used suggests that the chef created a fiction, a narrative of tastes that—

if told well—promised social recognition and advancement. On occasion, this metaphor took

tangible form. Developed by French chef Antonin Carême in the early nineteenth century,

grande cuisine was renowned for the construction of ornate inedible food sculptures. Created at

great expense, these elaborate decorations served no other purpose than to decorate the table and

to celebrate the wealth of the men who commissioned them. At New York's annual French

Chef's Ball in 1891, for example, W. K. Vanderbilt's "kitchen" produced "a reproduction of his

yacht, while Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt's chef contributed galantines *décorées sur socle*."[65] Size,

realism and pomp were the prized attributes.

> The collection occupied one whole table and numbered eighteen
> distinct pieces. The first of these to catch the eye was an
> American villa, a massive structure built on a rocky elevation
> decorated with trailing vines and blossoming flowers. On the
> balconies of the villa and from its windows appeared ladies and
> gentlemen in elegant dresses, and altogether the effect was
> exceedingly realistic.[66]

These "pieces de fantaisie," as the 1896 *Times* society reporter aptly labeled them, were a public

celebration of the estates and the restaurants which produced them. They were grand, showy

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[62] Carter, "The Chef," 19.
[63] Ibid., 21.
[64] McAllister, *Society as I Have Found It*, 101.
[65] "Cooking as a Fine Art: Beautiful Exhibits by Dexterous French Chefs," *New York Times*, 4 February 1891, 8.
[66] Ibid.

spectacles designed to flatter the creators' wealthy patrons via the instrument of the chef's expertise. Like Vanderbilt's seaworthy yacht, his chef's confectionery yacht was a conspicuous display of aristocratic wealth.

For the patron of an aristocratic restaurant, the French chef who treated cooking from a "high art standpoint" conferred honor on the diner whose order he prepared, an endowment that lasted well after the dessert course was complete.[67] In fact, the association of the elite with French cuisine was so close that an exception was considered newsworthy. In 1901 the *Philadelphia Times* printed, and the *Washington Post* reprinted, a story that claimed that J. Pierpont Morgan, the nation's leading financier, preferred the "simplest, plainest dishes the cook can prepare." Morgan, it seems, lived primarily on corned beef and cabbage.[68]

The French Language

With French cuisine and the French chef came the French-language menu. By the 1890s, it was unusual to find an elite menu that did not use French to describe its cuisine whether the food was genuinely French or not. The persistence of French insured that even as the middle classes entered the restaurant, the restaurant remained an aristocratic institution. The French-language menu was more than a subtle allusion to the aristocratic origins of the restaurant: it was a passkey to culture that excluded those who were not wealthy, traveled and educated.

In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, French was not a language of education and business but of breeding, diplomacy and culture. Educators pressed secondary and college students to learn the classical languages—Latin and Greek—arguing that the rigor of mastering these languages contributed more to the intellectual development of the pupil than

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[67] "Kings of the Kitchen: When Chef Explodes Even His Employees Trembles," *Washington Post*, 15 September 1901, 17.

[68] "Likes 'Corned Beef and ---': Millionaire Morgan Has a Fondness for Only the Simplest Foods," *Washington Post*, 17 March, 31. Morgan was the wealthiest American but he was not a "society" man.

French or German.[69] In 1900 only 14 percent of public high school students in grades nine through eleven studied French and French-language education continued to decline in the twentieth century.[70]

The paucity of French-speaking Americans increased the symbolic value of French to the elite. For the American aristocrat, speaking French was a sign of cultural superiority and a worldly education. Trips to Europe and a language tutor were, after all, among the privileges enjoyed by the wealthy scion.[71] As a professor at the New England College of Languages wrote in 1895, if you observe French "speakers" in America exhibiting "self-satisfaction . . . you may conclude they have acquired their knowledge of the tongue in a fashionable boarding-school" or with a private tutor.[72]

A thorough knowledge of French made it easier to read a restaurant menu and to place an order, but speaking French was not enough; the French-language menu posed challenges to the uninitiated diner lacking the appropriate cultural capital. French menus employed truncated French, derogatorily referred to as "cook's French," a complex language with its own linguistic conventions. Phrases were mysteriously abbreviated ("à la mode," for example, was written as "à la") and meanings changed with the context. "À la mode anglaise," for example, was written as "à l'anglaise," and connoted different preparations when modifying a potato, fish or custard dish. [73] To make matters worse, descriptive phrases were often honorific, defying direct translation. A 1902 anecdote illustrates this well. As the story was told, Col. Sam Reed was breakfasting at Delmonico's. After looking over the French menu for a few minutes, he called to

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[69] Herbert M. Kliebard, *Forging the American Curriculum: Essays in Curriculum History and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 10.
[70] Ibid., 22.
[71] Levenstein, *Seductive Journey*, 99-100. Levenstein notes that in the post-1850s increasing numbers of parvenus joined the upper-class in Europe.
[72] Alfred Hennequin, "Do Americans Need to Speak French?" *Education* 15 (1895): 171.
[73] Alan Davidson, "A La," in *Oxford Companion to Food* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8-9.

his astonished waiter: "You may bring me some eggs blushing like Aurora, and some breeches in the royal fashion with velvet sauce; and for dessert be sure you bring a stew of good Christians and a mouthful of ladies."[74]

Complicating matters, American chefs, many with only a passing knowledge of French, routinely created faux French names for the dishes they served. Macaroni and cheese, a staple entrée in the 1870s, was described by the Fifth Avenue Hotel as *Macaroni, au Parmesan cheese*.[75] But in other menus dating from the same period it is described as *Macaroni au gratin au Parmesan*, *Macaroni lié, aux fromage, à la Milanaise*, *Macaroni a la Neopolitaine*, *Macaroni à l'Italienne*, *Macaroni lie au fromage, à la crême*, and *Macaroni de Naples au gratin*. This endless, haphazard variation would further contribute to middle-class frustration with the French-language menu.[76]

Those who dined regularly at elite restaurants learned both the conventions and idiosyncrasies of "cook's French." Since menus were printed daily, wealthy Americans often brought their menus home as souvenirs. These bills of fare offered guides to household chefs and glimpses into the world of public dining for young children. Confusing as the system of naming dishes could be, an aristocratic American diner steeped in the rituals of dining and experienced with spoken French could order dinner without risking the waiter's scorn. Middle-class diners, without the linguistic skills to decode the elaborate names given to French dishes, were outsiders even if they occasionally had the money to purchase a full course dinner at an

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[74] Minnie E. Leo, "Jests for the Table," *What to Eat* 1902, 65.

[75] Menu, "Fifth Avenue Hotel," Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York, N.Y, November 21, 1873, Box 2 (1871-73-27), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[76] Menu, various, Boxes 1-4, Buttolph Menu Collection. As the nineteenth century closed, French menus in the United States generally became more standardized. In part, these reforms followed the emigration of more French chefs at the turn-of-the-century and the influence of a generation of American-born chefs trained in kitchens run by French chefs, but it also reflected reforms in French cooking, particularly the system of classification promoted by Georges-Auguste Escoffier in his *Le Guide Culinaire* (1903). A. Escoffier, *Le Guide Culinaire = the Complete Guide to the Art of Modern Cookery: The First Complete Translation into English*, 1st American ed. (New York: Mayflower Books, 1979).

elite restaurant. As the *Chicago Post* noted in 1914: "To order plain sweetbreads and peas,

instead of ris de veau [and] petits pois, identified a person as an aborigine who would tuck his

napkin into his collar and eat his sweetbreads and peas with his knife. . . . We do not pretend to

understand this; we only know from experience that it is so."[77]

Aristocratic Service

The commitment of the elegant restaurant of the nineteenth century to flattering its

wealthy clientele extended beyond the menu and the food to every aspect of service. Maitre d's

and waiters were servants and the best restaurants were imitations of the baronial dining rooms

of America's millionaires.

The aristocratic dining experience began at the door. Here the headwaiter met the patron

and passed judgment. The headwaiter was the restaurant's guardian; patrons who *looked like*

they might not be able to pay were refused service; the rest were seated according to their social

standing. An 1889 stewards' manual written by Jessup Whitehead explained the role of the

headwaiter:

> He has obscure tables, lower end tables, middle-class tables, upper-
> class tables and exclusive tables, and he sorts strangers as they
> come and allots them to their tables according to their appearance
> or their deserts generally, without their being at all aware of the
> sorting process they are subjected to. That is what he is at the door
> for.[78]

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[77] "Eating in American," *Literary Digest*, 10 October 1914, 702-3.

[78] Whitehead, *The Steward's Handbook*, 186. A similar idea was expressed by W. F. Cozart: "Never seat a poorly dressed and 'seedy' looking person or persons at the same table with a well dressed [sic], aristocratic person and yet this maneuvering must be so artistically done that it will not be detected, and consequently there will be no offense given." Winfield Forrest Cozart, *A Technical Treatise on Dining-Room Service: The Waiters' Manual* (Chicago: H. J. Bohn & Brother, 1898), 84. Of course, as time passed, middle-class patrons became increasing aware of the discrimination restaurateurs showed.

Despite Whitehead's promise of discretion, patrons were acutely aware of the distinctions made by the headwaiter. This process of selection and exclusion assured the elite diner that his standing in society would be acknowledged by the restaurant and advertised to the other guests.

Once the headwaiter had seated the guests and withdrawn, a waiter arrived with the bill of fare. Waiters were dressed and drilled like an elite military corps.[79] "Waiters must be promptly in line at roll-call," one guide to waiting tables stated, "clad in the proper uniform, with shoes neatly polished.[80]" Although dress varied from establishment to establishment, the most common uniform consisted of black pants, polished shoes, vest, bow tie and a white or black jacket depending on the time of day.[81]

The waiter's appearance was an integral part of the restaurant's atmosphere. Guides for wait staff repeatedly advised waiters to be "neat and clean in their general appearance" and provided detailed instructions on proper hygiene.[82] One guide even warned waiters "to avoid having your face com[e] in too close contact with your guests, as your breath may be

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[79] Elenor Blissford, "Fads and Fancies of Gotham," *What to Eat*, September 1907, 114.

[80] Cozart, *A Technical Treatise on Dining-Room Service*, 61. Until the Civil War, hotels often had only one seating for each meal and the food was served all at once. Waiters would march into the dining room in lockstep and serve the food in synchronized fashion. This required extensive drilling and a military-like chain-of-command. In 1848, Tunis G. Campbell, an African American headwaiter with experience in Boston and New York (and a leading proponent of abolition), proposed that "[w]aiting-men should be drilled every day, except Saturday and Sunday." Tunis G. Campbell, *Hotel Keepers, Head Waiters, and Housekeepers' Guide* (Boston: Coolidge and Wiley, 1848), 11, 34-35. As service became more flexible and dining rooms larger, the coordinated wait staff became less common. But military discipline was still required. W. F. Cozart explained in 1898: "Of all the army of people employed for one of these occasions [a club dinner], perhaps the head waiter's duty is the most strenuous and exacting, for the success of the banquet depends very largely on the manner and method of service. Under his command are an hundred men, trained with military precision, each to know his exact place and duty and attend to that alone." The metaphor was common. One guide even suggested that height be a concern when selecting waiters in order to maintain a disciplined appearance. "In the army there is a rule which shuts out all men below a certain standard height, and if it is bad for the little men, the rule is good for the appearance of the ranks on parade. Small waiters may do well enough, but if they run large it comes hard for a stumpy headwaiter to play the peremptory colonel over them." Whitehead, *The Steward's Handbook*, 187.

[81] Cozart, *A Technical Treatise on Dining-Room Service*, 58. For dinner: "Full dress suit and white bow tie. Scrupulously clean white shirt, cuffs, and collar must be worn at all times. A uniform comprising black pants, vest, jacket and black bow tie may be used during breakfast, dinner and supper, in hotels where the above uniforms are not required." See also Whitehead, *The Steward's Handbook*, 191.

[82] Cozart, *A Technical Treatise on Dining-Room Service*, 62.

offensive."[83] But appearance was more than a clean collar and a well-scrubbed face; race and

ethnicity determined the honorific value of service. No group was viewed as more fit for

restaurant service in the nineteenth century than African Americans. Evoking images of slavery,

the black waiter became a part of a restaurant's aesthetic, a physical reminder of servitude. As E.

A. Maccannon, himself an African American waiter, explained, "[P]atrons in the majority of

classes prefer colored waiters. . . [an] intelligent polished piece of ebony is just the thing needed

to give force of contrast to the marble guests and at the same time properly distinguish the

servitor from those he serves, and gives the exquisite and artistic variety of color-blending to the

splendor of the surroundings in the dining room."[84]

By the time that Maccannon was writing in 1904, however, the once secure position of

the African American waiter was under assault. Maccannon's assertions about race were, in his

words, a response to "the rapid rise of the hotel industry, within the past decade" that had led

"many hotel proprietors and managers" to wonder whether "colored waiters could not fit in

nicely into the royal splendor of the general surroundings. . ."[85] Growing racism in the post-

Reconstruction nation, the availability of low-wage immigrant labor and the increasing

identification of wealthy Americans with European aristocracy probably contributed to the

marginalization of black waiters in the North. [86] On the West Coast, Asian waiters struck an

appropriate note of servility; in New York, western Europeans, especially those with a

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[83] Ibid., 15.

[84] E. A. Maccannon, *Commanders of the Dining Room: Biographic Sketches and Portraits of Successful Head Waiters* (New York: Gwendolyn Pub. Co., 1904), 11.

[85] However, Maccannon felt confident that the recent trend away from African American waiters had been reversed. "There is, however, a very strong and general belief that many of these men have realized the fallacy of the idea . . ." Ibid. No evidence supports this claim and, in fact, the growth of the restaurant trade was quickly outstripping the number of available black waiters in cities like New York. See Mary White Ovington, *Half a Man: The Status of the Negro in New York* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1911), 78-79.

[86] Not everyone appreciated the African American waiter. Rudyard Kipling in his 1891 account of American life commented: "Now let me draw breath and curse the negro waiter and through him the negro in service generally." Kipling felt that the African American waiter was manipulative and not genuinely subservient. This attitude which appears to have been shared may have contributed to shifting trends in service. Rudyard Kipling, *American Notes* (New York: Arcadia House, 1950), 41.

continental accent, were preferred. French waiters, when available, may have been considered

the most desirable but most essential was the appropriate air of subservience.

Appearance was not the only determinant of good service in the nineteenth century. A

waiter was expected to be ever attentive to the needs of a guest but never intrusive. At most elite

establishments, each table had its own waiter who stood quietly by the table waiting (as the title

implies) to serve as needed. "[P]oliteness, obedience, and submission" were considered the "first

qualifications of a good waiter" and waiters were regularly warned never to "assume or show too

much authority over a guest [or] . . . become officious in any respect."[87]

But while the waiter had to veil his authority, he exercised tremendous power over the

success of the meal. Until the late nineteenth century, most American hotels and many

independent restaurants served *table d'hote* dinners.[88] For a fixed price, a restaurant patron was

offered a broad menu featuring up to seven or eight courses with as many as ten items for each

course. No one was expected to sample everything on the menu but there were also no formal

restrictions. The nineteenth-century diner viewed this broad bill of fare as an opportunity to

demonstrate his artistry by carefully constructing a choice dinner. The expert waiter quietly

assisted; he would subtly guide the diner, informing him of what was fresh and assisting with the

selection of appropriate wines. Expert waiters were taught to "anticipate the wants of the guests"

and a kindly waiter might even bring two or three entrees to the table allowing the diner to select

what he or she liked best.[89] If the waiter was skilled, his assistance was barely noticed and the

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[87] Cozart, *A Technical Treatise on Dining-Room Service*, 13, 83.
[88] Most hotel dining rooms used the table d'hote method of service although some also provided a "restaurant" where food was served à la carte. Independent restaurants were not as wedded to the table d'hote model of service although there was no universal rule. In most cases, the advantages a waiter might secure for a patron were no less in an à la carte restaurant.
[89] Campbell, *Hotel Keepers, Head Waiters, and Housekeepers' Guide*, 59.

aristocratic diner would claim credit for the imagination and skill he demonstrated in selecting the meal.

Elite Patronage

The European chef and the well-trained waiter endowed America's elite restaurants with an aristocratic imprimatur, but it was the continued patronage of wealthy clients that made a restaurant "aristocratic." Wealthy Americans who had established aristocratic credentials through private acts of conspicuous consumption lent their reputations to the public sphere of dining by being seen at restaurants and hotel dining rooms. Newspaper society columns anointed and publicized the restaurants of the wealthy and in time, a restaurant's reputation for attracting elite guests, no less than brick and mortar, became a part of the décor. As Ward McAllister reminded New York Society, "[t]he success of the dinner depends as much on the company as the cook."[90]

Elite restaurants understood the important role that a reputation for being popular among the social set played in their continued success. Wealth beget wealth, and carefully cultivated reputations were expected to attract wealthy patrons. In New York, "secret commissions" were sometimes paid to society men in positions to influence where aristocratic balls and other elite gatherings were held.[91] The proprietor of the Waldorf-Astoria George Boldt purportedly said: "I'd rather see Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish enjoying a cup tea in an all but empty Palm Room than a dozen lesser-known guests there feasting."[92]

Perhaps the best evidence of the symbiotic relationship between elite restaurants and their patrons appears in the obituaries of closed restaurants. No restaurant or hotel in one of

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[90] McAllister, *Society as I Have Found It*, 257.
[91] Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 217.
[92] Dearing, *The Elegant Inn*, 78.

America's major cities moved, closed or remodeled without a paean to the patrons who made it famous. Delmonico's move to Madison Square in 1876, for example, warranted recollections of some famous banquets held in its dining rooms as well as a list of recent dinners.

> For about ten years . . . society has given its dinners at Delmonico's, and among the names which have marked its annual lists of guests are Henry Wilson, Schuyler Colfax, Gen. Sherman, Rev. Dr. Hitchcock, J. Lothrop Motley, Major Gen. McDowell, Edwin P. Whipple, Judge Hoar, William Cullen Bryant, Mr. Evarts, Senator Conkling, Secretary Robeson, and Charles Sumner.[93]

Nor was this type of eulogy atypical. The closing of the Fifth Avenue Hotel in 1907 (the *Times* gently referred to its closing as the "passing of the Fifth Avenue") led to a similar tribute. In the dining room of the Fifth Avenue, *New York Times'* readers were reminded, one "met men who made and unmade Presidents and Governors and who decided political questions of highest importance."[94] The half-page story recalled dozens of dinners attended by the historical, wealthy and influential.

Such tributes were so commonplace that any association with the upper class was mentioned in a restaurant's profile. For example, the closing of The Steven's House produced a typical tribute to its aristocratic past in the pages of *The Steward* in 1918 that in many ways was typical account noting the hotel and restaurant's popularity with shipbuilding magnates. "[A]mong its guests being George Steers, builder of the famous yacht America; John Ericsson, inventor of the Monitor; John Englis, and Joseph Francis, inventor of the lifeboat bearing his name, while Commodore Vanderbilt was an occasional patron." The article's writer, however, did not hesitate to mention a famous death that had also graced the halls of The Steven's House. The tribute noted that "like every popular hostelry the Stevens House had its tragedies;" in 1858,

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[93] "Delmonico's Restaurant," *New York Times*, 14 September 1876, 8.
[94] "Passing of the Fifth Avenue Hotel About to Remove One of New York's Noted Landmarks," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 7 July 1907, 2.

"Henry William Herbert, better known as Frank Forester to three generations of lovers of healthful, open-air sports," distinguished the establishment with his self-inflicted death.[95]

CONCLUSIONS: SOCIAL DARWINISM AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

The elite restaurant of the nineteenth century, dominated as it was by the needs of the aristocrats, was never a democratic space. Through cuisine, language and service, it ensured that the best was reserved for those who imagined themselves the best. The Gilded Age was a time of celebration for America's elite. Social Darwinism and survival of the fittest justified wealth and made possible guilt-free and lavish expenditures, and luxury restaurants and hotel dining rooms flattered the egos of wealthy patrons by invoking European splendor in their menus, service and décor.[96] While their fast-paced counterparts dished beefsteaks to businessmen rushing through early evening dinners, aristocratic restaurants—led by Delmonico's in New York—offered a dining experience: a slow, multi-course meal described in French-language menus, cooked by French chefs, and served by French or African American waiters.

As locations of conspicuous consumption, restaurants served as guardians of the reputations of their elite patrons. The restaurant was charged with maintaining the proper balance between the exclusivity of aristocratic society and society's need for publicity.[97]

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[95] "The Steward" *The Steward*, April 1918, 33.

[96] On social Darwinism, see Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975).

[97] Failure to maintain the proper balance between openness and discretion could ruin a restaurant. The Brunswick Hotel, once a rival to Delmonico's, suffered irreparable damage to its reputation in 1882 when the concert hall owner Billy McGlory, posing as a "Mr. Thompson," booked a private room and arrived that night with forty-seven female concert hall girls and three male guests. The guests created havoc and the Brunswick Hotel never recovered. It closed in 1896. Michael Batterberry and Ariane Ruskin Batterberry, *On the Town in New York: The Landmark History of Eating, Drinking, and Entertainments from the American Revolution to the Food Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 156-58. Publicity entailed other risks. In 1893, Delmonico's restaurant windows were shattered when a disgruntled laborer, George Roeth, stood outside the restaurant and fired his revolver at diners in the

Middle-class patrons were never formally excluded from the aristocratic restaurant; their

presence served as a necessary foil for the wealth of the aristocrat. When Delmonico's moved to

Madison Square in 1876, the new restaurant was located on the first floor with large glass-paned

windows that overlooked the trees and flowerbeds of the square and allowed passersby to

glimpse the assembled diners.[98] And in 1893, the Waldorf Hotel (the first stage in the building

of the Waldorf-Astoria) introduced its famed Peacock Alley, a glass-lined hallway that served as

a promenade and allowed patrons to view guests as they arrived for dinner and visitors to inspect

the diners.[99] As many as twenty-five thousand might pass through the long hall on a daily basis.

The French restaurant with its European service and foreign trappings was among the

symbolic goods that distinguished the upper class from the lower classes in the nineteenth

century. As Thorsten Veblen explained it in his 1899 study of the conspicuous consumption of

the leisured class, value stemmed from the inaccessibility of an item and not its utility or beauty.

> The superior gratification derived from the use and contemplation
> of costly and supposedly beautiful products is, commonly, in great
> measure a gratification of our sense of costliness masquerading
> under the name of beauty. Our higher appreciation of the superior
> article is an appreciation of its superior honorific character, much
> more frequently than it is an unsophisticated appreciation of its
> beauty. The requirement of conspicuous wastefulness is not
> commonly present, consciously, in our canons of taste, but it is
> none the less present as a constraining norm selectively shaping
> and sustaining our sense of what is beautiful, and guiding our
> discrimination with respect to what may legitimately be approved
> as beautiful and what may not.[100]

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restaurant while screaming "Curse the rich! Curse them now and for all time." M. H. Dunlop, *Gilded City: Scandal and Sensation in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, 1st ed. (New York: W. Morrow, 2000), 201-03. And in 1897, the Bradley Martin Ball at the Waldorf-Astoria, held in the midst of an economic downturn, attracted so much negative publicity that 250 policemen had to form a protective cordon around the hotel. McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 5.

[98] Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 156-61.

[99] Dearing, *The Elegant Inn*, 78. George Boldt, the Waldof-Astoria's first proprietor, recognized the elite's interest in discrete publicity and, breaking with tradition, placed the exclusive Palm Room restaurant adjacent to the lobby. He apparently did not, however, anticipate that not only the lobby but the hall would become a place to seen and to be seen by.

[100] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Modern Library, 1934), 86.

Veblen's theory helps to make sense of the popularity of the French restaurant. French cuisine, as every nineteenth-century Boniface knew, was simply the best. It was showy, difficult to acquire and time-consuming to produce.[101] It echoed the wealth and prestige of aristocratic France and required, as we have seen, trained professions to prepare and serve. The cuisine conveyed honorific value.[102]

Command of this honorific value of the restaurant menu allowed the upper class to distinguish itself. Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, argued in *Distinction* that it is the command of cultural capital as much as economic capital that serves to differentiate one class from another. Cultural capital is knowledge, the inherited expertise in cultural matters that can be "cashed in," in much the same way that money can be spent, to achieve prestige. Cultural capital stems from one's family background, class and education. Buying a mansion on Fifth Avenue distinguished the wealthy from the middle-class New Yorker because it represented an enviable expenditure of money. But dining at Delmonico's, unselfconsciously selecting a meal, ordering in perfect French, and speaking to the waiter with the correct tone of polite condescension, also set aristocratic Americans apart from their social inferiors. Dining in public demonstrated wealthy society men and women's familiarity with the symbolic language of wealth. As Bourdieu writes:

> Knowing that 'manner' is a symbolic manifestation whose
> meaning and value depend as much on the perceivers as on the
> producer, one can see how it is that the manner of using symbolic
> goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence,
> constitutes one of the key markers of 'class' and also the ideal

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[101] See also Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 9.

[102] This "American" attitude might be contrasted with the French approach to their own cuisine. According Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson by the late nineteenth century French cuisine was identified with the nation and had lost its aristocratic associations. Ibid., 7.

weapon in strategies of distinction, that is, as Proust put it, 'the infinitely varied art of marking distances.'[103]

In the context of restaurants, mastery of French restaurant cuisine—its etiquette, language and multiple courses—helped secure the nineteenth-century American aristocracy's position within the social hierarchy and reinforced their role as cultural arbiters. Although restaurants quietly policed their patrons, reserving the best seats for those with social clout, more often than not it was the complex codes of culture that ensured only those born to wealth would feel comfortable in the restaurant. The stability of a code of fashion that stemmed from history and manners rather than something as potentially unstable as physical "taste" or as crass as money only furthered the ability of the French restaurant to distance the haves from the have nots.

The cultural distinctions that the restaurant encouraged were justified by the peculiar notions of social evolution popular in Gilded Age America. Social Darwinism held that survival of the fittest applied not only to the natural world, but to the world of man and it promulgated the belief that a racial hierarchy existed based on the superior accomplishments Western Europeans had achieved. Influenced by the theories of civilization advocated by the social Darwinists— Spencer, Carnegie and a cadre of other elite thinkers—food chroniclers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century held that "good taste" was a product of good breeding. As Abraham Hayward, Britain's most famous 19th century culinary historian wrote, there was a "hereditary quality [to] taste."[104]

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[103] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 66.

[104] Abraham Hayward, "The Art of Dining," *Current Literature*, May 1900, 219. Abraham Hayward's *The Art of Dining*, the book from which the quoted passages were excerpted in 1900, was first published in 1843—before Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* and the advent of social Darwinism. But the influential work was reprinted in both 1883 and 1899 (and the 1899 version was widely reviewed in the American press) at a time when Herbert Spencer's ideas about natural selection were being widely discussed in the United States. As the Current Literature selection suggests, the passages on heredity were particularly interesting to Americans in the late nineteenth century. See also Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste*, 31.

In an article titled "The Cultured Palate" that originally appeared in the American journal *Self Culture* in 1900, A. H. Gourand distinguished himself as one of the most ardent spokespersons for a link between high birth and gastronomic discrimination.[105] Gouraud argued that "superior taste" was "absent in most animals, and its deficiency in savages is evident from their manner of eating, their rapid swallowing, their silence and gravity, their intensity of action, and finally from the fury and fierce desire that gleams from the eye as it rests upon the food." This savage experience of food was not "yet wholly eliminated from civilization," but when the basest instincts cooperated with man's "intellectual facilities," the pleasures of the table could be fully appreciated. For Gourand, the best food offered the "highest gratification to the most cultured intelligence."[106]

Although Hayward and Gourand did not attribute the sophisticated tastes of the cultured class to a biological inheritance, their willingness to ascribe discriminating palates to an elite upbringing sanctioned those who did. M. O. Warren writing about the science of dietetics in *The Steward* in October 1903 drew a specific biological link between European cuisine and racial success.

> It is obvious that in the study of dietetic customs, those most
> widely disseminated and followed by many races and vast
> populations are of higher validity than those confined to small
> communities, and further, that the practices of the more successful
> races and the more affluent classes of a nation are more likely to
> yield good dictate models than the practices of backward races and
> poorer classes. The former have had greater freedom of choice,
> and their success in the struggle for existence is evidence of the
> suitability of their food habits. Now the British race and the other
> races of western Europe, together with their descendants in
> different parts of the globe, are, on the grounds stated, best able to
> supply us with a body of dietetic customs that may serve as a

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[105] A. H. Gouraud, "The Cultured Palate," *Current Literature*, October 1900, 452.
[106] Ibid.

model, and the salient characteristic of their diet has always and everywhere been its large proteid content. . . .[107]

Not every theorist who saw a link between class or race and what one ate embraced the scientific determinism of social Darwinism or used scientific study to justify inequality. Progressive food reformers; from the Harvard-educated pioneer in dietary studies, Albert J. Bellows, to the Wesleyan University chemist who founded modern nutrition, W. O. Atwater, preached that "the man who is engaged in physical labor needs much of the fuel producing food."[108] But these early investigators into the science of eating saw class differences in food consumption as a product of physical exertion, not cultivated tastes. The popular understanding of nutrition, however, blurred the distinction. Carl Benson appealed to a more primitive understanding of the science of eating in a letter on French cooking he wrote to the editors of the *New York Times* in 1873.

> The man with an iron constitution, who has passed the greater part of the day in manual labor, or hunting or shooting, may eat the same dinner month and month, but those not able to up the like account of Spartan sauce require variety, and here the French art comes in.[109]

Benson's understanding of the relationship between culture and cuisine, closer to the theories of social Darwinism than nutritional theory, were shared by those who served the American aristocracy. Ward McAllister's suggestion to the planners of the 1893 Chicago World Fair that they import French chefs stemmed not only from eastern snobbery, but also the deep-seeded belief that the wealthy, if not biologically ordained to eat fancy food, were at least culturally disposed towards *foie gras*.

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[107] M. O. Warren, "The Basis of Dietetics," *The Steward* 3, no. 7 (1903): 23. Warren went on to argue that the development of Japanese society had been severely retarded until the recent adoption of meats by vegetarianism.
[108] On Bellows, see Albert J. Bellows, *Philosophy of Eating*, Revised and Enlarged ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1870). On Atwater (and the source of the quote), see "A Curious Experiment," *What to Eat* 3, no. 2 (1897): 44.
[109] Carl Benson, "French Cooking," *New York Times*, 24 April 1873, 4.

> In these modern days, society cannot get along without French chefs. The man who has been accustomed to delicate fillets of beef, terrapin, pâté de foie gras, truffled turkey and things of that sort would not care to sit down to a boiled leg of mutton dinner with turnips. . . . One paper says it is evidently my opinion that cultivated society is one in which the entertainment of the stomach is perfectly understood. That is a sound maxim.[110]

And McAllister's ideas, if controversial at the time, were nonetheless widely embraced. Dr. Stephen Smith Burt, the house physician at the upper-crust Hotel Astor in New York, evidenced his belief in a social Darwinism of dining in comments he made to a reporter in 1905. Dr. Burt, misrepresenting studies that had demonstrated the relationship between exercise and calories, asserted that the quality of a man's steak should reflect the work he performed.

> [A] working man, one who is employed out of doors at hard manual labor, needs rugged food—something upon which his digestive organs can work for a protracted period. Give such a man a delicate tenderloin steak for luncheon and he would become faint before the day ended, simply because it is too easily digested—for him. But, as it is an ill wind that blows nobody good, poverty is often a blessing in disguise, since people in very moderate circumstances are not heirs to the ailments which haunt and afflict the highly prosperous. On the same line of reasoning, high prices are frequently a means of deterring people from overeating.[111]

Ideas of distinction enshrined in theories of social Darwinism—the belief that certain classes through nature or nurture were superior—seemed to justify the exclusion of workingmen, including many in the middle classes, from the elite dining rooms of the Hotel Astor.[112] The aristocrat was born and bred with the sensitivity and taste necessary to appreciate an exquisite meal, a French croquette or a delicate steak; other classes were not. The cultural differences that had been constructed by the restaurant and its aristocratic patrons became, in the hands of

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[110] Dedmon, *Fabulous Chicago*, 225.

[111] William Griffith, "The New Yorker and His Dinner," *New York Times*, 26 March 1905, III1.

[112] Of course not every spokesperson for the hereditary nature of the culinary arts was as clear or as absolute as Dr. Burt. See "Carver Like Poets, Born and Not Made," *New York Times*, 13 December 1908, VI6.

pseudoscience, biological barriers that transformed simple differences in taste and experience into concrete and insurmountable social barriers.

Conspicuous consumption undermined early nineteenth century ideals of equality. It thrived on distinction and exclusion and the aristocratic restaurant, with its elaborate cuisine and complex etiquette, served as the guardian of aristocratic privilege. In doing so, restaurants helped to shape a cultural aristocracy: an elite corps of diners who set the standard for what constituted a proper and respectable dinner in the Gilded Age.

Chapter 3: PLAYING AT "MAKE BELIEVE": THE FAILURE OF IMITATION

> The Stevens House, at the end of the row, was the original
> "Delmonico's." It is said that years ago an elderly foreigner and
> his son, strangers in New York, went into this place for dinner. It
> looked very plain and simple from the outside, and they were
> unsuspicious of the bill which their appetites were piling up.
> When the reckoning time came it was like the day of judgment.
> Five dollars and seventy cents was demanded. The strangers
> stormed, threatened, expostulated and begged; but the bill of fare,
> which they had not used in ordering, was the waiter's unfailing
> defense. They paid with heavy hearts and glowering brows.
> "Fader," said the son, when they reached the street. "Fader, will
> not God punish dot man for his exdortion?"—"Psh!" my son.
> "Sh!" was the reply. "He has punished him alretty. I've got his
> silver spoons in mine pocket!"[1]

This story, recounted in Frank Moss's popular 1897 history of New York, would have garnered a

chuckle from many in the middle class who like the young boy felt "exdorted." The elite French

restaurant was operated for the convenience of the aristocratic elite. Its food and service, while

attainable, were unfamiliar and intimidating to middle-class Americans that lacked the breeding

and training, the cultural capital, of America's elites. Rapid economic expansion in the late

nineteenth century had propelled a new urban middle class into the public sphere, but they feared

they would remain second-class citizens in the world of consumption. At first, facing few

options, they sought to imitate the wealthy, but when imitation failed, the middle-class

Americans came to reject the codes of etiquette and standards of taste that the aristocrats had

championed.

In the nineteenth century, the new industries of the industrial revolution produced not

only once unimaginable wealth, but also the cadre of clerks, salespeople, professionals, lawyers,

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[1] Frank Moss, *The American Metropolis: From Knickerbocker Days to the Present Time* (New York: P. F. Collier, 1897), 104.

managers and administrators needed to organize the burgeoning economy. Few of these employees could imagine, as perhaps their parents had, owning their own industrial or commercial enterprises, yet their jobs were secure and their prospects—owning a home, hiring a maid, sending their children to college—were good. They went to work in white collars, were comfortable enough to purchase luxury items and take vacations, and their wives and children did not work. Some were the children of immigrants not unlike the "fader" in Frank Moss's story. Most lived in cities where corporate headquarters were beginning to reach towards the sky.

These men and women strove for social recognition. Many in this emerging class of professionals and managers envisioned themselves as not so unlike the wealthier folks who employed them and lived in the largest homes in their cities. To the best of their ability, they imitated the upper class, hoarding their resources to purchase the best china or to attend the opera. Yet the possibilities of imitation were limited. Wealth offered too many advantages for those who had it; not only were the upper crust able to afford more but, in the late nineteenth century, the rich began to consume conspicuously, eviscerating older notions of republican equality. Few in the nascent middle classes could compete and the period from 1870 to 1920 is replete with cautionary tales about those who tried and failed.

The economic disparity between the managers and the owners of modern industry bred cultural disparities. Not only were the nascent middle classes unable to afford the luxuries of their wealthy neighbors, they failed to acquire the cultural capital of wealth. Without a French chef to cook dinners, they had not learned the intricacies of the French menu. Without yearly trips to Paris, they were slow to adopt the most fashionable dresses or the latest fad in a series of ever changing manners. Distanced from the wealthy by money and what it could purchase—

private estates, vacations in Newport, access to exclusive clubs—middle-class Americans found it increasing impossible to imitate the aristocratic class. The middle classes' failure to master the cultural capital of the aristocratic elite, including the intricacies of restaurant-going, eventually led to frustration and a quiet rejection of the European trappings of wealth. In time, this frustration gave birth to a new middle class and the transformation of dining culture.

THE NEW MIDDLE CLASSES

The industrial expansion that the United States underwent following the Civil War expanded the economic and structural base for the middle class.[2] Early in the nineteenth century, artisans, lawyers, ministers and merchants constituted America's first substantial, urban middle class. This middle class, as a whole, owned their own enterprises and did not do manual labor.[3] For those in urban America, industrialization eroded the old middle class's position in society. While some merchants succeeded by turning small factories and mercantile establishments into larger competitive firms, others found the growth of big business threatened their livelihood. Yet as the economy grew it also created new opportunities for well-educated managers and professionals. These benefactors of the industrial revolution—urban, white-collar men and women with middling salaries—were the catalysts for the formation of new middle classes in the late nineteenth century.

Little historical research on the occupations and incomes of the middle classes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century exists, at least in part because few historians accept that

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[2] Between 1869 and 1919, the valued added by manufacturing to products made in the United States from 1.4 billion to 24 billion dollars and the per capita GNP rose from 223 dollars to 683 dollars. Mansel G. Blackford, *A History of Small Business in America*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 43-44.
[3] For a much more nuanced description than is provided here, see Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, 68-78.

these imprecise measurements offer an accurate picture of middle-class status.[4] Income data is

not consistently available for the period of this study and it is at best an awkward measure of the

middle classes. Income might be supplemented, hidden or squandered; real income must

account for familial contributions, the vicissitudes of contract work and successful and

unsuccessful investments. Income, for example, can not determine the class of a member of the

labor aristocracy whose specific income might rival a mid-level clerk in a department store, but

whose workplace relationships and conditions cause him to identify more closely with the

working class. And when these occupational snapshots are viewed over a period of time, they

become even flimsier indicators of class.[5] A clerk in the 19th century, Richard Ohmann argues,

was often second in charge of a business and might someday own a shop of his own, while a

clerk in the twentieth century was more often counter help or a secretary holding a low-paying

job with little opportunity for advancement and little job security.[6] A job did not guarantee one's

social standing in perpetuity. In Booth Tarkington's *Alice Adams*, the protagonist's ridiculous

scheming is precipitated by the desperation the family of a middle-class department store clerk

feels as his job loses its prestige.[7] These qualitative accounts have been born out by sociologists

studying twentieth-century survey data. Richard Hamilton's examination of survey data on

1950s white-collar workers, for example, demonstrates that more than half these workers viewed

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[4] Bledstein and Johnston, *The Middling Sorts*, 18. Stearns, "The Middle Class: Toward a Precise Definition," 384-5. See also, Archer and Blau, "Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: The Case of the Middle Class."; Nugent, "Tocqueville, Marx and American Class Structure."; Ohmann, *Selling Culture*.
[5] Archer and Blau, "Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: The Case of the Middle Class," 22.
[6] Ohmann, *Selling Culture*, 119.
[7] Tarkington, *Alice Adams*.

themselves as working class.[8] Other studies, most notoriously the 1940 *Fortune* magazine study, have also found that a middle-class identity is seldom a simple reflection of the job one holds.[9]

Further, professionalization in some occupations, particularly the middle-class professions, led to significant differences in income and prestige that translated into different performances of class. A country doctor, for example, might consider himself local gentry; an urban doctor hired by a large hospital might see himself as a member of the middle class; and a self-described doctor in an immigrant community with little or no formal medical training might consider himself as working class (as seems to be the case with Frank Norris's McTeague, a dentist).[10] And not only were occupational lines between middle-class and working-class Americans blurred, but the lines between wealthy and middle-class Americans were also blurred. Although the practice decreased in the early twentieth century, wealthy capitalists often held white-collar jobs as lawyers and brokers. It was their property and stock holdings that made them "wealthy."

Class categorization based on income, although perhaps a more reliable indicator of who belonged to the middle class than occupation, is also a faulty predictor of class at the turn of the century. In 1900, a unionized male factory worker might earn over 900 dollars a year, more than the average annual salaries of employees in such typical middle-class occupations as health service, state and local government, public schools, and the retail trade, and nearly as much as

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[8] Richard F. Hamilton, "The Marginal Middle Class: A Reconsideration," *American Sociological Review* 31, no. 2 (1966): 195 n. 14.

[9] "The Fortune Survey," *Fortune*, February 1940, 14. See also Norval D. Glenn and Jon P. Alston, "Cultural Distances among Occupational Categories," *American Sociological Review* 33, no. 3 (1968).

[10] Frank Norris, *Mcteague: A Story of San Francisco* (New York: Doubleday & McClure, 1899). Empirical efforts to assign cultural difference to occupation categories, although suggesting some correlations, have also been less than conclusive (possibly, in part, because such distinctions diminished in the twentieth century when these studies were done). Nonetheless, the studies suggest the folly in using occupations to describe class when class is used to explain cultural difference. See, for example Alston, "Cultural Distances among Occupational Categories."

federal civilian employees or clerical workers in the manufacturing and transportation sectors.[11]

And individual income did not reflect a family's resources or lifestyle. John Modell, for

example, discovered that Irish immigrants in nineteenth-century Massachusetts constructed

middle-class standards of living by sending wives and children to work.[12] Luck and lifestyle—

inheritance, investments, credit, lottery winnings, number of children, drinking habits and a host

of other variables too numerous to count—also determined the real income of a family.

Historians' failure to find an accurate scale with which to use income and occupation to

measure class also accurately reflected the lack of middle-class cohesion in the 1870s and 1880s.

As neither the owners of capital nor as exploited workers, the new managers and professionals

initially found little with which to discover shared markers of class along occupational or income

lines.[13] Scattershot efforts at professional organization (from the American Medical Association

to Harvard alumni organizations) were not only limited to the few, but also served memberships

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[11] Derks, *The Value of a Dollar*, 63.

[12] Model, "Patterns of Consumption, Acculturation, and Family Income Strategies in Late Nineteenth-Century America."

[13] Any discussion of the material basis of the middle class brings the researcher back to Marx. Although it is not the intent of this study to offer a comprehensive theory of class, it is impossible to discuss the middle class without offering some observations on classical Marxism. Marx, after all, argued that the bourgeois, once victorious in its revolution against the hereditary aristocracy, would splinter into two groups. The more successful would become the owners of capital. Their efforts to consolidate capital, however, would drive the less successful of the bourgeoisie, the petit bourgeois, to bankruptcy and an acknowledgement that they shared a common fate with the proletariat. The middle class, in other words, would cease to exist.

The persistence of middle classes across capitalist societies suggests Marx's assessment was flawed. It is, however, possible to reconcile Marx's bourgeois revolution with an examination of the middle class that argues that class consciousness for the middle class is by-product of consumption. If Marx's assumption (and, despite the extensive review of class history in *Capital*, it is largely an assumption) that the bourgeois revolution was solely about controlling the means of production is modified, the subsequent history is clearer. If the bourgeois revolution was multi-causal, a revolution for control of both the means of production and access to consumption, then the splintering of the bourgeoisie into an elite class (still occupied, in part by consumption as Veblen argues) and a middle class cut off from significant ownership of capital but able to consume, Marx's historical timeline (if not his theoretical model) is preserved. Some recent scholarship on France suggests that the French bourgeoisie prior to the Revolution were becoming consumers and identifying themselves through consumption. See for example Colin Jones, "The Great Chain of Buying: Medical Advertisements, the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and the Origins of the French Revolution," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 1 (1996). or Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant*. For a provocative discussion of the importance of "enjoyable property" to Americans, see Nugent, "Tocqueville, Marx and American Class Structure."

too diverse to be considered the source of a class consciousness.[14] But economic indicators of

class were not the only markers of class cohesion to be disrupted by urbanization and industrial

growth. The sanctity of the home, the cultural foundation of the middle classes, was also

challenged. Urbanization not only shrank the size of the city dwellers' homes but pushed many

in the middle class into the suburbs where maintaining the extended family and even entertaining

became more difficult. Certainly mass-marketed books and magazines inserted new ideas of

being middle class into the increasingly insular home, but the performance of class roles (and I

would argue the construction of class identity) increasingly happened in public spaces in urban

centers where the middle classes lacked their own institutions.[15]

If these factors tell us little about what constitutes class, viewed in aggregate they serve

as indicators of the growth of the material base of the middle class at the turn of the century. [16]

Real daily wages (adjusted for inflation) nearly doubled between 1860 and 1914, increasing by

more than twenty-five percent in the 1890s alone.[17] Real wages increased in the late nineteenth

century and these increases were, in part, a product of the emergence of a larger number of

salaried workers. The professions, as P. K. Whelpton argued in 1926 using census data, doubled

(when adjusted for increases in the population) between 1820 and 1920.[18] In addition, between

1880 and 1920 alone the number of managerial occupations in the United States grew from

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[14] For a fuller discussion of organizational class, see the introduction. For the opposing argument, see Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism*; Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*.

[15] For a discussion of the Victorian home, see Stevenson, *The Victorian Homefront*, 60.

[16] Post Civil War industrial growth was accompanied by a change in management and a restructuring of the labor force. By 1917, four-fifths of the larges 236 manufacturing firms in the United States employed some form of "management system based upon departmentized corporate offices." Blackford, *A History of Small Business in America*, 46. See also Alfred Dupont Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977).

[17] Due to available data, these studies are based primarily on incomes in manufacturing. Clarence Dickerson Long and the National Bureau of Economic Research, *Wages and Earnings in the United States*, 60-61; Albert Rees, *Real Wages in Manufacturing, 1890-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 5.

[18] P. K. Whelpton, "Occupatonal Groups in the United States, 1820-1920," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 21, no. 155 (1926): 336. Whelpton reclassified jobs according to common sense categories so to match twentieth century categories with earlier census reports.

161,000 to approximately 1 million, an increase from 1.1% to 2.6% of the population.[19] And

their numbers continued to grow. David Montgomery notes that in only ten years, from 1910 to

1920, the number of white-collar managers in manufacturing, mining and transportation

increased by 66.3 percent as compared to a mere 27.7 percent increase in the number of wage

earners.[20] And the number of male clerks, just one occupational group that composed the new

white-collar workforce, rose three hundred percent from 1880 to 1900, substantially outpacing

overall increases in the labor force.[21] Meanwhile, less direct measures of middle-class growth

from the rise of the suburbs and increasing home ownership to increases in the size of the

government workforce, all suggest that more and more Americans had the time and money

necessary to enjoy a moderately well-off life.[22] The workday was shortened and leisure time,

especially for those in the nascent middle classes, rose dramatically.[23] In all, between ten and

twenty percent of Americans were probably situated in the middle class at the turn of the

century.[24]

These material advances made possible the emergence of a modern middle class,

however vaguely defined. The sons and daughters of the early nineteenth-century

entrepreneurial middle class, beneficiaries of both the cultural legacy of the middle class (that

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[19] Blackford, *A History of Small Business in America*, 46-47. For additional figures on the size of the middle class, see Ohmann, *Selling Culture*, 119.

[20] David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 216. Montgomery drew his statistics from Jacob Benjamin Salutsky Hardman, *American Labor Dynamics in the Light of Post-War Developments* (New York: Harcourt, 1928), 60.   For additional statistics on the rise of the middle class, see Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism*, 35-39, 45; Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1992), 29, 64.

[21] Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service*, 18-9.

[22] On suburbs, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). On consumption, see Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*. On government jobs, see Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service*.

[23] Gilkeson, *Middle-Class Providence*, 109.

[24] Richard Ohmann estimates the middle class constituted about twelve percent of the population in 1910. Ohmann, *Selling Culture*, 119. Michael McGerr, drawing on a 1932 study by F. W. Taussig and C. S. Joslyn as well as U. S. Bureau of the Census figures, estimates the middle class made up twenty percent of the population at the turn of the century. McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 43.

Stuart Blumin has identified) and, often, of higher education, would in time discover themselves through acts of consumption.[25] So would growing numbers of immigrant children who achieved financial success. For these Americans, shopping, seeking entertainments, and dining out would with time generate class cohesion. The collective economic power of the middle classes transformed public spaces into places where the middling folk might recognize themselves as a class.

In 1870, however, the dining culture of the American city showed little evidence of the the dominant role that the emergent middle class would assume. Fashionable restaurants, most in hotels, catered specifically to the tastes of the elite. Other than these aristocratic restaurants, there were few options for "respectable" middle-class families. A few lunch places offered quick meals to hungry businessmen and travelers, but the urban landscape was dominated by saloons, oyster venders and establishments too seedy for many respectable businessmen and unquestionably off-limits for their wives and family. Not surprising, as they entered the new public sphere of the modern city, the middle classes grasped at the nearly unattainable respectability that elite restaurants and hotels promised and to most observers it would have appeared that the fledgling middle-class Americans of the early Gilded Age seemed more intent on mimicking the rich than in defining themselves. Only when the their efforts at imitation failed, did middle-class Americans begin to create the markers of their own class identity and start to recognize themselves as a group with a distinct class identity.

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[25] For a parallel argument in which the author argues that the middle class shaped culture, rather than were shaped by culture, see Stevenson, *The Victorian Homefront*.

CULT AND CULTURE OF IMITATION

The aristocratic restaurant was theoretically open to all; French menus, aristocratic reputations and ostentatious decorations were the only barriers faced by the neophyte restaurant patron. But the exclusiveness of the upper-class restaurant was never in doubt. Exclusivity was sustained by an informal system of discrimination embedded in the requirements of cash and culture that made if difficult for those who were neither rich nor intimately familiar with the intricacies of dining in a restaurant to feel comfortable. The middle classes were rarely barred from dining in aristocratic restaurants, but the middle class were clearly second-class consumers, imitators in a restaurant culture that exposed their lack of economic and cultural capital.

Elite culture had not always been so exclusive. In the small-city intimacy of the early nineteenth century, the upper and the middle classes were residential neighbors who shared streets, markets and restaurants. Distinctions certainly existed, but a strong republican culture suppressed ostentatious displays of wealth while promising that the separation between the hard-working middle-class merchant and the hard-working upper-class merchant was traversable. Great fortunes, a product of the explosive industrial expansion following the Civil War, were accompanied by great acts of conspicuous consumption that broadened the divide between the merchant and the millionaire. The rise of the French restaurant was one indication of a growing disparity between the urban middle classes and the elites.

Yet even as the wealthy purchased larger homes and entertained on a grander and grander scale, the restaurant—unlike the urban men's club—remained a titularly public space in which elites and the middle classes might mingle. The public nature of the restaurant served the interests of aristocratic Americans. Dixon Wecter, an early historian of America's aristocratic class, argued that the "assimilation of plutocracy to aristocracy has been the vital problem of

Society in America since its beginnings, but particularly since the rise of great industrial fortunes."[26] Public spaces where the classes could mingle, places such as the restaurant, made social reproduction possible. In the restaurant, the nouveau riche auditioned for inclusion in the city's social register.

Few had the money or connections necessary to be embraced by wealthy society. But genuine social mobility was less important than the appearance of social mobility. The public nature of the restaurant served a vital social purpose by promising, disingenuously, that class hierarchies were permeable. In inviting middle-class urbanites to seek membership in the elite, the restaurant sustained the hegemonic culture. The restaurant's open door encouraged the middle classes to accept the rules and etiquette of elite culture and to believe that those who were allowed to dine had not been selected by arbitrary rules but by the superiority of their business acumen and their social graces.

In the imagination of the nation, the French restaurant was the pinnacle of public dining.[27] For some in the middle class, the opportunity to eat in one of these elite restaurants was evidence that they had attained social acceptance. An 1888 article first published in the *New York Telegram* recounted the story of a young man who invested his money in clothes, "dine[d] conspicuously at first-class restaurants at least once a month," and spent his free time in the lobby of expensive hotels. Although he lived in a boarding house, he kept this information from his acquaintances and employers hoping that if they saw him in expensive hotels they would assume he came from money. "My income is only $1,200 a year, yet people think my income five times that amount; consequently I am sought after. . . . By and by I am invited to dinner, and

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[26] Wecter, *The Saga of American Society*, 108-09.
[27] Joanne Finkelstein, *Dining Out: A Sociology of Modern Manners* (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

I get acquainted with the ladies of the family. My promotion to an important position follows."[28]

Ward McAllister, long before he had established his reputation as the majordomo of dining in

New York, gave a dinner for Commodore Vanderbilt at the New York Hotel. The carefully

chosen meal was an attempt to ingratiate himself with elite New York and he was clearly

gratified by the comment of the hotel's manager: "My young friend, if you go on giving such

dinners as these you need have no fear of planting your self in this city."[29] Seduced by the

prospect of social advancement, the social-climbing middle class, for a time, embraced the

French restaurant and its cuisine expecting that imitation was not mere flattery, but a roadmap to

social acceptance.

For those aspiring to eat like the wealthy, knowledgeable guides offered assistance.

Arthur M. Schlesinger estimated that before the Civil War an average of three new etiquette

guides were published each year and that following the war, as both the fledgling middle classes

and the publishing industry boomed, between five and six new publications were released

annually.[30] Another scholar has identified over 200 etiquette guides published in the United

States before 1900.[31] And etiquette books were only one source of advice on manners and

dining in the Gilded Age; articles on how to map out the social landscape were the bread and

butter of dozens of nineteenth-century magazines and newspapers.[32]

Etiquette guides promised the ambitious middle-class family that they might acquire,

through careful study, the subtle codes of dress, etiquette and behavior that set the elite apart

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[28] "Appearances Are Everything," *Washington Post*, 9 July 1888, 7. A single man living in New York with a substantial salary of over $1000, the fellow would have been considered comfortably middle class.
[29] McAllister, *Society as I Have Found It*, 78.
[30] Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Learning How to Behave: A Historical Study of Social Etiquette Books*. (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 18, 34 as quoted in Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*, 44. As Kasson notes, Schlesinger's numbers were avowedly incomplete (although he defined the genre liberally including all advice manuals). Schlesinger's post-Civil War estimates span 1870 to 1917.
[31] Mary Reed Bobbit, "A Bibliography of Etiquette Books Published in America Before 1900." *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 51 (December 1947): 687-720 as referenced in Kasson, Rudeness & Civility, 265.
[32] Ohmann, *Selling Culture*, 231-33.

from the parvenu. "Behind endless manuals of etiquette and blue books of behavior, scrapbooks

of culture and outlines of knowledge, and all the nostalgia for European titles as well as Old

Masters," Dixon Wecter wrote, "lies the aspiration of a rising middle class attempting to seize,

even by casual symbols, upon some guiding wisdom, upon the art of being rich gracefully, which

Americans are accused of lacking."[33] Abby Buchanan Longstreet, while conceding the

advantages of birth, stated in her 1883 guide to etiquette that "[e]legant manners should not be

considered beneath the attention of any man or any woman. They will carry a stranger further up

the heights of social ambition than money, mental culture, or personal beauty. Combine

elegance of manner with thoughtfulness and any other of the three powers, and the world is

vanquished."[34]

Although the etiquette manual addressed a dizzying array of subjects—"[o]ne could learn

to act, build, calculate, carve, cook, dance, draw, dye, and so forth through an alphabet of

attainments"—how to dine was a significant concern of most.[35] In many etiquette books and in

myriad articles, middle-class women could learn how to set a table for dinner, arrange flowers,

manage servants, purchase china and select entrees while middle-class men might learn how to

dress, which fork to use, how to read a menu and what to order when purchasing on a budget.

The advice varied from the pedestrian to the obsessive. Clara L. Cousine, in the 1894 *Columbia*

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[33] Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*, 43; Wecter, *The Saga of American Society*, 108-09. John Kasson argued that etiquette guides promised that "[w]ith the proper drive, knowledge, and success, an individual or family might climb the social ladder to new heights. Though the path to the summit rose precipitously and was guarded by jealous watchdogs of the upper class, middle-class members might nonetheless emulate some of its forms and manners." Kasson's assessment of these etiquette guides is rather inconsistent. In places he argues that the guides offered the middle class a means of accessing upper class culture (43), in other places he suggests that advice manuals popularized middle class notions of behavior and dress (121), and in still other places he suggests that civility was viewed as leveling class differences (2110. Kasson's analysis is not strictly chronological; however, his work does suggest that etiquette guides were, during the nineteenth century, evolving from instruction to the middle to instruction among the middle class.
[34] Abby Buchanan Longstreet, *Social Etiquette of New York* (New York: D. Appleton, 1883), Microform.
[35] Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*, 43.

Ideal Account Book, addressed both "manners for company" and "what is observed in every-day life" with a concise, practical list of rules:

> Good table manners demand that one shall take soup from the side
> of the spoon; shall eat with a fork, rather than a knife; shall take
> small mouthfuls of food and masticate quietly, making no
> unpleasant sound; shall take in the fingers no food except fruits,
> confectionery, olives, bread, cake, celery, etc., and that the
> members of the family shall be as polite to each other as to any
> guest. Where people rush through their meals there is not much
> chance for table manners or good digestion."[36]

Homey domestic advice, however, was the exception and typically appeared in guides that addressed a rural audience. More common and more exacting were the guides written for the ambitious urban social climber. The *Bazar Book of Decorum* published in 1870 advised dinner-givers not to invite "more than the Muses [nine], or less than the Graces [three]" to dinner and in an effort to condemn ostentation suggested a hostess should serve an "ordinary French dinner."[37] The recommended menu, simplified for the "sovereign people of a republic," consisted of "soup, salmon and peas, a pair of boiled chickens, and a roast joint, with the various vegetables, followed by a good pudding or tarts, and the usual knickackeries of confectionery." If a brace of partridges or a pair of canvas-back ducks and a salad could be added, the "banquet will be one which ought to satisfy the most exacting of guests in this democratic country."[38]

Perhaps because public dining was relatively new (and etiquette guides were hopelessly committed to time-honored rules), restaurants received only passing attention in many of the guides. In a few of the most urbane guides where specific advice on restaurants, chaperones and public manners appeared, the rules governing public dining, while modeled on home etiquette,

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[36] Clara L. Cousine, *The Columbia Ideal Account Book* (Chicago, Ill.: Columbia Publisher, 1894), Microform.
[37] Robert Tomes, *The Bazar Book of Decorum. The Care of the Person, Manners, Etiquette and Ceremonials* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1870), Microform.
[38] Ibid.

were often more exacting. [39] As the author of the *Bazar Book,* Robert Tomes, noted that attention to the rules of etiquette was even more important if the event was catered by a restaurateur since the host, freed of material concerns, was expected to have more time to focus on manners and civility.[40]

After warning that the formal opera and theatre party might "belong peculiarly to the province of the wealthy," Abby Longstreet in *The Social Etiquette of New York* laid out a complex set of rules for hosts and guests alike.[41] A woman invited to a restaurant party had to be accompanied by a chaperon and a waiting-woman. The chaperone stayed for the gathering; the waiting woman was expected to return home and then only reappear when the party was over. Following the dinner, the guest had to pay a visit to her chaperone to thank the person while, if the host was a bachelor, he was obliged to pay a visit to his guest's home in order to thank "mother and daughter . . . for the honor and pleasure he has received from his lady-guests."[42] All this, in addition to the table manners expected of a guest at any formal dinner.

While the "blue books of behavior" were slow to address the growing trend of entertaining in restaurants, middle-class magazines and urban newspapers were quick to fill the gap offering specific advice on navigating menus and behaving courteously. Culinary magazines such as *What to Eat* and *Table Talk*, although often unsympathetic to aristocratic restaurant culture, published menus and recipes authored by renowned chefs, detailed dictionaries of

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[39] The transfer of private manners to public restaurants followed the development of the aristocratic restaurant. In an 1869 guide, Sarah Annie Frost warned against treating the home waiter as one would a restaurant waiter, assuming that the only waiter her readers would be familiar with were those who worked in quick lunch establishments. "If you want anything, take the occasion of a waiter being near to you, to ask for it in an undertone. To shout out 'Waiter!' or order one about, as if you were in a restaurant, is a certain mark of ill-breeding." S. Annie Frost, *Frost's Laws and by-Laws of American Society: A Condensed but Thorough Treatise on Etiquette and Its Usages in America, Containing Plain and Reliable Directions for Deportment in Every Situation in Life* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1869), 59.

[40] Tomes, *The Bazar Book of Decorum. The Care of the Person, Manners, Etiquette and Ceremonials.*

[41] Longstreet, *Social Etiquette of New York.*

[42] Ibid.

French terms and lists of rules for public dining. *What to Eat's* Paris correspondent, Frank Tryon

Charles, offered typical advice in an 1897 series titled "Don'ts for the Table." [43]

> Don't pronounce MENU "may-nu," but "men-ue."
>
> Don't pronounce the A long in "A LA."
>
> Don't cross the knives and forks.
>
> Don't use butter at dinner, except with cheese.
>
> Don't use the same knife for more than one course.
>
> Don't use the same fork for more than one course.
>
> Don't use a spoon for ices or ice-cream.
>
> Don't serve peas, beans, cauliflower, etc., with meat.
>
> Don't eat sugar with salad. [44]

Such lists offered a blueprint for social interaction, instructing the urban middle class on how to

behave in a formal, aristocratic restaurant. [45] Memorize a few rules, demonstrate some common

sense, and the wall between the middle classes and the aristocracy would fall.

Still more practical advice was offered by newspapers. In two *New York Times* articles

published in 1897 and 1906, the *Times* presented suggestions on choosing a restaurant, selecting

from a large and varied French menu, and managing the costs of eating out. Both articles were

addressed to the aspiring young men seeking to entertain women friends, both assumed the

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[43] Frank Tryon Charles, "Don'ts for the Table," *What to Eat*, February 1897, 164. Charles' Francophile celebration of Parisian culture were often at odds with the journal's general hostility to aristocratic society. Living in Paris, however, his articles epitomized the aristocratic attitude towards France and French food and offered the middle class a glimpse at elite culture. In a piece titled "Why I Prefer Paris" he argued that Paris was superior to New York because France's culinary capital cared more about food than America's. "Because quality is preferred to quantity; Because the butter is fresh, never salted; Because the French know how to cook, and cook knowingly; Because good cooking adds happiness." Frank Tryon Charles, "Why I Prefer Paris," *What to Eat*, June 1901, 203. Tellingly, Charles also noted (while conceding some of New York's advantages) that it was in Paris that one "[C]an be acquainted with counts, dukes, etc., without bragging about it. . ." Frank Tryon Charles, "Paris Vs. New York," *What to Eat*, June 1899, 14.

[44] Charles, "Don'ts for the Table," 164.

[45] The term aristocrat as used here is significant. As Susan Williams observed, "[T]he model for etiquette conventions has in fact traditionally been the aristocracy, and reference to an aristoacy among Americans meant reference to Europe." Williams and Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum., *Savory Suppers & Fashionable Feasts*, 24. Williams also notes that as the middle class imitated, the upper class became more exclusive in order to maintain distinctions.

reader was unfamiliar with the workings of an elite restaurant, and both made it clear that it was

preferable to eat a "dainty" feast at an established aristocratic restaurant than a more substantial meal at a lower class establishment.

Published in 1897, "Cheap and Dainty Feast" promised to show a young gentleman how he might invite "two young women" and "their escorts, a chaperon and himself" to dinner without the bill surpassing twenty dollars. This strange date, six people in all, was possible, the newspaper assured readers, if the young man planned carefully, "abjure[d] wine altogether," and consulted the menu in advance so that he would be able to "cultivate the study of arithmetic as well as the tastes of the prospective guests."[46] To assist the neophyte gastronome, the *Times* provided a selection of suggested menus: three from Delmonico's and three from the Waldorf. The

shortest of the menus presented six courses, the longest offered nine, and while the actual menus

in these restaurants were in French, the *Times'* recommendations were printed "almost entirely in

English."[47]

DELMONICO MENU, C
From "Cheap and Dainty Feasts,"

Blue Points [Oysters], six orders at 25 cents … $1.50

SOUP
Chicken Gumbo, three orders at 60 cents. . . 1.80

FISH
Sea bass, shrimp sauce, three orders at 65 cents . . . 1.95

SIDE DISHES
Olives, pickles, celery . . . 1.50

ROAST
Sirloin beef with fritadelles, three orders at 75 cents . . . 2.25

VEGETABLES
Spinach, three orders at 40 cents . . . 1.20
Potatoes duchesse, three orders at 30 cents . . . 90

GAME
Quail, larded, three orders at 75 cents . . . 2.25

SALADS
Watercress, three orders at 40 cents . . . 1.20

DESSERT
Biscuit glace, six orders at 25 cents . . . 1.50
Nuts and raisins, three orders at 25 cents . . . 75
Assorted cakes, two order at 25 cents . . . 50
Cheese, gorgonzola, two orders at 30 cents . . . 60
Coffee, French, six orders at 15 cents . . . 90

WAITER . . . $1.20

TOTAL: $20.00

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[46] "Cheap and Dainty Feast," *New York Times*, 17 October 1897, X6.
[47] Ibid.

Less than a decade later, with the etiquette of dating and dining in flux, the *Times* once again proposed to open the doors of the aristocratic restaurant to the middle-class romantic. "Covers for Two: A Gastronomic Study" was addressed to the young man seeking to impress a date with a fancy dinner. Once again, the *Times* offered a step-to-step guide to when, how and what to order at a "smart" New York restaurant with select menus and prices from three of the city's most fashionable restaurants: Delmonico's, the Café Martin, and the Hotel Astor. This time, reflecting changes in dating rituals, the chaperones and escorts were left at home.

Fortunately for New York's young suitors, not only would they not have to pay for the chaperones, but "fashions in eating [had] changed very much within five years" and women "afraid of becoming corpulent" now "abstain[ed] from many things which they like." As a result, in 1906 a "very good little dinner" could be purchased for between ten and twenty dollars (although, curiously, all three of the newspaper's recommended dinners costing over twenty dollars).[48]

"Covers for Two" offered a variety of practical tips for the uninitiated diner. Middle-class readers were told that it is "bad form at a dinner in a private house to have these refreshers [cocktails] served, and more than bad form to partake of them at restaurants."[49] They were instructed to order a "clear soup rather than a puree or a thick one" and a glass of sherry, preferably Xeres, as a compliment to the soup. Likewise, the author suggested that "if you desire to appear to have a correct judgment of wines you should order a bottle of red Burgundy" with the roast rather than the common choice, champagne.[50] Culinary terms such as timbale were defined and the *Times* also provided information on the mechanics of dining out. Readers were reminded to dress formally for dinner, were prepared for the dinnerware they might expect to see

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[48] "'Covers for Two': A Gastronomic Study," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 2 September 1906, 2.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

at some of the better restaurants ("The Astor and Rector's have peculiar shapes designed for them . . ."), and were instructed that seven in the evening was the ideal time for a meal (unless you are going to the theater afterward).

"Cheap and Dainty Feast" and "Covers for Two" were not written for the sons of aristocratic families who had been initiated in restaurant culture at the Patriarch's or the French Chef's Ball or had learned the basics of gourmet cooking (or at least, eating) from their family's private chef. Their audience was the rising class of new urban professionals with the money and leisure time to go out for an occasional dinner. The names and locations of the city's best restaurants were noted and the author led the reader painstakingly through each course offering tips on proper manners and culinary fashion. Like the etiquette books and instructional magazine articles, these newspaper columns sought to provide enough information that middle-class urbanites might feel comfortable joining aristocratic diners in the city's best restaurants.

Nonetheless, a young middle-class diner would certainly have to be clever, self-assured and suave to put these plans into action, even with the *Times* providing the menus. Savings were largely accomplished by ordering few dishes, dividing them among the diners and giving the waiter a mere six percent tip. In "Dainty Feasts," for example, the young gentleman is instructed to order a full six servings of such sundries as "oysters, coffee and one or two other things," and otherwise to share portions among the guests. All of this would have to be accomplished without appearing cheap and, in contrast to the menus reprinted in the newspaper, the actual ordering would have to be done in French.[51] Acknowledging these potential difficulties, the author of "Dainty Feasts" made mention of acceptable table d'hôte dinners (where the menu was fixed) that might be found at some of the less expensive hotels in New York, but the newspaper gave

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[51] "Cheap and Dainty Feast," X6. Dinner portions were large and it was not unusual to share orders. However, one imagines it must have been considerably easier to share the three portions of beef fritadelles than the three orders of larded quail.

only passing attention to these and advised against the "progressive" dinner where guests might go to Delmonico's or the Waldorf for appetizers and then to a French or Italian table d'hôte for dinner. ". . . [T]he young man referred to would undoubtedly feel embarrassed if he were obliged to take his guests from the Waldorf or Delminico's . . ."[52]

Nonetheless, by systematically detailing the obstacles a middle-class diner faced, "Dainty Feasts" and "Covers for Two" promised that anyone—at least anyone who read *The New York Times*—might succeed in ordering a dinner in a fine restaurant. Follow our advice, the newspaper columnist suggested, and you will "demonstrate that you are not only generous, but likewise you are an epicure and that you know the ropes."[53] But ordering a single meal to impress a date was not the same as social acceptance. For the few, these etiquette guides and newspaper advice columns may have provided the blueprint for social advancement, but the majority of middle-class Americans would never achieve either the financial success or the social grace demanded by the elite restaurant. In practice, the assurances of social inclusion offered by these guides were never to be taken too seriously. Their purpose was not to increase the size of the upper class, but to win the middle classes' acquiescence to the hegemony of upper-class culture. Often written by members of the upper middle or aristocratic class (or those trying to feign membership in the elite), these books celebrated the trappings of European society that wealthy Americans had adopted as their emblems and, in doing so, they sought to preserve those trappings as marks of civility and success.[54]

Many middle-class Americans—certainly not all, possibly not most—sought a place in high society by modeling themselves after their social betters. In urban hotels and vacation resorts, middle-class Americans thrust themselves into the world of the aristocratic restaurant

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[52] Ibid.
[53] "'Covers for Two': A Gastronomic Study," 2.
[54] Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*, 48.

where they imitated aristocratic manners and experienced the elite splendors of the nineteenth century restaurant in the hope that they might be seen in the company of wealth and by association begin the upward climb into society. Yet it quickly became clear to many in the middle classes that true access to elite culture was impossible. Lacking the necessary funds and the required cultural capital, the middle class faced the likelihood of remaining second-class consumers in a world where what one ate mattered.

"ORDINARY MORTALS": THE FAILURE OF IMITATION

Despite the advice manuals, by the turn of the century, many in the urban middle class had failed to breach high society. While the middle classes, spurred by industrial growth and corporate consolidation, continued to grow, the same economic forces were widening the economic gap between the upper and middle classes. In 1860, the richest one percent of society controlled twenty-nine percent of the nation's wealth. By 1912, the first date for which economic data allows comparison, the richest one percent had increased its share of the nation's wealth to fifty-six percent.[55] As Americans became aware of the growing concentration of wealth, illusions of social mobility and republican equality were threatened. As James Huston argues in *Securing the Fruits of Labor*, it was generally believed in the first part of the nineteenth

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[55] Huston, *Securing the Fruits of Labor*, 83 (Table 1). Since income taxes were not collected, data on the distribution of wealth in the late nineteenth century is scarce. Williamson and Lindert (one of Huston's sources for the data cited above) argue that inequality probably increased around 1900 after a period of relative "quiescence." Jeffrey G. Williamson and Peter H. Lindert, *American Inequality: A Macroeconomic History*, *Institute for Research on Poverty Monograph Series* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 77. Notably, they also argue (by examining payroll changes) that the urban middle class may have begun to distance themselves from skilled labor around 1896. Williamson and Lindert, *American Inequality*, 82. However, comparisons between the consolidation of wealth by the top one percent and the top ten percent suggest that even as those below the most wealthy made progress, they did so at a slower rate. While the top ten percent of the nation increased its holdings from seventy percent to ninety percent, much of that increase would have been attributable to the more than fifty percent increase in wealth held by the top one percent. The top ten percent would not, generally, include the middle class, it is suggestive of their relative advancement. The relatively sketchy data available suggests the importance of taking a more cultural tack when looking at wealth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

century that a free and open market was the best guarantor of egalitarianism, but by the

Progressive Era the illusion of emergent equality had become impossible to maintain.

> Whereas before one had to hunt for expressions about the
> distribution of wealth in political speeches on mundane problems
> and seek for short paragraphs in weighty tomes, now the periodical
> press erupted with articles devoted solely to the question of wealth
> distribution. Unlike earlier years, when discussion of American
> wealth distribution was usually a signal for self-congratulations,
> the articles and speeches appearing in the 1880s and 1890s were
> lamentations.[56]

For urbanites, evidence of the growing economic power of the upper class—and the

growing distance between the upper and middle classes—abounded. The wealthy built new

mansions in New York, Chicago and San Francisco, and trips to Europe replaced trips to

Saratoga. Society columns publicized exclusive balls and elaborate dinners held behind closed

doors. For middle-class Americans, this growing disparity of wealth belied the promise of

etiquette guides and made it increasing difficult to believe that the mere imitation of social codes

of etiquette and behavior would provide entry into the circles of social power in America's cities.

Michael Kammen contends that the 1870s marked a turning point in which elites began to

exclude the masses from "high culture."[57] In New York, for example, the establishment of the

Patriarch's Ball (1872), the publication of the Social Register (1887), and Ward McAllister's list

of the four hundred society families of New York marked an effort to establish clear lines

between old money, new money and the hopeless parvenu (1888).[58] These efforts at establishing

class hierarchies (even if only intended to manage class distinctions within the wealthy class)

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[56] Huston, *Securing the Fruits of Labor*, 344.

[57] Michael G. Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 29. See alsoBushman, *The Refinement of America*, 419-20.

[58] McAllister claimed that New York society was made up of four hundred in an 1888 interview with the *New York Tribune*. However, the number (often attributed to the size of Mrs. Caroline Astor's ballroom) represented the optimal number of guests that could be accommodated at Delmonico's and appears to have been set by 1880. "Fashion at Delmonico's: The Gay Season Opened by the Patriarchs," *New York Times*, 21 December 1880, 2. See also Stuyvesant Fish's comments in Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 215.

narrowed the opportunities for informal contacts between elites and the middle classes.[59] The

restaurant, if only because it was open to all, was the cynosure of middle-class frustration with

the limits of their social advancement. No daily reader of the newspaper could fail to notice the

lavish parties and extravagant banquets that the wealthy held and contrast these events with the

staid businessman's banquet.

Lavish displays of conspicuous consumption drew the wrath of some in the fledgling

middle classes, but more importantly they made apparent the limits of emulation and imitation;

the earnest efforts of many in the middle class to gain mastery of the conventions of the

aristocratic restaurant had largely failed. Imitation had not transformed the middle classes nor

had the social registers swelled to accommodate every middle-class aspirant who used a fork to

eat ice cream.

Imitation of elite restaurant culture failed as strategy of class advancement for two

inextricable reasons. First, despite their collective wealth as a class, individual middle-class

families found it difficult to afford the costly dinners of elite restaurants. Second, no degree of

study could overcome the deficient cultural capital of the middle classes. Imitation assumed a

fluidity of class that was unrealistic in the late nineteenth century.

Economics of Dining

The aristocratic restaurant was public, but it was not inexpensive. While collectively the

large and growing middle classes were a significant economic force credited by contemporary

economists with the consumer credit necessary to keep American business viable, individual

members of the middle classes lacked the financial resources to share equally in elite urban

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[59] The Social Register had precursors in American Queen (1879), The List (1880) and The Season (1883). Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 11.

pleasures. While a middle-class couple might dine at Delmonico's every few months, they would never be regular patrons.

"Cheap and Dainty Feast" and "Covers for Two" promised to reduce the cost of eating at a restaurant, but the economies such articles recommended could not make Delmonico's, Sherry's and the Waldorf affordable for most middle-class Americans. A twenty-dollar dinner— possible only if the diners shared single orders, under tipped and avoided alcohol—was still beyond the means of most in the urban middle class.

The *Times'* "frugal" dinner for six, priced at twenty dollars in 1897, would cost in 1990 dollars about $326 or $54 per diner.[60] The dinner proposed in "Covers for Two" in 1906 would cost **$276** in 1990 dollars, or about $138 a person--both princely sums.[61] Although consumer price indexes are not a perfect measure of the real prices of dinners, neither "cheap" menu was all that cheap. The average weekly salary (nationally) of clerical workers in the manufacturing and railroad sectors in 1900 was $19.44. The average weekly salary of civilian employees of the federal government was $18.08. The average weekly salary of those employed in finance, insurance or real estate was $20.00. And these were highly paid members of the middle classes. Wholesale and retail trade workers earned only $9.77 a week while public school teachers earned

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[60] Calculations utilize John J. McCusker's historical price index. The index is constructed from commodity prices and, as McClusker warns, "is better considered as hypothetical rather than as definitive." The commodity index McClusker uses is not based on restaurant prices and therefore can only serve as a rough approximation of the effects of price inflation. It is useful to remember that food prices, a product of growing costs, transportation costs, storage and preparation costs, are volatile and fluctuate according to weather, technological innovation and world demand. No simple "calculator" can accurately reflect price inflation in restaurants. John J. McCusker and American Antiquarian Society, *How Much Is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1992), 313. However, other "inflation calculators" produce similar results. S. Morgan Freidman's online "Inflation Calculator" calculates that "what cost $20 in 1897 would cost $297.92 in 1990." This site (http://www.westegg.com/inflation/) uses the Consumer Price Index statistics from Historical Statistics of the United States (USGPO, 1975) and the annual Statistical Abstracts of the United States as the basis of its calculations. S. Morgan Freidman, "Inflation Calculator." 2000. In http://www.westegg.com/inflation/ (accessed August 8, 2001).
[61] Freidman, "Inflation Calculator."

$6.31.[62] The scion of a wealthy manufacturing family might have managed to take a date to one of New York's elite restaurants in 1897 or 1906 and have felt frugal spending only twenty dollars, but for the middle-class clerk it amounted to at least a week's salary. Few in the middle classes could afford such an expense on a regular basis.[63]

A letter to the *New York Times* in 1908 made explicit the expense of dining out. Writing in 1908, H. Schuyler compared the cost of a meal for five at a restaurant to the cost of a similar meal at home. Schuyler did not specify what type of restaurant he chose except to say that he was "not dealing with the 'highest price restaurant,'" but he offered an item by item cost comparison of a menu consisting of cocktails, oysters, soup, chicken, peas, potato gratin, celery, cranberry sauce, lettuce, French ice cream, coffee, cheese, wine, liquor and cigars. The restaurant meal (including the cost of tipping the waiter) came to a total of $24.30; the home meal (including the cost of fuel and other sundries) cost $10.45.[64] Eating at home, even without calculating the costs of incidental expenses—transportation, clothing, jewelry—cost less than half of what it cost to dine at one of the better-class restaurants.

The high cost of dining not only discouraged middle-class diners from eating at aristocratic restaurants, it curtailed their experience on the occasions they did eat out. Frugal

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[62] Derks, *The Value of a Dollar*, 53. Annual salaries have been divided by 52 to produce weekly salaries. In some cases, most notably school teachers, this assumes the annual pay was for fifty-two weeks of work when it may have been for less and there would have been opportunities for additional income. Derks provides "selected incomes" for some occupations based on newspaper advertisements. These are consistent with the national data quoted. For example, a "business representative" position was advertised in the *New York Times* in 1903 for $18 a week; a bookkeeper/stenographer position was advertised in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1902 for $20 a week.

[63] There were less expensive restaurants but even these would strain a middle-class budget. Table d'hôte restaurants—often located a few blocks from their more famous rivals—offered relatively inexpensive multi-course dinners with an orchestra and wine for anywhere from twenty-five cents to, at most, a dollar and a half. In 1897, American Queen magazine held a contest asking readers to submit household menus that might meet a lower middle class budget. Miss M. W. Glidden, a public school teacher from Minnesota, submitted a seven-day menu that included breakfasts, lunches and multi-course dinners (including a first-course appetizer, an entrée, a vegetable dish, dessert and coffee or tea) that would cost a family of five no more than ten dollars a week. ["Ten Dollars a Week for a Family of Five," *What to Eat*, October 1897, 86.] While Miss Glidden's menu was exceptionally frugal, it makes clear the sacrifices necessary for the middle class to dine at Delmonico's or a less expensive imitator.

[64] H. Schuyler, "Home Versus Restaurant Dining," *New York Times*, 10 February 1908, 8.

diners found that the prices of some items on the menu prohibited indulgence. As the *New York Times* reported in 1904, "many thousands of men, not rich, not poor, earning a fair competency" found the prices at better restaurants made it impossible to order a complete meal. "When the average all-the-year-round patron of hotels or restaurants goes into a place of the better class he finds nowadays that unless he wishes to be extravagant he must deny himself strawberries; more than one vegetable for dinner is out the question, too. . . . Of course, if a man can't have strawberries for breakfast he isn't gong to cry about it; but that is merely one item by way of illustration. There are many others."[65] Clever diners might try to shave costs by ordering a single portion and sharing it, but restaurants discouraged more than two from sharing a single order and only a seasoned restaurant-goer was likely to be so bold as to defy such dicta.[66]

Penny-pinching patrons also faced the likelihood of poor service and inferior food— especially if they left the six percent tips recommended in "Cheap and Dainty Feasts." The quality of service depended upon establishing a relationship with a waiter and nurturing that relationship over the course of many visits to the restaurant. Experienced waiters "sized up" patrons and reserved the best food and service for those who promised a big tip.

> The bill of fare is handed you by the waiter. You order from it,
> and give the waiter instructions as to the way you wish it cooked
> and served. If the waiter sizes you up as a good TIP, you may get
> your desires. If he thinks otherwise, you may even, before he takes
> the order to the kitchen, be told, We are out of this or that to day;
> and you inwardly register a kick about the bill of fare and its
> maker. [67] [All punctuation in the original.]

Given the obstacles that the cost of dinner posed and the few rewards that the adventurous middle-class diner could expect, it is not surprising that the middle classes retreated

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[65] Adolph Klauber, "Woes of the Well-to-Do," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 5 June 1904, 5.

[66] "Restaurant Prices," *New York Times*, 1 February 1908, 8.

[67] Charles Fellows, *The Menu Maker: Suggestions for Selecting and Arranging Menus for Hotels and Restaurants, with Object of Changing from Day to Day to Give Continuous Variety of Foods in Season* (Chicago: Hotel Monthly Press, 1910), 57.

from the aristocratic restaurant. Contemporary observers—those few who considered class—

noted how rare it was in the late nineteenth century for any one other than the wealthiest to eat at

"swell" restaurants. As Elizabeth Tompkins observed in 1889:

> Swell places like Demonico's and the Brunswick are mainly for
> the pretentious and exclusive fashionables, who go there more for
> the sake of being seen there by their friends than for the sake of
> their stomachs. In these places can always be seen a sprinkling of
> strangers, who are taking in the town and who don't mind paying
> the extortionate prices just once, in order to tell what the famous
> places look like then they get home.
>
> Show places, like the Hoffman House, of course attract
> their attention also, and count among the regulars the fast set
> whose wine bill makes the rest of their bill appear an insignificant
> trifle.
>
> These fancy-priced places are only favored by occasional
> visits from ordinary mortals, however.[68]

Ordinary mortals, try as they might, could not easily transform themselves into self-assured

aristocrats.

Cultural Capital on Display

> The self-assured aristocrat—who can most readily be distinguished
> from the arrivist by the nonchalance with which he invites the
> world in general to go to hell—has passed beyond the servility of
> regarding wealth as the measure of success. Rich enough to take it
> for granted, or else poor enough to ignore it, he under no
> circumstances crooks the knee.
>
> Dixon Wecter, *The Saga of American Society*, 1937 [69]

The self-assurance that Dixon Wecter attributed to the aristocratic class in the United

States was not shared by the middle classes. For the fledgling middle-class diner, selecting

which fork to use, ordering a dinner in French or choosing the correct wine to drink with a beef

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[68] Elizabeth Tompkins, "A Dinner with Wine: Scenes in the Popular Public Eating Places of New York,"
Washington Post, 15 September 1889, 9.
[69] Wecter, *The Saga of American Society*, 7.

entrée required study and practice. Etiquette book writer Abbey Longstreet believed, naturally

enough, that manners could be learned, but she acknowledged that the social graces that came

naturally to the rich could only be imitated by the less refined.

> An intimate acquaintance with the refined customs and highest
> tones of society insures harmony in its conduct, while ignorance of
> them inevitably produces discords and confusion. Fortunate are
> those who were born in an atmosphere of intelligent refinement,
> because mistakes to them are almost impossible. They know no
> other way than the right one in the management of their social
> affairs.
>
> As to the unfortunates who have been reared at remote
> distances from the centres of civilization, there is nothing left for
> them to do but to make a careful study of unquestionable authority
> in those matters of etiquette which prevail among the most refined
> people. High breeding may be imitated, and a gentle courtesy of
> manner may be acquired through the same process by which other
> accomplishment is perfected.[70]

Other etiquette guides were more circumspect but offered a similar message. When Clara

Cousine told readers that "[i]f the father and mother be so unfortunate as not to have had proper

training themselves, they should study to correct any bad habits they may have, for the sake of

their children," she inadvertently conceded that the process of inculcating aristocratic behavior

was a generational undertaking and not a quick-cure for a middle-class social aspirant.[71]

Cultural capital could not be garnered overnight.

Subtle suggestions that the social order was impermeable did not prevent the fledgling

middle-class urbanite from trying to imitate the manners of the wealthy, but by the Progressive

Era his efforts were increasingly being viewed as foolhardy. Dozens of novels in the late

nineteenth century and early twentieth century served as warnings about social climbing. In

William Dean Howell's 1885 *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, the Lapham family's efforts to

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[70] Longstreet, *Social Etiquette of New York*.
[71] Cousine, *The Columbia Ideal Account Book*.

ingratiate themselves with Boston's wealthy aristocrats, despite their considerable wealth, earn

them little more than pity. In Edith Wharton's 1905 *House of Mirth*, a young woman's search

for a place within society leads to her death. In David Graham Phillips 1917 *Susan Lennox: Her*

Fall and Rise, financial success comes only at the expense of middle-class moral rectitude.[72] In

Booth Tarkington's 1921 *Alice Adams*, the Adams' sacrifice their dignity and their economic

security in a disastrous pursuit of respectability. In Theodore Dreiser's 1925 *American Tragedy*,

the protagonist's desperate pursuit of a distant relative's wealth leads to murder and

imprisonment. If not every tale focused explicitly on the middle classes, the message was

nonetheless clear: aspiring to live beyond one's station leads to failure and tragedy.

Nor were accounts of the perils of social climbing limited to works of the literati; they

also appeared routinely in stories and travel accounts published in popular magazines. Thyra

Samter Winslow's "When We Get in With Nice People" published in the *American Mercury* was

typical of stories that appeared in the popular press. Winslow was a journeyman magazine

author with hundreds of stories published in *Smart Set*, *Cosmopolitan* and the *New Yorker*.

"When We Get in With Nice People" is the story of a young couple, Laurence and Irene Turner,

who turn their backs on Camden, Illinois where there was "no one here to go with who is our

sort" and move to New York.[73] Laurence is a financial success in New York and with each

economic advancement the couple move to a more prosperous neighborhood and frequent more

prosperous restaurants—from delicatessens to table d'hotes to "the smartest and one of the most

expensive places in town."[74] But despite their best efforts, they remain outsiders, too focused on

social advancement to form genuine relationships, and unnoticed by the elites they seek to

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[72] Dreiser, *An American Tragedy*; Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*; David Graham Phillips, *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise* (D. Appleton and Company, 1917) In http://ibiblio.org/gutenberg/etext96/lenox10.txt (accessed October 2002); Tarkington, *Alice Adams*; Wharton, *The House of Mirth*.
[73] T. S. Winslow, "When We Get in with Nice People," *American Mercury*, October 1925, 173.
[74] Ibid., 182.

befriend. Winslow's tale, a sort of reverse Horatio Alger story, is both a warning about urban

America and a cautionary tale for the urban middle class. Modest financial success did not

promise social acceptance.

More explicit warnings about the foolishness of emulating the wealthy appeared in

nonfiction accounts of travel. Traveling offered the middle-class opportunities to escape their

local castes and experience the anonymity of consumer culture. Public dining was a potential

moment of transgression, an opportunity to test one's social standing. Accounts of travel,

however, regularly included warnings for those who might seek to escape their class. In a 1910

article for the culinary journal *Table Talk*, Hilda Richmond wrote about how easy it was to spot

the social climber.

> One of the most amusing things about going away from home is
> the study of people who try to "put it on" to use an expressive bit
> of Western slang. The instant they enter a [railroad] car they make
> themselves felt, and it is impossible not to see and hear them. . . .
> Often to know the talkers is to get the impression that they are
> playing the old game of "Make Believe" indulged in by little
> children.[75]

To illustrate her point she recounted stories of inexperienced diners who tried to fake a high-

class upbringing. In one, a "sensible couple, who always got much amusement out of every

journey, listened to the accounts of a young man just ahead of them as he told of the hotels at

which he had stopped." At first glance, the young man appeared gentlemanly, a seasoned

traveler with a taste for the finest. "He rolled off the delicacies served at the various famous

hostelries together with the prices in a way to convince the most skeptical, and lamented that the

service in dining cars was beastly. In fact it was impossible to get decent food outside a few

exclusive hotels of the state, and going away from them was a hardship refined travelers could

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[75] Hilda Richmond, "One Amusing Feature of Journeying," *Table Talk*, September 1910, 478.

hardly endure." Yet a week later, the young man's web of lies unraveled. Dining in a "modest

restaurant in a large city, where expensive hotels abounded to care for the wants of wealthy

tourists," the "sensible couple" are only mildly surprised to see the young man, "who had almost

starved on board the train because he could find nothing to which he had been accustomed," was

seated at a nearby table. "He ordered a dinner for about thirty-five cents from the bill of fare,

and ate as if he enjoyed it, much to the amusement of the couple who had listed to his complaints

a week before."[76]

The young man in Hilda Richmond's story was discovered by accident, but most social

climbers were quickly identified. Helen Bruce Wallace observed in 1911 that dinner was a

particularly dangerous moment for the upstart.

> Some women are chronic abusers of the food. They will sit at a
> hotel table and growl in loud tones at the cooking, make
> unnecessary demands on the waiter's time and ostentatiously send
> dishes from the table. Naturally they are disliked and get poor
> service while they are terribly mortifying to the rest of their party.
>
> The disgusted onlooker never fails to wonder if that woman
> is not "very plain" and used to miserable cooking at home. She
> who is accustomed to a good table rarely is loud in complaint of
> her food in traveling.[77]

For Richmond and Wallace, such grotesque acts of social climbing not only betrayed the

parvenu's lack of cultural capital, but offered a warning for others who might pretend to be

something they were not. Wallace's advice to the middle classes was to accept their class status.

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[76] Ibid. Richard felt that few social aspirants were as clever as the young man and was at pains to note how easy it
was to spot the pretender. In another of her stories the protagonists bluff is immediately recognized. "Recently a
young woman in a dining car complained loudly that there were no salads on the bill of fare. After making various
remarks to her husband loud enough to include the people at three tables about the stupidity of having no salads, and
how impossible it was for her to make a meal without this necessary dish, she called the busy waiter and inquired if
he could not get up one for her especial benefit. . . . It is safe to say that the young woman who could not exist
without salad . . . [is] not quite so important in the [town] in which [she lives], as [she] would like others to
imagine."

[77] Helen Bruce Wallace, "The Summer Gadder and Her Ways," *Table Talk*, July 1911, 385.

And those others who go places and do things they actually dislike because they think it "the thing." They come home worn out, have had a miserable time and no one thinks any more of them than if they had been unfashionable and gratified their own tastes.[78]

THE MIDDLE CLASSES SPEAK

The cult and culture of imitation was short-lived. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the middle classes quietly began to distance themselves from elites by patronizing and colonizing restaurants that did not cater to aristocratic pretensions. This rebellion, a subtle, economic and cultural process, was accompanied by protests against how the wealthy dined. While this discourse of discontent (with origins in the early nineteenth century) never reached a fever pitch, it demonstrates the simmering resentment that the middle classes felt towards the aristocratic elite that had excluded them from social advancement.

Concerns about the nation's diet and condemnations of how the wealthy ate date back to the food reformers of the early nineteenth century. These early advocates of simplifying the American diet drew upon religion and pseudoscience to condemn extravagant lifestyles. But in the post-Civil War period, the moral crusaders were joined by food reformers whose science, if only in its infancy, provided their social critique with authority.

A graduate of Harvard's medical school, Dio Lewis was a food reformer, an early and influential advocate of physical exercise, and a founder of the Temperance Movement. Like many spokespersons for the early Progressive movement, Lewis was deeply suspicious of worldly pursuits. In *Talks About People's Stomachs* published in 1870, Lewis drew a link between dyspepsia and wealth that would become a standard refrain of the critics of the

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[78] Ibid.

aristocratic table. Lewis believed that it was as difficult for a rich man to live a healthy life as it

was for the biblical camel to make it through the eye of the needle.

> Look at those two men. They are the ordinary pale, round-shouldered Americans. To-day they have nothing but their naked hands, and brave hearts. They engage in the struggle for success. One gives up body and soul to making money, the other, a generous part of his life, to laying up this inestimable wealth of health. Ten years elapse; now we look at them again.
>
> The greedy merchant counts his gold by the million; but he is twenty years older than when we saw him first. He is thinner and paler; he is dyspeptic, nervous, anxious, old, thoroughly unhappy. That man has made a wretched failure in life. Every large heart sincerely pities him.
>
> Now we look at the other. Erect, broad-chested, muscular, vigorous, healthy, happy, buoyant, victorious. We will not trouble ourselves to ask how much money he has collected. We cannot look upon him without feeling that he has achieved a grand triumph.[79]

Lewis' antagonism towards the greedy merchant would become, in the following decades, hardly

exceptional. As an 1873 article in *New York Times* coyly made clear, the hearty delicious food

of the middle classes was not for the dainty, dyspeptic wealthy who had ruined their appetites

dining in elite restaurants.

> To the wealthy who can afford to pay any sum for their lunches, it generally happens that a hearty appetite is wanting. The man whose name is worth millions, and to whom Delmonico or Sutherland would be only too happy to extend unlimited credit, is usually obliged to content himself with a hard biscuit and a glass of sherry.[80]

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[79] Lewis, *Talks About People's Stomachs*, 18-19.
[80] "German Restaurants," *New York Times*, 19 January 1873, 5.

And a cartoon from the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* in 1913 provided a similar parable.

In the cartoon, a stocky, spectacled man in a dinner jacket and tie stands along side an unshaven hobo in a battered hat. Both are looking longingly through the window of a restaurant. The caption read: "Two Things Interfere with the Enjoyment of Food, Too Much Money and Too Little."[81]

"Two Things Interfere With the Enjoyment of Food, Too Much Money and Too Little."

Figure 2: "Two Things Interfere With the Enjoyment of Food, Too Much Money and Too Little," 1913 (*New York Times*)

Citing dyspepsia and gout, critics of the rich diets of America's wealthiest citizens offered a broad critique of class differences that favored the sensible diets of the middle classes. These advocates for dietary reform were joined with a popular condemnation of the foreign dining habits of the rich. Europeanized luxury not only distanced the middle-class American—both financially and philosophically—from the aristocrat, it sparked condemnation.

"Foreign fixins," as one New York journal termed French sauces, were the most common target of middle-class frustration.[82] A letter written to the *New York Times* in 1880 expressed the anger many felt about the growing trend in restaurants to exclusively serve French dishes instead of the hodgepodge of English, French and American foods that had graced the early nineteenth century table.

> Can't you inveigh against the stereotyped form of dinner? It was
> not so in former times, but now when I dine out I am pretty sure to
> have the same things served me over and over again. An
> American dinner 20 years ago used to be a happy *mélange* of an
> English and French cuisine, with just that much of American

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[81] "The Romance and Reality of New York's Restaurants," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 23 November 1913, 9.

[82] "Editorial," *The Cook: A Weekly Handbook o Domestic Culinary Art for All Housekeepers*, 30 March 1885, 8.

cookery as gave it originality; but alas! Now it is *toujour perdrix*
[sic]. . . . The American cuisine has really no distinctive character,
and hence its charm.[83]

Likewise, editors of *The Cook*, a short-lived journal that catered to New York's housewives in

the 1880s, were insulted by an 1885 article in the British *Pall Mall Gazette* and responded with

an article condemning the French chef. The *Gazette's* flattering article on New York's

Delmonico's claimed "the two most remarkable bits of scenery in the States are undoubtedly

Delmonico's and the Yosemite Valley, and the former place has done more to promote good

feeling between England and America than anything else in this country." The editors of *The

Cooks* magazine treated the compliment as an affront. "[T]here is much truth in the statement

that our luxuries are toothsome, but the very last place to procure these dainties cooked to

perfection is in the average first-class restaurant," the editors fumed. The French chefs employed

in these elite restaurants, they continued, did not understand "the simplicity with which our

dainties should be cooked." In fact, the typical Parisian chef "insist[s] on serving terrapin

drowned in sauce so highly seasoned that all the terrapin flavor is lost." For *The Cook*, no matter

how good the sauce, such obvious catering to the aristocratic palate was out of place in the

United States.[84]

Explicit criticisms of the aristocratic restaurant became more common as the nineteenth

century closed. *What to Eat*, a national culinary journal founded in 1896 by the pure food

advocate Paul Pierce, regularly championed middle-class Progressive reforms and showed little

patience for the ostentations of the aristocratic restaurant (even as it reprinted recipes from

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[83] "An Unhappy Diner-Out: Some of the Complaints and Some of the Remedies," *New York Times*, 7 March 1880, 9.
[84] "The Cook," 8.

restaurants like Delmonico's).[85] An essay by H. C. Chatfield-Taylor in the inaugural issue of the

journal set the tone for editorials that would follow. Chatfield-Taylor was not middle class. The

author and publicist, a denizen of Chicago's gastronomic clubs, was reputed to be a millionaire

and his influence over Chicago fashions had been compared to Ward McAlister's in New York.[86]

However, his 1896 essay "The Philosophy of Gastronomy," published in a magazine favored by

middle-class readers, was a stinging attack on aristocratic eating and the growing prevalence of

French cuisine in America.

"Nations," H. C. Chatfield-Taylor argued, "that live to eat, judging by the world's

history, are invariably degenerate."[87] Although the United States had been founded by "practical

and morose" Puritans (with a fondness for pie, Chatfield-Taylor incongruously noted), recent

history suggested that the United Sates had, at its peril, turned away from its Puritan culinary

heritage. The trouble, Chatfield-Taylor asserted, was that wealthy Americans harbored a

fondness for the decadent food of the French.

> In the meantime, great fortunes began to be amassed and the East,
> as the center of great fortunes, became the center of luxury. People
> had both time and money for pleasure and demand for French
> cooks was incited. With the advent of French cooks came the
> downfall of Puritanism, for the cities of the East are now given
> over to the pleasures of France, where cooking reigns supreme.
> Slowly but surely the country is coming under the gastronomic
> sway of the Gaul. To one who surveys the situation, it is full of
> foreboding. . . The church sociable and pie still hold sway over
> large portions of the country, but when they disappear, as they
> must before the triumphant march of the French cook, will our
> national degenerate? Wealth breeds idleness, idleness begets

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[85] At this time, I have found little about Paul Pierce. He used *What to Eat* to promote the Pure Food movement and eventually organized the St. Louis Exposition's Pure Food booth, one of the first events to bring together the diverse forces fighting for pure food. Before that he seems to have been involved in various "pure food shows" in Minneapolis and an exhibit at the fair in Buffalo. Lorine Swainston Goodwin, *The Pure Food, Drink, and Drug Crusaders, 1879-1914* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1999); "The Pure Food Show," *What to Eat*, April 1898, 234.
[86] The handsome Hobert C. Chatfield-Taylor was a well-known and wealthy Chicago gourmet who, along with other "epicures and artists," frequented Chicago's famous St. Hubert's café. For more on Chatfield-Taylor, see "Artibur of the Elegancies," *Newark Daily Advocate*, 1 July 1893, 2.
[87] H. C. Chatfield-Taylor, "The Philosophy of Gastronomy," *What to Eat*, August 1896, 3.

> luxury, and luxury incites vice. . . . Will the modern American,
> with his brown stone [sic] palace and French cook, command as
> much respect [as the Puritan]? He has money to give perfect
> dinners and his children may have the taste, but one doubts
> whether the national character will be as good and sterling as it
> was in the days when Americans ate to live.[88]

Despite the rhetorical flourishes, Chatfield-Taylor was careful to point out that he was not calling

for a return to "the swarthy frontiersman who dines on pork and beans off a tin plate."[89]

Chatfield-Taylor respected the man who ordered a smart dinner, but he lamented the economic

constraints that insured that only a millionaire could eat well and he ridiculed the intemperate

rich. He applauded the diner who "stud[ied] the effect of his viands upon the palate, in

additional to the effects of colour and light,"[90] but he deplored the French chefs who placed

luxury before quality. In a refrain that also served as the motto for the new magazine, Chatfield-

Taylor insisted that Americans must eat to live, not live to eat.

Chatfield-Taylor was an unlikely spokesperson for the middle-class diner, but he was

soon joined by other opponents of the aristocratic restaurant. Donald G. Ross proposed "A

Sensible Plea for American Food and American Cooking" in the pages of *What to Eat* in 1897.

Ross lambasted the "privileged class who have been 'abroad'" and "the imitators of foreign

habits and appetites who have not been abroad" for preferring the "'a la mode' preparations" of

the French to the plainer, more flavorful food of the American.[91] French dishes and their

linguistic disguises, the hallmarks of the aristocratic restaurant, were for Ross destroying

America's culinary legacy. "We find such delicate foods distributed by all manner of harrowing

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[88] Ibid., 4.
[89] Ibid., 3.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Donald G. Ross, "Food Luxuries of America," *What to Eat*, December 1897, 169.

seasonings and 'patois' titles, that not only successfully disguise the plain American name, but their first virtue—the flavor."[92]

Other complaints, each focused on a particular peeve but all contributing to the same broad attack on aristocratic dining and French cuisine, appeared in a variety of newspapers and magazines in the following decades. Edith L. Russell, with patriotic vigor and middle-class sensibility, wrote to *What to Eat* in 1897 to complain that restaurants were no longer serving pies. She chided the "two or three New York hotels [that] have forbidden the word 'pie' to appear on their bills of fare, simply because the abuse of the American pie 'is English, you know.'"[93] Five years later, Dora Morell argued that while "all the world concedes French cookery to be the best," the American in Paris was "unnourished and half fed." "There are many excellent dishes to be found in France," Morell wrote, "but fewer than are known in the United States, and the experience of one who has tried both is that the cooks in country places of the United States surpass those in corresponding sections of France, and that the men and women of the former are taller, heavier and stronger would seem to prove they are as well fed in this country, maligned of its own children, as in that other whose reputation for excellence in food is equally undeserved."[94] Her patriotic zeal was echoed in 1909 article in the restaurant journal the *Steward*. "La Billie," the culinary journal's European correspondent, asserted that the "utter lack of originality and the deadly repetition in the cooking all over Europe is incredible to one accustomed to the various cuisines of America."[95]

Nor were these complaints limited to the cooking journals and the newspaper food columns. An unlikely 1914 article in *Field and Stream*, for example, employed a stock-

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Edith L. Russell, "A Plea for the Pie," *What to Eat*, August 1897, 32.
[94] Dora M. Morrell, "French Cookery," *What to Eat*, March 1902, 139.
[95] La Billie, *The Steward*, February 1909, 16.

character—"Unkel David"—speaking in a countrified, black dialect to criticize the aristocratic New York dinner.

> When in the coarse of hooman events a man's troo & belovid wife gits so she can tawk nothing but fashuns & soshul affares & will eet only things with French naims to them, like sharlot roozes & blum mong & demmy tasses, then it is hi time to taik her away from the bizzy hants of welth & bild a tent big enuff for two (2) in the loansum forrist, whare vizziters never leev their kards, & the only tabel dellykisses are fried poark & sody biskits. Whitch explanes why I now rite my monthly letter from the Katskill Mountins . . . [96]

From *The Cook* to Unkel David, the complaints about French cuisine and French restaurants were remarkable not only because they defied the established hegemony that held French cooking in high regard, but also because these articles about eating are so explicitly condemnations of the aristocratic class. Patriotism as well as class antagonism are a continuing theme of middle-class discussions about the European cooking celebrated by elites.

Criticisms of the cultural aristocracy were particularly pointed when elites were particularly extravagant. Writing for *Cosmopolitan* in 1904, William Stewart roundly condemned the decadent showy banquets of the elite that stood in such sharp contrast with the dour American businessman's banquet. "Among a certain class in New York Society," Stewart wrote, "there has grown up recently a mania for the odd and eccentric in banquets, which often is carried to absurd lengths."

> Of course, dinners of this kind are of no national importance, and are merely efforts on the part of the givers to provide a novelty for jaded appetites. Indeed, the very extravagance on the part of the givers is an admission that the conversation of the guests is not thought likely to be especially interesting, and that something is required to take its place. . . . Such affairs afford the vain—and there are many of them—an opportunity for rivalry in

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[96] Unkel David, "Unkel David's Letter," *Field and Stream*, December 1912, 900. The Unkel David feature of Field and Stream was a regular feature of the magazine featuring a black Southerner. This letter was unusual in that he had temporary taken up residence in the North.

> extravagance which often is carried to such an extent as to bar any
> but the very well-to-do from attending. They are a development of
> the play instinct, which, among children, finds its expression in
> mud pies; among the idle-rich, in luncheons to dogs, with their
> mistresses as waiters.[97]

Yet no matter how virulent or subtle were the middle classes' condemnations of the aristocrats' dining habits, the discourse was never as essential to the transformation of American dining as the pragmatic choices that the middle classes made each day. While imminent changes in dining were sometimes reflected in public criticisms of the elite, the metamorphosis itself offers the best evidence of the middle classes' growing dissatisfaction with elite culture.

Nonetheless, the dissatisfaction that those in the middle class expressed about how the aristocratic elite dined demonstrates that the debate was an integral part of the larger changes taking place in American society. Inexpensive goods and entertainments in the urban America drew the middle classes into the public marketplace; cheap goods made both the imitation of elites and the development of alternative cultures possible. The concerns about big business, the concentration of wealth, and the corrupting influence of money expressed by the Progressive reformers, if not synonymous with middle-class complaints about dining, stemmed from the same sources. And nationalism, revived by the military conquests of the Spanish-American War, infused anti-French and anti-European sentiments with patriotic zeal. Middle-class frustration with their second-class status in the restaurant revealed the growing primacy of the middle classes in determining the "spirit of America."

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[97] W. R. Stewart, "Banquet in Modern American Life," *Cosmopolitan*, March 1904, 618.

CONCLUSION

The seasoned aristocratic diner understood the culture of dining in a first-class restaurant. It was not merely that he had more cultural capital, but that he had the right cultural capital. Established by and for the upper class, the aristocratic restaurant catered to the expectations of the dominant class. As the author of a guide to menu writing for restaurateurs explained in 1910, the high-class restaurant—from menu to service—offered few rewards for the middle-class diner.

> In the higher class restaurants and hotels where the kitchen crews are generally all foreigners, and the waiters also, it is next to impossible to obtain a bill of fare fitted for the American traveling public, or for the business man who cannot get home, or the flat dweller who wishes to entertain, or the pater familieas, who thinks to give family and friends a treat, or to get plain food cooked and served with plain civility.[98]

In other words, the cultural values that the middle classes held dear—family, plain food, simple civility—were not the values of the aristocratic restaurant

The middle classes' failure to master the culture of the aristocratic restaurant eventually led to frustration and a quiet rejection of the formal French restaurant. The conscientious middle-class diner not only avoided the restaurants he could not afford, but he also shied away from elite restaurants where the cultural codes governing dining were a barrier to middle-class patronage.[99] In the 1890s, it was the custom on New Years Day for New York's elite hotels to offer "free lunches" in their men's dining rooms.[100] These buffets were cooked by hotel chefs jockeying for accolades and offered free by respectable hotels hoping to win the patronage of

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[98] Fellows, *The Menu Maker*, 57.

[99] Contemporary studies have similarly demonstrated that restaurant patrons avoid eating in places where they feel "uncomfortable." See Alan Warde and Linda Martens, "The Prawn Cocktail Ritual," in *Consuming Passions: Food in the Age of Anxiety*, ed. Sian Griffiths and Jennifer Wallace (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1998), 121.

[100] "Dishes for the Million," 6.

elite bachelors (and their dates) during the coming year.   As a result, the menus were elaborate.

The menu at the Savoy in 1893, for example, included *consommé en tasse*; *aspic d'hiútre,*

Bresilienne; *saumon à la Parisienne, sce. verte*; *galantine de dinde d'Adirondack, Renaissance*;

pièce de bœuf, à l'Anglaise; *chaud-froid de Cailles, Perigord*; *jambon d'York, à la gelée; pain de*

foie gras en Bellevue; *langue de bœuf, à l'Ecarlate en lyre*; *faisans Anglaise en Vollière*; *pâté de*

grouse en croustade, truffé; salade de homard à la Russe; *mayonnaise de Volaille à*

l'Americaine; *petits fours*; and *pièce montes.*[101]

Although there is no evidence that middle-class diners were turned away from the free

buffets offered on New Years Day, reporters who visited these establishments described the

patrons in terms that suggest they came exclusively from the fashionable set. An article from the

New York Times in 1893 made clear that it was the fashionable aristocrat and not the middle-

class diner who patronized the New Year's lunch.

> Several of the leading hotels yesterday set out in their cafés
> sumptuous and inviting free lunches, although the chefs who set
> out the displays of delicacies did not call them by the vulgar name
> by which they are commonly known. They were patronized
> largely by the unfortunate and fashionably-attired men about town,
> who are comparative strangers to the comforts of domestic life.
>
> Chef Fari's display in the Plaza Hotel café attracted a
> throng of well-dressed men, *who would doubtless feel ashamed to*
> *stand up at a table and eat the ordinary free lunch.* They were not
> there because they really desired anything to eat, but mainly to
> gratify curiosity, kill time, and pay compliments to the artistic skill
> of the chef.[102] [Italics added.]

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[101] "The Tourney of the Chefs: Artistic New Year Feasts Spread by the Big Hotels," *New York Times*, 3 January 1893, 2. Spelling from original.

[102] Ibid. Italics added. The reference to men who would feel ashamed to eat standing or to partake in a free lunch would not exclude middle class men who, as we shall see later in the chapter, patronized downtown restaurants where food was served at counters. The free lunch, although often associated with the working class, was also widely utilized by middle class men in bars and saloons that offered better food and higher prices for the required beer.

The food was free. There was no pecuniary reason that middle-class merchants and

clerks would not patronize these rarefied feasts. Nor were middle-men unaccustomed to the free

lunch (served by bars with the purchase of a beer) or the self-serve restaurant. We can only

assume there was a less tangible obstacle that kept the middle-class gentleman from availing

himself of the best that New York's restaurants could offer.

The comments of a newspaper reporter, a fledgling member of the middle class, provide a

clue to the reticence that middle-class men felt about patronizing an elite hotel or restaurant. The

anonymous reporter for the *New York Times*, a little intimidated by the elaborate surroundings

and the use of French on the menu, favorably contrasted the Murray Hill Hotel to the Hoffman

House. The Murray Hill Hotel was downtown establishment that offered, on New Years Day, an

English-language menu "in thoughtful consideration of the few patrons of the house who do not

understand French." While at the Hoffman House, in "recogn[ition] of the fact that the Hoffman

House patrons all understand French, the chef did not deem it necessary to use English in naming

his produetious [productions?] . . ."[103] For this reporter, command of the French menu separated

the aristocrats from the middle classes. Two years later, another *Times* reporter drew similar

conclusions and put them in broader terms. At the end of an article on the free buffet he

reflected, "No one who knows the ropes need start in hungry for the New Year."[104]

The middle classes did not "know the ropes." With its foreign menu, dress codes and

intimidating service, the elite restaurant was an alien and unforgiving space. Books might talk

about etiquette and describe what it was like to dine at the Waldorf, but books could not

substitute for the extensive experience that those who had dined at the Waldorf could call on

before signaling for the waiter. Rather than feel like an outsider, it appears that many middle-

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[103] Ibid.
[104] "Dishes for the Million," 6.

class New Yorkers spent their New Year's Day at home where the cuisine was familiar and the dishes were spoken of in a language everyone understood. Those middle-class diners who chose to eat out on New Years Day seem to have ventured downtown to the familiar business district where the hotels served friendlier fare—"roast beef, bologna, crackers, cheese, potatoes à la Irlandaise [sic] and pigs' feet"—with no linguistic disguises.[105]

The futility of imitation has led Pierre Bourdieu to conclude that the class system is entrenched.[106] For Bourdieu, if one is born into the working-class, one comes to see pig's feet, not *jambon d'York, à la gelée,* as destiny. These "deep-seated disposition[s]" were for Bourdieu not necessarily "incompatible with revolutionary intention," but they did create a "modality which is not that of intellectual or artistic revolts."[107]

The transformation of restaurant cuisine at the turn of the century suggests that Bourdieu's model is too rigid. In the mid-nineteenth century, a nascent urban middle class composed of professionals, managers and clerks had few public commercial institutions of their own. Many did not own homes, servants and the other trappings of middle-income wealth that had served as class markers for their parents. Thrust into the rapidly expanding metropolis, middle-class urbanites at first sought to join in the established public culture of the wealthy. But the alienation that many felt led to resentment and then, when efforts to imitate the lifestyles of

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[105] "The Tourney of the Chefs," 2.

[106] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 375. Although he does not address Pierre Bourdieu's argument directly, Peter Stearns makes a similar assertion about the cultural influence of the middle class in an analytical work on class published in 1979. Stearns writes: "We have assumed, whether agreeing with Marxist analysis or not, that modern society neatly corresponds to the model in one respect: if values spread they must come from the upper class, and since we know that middle-class values spread then the middle class must be the upper class and so we can exercise the convenient option of studying the upper class to know what the middle class was and what its values were. In fact, however, the modern middle class has no clear historical parallel in being capable of dominating any social consensus about proper life style while not wielding power or predictably or uniformly joining the upper class in defense of the structural status quo. Its high educational level and ability to dominate the consumption of culture explain the apparent anomaly. Never before has a large but not ruling social group been in such a position with regard to predominant cultural media. Of course the upper class has proved open to middle-class standards, of course it often manipulated them, but in many cases it has not initiated them and is not best studied to determine what they were."Stearns, "The Middle Class: Toward a Precise Definition," 393.

[107] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 372.

the elites failed, to new dining institutions. Spurned, middle-income urbanites created their own clubs, patronized their own theaters, and ate in their own restaurants. Through individual acts of consumption, the burgeoning middle classes manifested their emergent class identity in codes of conduct that privileged middle-class experiences. By the turn of the century, middle-class Americans had started a cultural revolution in dining that would not only undermine the aristocratic French menu, but also celebrate the cultural capital of the new middle classes.

Chapter 4: "ROAST MEATS, 15 CENTS; ALL SORTS OF VEGETABLES, 5 CENTS": THE RISE OF THE MIDDLE-CLASS RESTAURANT

In 1869 the illustrious former war correspondent Junius Henri Browne published *The Great Metropolis*, a vivid portrayal of life in New York City. Browne included a wry celebration of the diverse restaurants found in New York.

> The city contains five or six thousand restaurants and eating-houses of different kinds. . . . They range from the elegance and costliness of Delmonico's and Taylor's to the subterranean sties where men are fed like swine, and dirt is served gratis in unhomœopathic doses. There, are silver, and porcelain, and crystal, and fine linen, and dainty service. Here, are broken earthen-ware, soiled table-cloths, and coarse dishes.[1]

Browne's New York may have had "five or six thousand restaurants," but between the elegance and the dirt, there seemed to be—at least Browne and others were hard pressed to name them—few choices for the middle-class dining public. "One advantage of New-York is that a man can live here very much as he chooses," Browne cynically conceded. "He can live fashionably and luxuriously for from one to five hundred dollars, or meanly and poorly for six to eight dollars a week. The latter method very few Americans adopt unless compelled by absolute necessity; and not then very long, for laudanum is not dear, and the rivers are very deep."[2]

Twenty-three years later, the city of New York boasted a true cornucopia of restaurants—including thousands of restaurants that catered to the middle classes. In *Appleton's Dictionary of Greater New York and its Neighborhoods* from 1892, New York was described as a city that

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[1] Junius Henri Browne, *The Great Metropolis: A Mirror of New York* (Hartford: American Publishing, 1869), 261.
[2] Ibid., 260-1.

housed a "wide range" of restaurants "of every grade" that catered to every class—from the humble lunchrooms, chophouses and ethnic restaurants to exquisite Delmonico's.

> The peculiarly long and narrow shape of the city proper removes the residences of New-Yorkers so far from their places of business that the habit of eating away from home is a very general one, and consequently restaurants and eating-houses of every grade abound in almost every part of the city. From the "coffee and cake" saloons, indigenous to basements in certain parts of New York, to the palatial and perfectly appointed mansion of Delmonico, in 5th av., is a wide range. Within this come oyster-saloons, chop-houses . . . , lunch-counters, 15-cent-restaurants, commonly called "hash houses," foreign restaurants, the restaurants attached to first-class hotels kept upon the so-called European plan, dairies, and restaurants proper.[3]

This remarkable transformation of dining in New York—and in most of the great American metropolises of the late nineteenth century—was a triumph of the middle classes. Unable, by dint of cash and culture, to become full participants in the fashionable world of the aristocratic restaurant, middle-class men and women sought out the "subterranean sties where men are fed like swine" and through their patronage converted them into family establishments featuring inexpensive meals and clean linens.

The emergence of the middle-class restaurant in the second half of the nineteenth century was a cultural revolution waged in the urban marketplace. Middle-class preferences—the desire for healthy portions served cheaply—did not need to be clearly and consciously articulated in print for dining to be transformed. As middle-class Americans sought out simple inexpensive restaurants, their collective purchasing power encouraged restaurant entrepreneurs to cater to their tastes. Over the course of forty years preferences begot cultural institutions and the middle-class restaurant was born.

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[3] "Restaurants," in *Appleton's Dictionary of Greater New York and Its Neighborhood* (New York: D. Appleton, 1892), 220.

Across the nation, new restaurants were opening, old restaurants were expanding, and nineteenth-century Americans were becoming comfortable with "dining out." U.S. Census figures on restaurant occupations offer a glimpse at the rapid growth of the restaurant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[4] Although national occupational figures for restaurant, café and lunch room keepers are unreliable for the year 1870, census figures demonstrate a steady rate of growth in restaurant employment from 1880 to 1930.[5] Over the course of these fifty years, the number of restaurant keepers in the United States increased from 13,000 to approximately 165,000. Decade by decade, the number of restaurants grew faster than the population. In the 1880s, per capita growth in the number of restaurant owners and managers exceeded 18%, in the 1890s it was 45%, in the first decade of the 1900s it was 49%, in the 1910s 26% and in the 1920s 62%. Cumulatively, restaurant, café and lunchroom keepers increased by over 400% per capita from 1880 to 1930.[6]

These national trends were reproduced at both the local and state level. In a sample of restaurant proprietor census counts from ten major American cities and ten states, the number of proprietors increased at a rate that usually outstripped population growth; only Boston and San

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[4] Occupational data is not without its weaknesses as a measure of restaurant growth. Census categories changed, census reporting was notoriously inaccurate, and occupational census classifications do not represent a one-to-one relationship to the number of restaurants. Census groups such as "restaurant, café and lunch room keepers," for example, include both owners and managers of restaurants. As a result, the Nixon Restaurant was probably counted more than once. Thomas Griffith, its owner, would have been counted in the occupational classification, but so would his partners (if he had any) and possibly his lunch, dinner and supper managers. However, as a measure of expansion occupational figures generally represent the trend in restaurant dining. Higher numbers of waiters represent both more restaurants and the expansion of existing establishments.

[5] The number of restaurant keepers listed in the 1870 census appears inflated and probably included all restaurant employees (excluding cooks and waiters) and not just restaurant owners and managers.

[6] Data for 1870-1900, US Bureau of the Census, "Special Reports. Occupations at the Twelfth Census," (Government Printing Office, 1904), Table 3 "Number of Persons Credited to the Various Occupation Designations Used at the Census of 1870, 80, 90, and 900." Data for 1910-1930, US Bureau of the Census, "Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Population," (Government Printing Office, 1933), Table 3 "Gainful Workers 10 Years and Over, By Occupation and Sex, for the United States: 1930, 20, and 10".

Francisco experienced any per capita decrease and then for only one decade, 1910 to 1920.[7] The

average decade-to-decade growth rate in restaurant occupations from 1890 to 1930 in New York

State, for example, was about 39%, for Massachusetts it was 29%, and for California 28%. And

this growth was not limited to the cultural centers on the coast. Inland and southern states—for

example, Colorado, Missouri, Louisiana, Kansas and Illinois—all experienced per capita

restaurant growth between 1890 and 1930 that exceeded 20%. Even an industrial city such as

Pittsburgh witnessed substantial, if delayed, growth in the number of restaurants. In 1870, the

city directory listed only 32 eating houses, eating saloons, oyster houses and restaurants and for

the next twenty years the number of eating establishments remained small. However, from 1890

to 1905, Pittsburghers saw the number of restaurants in their city double, and this substantial rate

of growth was surpassed in subsequent years. By 1930, the city boasted 818 restaurants (and an

overall rate of change remarkable similar to the national growth rate).[8]

These levels of restaurant growth were notable even during a half century marked by

considerable commercial expansion. Although the numbers of boarding house keepers,

hotelkeepers and saloonkeepers also generally grew at the turn of the century, these industries

seldom kept pace with population growth. In Louisiana, one of the few states in which the

average decade to decade growth rate for hotel managers was positive, hotel occupations grew at

a per capita rate that was one third that of restaurant occupations. While specific industry-wide

circumstances help to explain some of these differences (saloons, for examples, suffered with the

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[7] Boston's decrease may reflect the declining status of the city. San Francisco's decrease probably represented a disruption of growth patterns following the earthquake of 1906.

[8] Adjusting for increases in the city's population, the increase in the number of restaurants serving the city of Pittsburgh is no less phenomenal. Although per capita growth was erratic in the 19th century, apparently responding to downturns in the economy, by the early 20th century restaurant growth substantially outstripped population growth. From 1870 to 1930, the number of Pittsburgh restaurants per capita rose over 400%. R.L. Polk & Co., *Polk's Pittsburgh City Directory* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: R.L. Polk & Co., 1869-70, 1874-75, 1879-80, 1885, 1890, 1895, 1900, 1905, 1910, 1915, 1920, 1925, 1930).

rise of the temperance movement), the restaurant industry proved remarkably resistant to economic downturns, food quality scares, labor strife and war.[9]

MIDDLE-CLASS RESTAURANTS

In the early nineteenth century, the traveling public in New York, Philadelphia and Boston depended upon taverns.[10] At a tavern, one ate a set meal at a set time. Although taverns began to give way to eating saloons and quick lunch establishments in the early nineteenth century, it was only in the closing decades of the century, fueled by middle-class patronage, that a full panoply of eating establishments emerged.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the middle-class restaurant barely existed. Although a great variety of quick lunch establishments provided meals to middle-income urbanites unable to get home for the traditional midday dinner, the most substantial meal of the day, these establishments put a premium on speed, not food or service. These were restaurants of convenience. George G. Foster, a reporter for the *New York Tribune*, published an account of New York's eating houses in his 1849 city expose *New York in Slices*. Thirty thousand New Yorkers, he estimated, ate each day at one of three types of eating establishments that Foster

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[9] The rise of modern hotels and apartments depressed the expansion of boarding houses. New technologies in the hotel industry reduced the number of employees required to run a hotel even as more rooms became available for tourists. And, although the decline started long before national prohibition, anti-alcohol leagues probably had an effect on the number of men and women who operated and worked in saloons (the census continued to list saloon keepers in 1920, but by 1930 aggregate tables no longer listed saloon keepers). Yet, many of these trends might have effected the growth of the restaurant industry as well. Although the popularity of modern apartment complexes probably helped to spur restaurant growth, economic consolidation and the development of larger restaurants very likely drove small restaurants as well as hotels out of business. Similarly, restaurants might have been adversely affected by prohibition as one profitable line of income, alcohol, was eliminated. However, restaurants proved remarkably durable experiencing substantial growth in both times of economic prosperity and times of economic decline.

[10] For a general discussion of taverns, see Elise Lathrop, *Early American Inns and Taverns* (New York: Arno Press, 1977).

named for their most famous exemplars: the Sweenyorum, Browniverous, and Delmonican.[11]

The Sweenyorum and the Browniverous both served "stringy meat and tepid vegetables" to the

"great middle stripe of [the] population" (although the Sweenyorum was an "extension

downward").[12] At both, business boomed from noon to three as male city workers sought quick

"lunches."

> A thorough-bred diner-down-town will look at a bill of fare, order
> his dinner, bolt it and himself, and be engaged in putting off a lot
> of foods upon a greenhorn, while you are getting your napkin fixed
> over your nankeens (we think the cotton article preferable) and
> deciding whether you will take ox-tail or mock-turtle. A regular
> down-towner surveys the kitchen with his nose as he comes up-
> stairs—selects his dish by intuition, and swallows it by steam and
> the electro-galvanic battery. As to digesting it, that is none of his
> business.[13]

Twenty years later, little had changed in the daily dining ritual of New York. Junius Browne

described the rush of noonday feasting in 1869.

> Eating is done in the Metropolis with the haste of Americans
> intensified. From 12 o'clock to 3 of the afternoon, the down-town
> eating-houses are in one continuous roar. The clatter of plates and
> knives, the slamming of doors, the talking and giving of orders by
> the customers, the bellowing of waiters, are mingled in a wild
> chaos. . . . A long counter is crowded with men, either standing
> elbow to elbow, or perched on stools, using knives, and forks, and
> spoons; talking with their mouths full; gesticulating with their
> heads, and arms, and bodies; eating as if they were on the eve of a
> journey round the World, and never expected to obtain another
> meal this side of the antipodes. The hungry are constantly
> satiated,—constantly going; but others, as hungry, as feverish, as
> garrulous, as energetic as they, are always coming . . . and continue
> the chaos of confusion as before.[14]

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[11] Foster and Blumin, *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches*, 216. Foster also mentioned the open-all-night cake and coffee shops.
[12] Ibid., 216-7.
[13] Ibid., 217.
[14] Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 262-3.

The Sweenyorum and the Browniverous were restaurants of expediency, pragmatic establishments that served only the lunchtime rush of businessmen and were rarely open at night. The short business day of the lunchroom meant that a middle-class couple, married or dating, had few choices if they stayed in the city to shop or take in a performance at the theater. When a middle-class couple in the 1850s and 1860s wanted to dine out in the evening, they were compelled to patronize one of the elite aristocratic restaurants that catered to the fashionable set.

> When evening comes and the business of the day is ended, the down-town restaurants are closed, and those up-town have their active season. Then Curet's, and the Café de l'Universite, and Taylor's, and Delmonico's thrive, particularly toward midnight, after the theatres and the concerts and the operas are over. . . . The up-town restaurants furnish quite a contrast to those in the lower quarter of the City. They have no confusion, no bustle, no jostling, no door-slamming. Ladies elegantly and elaborately dressed go with their escorts to upper Broadway and Fourteenth street; go in handsome equipages, amid flower and toilette odors, and with all the suggestive poetry that night lends to a fine woman, intoxicated with her own sweetness, and the consciousness that she is lovable to every sense.[15]

Lacking the economic and cultural capital to fully enjoy the pleasures of the elite restaurant, the middle-class family either patronized a "cake and coffee shop," an open-all-night eating house popular with both middle- and working-class diners that offered simple cold foods and few or no amenities, or they sacrificed pride and purse to eat at one of the restaurants that Foster labeled "*aristocratic* restaurant[s]" where a dinner could be had "which is not merely a quantity of food deposited in the stomach, but is in every sense and to all the senses a great work of art."[16]

Public dining in 1869, however, was on the verge of significant and lasting transformation. Two decades after Foster described the pragmatic Sweenyorums and Browniverouses, restaurants catering to middle-class urbanites had increased in number and

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[15] Ibid., 265.
[16] Foster and Blumin, *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches*, 219. Emphasis in original.

type, providing a variety of cuisines from beefsteak and fish to bratwurst and spaghetti. These restaurants began to attract middle-class diners. As thousands of new restaurants amenable to the middle classes opened across the nation, newspapers reported increasing numbers of moderately-income men and women were dining out.[17]
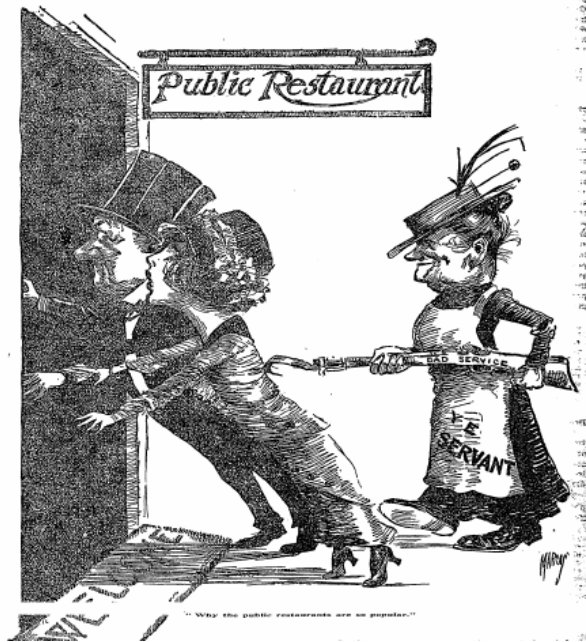
Figure 3: "Why the Public Restaurants are So Popular," 1913 (*New York Times Sunday Magazine*)

Restaurants increasingly accommodated the new lifestyles imposed on middle-class Americans by urban and commercial growth—and offered a pleasant respite from the hustle and bustle of city life. Newly married couples living in small apartments or residential hotels without kitchens ate at restaurants.[18] Bachelors tired of the unchanging fare at boarding houses sought out restaurants.[19]

Young women earning an independent living patronized lunchroom restaurants (even if they returned home to family homes for their dinner).[20] Shoppers, unwilling to travel long distances to uptown or suburban apartments for a simple meal, frequented downtown and department store restaurants. And, as more urbanites took advantage of the entertainments that the modern city

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[17] "Reduction in Restaurant Rates: Great Success of Cheap Eating-Houses and General Lowering of Prices among All except the Most Fashionable," *New York Tribune*, 29 January 1877, 8.

[18] On the growth of apartments, see Duis, *Challenging Chicago*, 83-4; Paul Erling Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 57. On kitchenless dining, see "The Mania for Apartment Hotels," *New York Times*, 18 May 1902, 6. See also Schlereth, *Victorian America*, 110.

[19] Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 92, 126-31.

[20] "Fair Women at Lunch," *New York Times*, 20 December 1885, 4. However, young women might also skip meals in order to save money. See Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 53.

offered, eating at a restaurant made it possible to entertain friends and sweethearts before or after the theater.[21]

The "servant problem" also made restaurants an attractive alternative to domestic help for many middle-class families. Etiquette guides routinely advised middle-class women on the number of servants necessary to manage a respectable household or to hold a formal dinner party, but securing help became more difficult as the economy expanded and working women sought the higher wages and greater freedom of industrial work.[22] Immigrant women eager for work stemmed the decline, but in New York City as in other cities the number of domestic servants dwindled in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. There were 188 servants for every 1,000 New York households in 1880, 141 in 1900 and only 66 in 1920.[23] Middle-class families, by the early twentieth century, rarely employed live-in servants.[24] Frustrated by the annoyances of keeping and training American-born domestic help, the middle-class regularly took supper in restaurants. An English visitor to the United States observed in 1913, well after the servant problem had been enshrined in popular folklore, that "[t]his entertaining at public restaurants probably arises a good deal from the complexity of the servant question. Servants may be a difficult problem in England, but they are nothing as compared with the States. The republican bringing up does not allow an American to accept service under any one, therefore, there are no real American-born servants at all, while there are nearly a hundred millions of people in that

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[21] On sweethearts and theater, see "15,000 Chicago Girls Who Work at Night," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 June 1912, F5.

[22] On etiquette, see Longstreet, *Social Etiquette of New York*; Tomes, *The Bazar Book of Decorum. The Care of the Person, Manners, Etiquette and Ceremonials*. On economics of domestic service, see Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 122; Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America*, 1st ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 127, 240; Sarah Tyson Heston Rorer, *Mrs. Rorer's New Cook Book: A Manual of Housekeeping* (Philadelphia: Arnold, 1902), 653, 67-8.

[23] Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 122.

[24] Dudden, *Serving Women*, 127, 240.

vast country, half of whom are more or less requiring domestics."[25] A cartoon accompanying

the article in the *New York Times* depicted a servant carrying a bayonet forcing a middle-class

couple into a public restaurant.

More generally, the growth of the city, the crowding out of houses and the increasing

length of commutes into the central city, brought about a revolution in dining. As the *New York*

Times remarked in an 1885 on "The Restaurant System:"

> A decade or two ago it would have been practically impossible for
> many thousand people to live as they are living now. Flats were
> unknown and restaurants—of the right kind—a rarity. . . . [T]he
> restaurant system is now so complete that if they live in anything
> like proximity to the central part of the city they need not fret
> about a cook—at least in so far as the principal meal of the day is
> concerned.[26]

The middle classes' patronage of saloons and eating houses transformed them, and their

ongoing support encouraged entrepreneurs to open new restaurants more suited to the emerging

tastes of this "new" class. Restaurants that once served only the lunch-hour businessman now

stayed open late to attract the patronage of middle-class couples and families. Eating

establishments notorious for their lack of service soon hired immigrant waiters and covered their

tables with checkered linens. Chop-houses that once served only steak now offered a variety of

simple inexpensive dinners. Saloons installed family dining rooms, cellar restaurants moved to

storefronts, downtown restaurants migrated uptown, and ethnic restaurants began to serve

American dishes. New restaurants opened specifically for the urban middle class and the

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[25] Mrs. Alec Tweedie, "Mrs. Alec Tweedie Mourns Our Disappearing Home Life," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 23 March 1913, 5. See also "Some of the Mysteries of the Servant Question," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 March 1903, A5. On domestic help, see Cowan, *More Work for Mother*; Harvey A. Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 71. Levenstein argues that it was the "servant problem" that led to a rash of articles about communal cooking and eventually inspire Charlotte Perkins Gilman's famous article on cooperative kitchens. Ultimately, he argues, communal cooking was antithetical to middle class ideas of individuality and privacy.
[26] "The Restaurant System: Choice Cuisine at Reasonable Figures; How Foreign Fashions Are Acclimatized in New-York," *New York Times*, 24 May 1885, 3.

Sweenyorums and Browniverouses evolved. Now, not only was it no longer possible to fit the city's restaurants into three simple categories, but it was also no longer possible to dismiss every restaurant outside of Delmonico's as substandard.

Contemporary observers acknowledged the relationship between the increasing number of professionals, managers and clerks living in the city and the growth of the restaurant trade. An 1866 an article in *Harper's* made note of the "sundry restaurants near Wall Street where Mr. Omnium can find good, wholesome cuts from well-cooked joints, and old-fashioned mealy potatoes, boiled in their jackets, and comforting beverages in abundance." [27] In 1877 the *New York Tribune* cataloged the variety of middle-income urbanites that were now dining out.

> Business men almost without exception take lunch at down-town restaurants. Ladies engaged in day's shopping frequently lunch at restaurants; play-goers are accustomed to eat supper after the close of the performance. Added to these is [sic] a large number of persons who live in hired lodgings and take all their meals at restaurants. These diverse causes have given encouragement to almost innumerable eating-houses which are to be found scattered all over the city.[28]

Although New York remained a center of dining culture, the growth of what one writer referred to as the "outdoor life," a life of restaurants and public entertainments, was not limited to the East Coast.[29] Noah Brooks, as early as 1868, remarked on the large number of restaurants in San Francisco that catered specifically to middle-class urbanites. "The Californian love of good living is as prominent in these middle-class restaurants as anywhere. Respectable citizens and well-to-do businessmen dine luxuriantly for fifty or seventy-five cents, though, of course, they do not have a bottle of table claret with their roast, nor cognac with their coffee."[30] And a little later, a reporter in Los Angeles came to similar conclusions. Although a small city of little

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[27] C. W. Gesner, "Concerning Restaurants," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, April 1866, 593.
[28] "Reduction in Restaurant Rates," 8.
[29] "The Restaurant System," 3.
[30] Brooks, "Restaurant Life of San Francisco," 471.

more than fifty thousand residents, Alessandro at the *Los Angeles Times* observed that in addition to its "first-class metropolitan restaurant[s] . . . where luxury runs riot from the solid gold and silver service and broadcloth swallowtails of the attendants, to the ponderous aristocracy of the patrons," Los Angeles hosted numerous establishments that catered to "that class of people called the middle classes, who are neither financially independent nor squalidly poor."[31]

Scant evidence of these restaurants has survived. In the 1870s and 1880s, city directories used a kaleidoscope of terms—eating houses, oyster houses, eating saloons, oyster saloons—to designate places where food might be acquired, but the taxonomy was notoriously imprecise and offered few clues as to who and what was being served.[32] It was Foster's protégés, reporters in New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco, who provided the most detailed and descriptive record of the restaurants that were soon crowding the avenues of America's cities. These reporters, themselves members of the emerging middle class, described a rich variety of American and ethnic restaurants that catered extensively to men and women of the "middle stripe" and provided the middle classes with an alternative to the high prices and restrained etiquette of the aristocratic restaurant.

"AMERICAN" RESTAURANTS

Middle-class men continued to patronize saloons (at least those located in respectable neighborhoods) for the infamous free lunches that accompanied nickel beers, but during the

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[31] Alessandro, "Los Angeles Restaurants," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 April 1892, 11.

[32] On proliferation of terms, see Richard Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro: The American Restaurant Then and Now* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 23. See also R.L. Polk & Co., *Polk's Pittsburgh City Directory*. As late as 1921, H. L. Mencken noted in American Language that "a common public-house" might be called "a café, a restaurant, an exchange, a buffet or a hotel." H. L. Mencken, "Euphemisms," in *The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1921).

Gilded Age more and more men and women began to dine at establishments that demonstrated the same commitment to food as they did to drink. As early afternoon dining, a luxury not readily available to an increasingly regulated workforce, gave way to lighter, earlier lunches and more complex dinners, middle-class Americans sought eating-places that offered moderately-priced evening meals and good cooking. Hurried clerks might tolerate "stringy meat and tepid vegetables" when a brief lunch break required it, but the more leisurely pace of the evening dinner raised expectations and created demand for more dining choices and better food. Restaurants stayed open late, improved their service and offered more elaborate multicourse dinners during evening hours. Soon kitchenless families, servantless families and couples going or returning from the theater joined the bachelor diners.

For middle-class urbanites who felt excluded from elite restaurants, the city of the 1870s offered a variety of restaurants serving everything from simple inexpensive meals to higher-priced table d'hôte dinners. Among the most respectable of the middle-class restaurants (for both midday and evening meals) were the lunch rooms. William Dean Howells, the editor of *Harpers*, described a typical lunch room restaurant of the 1870s in his novel *A Modern Instance*. In Howell's story, Marcia, a country girl, elopes with Bartley and the young couple move into an apartment in Boston.

> Marcia had never dined in a restaurant, and she was somewhat
> bewildered by the one into which they turned. There was a great
> show of roast and steak and fish, and game and squash and
> cranberry pie in the window, and at the door a tack was driven
> through a mass of bills-of-fare, two of which Bartley plucked off
> as they entered, with a knowing air and then threw on the floor
> when he found the same thing on the table. The table had a marble
> top, and a silver-plated castor in the centre. The plates were laid,
> with a coarse red doyly [sic] in a cocked-hat on each, and a thinly
> plated knife and fork crossed beneath it; the plates were thick and
> heavy; the handle as well as the blade of the knife was metal and
> silvered. Besides the castor, there was a bottle of Leicestershire

sauce on the table, and salt in what Marcia thought a pepper-box;
the marble was of an unctuous translucence, in places, and showed
the course of the cleansing napkin on its smeared surface. The
place was hot, and full of confused smells of cooking; all the tables
were crowded, so that they found places with difficulty, and pale,
plain girls, of the Provincial and Irish-American type, in fash-
ionable bangs and pull-backs, went about taking the orders which
they wailed out towards a semi-circular hole opening upon a
counter at the further end of the room; there they received the
dishes ordered, and hurried with them to the customers, before
whom they laid them with a noisy clacking of the heavy crockery.
A great many of the people seemed to be taking hulled-corn and
milk; baked beans formed another favorite dish, and squash-pie
was in large request.[33]

Lunch rooms were famous for their large, á la carte menus and simple appearance. Eager

to build a niche in the market, these small restaurants occasionally experimented with their

menus, but most offered some variation on the Anglo-American bill of fare. A typical New York

lunch room featured oysters, fish, cold meats and a selection of "specials" that might include

"beef a la mode, lamb pot-pie, knuckle of ham with spinach, hashed turkey with poached eggs,

chicken and oyster patties, roast pork and apple sauce, roast turkey and cranberry sauce, roast

venison, wild duck, roast Spring chicken, and a dozen other things to make your mouth water."[34]

Regional cuisines—Boston baked beans, Virginia hams, and Southern chicken—also regularly

appeared on the menu. In San Francisco, where the dining public tended to be more

cosmopolitan, middle-class establishments also serve bowdlerized French cuisine.

Lunch rooms were considered respectable and increasingly middle-class; the food was

moderately priced and well-liked.[35] In 1892 in Los Angeles, a small but growing city, the

popular businessmen's "restaurants and lunch-rooms" served meals that cost anywhere from

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[33] Howells, *A Modern Instance*, 152-3.
[34] "Men Who Live Down Town," *New York Times*, 4 December 1881, 3.
[35] "As to second-class establishments, the comparison [with London's inexpensive restaurants] is immensely to our advantage. By second-class establishment is simply meant a restaurant where men assemble for a hurried meal at midday, and stay a half to three-quarters of an hour, and where there is not attempt at display or elegance." "The Household: At the Dinner Table," *New York Times*, 27 April 1879, 9.

twenty-five cents to a dollar twenty five with the cost dependent on the restaurant's "style" as well as what was ordered.[36] But price and service varied from city to city. In San Francisco, in anticipation of the plate dinner, dishes were served a la carte but a standard selection of side dishes could be added for a set price.

> The "three-for-two" place is the typical popular standard of prices.
> Being interpreted, it means that most of the dishes, --and a "dish"
> is a lavish portion, all that a hearty man could eat,--soup, fish,
> meats, vegetables, deserts, are charged at a rate of ten cents, and
> that three such dishes may be had for two bits—twenty-five cents.
> In these places a single ten-cent dish is charged at fifteen cents, to
> cover the cost of the extras that are usually given free; as potatoes,
> bread and butter, salad, celery, radishes, pickles, black coffee, and
> many such things. This custom of giving free additions to the
> order is peculiar to the West Coast, I am told, at least to the extent
> it is done here.[37]

Nonetheless, most lunch rooms, as the *New York Times* explained, offered both counter and table service.

> This was one of the many places known to New-Yorkers as a
> "lunch-room." One room was filled with tables, and in the other
> was a long lunch counter with stationary seats. For some
> unaccountable reason the lunch counter was nearly breast high, (as
> it always is), and when a man sat on one of the stools his feet were
> far above the floor and rested upon an iron bar. . . . A man can live
> better here on $2 a day than he can in many a foreign city on five
> times that much.[38]

Although custom and not usually law governed these establishments, the lunch counter was generally reserved for men while the dining room, sometimes with its own entrance, was for couples and families. In less formal establishments without separate dining room facilities, a small section of the restaurant might be screened off for families during the evening dinner

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[36] Alessandro, "Los Angeles Restaurants," 11.
[37] Charles S. Greene, "The Restaurants of San Francisco," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, December 1892, 565.
[38] "Men Who Live Down Town," 3.

hours. On the West Coast, couples could avoid the annoyance and embarrassment of dining at a

restaurant by having the dinner delivered to their apartment.[39]

The lunch room's stiffest competition came from table d'hôte restaurants. Table d'hôte

restaurants served a full multicourse meal, occasionally including wine, for a fixed price. Many

table d'hôte restaurants were ethnic—Italian, German or French—but others served a generic

American meal.

> The table d'hôte dinner, served in every style and at variegated
> prices to that ever-increasing army of Bohemians here who know
> not, and care less, where to lay their heads, is a deservedly popular
> institution. I have sampled them in every language, in a
> corresponding variety of localities, and my ennuied and satiated
> personality has absorbed everything from a New England boiled
> dinner to a meal at which spaghetti by the furlong was supposed to
> supply every want, all under the same tempting title. Some of
> these dinners have nothing unusual in their composition, and begin
> at the blue points and proceed decorously through entrée, roast,
> and salad, to the black coffee in the usual stereotyped style; and
> again, at others, you are supposed to enjoy cloves of garlic and
> pods of red peppers, eaten in all their virgin purity and strength.[40]

The table d'hôte was from the start both praised and ridiculed. Offering large servings

and dozens of extras, it was a boon for middle-class families. "At a great many of the first-class

places somebody has let the cook go out for the evening, and an entire family, including a small

boy, are dining there."[41] However, the table d'hôte was also regularly criticized for the low

quality of the food. A typical exchange over the value of the table d'hôte took place in the *New

York Times* in 1899 when "American" wrote into the newspaper to complain that a French table

d'hôte he had stopped at was little more than "Alsatian humbuggery." The menu, "American"

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[39] On San Francisco, see Brooks, "Restaurant Life of San Francisco," 467. See also Norris, *Mcteague*.

[40] "Restaurants of New York," *Washington Post*, 20 February 1898, 13.

[41] Bab, "Restaurants of Gotham: Meals Served on American and Several Other Plans," *Washington Post*, 21 August 1892, 12. Even those who were sympathetic towards table d'hôte dining worried about the effects of the restaurant, particularly the table d'hôte restaurant, on the family. Bab "the epicure," a food writer whose work appeared in both the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times in the 1890s, fretted about the neglect of home life if women did not cook. See also, Tweedie, "Mrs. Alec Tweedie Mourns Our Disappearing Home Life," 5.

complained, consisted of "soup made of Croton water and colored with beef extract," a small

portion of fish and a half a potato, chicken that tasted like the "rim of an old straw hat," "roast

beef, a "a few sprigs of spaghetti," cheap wine, coffee and dessert.

> [I]t is fair to assume . . . that some of the dishes served at these
> table d'hôtes may have been chewed on by the guests of the Fifth
> Avenue Hotel or Waldorf-Astoria. It is time New Yorkers had
> learned some common sense, and either buy their own food and
> cook it or patronize honest restaurants.[42]

For others, however, the table d'hôte restaurant's shortcomings were easily forgiven.

"American's" tirade was met with a quick response by other readers of the *New York Times*.

"H.S.H." wrote to report that respectable men and "their wives and daughters" regularly visited

table d'hôtes for the healthy food. "Housekeeper" reminded readers that the table d'hôte might

not promise excellence, but it delivered ample portions cheaply.[43]

> No one knows human nature and a hungry public better than a
> restaurateur. His experience teaches him that people will go out of
> their way in their insensate desire to get something for nothing, and
> this knowledge induces him to sacrifice quality for quantity. No
> intelligent being could expect, no hotel keeper could give, both the
> quantity and the quality "American" wanted for the price paid. But
> there is a class of people not over-particular, who, not being
> accustomed to anything better, neither require, desire, nor expect
> other than what they obtain at cheap restaurants. What they get
> satisfies them, and it is for them such caterers . . . offer the variety
> they do. But it is absurd to demand the first and best quality for
> third-rate prices.[44]

While only a few argued that the food was better at either the inexpensive lunch room or the

table d'hôte restaurant than at the expensive aristocratic restaurant, many celebrated the

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[42] American, "A Table D'hote Dinner," *New York Times*, 2 August 1899, 6. The author's choice of the pseudonym
"American" suggests, in part, that his complaint was that most table d'hôte restaurants were foreign.
[43] H.S.H., "As to Table D'hote Dinners," *New York Times*, 4 August 1899, 6; Housekeeper, "Table D'hote Dinners,"
New York Times, 4 August 1899, 6.
[44] Housekeeper, "Table D'hote Dinners," 6.

emergence of a practical alternative to the elite restaurant and were willing to sacrifice some quality for more accessibility.

Lunch rooms and table d'hotes were not the only alternative for the middle-class diner who chose not to dine in expensive hotel restaurants. In 1881 the *New York Times* described a number of other downtown restaurants. While the lunch room and the ethnic table d'hôte were considered the most respectable, restaurants that were once avoided by the middle-class family—the inexpensive beefsteak restaurant, the American restaurant, and the "coffee and cake saloons"—also began to cater to the businessman and his family. The beefsteak or chophouse, "modeled on the plans of British cities," was a favorite eating place for American men. [45] Despite the "cheapness of the articles on the bill of fare" and the "rush and tumble of waiters," the beefsteak attracted a large clientele and the food was usually excellent. As one New York reporter noted:

> The meats especially were of the very best. Indeed, it is doubtful whether Delmonico serves better steaks or roasts. The tables were full, and the customers were of all sorts and kinds—well-dressed people, evidently with plenty of money in their pockets, marketmen, countrymen, clerks, store boys—a regular gathering of clans scattered at Babel. Two good dinners at this place cost less than a dollar, without stint in anything—soups, fish, roasts, dessert, and coffee. The company was not as select as fastidious persons desire, but there was nothing to be said against the food. [46]

Beefsteak restaurants were a national favorite. In Los Angeles as in New York, the "chop-houses and beefsteak shops" (where "several stalwart chefs arrayed in immaculate white caps, aprons and jackets, [attend] to the wants of half a hundred hungry maws flanking the high counter . . .") were a popular alternative to more expensive restaurants.

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[45] "German Restaurants," 5.
[46] "Men Who Live Down Town," 8.

> The bill of fare at these places is very simple, comprising chips and
> beefsteak and a two-story cup of coffee, the tariff for which is "two
> bits," but anyone who has indulged in this simple fare will be sure
> to try it again, as some of the cooks who have made a study of this
> branch of cookery have attained a very high proficiency in the art
> of grilling meats, and what is left out in accessories is added in
> bulk of meat, so that altogether one has to confess that he has
> received a most satisfying meal and gotten the worth of his
> money.[47]

The world of the beefsteak, however, was generally, although not exclusively, a place for

respectable men. Businessmen, bachelors, and gamblers were its primary customers.[48]

If the beefsteak was considered "good—nay, superlative in both quality and quantity" by

most commentators, the same could not be said of the "average 'American' restaurant."[49]

Nonetheless, the relative expense of eating at a lunch room or chop house forced even the

moderately well-off to occasionally patronize the comparatively inexpensive "average American

caterer"—even at the risk of being "stuffed and crammed with dyspepsia."[50] Featuring an a la

carte menu with an impossibly large bill of fare, the typical American restaurant, especially in

New York, was known for the poor quality of its food and the belligerence of its waiters.

> In this American restaurant there were three long rows of tables,
> with aisles between, hardly wide enough to walk through. . . . The
> dishes were evidently those used by Noah in the ark, nearly all of
> them having been nicked and otherwise damaged when the tigers
> began to chase the lambs around the ship. The waiters were of that
> bleached type of darkies that express their contempt for the whole
> human race, in face and manner. . . . But it was a cheap place, very.
> Roast meats, 15 cents; all sorts of vegetables, 5 cents; pies, tea,
> coffee, bread and almost every other edible and inedible thing, 5
> cents. The bill of fare was long, but the waiters had an unpleasant
> habit of returning, after a piece of pie, for instance, had been
> ordered, with the telegraphic message: "Ain't no pie!"[51]

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[47] Alessandro, "Los Angeles Restaurants," 11.
[48] Duis, *Challenging Chicago*, 148.
[49] "German Restaurants," 5.
[50] Ibid.
[51] "Men Who Live Down Town," 8.

The American restaurant's reputation varied from city to city. Conservative Boston took pride in some of its plain American restaurants.[52] Chicago felt it was a mark of sophistication that New England seafood was available in the city's American restaurants after 1873.[53] But the American restaurant with its unremarkable bill of fare generally offered little to please discriminating diners until technological innovations in the late nineteenth century resurrected it. Buffets and automats, introduced in New York and Philadelphia in the 1880s and 1890s, may have done little to improve the quality of the food, but they eliminated the contemptuous service and replaced the chipped dishes with a dedicated effort to provide clean, antiseptic dining rooms.[54] Department store restaurants, introduced at Wanamaker's in Philadelphia in 1877, also utilized the profits from the high volume of women shoppers to establish a reputation for giant menus, good prices and pleasant surroundings.[55] Finally, some "American" restaurants secured a steady clientele by specializing in regional cooking, especially southern (in restaurants sometimes operated by African Americans) and New England cuisine.[56]

At the bottom of the hierarchy of culinary experiences were the "coffee and cake saloons." Open late, the coffee shop generally served sliced cold meats, corned beef, beans and desserts. Although the food was oftentimes better than that served at the typical American

[52] "Boston Women Well Fed," *Washington Post Sunday Magazine*, 22 November 1908, 8.

[53] Duis, *Challenging Chicago*, 148.

[54] J. MacDonald, "Eastern Menus," *Overland*, November 1904, 529; John F. Mariani, *America Eats Out: An Illustrated History of Restaurants, Taverns, Coffee Shops, Speakeasies, and Other Establishments That Have Fed Us for 350 Years*, 1st ed. (New York: Morrow, 1991), 116-8; Alec Tristin Shuldiner, "Trapped Behind the Automat: Technological Systems and the American Restaurant, 1902-1991" (Ph.D., Cornell University, 2001), 78-85.

[55] MacDonald, "Eastern Menus," 529. On origins, see Ina Marie Hamlin and Arthur Harry Winakor, *Department Store Food Service, University of Illinois Bulletin* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1933), 6. Department store restaurants initially served mostly women but their reputations for excellence began to attract men in the early twentieth century.

[56] On various American cuisines, see Duis, *Challenging Chicago*, 150.

restaurant, the selection was limited. The "coffee and cake saloon's" popularity rested entirely

on its late hours and its inexpensive fare; twenty-five cents bought a satisfying meal.[57]

> Now look on the picture of A CHEAP DINNER, such as the guests
> of the Morton house or the Marble Saloon sit down to. . . . That
> looks pretty fair, and it *is* fair for twenty-five cents, one-sixth the
> price of the big dinner, and the probability is that in no place on the
> Continent can more be had for a quarter than in this very city.[58]

"Coffee and cake saloons" were given different names and specialized in different foods

depending on the city visited, but all shared a reputation for respectability that attracted both

middle- and working-class women. In Boston, small restaurants and beaneries, including

vegetarian restaurants for women, predominated.[59] In Chicago, cafes—"tolerably respectable

imitations of the German *conditorei*, and cheaper places which are a sort of parody on the French

cremeries"—served inexpensive meals.[60] In Los Angeles, the "Waffle Foundry"—where "a

large waffle, swimming in melted butter" and covered with "enough maple sprup [sic] to float

the Chilean navy" could be had for ten cents—established a "large patronage."[61] In Washington,

D.C., the "coffee and cake saloon" enjoyed success in the form of the twenty-four hour dairy

lunch.[62] And in San Francisco, Charles S. Greene estimated that there were "a hundred . . .

establishments that pass under the less pretentious name of 'Coffee Saloons'" in 1892.[63] No

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[57] "Men Who Live Down Town," 8.

[58] "The Cost of Living," *Washington Post*, 24 December 1877, 1.

[59] On vegetarian eating, "Boston Women Well Fed," 8.

[60] "Chicago Topics: Gastronomical and Otherwise," *New York Times*, 11 May 1876, 4. The German konditorei is a pastry shop; the French cremeries, or more accurately crémeries, were teashops. Perry Duis dates the emergence of coffee houses, gentlemen's restaurants and ice cream saloons in Chicago to the 1850s. Like Chicago's elite restaurants, these were often imitations of restaurants in New York and other eastern cities. See Duis, *Challenging Chicago*, 147.

[61] Alessandro, "Los Angeles Restaurants," 11.

[62] "The Cost of Living," 1. "Of course it cannot be expected that a man who is limited in his expenditures can have cut-glass and damask on the table, but there are scores of places where, although the prices are ridiculously low, the service is good and neatness and cleanliness prevail. The dairy lunch is peculiarly a Washington institution, and its popularity is ever on the increase." Dairy lunches started out serving cold food but by the turn of the century were serving hot, simple course meals similar to New York's lunch rooms. "Diet Costing a Dime: Local Dairy Lunch Rooms Sell Meals at Small Cost," *Washington Post*, 15 February 1897, 8.

[63] Greene, "The Restaurants of San Francisco," 561.

matter what title they had, however, these restaurants and the more ornate ice cream parlors specializing in small lunches, sweets, and, of course, ice cream, were often the only restaurants outside department stores where a woman unaccompanied by a male escort could dine without raising eyebrows.

By the close of the nineteenth century, middle-class restaurants had become established urban institutions that could feed thousands daily.[64] If some cities—Atlanta and Pittsburgh, for example—seemed to lag behind, most major cities developed restaurants that catered to managers, clerks, women shoppers and their families. Influenced by their growing clienteles, these restaurants would serve as the foundations of an emergent middle-class public culture.

AN ECONOMIC REVOLUTION

Despite the rapid growth of the restaurant industry in the nineteenth century, individual restaurants constantly struggled. Historical geographer Richard Pillsbury estimates that only two percent of the restaurants, oyster houses, and coffee houses operating in 1850 survived more than ten years and surviving business records suggest that the restaurant industry was no less stable in the later decades of the nineteenth century.[65] While relatively low entry costs encouraged former

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[64] United States. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce and Edwin Bates, *The San Francisco Restaurant Industry* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1930), 1.

[65] Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro*, 28. No comprehensive study of the restaurant industry in the nineteenth century exists and census data on restaurants would not be collected until the late 1920s. In general, however, small businesses did not fare well in the nineteenth century. Of 1,530 businesses in Poughkeepsie, New York, monitored by the credit agency R. G. Dun and Company between 1845 and 1880, thirty percent closed in three years or less and only fourteen percent survived more than twenty years. Blackford, *A History of Small Business in America*, 70. In 1917, however, the United States Congress, apparently concerned about war profiteering, called for a study of industrial profits based on 1916 and 1917 income and excess profits tax returns. Eight years later, Ralph C. Epstein of Harvard University used this data to calculate the relative profitability of various American industries. In Epstein's analysis, restaurants fared well. Of the 108 business enterprises that Epstein examined, restaurants—while requiring very low capital investments—produced a net income relative to capitalization in the top fifty percent of the industries he examined. In fact, compared to other service businesses, restaurants were a bullish investment in 1917. Hotels mustered only a 19.24% net return to invested capital, laundries only a 16.52% return. In contrast, restaurants demonstrated a 27.96% rate of return. The restaurant industry's success in 1917, however, cannot be taken as evidence that the industry was stable or profitable in the

waiters and beer retailers to venture into the restaurant industry, fickle patronage led to a substantial rate of failure. The records of R. G. Dun & Co., the first commercial credit agency in the United States, offer a glimpse at the difficulties faced by restaurateurs in the 1870s and 1880s. Correspondents for the company regularly reported that an apparently successful enterprise had changed locations, been sold to new owners or had declared bankruptcy. Typical is the story of Thomas Hanlon and James McCafferty. Hanlon and McCafferty opened an Oyster Saloon on 46th and 14th Streets in New York City around 1874. McCafferty had experience in the liquor business and the place was "nicely fitted up," but the partners were saddled with some debt and Dun's assessors concluded: "Are not doing a great deal of business. It is an experiment for them both and it is hard to tell whether it will be a success . . ." Although four years later the business, now called a "Bar & Restaurant," was successful enough that the partners had invested in other restaurant concerns, by 1883 the restaurant had closed.[66] Similarly, Carl Schalk's "bier garden of sort" on 120 Nassau Street in New York opened in 1869 but had closed by 1876. Schalk did not give up but his second effort at the restaurant business was no more successful. Although Dun's correspondents thought Schalk a generous man who was popular with his customers, on August 12, 1878 he committed suicide. Dun's account books attribute his suicide to "bus[iness] embarrassments."[67] Neither Hanlon and McCafferty nor Schalk's experience was unusual. More casual observers acknowledged the precariousness of owning a restaurant.

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nineteenth century. First, World War I offered an exceptional opportunity for the service industry. Demand for services rose and, unlike other industries which found it difficult to expand during the war, restaurants could easily add a few tables and increase their business. As Epstein noted, restaurants had the third lowest capitalization of any industry (despite high relative profits). Second, by 1917, the restaurant industry had matured. There was advertising, trade organizations and a stable middle-class restaurant-going public. Epstein, "Industrial Profits in 1917," 241-66. Nonetheless, one casual observer in the nineteenth century felt that restaurants were making their proprietors rich. See Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 261.

[66] New York, Vol. 278, p. 600A47, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

[67] New York, Vol. 272, p. 930, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection and New York, Vol. 272, p. 1000BB, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection.

Intense competition and the expectation of low prices led many to restaurants "to give up the business for the reason that it does not pay."[68]

The precariousness of the restaurant business empowered the middle-class patron. In an age when restaurants were simply named after their owner and rarely advertised, catering to the public meant, as Dunn's assessors regularly noted, forming a personal bond with the clientele and catering to their wishes.[69] "The great desideratum for caterers is to first acquire and then retain patrons," J. Fanning O'Reilly claimed in a 1910 article for *The Steward*. "Eating in restaurants is more or less a luxury and our friends should remember that nothing is easier in this life to break away from than luxury."[70]

A brief story reprinted in the *New York Times* in 1885 illustrates the willingness of restaurateurs to accommodate middle-class patrons in the late nineteenth century. A visitor to a table d'hôte restaurant in Manhattan offered the proprietor of the restaurant a ten dollar bill to pay a one dollar check. The proprietor did not have the money to make change and refused the guest's offer to pay the bill with pocket change. Instead, the proprietor suggested the young man pay him the next time he was in the restaurant. When another customer asked the restaurateur why he would take such a risk, the man explained.

> [H]e's a gentleman, and he would no more think of cheating me
> out of that dollar than he would of selling his soul. It's a question
> of honor with him. Besides he'll have to come in again to pay that,

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[68] H.S.H., "As to Table D'hote Dinners," 6. On the low profits of Italian restaurants in the nineteenth century, see "The Restaurant System," 3.

[69] Restaurants occasionally advertised in city directories in the nineteenth century, but the ads were seldom descriptive, typically displaying little more than the restaurant's name and address. In 1912, D. F. Pride noted that restaurants were just beginning to advertise but that their advertising was seldom effective. "Of late, quite a number of New York's restaurants have begun to advertise in the morning and evening daily papers and there is about as much variety in these advertisements as in the places themselves.   Some of this publicity work is fairly well put together, but the greater portion of it is exceedingly crude with little chance of getting any adequate returns from the cost of the space used in absurd and meaningless statements. In short, about the poorest kind of advertising put out in New York to-day is that pertaining to restaurants." D. F. Pride, "Restaurant Advertising," *The Steward* 6, no. 12 (1912): 11.

[70] J. Fanning O'Reilly, "James B. Regan - Evolutionist," *The Steward* 5, no. 5 (1910).

and of course he'll stay for dinner. I've done the same thing again and again and I never lost a cent by it. . . . It's convenient sometimes to men who receive weekly or monthly salaries.[71]

The restaurant proprietor's attitude was remarkable enough to warrant a newspaper article, but his willingness to pander to men on salaries speaks to the growing influence of the middle classes.

"Public demand" in the restaurant industry was a new concern in the late nineteenth century. In the aristocratic restaurant, the chef was selected because he represented expertise and skill; although no one felt that the chef was immune to criticism, generally he was the expert and his customers trusted him to provide the best that was possible. In the middle-class restaurant, the tables were turned and the customer was the ultimate authority.[72] Customers who did not like what was being served simply went elsewhere. An 1885 article in *The Cook* acknowledged the growing influence of the new restaurant patrons. Quoting the *Commercial Advertiser* at length, *The Cook* noted that in the past, restaurant-goers had to choose between the "ridiculously high" prices of the various aristocratic restaurants in New York and "places that are squalid and otherwise unattractive."[73] Now, however, there were "new cheap restaurants that furnished meals at very low prices." "A sign of the times," these restaurants, unlike the elite restaurants, were not "selfishly unjust to the public that has paid them so much money;" rather the new ten or twenty-five cent restaurants sought to court their customers and responded, *The Cook* claimed, to "public demand."[74]

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[71] "One Way to Get Trade," *New York Times*, 18 January 1885, 4.

[72] "Culinary Lore," *The Steward* 12, no. 1 (1917): 50. The middle-class chef was expected to take his customers' wishes into consideration. "Although no one has ever succeeded in pleasing all palates, because the tastes are as different as the faces, yet the palates must be studied by the cook, and if he be industrious and energetic, he will, with tact and observation, soon acquire a knowledge of the particular tastes of his patrons."

[73] "Dime Dinners," *The Cook*, 27 July 1885, 8.

[74] Ibid. Arguing that the modern restaurant emerged under specific economic conditions, Nicholas M. Kiefer has more recently noted: "Ultimately, the forces of competition will engender the market segmentation that the consumers' desire. A cookshop or inn that is the only place to eat away from home in a village has flexibility in

For the restaurateur, the instability of the restaurant industry required he take risks that were often met with bankruptcy; for the urban middle class, instability translated into economic and cultural power. While the clerk or the manager acting alone exercised limited influence on what was served or how it was served, the nascent middle-class acting as individuals created a "public demand" that no successful restaurant owner could ignore. "Public demand" was the vehicle for cultural change. As middle-class patronage of lunchrooms and chophouses increased, successful restaurateurs who recognized the importance of the new clientele adapted to middle-class preferences. As early as 1892, a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* observed that urban restaurants that catered to the middle classes were becoming "exclusive."

> These places are conducted and patronized by people whom any respectable person can meet on equal terms, but are as exclusive in their way as some others with the most aristocratic pretensions, inasmuch as there are no other places where the rules of good breeding are more strictly demanded and observed."[75]

The new middle-class restaurant was cleaner than its lunch room forerunner. Its menu was larger, its service more expedient, its location closer to the centers of shopping and entertainment. The business formula for attracting middle-class patronage, D. F. Pride wrote in 1912, was simple. "The average patron wants something appetizing to eat, pleasant surroundings and good service."[76]

CONCLUSIONS

> Within the last ten years the luncheon and dinner hours have stretched longer and longer, not only in the better class of eating

what it offers. However, competition forces suppliers to pay attention to consumers' desires. As dining establishments proliferate within a town or city, they will find that they must compete with each other for customers. Offering choice is one way to compete and to boost market share and profits. The supply-side and demand-side forces are thus reinforced by competitive pressures." Kiefer, "Economics and the Origins of the Restaurant."

[75] Alessandro, "Los Angeles Restaurants," 11.

[76] Pride, "Restaurant Advertising," 11.

places, but even in cheaper ones. The building of dozens of
skyscraping office buildings and the congestion of the downtown
district not only have made troubles for the transportation lines but
have made crushes for the restaurants.[77]

The Chicago Daily Tribune, 1903

Of course, the rich and luxurious are here as in larger cities . . .
offering a variety and elegance of cuisine which can be approached
by but a few cities in the world. . . . But it is not in respect to the
more expensive places that San Francisco is peculiar, for these
naturally approximate in style and manner to the pattern set by
restaurants for the well-to-do everywhere. The cheap restaurant . .
. is at once the pride of the city and the wonder of tourists. And
there are literally scores of them.[78]

R. Whittle, *Overland*, 1903

By the early twentieth century, it was no longer necessary, as a condescending 1911

article in the *Steward* noted, for the middle-class diner who "merely wants food and cares

nothing for the manner in which it is served to him . . . [to] 'chuck a bluff'—to also use the

vernacular—by going to fashionable dining places where naturally he would feel out of place,

and where he could not possibly have any appreciation of the refinement and elegance of his

surroundings."[79] In New York in 1911, as in Chicago and San Francisco, the middle-class diner

could find "restaurants of all degrees and adapted to every man's wants and purse."[80]

The middle-classing of the restaurant was a process so subtle that for some it may have

appeared that little changed. But in the nineteenth century, public dining culture was the

province of the rich. Those with money determined restaurant and clothing and reading fashions

and those without substantial resources followed their lead. By the twentieth century, while the

wealthy still controlled production, they no longer determined how Americans consumed. This

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[77] "How to Get a Husband," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 October 1903, 49.
[78] R. Whittle, "Humbler Restaurants of San Francisco," *Overland*, May 1903, 362-4.
[79] "New York Restaurant Prices," *The Steward* 6, no. 9 (1911): 15. The original reads "chucking a bluff." The
colloquial phrase used by sailors may mean, roughly, to fire pointlessly, somewhat similar to the modern "shooting
blanks."
[80] Ibid.

dramatic increase in consumer choice represented the growing influence of the middle classes on dining in America. Middle-income urbanites, frustrated by the lack of economic and cultural capital that made the aristocratic restaurant an alien and inaccessible place, did not stop dining out. Instead, they sought out new restaurants to patronize, colonized them and transformed them. Small changes in preference had dramatic consequences.

The impetus for change was cultural but the changes were economic. Simple preferences, when shared by enough people, can produce dramatic changes in a marketplace. In the late 1960s and 70s, the Harvard economist Thomas C. Schelling undertook a study of racial segregation. Public opinion polls suggested that attitudes about race were changing but Americans continued to live in all-white and all-black neighborhoods. Schelling's simple mathematical model (pennies on a checkerboard) led to a theory of micromotives. In the case of racial segregation, the subtle, often unstated desire to live near at least one or two neighbors of one's own race explained the nearly absolute segregation of American cities. As Schelling stated: "The interplay of individual choices, where unorganized segregation is concerned, is a complex system with collective results that bear no close relationship to the individual intent."[81] In the late nineteenth century, micromotives brought about the gradual expansion of restaurant dining. There was no coherent, mass movement by a delineated middle class to create a new restaurant culture. Rather, the subtle interplay of individual choices, a preference for restaurants where the middle-class diners felt comfortable, brought managers, clerks and professionals together and, coupled with the economic pressure their collective wealth exerted, transformed the restaurant.

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[81] Thomas C. Schelling, "Models of Segregation," *The American Economic Review* 59, no. 2 (1969). See also Michael Hechter and Christine Horne, *Theories of Social Order: A Reader* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Social Sciences, 2003); Jonathan Rauch, "Seeing around Corners," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 2002; Richard Zeckhauser, "Distinquished Fellow: Reflections on Thomas Schelling," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 3, no. 2 (1989).

Members of the nineteenth-century middle classes demonstrated class solidarity without quite acknowledging it by consuming the same goods and making the same choices. They transcended diverse political, intellectual and occupational experiences through public cultural consumption and became a coherent class through action. Once restaurants responded to the subtle preferences of the middle classes, the more conscious decision to dine out at a middle-class restaurant further cemented class identity. Strict materialists might argue that a middle class formed and cultural institutions followed. Empirically, however, there is little evidence of broad-based middle-class consciousness in the late nineteenth century that would justify such a contention. Certainly, only a few in the middle class explicitly argued for middle-class restaurants. We know that the transformation was happening only because we can document the changes the restaurant underwent.

By the end of the 1920s, *The American Restaurant Magazine* estimated that one out of four urbanites dined out at least once a day.[82] For most part, they did not eat in elite hotels and aristocratic restaurants. They ate in simple, affordable middle-class establishments. For the most enthusiastic of American boosters, the twenties represented a golden age of dining. John R. Thompson, the author of a celebratory account of the development of modern dining, boasted in his 1920 tract that "[i]t is to the United States that one must turn . . . for real progress in the feeding of the people . . .."[83] Similarly, *The American Restaurant Magazine* concluded, "it is common knowledge that restaurants existed in foreign lands long before their appearance in this country" but "we can look to the United States for real progress in the art of feeding the people."[84]

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[82] Research Department of the American Restaurant Magazine, *A Market Analysis of the Restaurant Industry* (Chicago: Patterson Publishing Co., 1930), 8.
[83] John R. Thompson, *Where We Foregather* (Chicago: n.d., ca. 1922), 6.
[84] Research Department of the American Restaurant Magazine, *A Market Analysis of the Restaurant Industry*, 8.

The "real progress" touted by the restaurant boosters was not the development of a new cuisine, but the proliferation of quick, clean and reputable restaurants where families could secure an affordable meal in the evening. As Thompson recalled:

> Fifty years ago there was practically nothing but railroad eating houses, with occasional all night lunch counters, in which one could eat a sandwich or drink a cup of coffee from heavy earthen ware cups and saucers, made for durability, not for looks or comfort. Ten years later the march of progress began, but it was not until the beginning of the present century that the possibilities of the business of feeding the world attracted the attention of the men who subsequently became the great organizers and money makers of the industry. One might almost say that it was not until the last score of years that the masterminds began to see their dreams come true. . . . The public today is more quickly served and better fed than at any time in the history of the world.[85]

Thompson's not so humble account of the rise of the American restaurant belies a genuine expertise on the growth of the industry. By 1920, as Thompson recognized, a revolution in dining had taken place.

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[85] Thompson, *Where We Foregather*, 1-2.

Chapter 5: "TASTE IT ONCE YOU WILL NOT BE DISTURBED BY THE SMELL": COLONIZING THE ETHNIC RESTAURANT

The 100-year celebration of American independence was marked by much fanfare in the United States and culminated in the Centennial Exhibition (formally known as the "International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Products of the Soil and Mine") that opened in May of 1876 in Philadelphia. Nearly nine million visitors would tour the Centennial site on the banks of the Schuylkill River during the Exposition's six-month tenure; thirty-seven nations participated in the event.

A few months after the fair opened, *Harper's Weekly* published a special supplement dedicated to the Centennial. Slipped among the etchings of Centennial buildings was a sketch by

Walter Brown, a Rhode Island-born artist and illustrator best remembered for his drawings in Mark Twain's *A Tramp Abroad*. Brown's "Our Artist's Dream of the Centennial Restaurants" depicts a clutter of restaurants and stalls grouped on a hill with various signs advertising their offerings.

Figure 4: Walter Brown, "Our Artist's Dream of the Centennial Restaurants," 1876 (*Harper's Weekly*)

In the left forefront is a small Russian restaurant, dwarfed by two burley men with fur-trimmed hats, and signs that advertise "Charlotte Russe" and "Castor Oil on Tap." Towering above, on unsteady posts, is an African restaurant bedecked with makeshift menus offering "Natives on the

Half Shell" and "Elephant á la Stanley." Dead center are a Turkish and a French restaurant.

Behind a turbaned, hookah-smoking Turk the sign reads "OTTO Roses by the Glass" while at

the nearby French restaurant, a waiter, nose in the air, offers "Bull Frogs," "Vin" and "Snails."

Meanwhile, just visible to the right, a German "Bier Garten" is stacked on top of a Chinese

restaurant and almost obscured by the various Chinese signs for "Cat Sup," "Rat Pie" and

"Hashed Cat." Sundry other booths offered ham or missionary sandwiches (Sandwich Islands),

mud pies ("Digger Indians"), Camel's Milk Punch (Arabia), Roman Punch (the Papacy) and

whale on toast (Greenland Eskimos?).[1]

The racial stereotypes of Brown's "Dream"—the narrow-minded, if sometimes clever

xenophobia—may have been an accurate depiction of American's fears about foreign cuisine,

but it poorly reflected the reality of the fair.[2] Brown envisioned a curiously cosmopolitan dining

experience, a quixotic panoply of American and ethnic cuisines. In practice, however, the fair

offered little to challenge the adventurous eater. Exposition organizers provided for nine major

restaurants: two French restaurants, three loosely defined as "American," (including a Southern

Restaurant featuring, as William Dean Howells noted, fried chicken "served by lustrous citizens

of color"), a Vienna Bakery Café and Lauber's German Restaurant. The most fashionable was

the *Trois Frères Provençaux*, an aristocratic French restaurant that could rival in cost and

elegance the best restaurants of New York or Philadelphia, but all were relatively expensive and

exclusive.[3] Many visitors to the fair ate at their hotel and never sampled the food at the signature

restaurants; most of those who did dine on the fair grounds visited the Great American

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[1] Walter F. Brown, "Our Artist's Dream of the Centennial Restaurants," *Harper's Weekly*, 1 July 1876, 541.
[2] Ibid.
[3] The restaurant La Fayette appears to have been the more Americanized of the two and also the more affordable. Of the other, Trois Frères Provençaux, William Dean Howell wrote: The restaurant is "so called because each of the Brothers makes out his bill of Three Prices, and you pay the sum total." William Dean Howells, "A Sinnight of the Centennial," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1876, 94.

Restaurant or the comfort station lunch rooms that featured typical "American" fare: cold meats,

raw oysters, ice cream and, in a nod to internationalism, "foreign bottled malt beverages."[4]

Cat, rat, whale, elephant, camel and dog were not served. Spaghetti, tamales and

Hungarian goulash were also not available. Notably absent, as Donald Mitchner wrote in

Scribner's Monthly, were restaurants that meaningfully expressed the diversity of the thirty-nine

nations that had sent representatives to the Centennial.[5]

> We are at the fair to measure so far as we may all the outcome of
> the civilization of our sister nations, the world over; and when we
> have grown wearied with study of their art, their guns, their cloths,
> their jewels, what better can we do in the noontide of rest, than test
> the dinners they cook? It is a pity, indeed, that the opportunity is
> not larger in this direction. We can try a cup of Tunisian coffee,
> and the excellent bread and chocolate of Vienna; but there is no
> Hollander to regale us with Deventer gingerbread, or his cheese, or
> herring; no Spanish service of an *olla-podrida*; no Provençal flavor
> of garlic, even at the *Trois Frères*. There is no Indian specialty of
> curry, or of mulligatawny; no sight of chopsticks, unless one
> follows the Chinamen to their private haunts. There is, again, no
> restaurant where one can be sure of great "rounds" of beef, or true
> roast sirloin, or turtle soup, or turbot, or muffins. The English
> could have wisely supplemented their very full exhibit by an
> honest British tavern table, were it only as a reminder of the
> Tabard, or of Weller, senior, or of Dame Quickly.[6]

There is no telling how Americans would have received a more diverse culinary

Centennial had it been offered. Journalists remarked on how receptive Americans were to the

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[4] Vistors such as the seventeen year-old Thomas make scant mention of eating. Outside of one dinner listed in
Thomas's expense account (90 cents), he purchased only soda water, cream mead and ice cream (which, in the
diary, is referred to as lunch). Given his late daily arrival at the fair (typically around 10:30) and the lack of food-
related expenses, it would appear that he took most of his meals in his hotel. This was typical of the Victorian era
traveler. Frank L. Thomas, My trip to Philadelphia in 1876 (Diary MS July 12-July 26 1876), Free Library of
Philadelphia, Centennial Exhibition Digital Collection http://libwww.library.phila.gov/CenCol/exh-food.htm (cited
Feb 28, 2004). Last updated Jan 25 2001.

[4] Donald G. Mitchell, "In and About the Fair," *Scribners Monthly*, November 1876, 116. On comfort stations, see
Café Leland [Menu]. Centennial Exhibition 1876 Philadelphia Scrapbook, Free Library of Philadelphia, Centennial
Exhibition Digital Collection http://libwww.library.phila.gov/CenCol/exh-food.htm (cited Feb 28, 2004). Last
updated Jan 25 2001. (Note: Beers were listed on the wine list as "Foreign.") These were supplemented by various
stalls selling popcorn, soda water, cream mead and ice cream.

[5] Donald G. Mitchell, "In and About the Fair," *Scribners Monthly*, November 1876, 116.

[6] Ibid.

multicultural exhibits at the fair, but culinary adventurism was not a trait typically ascribed to Americans in the nineteenth century. In the United States in 1876, French food—by dint of its association with both European and American aristocracies—was recognized as the only great cuisine and both American and ethnic dishes had few defenders. Brown and the fair's organizers had different visions of the Centennial Exhibition, but both agreed that America was not ready to experience the diversity of the world's cuisines.

In the closing quarter of the nineteenth century, restaurant dining in the United States changed. New immigrants flooded into American cities bringing diverse cuisines and establishing their own entrepreneurial traditions of restaurant ownership. These foreign restaurants offered slices of home for immigrants in an alien land. However, the "ethnic" restaurant did not stay on the margins of urban life for long. A growing middle class, eager to find its cultural identity, colonized the foreign restaurant, transformed it into an institution that catered to the middle-class public, and established a new ideal of dining grounded in a celebration of cosmopolitanism.

FOREIGN FOOD

In the early 1870s only a few visionaries thought that Americans would embrace foreign cuisines. An 1872 editorial in the *New York Times* argued that the United States could become a great culinary nation if Americans learned to celebrate the diversity of dining experiences found in American cities, but the *Time's* editorial staff had to admit that the moment had not yet arrived: ethnic cosmopolitan cooking might be the "Cuisine of the Future," the *Times* wrote, "but our trouble is, it is not the Cuisine of the Present."[7]

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[7] "Middle-Age Cookery," *New York Times*, 25 October 1872, 4.

New-York, we all say, is getting to be very cosmopolitan. Her houses and her theatres, her tastes and her habits, are taking on the air of Old World capitals—in fact, so to speak, of an agglomerate of capitals, since here we have numbers of people from nearly all the great cities abroad, who bring the ways of their former homes across the sea with them. From this novel state of things, in which a vast metropolis is made up, not of Americans only, but Germans and Irish and British and French, Italians and Spanish, Swedes, Danes, Poles, Africans, with a sprinkling of Chinese, Japanese, and Turks, arise some inconveniences and some valuable advantages. Among the latter, it might be supposed that eclectic modes of cookery would spring up, wherein all the best customs of the various nations might be combined into one harmonious whole, and a system thus produced which in its entirety should be superior to any of its parts.[8]

The *Times* had identified a major obstacle to the adoption of ethnic food by Americans. For ethnic food to become the cuisine of the future, the paper argued, the stranglehold on restaurant culture held by the ruling class had to be broken. In the mid-nineteenth century, restaurants served French food to elites seeking to claim the mantel of an American aristocracy. The United States, the newspaper stated, had "restaurants and hotels perhaps equal to any in the world," but these establishments were only for the "opulent classes." For the "middle orders as regards the purse," dining in the United States was "certainly not what it should be." "We may be ever so cosmopolitan, progressive, and modern in other things," the editors wrote, "but in this we are still far behind hand [sic], and our cookery, as adapted to the persons named, is little better than that of the Middle Ages. . . .Unless you can pay for the best of everything, you will, for the most part, have to put up with the worst."[9] Until the middle classes demanded an alternative to the elite French restaurant, the *Times* article suggests, the restaurant of the future was little more than wishful thinking.

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

The *Times* did not address it but the rise of the ethnic restaurant faced a second obstacle.

Before the ethnic restaurant could become a staple of the middle-class urban experience,

stereotypes attached to foreign cuisines had to be confronted. In 1866, C. W. Gesner writing in

Harper's New Monthly Magazine surveyed New York's culinary fare and while he—like the

editors at the *New York Times*—condemned the "up town" restaurants (which he found to be "the

most expensive and the most unsatisfactory dining places" in the city), he could not envision the

ethnic restaurant serving as an acceptable alternative for the middle-class dining public.

> Greasiness in various degrees distinguishes the German dishes.
> Dirt in all degrees is present at the German restaurants. Plates and
> cups with pieces chipped out . . . and knives which know no
> cleaning, are always found. When the grease, which is so freely
> used, takes fire in the kitchen below, or in the rear of the dining-
> room, there is a suffocating odor which attends the decomposition
> of animal fat dispersed through the room.[10]

Gesner's account of New York's ethnic restaurants was not unusual for the middle of the

nineteenth century. Most Americans, except for those who had recently immigrated, avoided

ethnic cuisines which they found too greasy, too garlicky, or too spicy, and looked askance at

restaurants where the odors and the tastes were unfamiliar.   In San Francisco, although ethnic

restaurants had provided inexpensive Chinese, German and Italian meals to a bachelor

population drawn to the city by gold in the 1850s, few positive accounts of the city's ethnic fare

were published before the 1870s.

The newspaper editor Noah Brooks, a former confidante of Abraham Lincoln, was a

regular denizen of San Francisco's small French restaurants. "French cookery," Brooks claimed,

had "in the cosmopolitan city of the republic . . . predominance over that of all other peoples"

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[10] Gesner, "Concerning Restaurants," 593.

and his account of the city's ethnic restaurants was not flattering.[11] While he was aware of one

Italian restaurant frequented by "traveled people, gourmands and blasé diners-out" looking "to

enjoy a new sensation," for the most part Brooks felt foreign restaurants were solely for

immigrants.

> The flavors of many nationalities are pronounced instances of their
> several national schools of the art. Germany has several
> restaurants—not especially distinctive, but essentially
> Germanesque in their customers. In the lower part of the city are
> numerous Italian restaurants, few of which are really first-class, if
> prices indicate such grades. . . . The fishing business of the bay of
> San Francisco is exclusively in the hands of these brave and hardy
> men; and at six o'clock you shall find them congregated about the
> little tables of their favorite resorts, talking loudly, pouring
> continuous streams of red wine under their huge dark mustachios,
> emphasizing their speech with table-thumps and smelling
> dreadfully of fish and the salt, salt sea. . . . The Italian restaurants,
> however, are more exclusively patronized by the people of their
> own nationality than is true of any other class.[12]

Even in the city's famous Chinatown, already a tourist attraction, Brooks argued that the

restaurants were "liberal and bountiful to [their] guest" but "few western palates can endure even

the most delicate of their dishes."[13]

Gesner and Brooks' dislike of foreign restaurants was typical of many nineteenth century

accounts of ethnic eating. *The Cook*, one of the first culinary newspapers in the United States,

regularly disparaged ethnic food during its short run in the 1880s. Polish dishes were a mixed

bag; a beetroot soup called barszoz was acceptable, but the magazine warned travelers that

kapusniak, a sauerkraut beef soup, was "nasty."[14] Likewise, a traveler's account of the

"unwearying round of pork fat, black beans and rice or mealio" popular in the countryside of

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[11] Brooks, "Restaurant Life of San Francisco," 467.
[12] Ibid., 471-72.
[13] Ibid., 472.
[14] "Polish Dishes," *The Cook*, July 20 1885, 9.

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Brazil sported the title "Barbaric Feeding."[15] And while the editors bowed to pressure from

middle-class readers to print German recipes (conceding that "the cooks of the Vaterland prepare

many delicate, delicious, nutritious compounds"), they showed no such magnanimity towards the

Swedish. A venomous 1885 article reprinted from *Lippincott's Magazine* labeled Sweden's

sideboard appetizers (smorgasbord) "a nightmare of gastronomic horrors" and concluded that

"long before the unhappy tourist has finished his tour he is a hopeless dyspeptic or a raging

Swedophobe."[16]

By then, however, the cultural politics of dining were undergoing dramatic changes.

Lacking the economic and cultural capital to be full participants in the elite aristocratic

restaurant, middle-class consumers sought out alternatives. They ate in lunchrooms and

chophouses and small American restaurants. They also increasingly ate in ethnic restaurants.

Although jokes about odorous German concoctions and garlicky Italian food remained a staple

of many journals and newspapers, the middle classes—eager to find an alternative to the

unfriendly and expensive aristocratic restaurant—ventured into ethnic neighborhoods and

experimented with new foods. Familiarity bred tolerance, patronage brought accommodation,

and by the turn of the century, middle-class Americans had become champions of a new culinary

adventurism.

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[15] "Barbaric Feeding," *The Cook*, April 13 1885, 7.

[16] "A Nightmare of Gastronomic Horrors," *The Cook*, June 15 1885, 9. *Lippincott's Magazine* seemed to take a perverse pleasure in disparaging national cuisine. An 1898 article on German cooking, widely reprinted in the newspapers of the era, claimed that in the German restaurant "the cuisine is on the whole monotonous and the food singularly insipid . . ." "Teutonic Cookery," *New York Times*, 5 June 1898, 17. See also "German Dinners," *Boston Daily Globe*, 26 September 1873, 3.

THE INEXPENSIVE DINNER

Middle-class urbanites, many who lived in flats without cooking facilities and sought

something a little better than boarding house fare, discovered the ethnic restaurant in the 1870s

and 1880s. Despite the scurrilous reviews and negative stereotypes, ethnic restaurants—in New

York and San Francisco and a number of other cities—won the patronage of the emergent

middle classes by offering good, abundant, inexpensive food. As one observer commented,

middle-class urbanites "choose restaurants from preference" and "cheapness and abundance" can

only be found in "foreign table d'hôte restaurants."[17]

> Eating at a first-rate restaurant à la carte means a very large
> expenditure, in addition to the trouble of ordering—a trouble the
> average American shrinks from as naturally as the average
> Frenchman or Italian welcomes it. Eating at a second-rate
> restaurant of the same description implies dyspepsia if not worse.
> But frequenting a passable restaurant . . . the outlay is determined
> at once and the danger of the repast being followed by indigestion
> reduced to a minimum. The restaurant may be French, Italian,
> Hungarian or even German, and the price may be 30 cents or $1.25
> a head; the consequences, at any rate, will in all cases cause no
> annoyance.[18]

In Eastern cities, including New York, German restaurants were the first to establish a

reputation among the urban middle class.[19] German immigrants had been coming to the United

States since colonial times and by the mid-nineteenth century, there were over a million German-

born immigrants living in the country. In large cities, these immigrants clustered in ethnic

enclaves and supported dozens of restaurants. The prominence of German immigrant

communities, and the fact that by the 1870s many Germans were fully assimilated (and

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[17] On preference, see "Cheap Restaurants," *New York Times*, 6 August 1871, 5. On table d'hôte, see "Cheap Restaurants," 5; "The Restaurant System," 3.
[18] "The Restaurant System," 3. See also "German Restaurants," 5.
[19] "German Restaurants," 5. Compare to descriptions of only moderately patronized Italian restaurants in "Cheap Restaurants," 5.

increasingly middle class), undermined inhibitions and made it easier for middle-class Americans to find and experiment with German food.

German restaurants were initially located in working class neighborhoods where, in order "to secure their rooms at as cheap rentals as possible," they "generally occup[ied] the basements of stores and dwelling-houses, and from the exterior do not, therefore, present as inviting an appearance as they would were they located on ground floors."[20] Reflecting the widely held view that German food smelled foul, reporters who visited these restaurants often commented on the "smells from the kitchen," but they nonetheless pronounced these restaurants "almost always neat and clean" and inexpensive.[21]

> The table furnishes are simple but clean, and the floor generally sprinkled with fresh white sand. . . . At most of these places in the Bowery, the price is thirty-five cents and for this one may get five courses, consisting of soup, fish, an entrée, a roast, and pudding or pie, with, at this time of the year, three or four kinds of vegetables, and ending with a small cup of particularly good coffee. Though the meat is not always of the best quality, it is sure to be good, and well-cooked, though in a distinctly national manner.[22]

Urban newspaper reporters cautiously encouraged middle-class diners to try German cuisine. "So entirely German are the dinners in this latter particular, that Americans can, by partaking of them, become acquainted with dishes of whose existence they had never before dreamed, though in this respect much that is served may be distasteful to the native palate."[23] Lentil and bologna soup, beef a la mode served with macaroni ("a very peculiar but highly satisfactory way of eating it"), *Wiener schnitzel* ("a tremendous name, which, however, when bought, is only veal culet with the bone removed"), and "Hamburger steak" ("simply a beefsteak redeemed from its original toughness by being mashed into mince-meat and then formed into a

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[20] "Cheap Restaurants," 5. See also "German Restaurants," 5.
[21] "Cheap Restaurants," 5.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

conglomerated mass") were deemed particularly suited to the American palate by a *New York Times* reporter in 1873. The reporter also assured readers that many German restaurants offered—"on a very small scale for the Americans only"—"roast beef, as well as the odd things that foreigners love, and . . . pumpkin pies and dumplings baked."[24]

German cuisine remained popular throughout the late nineteenth century, especially in cities like Buffalo or Milwaukee where the native-born middle class joined a growing German middle class in patronizing the most popular restaurants. But as the 1870s waned, German table d'hôte restaurants faced competition for middle-class patronage from French and Italian establishments. In New York, French and Italian table d'hotes were located a little further uptown than their German counterparts. While still found primarily in basements, these restaurants often charged "five or ten cents per meal" more than the Germans restaurants and featured more elaborate menus.[25]

French table d'hôte restaurants, although serving fixed price meals and simple dinners, were familiar to middle-class patrons that had experimented with the aristocratic restaurants in the city's grand hotels and elite restaurants and in some cities their reputations suffered as a result of the comparison. But if the food was sometimes disparaged, French immigrant restaurants were applauded for their low prices and the informality of service middle-class diners could not find in their aristocratic counterparts.

> But still the wonder is how they can do so much. They serve soup,
> a salad, a choice of several kinds of fish, and any one of half a
> dozen entrees, either of two kinds of roast, fruit, cheese, and black
> coffee with kirsch or cognac (only don't try to light the spirit), and
> of course, the half bottle of ordinaire to each guest. The cooking is
> fairly good, too,--French cooking that conceals the nature of the

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[24] "German Restaurants," 5.
[25] "Cheap Restaurants," 5.

materials, and desire you only to accept the results and be thankful.[26]

Italian cuisine, while popular with male clerks in New York in the 1860s and 1870s, was less familiar to many middle-class diners than French cuisine (although occasionally macaroni dishes were served in formal French restaurants). Contemporary accounts of the first Italian restaurants favored by the middle classes often included reassurances that Italian dishes were palatable to middle-class tastes.[27] Encouraging experimentation, a reporter for the New York Times favorably compared Italian cuisine to German cuisine in 1871.

> The manner in which the different dishes are cooked, or compounded, is better suited to the American taste than the [German], though at the same time it is distinctively national. It is only by visiting these restaurants that New Yorkers who have never been in Italy can really know how macaroni should be properly prepared.[28]

Such reassurances were apparently effective. Fourteen years later the *New York Times* claimed that Italian table d'hôtes had become the most popular foreign restaurants in the city.[29] As with other table d'hôtes, the Italian restaurant's popularity rested on the low cost of the dinner.

> The greatest mystery about Moretti's dinners, next to the cooking of them, is their cheapness. For a good soup, a dish of macaroni—and plenty of it—fish, excellent lamb chops and kidneys, two or three kinds of birds in season, lettuce, salad, two or three kinds of cheese, as many kinds of fruit, coffee, and half a flask—in quantity at least a quart—of light Italian wine, he charges $1.25; with vin ordinaire, $1. At his own place, Charles Delmonico would have charged at least $5 or $6 for the same dinner.[30]

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[26] Greene, "The Restaurants of San Francisco," 566.
[27] "Cheap Restaurants," 5.
[28] Ibid.
[29] "The Restaurant System," 3. Italian food was popular, but it was still quite new in 1885 and the paper felt it judicious to define "spaghetti—by which title the vermicelli-like form of macaroni is known . . ." But Italian cuisine had received the approval of the late Charles Delmonico of New York's most famous restaurant and the middle class were not yet so thoroughly disabused of the elite's influence in matters of taste that such things did not matter. A number of newspaper articles in the nineteenth century made reference to Delmonico's penchant for the risotto and ravioli at the Café Moretti. See, for example, "Delmonico's Delights," *Washington Post*, 24 Febuary 1884, 3.
[30] *New York Tribune* [author], "Delmonico's Delights," *Washington Post*, 24 February 1884, 3.

German, French and Italian restaurants remained the staple foreign cuisines in most American cities, but by the end of the nineteenth century there were a wide variety of immigrant restaurants competing for middle-class patrons. New York's rapid growth as an immigrant destination brought new ethnic communities and new culinary experiences for the ambitious and adventurous diner. Hungarian, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, South American and Syrian restaurants were patronized by a middle class looking for inexpensive meals, good cooking and a friendly environment. And similar changes were happening in other American cities. Although the most popular cuisines varied from city to city—a reflection of different patterns of immigration—by the 1890s, new restaurants and new cuisines were widely embraced by middle-class restaurant-goers.

In San Francisco in 1892, Charles S. Greene, an editor of the *Overland Monthly* and later the city librarian of Oakland, California, observed that the "[t]he large floating population and its cosmopolitan character have made restaurants numerous and very varied."[31] Among the over four hundred restaurants that served the city were dozens of immigrant establishments. "So far as the education of the stomach goes," Greene preened, "one may obtain all the benefits of the grand tour without leaving San Francisco."[32] Greene's "grand tour" of San Francisco included a German restaurant featuring prune soup, herring salad, "a full variety of sausage," and matzos; a Mexican restaurant "where the visitor can burn out his alimentary canal in the most approved Spanish style . . . ;" and a genuine Italian restaurant where, unlike the uptown restaurants that "only differ from the French in having a course of Italian pasta in the shape of macaroni,

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[31] Greene, "The Restaurants of San Francisco," 561.
[32] Ibid., 567. Wealthy Americans of the nineteenth century took their "grand tour" in Europe. The grand tour almost always included stops in France and Italy.

tagliarini, spaghetti, or ravioli," the "food was surprisingly good."[33] For a true "Celestial repast"

in Chinatown, Greene suggested making arrangements in advance; if prearranged "they will give

you a wonderful assortment of viands, even to shark's fins and birdsnest soup, if you are willing

to pay for such great delicacies."[34] Greene conceded he had only begun to discover the city's

foreign fare and noted he had not yet experienced the Russian, Scandinavian and Japanese

restaurants of his cosmopolitan home.

Journalists in other cities were also taking note of the growing numbers of foreign

restaurants patronized by middle-class urbanites. In 1892, the *Los Angeles Times* claimed that "a

person must have come a long distance from a very obscure corner of the earth if he cannot find

something to suit him among all the variety there is to choose from, and Los Angeles restaurants

are justly popular and well patronized."[35] Such restaurants included many which "cater to

particular nationalities, where the German can satisfy his taste for sauer-kraut, limburger and

pigs-feet, the Frenchman enjoy[s] his patent mixtures with absinthe in his coffee; the Italian his

favorite macaroni and the Spaniard his fiery chilli-con-carve [sic], and the writer once heard a

'Tarheel' order 'some fa-at pork an' some dandelion greens with a few morlasses onto hit,'

which was instantly forthcoming."[36] Similarly, Washington D.C. celebrated the "cosmopolitan"

dining opportunities available to urbanites at the turn of the century.[37] Washington in 1901

opened its first Tex-Mex restaurant featuring "Hot Tamales" and "Chile Con Carne," foods so

"biting hot because of the peppers" that "those who eat, partake freely of iced water on the

side."[38] But chili, as the *Washington Post* reported, was not all the city had to offer. "Der

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[33] Ibid., 567-9.
[34] Ibid., 570.
[35] Alessandro, "Los Angeles Restaurants," 11.
[36] Ibid.
[37] "All Palates Pleased: Cosmopolitan Variety in the Washington Restaurants," *Washington Post*, 14 July 1901, 20.
[38] Ibid.

Vaterland is by the far the best represented here of any nation in the matter of national eating places. . . . Washington has rathskellers and beer tunnels galore, where pumpernickel, boar's head, Brauchweiser, leberwurst, schnitzels, Bismark herring and limburger may be had ad libitum."[39] And the city also boasted three French restaurants, one near the Capitol building; "a dozen or more Chinese restaurants in different parts of the city;" and an Italian restaurant where "[t]he intruder is not looked upon with great favor, but the proprietor willingly serves the visitor with one of the coarse bowls of slippery spaghetti."[40]

For a growing number of middle-class urbanites in New York, San Francisco and a host of other Progressive era cities, ethnic cooking had become a seminal part of their public dining experiences. In 1897, Rose Bell Holt shared her experience of living in New York on a fixed budget with the readers of *What to Eat*. Initially she shared expenses with a friend and engaged the services of a maid to assist in preparing meals. But when Holt's friend returned to "her Western home," she dismissed the maid and began to explore the city's restaurants. Quickly she discovered, and exploited, the variety of restaurants in New York.

> Within a radius of one mile from our home we know the cooking
> in all the good French, Italian and German restaurants. Finally we
> [she often dined with her brother] settled on three special places,
> each one presided over by a chef of a different nationality, and
> each one all that could be desired. The French and Italian served a
> table d'hote dinner, fifty cents, consisting of from five to eight
> courses, and smile as you may, they were good. It was, indeed,
> hard to choose between them.[41]

Holt's experience was not unusual. By the turn of the century, middle-class diners had embraced the foreign restaurants where, if the food was sometimes unfamiliar, they commanded the

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid. Regrettably, the article notes, the city's one Spanish Restaurant, patronized mostly by Cubans, had recently closed.
[41] Rosa Belle Holt, "Bohemian House-Keeping in New York," *What to Eat*, June 1897, 251-52.

cultural authority they lacked in the elite restaurant and through their patronage established the

respectability of ethnic cuisine.

A MIDDLE-CLASS INSTITUTION

The foreign table d'hôte was a practical alternative for the middle-class diner who lacked

the resources to eat regularly at the more expensive French-influenced hotels and restaurants.

But middle-class patrons did more than eat in ethnic restaurants; they colonized them. Middle-

class diners, like their empire-building counterparts, embraced ethnic culture but only to the

extent that it furthered their own interests.[42] Cosmopolitanism eating was rarely about

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[42] The use of the term colonization here is intended to conjure up a comparison with the duality of imperialism. Imperialism involved both a conquering and, often, an appropriation of local culture. Similarly, as Lisa Heldke explains, "food adventurers" seek novel experiences for the sake of novelty, a purely selfish act. "The harm to the colonized culture is primarily cultural, not economic. To value a culture simply because it brings me into contact with something different from my own is to value it because of an incidental fact about myself; such a form of appreciation makes my experience the most relevant aspect of the exchange, and makes me the only relevant measure of the interest of a cuisine." Colonial acts of culinary appropriation and refinement, Heldki argues, "mine" the exotic other's culture and undermines the original cultural meanings embedded in food and food rituals. Lisa M. Heldke, *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 15, 45-59. Historically, I argue that the middle class did not merely enjoy ethnic cuisines, they used these cuisines to advance their class interests and through their economic patronage transformed foreign restaurants. This approach differs from many recent works on ethnic food in the United States where the emphasis is on the multicultural gains achieved by culinary exchange. Thus, Donna Gabaccia describes the development of a market for uniquely ethnic cuisine neutrally as "cross-over eating;" Richard Pillsbury uses a melting pot metaphor and is soberly triumphant. And Harvey Levenstein argues that argues ethnic foods were not generally assimilated prior to the 1960s, but, nonetheless, views the exception, Italian food, as having been "internationalized." These accounts reflect the perspective of their authors who view the success or failure of ethnic food largely from the standpoint of immigrants (even if Levenstein claims otherwise) and although fully acknowledging that ethnic cuisines were never adopted by Americans without changes, nonetheless see the increase in ethnic food consumption in the United States as, in some small way, a triumph of ethnic integration. Donna Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 117-21; Harvey Levenstein, "Immigration, Travel, and the Internationalization of the American Diet," in *Food Selection: From Genes to Culture*, ed. Harvey Anderson, John Blundell, and Matty Chiva (Levallois-Perret, France: Danone Institute, 2002), 154; Richard Pillsbury, *No Foreign Food: The American Diet in Time and Place*, *Geographies of the Imagination* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998). I don't take issue with that argument (except, perhaps, to emphasize the importance of ethnic cuisines at an earlier date in United States history), but from the vantage point of the middle class, the foreign restaurant was as much a product of their patronage as it was an immigrant achievement. The term colonization seems appropriate given the way that ethnic foods are described in non-ethnic "American" sources. In 1907, the *New York Times* printed a recipe for spaghetti that called for boiling tomato paste with noodles and topping it with a sauce made from leftover duck. This strange dish bore little similarity to what the Italian chef prepared, but the *Times* claim it was "'the best' recipe in the world" for spaghetti. Acknowledging that "before so many table d'hote cooks had come to this country . . ., one might have made such an assertion without fear of

celebrating ethnic identity. It was a celebration of middle-class culinary adventurism but the

middle classes championed only those ethnic restaurants that catered to their preferences. Ethnic

restaurants became more respectable, moved to centers of major cities, and adapted their menus

for an American clientele. In 1870s, the *New York Times* had speculated that as the foreign table

d'hotes became popular with the middle classes "it is highly probable that in the next few years

their influence will work great changes in the present very expensive style of living."[43] By the

end of the nineteenth century, these "great changes" were readily apparent.

As middle-class patrons chose to eat in ethnic restaurants and restaurant owners began to

cater to this relatively well-off clientele, the character of immigrant eateries changed. Ethnic

families, "the small band of Italian and polyglot intimates who gave [the ethnic restaurateur] his

first 'lift,'" were crowded out by the rush of wealthier patrons.[44] A reporter for the *New York*

Times noticed in 1885 that it was the "quieter people," middle-class couples and families, which

formed the majority of the patrons at the more respectable ethnic restaurants of cities like New

York. "Young couples who dwell in furnished rooms and have no cook and no servant visit

these restaurants constantly; people who have country cousins 'dine them' there as a 'treat,' and

when materfamilias has been given ten minutes notice by Bridget she often proposes to

paterfamilias that the whole brood shall, for a day or two, tone up their stomachs by means of the

masterpieces of Signor Bottesini's chef."[45]

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contradiction," the paper nonetheless asserted that it was superior to anything "devised by either the French or the Italian cook." The assertion suggests the boldness with which Americans approached ethnic cuisines and their willingness to demand changes. "New Sauce for Spaghetti: A Method of Preparing the Dish Seldom Seen Here," *New York Times*, 12 October 1907, 9.

[43] "Cheap Restaurants," 5.

[44] "The Restaurant System," 3. The article also notes that by 1885, fashionable "swells" were patronizing downtown restaurants.

[45] Ibid.

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Restaurants that had "taken root in basements . . . or in parlor floors in side streets" were now regularly patronized by the urban middle class.[46] But restaurateurs, eager to capitalize on success, increasingly moved to locations more accessible to the professional and managerial class. By 1885, ethnic eateries in New York could be found near "Fifth-avenue and amid brownstone abodes in fashionable byways within sight of the main arteries of the metropolis."[47] This migration from ethnic enclaves to middle-class neighborhoods progressed year after year. Looking back in 1920, a writer for the *New York Times* recalled that it was only "a short time ago," in the first decade of the twentieth century that the streets in the twenties and thirties blocks of Manhattan had been home to the city's French and Italian restaurants. More recently, "within the last half dozen years," the reporter had witnessed the migration of ethnic restaurants to the lower forties; by 1920, the "high stooped brownstones" between forty-third street and forty-seventh streets near Times Square, neighborhoods that had only recently been "doing service as private homes or boarding houses," were occupied by inexpensive middle-class restaurants. The writer concluded that "the increasing presence of Italian and French restaurants is an unfailing mark of the decadence of the former homelike atmosphere and the preparation for a hustling and commercial life."[48] More accurately, these restaurants chased their clientele, following them uptown and even to the suburbs.   Historians Michael and Ariane Batterberry observed that by the 1920s fashionable uptown Manhattan played host to Italian, German, Chinese, Russian and Romanian restaurants and studies of New York and Chicago in the twenties demonstrate that Chinese restaurants were increasingly opening in suburban communities.[49]

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[46] Ibid. Not every ethnic restaurant chased after middle-class patronage. Many remained in ethnic enclaves and continued to cater to ethnic workers. These "bohemian" restaurants remained in vogue with the most adventurous in the middle class.

[47] Ibid.

[48] "Business Changes in Times Square," *New York Times*, 26 December 1920, 82.

[49] Batterberry and Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 222; Jie Zhang, "Transplanting Identity: A Study of Chinese Immigrants and the Chinese Restaurant Business" (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1999), 127,

The move uptown brought with it changes in the menu of the ethnic restaurant. Ethnic restaurants developed "hybrid" menus that featured an assortment of ethnic dishes and American favorites. As we have already seen, the earliest German restaurants made concessions to their new clientele by grafting American favorites onto their menus.[50] Italian restaurants made similar concessions.

> Then the intelligent Boniface has bettered his service, added a
> course to his bill of fare, poured less water into his ordinaire, and
> levied an additional tax of 10 to 25 cents upon each of his question.
> It is a curious fact that, as the quality of the guests and food
> improves, the national dishes disappear, and the Italian cook shows
> a stronger inclination to a hybrid cuisine than to the unadulterated
> and savory dishes of his mother land.[51]

This trend continued into the twentieth century. A 1915 fixed price multicourse menu at New York's most celebrated German restaurant, the HofBräu Haus, featured a polyglot choice for the first course that included two French dishes, *Broiled Spanish Mackerel, Maitre d'hotel;* and *Fried Filet of Sole, Ravigote;* and an English dish, *Boiled Beef [with] Horseradish Sauce*; a second course of *Spaghetti a l'Italienne*; and a third course that offered a choice between turkey or *Gefuellte Kalbsbrust*.[52] The *Gefuellte Kalbsbrust*, a stuffed veal breast, was the only decidedly German dish of the entrees listed. Similarly, Ye Olde Dutch Tavern in New York, an ostensibly German/Dutch restaurant, served such a multicultural mix of German and American dishes in 1914 that it might not be fair to class it as an ethnic restaurant at all. Of the twenty-nine

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35-36. See also, Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 102. Ting-chiu Fan, "Chinese Residents in Chicago" (master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1926) as cited in Xinyang Wang, *Surviving the City: The Chinese Immigrant Experience in New York City, 1890-1970* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 76.
[50] "German Restaurants," 5.
[51] "The Restaurant System," 3.
[52] Menu, "Menu," Hofbräu Haus, New York, N.Y, December 29, 1915, Box 292 (not numbered), Buttolph Menu Collection. The only other two German items on a menu that featured a choice of three soups, three vegetables, a salad and five desserts were the Deutsch Linsen Suppe mit Wurstschnitten (Lentil and Sausage Soup) and Sauerkraut.

entrees listed in its December 1914 menu, only four were clearly German.[53] Recounting a

similar experience, the food writer Charles Rosebault observed after he visited a Danish Coffee

Shop that "if there was any fault to find it was in the bewildering variety of offerings. It was as

though it aimed to be the whole world at once: French, Austrian, German, Italian, English and

American cuisines were all represented, as well as the Danish."[54]

Menus, however, fail to reveal more subtle changes, and it is likely that ethnic restaurants

adapted their cuisines to accommodate middle-class tastes. Garlic and other spices unfamiliar to

Americans were eliminated and dishes too ethnic for Americans disappeared from menus. For

those early middle-class adventurers who had developed a taste for authentic food, these changes

were cause for complaint. A cartoon from 1913 spoofed the "supposedly foreign restaurants."

In the cartoon set in a dining room with a sign proclaiming it a "Real Italian Restaurant," an

American restaurant proprietor calls back to his co-owner, a German chef, "Hey Lina! Der's an

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[53] Menu, "Ye Olde Dutch Tavern," Ye Olde Dutch Tavern, New York, N.Y, September 1, 1914, Box 281 (1914-0891), Buttolph Menu Collection.
[54] Charles J. Rosebault, "Where New York Dines Out," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 27 May 1923, 8.

Eyetalian guy that actually wants some Eyetalian grub."[55] In the article that accompanied the

cartoon, the writer bragged that he has found two authentic immigrant restaurants—one Arab,

the other Italian—but refused to name them because he feared that they would be quickly

overrun.[56]

Figure 5: "Supposedly Foreign Restaurants," 1913 (*New York Times*)

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[55] Marty, "Supposedly Foreign Restaurant" illustration for "The Romance and Reality of New York's Restaurants," 9.

[56] Ibid. See also Clarence E. Edwords, *Bohemian San Francisco: Its Restaurants and Their Most Famous Recipes; the Elegant Art of Dining* (San Francisco: P. Elder and company, 1914), 48. Edwords made similar comments about Chinatown: "But with the changed conditions there has come a change in the restaurant life of the quarter, and now a number of places have been opened to cater to Americans, and on every hand one sees 'chop suey' signs, and 'Chinese noodles.' It goes without saying that one seldom sees a Chinaman eating in the restaurants that are most attractive to Americans. Some serve both white and yellow and others serve but the Chinese, and a few favored white friends." Edwords, *Bohemian San Francisco*, 54-55; Rosebault, "Where New York Dines Out," 8.

Changes in patronage and cuisine were not the only changes that the foreign restaurant

underwent at the turn of the century. As the middle classes colonized immigrant restaurants,

they demanded more service and more elaborate décor, demands that drove up prices—and

profits—and ultimately gentrified the ethnic restaurant. The restaurants patronized by the

"middle classes" became, as the *Los Angeles Times* noted in 1892, "exclusive in their own

way."[57] It was these gentrified restaurants, the polished polite establishments that served ethnic

cuisines, which became gateways to cosmopolitan eating and encouraged greater numbers of

middle-class urbanites to experiment with ethnic food.

CULINARY ADVENTURISM

The uptown ethnic restaurant made concessions to its new middle-class clientele, but it is

nonetheless clear that the middle classes were embracing a new culinary adventurism and that

this adventurism increasingly trumped the culinary xenophobia of the mid-nineteenth century.

While some of the earliest guides to ethnic dining offered specific advice on how to avoid food

that would be unsuitable for American palates, in time, novelty became more important than

hereditary predispositions.[58] The *New York Sun,* for example, in a 1903 article that was

reprinted in contemporary magazines, encouraged diners to eat in the "small and cheaper priced

Italian eating places [that] abound on the upper side streets off Broadway and are gaily decorated

within and extremely clean." While the article conceded that these restaurants had faults—the

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[57] Alessandro, "Los Angeles Restaurants," 11. The article does not specifically attribute this exclusiveness to the immigrant restaurants but rather to middle class establishments; however, the extension of the idea to immigrant restaurants patronized by the middle class appears justified.

[58] "The Italian Cook's Best," *Washington Post*, 20 June 1909, M7. See also, See also, Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*.

soup and the spaghetti "are always good" while the oil and the wine "are apt to be bad"—Italian

food offered a welcomed alternative to aristocratic French cuisine.[59]

> Now [Italian restaurants] abound and have a paying patronage, the larger part of which is American. It is a generally admitted fact that French cookery palls very quickly upon the palate of some people, and the fact was often commented upon that one of the leading restaurant keepers of New York was wont to steal away to less fashionable dining rooms than his own quite frequently for dinner.[60]

The *Sun* was not alone in challenging Americans to seek novelty. A 1903 report from a German

restaurant in Milwaukee suggested that the negative traits of some ethnic foods were obstacles

that could and should be overcome in the pursuit of unique culinary experiences.

> "You don't like it, no?" [the waitress said] with a quaint German drawl. "If you will taste it once you will not be disturbed by the smell."
>
> So with an inward prayer to the special little god that watches over your health and well-being you sample, timidly and hopelessly, the dainty she holds out to you on the tip of a fork. The fear vanishes and something akin to joy fills your soul, for you have experienced a distinctly new gustatory sensation. It may or may not be pleasing. The joy in the sensation lies in its novelty.[61]

Similar articles appeared regularly in city newspapers and culinary magazines at the turn of the

century. Guides to German, Spanish, Scandinavian or Italian restaurants were regular features

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[59] The new standards of taste were only one factor that attracted middle-class consumers to new restaurants. As other chapters will recount, the middle classes were often concerned about cleanliness, safety and health. Notably, the food writers made an effort to point out that uptown ethnic restaurants were clean. They also stressed the health benefits of ethnic food. As the *New York Sun* remarked: "Besides the flavor that distinguishes Italian cookery it has the merit of being extremely nourishing and healthful. While it may not tempt the over-delicate palate it will never injure the digestion or the nerves. The foods most in favor are the farinaceous sort, all of which possess much nutriment." Reprinted in "Table Talk: Concerning Eating and Drinking." *New York Sun*, "The Italian's Cookery," *Current Literature*, July 1901, 67.

[60] Reprinted in "Table Talk: Concerning Eating and Drinking." Ibid. The reference is to Charles Delmonico.

[61] *Milwaukee Sentinal* [author], "The German Palate," *Current Literature*, July 1901, 67.

encouraging middle-class readers to seek out new and challenging culinary experience.[62] *What to Eat*, for example, kept Felix L. Oswald, M. D. (author of "Physical Education" and "The Remedies of Nature,") occupied for much of 1901 and 1902 with an extensive series titled "International Food Studies" and *Table Talk* repeatedly published ethnic recipes requested by readers.[63] New foods—Japanese "raufish" and Venezuelan "hallacas"—were discovered and applauded.[64]

If not all the tendered advice was accurate, its proliferation suggests the growing importance foreign foods played in middle-class lives. A brief item in the *Washington Post* confused the grated cheese provided with pasta for the traditional French postprandial cheese course. "It is no unusual thing in an Italian restaurant for a dinner to be begun with salad, and cheese, grated and served in a saucer, is generally brought in with the soup instead of at the end of the repast."[65] Nonetheless, the middle classes embraced ethnic cuisines with an almost patriotic zeal. Rosa Belle Holt, after attending an Armenian dinner, explained her new appreciation for Middle Eastern cooking. "[T]he various dishes, so unique from the American stand-point, were relished with true American adaptability."[66]

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[62] See for example, "Food a La Scandinavia," *Washington Post*, 12 January 1902, 9; "For German Palates," *Washington Post*, 26 April 1903, B2; "A Highly Spiced Spanish Restaurant," *Washington Post*, 20 August 1905, G12; "The Italian Cook's Best," Washington Post Magazine, 20 June 1909, 7.

[63] For example, Marion Harris Neil, "Curries as They Should Be Made," *Table Talk*, February 1908, 95-6; Marion Harris Neil, "Recipes from over the Seas," *Table Talk*, June 1908, 242-43; Felix L. Oswald, "International Food Studies: China," *What to Eat*, July 1902, 1; Oswald, "International Food Studies: France," 145; Felix L. Oswald, "International Food Studies: Germany," *What to Eat*, June 1901, 183; Pansy Viola Viner, "Excellent Dishes Found Abroad," *Table Talk*, January 1907, 30-1.

[64] "Exotic Bits for Gourmets," *The Steward*, September 1909, 66. For other examples, see M. P. Handy, "A Dish of Snails," *What to Eat*, January 1897, 139; "An Invasion of Snails: They Are of the Edible Variety--Will Be Sold to Cafes," *New York Times*, 28 September 1902; William Gilbert Irwin, "Macaroni: How and Where It Is Made," *What to Eat*, October 1898, 97; "Italian Macaroni in Italy," *New York Times*, 16 July 1893; Theodore Tracy, "Macaroni: Italian Cooking of the Toothsome Vegetable," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 November 1892, 16; *New York Star* [author], "What Is 'Zabaglione?'" *Washington Post*, 19 April 1890, 4; Wong Ching Too, "The Chinese Cuisine," *Washington Post*, 13 July 1884, 6.

[65] "Don't Snub the Spaghetti," *Washington Post*, 8 December 1903. See also Jane Eddington, "Economical Housekeeping: Macaroni," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 March 1910, 8.

[66] Rosa Belle Holt, "An Armenian Dinner," *What to Eat*, November 1897, 116.

The modern idea of taste—a liking for foods learned in childhood and modified through experience and education—did not exist in the nineteenth century. To the extent that taste was discussed, it was generally assumed that—as social Darwinists predicted—an appreciation for a particular cuisine was hereditary and that ethnicities had their own "national palates." While nothing prevented an American from trying German or Chinese cuisine, it was generally believed, that foreign dishes (as one observer noted of Turkish cooking) "are all seasoned so highly and are so rich in oils and fats that our plain American digestive apparatus loudly rebels against them."[67] Given these attitudes, venturing into an ethnic restaurant was a challenge to established notions of cultural hierarchies. The middle classes' embrace of immigrant foods implicitly conceded that the racial hierarchies that governed social interaction could be transgressed.

The transformation of the marginal foreign restaurant into the mainstream ethnic restaurant challenged nineteenth-century aristocratic ideas of dining that held that French cuisine was the only cuisine of merit. By eating ethnic, and celebrating ethnic cuisines, middle-class Americans began to distinguish themselves from the rich.

THE RESTAURATION

> All the chefs of all the nations juggle all the cookbooks into one culinary anthology, until there is surely no city on earth where such elaborateness and variety distinguish the menus. Verily, we are in the period of the Restauration.
>
> <div align="right">Robert Hughes, The Real New York, 1904[68]</div>

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[67] E. Lyell Earle, "Foreign Types of New York Life," *New York Times*, 28 August 1898, IMS14.
[68] Rupert Hughes, *The Real New York* (New York: Smart Set, 1904), 252.

As more and more middle-class diners experimented with ethnic cuisine, nationalist boosters seized upon the idea of "cosmopolitan dining" as America's unique contribution to the historical development of cooking. For much of the nineteenth century, Europeans had criticized the United States because it lacked a unique national cuisine and elite Americans had spurned both "American" and ethnic cuisine for aristocratic French dinners. Cosmopolitanism was the self-conscious middle-class answer to these critics.

The cosmopolitan creed of dining was simple. Other nations had older cultures, but America had more culture. When cities teeming with immigrants and culinary expertise cooked with American ingredients, they created a cuisine superior to anything experienced by the most intrepid globetrotter. By the early 20th century, many American cities were celebrating their cosmopolitan cooking credentials.

New York's Cosmopolitanism Chic

New York, since Delmonico's first opened in the 1830s, had been the center of American culinary culture. And no city in the United States—and possibly no city in the world—was better poised to claim the mantel of cosmopolitanism than New York. As the nation's shipping capital, it was the first place that visitors from Europe came to experience America. As the arrival point for hundreds of thousands of immigrants in the late nineteenth century, it hosted dozens of ethnic communities each with its own restaurants.

A brief notice in *What to Eat* in 1896 was one of the first declarations of New York's new culinary identity. Possibly written by the magazine's New York editor, the anonymous article boasted that anyone could dine in "eleven languages" in New York.

> If in dining, as in other things, variety is the spice of life, certainly
> existence in New York City is well seasoned. You can dine there
> "in eleven different languages" and innumerable dialects, and the
> number is still increasing. Spanish, American, Arabic, Turkish,

Italian, Chinese, Jewish, German, Hungarian, Swedish and English restaurants exist, while Irish, Yankee, Scotch and "colored" cooking have their devotees and separate service. If a man only knows "What to Eat," and has the wherewith to obtain it, he will have little trouble in satisfying himself in the metropolis.[69]

This brief celebration of the diversity of New York's restaurant culture was, in 1896, a little premature, but in the following two decades the diversity of dining to be found in New York became a bragging point for all those who sought to demonstrate that New York was a world-class city. *The Steward* declared in 1910, for example, that "there is hardly a nationality on the face of the earth that has not a representative restaurant within the limits of . . . [this] most cosmopolite city." In that, the magazine asserted, New York was "distinctive."[70] And, echoing a decade of boosterism, advertising expert D. F. Pride declared in 1912 that the "restaurants of New York are probably unequaled in any other city in the world, either in number or variety. The cuisine and national dishes of very nation, as well as dishes peculiar to certain sections of the United States, can all be found within the limits of the Metropolis, and, as a rule, creditably and faithfully represented."[71]

The celebration of cosmopolitanism in New York was more than civic pride; it involved an explicit rejection of Europe's claims to culinary superiority and a tribute to the middle-class restaurant culture embraced by immigrant restaurants. Charles Multerer, a waiter at a leading New York restaurant, credited cosmopolitanism with establishing America's culinary reputation. American must, Multerer wrote in 1911, "concede that the older world has given us the initiative in gastronomic science, but we have been apt pupils . . ."

Where in all the world can you find its equal in the gastronomic world? Every cuisine from every corner of the globe is represented here. We have dozens of French, German, Italian, and

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[69] "Dining in Eleven Languages," *What to Eat*, October 1896, 71.
[70] "New York's Restaurants," *The Steward*, December 1910, 50.
[71] Pride, "Restaurant Advertising," 11.

> Hungarian restaurants, English chophouses, Chinese eating places,
> not to forget our Southern kitchens and many others that cook and
> serve the national dishes of every civilized country at least as well,
> if not better, than they are cooked at home.[72]

Similarly, "La Billie," the European correspondent for *The Steward*, argued that European cooking had become stale while American cooking had advanced. "The sauce that was said to please Francis III, or Henry VIII, or Louis [the] XIV, is expected to please the denizens of Europe—and to change it would be heresy."[73] "Europe lives on tradition, America lives on variety. . . The New York hotel manager hears of the Southern fashion of the preparing [of] one dish, of the New England manner of cooking another, of the French and Italian specialties, and he never rests until he provides them all for his guests."[74] It was this remarkable diversity of cuisine that led Robert Hughes to wax "Verily, we are in the period of the Restauration."[75]

Cosmopolitan Competition

New York was not alone in celebrating cosmopolitanism; other cities competed for the same mantle of sophistication. Since the mid-1800s San Francisco had boasted a diverse, restaurant-going population and wide variety of restaurants. Noah Brooks, although not a fan of ethnic restaurants, described the city in the 1860s as lacking a "distinctive local dish" but having compensated with a fare that was "cosmopolitan."[76] Charles Greene described restaurant life in San Francisco in 1892 as a "grand tour."[77]

In the early twentieth century, accounts of San Francisco's cosmopolitan culinary offerings grew more fervent and frequent. Roland Whittle informed readers of the West Coast

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[72] Charles Multerer, "Modern Hotel Service: Part 6, Gastronomy," *The Steward*, December 1911, 15-6.
[73] Billie, 17.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Hughes, *The Real New York*, 252.
[76] Brooks, "Restaurant Life of San Francisco," 472-73.
[77] Greene, "The Restaurants of San Francisco."

journal the *Overland Monthly* that San Francisco "is known to the globe trotter as the very

metropolis par excellence" in 1903. In an article titled the "Humbler Restaurants of San

Francisco" he made it clear that the city's reputation rested, not on its aristocratic restaurants, but

on the diversity of its middle-class restaurants.

> The semi-tropical life, the cosmopolitan population, and the
> absence of the home life in the beginning of its history, all
> combined to make the inhabitants of the city by the Golden Gate
> enthusiastic diners out; and it is to be questioned if any city in the
> world can show such diversity and individuality in public places of
> refreshment as can San Francisco.[78]

Whittle went on to describe the breadth of San Francisco's restaurants—from the genuine

Mexican restaurant "where the meals are cooked by Mexican women before your eyes in the

approved Mexican fashion" to the popular Italian restaurants "with all its noise and all its

crowded revelry."[79]

Clarence Edwords, a self-styled middle-class Bohemian, was San Francisco's most

enthusiastic champion of the city's cosmopolitan culture.[80] Writing in 1914, the former editor

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[78] Whittle, "Humbler Restaurants of San Francisco," 362-4. The excerpted text removes a reference to the French table d'hôte. Although the full quote implies the French table d'hôte is the city's "pride," in context, this does not appear to be Whittle's intent. The quoted passage, in fact, is directly followed by a description of a Mexican restaurant.

[79] Ibid., 364-5.

[80] Writing in 1914, Edwords uses the term "bohemian" to refer to a cultured middle-class vanguard. The term evolved significantly during the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. In the mid-nineteenth century, the term may have been exclusively to members of elite Society who, through their participation in avant-garde culture (often, working class culture), rejected their birthright, but by the end of the Gilded Era it was often used ambiguously to describe members of both the wealthy and middle classes who embraced an epicurean interest in ethnic restaurants. The anonymous author of one of the first book-length restaurant guides published in the United States used the term with caution in describing the patrons of the Café Des Beaux Arts but his definition does not exclude the middle class: the "favorite resort of the bright people of smart society, of the best actors, artists, literary and professional men. . . One hesitates to apply the much-abused term Bohemian to such a place, but the Café' Des Beaux Arts really is the abode of that cultured and prosperous Bohemianism, which is cosmopolitan in its tastes and characteristics."*Where and How to Dine in New York: The Principal Hotels, Restaurants and Cafes of Various Kinds and Nationalities Which Have Added to the Gastronomic Fame of New York and Its Suburbs*, (New York: Lewis, Scribner, 1903), 1. By the nineteen-teens, the term had acquired salacious connotations. Yet its defenders, including Edwords, used the terms to express both their rejection of aristocratic Society and sexual license that Gilded Age critics ascribed to elites. "How abused is the word! Because of a misconception of an idea it has suffered more than any other in the English language. It has done duty in describing almost every form of license and licentiousness. It has been the cloak of debauchery and the excuse for

of the *Kansas City Journal* reported that even those who had been to Paris believed that San

Francisco was the place "where you get the best there is to eat, served in a manner that enhances

its flavor and establishes it forever in your memory." What accounted for this reputation,

Edwords asked? "Do not other cities have equally as good chefs, and do not the people of other

cities have equally as fine gastronomic taste?" The answer for Edwords was the indisputably

cosmopolitan nature of the city, the "queer little restaurants, where rare dishes are served, and

where one feels that he is in a foreign land, even though he be in the center of a highly

representative American city."[81]

> San Francisco's cosmopolitanism is peculiar to itself. Here are
> represented the nations of earth in such distinctive colonies that
> one might well imagine himself possessed of the magic carpet told
> of in Arabian Nights Tales, as he is transported in the twinkling of
> an eye from country to country. It is but a step across a street from
> America into Japan, then another step into China. Cross another
> street and you are in Mexico, close neighbor to France. Around the
> corner lies Italy, and from Italy you pass to Lombardy, and on to
> Greece. So it goes until one feels that he has been around the world
> in an afternoon. . . .
>
> This aggregation of cuisinaire, gathered where is to be
> found a most wonderful variety of food products in highest state of
> excellence, has made San Francisco the Mecca for lovers of

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sex degradation. . . . To us Bohemianism means the naturalism of refined people. . . . Bohemianism is the protest of naturalism against the too rigid, and, oft−times, absurd restrictions established by Society." Edwords, *Bohemian San Francisco*, 6. For a self-described Bohemian such as Edwords, the distinction between the middle class and the Bohemian was minimal. "Pop Floyd . . . had a place down in California street much patronized by business men. He had very good service and the best of cooking, and for many years hundreds of business men gathered there at luncheon in lieu of a club. The place is still in existence and good service and good food is to be had there, but it has lost its Bohemian atmosphere." Edwords, *Bohemian San Francisco*, 25. I have used it in this context as an intentional reminder that the middle class were not monolithic. More adventuresome eaters (Bohemians) paved the way for less adventurous eaters (the larger middle class) at the turn of the century.

The middle-class Bohemian was a fleeting phenomenon; all vanguards are. As early as 1889 as the middle class colonized the ethnic restaurant critics thought that Bohemianism was fading. "On the cross streets and around Union and Madison Squares are the French and Italian restaurants that serve a table d'hôte dinner form forty cents up. These are frequented entirely by New Yorkers, and in them you can catch glimpses of that Bohemian life that so many people say no longer exits." Tompkins, "A Diner with Wine," 9. By the 1920s, the new Bohemianism of places like Greenwich Village in New York set itself in opposition to an increasingly hegemonic middle-class culture rather than the nearly extinct aristocratic culture.

[81] Edwords, *Bohemian San Francisco*, 3.

gustatory delights, and this is why the name of San Francisco is known wherever men and women sit at table.[82]

Edwords' observations were born out by disinterested observers. A study conducted in the 1920s by the Department of Commerce concluded that the "highly cosmopolitan nature of the city's population is an important factor in diversifying the character of its restaurant industry." In San Francisco, the study's author's noted, "it is possible to eat in any language." [83]

San Francisco, with its long tradition of ethnic dining, posed the mostly likely challenge to New York's claim to be the nation's cosmopolitan dining capital, but it was not alone. Even some less likely cities made claims to cosmopolitanism in the early decades of the twentieth century. Journalists in Los Angeles, still a small city at the turn of the century, claimed the city "may modestly boast of consuming more cooked food than any other city . . . and [having a population] who may enjoy a greater variety of meals in a greater variety of eating places than in any other city." In the "melting pot of epicures," the *Los Angeles Times* boasted, "the appetite may enjoy a tour of the world, touching almost every nation of the universe without passing beyond the city limits . . ."[84] Likewise, Washington, with its embassies and foreign diplomats, had, by the first decade of the twentieth century, a vibrant ethnic restaurant culture and was eager to make its own claims to cosmopolitanism. In 1901, the *Washington Post* argued that "[o]ne does not have to leave Washington and seek the Pan-American midway for novelty in the line of foreign restaurants, for there are any number of quaint dining-rooms in the Capital City to accommodate the cosmopolitan population."[85] A year later, the paper implied that the city's Chinese restaurants were as much a part of the Washington experience as the White House and

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[82] Ibid., 4.
[83] Commerce and Bates, *The San Francisco Restaurant Industry*, 1.
[84] Otis M. Wiles, "All Nation's Food Served Here," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 January 1922, II1.
[85] "All Palates Pleased," 20.

the Washington Monument. "The person who sets out to see the sights of the Capital and fails to visit the Chinese restaurants misses one of the features of the city."[86]

Only Boston, proud of its baked beans and cod and seat of the conservative Boston School of Cooking, seemed content to leave ethnic food to the ethnic masses. An article from 1908 titled "Boston Women Well Fed" passionately made the case that restaurant-goers in Boston, unlike New York and Chicago, "may eat better for less money than in any other capital in the country, and she doesn't have to go to a foreign restaurant to do it, either."[87] But Boston's regionalism was increasingly prosaic. While not every claim to cosmopolitanism was as grand or as realistic as New York's and San Francisco's, the rush of cities seeking the title suggests a revolution in dining had taken place. Over the course of little more than thirty years, ethnic cuisine had established a place in middle-class Americans' diets and had gone far to supplant elite French cuisine as the nation's claim to culinary excellence.

CONCLUSIONS

In 1910, one hundred teachers joined the Nebraskan State Superintendent of Public Instruction on an excursion to the National Education Association's convention in Boston. The trip took the party of teachers through Chicago, Detroit, Niagara Falls, Toronto, Montreal, Boston, Washington and Pittsburgh and they made every effort to see the sites. When the party eventually made it to New York, they visited the Statue of Liberty, Grant's Tomb, the Bowery, the Ghetto and the bread lines outside Fleishman's. And they ate. In Manhattan, the teachers engaged in a culinary adventure. First they visited Chinatown where they "were served a dish of

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[86] "Like Oriental Cuisine," *Washington Post*, November 30 1902, 28.
[87] "Boston Women Well Fed," 8.

dry cooked rice, chop suey, golden lime preserves, and tea, with chop sticks thrown in."[88] Later

the group visited the 'Little Hungarian Restaurant' where, according an account by Bessie

Casebeer of York, Nebraska, "After being served soft drinks (as requested by our leader) we

went below to the famous wine cellar, with barrels and barrels of the most expensive wine stored

around the sides, where too, all good Hungarians must be married and have their wedding

feast."[89]

By the early twentieth century, an ethnic dinner at a restaurant was a commonplace

experience for many urban middle-class Americans and a daring—but not too daring—adventure

for Midwestern tourists. To the dismay of the Bohemian who witnessed his exotic adventure

turned into a tourist attraction, groups of teachers touring Chinese and Hungarian restaurants

were becoming a regular occurrence.

> There may be seen not only the serious-minded young makers of
> verse and pictures, but those entertaining phenomena, the
> dissipating school teachers. From every little town in the Middle
> West they come, making New York their place for holiday. In
> parties of three or four they timidly enter little restaurants with
> foreign names; timidly, but with a certain delicate bravado. A sip
> of Chianti is an adventure, the fork that lifts spaghetti trembles
> with excitement.[90]

In 1876, the Centennial had provided a few French restaurants for its wealthiest guests

and assumed (correctly, if surviving accounts are accurate) that most of the fair's middle-class

visitors would be content to eat cold meats, oysters and ice cream. In 1910, tourists from

Nebraska sought out ethnic restaurants. The transformation of the ethnic restaurant from an

exotic and dangerous place to a tourist attraction—a monument to American achievement no less

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[88] E. C. Bishop, *Twenty-First Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Governor of the State of Nebraska*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: Department of Public Instruction, 1911), 387.
[89] Ibid., 387-8.
[90] "The Romance and Reality of New York's Restaurants," 9. See also Edwords, *Bohemian San Francisco*, 24.

popular with touring teachers than the Old North Church or Grant's Tomb—represents the success of the cosmopolitan revolution in dining.

It is tempting to view this change as merely another indication that the United States was becoming a melting pot; a story of immigrant culture triumphing over ethnic prejudice. But that is too simple. Although immigrant restaurateurs, in their willingness to adapt their cuisine to the American public, contributed to the acceptance of the ethnic restaurant, it was the patronage of the middle classes that made the ethnic restaurant a part of the American experience. Conversely, it is not possible to argue that the patronage of the ethnic restaurant by the middle classes in the first two decades was evidence of simple ethnic or racial tolerance. In colonizing the foreign restaurant, middle-class diners embraced only the food. In an article on the merits of chili con carne and tamales that appeared in *What to Eat* in 1898, M. Lane Griffin stated bluntly what others invariably felt. ". . . I see no reason why Mexican viands, prepared by clean American hands and served in a comfortable dining room, should in any wise depreciate in value, or taste at least, simply because of the absence of Mexican picturesqueness and dirt. And between our American selves, the viands, instead of losing by clean, intelligent preparation and cooking, actually gain in both savory flavor and appearance."[91]

The middle-class celebration of cosmopolitanism was not political, but cultural; nonetheless, it signaled a sea change in American dining. As middle-class urbanites dined on spaghetti and borsht, they transformed restaurant culture in the United States and articulated a culinary credo that challenged the aristocratic sanction of French cuisine. Cosmopolitanism

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[91] M. Lane Griffin, "Two Mexican Recipes from San Antonio," *What to Eat*, February 1898, 201. See also L.W., "Mexican Kitchens and Cooks," *Table Talk*, October 1913, 545-50. If an embrace of ethnic food did not necessarily result in greater political acceptance of immigrants, the opposite is also true. Integrating and modifying ethnic cuisine to accommodate established tastes should not be read as racism. For an opposing view, see Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa City, 2001), 88-108.

celebrated the power of the middle classes as consumers more than it celebrated the ethnic restaurant; it marked the first claim by the emergent class to public culture. Motivated by their own self interests, disparate groups of diners—hungry bachelors, adventurous Bohemians, servantless families, parched shoppers—emerged from the ethnic restaurant as a consumer cohort, a class with influence over the American marketplace.

Chapter 6: A PROTEST AGAINST GASTRONOMIC OSTENTATION: MIDDLE-CLASS AGENCY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ARISTOCRATIC RESTAURANT

In 1904, the St. Regis Hotel in New York City engaged in an extraordinary public relations campaign. Since the rise of the aristocratic restaurant in the mid-nineteenth century, independent and hotel restaurants had competed for the patronage of what one editorialist referred to as "The Real New York," the rarified elite that "secludes itself in high-class restaurants and takes refuge in clubland, screening and protecting itself from contact with the coarse and vile elements . . ."[1] Restaurants that catered to the rich prided themselves on their reputations for exclusivity.

When it opened in 1904, the St. Regis was hailed as "the finest hotel in America." The hotel, owned by John Jacob Astor, cost five and half million dollars and was designed to capture the elegance of Europe hostelries. China, tapestry and furniture were imported to create the Old World atmosphere.

> One has but to enter the place to be impressed with its magnificence. It is there that the most money was spent. On the first floors are the public rooms, and on the Fifth Avenue side is the general dining hall and restaurant, the ornamentation being in keeping with the rich effect carried out all through the building. Connecting with the dining room is the Palm Room, perhaps the most gorgeous of all. It is lighted by a skylight, supported by great marble arches, set with rare tapestries and wonderful mural decorations.[2]

Extravagant accounts of the Beaux Arts building and its luxurious appointments quickly spread across the globe. One newspaper reported that "[y]ou can live nicely at the Hotel St. Regis at $100,000 a year. It is a caravansary whose cachet will be so unmistakable that none save those

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[1] "The Misunderstood Metropolis Explains," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 15 September 1907, 3.
[2] "Palatial St. Regis to Open Its Doors to-Day," *New York Times*, 4 September 1904, 5.

of the largest means and the most unmistakable social standing will care to be among its patrons, so icy will be the reception to others."[3]

The luxury of the hotel, however, also met with ridicule. One newspaper illustration showed a regiment of waiters surrounding a single patron with the caption: "What is one tip among so many? It is possible to live on oysters at $126 dollars a day at the Hotel St. Regis." Another paper joked:

> Rich Man: "Waiter, bring me a plate of St. Regis ice cream if it does not cost more than $414."
>
> Waiter: "I regret that we are out of that, Sir, the cheapest thing is a chocolate eclaire [sic] at $500 per half portion."[4]

Accounts of such luxuries, even if exaggerated, might have been tolerated, even encouraged, a century earlier. But stories that painted the St. Regis as a hotel only for the wealthy did not please R. M. Haan, proprietor of the new hotel. "There are people who would think this mass of advertising worth a million. It works the other way with me. I am one of the few men who have been actually hurt by advertising so that I am suffering from it." Concerned that reports of luxury were driving customers away, Haan was soon insisting—to any reporter who would listen—that the St. Regis was not the expensive and exclusive bastion of wealth that rumor suggested. He was particularly concerned about reports that the food at the St. Regis was exorbitantly expensive. "We charge the same [as a nice, but not exclusive restaurant], 30 cents, for oysters," Haan told the *New York Times*. "Caviar is the same--$1.50. They charge 70 cents for consommé. These are my figures. My prices for fish are a little higher, smelts being 90 cents to their 60 cents. Sweetbreads cost $2.50 at the St. Regis and $2.25 in the other place. The prices for game are practically the same. They charge 75 cents for Brussels sprouts. My price is

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[3] "Those St. Regis Stories," *New York Times*, 25 October 1904, 6; "Too Well Advertised, St. Regis Man Laments," *New York Times*, 25 October 1904, 12.
[4] "Those St. Regis Stories," 6; "Too Well Advertised," 12.

60 cents. For oyster plant they charge 40 to my 60 cents. The biggest difference is in turkey, my price being $4.50 and their's $1.00, but the difference I am sure is in the turkey, for there never were such as mine. They charge $3 for duckling, and I charge 50 cents more."[5]

Haan was not suggesting that his hotel was a palace for the common man. In fact, one of his concerns was that the false reports of decadent luxury were attracting "crowds of the vulgar to peep in where they could, to wonder how it would feel to sleep in a $10,000 bed after a dinner costing $75."[6] However, as the proprietor of an eighteen-story hotel with a dining room that sat hundreds, Haan could not afford to have his establishment appear too exclusive. "There has been the wildest exaggeration about my prices. They are slightly higher, but not alarming so. . . . My hotel is not a place for billionaires only, but a hostelry for people of good taste who have the means to live as comfortably as they choose."[7]

Haan was not alone. Restaurant proprietors in New York, Chicago and San Francisco had come to recognize that their massive restaurants and lofty hotels could not survive by catering only to the rich. Restaurant dining was changing, challenging the well-trained waiters and the codes of the aristocratic restaurant. Dinner jackets, still the norm in cities like London, were abandoned in New York so that the harried businessman could go to dinner without changing. Efforts to prevent dinners from carrying their coats and hats to the table (in defiance to the "coat checking trusts") had been met with resistance. Music, once considered a distraction to diners engaged in the fine art of eating, was now the commonplace in restaurants and the distinction between the restaurant and the dance hall was increasingly muddled.[8] And these were

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[5] "Too Well Advertised," 12.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] "Dancing at the hotels and restaurants in New York seems fair to be fully as popular this season as it was last, for it is noticed that more and more of the institutions that held aloof from the popular craze in the past have yielded to the demands of their patrons, while those places that introduced dancing in the earlier days, are certain to continue. Among the very latest of the ultra conservative places that have at last given way is Delmonico's, where dancing

the superficial changes. Leveraging the successful middle-classing of smaller urban restaurants, middle-class diners threatened to take their dollars elsewhere if the inheritors of the aristocratic tradition of the nineteenth century, elite restaurants, did not adapt to middle-class preferences. While the influence of the middle-class consumer over elite restaurant dining was never absolute and was rarely self-consciously articulated, it nonetheless exerted a subtle economic pressure on restaurant proprietors that forced changes in the aristocratic restaurant's cuisine and service in the early twentieth century. The once-exclusive aristocratic restaurant would now have to woo the lucrative patronage of the free-thinking, independent middle classes that had proven its ability to shape the culture of dining.

This new spirit was captured in a *Washington Post* editorial on the decline of New York's lobster palaces after the imposition of rules requiring dinner jackets in the evening.

> Here is a new Declaration of Independence. It may be assumed
> that the proprietors or the responsible managers of a restaurant
> have the legal right to make such regulations as they please; but if
> the regulations offend customers to the extent of diverting trade,
> that pleasure will find a speedy ending. This is not to decry
> decorum, nor to disparage the becoming formalities of attire for
> both man and woman. But it may be observed that those who
> would feast are quite qualified to make their own rules of both
> apparel and conduct, and that their consensus of wholesome
> opinion will not brook the arbitrary censorship of those who they
> are willing to regard highly as possible, as intelligent and artistic
> contributors to the refined enjoyment of living.[9]

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will be held every afternoon during the week in what is known as the roof garden." "Notes and Notions," *The Steward* 9, no. 8 (1914): 25. Nonetheless, the introduction of orchestras and later dance floors in restaurants was the source of much lamentation by the stewards of the aristocratic restaurants. Jacques Kraemer, manager of the celebrated Hotel Carlton, London, declared in 1914: "We would not have tea dancing at the Carlton; nor would we have supper dancing. I think these do a lot of harm to a restaurant. They rather spoil its 'cachet.'" "Praises and Criticizes American Hotels and Food," *The Steward* 9, no. 3 (1914): 29. The sentiment was shared by many. See the comments of George Newton, proprietor of the Hotel St. George in 1914 "Notes and Notions," 18. See also Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); "Where Music Soothes While Lobsters Broil," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 24 April 1910, 7.

[9] "A Restaurant Revolt," *Washington Post*, 10 April 1910, E4. The formalwear revolt took place among the customers of Broadway. The *Washington Post* suggested vaguely that these patrons were wealthy and fashionable,

Sureness of numbers empowered the middle class; their preferences, embodied in the dining choices they made, set the stage for a genuine transformation of restaurant dining in the United States and foreshadowed the growing importance of the middle class in the shaping of American culture.[10]

NEW SCALE, NEW ECONOMIES

For much of the late nineteenth century, aristocratic restaurants were located in hotels. These restaurants depended upon the captive patronage of travelers as well as the cultivated patronage of fashionable society to support their corps of waiters, well-stocked wine cellars, massive menus and foreign chefs. In the United States, this arrangement was formalized under the American plan of service. With the American plan, hotel patrons paid a set fee for both room and board. The arrangement guaranteed hotel restaurants a steady source of income supplemented by the periodic dinners, balls and extravaganzas of the wealthy.

Improvements in transportation made travel easier in the late nineteenth century and in large cities such as New York wealthy entrepreneurs built ever-larger hotels to accommodate the new trade. The thirteen-story Waldorf Hotel opened in 1893 and four years later the seventeen-story Astoria was added. The St. Regis and the Hotel Astor both opened in 1904, the Gotham in 1905, the Belmont and the Knickerbocker in 1906, and the Plaza in the fall of 1907.[11] Taking advantage of the same technology that made the skyscraper possible, these new hotels were immense, each with a thousand or more rooms and restaurants that could accommodate

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and that was certainly the reputation of the Great White Way. But the celebrities were the minority and the mass of restaurant patrons were, in fact, middle-class urbanites and tourists. See also Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*.
[10] The Lobster Palace's successor was viewed as a middle class and tourist establishment. See Richard Barry, "Transient Society for the Transients Made to Order at the Cabarets," *New York Times*, 24 November 1912, X1.
[11] Dearing, *The Elegant Inn*, 196, 97, 211. See also Groth, *Living Downtown*, 42.

hundreds. While hotels such as the Waldorf-Astoria maintained an elite reputation by catering to

visiting royalty, hosting annual horse shows, and encouraging wealthy families to take up

permanent resident, they also found it increasingly profitable to cater to middle-class business

and vacation travelers.

Resentment towards the American plan grew as alternatives blossomed. Middle-class

guests disliked paying a boarding fee to the hotel; they wanted the freedom to dine at restaurants

of their choice, restaurants that matched their budgets and cosmopolitan tastes, and large hotels

could not afford to alienate middle-class customers. By the turn of the century, many hotels had

capitulated to their guests' wishes and had adopted the European plan of service where room and

board were paid for separately.

The introduction of the European plan changed the economics of running a hotel

restaurant and further eroded the influence of local elites. To keep their restaurants full and

viable, restaurant managers had to attract not only the "nobs" and the "swells," but also had to

compete with independent restaurants for the casual middle-class patron.[12] While some of the

most elite hotels attempted the Herculean feat of selling luxury to the masses, few could

accomplish this without some compromise. Writing in the *Steward* in 1918, Edward C. Maginn

recounted the efforts that hotel restaurants made to attract middle-class customers.

> A great many hotels have some specialty which features the
> house—such as special dining facilities for parties, or a lunch room
> with stools, to attract cheaper business. We now find many of the
> larger hotels have a delicatessen shop as a part of their premises,
> where fine bakery goods and other delicacies are sold, and it is the
> general tendency to get patronage from the local field as well as
> the traveling public, all of which, of course, adds to the volume of
> business.[13]

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[12] On the appeal of the American plan to restaurateurs, see "Editorial," *The Steward* 8, no. 6 (1913): 15.

[13] Edward C. Maginn, "Building Patronage and Good Will: Learning from Competitors; Co-operation among Hotel Men—the Value of the Hotel Press," *The Steward* 13, no. 9 (1918): 21.

But lunch rooms and delicatessen shops were only the most conspicuous changes that hotel restaurants made to attract the middle-class patrons; more subtle changes were also underway—evidence of the growing influence of the middle classes on the culture of fine dining. Middle-class complaints about the heavy multi-course dinner of the nineteenth century encouraged aristocratic restaurants to experiment with smaller portions. Competition from cosmopolitan restaurants led to the adoption of foreign cuisines. And irritation with the unreadable French-language menu led slowly to an increasingly English-language bill of fare. The French aristocratic restaurant and the public culture it facilitated did not disappear, but by 1920, the foundations of aristocratic culture were severely shaken.

SIMPLIFYING THE ARISTOCRATIC MENU

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the science of nutrition, although still in its infancy, was beginning to describe how the body utilized calories, proteins and other nutrients. The new science bolstered a century-old campaign by health-food evangelists and domestic doyens to transform and simplify the American diet.[14] Aided by the popular press, particularly a new breed of middle-class culinary magazines, science and morality endorsed the middle classes' rejection of the elaborate and exclusive *table d'hôte* dinner and justified the outrage that many felt at the European excesses of the upper-class table. Although Progressive food reform first targeted the domestic groaning board, the campaign to simplify diets developed into middle-class antagonism towards the aristocratic restaurant and eventually led to dramatic changes in the restaurant menu.

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[14] For a historical overview of the food reform movements of the nineteenth century, see Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*; Hillel Schwartz, *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies, and Fat* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1986); Emma Seifrit Weigley, *Sarah Tyson Rorer: The Nation's Instructress in Dietetics and Cookery*, *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society; V. 119* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1977).

Protest

The new ideas about simple eating and nutrition were popularized by columns on cooking and food which in the early twentieth century became staples of many mainstream magazines and newspapers. These popular periodicals were joined by a spate of new culinary magazines. By 1911, N. W. Ayers & Son, a company that measured the circulation of magazines for potential advertisers, listed eighteen American culinary journals published in five states with a combined circulation of at least 184,000.[15] In Philadelphia, cookbook author Sarah Rorer contributed to Finley Acker's *Table Talk* until she founded her own magazine, *Household News,* in 1893. In New England, the Boston School of Cooking, home of Mary Lincoln and Fannie Farmer, began publishing the popular *New England Kitchen Magazine* in 1894.[16] And other magazines served regional, specialized or professional interests. In 1911, *Chef, Steward and Housekeeper* attracted over 4,000 readers while *Vegetarian Magazine* found a readership of over 15,000.[17]

No magazine took a stronger stand on simplifying the American diet or more stalwartly condemned the excesses of wealth than *What to Eat* and, at the turn of the century, no magazine surpassed it in circulation. The Minneapolis-based journal was founded by the pure food advocate Paul Pierce in 1896. *What to Eat* was an eclectic journal and, as Pierce explained to his readers, an open forum where "no school or practice will be slighted."[18] The journal featured articles on everything from Kellogg's Battle Creek Sanitarium and the science of W. O. Atwater

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[15] N. W. Ayer and Son, *N. W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer and Son, 1911), 1165-66.

[16] Shapiro, *Perfection Salad*, 57.

[17] N. W. Ayer and Son, *N. W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory*, 1165.

[18] The journal's lengthy subtitle promised it would provide "information about What to Eat, How to Eat, When to Eat, How to Cook, How to Serve, How to Give-Up-to-Date Dinners, How to Give Recherche Luncheon, How to Set Tables a la Mode, The Latest Thing in Tableware, Table Furnishings and Novel Effects." "Masthead," *What to Eat*, June 1897, 264.

to Parisian tearooms and how to celebrate the American victory in the Spanish-American War with a tea party.[19] In the inaugural issue, Pierce included a laudatory article on Dr. James Salisbury, a nutritional consultant to the Army during the Civil War who promoted a diet of lean meat and warm water that he claimed would eliminate dyspepsia, and, conversely, two nine-course "party" menus submitted by Delmonico's famed chef Charles Ranhofer.[20]

The catholic nature of the publication did not, however, mean that the magazine lacked an agenda. The magazine was a leading advocate of pure food laws and prohibited advertising by companies that sold tainted foods. But no other issue captured the editor's attention as did the crusade to simplify the American diet.

> There are many theories about living, many cures for disease. . .
> But, while this is undeniable true, there are still certain modes of
> living which will apply beneficially to the whole race, and about
> which there need be no two opinions. There is no more doubt, for
> illustration, that plain food is conducive to good health than there
> is that pure air is good for the respiratory organs. . . .[21]

In an August 1904 editorial *What to Eat* declared its commitment to "a constant repeating of the laws of hygiene and of rational dietetics" that it hoped would "utimately [sic] bring Americans to a realization of the fact that the greatest health and happiness are to be found in plain living and

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[19] On Atwater, see "A Revelation About Food," *What to Eat*, January 1901, 27. On Kellogg's sanitarium, see a glowing article on the "Enchanted Castle" titled "Battle Creek Sanitarium, Battle Creek Sanitarium Food Co. And Sanitas Nut Food Company," *What to Eat*, July 1902, 38. On Parisian Tearooms, see F. Tryon Charles, "Parisiana," *What to Eat*, September 1902, 134. On Spanish-American War parties, see "What We Will Eat in Our New Colonies," *What to Eat*, March 1899, 91.

[20] Frank J. Jungen, "Ralstonism in General," *What to Eat*, August 1896, 6-7; "Ralstonism," *What to Eat*, August 1896, 4-6; Charles Renhofer [Ranhofer], "Dinner Giving at Delmonico's," *What to Eat*, August 1896, 20; "The Salisbury Treatment," *What to Eat*, August 1896, 21; Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 101-02. In its eclecticism *What to Eat* demonstrated its respect for the middle-class household with its competing traditions borrowed from the aristocratic table and the culinary reformers. "In the field of dieting," Paul Pierce explained, "experience is worth everything, and experience comes to men and women of every shade of belief." Paul Pierce, "Our Magazine and Its Mission," *What to Eat*, August 1896, 18.

[21] "Avoid Temptation," *What to Eat*, August 1897, 43.

simple cooking."[22] As a proactive article titled "The Art of Eating Enough and Eating Right"

succinctly stated: "Nine out of ten persons eat too much . . ." [23]

  What to Eat's advocacy of simple eating—inspired in part by Theodore Roosevelt's

public endorsement of the "simple life"—reached a fever pitch in the early years of the twentieth

century.[24] As with Rorer, *What to Eat's* growing militancy was fueled by a distrust of the elite. [25]

One writer in *What to Eat* noted that "people who are well-off in the world's goods are not

always the ones who adopt the most liberal and most rational policy in the matter of selecting a

diet."[26] Paul Pierce was less circumspect. In a 1904 article he ascribed the simple eating

movement not "to any motive of economy, but . . . as a protest against the gastronomic and

extravagant ostentation in which society formerly indulged." "[T]he ordering of long and

wearisome courses of a dinner is not an American custom," Pierce inveighed, "but was borrowed

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[22] "Simpler and Cheaper Meals," *What to Eat*, August 1904, 93-4.

[23] "The Art of Eating Enough and Eating Right," *What to Eat*, March 1904, 106.

[24] On Roosevelt: "As we come to a more adequate appreciation of the principles and precepts of the "simple life" as proclaimed in Mr. Wagner's book, which President Roosevelt says is the finest literary product of the century, we can hardly fail to apply them to our ideas of dining and entertaining to the end that our meals may present a more practical illustration of these ideas. In a land of plenty, where the table of even the wage-earner is profusely supplied with everything that can tempt the palate or frailty the most fastidious appetite, it is natural that the great sin of American life should be that of gormandizing and over-eating . . ." "Simpler and Cheaper Meals," 93-4.

[25] Despite the overt class rhetoric, the simple food movement found adherents in wealthy circles. *The Cook* featured a series of interviews with famous business leaders in which, generally, these men advocated "simple" fare. Jay Gould, for example, told the weekly that "I do not myself believe that any man can stand the strain of a large business unless he lives upon the simplest food he can get." Simplicity was relative: Gould's idea of a simple breakfast was "a piece of steak, a mealy baked potato, some graham bread and a glass of milk." "Business Dishes," *The Cook*, 20 April 1885, 1. Mrs. John Jacob Astor made headlines in 1905 when she adopted "a diet of remarkable simplicity" in an effort "to protect her beauty from the spoilating [sic] attacks of the relentless hand of Time." "Mrs. Astor Adopts Simple Life," *What to Eat*, September 1905, 105. While some argued that "[o]ne must be rich . . . to be able to afford to give one's guest poor food," not everyone was convinced of the sincerity of the wealthy advocates of simple eating. Marila Pemberton, "New York Adopts Simple Life," *What to Eat*, October 1905, 146. The cultural critic Julian Street reported a visit to the home of a wealthy Buffalo Society woman. She was holding a dinner party to celebrate the formation of the "'Simplicity League,' the members of which bound themselves to give each other moral support in their efforts to return to a more primitive mode of life." Following a dinner that featured caviar, cocktails, sauterne, roasts, Burgundy, salad, ices, Turkish coffee and Port, Street struck up a conversation with the women about what it meant to live the simple life.   "We don't intend to go to any foolish extremes," said one who looked like the apotheosis of the Rue de la Paix. "We are only going to scale things down and eliminate waste. There is a lot of useless show in this country which only makes it hard for people who can't afford things. . . . Take this little dinner we had tonight—" "What?" cried Street. "Yes," his hostess nodded. "In the future we are all going to give plain little dinners like this." Julian Street, *Abroad at Home: American Ramblings, Observations and Adventures of Julian Street* (New York: Century, 1915), 37-9.

[26] "Does the Human Family Eat Too Much?" *What to Eat*, October 1904, 149.

from the Europeans, and represents an effort to imitate the senseless and foolish extravagance of our friends across the water."[27]

Even when Marila Pemberton, *What to Eat's* New York correspondent, reported in 1907 that "[s]imple fare" had become the "reigning fad" among New York City's elite, the editor of *What to Eat* expressed skepticism. In the past, the editor noted, the excesses of the wealthy were imitated in the homes of those less able to afford it. "Champagne revelries in the millionaire's home have their counterpart in the cocktail carousals of the middle classes; in the Dutch beer lunches in other classes and in the 'can-rushings' and drunkenness among the laborers' families." "[L]et us hope," the editor wistfully wrote, "that our vulgar rich have learned something with their money and that this reversion to the simple life is a real and lasting reform that will have its beneficial influences in all classes of our society."

As it condemned the wealthy, *What to Eat* flattered the middle classes. By drawing on its middle-class readership as contributors, it came to celebrate middle-class lifestyles. Simple dining was an acknowledgement of how the middle classes ate at home more than it was a political agenda. For the middle-class family that could only rarely afford to indulge in the extravagances of the wealthy, the simple food movement turned practice into praxis. As one advocate of scientific eating noted: ". . . [T]he middle classes are the well-to-do classes when it comes to the question of the adequate nourishment of the human body to fit for the daily and mental demands that are made upon it."[28]

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[27] "Simpler and Cheaper Meals," 93-4.

[28] "Does the Human Family Eat Too Much?" 149. *What to Eat's* campaign for simple dinners corresponded to its growing success. By 1903, *What to Eat* had an annual readership of 44,000—just less than the combined circulation of its two closest competitors, the Indiana-based *Cooking Club* and Philadelphia's *Table Talk*. Although mass-market magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post* and *the Ladies Home Journal* boasted circulations of more than half a million at the turn of the century, What to Eat's readership surpassed that of political staples such as The *Atlantic Monthly* or the muckraking *Survey*. Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, vol. 4. 1885-1905 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), 42, 745, 66, 690; Mott, *A History of American Magazines*. Rival culinary journals would narrow the gap, but *What to Eat* remained the nation's leading culinary journal

Resistance

As the culinary reform movement found support within the middle-class press, it met with resistance from stewards of elite culture. Nineteenth-century fashion dictated that both men and women demonstrate their wealth with a stout appearance and contemporary etiquette guides sought to justify the French multi-course dinner despite criticism from nutritionists and the culinary community. The *Bazar Book of Decorum*, for example, blamed dyspepsia on the "higgledy-piggledy tables of our country cousins" and audaciously, given the growing criticism, recommended the multi-course dinner of the aristocratic table as the height of scientific eating. "The experience of good livers, with their regular succession of courses of soup, fish, meat, vegetables, and dessert, has long since settled this matter of variety of food to their own satisfaction, and in accordance with the teaching of science. Our country friends are apt to scorn all lessons from such a quarter, but we assure them that in regard to the manner of eating they may follow the example of the fashionable with advantage."[29] For the middle classes, once eager to emulate the fashionable set in all matters of cultural importance, such reassurances were less than convincing given the criticism of the laden table made by both simple-dining advocates and scientists in the new culinary press.

For the most part, food reformers came from the middle class and the new diets they offered were often no more than "scientific" reformulations of what the middle classes—by dint of income if not desire—ate at home. The economical middle-class family might benefit from eating more salads and less meat, but its larder was simpler and often healthier than the elaborate pantries of elite restaurants that catered to the aristocratic class. The rise of the professional

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throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century. N. W. Ayer and Son, *N. W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer and Son, 1893); N. W. Ayer and Son, *N. W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer and Son, 1897).

[29] Tomes, *The Bazar Book of Decorum. The Care of the Person, Manners, Etiquette and Ceremonials*.

managerial class in the late nineteenth century tied the rhetoric of reform to the interests of a

rising class. With the economic and cultural influence of the middle classes behind them, food

reformers brought pressure to bear on restaurants to abandon the elaborate aristocratic dinner.

Restaurants Respond

The American middle classes' embrace of simple eating pressured restaurants to change.

In 1885, *The Cook*, a weekly publication for New York "housekeepers" featuring menus and

food prices, took exception when the British *Pall Mall Gazette* described Delmonico's as one of

the "two most remarkable bits of scenery in the States" (the other was the Yosemite Valley).[30]

The article titled "True Art in Simplicity" argued that "[a]s an advertisement for Delmonico's

[the *Gazette's* article] has undoubted merit, and there is much truth in the statement that our

luxuries are toothsome, but the very last place to procure these dainties cooked to perfection is in

the average first-class restaurant." What the French cooks "cannot understand is the simplicity

with which our dainties should be cooked, in order that they be enjoyed in perfection." To

experience the best American cookery, *The Cook* explained, one had to "taste some of the

toothsome dishes unpretentiously and ordinarily prepared . . . for the family table."[31]

The Cook was not satisfied to leave simple dining at home. In the 1880s, *The Cook*

joined with the *National Hotel Reporter* to urge restaurants and hotels to adopt "short, sensible,

scientifically arranged . . . bill[s] of fare."[32] And restaurateurs, eager to attract middle-class

patrons, took note. In the 1880s, many fashionable restaurants began to reduce their menus. "At

length [the *National Hotel Reporter's*] persistent hammering seems to have some effect," *The*

Cook enthused, "for now some of the best hotels in the country have adopted the new system of

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[30] "True Art in Simplicity," *The Cook: A Weekly Handbook of Domestic Culinary Art for All Housekeeps* 1, no. 1 (1885): 8.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Thomas J. Murray, "Less Variety and Better Quality," *The Cook*, 17 August 1885, 4.

restricting the variety of dishes offered to guests and making up for the reduction by the

increased excellence of what they put upon the table."[33]

By the turn-of-the-century, the movement to simplify eating was being applauded the

custodians of aristocratic restaurant culture. In 1898, Oscar Tschirky, the Waldorf-Astoria's

famed steward known to New Yorkers as simply Oscar, commended Americans for ordering

"fewer courses." "We used to say that the Frenchman was the bon vivant," Oscar added, "but it

is getting very hard to please the American, for his way of eating is so perfect."[34] A few years

later in another interview with the *New York Times* Oscar confirmed his impression that "there

are a smaller number of courses than were demanded, say, ten years ago."[35] Tschirky was soon

joined by other leading New York restauranteurs. J. B. Martin, owner of the fashionable Café

Martin, declared in 1906 that it was "nonsense" to have on the bill of fare more than "four or five

good soups, four or five varieties of strictly fresh fish, four five, entrees, &c."[36] And the chefs at

the St. Regis and the Savoy hotels, Emile Bailly and Xenophon Kuzmier, further suggested that

the double portion, an extravagant serving that was the standard in most elite restaurants, should

be eliminated in addition to reducing the number of offerings on the bill of fare, often as many as

1,000 items, to no more than 100.[37] Echoing the same sentiment, John A. Ewins of the Hotel

Savoy in Kansas City told the Annual Convention of the Missouri-Kansas-Oklahoma Hotel

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[33] Ibid. See also "Americans Rounding Out," *The Cook*, 3 August 1885, 5. "The best hotels, it gives me pleasure to state, are fast moving in the direction of simplicity of bill of fare. In New York the leading house of the American plan does not provide its table with much more than one-half the variety of dishes one may have offered at second rate pretentious concerns through the country."

[34] "Woman Can Order Dinners," *New York Times*, 7 August 1898, 14.

[35] Griffith, "The New Yorker and His Dinner," III1.

[36] New York World, "Too Much on Menu," *Washington Post*, 2 December 1906, E4.

[37] Ibid. Simpler menus did not prevent the elite from overindulging. A 1913 article on the fashionable New Yorker noted that except during opera season, when dinners became shorter to accommodate the performances, "fully one-fourth of the diners will order an eight or nine course dinner, with fruit and flowers and coffee afterward." "What the New York Diner out Orders for His Dinner," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 28 December 1913, 7.

Men's Association in 1912 that the customer's wishes needed to be respected when it came to simplifying the menu.

> The patron of your café today spends his money for what he eats and for what goes back to the garbage can; and if in some places he attempts to divide one portion to two people, he is charged 25 cents for service. Is not that an injustice? . . . Why not serve a guest a reasonable amount—say half the amount he is now getting, and charge him a little less, thereby permitting him to partake of a greater variety, and what is most important, *pleasing him?*[38]
> [Emphasis added]

In 1904, *What to Eat*—still in the midst of its campaign against the excesses of the elite table—applauded "restaurant proprietors" who had recognized the "changing tendency" to eat light and healthy meals and had "made efforts to arrange their courses accordingly."[39] The praise came in response restaurants' turn-of-the-century efforts to experiment with alternatives to the *table d'hôte* dinner. The aristocratic restaurant's *table d'hôte* service, in contrast to the common *table d'hôte* restaurant's service popular with the middle-class diner, was a costly affair offering patrons a virtually unlimited amount of food for a fixed price. Earlier in the century, when most restaurants were in hotels and hotel patrons were billed for both room and board, *table d'hôte* service had worked to the benefit of hotelkeepers. But growing competition from independent restaurants as well as changes in food fashions forced restaurateurs to seek an alterative. Some adopted a modified *table d'hôte* dinner—what one culinary expert termed the American-French dinner— that featured fewer options, fewer courses and fixed portions.[40]

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[38] John A. Ewins, "How Are We Going to Satisfy Our Guests at the Present Cost of Food Supplies," *The Steward* 7, no. 9 (1912): 17.

[39] Restaurants' quickness in adopting lighter fare was often credited to women. Marila Pemberton told readers of *What to Eat* in 1906 that "many of New York's business men have adopted the custom [of doing without luncheon] from women, who seem to thrive on it, and have abandoned the midday restaurant lunch. For the women the no-lunch rule is said to be a great convenience as well as a health producer." Marila Pemberton, "Fads and Fancies of Gotham: The "Doing without Lunceon" Fad," *What to Eat*, April 1906, 130. As was usual, the *New York Times*' editorial pages were out of touch with the prevailing trend. As late as 1908, they were still defending large portions. "Restaurant Prices," 8.

[40] Whitehead, *The Steward's Handbook*, 58.

Others committed themselves to *à la carte* service. The largest New York hotels resolved the problem with redundancy: many offered a hotel dining room featuring *table d'hôte* meals and a restaurant offering *à la carte* service.

But if restaurants were quick to adopt fewer courses and eliminate extravagant portions, they were slow to find a culturally acceptable alternative to the inherently wasteful *table d'hôte* service; middle-class restaurant patrons disliked the *à la carte* dinner almost as much as its predecessor. Not only was *à la carte* dining often prohibitively expensive, it did little to ease the cultural anxiety middle-class diners felt about ordering a restaurant dinner.

À la carte service granted patrons greater control of their order, but the *à la carte* menu was still an imperfect system subject to abuse. As long as dozens of individual dishes were brought to the table, unscrupulous waiters hoping for large tips could provide extra portions or even sneak unordered items to the table without charge. Worse yet, waiters exploited the confusion to overcharge patrons and pocket the profit. Some restaurants were so concerned about abuses that they began to print admonitions on their menus cautioning patrons to verify charges before paying the bill. Others adopted complex checking systems. But no solution prevented every abuse.[41] And even when thievery was not an issue, middle-class patrons were often dismayed at the alacrity with which individually ordered dishes added up to a substantial bill.

Equally important, many in the middle classes found the dizzying array of dishes intimidating. The *à la carte* menu assumed the diner was skilled at pairing flavors, selecting wines or judging unfamiliar cuisines. New to public dining, the middle-class ingénue despaired

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[41] "A head waiter has to know all the tricks of the trade, and they are many. You have to watch them closely, for if you don't they will make more money than the proprietor. To keep their checks straight is a task in itself. Every system of checks has been outdone by the waiter. Some of them won't stay in places where they cannot make a fair salary by scheming." James Joseph Flanagan, *The Waiter* (Providence: Star Printing Company, 1903), 42.

of ever having the cultural capital to construct a socially acceptable gourmet meal. A 1909 fictionalized study of restaurants in New York vividly portrayed the insecurity of middle-class urbanites. At first the waiter at the elite French restaurant was, according to the middle-class protagonist, as accommodating as a "Numidian slave," but as soon as he placed his order the waiter's demeanor changed.

> In his eyes I was a helpless infant to be taken care of, and guided in the way I ought to go. I tried to order cauliflower. He said, in a tone of infinite pity, 'No you don't want cauliflower when you have potatoes au gratin.' Now how the devil did he know that? What social crime did I commit in ordering cauliflower and potatoes au gratin? I was so hot that for one insane moment I contemplated ordering sauerkraut and ice cream, just to shock that potentate.[42]

No waiter would have dared to second guess an aristocratic patron for fear of losing his tip, but then again, the aristocratic patron would not have been intimidated. Only the middle-class patron cringed at the waiter's disapproval.

It was not until the nineteen-teens that restaurants stumbled across a new form of service that seemed especially suited to the most economical and self-conscious in the middle classes. The modern plate dinner, with entrée, vegetables and starch served on a single plate, eliminated wasted food and offered a reasonably priced alternative to both *table d'hote* and *à la carte* service. In 1918, with World War I making food rationing a necessity, the Restaurant Royale in Chicago drew national attention in the restaurant trade journals when it introduced what was perhaps the first significant adoption of the plate dinner. For 65, 75 or 85 cents, depending on the dish ordered, the Royale offered a dinner featuring "meats, vegetables and side dishes . . . all served together on a compartment plate."[43]

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[42] "Getting Served in New York," *New York Times*, 2 May 1909, V3.
[43] "Plate Dinners Are Popular," *The Steward* 13, no. 8 (1918): 27.

When restaurants adopted the plate dinner (sometimes referred to as the "selective meal"), the cultural advantages the aristocracy had in the nineteenth century evaporated and public dining became more hospitable to the middle classes. Menus that emphasized simple eating and lighter meals more closely reflected how the middle-class Americans ate at home. Moreover, plate dinners demystified dining. Proportioned and selected, the plate dinner made the well-balanced and well-selected meal the responsibility of the restaurant's chef.[44] For the middle-class diner, that meant he or she could relish the fun of choosing between entrees without the worry of making an inappropriate selection or an unhealthy choice. Although the plate dinner would not be fully embraced by elite dining establishments until the 1930s, its growing popularity suggests the growing influence of the middle classes.[45]

BEYOND THE FRENCH DINNER

Changes in the size of the meal were accompanied by changes in cuisine. In the early twentieth century, elite restaurants, eager to attract the middle-class patron, began to modify their menus, eliminating French dishes and adding "American" and foreign foods. Although the middle-classing of the restaurant would be a century-long process, between 1900 and 1920,

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[44] As a contemporary joke spoofed: "The two-dish dinner seems destined to become popular." "It's going to be extremely popular with the man who never knows which fork to use at a seven-course dinner." "Great Relief to Him," *The Steward* 14, no. 8 (1919): 17. A precursor of the plate dinner, however, was roundly condemned by etiquette guides in the nineteenth century. Robert Tomes wrote: "The combination on each plate of the numerous items of the hotel or boarding-house bill of fare, which passes daily the unquestioning swallow of American voracity, is a prodigious test of the powers of digestion." Tomes, *The Bazar Book of Decorum. The Care of the Person, Manners, Etiquette and Ceremonials.*
[45] "Bans on Foreign Names on Our Menus Urged as First Culinary Congress Is Organized," *New York Times*, 7 November 1939, 25.

discernable changes in restaurant menus offered evidence of the middle classes' growing cultural authority.[46]

Competition from middle-class establishments forced aristocratic restaurants to make concessions and French cuisine, while still prominent in the early twentieth century, was no longer the exclusive cuisine of fine dining. The Fifth Avenue Restaurant in New York described itself as "Le Restaurant Français par Excellence" in 1912 and at night the restaurant was the formal French establishment its advertising slogan promised. A table d'hôte menu from December 1912 is printed entirely in French from the *filet de bœuf Duchesse* to the *poulet de grain grillé*.[47] During the day, however, the Fifth Avenue was a different establishment. Lunch was a time when the middle-class business person, briefly released from work, joined the mid-day shopper looking for a meal and the Fifth Avenue made efforts to attract the noontime patronage. The restaurant's midday menu was predominantly in English and the dishes served were eclectic: *sausage with wine sauce and mashed potatoes*, *deviled beef bones and chips*, and *half squab chicken in casserole, fresh mushrooms* complimented dishes dressed with specifically French sauces such as *quail in casserole Liegeoise* and *Wallkill Valley squab in casserole Bourgeoise*. French cuisine and French sauces appear on the menu but the menu is not decisively French and most of the dishes were described in terms that would have been clear to middle-class customers.[48]

The Fifth Avenue was not unique. One of the premier French restaurants in New York prior to World War I was Louis Bustanoby's Café des Beaux-Arts. A July 1912 dinner menu

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[46] There is no exact science to reading menus and as a result they have been largely ignored as historical documents. The following observations, while based on a careful reading of hundreds of menus, are necessarily subjective and interpretive but support general trends that are difficult to quantify.

[47] Menu, "Menu," Fifth Avenue Restaurant, New York, N.Y, December 14, 1912, Box 248 (1912-0875), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[48] Menu, "Luncheon," Fifth Avenue Restaurant, New York, N.Y, n.d. (ca. 1910), Box 218 (1910-5415), Buttolph Menu Collection.

featured a plain *leg of lamb* and the American-styled *Philadelphia chicken*. While the menu also included cold consommés, grouse with truffles, larded tenderloins and boar's head, all "continental" or French dishes, it used French terms sparingly.[49] Likewise, the menu at the St. Denis Hotel in New York offered French dishes and a variety of other cuisines. In 1912, the respectable hotel's dining room served twelve entrees on its menu of which only five employed either *haute cuisine* techniques or sauces (Flamande, Bordelaise, Polonaise, Parisienne, Bearnaise).[50] Although the St. Denis lunch menu was titled "Carte du Jour," the menu seldom employed French terms and the daily specials were drawn from a variety of international cuisines: French *bouillabaise a la Marseillaise* on Fridays, but *paprika schnitzel with homemade noodles* on Mondays, *corned beef and cabbage, Irish style* on Wednesdays and *Hungarian goulash* on Saturdays.[51]

Not every elite restaurant abandoned the all-French menu, perhaps not even most. But the trend was away from French menus—and not only in New York. In 1885, The Antlers in Colorado Springs was so committed to Gallicizing its menu that it created French terms for dishes named after American presidents. In 1912, for the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Colorado Bar Association, the menu paid tribute to French culinary expertise only when strictly necessary. The trout was described as *mountain trout, Meuniére* but the chicken was simply *roast spring chicken* and the salad was simply *lettuce and tomato*.[52] Likewise, the Hotel Cadillac in Detroit avoided French preparations and used simple English cognates on its extensive menu.

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[49] Menu, "Table d'Hôte," Café des Beaux-Arts, New York, N.Y, July 11, 1912, Box 242 (1912-0513), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[50] Mayonnaise was in common use in America and was not capitalized on the menu so it was not counted as one of the five French items. Menu, "Carte du Jour," St. Denis Hotel, New York, N.Y., December 15, 1912, Box 248 (1912-0879), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[51] Menu, "Carte du Jour," St. Denis Hotel, New York, N.Y., December 15, 1912, Box 248 (1912-0879), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[52] Menu, "Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Colorado Bar Association," The Antlers Hotel, Colorado Springs, Colo., July 12, 1912, Box 242 (1912-0514), Buttolph Menu Collection.

A September 1911 menu includes over fifty main dishes and salads of which only seventeen used any form of "cooks' French" and in most cases these would have been easily understood by middle-class patrons either because the French term was easily translated (*crab flake a l'Epicure*) or because the dish was so common as to defy linguistic disguise (*chicken a la King*). Even menu items that one might expect to be described in French did not necessarily receive a French title. Frog legs, a French dish that was not widely accepted by Americans until after World War I, appeared on the menu as *frog legs roadhouse style*.[53]

The erosion of the French menu was even more precipitous in rural areas, including resort communities that had once been fashionable with wealthy tourists. New Hampshire had been an out-of-the-way retreat for the wealthy in the nineteenth century, but in the twentieth century improvements in transportation made it a popular middle-class vacation destination. In the restaurants that catered to the new vacationers, rice fritters replaced croquettes and "au jus" was the only French term on a typical menu from 1915.[54]

French still commanded enough respect that it was used on occasion to describe a restaurant or a menu item even when the menu itself included few French dishes. Schraft's Fifth Avenue lunchroom called itself a "Petit Salon" although the menu, mostly sandwiches, was generically American.[55] Likewise, Macy's, a bastion of middle-class consumerism, included a few French terms on its laundry-list menu featuring nearly sixty variations of steaks and roasts (including *planked sirloin steak, Rochambeau* and *calf's head, Poulette*).[56] But if French dishes did not disappear entirely, public demand for an accessible menu usually won out. Unlike the

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[53] Menu, "Supper," Hotel Cadillac, Detroit, Mich., hand dated September 29, 1911, Box 231 (1911-0670), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[54] Menu, "Mid-Day Meal," Thayer's Hotel, Littleton, N.H., August 18, 1915, Box 291 (no item number), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[55] Menu, "Petit Salon," Schrafft's, New York, N.Y., hand dated September 26, 1911, Box 231 (1911-0667), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[56] Menu, "Macy's Restaurant," Macy's Restaurant, New York, N.Y., n.d. (ca. 1905), Box 129 (1905-0955), Buttolph Menu Collection.

nineteenth-century elite restaurant where both French dishes and the French language were ubiquitous, menus from the first two decades of the twentieth century exhibit their creator's willingness to experiment with a variety of cuisines and English-language descriptions.   When the Bar Association of the City of Boston met in 1914 at the city's very fashionable Copley-Plaza Hotel, the menu was printed in English and featured *green turtle and chicken gumbo with tapioca* as well as a *filet of sea bass a l'Ancienne*.[57] Likewise, at a slightly more pretentious dinner at the Hotel Sherman in 1912, the menu included an idiosyncratic mix of French and English terms pared with a mix of French and American delicacies. The dinner for Chicago seedmen started with *strained gumbo en tasse* and ended with *roast stuffed jumbo squab on toast*.[58]

Cosmopolitan Cuisine

Changes in restaurant menus—the declining use of French dishes and the substitution of some "American" dishes—demonstrated the growing influence of the middle-class restaurant on its aristocratic counterpart. The decline of the French menu, however, was slowed by the failure of the United States to develop an elite "American" restaurant cuisine. As Fannie C. W. Barber confessed in a May 1897 article for the *Chautauquan*, "[t]here seems to be no especial school of American cooking, to be designated as such, although we have cook-books innumerable, and there is no end to the cooking lessons given at present, to both rich and poor, all over the

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[57] Menu, "The Bar Association of the City of Boston Seventeenth Triennial Dinner," Copley-Plaza, Boston, Mass., December 28, 1914, Box 284 (1914-1057), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[58] Menu, "Banquet tendered the American Seed Trade Association by the Chicago Seedmen on the Occasion of the 30th Annual Convention," Hotel Sherman, Chicago, Ill., June 26, 1912, Box 242 (1912-0487), Buttolph Menu Collection.

country."[59] Echoing the sentiment a decade later, a headline in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*
declared: "Discovered, American Restaurant; Chances are It's the Only One Alive."[60]

Even the most nationalistic Americans generally agreed the nation lacked a respectable
national cuisine. In 1869, Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe argued that Americans
should swallow their pride and learn to adopt French cooking techniques. "[T]he French mode
of doing almost all practical things is based on that true philosophy and utilitarian good sense
which characterize that seemingly thoughtless people. . . . Half of the recipes in our cook-books
are mere murder to such constitutions and stomachs as we grow here. . . . [W]e may, without
accusation of foreign foppery, take some leaves from many foreign books."[61] A half-century
later, George Ellwinger in a well-reviewed and well-publicized history of dining concurred.

> STRICTLY speaking, there exists as yet no general high-class
> English or American cuisine, beyond the natural alimentary
> resources of these countries, supplemented by the efforts of foreign
> cooks. There are certain native dishes of merit in England, to be
> sure, and there is a so-termed Southern and Eastern kitchen in the
> United States where not a few dishes are admirably prepared. But
> the art of baking bread and of pastry-making, as well as that of
> frying, is, alas! lacking to a great extent in both countries, while
> the entree is still largely an uncertain quantity with the housewife.
> There is a lack, likewise, both in England and in America, of a
> proper understanding of sauces, and this is the more to be regretted
> on the score of their appetising qualities, the variety they impart to
> the flavour of viands, and, where the properties of the numerous
> seasonings and condiments are thoroughly understood, the
> beneficent effect they lend to digestion.[62]

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[59] Fannie C. W. Barber in the Chautauquan (May) as Fannie C. W. Barber, "American Cooking," *What to Eat*, July 1897, 8.

[60] "Discovered, American Restaurant; Chances Are It's the Only One Alive," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 October 1910, I4.

[61] Catharine Esther Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes* (J.B. Ford and company, 1869 [cited February 24 2005]); available from http://www.ibiblio.org/gutenberg/etext04/mrwmh10.txt.

[62] Ellwanger, *The Pleasures of the Table*, 248-49. If Ellwanger was dismissive about American cooking, his contemporaries in Rochester, New York, were puzzled by this native son's fascination with European cooking. "His unhesitating and perfect expression of this love for beauty . . . antagonized some and was thought by others to be mere affectation. His epicurean tastes were a constant source of bewilderment and even revulsion to many of his

The failure to anoint an American cuisine gave credence to the middle classes'

celebration of cosmopolitanism as the nation's contribution to the culinary world. As Henry T.

Finck, the Harvard-trained physiological psychologist and one of America's most prolific food

writers argued in a 1911 article in *The Century Magazine*, "Really the [German]

Kaiserschmarren and the Apfelstrudel ought to be made national American dishes by special act

of Congress."[63]

Finck's comments acknowledged the growing popularity of ethnic cuisines in the first

two decades of the twentieth century. Middle-class ethnic restaurants spawned elite competition

and slowly even the most staid aristocratic establishments came to realize that they would need

to accommodate patrons who sought out foreign foods. We no longer know who authored

Where and How to Dine in New York; however, the substantial book published by Lewis and

Scribner in 1903 was one of the first comprehensive guides to fashionable dining in New York

and it featured, among the lush accounts of aristocratic restaurants, descriptions of the most

celebrated of the cosmopolitan restaurants. Subtitled "the principal hotels, restaurants and cafes

of various kinds and nationalities which have added to the gastronomic fame of New York and

its suburbs," the guide included listings for the Hof-Brau Haus, the Café Boulevard and

Lüchow's, restaurants that specialized in ethnic fare. Lüchow's, the city's most famous German

restaurant, was described as regional asset with "renown of its own not only in the United States

but in continental Europe as well."[64]

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acquaintances, but were a delight shared by a few." Natalie F. Hawley, "Literature in Rochester, 1865-1905," *Rochester History* 10, no. 1 (1948): 18.

[63] H. T. Finck, "Mulitplying the Pleasures of the Table," *Century*, December 1911, 220-8.

[64] *Where and How to Dine in New York*, 201. While the author is unknown, the title suggests familiarity with two European works printed by the publishing house of G. Richards and Pall Mall Publications: Lieut. Col. Newnham-Davis, *Dinners and Dinners: Where and How to Dine in London* (London: G. Richards, Pall Mall Publications, 1899); Roland Strong, *Where and How to Dine in Paris, with Notes on Paris Hotels, Waiters and Their Tips* (London: G. Richards, 1900). Notably, Roland Strong was the Paris correspondent for a number of papers including

Where and How to Dine was at pains to make clear that these restaurants were patronized

by both the upper- and upper middle classes. The venerable "Hof-Brau Haus," the guide noted,

"is a tavern in the true sense of the word. Lawyers, doctors, brokers—prosperous business men

of all kinds—meet there every evening over a social glass. . . . The cuisine is famous. German

dishes are served that tempt the epicure."[65] Likewise, the Café Boulevard, a Hungarian

restaurant, was as cosmopolitan in its patronage as its was on its menu.

> Should you wish to visit one of the most cosmopolitan dining
> places in New York, go to the Café Boulevard. In this "Classic
> Bohemia" there is enough of a contrast to delight the heart of the
> most exacting connoisseur of "atmospheres." The Café is
> Hungarian in flavor, Bohemian in spirit, modern and artistic in
> decoration, and Old Colonial at back bone. . . . There you will see
> men and women of many nationalities, and of many walks of
> life—lawyers, artists, literati, journalists, musicians, clergymen,
> many of them met by appointment to discuss affairs or to forget
> perplexities in the sociability of good cheer.[66]

Other guides to dining in New York painted similar pictures of the city's cosmopolitan culture.

From the playwright and novelist Rupert Hughes' 1904 book *The Real New York* to the *New*

Yorker architectural critic George S. Chappell's 1925 book *The Restaurants of New York*, guides

to dining in the culinary capital celebrated ethnic food and the new tier of respectable, upper- and

middle-class restaurants that catered to the city's cravings for novel dining experiences. Ethnic

eating came of age in the early twentieth century.[67]

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the *New York Times* and his writing would have been familiar to the author of this work. There is no concrete
evidence, however, that he himself authored the book.

[65] *Where and How to Dine in New York*, 34.

[66] Ibid., 205-7. Visitors were assured, however, that the wealthy occasionally visited the Café Boulevard as well.
"Not infrequently it happens a party of representative New Yorkers—the Goulds, the Vanderbilts, or the
Whitneys—dine at the Café Boulevard in democratic disregard of social distinctions, possibly unrecognized by the
actress dining with her worshipping friends on the right, or the lonely poet dining with his muse on the left."

[67] George S. Chappell, *The Restaurants of New York* (New York: Greenberg, 1925); Hughes, *The Real New York*.
Chappell was also the lyricist for a fairly unsuccessful 1916 Broadway production called "Come to Bohemia"; he
had a degree from Yale, studied architecture in Paris and lived most of his life among the literati of New York.

The rise of the cosmopolitan restaurant created competition for aristocratic restaurants and encouraged those restaurants that wanted to attract middle-class patrons to broaden their menus and embrace international cuisine. But the adoption of ethnic cuisines by elite hotels and restaurants was eased by orientalist fantasies that portrayed non-Westerners as a primitive, sensuous antidote to the ennui of the modern urban experience. As William Leach observes in *Land of Desire*, "[E]ven as European and American orientalism distorted and demeaned non-Western cultures, it also exposed an underlying sense in Westerners themselves that they lacked something vital that 'Orientals' had. Orientalism . . . symbolized a feeling of something missing from Western culture itself, a longing for a 'sensual' life more 'satisfying' than traditional Christianity could endorse."[68] Consuming the culture and cuisine of "Orientals" provided a veiled way for Americans to experience pleasure without remorse.

Following the Spanish-American War, orientalist themes had found a place in both high art and commercial culture.[69] This marriage of East and West smoothed the transition from the French menu to the cosmopolitan menu at elite eating establishments. With nationalist undercurrents, orientalism promised to pair America's superior ingredients with the hedonism of foreign cooking to create an epicurean cosmopolitan cuisine unmatched anywhere in the world. It would lead to an embrace not only of the exotic foreign cuisines of Asia and South America, but also to the celebration of cuisines from central, eastern and southern Europe.

Restaurant menus from the Gilded Age rarely had included foreign dishes. The few dishes with an international flavor that appeared on these menus were prepared according to French tradition and were given appropriate French names. The Arlington Hotel's menu on May 10, 1871, for example, included *Macaroni a la Milanaise, Fromage de Parmesan*, a staple dish

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[68] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 105. For a further discussion of orientalism, see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
[69] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 105-11.

on many French menus consisting of boiled pasta with grated cheese and butter. But while

Macaroni a la Milanaise (and its linguistic variants) was a tribute to the Italian influence on

French cooking, it was not prepared as an Italian dish following an Italian recipe. Likewise, the

Kuri des Volailles, a l'Indienne that appeared on the Arlington's menu referred to a French

poultry dish that incorporates curry powder and not an authentic ethnic dish from the

subcontinent.[70]

In the twentieth century, however, ethnic dishes, while still relatively rare, began

appearing on the menus of non-ethnic restaurants—including some of the most staid aristocratic establishments. *Macaroni à l'Italienne,* the French version of the Italian pasta dish (served with a brown or white sauce) was served as entrée (sauced side dish) in the nineteenth century and infrequently appears on

Figure 6: La Salle Hotel, 1909 (Library of Congress)

American menus. At the turn of the century, the dish was rechristened as *Spaghetti l'Italienne*

(suggesting a growing American familiarity with Italian pasta styles) and served southern Italian-

style with a tomato sauce, but the dish was now considered a side-dish and was usually listed on

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[70] Menu, "Regular Dinner," The Arlington, Washington, D.C., May 10, 1871, Box 2 (1871-73-30248), Buttolph Menu Collection.

menus á la carte menus as a vegetable.[71] By the mid-nineteen teens, however, *Italian spaghetti*

with tomato sauce (sometimes with reassurances that the dish was "real native Italian style")

regularly appeared as a main course on American menus in imitation of how it was routinely

served at Italian restaurants.[72] In fact, by the nineteen-tens Italian cuisine was so well

established in America that at least one aristocratic hotel completely overhauled its menu. In

1912, the fashionable restaurant at the Hotel La Salle in Chicago "[left] the French cuisine era"

and reinvented itself as an Italian restaurant.[73] "I don't know if the guests notice the change,"

Frank Cucco, the new Italian chef stated, "but everybody seems pleased. They should be, for I

am a culinary artist and know how to please the stomach."[74]

German dishes also found their way onto standard "American" menus at the turn of the

century. The Flat Iron Restaurant & Café in New York in 1905 advertised itself as having a

"Cosmopolitan Kitchen" and included German dishes on an otherwise fairly typical meat and

potato menu. Soups at the Flat Iron included *Deutsche Kraftsuppe* (a broth is presented without

explanation in the menu), cold dishes included *Kalter Aufschnitt, Flat Iron* (German cold cuts

not defined in the menu) and *Geräucherte Gánsebrust* (defined in the menu as Smoked Goose

Breast) and dishes to order included *Wiener Schnitzel* and *Paprika Schnitzel with noodles*.[75]

That same year, patrons of the restaurant at the New Grand Hotel, a respectable New York hotel,

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[71] For Macaroni à l'Italienne, see Menu, "Dinner," The Waldorf, New York, N.Y., November 11, 1895, Box 22 (1895-28 or 1895-179), Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library, New York; Menu, "Carte du Jour," Fred Harvey Union Station Restaurant, Chicago, Ill., November 15, 1905, Box 128 (1905-859), Buttolph Menu Collection. Harvey's restaurant included both "Macaroni au Gratin" and "Spaghetti, Italian" on its vegetable menu. For a definition of l'Italienne as "brown or white sauce with wine, shallots, mushrooms, etc.," see Whitehead, *The Steward's Handbook*, 350.

[72] Menu, "Garret Restaurant," Garret Restaurant, New York, N.Y., n.d. (ca. 1914), Box 281 (1914-0887), Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library, New York; Menu, "Bill of Fare," Jeo's Restaurant, Brooklyn, N.Y., September 1, 1914, Box 281 (1914-0878), Buttolph Menu Collection. For the reference to "real native Italian style" see Menu, "The Place to Dine," Hotel Princesa Café and Restaurant, New York, N.Y., n.d. (ca. 1914), Box 281 (1914-0892), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[73] Rodenbaugh and Morris, "Midwestern Hotel Items," *The Steward*, April 1912, 20.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Menu, "Flat Iron Restaurant and Café," Flat Iron Restaurant, New York, N.Y., n.d. (ca. 1905), Box 128 (1905-297), Buttolph Menu Collection.

were offered a special sidebar menu attached to the standard French-styled menu that featured "Our German Specialties."[76]

More exotic foreign dishes also found their way onto "American" menus in the first decades of the twentieth century. While it is not surprising that the middle-class Levy's Restaurant located in Los Angeles, California—reflecting local familiarity with Hispanic cuisine—featured *Chicken Tamales* for 20 cents a serving, Mexican dishes also appear on the menus of elite east-coast establishments. In 1895 the Christmas menu for The Windsor in New York City—an elite hotel whose 1870s menus were decidedly French—featured *Fried Bananas, Mexican Style.*[77] Similarly, Chinese cuisine was increasingly available in aristocratic establishments. The Hotel McAlpin, one of New York's largest and most respected hotels, converted its tea room into a Chinese restaurant in 1919.

> In New York the McAlpin Hotel teashop is serving a special Chinese luncheon and supper . . . and is proving very successful. This may be due to the fact that it is prepared entirely and served by Chinese. Mrs. A. L. Evans, manager of the candy and tea shop, was recently able to secure a number of dainty little American-born Chinese girls to serve as waitresses. This proved so pleasing and satisfactory that she at once arranged for several young men cooks and presto! the Chinese menu.
>
> White meat Chicken Chop Suey with mushrooms, Bamboo shoots celery and water-chestnuts, Chinese vegetable jelly, and the like, comprise these menus, and there is not [sic] discounting the evident pride the Celestials take in preparing and serving the viands which appear to have struck the fancy of the Occidentals.[78]

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[76] Menu, "Our German Specialties," New Grand Hotel, New York, N.Y., June 15, 1905, Box 125 (1905-469 Item A), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[77] Menu, "A Merry Christmas," The Windsor, New York, N.Y., December 25, 1895, Box 22 (1895-184 or 1895-2246), Buttolph Menu Collection. cf. Menu, "The Windsor," The Windsor, New York, N.Y., May 13, 1874, Box 2 (1875-80-12), Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library, New York; Menu, "Bill of Fare," Levy's, Los Angeles, Calif., n.d. (190?), Menu Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, http://www.lapl.org/resources/en/menu_collection.html (accessed May 1999). Levy's, in addition to its tamales, offered customers Wiener Schnitzel with Paprica (sic) or Garni Sauce, Imported Frankfurters and Sauerkraut, or Finnan Haddie, a Scottish cured white fish, boiled, broiled or in a chafing dish—all with the option of Spanish sauce on the side.

[78] "Chinese Dishes Served Daily at a Big New York Hotel," *The Steward*, March 1919, 16-7.

Vividly demonstrating the growing popularity of foreign dishes in elite establishments, the

manufacturer of a tonic for the "bilious, malarious, [sic] and persons with weak kidneys,"

advertised in 1898 that whether "the engrafting of French and German dishes upon the bills of

fare of the better class of American restaurants is or is not an improvement," Hostetter's Stomach

Bitters will cure the resulting dyspepsia.[79]

Restaurants eager to capitalize on the growing interest in foreign cuisine also employed

foreign culture as a means of setting an orientalist and exotic atmosphere in their dining rooms.

The luxurious Hotel Astor in Times Square opened in 1904 and featured a Spanish lounging

room, a Chinese tearoom and (inexplicably) an Indian rathskellar.[80] In 1915, the Homestead

Restaurant in Hot Springs, Virginia featured a diet menu typical for a spa but advertised a

"Colored Cabaret" performed every night in the Japanese Room from 10 to 11:30 PM.[81]

Likewise, the "Italian Garden" at the St. Charles Hotel in New Orleans, a vine covered

Romanesque lounge, did not mean the dining room had abandoned its New Orleans French menu

but it did signal the growing interest in the exoticism of foreign cultures.[82] In 1904, Rupert

Hughes remarked on the trend in ethnic decorations and the patrons (middle-class, although not

necessarily the most respectable of the middle classes) it attracted.

> Some astute New York caterer found that, while few people will
> go to a basement restaurant, great crowds will throng to the same
> place if it is called a rathskeller, and furnished in a pseudo-German
> style. The rathskeller, which, as you know, means 'council-cellar,'
> is well named, being the favorite resort for those who are most in
> need of good advice. In the spume of beer, the broth of society
> finds its counterpart. Here the chorus girl and the woman-about-

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[79] "Bills of Fare in Fashionable Restaurants," *Washington Post*, 21 May 1898, 7.
[80] "Dinner under Ground at New Astor Hotel," *New York Times*, 29 August 1904, 7.
[81] Menu, "Diet Menu/Dinner," The Homestead, Hot Springs, Va., November 22, 1915, Box 292 (no number), Buttolph Menu Collection.
[82] Menu, "Refreshments," St. Charles Hotel, New Orleans, La., February 1, 1913, Box 251 (1913-0144), Buttolph Menu Collection.

town meet the sporting salesman and the roué who is a shoe clerk by day. Gradually the more discreet code of foot-flirtation leads to the open holding of hands, and finally to embraces and bibulous love-making.[83]

Even the music played at restaurants in the nineteen teens contributed to the construction of an orientalist ethnic pastiche. "Here, in an uptown place," an article in the *New York Times* observed, "you find Irish waiters serving German beer to American diners-out, while a polyglot orchestra, dressed in Spanish costume, plays negro ragtime, or wants to know in voices that rise above the sound of their instruments has anybody here seen Kelly, which, you may be sure, they haven't, as it is a Teutonic assemblage. However, by the time the second or third chorus is reached the diners are all yelling the same question to each other. . . ."[84]

Foreign flourishes and ethnic cuisine infused the elite restaurant with the sensual exoticism of the "other," an exploitation of imperialistic fantasies for economic gain. Demand for ethnic cuisine, however, was grounded in the discovery of the immigrant restaurant by the middle classes in the nineteenth century and the celebration of cosmopolitanism that the middle classes advocated.

In the early twentieth century, aristocratic restaurants adapted their menus to middle-class tastes for variety because competition from ethnic eateries—fashionable and unfashionable— required that they make concessions to middle-class patrons. The editors of *The Steward* warned restaurateurs in 1911 that if they wanted to be profitable, they would have to reach out to customers seeking epicurean variety.

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[83] Hughes, *The Real New York*, 100. Ethnic pastiche carried over to the music of the restaurant: "Here, in an uptown place, you find Irish waiters serving German beer to American diners-out, while a polyglot orchestra, dressed in Spanish costume, plays negro ragtime, or wants to know in voices that rise above the sound of their instruments has anybody here seen Kelly, which, you may be sure, they haven't, as it is a Teutonic assemblage. However, by the time the second or third chorus is reached the diners are all yelling the same question to each other. . . . It is amazing to what an extent this desire for restaurant music has prevailed. "Where Music Soothes While Lobsters Broil," 7.

[84] "Where Music Soothes While Lobsters Broil," 7.

Notwithstanding the fact that almost every nationality on the face of the earth finds representation to a greater or less extent in the metropolis of the country [New York] it is amazing after all what an element of sameness there is in the cuisine of those places which are mostly in the lime-light. This may not be much of a factor in a solution of this question [of profits] which most people seem to think is supply in excess of demand, but nevertheless on the principle that "variety is the spice of life" it might be well to consider if the present number of high-class restaurants could not be made profitable by striking differenciation [sic] and the adoption of distinct features, for instance, as have made Luchow's a place of international renown for German food and cooking . . . The opportunity seems to be equally good for any kind of distinctive dish and service."[85]

CHANGING THE LANGUAGE OF DINING

When in 1912, G. G. Netter complained to his server, "Waiter, these dishes are all in French," all the waiter could do was stammer, "Yes, sir, but the prices are in English. Most people go by them."[86] Lacking the linguistic proficiency in French that birth and breeding granted the American aristocrat, the middle-class restaurant-goer found language, as much as price, a barrier to full participation in aristocratic restaurant culture. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, an eager urban middle class representing a growing and lucrative segment of the dining public, openly rejected the French-language menu and in newspapers and journals waged a campaign against the use of French culinary terms on the menus of elite restaurants. By the 1920s, although the adoption of English-language menus was not universal, the middle classes had demonstrated their ability to shape the culture and language of dining.

Protest

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[85] "New York's Restaurant Trade: Value of Distinct Features," *The Steward* 6, no. 3 (1911): 24-25.
[86] *Washington Star*, "What They Go By," *Iowa City Daily Press*, 12 January 1912, 2.

The first complaints about the use of the French menu were more aristocratic than middle-class. In 1875, to cite one example, Gail Hamilton warned readers about restaurants where "The table-cloth is spotted and the coffee is mud . . . but the bill of fare lies by your plate with all its French and fearful viands as mysteriously formulated as if your were at the Fifth Avenue or the Sherman."[87] But as the number of middle-class diners increased, the complaints were less about the pretension of greasy spoons and more about the exclusivity of fine dining.

When in 1885 the Scranton *Truth* challenged *The Cook*, a New York-based culinary journal addressed to housewives, to abandon French bills of fare, the editors of *The Cook* initially defended French as the language of good cooking: "You might as well expect a scientist to write intelligently about electricity without mentioning 'volts,' 'ohms,' or 'webers,' as require a cook to write about his art without calling things by their proper names."[88] But this chauvinistic defense of French was short-lived. In 1885 *The Cook* reversed its policy of printing bills of fare in French after its avowed readership, middle-class housewives, complained: "During the first month of the publication of this journal almost every mail brought protests from subscribers against the use of French words in our columns." Humbly, *The Cook* pledged to use English where it could be "effectually, clearly and succinctly" substituted. And then, deflecting criticism from itself, it attacked the deplorable conduct of America's restaurants.

> The thing that would be protested against is the useless and unnecessary jamming in of French words among English, for no other purpose than mere affection, as in the case of the [restaurant] cook who puts upon his bill of fare "calf's liver au jus," when he might better, for English speaking patrons, write it "calf's liver with gravy." Ignorant people, those who want all things done as they are done "in Yurrup," are most likely to be the offenders in this direction.[89]

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[87] Gail Hamilton, "Hotel of the Future," *Scribners Monthly*, 11:1 (1875), 111.
[88] "Concerning Words," *The Cook*, 11 May 1885, 4.
[89] Murray, "Less Variety and Better Quality," 4.

Cowed, *The Cook* would eventually join the *National Hotel Reporter* in endorsing a "short, sensible, scientifically arranged and English worded bill of fare" for restaurants.[90]

Behind the barbs levied at the pretensions of restaurant menus was a growing concern, expressed in the journals and newspapers of the middle classes, that the use of French was a conspiratorial effort to exclude the middle classes from the bounty of restaurant culture.[91] A joke, circa 1885, which first appeared in the *Philadelphia Call*, expressed this middle-class concern as clearly as any editorial. A mother and daughter are dining in a table d'hote restaurant that served a broad multi-course menu for a set price. The daughter can not read the menu and asks her mother what language the bill of fare is printed in. The mother, perhaps a bit embarrassed, tells her daughter that the menu is in French and admits that she can only read a little of it. Confused, the daughter asks "Why does the hotel man put the names in French?" and the mother answers, "Because most people can't pronounce the names without making themselves ridiculous and they therefore order just as little as possible."[92]

Reflecting their growing participation in restaurant culture and their rising frustration with the indecipherable French bill of fare, middle-class advocates of English-language menus, jocular in the nineteenth century, were more strident in the early twentieth century. To the outsider—the middle-class restaurant-goer whose birth and breeding did not provide him or her with the keys to unravel the mysteries of the menu—the French language, still a staple of fine dining even when the food served was not exclusively French, became an easy target for dissatisfaction with the aristocratic trappings of American culture and was cast as a threat to

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[90]Ibid. Radicalized, *The Cook* also poked fun at an American summer hotel that "set down grandiloquently in the bill of fare" gateaux de gingembre for the "simple ginger-snap." "Kitchen English in France," *The Cook* 1885, 9.
[91] "Opposed to the Spread of Knowledge," *The Cook* 1885, 10. *The Cook* claimed that professional chefs were preventing recipes from being disseminated so that only those who could afford to hire a chef, or for that matter eat in a restaurant, could enjoy French cooking.
[92] "Innocent Children," *The Cook* 1885, 12. On linguistic disguises, see also "French Bills of Fare," *Washington Post*, 9 October 1923, 6.

American democracy. In a fiery December 1899 article in *What to Eat*, the Midwestern-based

successor to *The Cook*, Donald G. Ross lambasted the "privileged class who have been 'abroad,'

and the imitators of foreign habits and appetites who have not been abroad" for "fancy[ing] . . .

'a la mode' preparations." As Ross went on to say (arguing for both English-language menus

and American cookery):

> We find such delicate [American] foods disturbed by all manner of
> harrowing [European] seasonings and "patois" titles, that not only
> successfully disguise the plain American name, but their first
> virtue—the flavor. It probably looks well to see broiled pompano
> on a Boston bill of fare . . . but when a faded taste has to be made
> up by using artificial flavoring and presented under a foreign alias,
> we should draw the line.[93]

An even stronger polemic was launched by a European émigré living in Chicago. August E.

Gans, the business manager at the Chicago Cooking College, argued that the French-language

menu pandered to the "patrician" class and undermined America's classless democracy. As

Gans wrote in a 1907 article in *Kitchen Culture and Cuisine*: "Are we getting to be more

Europeanized from year to year, and, are we quietly losing some of our distinctively American

ways? Is the use of high sounding, although mostly atrociously misspelled French terms on the

ordinary bills of fare of even our ordinary restaurants in smaller cities a sign of this 'catering' to

'classes?'. . ."[94] Gans thought so. But *Keeler's Hotel Weekly*, with the same blend of

nationalism and contempt, put it more succinctly: "[W]hy quarrel? Let those who like to eat in

French go to France, while those who like to eat in English stay right here and enjoy

themselves."[95]

      The debate over what language to eat in eventually spilled out of the culinary journals

and into the mainstream press. Max Bloch, a New Yorker, launched a extraordinary public

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[93] Donald G. Ross, "Food Luxuries of America," *What to Eat* 1899, 47.
[94] August E. Gans, "Ze Million Peegs in Our Ma-Niews," *Kitchen Craft and Cuisine* 1907, 256.
[95] "That Menu in English," *The Steward,* December 1920, 26.

debate over the practice of French-language menus when he complained to the editors of the

New York Times in 1909: "What sense is there in calling potatoes "Pommes de terre," oysters

"huitres," soups "pottages," and so on through a lot of lingual fol-de-rol, when plain everyday

English would tell the story comprehensively?"[96] French-language menus, Bloch felt,

represented "humbug and snobbery" in an English-speaking country.

Bloch's protest was seconded by other frustrated diners in the weeks that followed. A. H.

La Mont, despite the French surname, called for a "scrimmage" not only against the use of

French in menus but against the French term "menu" itself. "[B]anish it and return to the good

old understandable 'bill of fare'" wrote La Monte. "I want to eat in English—not French."[97] As

middle-class urbanites dined out en masse, they expected the restaurant to cater to their language,

eating habits and nationalism. The bill of fare, should not, as one *New York Globe* humorist

penned, be primarily a means of learning a foreign language.[98]

A year later, the debate reemerged and expanded when the *Louisville Courier-Journal*,

Col. Henry Watterson's flamboyant newspaper, popularized the concerns of Gaston G. Netter,

the secretary of the Geneva White Cross Society, an international advocate for pure food.

Gaston expressed dismay that the same standards that governed food manufacturers were not

being applied to restaurants; Watterson's populist *Courier-Journal* transformed his comments

into an attack on the snobbery of American elites. Netter believed (in the words of the partisan

newspaper) that "[r]estaurants in the United States are patronized chiefly by persons who speak

English only. The label should tell on the bill of fare [what is being served] as well as on the

bottle of catsup where the federal law compels frankness."[99] But equally important, the French-

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[96] Max Bloch, "Menus in French," *New York Times*, 19 April 1909, 8.
[97] A. H. La Mont, "Wants to Eat in English," *New York Times*, 21 April 1909, 6.
[98] "A Good System," *The Southern Hotel Journal* 1912, 57.
[99] "Reform the Menu!" *Washington Post*, 28 September 1910, 6.

language menu was not only deceptive, it was anti-American. Like Gans, Block and La Mont,

Netter (probably a Swiss immigrant himself) thought that the French-language menu betrayed

the democratic ideals of the nation.

> Of course there are many Americans who recognize "asperges." But there are
> many equally worthy and equally hungry persons who might be uncertain, of [sic,
> if] they should see the word in some isolated position, as to whether it means a
> hair tonic or an internal derangement calling for a surgical operation. . . . But the
> confusion resulting from the use of a foreign language upon a home-use of a
> foreign bill of fare is negligible in comparison with the implied toadyism. If we
> are to have opera in English for patriotic reasons, by all means let us reform the
> bill of fare similarly.[100]

Resistance

Not everyone was ready to abandon French menus. When the *New York Times* eventually

responded to the letters of outcry against the foreign language menu, they endorsed the use of

"cook's French." Admitting that their "own blood . . . doesn't boil very hotly at this outrage,"

the editors side-stepped the nationalist fervor and feelings of exclusion expressed by Bloch, La

Monte and others and focused on the practical.

> As the best French cooking is generally held to be the best in the world, it is not
> remarkable that the proprietors of the more ambitious hotels and restaurants like
> to hint in this cheap and convenient way that the rulers of their kitchens belong to
> the favored race. When such is the case—and perhaps it is in about one out of

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[100] Ibid. The article, "Reform the Menu!" appeared in the *Washington Post* with the tag "From the Louisville Courier-Journal" and the subtitle "Col. Watterson Wants French Terms Eliminated in All Cafes." Oddly enough, Netter is only briefly quoted so the ideas in the article may represent the reporter and not Netter. Netter, within a year, would become the international buyer for Louis Martin, the New York restaurateur, and he is sometimes referred to as the acting of manager of Martin's restaurant. The Geneva White Cross Society was founded in 1907 as an international pure food organization modeled after the Red Cross Society. In 1908, its chief spokesperson, Auguste Calvert visited the United States to drum up support for the organization and apparently spoke with both President Theodore Roosevelt and Dr. Harvey Wiley of the Bureau of Agriculture. The Swiss senator refused to comment on food adulteration in the United States until research had been conducted except to express concern about the contamination of French cooking in the United States: "There have been, of course, in this country, many adulterated imitations of French food and wines." "'a White Cross Society Needed:' Senator Auguste Calvet Tells of Geneva's Fight against Poisoned Food," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 21 June 1908, 5. The "White Cross" was adopted by a number of organizations that were not affiliated with the pure food movement including an 1890s moral purity campaign, a national nurses association founded during the Spanish-American War as an American alternative to the International Red Cross, and a Chicago slum relief missionary movement founded around 1900. Meanwhile, Col. Henry Watterson's *Louisville Courier-Journal* continued to attack all forms of Eastern snobbery.

twenty establishments using French food names—there is an excuse for the habit, since those names are the only ones there are for many of the dishes set before the diner. And when cooks of other nationalities make the same or approximate dishes, why shouldn't they, too, apply to them the same or approximate appellations?[101]

The *Times*, in other words, endorsed restaurants' "$5 a syllable" rationale for the French menu.

A month later, the paper published a *New York Times Sunday Magazine* feature that included a

lexicon of "cook's French" that would-be diners could memorize.[102]

This was not the first time that newspapers and magazines had provided dictionaries,

pronunciation guides and other forms of advice to middle-class restaurant-goers. *What to Eat's*

Parisian correspondent, Frank Tryon Charles, penned a long running series of articles in the

1890s that defined hundreds of restaurant terms and provided a pronunciation key.[103] His

comprehensive list of soups and consommés, for example, included:

> POTAGE à la bisque d'écrevisses (beeske-day-crev-eese)— crawfish soup
>
> BOUILLON de boeuf—beef tea
>
> BOUILLON gras—gravy soup
>
> POTAGE à la Chantilly (chaan-tee-e)—purée of lentils
>
> CONSOMME à la Colbert (colebear)—clear soup with garnish of cos lettuce, celery, button onions.
>
> POTAGE à la Conde—purée of red haricots[104]

Similarly, the *New York Times*, in both 1897 and 1906, offered its readers purloined menus from

Delmonico's and the Waldorf-Astoria as well as some basic suggestions on what and how to

order.[105] Although well-intended efforts to promote high culture, these guides were not practical.

Brave was the diner who memorized Frank Tryon Charles's massive list of culinary terms and

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[101] "Cook French Has Its Advantages," *New York Times*, 22 April 1909, 8.
[102] Laura A. Smith, "Why the French Menu Has Become So Universally Popular," *New York Times*, 16 May 1909, 5:11.
[103] Charles, "Paris Vs. New York," 182.
[104] Frank Tryon Charles, "French Menus," *What to Eat* 1900, 29; Charles, "Paris Vs. New York," 182-83.
[105] "Cheap and Dainty Feast," X6; "'Covers for Two': A Gastronomic Study," III2.

ordered his dinner in French despite Charles's warning that phonetic renderings of French are difficult and his admonition that a misplaced accent could be a disaster, turning the word for "peach," for example, into "sin."[106] But more to the point, middle-class restaurant-goers recognized that such paternalistic guides, written by members of the elite such as Frank Tryon Charles, reinforced the upper class's social dominance and, as their protests suggest, they largely ignored them.

Perhaps the *Times* editors were, in some small way, acknowledging the increasing influence of the middle classes when they predicted, despite their endorsement of "cook's French," that "widespread hostility for French menus in this or any other country" would eventually bring about reform.[107] In fact, public pressure was already having an effect on what language restaurants used to describe the food they served.

Restaurants Respond

Until the late nineteenth century, hotels and restaurants were deaf to middle-class concerns about the language of the bill of fare. Jessup Whitehead, author of the 1899 *Steward's Handbook*, encouraged restaurateurs to write clear, explanatory menus, but equivocated when it came to language. Whitehead acknowledged that "perhaps not one in ten thousand in this country understands French, as applied to dishes in a menu" but he held that a restaurant menu should pose a challenge to readers.[108] A challenging menu, Jessup wrote, "implies a compliment to the guests by the supposition that they are 'gastronomically educated.'"[109]

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[106] Frank Tryon Charles, "French Menus," *What to Eat* 1899, 183.
[107] "Cook French Has Its Advantages," 8.
[108] Whitehead, *The Steward's Handbook*, 50.
[109] Ibid., 48.

J. A. Pinard, one of New York's most prominent Gilded Era caterers, took a similar

stance. Asked in 1890 by the *New York Tribune* why he still printed his menus in French, he

cobbled together a rather patronizing defense.

> Because French cooking is still regarded as the perfection of
> culinary art. And there is another reason. One of the delights of a
> dinner is its surprises. It is not well to anticipate, and by
> concealing the precise character of what is coming, the pleasures
> of the table are greatly enhanced. Many of the beauties of a dinner
> are hidden behind some curious French word or phrase, only to be
> revealed at the proper moment.[110]

More typical were the justifications of the French menu offered by the food historian George

Ellwinger and the outspoken proprietor of the Hotel Knickerbocker James B. Regan. Writing in

1902, Ellwinger claimed that it was impossible to translate French dishes into English without

sounding silly.

> "Les quenelles de levraut saucees d'une espagnolle au fumet," "les
> amourettes de boeuf marinees frites," "Vepaule de veau en musette
> champetre," "un coq vierge en petit deuil," for example, while
> natural and comprehensible in French, would sound somewhat
> bizarre as "Forcemeat balls of leverets sauced with a racy Spanish
> woman," "the love-affairs of soused beef fried," "a shoulder of veal
> in rural bagpipes," and "a virgin rooster in half-mourning." And
> surely, in reviewing the aide-de-camp of the cook, it becomes
> obligatory to employ a French term upon occasion, and equally
> seemly to address him now and then in the classic tongue of the
> kitchen.[111]

Similarly, in a 1911 interview, Regan argued for the naturalness of the French-language menu.

"French is the language of the table," Regan stated, "and while it might be possible to use

English here and there, so many terms uppermost in our dietaries are of French origin without an

English equivalent, that I think our reformers have quite a task before them."[112]

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[110] "High Living in New-York," *New York Tribune*, 16 February 1890, 15.
[111] Ellwanger, *The Pleasures of the Table*, ix-x. Spelling in original.
[112] "Mr. Regan on Current Topics," *The Steward* 1911, 19.

Despite Ellwinger's and Regan's support for the French menu, restaurants were, by the turn of the century, begrudgingly changing their menus, even in the most elite restaurants of New York City. The Waldorf Hotel, predecessor of the Waldorf-Astoria, appears to have used exclusively French menus until the mid-1890s. In 1895, however, its dinner menu was bi-lingual (although French was still employed on banquet menus). On the left side of the menu card, the elaborate a la carte menu listed such items as *roast beef*, *red head duck* and *fresh strawberries with cream*; on the right, it listed *róti de boeuf*, *canard tête rouge*, and *fraises fraìches, á la crème*. [113] The English-language menu accommodated Americans, particularly middle-class Americans, while the French menu provided a universal option for foreign visitors. Other elite hotels and restaurants in New York followed suit. The St. Regis Hotel, long considered the bastion of the old Knickerbocker aristocracy, offered an English translation of its French menu by 1905.[114]

Ten years later, bi-lingual translations gave way to English-only menus. While a few stodgy old-school restaurants such as Delmonico's remained wedded to their French menus, more progressive restaurants abandoned French entirely. The Waldorf-Astoria adopted an English language menu by 1914. Using a standard that is still widely employed, English was employed whenever possible and convenient. The halibut with a lobster sauce was simply *Halibut, Lobster Sauce*. The duck was listed as *Duckling (half)*. The clams with a Newburg sauce were described as *Soft Clams à la Newburg*. Although the Waldorf-Astoria did have an

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[113] Menu, "Dinner/Diner," Waldorf-Astoria, New York, N.Y, November 11, 1895, Box 22 (1895-28 or 1895-179), Buttolph Menu Collection. The menu appears to be the general à la carte menu although the cover depicts a horse and rider with the caption "Rockaway Polo Team." The Waldorf, and later the Waldorf-Astoria, were centers of horse racing and polo culture and most likely this decorative menu celebrated that general connection.
[114] "Too Well Advertised," 12. Menu, "Breakfast," Hotel St. Regis, New York, N.Y, June 10, 1905, Box 124 (1905-446), Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library, New York; Menu, "Dinner," Hotel St. Regis, New York, N.Y, June 25, 1905, Box 125 (1905-512), Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library, New York; Menu, "Supper," Hotel St. Regis, New York, N.Y, June 10, 1905, Box 124 (1905-447), Buttolph Menu Collection.

alternative bi-lingual menu, possibly for foreign visitors, it increasingly saw the merit of using

English rather than French. [115]

These experiments in English gained permanence with the outbreak of war in Europe.

World War I increased America's suspicion of everything European and restaurateurs joined in

the patriotic fervor to eliminate foreign affectations. In 1914, *The Literary Digest* celebrated the

resolution of Chicago restaurateurs to abandon the use of French and German in menus.

> We at home must take foreign names as they come, but already the
> war has moved us, tho [sic] quite in the spirit of neutrality, to alter
> a few names in our own land. As evidence of this, from Chicago
> comes news of a change that may sweep like a fury of flame over
> the whole country, avenging in one instantaneous reversion to
> common sense an abuse of years' standing. Briefly, it is this:
> Chicago restaurateurs are deciding to call the dishes they serve by
> American names instead of German or French.[116]

A few years later, as America prepared to enter the European war, New York joined Chicago in

the jingoistic call for an end to the French-language menu. The regular meeting of the

Manhattan Waiters' Association held in April of 1917 unanimously endorsed the patriotic

resolution of John Bowman, manager of the Biltmore Hotel, urging the elimination of foreign-

language menus. The waiters explained:

> With the enormous growth in the last ten years of the number of
> people who must choose their dishes, or are compelled to eat in
> hotels and restaurants, the unintelligible foreign menus have

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[115] Menu, "Dinner," Waldorf-Astoria, New York, N.Y, September 10, 1914, Box 281 (1914-0909C), Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library, New York; Menu, "Dinner," Waldorf-Astoria, New York, N.Y, September 5, 1914, Box 281 (1914-0903D), Buttolph Menu Collection. Menu research is difficult since the menus are rarely preserved with any notation. A Waldorf-Astoria menu for September 16, 1914 (days after the previously cited menus) was folded at the center and included an English menu on the left and a French menu on the right. Like the other cited menus from this time, it was an à la carte menu, apparently a dinner menu, with a similar selection and essentially the same prices. The Waldorf-Astoria had numerous dining rooms and it is possible the difference reflects the more formal service in one of the restaurants (although one might expect to see a greater difference in the food offered or the prices if this was the case). Equally plausible, the second menu was prepared in small quantities (the full size menu is less common in the New York Public Library menu collection) for international guests.

[116] "Eating in American," 702. See also "Menus Are Now Neutral in Chicago Restaurants," *Washington Post*, 25 September 1914, 5.

become in many cases, the basic reason for poor service,
unsatisfied appetites, and dissatisfied patrons. Years ago it served
a purpose, but today it has outlived its usefulness . . . It is not only
unprofitable but unpatriotic, for it requires the employment of all
alien help in the dining room . . . rendering us more and more
dependent on Europeans in conducting the greatest industry in
America today.[117]

The First World War did not close the debate over the language of dining, although by
the end of the war few restaurants catered exclusively to the elite and few featured French-
language menus. Nonetheless, the controversy over foreign-language menus continued. In
1923, for example, a government contract with the Ritz-Carlton to operate a restaurant on the
captured German ocean liner Leviathan led to a heated, public outburst by Chicago-area U. S.
Congressman Fred A. Britten. Protesting that no more than a "portion of the waiters and not 2
per cent of the passengers can read them," Britten wondered why "we should follow a silly
fashion of printing menus in French when American are quite generally a one-language
people?"[118]

Britten's crusade ended with wimper, at least in part, because the obsequious French-
menu had largely been replaced with menus that accommodated English-language speakers. The
"Ooo la la la a la LaLa" of "cook's French," as one opponent described it, was slowly stripped
from the bill of fare. "Let those that will have their quail a la Mirepoix or pate de foi gras," he
wrote. "Personally I favor baked Virginia ham and sweet potatoes."[119]

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[117] (Foreign 1917, 41)

[118] "'Oeufs' on Leviathan's Menu Rouse Britten; Wants Eggs," *Washington Post*, 8 October 1923, 4. Britten's protest garnered national attention, see "French Menus under Fire," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 October 1923, I1. He also was the victim of a smear campaign in the society and gossip columns. See "By-Products," *New York Times*, 14 October 1923; "Post-Scripts," *Washington Post*, 12 October 1923.

[119] Laszlo Tehel, "American Cookery," *The Washington Post*, 7 July 1925, 6.

CONCLUSIONS

In his seminal study of consumption and the American department store at the turn of the century, William Leach wrote of the women shopper at the turn of the century:

> [W]omen needed to maintain distance to see clearly, in the interest of their families' well-being, the "true" worth to them of the goods on sale. Some women easily adjusted to the new separateness of the consumer world by simply "accepting uncritically the scale of conventional values which their day and generation provided ready-made." Others . . . worried about the new "scheme of [pecuniary] values embodied in every housewife's work." Still other women (as well as men) failed to make adjustments, fell prey to impulse, or went into debt; some even lost complete control and stole the goods they desired.[120]

As Leach described it, department store customers faced empty choices. They could buy the mass-marketed products of the early twentieth century uncritically, buy them critically, or steal them. Using mirrors and gimcrack to befuddle the new consumer, the department store alienated the middle-class shopper from the true value of the goods he or she purchased.

Some middle-class consumers "fell prey to impulse," but did "most," as Leach and other historians of consumption have suggested? The history of the restaurant begs us to revise our understanding of how moderns consumed. While the topsy-turvy period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century challenged the domestic values that had guided an earlier middle class, the new consumer culture was not uncontested. Middle-class men and women made choices which shaped the cultural landscape of the United States.

Restaurants and department stores were very different enterprises. The department store was not only patronized by the rich, it was owned by merchant princes who sought to impose a new consumer order on the masses and who reaped buckets of gold coins as their reward.

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[120] Leach, *Land of Desire*, 148.

Restaurants, even the large hotel restaurants owned by Marshall Field and John Wanamaker's fellow capitalists, were never as centralized or as Machiavellian. Faced with competition from small establishments that might, with relatively little capital investment, challenge their profit margins, the aristocratic restaurants of the nineteenth century could not impose their traditions with the same abandon as the department stores. Middle-class patrons made choices about where to dine and what to eat that threatened the profits of elite restaurants and their freedom to act forced restaurants to make concessions to middle-class tastes.

If as historians we have failed to see the agency exercised by turn-of-the-century consumers, it is because the scale of the largest ventures has blinded us to the smaller choices that were being made. Middle-class consumers, although constrained by the limits of their cultural capital and the size of their purses, were not passive consumers. When thousands of middle-class managers, clerks and professionals ate and drank and shopped, their actions were backed by the substantial collective purchasing power of their class. Subtle preferences when shared produced concrete changes. Restaurants that adopted simplified and English-language menus acknowledged the agency of the middle-class consumer and the influence that the middle classes exerted over the culture of dining.

To claim that the middle classes exercised some agency, that they did not always consume on the capitalists' terms, is not to assert that individual shoppers engaged in a wholesale rebellion against the emergence of a consumer culture. The middle classes bought and they bought willingly. But their acts changed consumption. Simplified, English-language menus made it possible for those who once trembled at the thought of dining in a first-class restaurant to celebrate an anniversary, attend a business meeting, or take a date to any restaurant he or she

could afford. If never fully realized, the self-interested middle-class consumer set the stage for a democratization of consumption.[121]

The middle classes' influence did not go uncontested. The guardians of the aristocratic tradition, the owners and managers of restaurants, also sought to shape the culture of consumption. Viewing themselves not as mere purveyors of food, but as men entrusted with a cultural legacy, restaurateurs—even in the face of falling profits—resisted change. The Waldorf-Astoria continued to print a French-language menu (possibly for foreign visitors) and serve French-inspired dishes well into the nineteen teens and twenties.[122] The Plaza, the St. Charles and other elite establishments with traditions of aristocratic patronage did not quickly abandon the multicourse dinner and continued to serve French dishes with French titles—particularly on special occasions like New Years.[123] But in the broad public marketplace, French cuisine survived only as one type of cooking forced to compete with a host of other cuisines.[124] French

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[121] On the political dimensions of the search for greater access to consumer goods, especially in the post-World War II era, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, 1st Vintage, 2004 ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

[122] See for example, Menu, "Dinner," Waldorf-Astoria, New York, N.Y, July 4, 1912, Box 242 (1912-0505), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[123] Menu, "A Happy New Year: Menu," The Plaza, New York, N.Y, December 31, 1912, Box 248 (1912-091), Buttolph Menu Collection, New York Public Library, New York; Menu, "New Year's Eve: Menu," St. Charles, New York, N.Y, December 31, 1913, Box 284 (1914-1069), Buttolph Menu Collection.

[124] Bertram Gordon examined the role of French culture in America by studying the number of entries for France (and all things French) in the *Reader's Guide for Periodical Literature*. The first entries for "Cookery, French" do not appear until 1915 and the listings (as a percent of total *Reader's Guide* entries) declined until the 1960s when interest in French cooking was sparked by Julia Childs. Gordon notes: "Despite the increases in the twentieth century, the gastronomy series shows a long-term pattern of decline for France when measured by the American series projected back to England in the eighteenth century century. If one takes the proportion of French entries in only the totals of the international cookery listings . . . the figures for French cookery in the eighteenth century, as measured in England's *Gentlemen's Magazine*, are 52 percent. The corresponding figures for the nineteenth-century *Poole's* are 40 percent. French cookery as a proportion of the international listings held at an average 29.1 percent for the five-year periods from the appearance in the *Readers' Guide* of the French subcategory in 1915-19 through 1934-39, but then declined to an average 15 percent for the years from 1940 through 1994, as the American culinary world expanded into Chinese, Italian, and Mexican, to name just a few." Gordon's analysis offers compelling evidence that interest in French food declined in the United States after 1915. Nonetheless, Gordon underestimates the influence of French cooking in the first part of the twentieth century because he assumes that the lack of an entry for French cooking means there was no interest prior to 1915. Actually, the *Reader's Guide* begins to list French cookery when it lost its hegemonic status; before 1915 French cookery was so prevalent that it was essential synonymous with the more general heading "cookery." The *Reader's Guide's* decision to give French cooking its own entry is an indication that it is coming to be viewed as just one among a number of competing ethnic cuisines.

cuisine did not lose its association with excellence, but the food of the aristocrats lost its hegemonic sway and restaurateurs that tenaciously preserved the aristocratic tradition did so at the peril of the institutions they guarded.

In 1923, Delmonico's, America's most influential nineteenth-century aristocratic restaurant, closed. While many blamed the deleterious effect of World War I on the lucrative business of banquets and balls and the passage of national prohibition in 1919, there were compelling reasons to believe that the great aristocratic restaurant was merely eclipsed by the rise of the middle-class restaurant. Delmonico's went into receivership in 1917, the year the United States entered World War I, but well before the economic impact of the war was fully experienced and three years before a constitutional amendment banning alcohol went into effect. The Delmonico family's chief chronicler, Lately Thomas, concluded that while "prohibition, the deterioration of dining habits, upward spiraling costs, a hurried, oblivious generation, the breakup of social distinctions, the disintegration of society as it had once flourished" and "internal decay" had led to Delmonico's closing, it was the "enormous expansion of the city and the changing customs" that had "outmoded" Delmonico's.[125] Lately did not identify the source of this change, but the fall of Delmonico's coincided with the rise of the middle-class restaurant. By 1923, it was undeniable that the old order was passing.

Not every aristocratic restaurant that resisted change closed its doors. But most suffered. By the late nineteen thirties, having survived both prohibition and the Great Depression, the last of the aristocratic restaurateurs gathered in New York for an extraordinary "culinary congress." The meeting was called to address dwindling sales and what a columnist for the *Washington Post* described as the "halt-who-goes-there?" atmosphere in many elite restaurant dining rooms. At

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Bertram M. Gordon, "The Decline of a Cultural Icon: France in American Perspective," *French Historical Studies* 22, no. 4 (1999): 644-5.
[125] Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 333-4.

the "congress" held in his hotel in 1939, Lucius Boomer, president of the Waldorf-Astoria, urged immediate action if restaurants and hotels were to lure back "the vanquished throngs" who had abandoned the aristocratic restaurant. To save the elite restaurant, Boomer endorsed what the middle classes had demanded more than twenty years before: simple dining and the plate dinner. "The vogue for the selective meal [plate dinner], which is growing very rapidly, has much merit. It started outside hotels, has largely killed a la carte in hotel restaurants, and hotels have been forced to follow suit. It meets the economic necessities of the patron. It makes variety possible at popular prices . . ."[126] Boomer's proposals were applauded, but for many they were not enough. The Philadelphia contingent, headed by the president of the International Cooks Association William Sprinzing, issued a report calling for "smaller menus, printed in English."[127] The report blamed the "many fancy names" used on menus as "perhaps one of the main causes for the inappreciation [sic] of fine cuisine by the American public."[128]

       H. I. Phillips, a newspaper columnist, acknowledged what the restaurant proprietors and chefs could hardly admit: the aristocratic restaurant no longer set the tone for dining in America. Phillips observed that the expensive hotel dinner was on its "last frog legs."

> Not so many years ago the hotel restaurants were the right places
> to dine. That was in the era when dining out was quite a lark
> anyhow and before so many small restaurants and lunch rooms
> blossomed on the streets of any city that it became quite an
> adventure to eat home. The small restaurant swept the country
> (and much of the resultant dust went into the hamburgers), but it
> gave the hungry man plenty of meat and potato at cut rates and in
> simple English. . . .
>
>   The hotel restaurant men should have staged a counter-
> attack by the mere process of making it less involved to eat with
> them. But they stuck to the table d'hôte which made $1.80 the
> bottom rate for a midget dinner, clung to the French language and

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[126] "A La Carte Menus Found Outmoded: President of Waldorf Advises Nation's Chefs That Selective Meals Will Win Favor," *New York Times*, 8 November 1939, 25.

[127] Sprinzing was opposed by Camille Den Dooven of Boston who argued for the "showmanship" of French. Ibid.

[128] "Bans on Foreign Names on Our Menus Urged as First Culinary Congress Is Organized," 25.

continued to regard rolls and butter as extra equipment. They have been slow to realize that nothing drives the trade away like the association of a square meal with a Federal loan.[129]

Culture is conservative, as Bourdieu and others suggest, but it is not stagnant. In the years between the rise of the middle-class restaurant and the death knell of the aristocratic restaurant, public culture had been revalued. Sensing the inevitable, wealthy aristocrats had long since deserted the city seeking safe haven from the new public culture in private resorts and country clubs, leaving the guardians of the elite French tradition to fend for themselves. In the twentieth century, the middle classes dined on their own terms. Cultural authority in the United States had passed to the middle classes.

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[129] H. I. Phillips, "The Once Over: The Dining out Problem," *Washington Post*, 18 November 1939, 9.

Chapter 7: DEAF, DUMB AND BLIND: DEMOCRATIZING RESTAURANT SERVICE

In the early twentieth century, August J. Bock was a waiter at a number of New York's more fashionable restaurants and hotels. Born in Vienna, he apprenticed in Europe and immigrated to the United States in 1907. Although Bock waited tables in the twentieth century, his experience and schooling were of the nineteenth century. The waiter, for Bock, was a liege in service to a lord. His memoir—telling titled *Knight of the Napkin*—is peppered with references to the rich and famous: Tafts, Goulds, Vanderbilts, Carnegies, Rockefellers, Rices and Dukes.[1]

Bock served these kings of industry with the deference of a loyal retainer. Yet during the years in which Bock was waiting on New York's elite, dining in America was undergoing dramatic changes. In the twentieth century, the public space of the restaurant was invaded by a burgeoning urban middle class. The arrival of these new restaurant-goers forced the aristocratic restaurant to reappraise its traditional role as arbiter of elite culture.

The new middle classes championed a more democratic ideal of dining and rejected the feudal service that waiters like Bock prized. As the middle classes overran the elite restaurant, they challenged the elaborate system of tips and privilege that was typical of the nineteenth-century restaurant. Service, for many in the middle classes, did not mean toadyism, but rather the opportunity to enjoy equal access. Efforts to end tipping and idealistic visions of restaurants without waiters represented the most leveling of middle-class initiatives to reinvent the restaurant.

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[1] August J. Bock, *Knight of the Napkin: Memoirs of Fifty Years' Experiences in Many Lands* (New York: Exposition Press, 1951).

But the middle classes' influence was not without limits and even as restaurants accommodated their new clientele, remnants of the aristocratic order remained. Despite middle-class contempt for the waiter's gratuity, tipping endured. Despite technological advances, waiters remained. Yet in victory or defeat, the middle classes' struggle to transform the restaurant reveals their unique vision of a more democratic consumer culture.

GRATUITIES

Prior to the Civil War tipping in the United States was rare, a reward for exceptional service and, in the eyes of many, a sign of affected Europeanism.[2] Tipping was closely associated in American minds with Europe and decadence of the European aristocracy. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, tipping became more common and the tips became larger. This escalation was probably spurred by the growing number of wealthy Americans who, having traveled in Europe where tipping was *de rigueur*, brought the continental custom home.[3] However, it might also have reflected increased demand. As more Americans dined out, the aristocratic diner tipped more frequently and more generously to maintain his monopoly on the best service.[4]

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[2] Ofer H. Azar, *The History of Tipping--from Sixteenth-Century England to United States in the 1910s* (2003 [cited 2 December 2004]); available from http://econwpa.wustl.edu/wpawelcome.html; Kerry Segrave, *Tipping: An American Social History of Gratuities* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1998), 5-6. Although tipping was rare prior to the Civil War, it was not unheard of. Tunis Campbell, a headwaiter with experience in Boston and New York, warned proprietors to pay their waiters well so to eliminate their need for tips in his 1848 waiter's manual. Campbell, *Hotel Keepers, Head Waiters, and Housekeepers' Guide*, 8-9.

[3] Eustace Williams, "Growth of Tipping Habit: Fifty Years Ago American Servants Rejected Gratuities," *Washington Post*, 11 September 1905, 9. Waiters may have also played a role in promoting tipping, especially as more and more hotels hired European immigrants waiters accustomed to receiving tips in the 1870s and 1880s. Europeans, ironically, were aghast at the influence that Americans had on tipping. Americans in Europe were considered spendthrift tippers who continually drove up the cost of good service. Some European restaurants, knowing that their servers could depend on American tourists for phenomenal tips, eliminated wages and charged the waiters a portion of their tips for the privilege of waiting tables.

[4] While tipping itself was viewed as a European vice, African Americans were blamed for transforming the tip from a reward to an obligation. Typical of this attitude is the Steward's Handbook of 1889: "And in regard to the headwaiter's 'tips' the subject is much mixed, because it depends upon the kind of man he is whether he receives

Tipping in the nineteenth century secured privileged service for those who could afford to be particularly generous. In most American cities, wealthy aristocrats had few restaurants to choose from. While New York was home to more luxurious restaurants and hotels than most American cities, there were still no more than five or six restaurants in the 1880s that a respectable upper-class family would consider acceptable.[5] Under these circumstances, a diner established a long-term relationship with the staff at a hotel or restaurant. A reputation for large tips would guarantee excellent service during subsequent visits.[6] As one headwaiter explained:

> In a great many hotels the regular boarders have their regular
> waiters and pay them a small fee every week for extra good
> service, and expect to get everything they want whether it is on the
> bill of fare or not. The waiter, in turn, will break any rule made by
> the steward or head-waiter in trying to give satisfaction to said
> guest, and often do things entirely unnecessary in order to keep in
> favor with the guest he serves.[7]

Cultivating the good will of a waiter promised tangible benefits. A favorable table from a headwaiter could enhance the reputation of a social ingénue—favoritism that would be noted and gossiped about by the other diners.[8] Likewise, a well-tipped waiter would be disposed to provide his patron the best food that the establishment could offer. At a time when most dishes were not prepared to order, the waiter carved the roast and selected the vegetables. If the waiter chose, he

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much or anything in that way, but it is a fact that very few white headwaiters ever receive 'tips,' unless, perhaps in a general way, the guests make up a purse at the end of a season or at Christmas . . ." Whitehead, *The Steward's Handbook*, 185.

[5] Late nineteenth-century hotels and restaurants were far less distinguished by food—all served similar French-inspired menus—than by clientele. Among the elites who dined out in a large city like New York, anglophobes might favor a particular restaurant, Wall Street men another, Republicans another, Society matrons another; as a result, those who dined out established routine habits and ate regularly at the same restaurant. Moreover, in an age when traveling was arduous and time-consuming, travelers might stay a hotel for months eating in the same dining room since the cost of food was often included in the hotel charge.

[6] In contrast, tipping in the twentieth century is largely an act of social control not personal privilege. Most people today tip to reward good service or punish bad service not because they ever expect to see the same waiter or waitress again, but because they hope that their tip will have an overall positive effect on the level of service when dining out.

[7] Cozart, *A Technical Treatise on Dining-Room Service*, 104. See also Campbell, *Hotel Keepers, Head Waiters, and Housekeepers' Guide*, 54-55.

[8] Flanagan, *The Waiter*, 30.

could bring the best cuts of meat, the hottest rolls, an extra helping of oysters or a specially

prepared dish. Visiting the United States in 1887, Charles Beadle noted the dramatic effect his

tip had on the corps of African American waiters at his hotel. "I found, however, a quarter-dollar

was necessary to get attention; but this understood, they would pile plates of food round you

until the sight almost made you turn sick."[9] Nor were the waiter's responsibilities limited to

food. Waiters were expected to provide restaurant patrons with any luxury they might desire—

from a cigar to a newspaper—even if that meant running a quick errand. Waiters were also

founts of information: experts on the weather, the stock market, directions and all the sundries of

urban life.[10]

Tips not only bought extra service, they also secured the waiter's discretion. Since

waiters were privy to the conversations that took place at the public tables of the restaurant, they

were intrinsically dangerous. In the best restaurants, well-heeled patrons expected the public

table to be treated as private space and they tipped generously to secure their secrets. As a turn-

of-the-century poem in the voice of a waiter acknowledged:

> I've seen So-and-So with another man's wife,
> I've seen High Society eat with its knife,
> I've heard the worst claret pronounced "nonpareil,"
> I've heard the best Roquefort condemned for its "smell". . .
> I've bowed and obeyed, and I've always agreed
> My business to serve is, and not to take heed;
> A quarter will cause me to doubt my own mind,
> And after a half I am deaf, dumb and blind . . .[11]

For the aristocratic American, eating in public conferred honorific value, demonstrating

to the world that one possessed the resources to command the attention of a restaurant's staff. As

Thorstein Veblen wrote in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*: the wealthy demonstrate their social

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[9] Charles Beadle, *A Trip to the United States in 1887* (London: J. S. Virtue, 1887), 69-70.
[10] Flanagan, *The Waiter*, 26-7.
[11] Edwin L. Sabin, "The Waiter," *What to Eat* 23, no. 4 (1907): 138. The poem has been edited for length.

standing by commandeering a "class of servants, the more numerous the better, whose sole office is fatuously to wait upon the persons of their owner, and so to put in evidence his ability unproductively to consume a large amount of service."[12] Not surprisingly, lavish tipping became a mark of pride for the rich. *The Washington Post's* society column reported in 1907 that when Miss Gladys Vanderbilt was engaged to marry Count Laszlo Szecheni, Newport society was reassured by the fact that the unknown foreigner "has the American style of tipping lavishly and appears to be a 'good spender.'"[13]

In theory, any patron should expect to command the services of a dedicated and conscientious waiter. Waiters' manuals advised new waiters that they "should not be partial to guests, but give each and every one the same good service." But money bought privilege.[14] Men and women who dined out regularly and tipped generously, the wealthy aristocrats, were prized customers.[15] In 1885, the middle-class culinary journal *The Cook* complained that the tipping evil was most entrenched in high-class restaurants.

> An evil system, that has become very common in the hotels and
> restaurants of this country, is that of the 'tipping' the waiters. To
> such a point has it now arrived than in very many of such places
> one can get no decent attendance except by submission to that
> extortion, and even the percentage upon his bill that the customer
> shall pay to the waiter is tacitly understood. And in this respect the
> 'first-class' places are the worst.[16]

For the middle classes, the tip was a passkey to service that they could never possess. Frustrated, middle-class diners spoke out and called for an elimination of the gratuity.

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[12] Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 63.
[13] "Society," *Washington Post*, 6 October 1907, 7.
[14] Cozart, *A Technical Treatise on Dining-Room Service*, 13.
[15] Flanagan, *The Waiter*, 36.
[16] "Feeing Waiters," *The Cook*, 13 July 1885, 10.

THE TIPPING EVIL

"What may I ask, is more un-American than tipping? It doesn't belong in American society; it doesn't belong in a democracy. It is a product of lands where for centuries there has been a servile class."[17] Middle-class restaurant patrons had been waging a war against tipping almost from the moment the first middle-class diner set foot in an American restaurant. Tipping, a legacy of the European aristocratic tradition of rewarding servants for the extra burden imposed on them when an estate entertained guests, was for many in the middle classes anathema in a democratic society; no one should have better access to restaurant service merely because they had more money. "Class distinctions are being more and more emphasized in this country, and one of the causes of it is the prevalence of tipping," editors of the *Lincoln Daily News* observed in 1915. "[A] considerable number of persons to whom money comes easy like to show off by aping the customs of the aristocracy of the old world by giving freely to those who serve them."[18] Tipping bought extra service and as long as the waiter could be bribed, the middle classes feared they would remain second-class citizens in the new democracy of dining.

From 1880 through 1920, anxiety about tipping filled the pages of newspapers and magazines. Letters to the editors complained of obnoxious waiters and partisans worried aloud about the mistreatment of middle-class diners who refused to tip. Typical was a story in *What to Eat* of a Chicago gentleman, "accustomed to tipping in a moderate way, [who] was scowled at and almost rudely treated by a waiter to whom but ten cents was given where a quarter was evidently expected."[19] More worrisome were the stories of waiters taking revenge on patrons

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[17] Alvin Harlow, "Our Daily Bribe." *Forum & Century* 99 (April 1938): 231 as quoted in Segrave, *Tipping*, 5-6. On tipping as a pernicious foreign influence, see also Frank Crane, "A Big Store and the Tipping Nuisance," *Syracuse Herald*, 9 May 1916, 8; Mary Marshall Duffee, "The Right Thing at the Right Time: How Much to Tip," *Indianapolis Star*, 1 November 1917, 7.
[18] "The Tipping Evil," *Lincoln Daily News*, 7 April 1915, 6.
[19] "The Custom of Tipping," *What to Eat*, January 1901, 31.

who did not tip. Chief among many concerns was that a spurned waiter might spit in one's soup.

In 1901, the editor of *Life and Health* demanded that the city of New York "make a searching

investigation into the tricks and manners prevailing in the first class restaurants" because he had

heard, "on the best authority," that a disgruntled waiter at the Manhattan Beach Hotel had spit in

the soup of a musician who "was not popular among the waiters because he never tipped them."

The editor suggested that the "blackguards" should be imprisoned for their offense.[20] In Chicago

in 1918, Illinois State's Attorney Hoyne had 100 waiters arrested after reports that they had

doctored the food of "known opponents to the tipping system."[21]

Reports of doctored dinners and sullied soup were only the extreme cases of what the

middle classes considered a social menace. At the heart of the middle-class complaint was the

fear that they would be seen as niggardly, that a small tip—even if justified—would violate the

aristocratic norm, expose the middle-class upstart, and bring disapprobation from the waiter and

fellow diners.[22] "If you'd offer a New York waiter in a first-rate place a quarter tip nowadays,

he'd probably hand it back to you together with two bits of his own, and advise you to go and

have your shoes half-soled with the money," an article in the *Washington Post* maintained.[23] A

small tip could bring social censure; even some anti-tipping advocates admitted that they

regularly tipped to avoid the negative attention. A 1912 headline in the *Indianapolis Sunday Star*

screamed: "Mr. Man! Do You Know You Are Spending A Fortune Every Year in Tips in

Indianapolis So You Won't Be Called a Piker?"[24]

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[20] "A Terrible Revelation," *What to Eat*, October 1897, 89. Accusations about disgruntled waiters contaminating food were so common that it is perhaps best to view these as urban legends which reflect middle-class insecurity more than actual occurrences.
[21] Segrave, *Tipping*, 14.
[22] Azar, *The History of Tipping* ([cited).
[23] "Tip or Do Without: Practice Has Reached Haughty Zenith in New York," *Washington Post*, 19 March 1905, 3.
[24] Don R. Egbert, "Mr. Man! Do You Know You Are Spending a Fortune Every Year in Tips in Indianapolis So You Won't Be Called a Piker?" *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, 31 March 1912, 1.

For the middle-class diner, competing for the best service was an impossible obstacle to enjoying full access to the pleasures of the restaurant. The more they tipped, the more they would be out tipped. Eustace Williams, a *Washington Post* subscriber who could recall a time in the 1850s and 1860s when waiters and bellhops refused tips, suggested in a 1905 letter to the editors of the *Post* that the size and uncertainty of the modern tip discouraged middle-class diners from going to restaurants. "This tipping nuisance has now become so extortionate that many persons of moderate fortune are deterred from going to the best hotels and restaurants, not so much by the prices charged there—and they are high enough in all conscience—but on account of the blackmail levied by waiters and other servants, who appear to be insatiate and whose avarice grows by what it feeds upon."[25] Others warned that before long, only the richest would be able to avail themselves of the best restaurants. "If the pernicious practice of forcing up the scale of tips were to continue much further than the point it is said to have reached now," cautioned one anti-tipping advocate, "only the rich would be able to purchase in certain restaurants the brief gratification of the waiter's smile or immunity from the terrible look."[26] Another writer worried that if tipping was not curtailed, "unfortunate citizens will have to leave, and seek a cheaper country."[27] A joke, circa 1903, made the point more bluntly.

> Wife to Husband—Let us have supper at Dary & Anthony's after the theater.
> Husband—Why, my dear, I have only a dollar and ten cents.
> Wife—That is more than enough.
> Husband—Why no. One dollar for the waiter and ten cents for supper?[28]

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[25] Williams, "Growth of Tipping Habit," 9.
[26] "Tyranny of Tipping," *Living Age*, 23 May 1908, 509. Reprinted from the British journal *Spectator*.
[27] Joseph Hatton, "The Idler's Club," Idler 3 (July 1893): 681 as quoted in Segrave, *Tipping*, 13.
[28] Flanagan, *The Waiter*, 9.

In most cases, rants about tipping reflected wariness towards the consumer economy that many in the middle classes felt at the turn of the century. For the middle-class restaurant-goer, his "grudge-stained middle-class tip"—as William Dean Howells referred to tipping in 1913—was a barrier to the best tables and the most attentive service.[29] H. C. Bierwirth writing in the *Andover Review* in 1886 complained about the "few guests or travelers of wealth who secure the waiter's service by bribes" as well as the "selfishness of the demoralized waiter who exacts a like bribe from all guests, at the peril of their being neglected . . ."[30] Three decades later, Richard Barry reminded readers of *Everybody's Magazine*: "If the tip were only a reward for good service, or even only a means of averting bad service, it might not be so complete in its destructive effect on the elements of character. But a tip is more. It is a bribe for discriminatory service."[31] And in dozens of newspaper editorials against tipping that appeared in early twentieth century newspapers, the practice was condemned for its elitism. The *Syracuse Herald* condemned "[t]he payment of an extra and arbitrary fee" as "hateful to the American mind" because it "puts a premium on selfishness." "What is a particularly lavish tip," the editors wrote, "but a bribe for special favors? And are not special favors to one man usually given at the expense of someone else?"[32] The *Newark Daily Advocate* put it more bluntly. "The man with the threadbare clothes is slighted and sneered at, while the one with the costly tailored suit is fawned upon. [The tip] is undemocratic and contrary to American principles."[33] Others observed that the tipping "evil is worse in proportion to the respectability of the place. In other words, the more expensive the meal the more liberal the tip, and the more insulting the waiters if

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[29] William Dean Howells, "Editor's Easy Chair: Tipping," *Harper's Magazine*, July 1913, 312.
[30] H. C. Bierwirth, "The Ethics of 'Tips,' Fees, and Gratuities," *Andover Review,* July 1886), 167.
[31] Richard Barry, "Tips," *Everybody's*, January 1913 1913, 65.
[32] "Why Not Get Rid of It?" *Syracuse Herald*, 5 September 1920, 3.
[33] "Tips and Wages," *Newark Daily Advocate*, 13 April 1915, 4.

it does not come up to their ideas of what the amount of the tip should be."[34] But perhaps even more fundamentally, tipping exposed inadequacies of middle-class cultural capital. Tipping, like ordering, required a subtle understanding of the codes of behavior that governed restaurant service; a knowledge that many in the middle classes felt they lacked. H. C. Bierwirth made note of "the trouble, the vexation, the agony that the traveler suffers in the uncertainty as to the amount of the compensation expected! [T]he meanness for which he reproaches himself when he has given too little, and the self-disgust he feels at having been duped when he suspects that in his generosity he has given too much!"[35]

These views were not merely the ranting of a few disgruntled diners but the viewpoint of a broad spectrum of the urban middle class who resented the privilege that tips purchased.[36] In 1908, the *New York Times* held a contest in which readers were asked to complete the caption for a cartoon in which a "reformer" asks his dinner companion: "Why don't you refuse to tip waiters?" In dozens of responses, the newspaper's readers expressed their anxieties about their social standing and their resentment of the waiter's tyranny. J.S. Markam wrote: "[B]ecause I'm afraid of what the waiters will think of me" and won second prize in the contest.[37] H. Dummer, a New Jersey resident, admitted: "One scornful look makes cowards of us all." In his entry, A. Kuntz suggested "Don't you know I'm the under dog? Why rub it in?" And J. Russell weighed in with "Because I would rather be considered a coward by the reformer than a tightwad by the supercilious waiter." Other readers feared more direct reprisals from their waiters. F. Bain

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[34] New York Herald, "Blackmail in Restaurants," *Lima Times-Democrat*, 7 September 1893, 2. See also Crane, "A Big Store and the Tipping Nuisance," 8.

[35] Bierwirth, "The Ethics of 'Tips,' Fees, and Gratuities," 169.

[36] William Dean Howells as editor of *Harper's Magazine* noted in 1913 that the middle class was the aggrieved party when it came to tipping. "But for the moment, as we recall, it is not the question of us upper-class profligates, but of the middle, the bourgeois, the citizen class, who by mere dint of their numbers do most of the tipping, and the grudging that goes with it, and we are anxious not to shirk our plain duty in treating of their sufferings and their sorrows." Howells, "Editor's Easy Chair: Tipping," 312.

[37] First prize went to Clarence Loeb of Brooklyn for "I am not rich enough to be eccentric." "The Contest to Find the Missing Answer," *New York Times*, 19 January 1908, V11.

humorously conceded: "[The waiters] hold too much over my head." Similarly W. Robbins wrote: "Because Tipping is a game that two can work at and this is my only suit." Charles Barton punned: "Because I will not feed well if he is not fee'd." And G. Livingston of Washington, D.C. penned: "Because I believe in civil service." Finally, C. Johnston recalled: "I tried it once and the waiter reaudited my bill." Only a few of the nearly one hundred replies demonstrated any support for tipping. Perhaps Emile Yunker of Newark expressed the middle classes' despair best: "We're living in Gotham, not Utopia," she wrote. [38]

Middle-class concern about tipping had its altruistic aspect. Not only did tipping distort the democracy of consumption, it also perverted political democracy. Freemen should not, the reformers argued, subjugate themselves for a tip. "[L]et us not congratulate the servants on their gain," one writer penned, "for no servant takes a tip without losing something of manhood or womanhood."[39] Another argued that to accept a tip "is to enter into a relationship of dependence to the giver and by implication to acknowledge his superiority."[40] Frank Crane, a syndicated columnist, contended that the tip put waiters "into a class with the beggar, or the receiver of a bribe" and "break[s] down the self-respect of a worker who is engaged in a perfectly honorable calling."[41] When one of the more progressive restaurants in New York substituted a service charge for gratuities, they implored their patrons to respect the new policy and not tip the waiters

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[38] Ibid. Waiters themselves were generally reluctant to admit that they pressured dinner guests into giving higher tips although they did admit that tips purchased better service. As the unusually candid Flanagan argued "[s]urely if the people who patronize these first-class houses and restaurants expect extraordinary attention, I think the service should be paid for in tips." Flanagan, *The Waiter*, 44. See also "Waiters," *The Cook*, 27 July 1885, 10.

[39] Barry, "Tips," 68. Notably, the altruistic argument against tipping was put forth more fiercely when the middle class itself was implicated. In 1905, the mayor of Portland, Maine drew national attention when he criticized college students who degraded themselves by accepting jobs as waiters at summertime resorts. "Komura's 'Tips' at the Waldorf," *New York Times*, 9 August 1905, 6.

[40] Reprinted from the Spectator as "Tyranny of Tipping," 508. Altruism could border on patronizing. A 1910 editorial in the New York Times suggested that tips should be given to the restaurant owners so that the restaurant might assure that money offered as tips was not spent unwisely but given to the wives of waiters to spend on their children. "Place your tips where they will be used to feed and clothe poor children, whose fathers' morals you have been ruining by your selfish and vainglorious prodigality." "A Suggestion About Tips," *New York Times*, 4 March 1910, 8.

[41] Crane, "A Big Store and the Tipping Nuisance," 8.

because tipping was a "relic of Old Europe," "essentially un-American" and "place[d] the stamp of servitude upon the Waiters' Profession."[42]

Diatribes against tipping may have curtailed some of the worse abuses, but they did not eliminate the "tipping evil."[43] A widely reprinted defense of tipping that first appeared in *Town and Country* in 1905 noted that the "ten per cent. rule is generally followed in all first class places" and subsequent etiquette guides universally endorsed the ten percent gratuity.[44] But the ten percent tip depended upon the cooperation of those who could afford to pay more. And the rule, it was widely reported, was flaunted by wealthy diners in the best restaurants and the individual middle-class diner recognized that there was nothing he could do to "insure himself against the impertinence of the waiter who, with the tip of a millionaire in his pocket, holds him up to the public gaze when he has paid the logical tribute which common sense pleads as enough . . ."[45] Further, the ten percent tip did not eliminate the familiarity that regular restaurant-goers might have with a waiter and, in fact, some of the same guides that endorsed the percentage tip recommended that regular guests provide a weekly gratuity in advance, a guarantee of good service.[46]

Anti-tipping sentiment was strong enough by the nineteen teens to attract the attention of both federal and state legislators. In 1910, the United States Congress banned waiters in the District of Columbia (notably almost all of Washington's waiters were African-American) from

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[42] "Tip for Restaurateurs," *Outlook*, 4 February 1920, 187.
[43] "The Anti-Tipping Crusade Is Dead: Waiters Read Papers and Got Cold Feet," *Syracuse Herald*, 31 October 1913; "War on Tips Spreads," *Washington Post*, 24 December 1911, 5.
[44] N. Q. R. (in *Town and Country*), "One Man Who Praises the Tipping Custom," *Washington Post*, 24 June 1905, 3. On etiquette, see Mrs. Chester Adams, "Advice on Social Customs: The Tipping Problem," *Indianapolis Star*, 19 March 1911; Duffee, "The Right Thing at the Right Time: How Much to Tip," 7. Ironically the percentage system of tipping seems to have originated in France.
[45] Hollis W. Fields, "The Ten Per Cent. Tip Idea," *Washington Post*, 17 June 1905, 8. See also *New York Sun*, "The Waiter Needs His Tips," *Washington Post*, 12 April 1903, E10.
[46] Adams, "Advice on Social Customs." In 1919, when the ten percent tipping rule was revisited in the press, proposals called for an involuntary ten percent surcharge. Frederic J. Haskins, "The Ten Percent Tip," *Fitchburg Daily Sentinel*, 20 August 1919, 4.

accepting tips although Congress was unable to pass a national law against tipping and reporters

noticed that Senators openly flaunted rules against tipping in the Senate restaurant.[47] Statewide

anti-tipping legislation was passed in Washington in 1909, Mississippi in 1912, Arkansas in

1913 and Iowa, South Carolina and Tennessee in 1915 and at least four other states considered

similar laws.[48] But despite the outrage that tipping engendered anti-tipping laws were generally

ignored and only sporadically enforced. Roy K. Moulton in a national column that appeared in

the *Elyria Chronicle-Telegram* (Ohio) observed in 1920 that reports of the demise of tipping

were greatly exaggerated.

> It has been a very interesting piece of news to us that the tipping
> system has been abolished. The papers tell us of hungry waiters
> and bartenders standing about the streets waiting for a meal. In
> view of this news we took a chance the other night on Broadway
> and escorted the missus to a restaurant. We were privileged to pay
> the hat girl 25 cents for depositing our hat. The head waiter got 50
> cents for showing us to a table. The waiter got $1 and, going out,
> the hall boy got 35 cents. The meal cost $2.50 and the help got
> $2.10. Yes, tipping is abolished, if you know where to go.[49]

Conceding that the laws had been ineffective, by the mid-1920s every state that had passed anti-

tipping legislation had repealed it.[50]

The persistence of tipping in American restaurants suggests the limits of the middle-class

colonization of the public sphere. Opponents of anti-tipping initiatives argued, with some

justification, that if tipping was wrong, people should just stop tipping. "[B]y the exercise of a

little moral courage in ignoring the scorn of those whom he has the best of right to consider his

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[47] Segrave, *Tipping*, 36. The *New York Times* commented: "This is a free country, and nobody enjoys its freedom so much as the elected representatives of the people." "Editorial," *New York Times*, 4 April 1910, 8. On tipping in the Senate restaurant, see "Antitipping Rule Broken: Senate Lunchroom Falls Back into Former Practices," *Washington Post*, 18 April 1910, 14.

[48] Segrave, *Tipping*, 37. Kentucky considered and may also have passed an anti-tipping law in 1912.

[49] Roy K. Moulton, "On the Spur of the Moment," *Elyria Chronicle-Telegram*, 26 November 1920.

[50] Segrave, *Tipping*, 38. A legal fight in Iowa that resulted in the state Supreme Court ruling the Iowa anti-tipping law unconstitutional may also have had a chilling effect on other states.

inferiors he can instantly and forever free himself from the tip hunter's tyranny," one reporter noted, "…these would disappear as soon as all, or even a majority of those who share his dislike for tipping acquired the courage to imitate his example."[51] Similarly, George Brunswick, one of the few hoteliers to argue that hotels and restaurants might play a role in ending the tipping plague, nonetheless held restaurant patrons responsible. "The greater share of this shameful condition is due to a hypocritical bribe-giving public, who, in spite of independence and equality spouting Americanism, meekly submitted to this constant growth of Oriental servility as well as blackmail. A determined stand by means of boycott would have nipped that imported abuse in the bud."[52] But no such concerted action materialized and it soon became apparent that the middle classes' cultural influence lacked political potency. Fear of acting alone and losing prestige prevented the middle classes from the self-conscious collective protest needed to eliminate tipping.

The failure of the middle classes to end tipping also suggests the precarious nature of the middle classes' cultural authority. For the most part, the economic interests of restaurateurs coincided with the demands of their growing middle-class clientele. Eager to woo the burgeoning middle classes, twentieth century restaurant proprietors modernized and simplified menus, introduced cosmopolitan cuisines and eliminated the French-language menu.[53] But when

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[51] "Tipping and its Remedy," *New York Times*, 23 January 1911: 6 as quoted in Ibid., 36. Even many critics of tipping opposed boycotts and other forms of collective action. The *New York Times* labeled tipping "the vilest of our imported habits" but generally dismissed both legislation and boycotts against tipping as unrealistic. In a 1911 editorial response to the National League of Commercial Travelers threat to boycott hotels that allowed tipping, the *New York Times* warned that the "conspiracy in restraint of trade" might warrant legal action under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act." "An Appeal Likely to Be Heard," *New York Times*, 4 November 1911, 12. Three months earlier, a letter writer had offered a different solution to readers of the *Times*. In an August 5, 1911 letter, J.K.M. suggested that those who disliked tipping might seek refuge in private clubs where tipping was prohibited. "[C]ertainly any business man can find among his acquaintances some one who belongs to one of these clubs, and who would vouch for him." "No 'Tips' at Clubs: More General Patronage of Clubs Would Diminish the Evil," *New York Times*, 5 August 1911, 6.
[52] George Brunswick, "Chance to Abolish Tips," *New York Times*, 14 June 1903, 6.
[53] Some middle-class reforms such as the plate dinner had the unintended effect of reinforcing the tipping system. By simplifying service, the plate dinner eliminated the one incentive restaurants had to combat tipping; the cost

the restaurants' economic interests and the middle classes' cultural interests did not coincide, as in the case of tipping, restaurateurs were reluctant to make changes. As long as the tipping system allowed restaurants to hide the cost of service, tipping endured.[54]

Acknowledging the likelihood that tipping would not go away, *Harper's Magazine* referred to a hotel rumored to have banned tipping as the "Hotel Utopia," but for many in the middle classes, frustrated by the formidable tip, technology offered the only genuine promise of a tipless consumer utopia.[55]

TECHNOLOGICAL UTOPIAS

Mrs. Bobs, a character in George R. Chester's story "The Millennium in Dining," asked the protagonist "I wonder what you will do when we reach the promised millennium in dining[?]"

> "Continue to eat, I suppose. But what is this millennium? A glorious period when every family will be able to secure the services of a good cook, by marriage or otherwise?"
>
> "That's a Utopian dream we shall never be able to realize," she said. "But science holds out the hope of solving at least part of the servant problem by doing without cooks. By and by the food specialists will do away with all the waste material in our provender and give us all the sustenance of a seven course dinner, for instance, in a half a dozen tiny capsules."[56]

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incurred by restaurants when waiters pandered for tips by providing patrons with extra food. Once a curse for restaurateurs, tipping now worked to their advantage; it produced the illusion of lower prices by shifting the burden of paying the wait staff directly to the customer.

[54] "Another Poor Defense of Tipping," *New York Times*, 2 June 1905, 8. See also "Chicago Waiter Lives in Luxury on Money He Gets as Tips," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 January 1907, F2; "Topics of the Times," *New York Times*, 21 November 1899, 6.

[55] Howells, "Editor's Easy Chair: Tipping," 313.

[56] George R. Chester, "The Millennium in Dining," *What to Eat*, May 1900, 133.

Mrs. Bob's turn-of-the-century faith in technology was neither unfounded nor unshared although the meal-in-a-pill was not forthcoming. [57]

In the late 1800s, middle-class idealists turned to technology to eliminate the drudgework of domestic labor. In the home, prepared foods, household appliances and the application of scientific management principles transformed women's work and reduced some of the arduousness of cooking. By 1900, the food processing industry constituted one fifth of American manufacturing and local markets provided goods—butchered meats, canned vegetables and pancake mixes—once produced in the home. Meanwhile, new technologies made household appliances—mechanical mixers and improved stoves—more affordable for middle-class families. Maria Parola, one of the most popular cookbook authors of the 1880s, recommended ninety-three "essential" utensils for the well-stocked kitchen. In 1912, the *Delineator* extolled the virtues of such "modern labor-saving inventions" as the dumb waiter, the lazy susan and paper mache plates.[58] While packaged foods and domestic appliances did not necessarily decrease the time women spent caring for their families, scientific management made it possible for middle-class families to maintain a respectable home with fewer servants.[59] By 1900, domestic technologies had addressed, if not solved, Mrs. Bob's "servant problem."

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[57] Warren Belasco, "Future Notes: The Meal-in-a-Pill," in *Food in the USA: A Reader*, ed. Carole Counihan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 62-3; David W. Miller, "Technology and the Ideal: Production, Quality and Kitchen Reform in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Dining in America, 1850-1900*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst and Rochester: University of Massachusetts Press and the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1987), 50-1. See illustrations in Carlotta Cherryholmes Greer, *A Text-Book of Cooking* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1915).

[58] M. Alden, "Automatic Dinner," *Delineator*, October 1912, 252; Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, 19. On manufacturing, see Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, 37. On goods, see Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 72-73. See also A Housewife, "Labor-Saving Devices for the Home," *Table Talk*, January 1913, 7-10; Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 6.

[59] Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 122. Dudden, like Cowan, argues that at first the new technology raised standards for homemakers and domestic alike without decreasing total household labor but by the early twentieth century the growing difficulties of acquiring domestic help as well as the increasing efficiency of household technologies made it possible to eliminate live-in servants from the middle-class home. Dudden, *Serving Women*, 127, 240. When Sarah Rorer updated her 1886 cookbook in 1902, she acknowledged the servantless household including a new section titled "Serving Dinner without a Maid." Rorer warned, however, that serving a dinner without domestic help was "of course, a difficult task" but not impossible "if thought is given to the first

Faith in technology came easy for many in the middle classes. In less than forty years, spurred by an unprecedented explosion in patents, new industrial techniques and a business climate unfettered by regulation, the United States rose from the fourth largest manufacturing nation in the world to the single largest producer of consumable goods.[60] Many in the middle classes owed their livelihood to new technologies that streamlined American industry after the Civil War and created a growing demand for managers, clerks, lawyers and other professionals. Soon, the technologies that structured their work lives were being applied to social problems. "In a period torn by class struggle, violence in the workplace, cultural diversity, and general social unrest," the historian Carroll Pursell wrote in *The Machine in America*, "'science' seemed to hold the promise not only of efficiency but also of impartiality and even inevitability."[61] In the public sphere, many interactions that once pitted class against class (raising the specter of servitude) were eliminated: vending machines, traffic lights, escalators and coin-operated turnstiles replaced personal exchanges that at one time reinforced class distinctions.[62]

Could technology eliminate the awkward exchange between restaurant patron and waiter? Would technology replace the tip? Middle-class visionaries promised that the same technology that was solving the "servant problem" and leveling class relations throughout the public sphere would soon eliminate the "tipping evil." Entrepreneurs and inventors, restaurateurs and mechanics envisioned a restaurant where food would be served with the touch of a button and the

arrangements." She then provided a minute-by-minute choreograph of how the hostess could accomplish the feat from when to remove the apron and sleevelets to when to pop into the kitchen to make the coffee. No apologies were necessary. "Then take your seat, and resume conversation as if you had not left the table." Rorer, *Mrs. Rorer's New Cook Book*, 653, 67-8.

[60] John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), 183.

[61] Carroll W. Pursell, *The Machine in America: A Social History of Technology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 204.

[62] In 1888, vending machines offered subways riders in New York City a mechanical way to buy gum. By 1920, vending machines could pour you a cup of soda. In 1900, Charles Seeberger transformed a Coney Island novelty ride, the escalator, into an alternative to the attended elevator. In the nineteen teens, the New York subway adopted coin-operated turnstiles to eliminate cheating by subway employees. In 1917, William Ghiglieri of San Francisco patented an automatic traffic light eliminating the need for traffic cops.

middle classes would be spared the humiliation, discomfort and expense of ordering dinner from

a waiter. In the eyes of these quixotic visionaries, technology would replace waiters, lowering

the cultural barriers to middle-class dining, and thereby creating a democracy of consumption

free of stogy nineteenth-century aristocratic codes of conduct. At least 20 patents were filed for

"waiterless restaurants" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[63] From Josephine

Doriat's "Means for Serving Guests in Restaurants" in 1887 to Yan Phou Lee's "Combined

Table and Dumb-Waiter" in 1900 to Charles P. Paul's "Waiterless Restaurant" in 1921, these

visions of a restaurant without waiters gave hope to the middle-class ideal of unfettered

consumerism by eliminating one of the last vestiges of the aristocratic past.[64]

While the new technology was never as successful as promised, the popular discourse

about the "waiterless" restaurant reveals the pivotal role that technology might play in the

middle-class re-envisioning of American culture. It suggests what in the late twentieth century

seems obvious: the middle-class colonization of the public sphere would rest squarely on

technology's emerging place in everyday lives.[65]

Waiterless Restaurants

Restaurant historians generally regard The Exchange Buffet as the first waiterless

restaurant in the United States. Opened in 1885 in New York's financial district, the restaurant

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[63] Only a few of the patents were specifically titled "waiterless" restaurants. Under classification number 186, however, are collected patents that refer to mechanical devices that deliver service in an eating establishment. Limiting the count to only patents that were issued between 1880 and 1925 and devices that might be used to deliver food in a moderately upscale restaurant, there were 20 patents. See for example US Patent and Trademark Office numbers 659057, 746615, 1147831, 1215536, 1222943, 1487179,

[64] US Patent and Trademark Office 358,149 (February 22, 1887); US Patent and Trademark Office 649,520 (May 15, 1900); US Patent and Trademark Office 1,389,690 (September 6, 1921) (Available online at http://patft.uspto.gov/netacgi/nph-Parser?patentnumber=[insert patent number]).

[65] For a fuller discussion of the utopian technological ideal as applied to dining, see Belasco, "Future Notes: The Meal-in-a-Pill," 59-72. Belasco ascribes four motives to the development of the meal-in-a-pill idea: a desire for mobility, a rejection of European decadence, a faith in engineering, and an acknowledgement of scientific eating. The waiterless restaurant embodied these ideals, but involved not only a rejection of European decadence, I will argue, but also a reinvisioning of the public sphere.

featured an innovative new form of counter service. Men—the restaurant was a male preserve—

ordered and paid for their food at a window and then ate standing up.[66] The success of The

Exchange Buffet encouraged imitation and in 1898 the fledgling Child's restaurant chain in New

York added a tray to its self-service restaurants perfecting the modern cafeteria.[67] Featuring

consistent and relatively inexpensive food, cafeterias offered the growing number of urban white

collar workers—clerks, secretaries, middle-managers and shop girls—a place to get a quick bite

to eat during the lunch hour. But despite efforts to glamorize the cafeteria with marble tables and

oak walls, cafeterias were generally regarded as lunch counters or a place to get a light snack and

a cup of coffee late at night. Long lines, impersonal mass seating and entrees that needed to be

kept warm for hours undermined any attempts to attract the middle-class diner seeking a

romantic or luxurious meal. The Exchange Buffet and the cafeteria were, after all, not that

different from the lunch wagons, street vendors and the notorious free-lunch saloons that made

self-service dining a commonplace, but not necessarily respectable practice through much of the

nineteenth century.

Technological visionaries demanded more than self-service and dreamed of eliminating

waiters without compromising the dining experience. A year after Americans first heard about

the German Quisiana Café, an automatic restaurant in Berlin that critics claimed "compared

favorably in point of variety with a first-class restaurant of the common type," there was already

talk of building a mechanical restaurant in the United States.[68] An 1897 article in *What to Eat*

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[66] Mariani, *America Eats Out*, 116-8. See also "New-York's Restaurants," *New York Tribune*, 14 October 1888, 15; Shuldiner, "Trapped Behind the Automat", 46.
[67] Mariani, *America Eats Out*, 116-8; Shuldiner, "Trapped Behind the Automat", 78-85.
[68] On Quisiana, see "Automatic Lunch Counter," *Scientific American*, 5 December 1896, 408. See also *Scientific American* [author], "Cafe without Waiters," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 March 1897, 5.

promised a future where "[g]uests will be served automatically with a complete dinner on pushing a button."[69]

Five years passed before Joseph Horn and Frank Hardart, a successful team of coffee shop proprietors, imported the technology used in the Quisiana Café, made a few modifications, and opened a mechanized restaurant in Philadelphia they dubbed the "Automat." Patrons of the first Automat purchased a token and then deposited it in a labeled slot representing the hot item they desired. The token signaled the basement kitchen, the food was prepared and then a dumbwaiter delivered the meal to the customer who carried it to a table.[70] Offering freshly prepared food in a lavish setting described by contemporaries as a "glittering . . . combination of plate glass, marble tiling, weathered oak, wainscoting and hammered brass trimming," Horn and Hardart's first restaurant was an automated alternative to the less formal middle-class restaurants that were popular in cities like New York, Boston and Chicago.[71] From the customer's perspective, there was only one important distinction: no waiter.[72] As one pundit observed, "There will be no waiting, no swearing at the waiter, and no tipping."[73]

Horn & Hardart's automatic restaurant was heralded as one of the great technological feats of the era.

> The horseless carriage, the wireless telephone and the playerless
> piano have been surpassed. Philadelphia will have Monday next a
> waiterless restaurant. After this the millennium![74]

But as the novelty wore off, the restaurant floundered. Middle-class customers seeking an elegant if affordable dinner became impatient with standing around waiting for their orders.[75]

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[69] "Editorial," *What to Eat*, July 1897, 22.
[70] Shuldiner, "Trapped Behind the Automat", 23.
[71] "Automat Lunch Room." *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* (7 June 1902): 2 quoted in Ibid., 26. See also Mariani, *America Eats Out*, 116-8.
[72] Horn & Hardart promoted the fact that there was no tipping. Shuldiner, "Trapped Behind the Automat", 19.
[73] "A Nickel-in-the-Slot Lunch," *What to Eat*, May 1897, 239.
[74] "Automat Lunch Room" quoted in Shuldiner, "Trapped Behind the Automat", 15.

Recognizing the limitations of the new technology, Horn & Hardart modified their restaurant over the next ten years, abandoning luxury for speed.[76] By 1912, they had replaced the dumbwaiters with a postal box system of heated and cooled cabinets and were using a central commissary system to supply their restaurants. The new Automat catered to the teeming masses of shop girls and office workers looking for a quick lunch and was immensely successful in both Philadelphia and New York. Yet as popular as it was for lunch, the Automat (like the cafeteria) lacked the formality and fresh cooking that the middle-class diner demanded in a first-class waiterless restaurant.

Constructing a white table-cloth restaurant that was automated would turn out to be a more ambitious project than Horn and Hardart were prepared to undertake but the formal waiterless restaurant remained a preoccupation of idealistic restaurant entrepreneurs. Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, newspapers and magazines routinely featured stories on restaurants where food would move from kitchen to table without touching human hands. These tales included detailed descriptions of restaurants with hydraulically lowered tables and machines that sent meals "zimmering" through tubes directly to the home.[77] A 1901 article in the Lima, Ohio's *Times-Democrat* announced the patenting of a "slot-machine restaurant" that would deliver hot dinners to your restaurant table with "[n]o more tipping of

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[75] Accounts of the 1902 automat suggest that the upper classes were not impressed with a no-service restaurant. "[Theater-goers] unaccustomed to the idea, insisted in [sic] personal service by rapping on the panes of the small enclosures containing the food they sought. Employees found it necessary to go among the customers, explaining how the nickel-in-the-slot apparatus worked." Quoted in Ibid., 50.

[76] Shuldiner sees development of a viable automat in the United States as a "dialectical" relationship between the users and developers of a new technology. Although Shuldiner is not concerned about class, the repositioning of the restaurant from a dinner establishment to mid-day lunch establishments suggests the influence of the middle class. Efforts to expand the chain to Boston and Chicago failed because of management problems. However, the Automat continued to evolve and after 1916, possibly to compete with cafeterias, Horn & Hardart broadened the menu and reintroduced full dinners. These changes would seem to reflect Horn & Hardart's business acumen; once the chain was well established as a lunch counter, H & H used its popularity to attract the dinner crowd. In an effort to attract an upscale market, H & H hired a Cordon Bleu trained executive chef in the early 1930s. Ibid., 19, 65n109, 77, 70.

[77] "Automatic Restaurant," *Scientific American* 89 (1903): 49-50; Genie H. Rosenfeld, "Meals Served by Electricity," *What to Eat*, April 1903; "A Waiterless Restaurant," *National Food Magazine*, October 1908, 155.

restaurant waiters." [78] A 1921 *Literary Digest* article meticulously described—with detailed diagrams—an innovative lunchroom fitted with a serpentine conveyor that moved the seated guests past a serving counter and then a cashier.[79] Many of these articles implied that the first waiterless restaurants were no more than a year away.[80]

The two most detailed plans for waiterless restaurants were not only the most luxurious but, if press accounts are to be believed, the closest to being realized. In 1908, Henry Erkins and John L. Murray, the architect and the owner of Murray's Roman Gardens announced plans to build an eight-story restaurant in Times Square. The planned restaurant would seat five thousand making it the largest restaurant in the world.

Erkins and Murray were successful showmen who hoped the novelty of the establishment would attract patrons.[81] Erkins vowed that "[t]here will be so many surprises that New York will be astounded" and while he refused to divulge most of his "cherished notions . . . lest imitators steal our thunder," he promised that the new restaurant would be elegant (featuring a marble staircase with winged lions and "one of the largest and most famous paintings in the world") and waiterless. [82]

The highlight of the restaurant's design would be a grand hall featuring a "wonderful waiterless restaurant." Erkins explained his plan for "invisible waiters" to the *New York Times*:

> The idea of automatic tables which can be operated by invisible
> waiters is my invention. . . . Guests will not give verbal orders to
> waiters, but will write on automatic pads what they want, and
> instantaneously the orders will be reproduced in the kitchen. . . .

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[78] "Slot-Machine Restaurant," *The Times-Democrat*, 18 January 1901, 7.

[79] "An Eat-as-You-Go Lunch Room," *Literary Digest*, 24 December 1921, 21-2.

[80] Typical was a 1903 article in *What to Eat* on a tube system that promised to deliver meals from a central commissary to individual home that ended with the statement that "the rube plan is being tried in Katonah, New York . . ." To date, however, I have found no evidence that this or any other waiterless scheme (with the exception of Horn & Hardart's Automats) were ever implemented. Rosenfeld, "Meals Served by Electricity," 120-1.

[81] Christopher Gray, *Streetscapes* (New York Times on the Web, 1996 [cited May 2003]); available from http://query.nytimes.com/search/article-page.html?res=9C06E6DE1439F935A25755C0A960958260.

[82] "Restaurant De Luxe to Seat 5,000 Diners," *New York Times*, 14 August 1908, 7.

> Not the entire table but the inner part of the table will be lowered,
> leaving the rim before the guests. The segment of the table will
> then be spread with the desired food and ascend to the guests.[83]

Erkins promised he would "eliminate waiters as much as possible because their presence is not desirable."[84] "Captains" and "omnibuses" would handle complaints and remove dirty dishes but in Erkin's new restaurant, as the headlines screamed, "YOU NEEDN'T SEE A WAITER."[85]

Contemporary newspaper and magazine accounts celebrated Erkin's restaurant and suggested that the future of dining was at hand. The *National Food Magazine* declared "[t]he waiterless restaurant has arrived;" readers were told that a company had been formed, the land had been rented and Erkin's restaurant, not yet named, would open shortly.[86] Erkins claimed the company had already raised $800,000 and the *New York Times* suggested, despite denials, that J. B. Duke and J. B. Cobb of the United Tobacco Company were financial backers.[87] But New York's waiterless restaurant was never to become a reality.[88]

In 1913, John F. Daschner, a well-known maitre d'hotel at the Hotel Statler in Cleveland, Ohio, resurrected the idea of a waiterless white table-cloth restaurant. Although it is not clear that Daschner was aware of Erkin's earlier efforts, the restaurant Daschner described was similar in design:

> Here is a picture that will be a reality within the near future: You
> enter a beautiful restaurant. The tables and table-cloths are the
> same as in any other first-class place. . . . You look over the bill of
> fare, mark your selections with a pencil, and then press the button,
> as directed, having attached your menu card to the menu holder on

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] "A Waiterless Restaurant," 155.

[87] "Restaurant De Luxe to Seat 5,000 Diners," 7.

[88] The scale of Erkins "waiterless restaurant" required that the restaurant appeal to the middle class. But Murray and Erkin envisioned an elegant restaurant with "prices as high as in any restaurant." The failure of the venture may have reflected the problem of attracting enough wealthy patrons to a restaurant that served thousands. As "one of the sagest of Broadway observers" told the *New York Times* in 1908, "New Yorkers only want to go to places where they can't get a seat." Ibid.

the table. Lo, the centre part of the table with the bill of fare, goes down; you look into the opening, but you see nothing as a screen automatically closes like a Kodak shutter . . . Before you are over your surprise—in less than a minute—the dish ordered appears on the table. . . . You dined comfortably, were served with dispatch, the food was hot, wholesome and nicely prepared. You were well pleased. You dined in a waiterless dining-room.[89]

Daschner cited a host of benefits that would flow from the waiterless restaurant. It would eliminate noise, minimize error, do away with unsightly piles of dirty dishes, lower prices and guarantee that food arrived at the table hot. But as with previous ventures, no justification for the waiterless restaurant was heralded more than the elimination of the awkward, unequal and discriminating exchanges between waiter and patron.[90] Daschner bragged that his new restaurant took ordering out of the hands of the "careless waiter" who invariably "disappoint[s] the guest" and reminded diners that eliminating the waiter meant there was "no one to overhear your conversation, whether it be on business or of a confidential nature." Most importantly, however, Daschner promised the end of tipping.

Many people now eat at restaurants to avoid the trouble at home with inexperienced cooks and other servants; but how many more people would dine out regularly if the price were not so high and were they not confronted at each meal with the necessity for giving the everlasting tip. . . . There is a solution near. . . .Experts on the tipping question for waiters claim that it can never be abolished; but everybody will agree that by this method the tipping question is absolutely solved . . . and the prices are not raised. . . . Is this not a question worth considering, when the expense of tips for eating and drinking amounts to about $300,000 each year?"[91]

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[89] John F. Daschner, "The New Service--the Waiterless Dining Room," *The Steward* 8, no. 6 (1913): 53. Daschner's plan did not entirely eliminate waiters. Waiters would work underground and only about half the usual number of waiters would be needed. To compensate for the loss of tips, Daschner suggested that male waiters, usually paid $10 a week, could be paid $25, or alternatively women might be hired at $10 a week.
[90] Ibid.: 52.
[91] Ibid.: 52-3.

Dashner's model of the waiterless restaurant was a middle-class utopia, a place where the individual diner could order dinner heedless of social censure and the waiter's condemnation. Aided by technology, the public "servant problem" disappeared and middle-class diners, freed of their discomfort, would flock to the restaurant.

Daschner announced his venture in an open letter to *The Steward* in 1913. He claimed that he had secured a lawyer and was seeking a patent for his waiterless restaurant.[92] He suggested that the restaurant would open shortly. But Daschner was no more successful than the other quixotic inventors who dreamed of a waiterless restaurant and his restaurant, like the others, never opened.

Figure 7: J. F. Daschner, "Automatic Table Service Apparatus," 1917 (U.S. Patent Office)

CONCLUSIONS

Americans' faith in technology was not new in 1900. Since the time of the Revolution, some Americans believed that technology would right the social ills of the young nation.[93] But the waiterless restaurant marked a change in how technology might serve the nation. With the

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[92] A search of the USTPO (United States Trademark and Patent Office) database indicates that John Daschner was awarded a patent in 1917 four years after he announced his plans. (USTPO #1,223,943 www.patft.ustpo.gov, October 2003). A second patent was awarded a few years later.

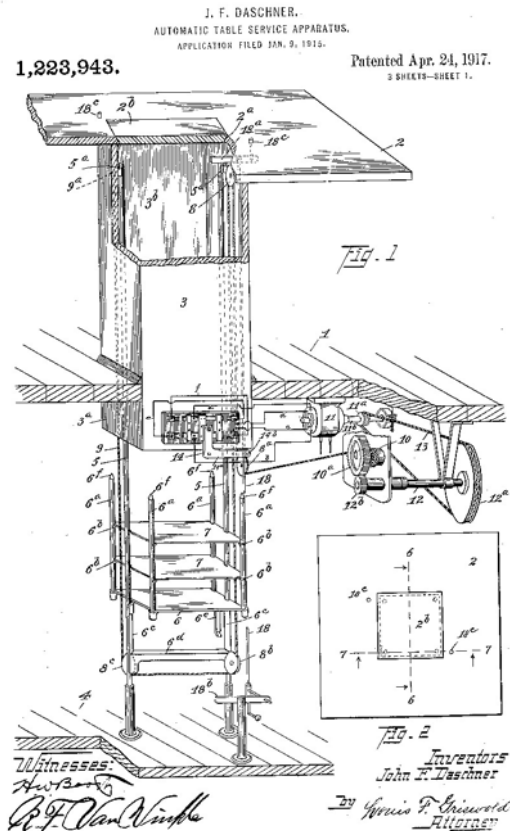[93] Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine*.

waiterless restaurant, practical science held forth the promise of democratizing access to American abundance. In contrast to the all-too-human waiter who served the aristocratic restaurant, the mechanical waiter of the middle-class utopian restaurant did not privilege wealth, did not turn up its nose at diners who ordered red wine with fish, and did not demand a tip.

The rules that governed the aristocratic table of the Gilded Age—from which spoon to use to the deference that waiters showed—were justified by the belief that codes of etiquette made possible social interactions desirable in a democracy. Codes of conduct created the civility necessary, it was believed, for gentlemen and ladies to both discuss the issues of the day without rancor and enjoy the pleasures of the table. According to the etiquette guides, the long, multicourse dinner was not merely a conspicuous show of wealth, but rather a ritual that encouraged witty and pleasurable talk. The *Bazar Book of Decorum* advised that "[i]t is particularly necessary to lengthen the American dinner, and we know of no better means of doing this than by dividing it into courses, and interposing between them cheerful interludes of social talk."

> A full hour at least should be spared from the busiest day for the main repast. It should never be slurred over by any of the miserable pretexts of the bar-room, eating-house, or confectionery, but treated with all the substantial consideration its importance demands. . . . Let it be prolonged, and freed from grossness by a graceful ceremony; and, above all, let it be partaken of in company, for nothing is so depressing to mind and body as solitary feeding.[94]

The presence of servants was an essential part of the aristocratic restaurant. Servants freed the nineteenth-century aristocratic diner from manual labor making a fuller enjoyment of both dinner and companionship possible. Abby Longstreet's observations about house servants were equally true of restaurant waiters: "As formal dinners are now served *à la Russe* entirely

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[94] Tomes, *The Bazar Book of Decorum. The Care of the Person, Manners, Etiquette and Ceremonials.*

(courses distributed by servants), the intellectual entertainment is less difficult of management than when the host and hostess used the soup-ladle and the carving knife." [95] Another guide strictly warned "gentlemen" that "[w]henever there is a servant to help you, never help yourself."[96]

Many in the middle classes viewed the aristocratic table differently. Codes of manners and behavior—at least the foppish codes of the aristocratic restaurant—may have preserved decorum, but they accomplished this feat not through the inherent merits of etiquette, but rather by excluding all those who did not possess the cultural capital the blue books of behavior embodied. The aristocratic table achieved sociability only by excluding those who by their dress and demeanor and inability to tip were regarded as less worthy and potentially disruptive.[97]

French-language menus and rules about forks were barriers to full participation in restaurant culture. And waiters were the enforcers. The maitre d' who sat the shabbily dressed man in a dark corner and the waiter who reserved the best cut of meat for the high-society matron flattered the wealthy at the expense of middle-class pride and preserved aristocratic sociability at the expense of middle-class participation. If the "tipping evil" bore the brunt of the middle-class diner's frustration with the privileges that the aristocratic restaurant reserved for its most well-heeled guests, it was only because tipping stripped away pretenses and laid bare the

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[95] Longstreet, *Social Etiquette of New York*.

[96] Cecil B. Hartley, *The Gentlemen's Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness: Being a Complete Guide for a Gentleman's Conduct in All His Relations Towards Society.* (Boston: DeWolfe Fiske, 1873), 58.

[97] This critique of the aristocratic table draws an explicit parallel with recent critiques of Jürgen Habarmas' concept of an unfettered historical public sphere. Jürgen Habermas wrote of the eighteenth century European coffee houses and salons: "[T]hey preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether. The tendency replaced the celebration of rank with a tact befitting equals." But critics, most notably Nancy Fraser, have argued that coffee house crowd could disregard status only because its membership was largely homogeneous. Similar to the aristocratic table, the idealized public sphere that Habermas describes can exist only because it excluded women, minorities and the working class. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 36.

inequality that served as a foundation for the elite dining. Tipping purchased both distinction and unfettered access.

While the waiterless restaurant was never a reality (with the possible exception of the first Automat), the tenacious efforts of early twentieth century entrepreneurs to develop a mechanical dining room—and the way in which the middle-class press applauded their idealism—offers a glimpse at what middling diners desired from the new spaces of consumption that flourished in the early twentieth century. The waiterless restaurant was an uncomplicated impersonal public space. The lone diner would not have to speak to anyone: he could order his dinner on an electric tablet, have his food magically appear in front of him and then pay his bill in silence. There would be no tip and no scrutiny and no need for the elaborate codes of civility. Stripped of the inherently dangerous human element, advantages of birth and breeding disappeared. The waiterless restaurant promised a democracy of consumption, a soulless but incorruptible democracy unfettered by social convention.

The waiterless restaurant was not an anomaly. Dozens of utopian novels published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries envisioned a future where man's corruptibility would be overcome by technology.[98] Magazines and newspapers promoted idealistic technologies like the meals-in-a-pill that, as the food historian Warren Belasco notes, served as explicit rejections of the "conspicuous consumption of upper-class banquets."[99] For these writers and inventors, the industrial revolution had concentrated wealth and power in the hands of a small minority less concerned about civic virtue than personal gain. Science and technology's promised dividend was that it removed the human element and in doing so

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[98] For a discussion of social engineering in turn-of-the-century utopian novels, see Howard P. Segal, "The Technological Utopians," in *Imagining Tomorrow: History, Technology, and the American Future*, ed. Joseph J. Corn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 119-36.
[99] Belasco, "Future Notes: The Meal-in-a-Pill," 61.

eliminated the inequality. In these utopian visions, as in middle-class diner's idealization of the

waiterless restaurant, technology leveled class differences.[100] In this, Daschner noted,

technology held little appeal for the "wealthy or well-to-do people" who "will continued to

patronize the elegant restaurants, and always will . . ."[101] Technology that promised equality of

exchange at the expense of human interaction spoke to a uniquely middle-class re-envisioning of

the commercial sphere.[102]

The waiterless restaurant promised that middle-class diners could experience the luxuries

of modern life without being cowed or judged by the waiter. It promised a cultural and culinary

marketplace without the discrimination that wealth purchased. It was a fantastic if unrealized

vision of a true consumer democracy.[103]

August J. Bock, the venerable waiter and author of *Knight of the Napkin*, outlived his

clientele. While the waiterless restaurant failed and tipping continued, the middle-class

colonization of the elite restaurant continued apace. Upper-class Americans adapted or fled the

public sphere finding sanctuary in private clubs and country clubs where aristocratic ideals of

excess and service linger until our own time. For the most part, Bock seemed blissfully unaware

of the changes that restaurant service was undergoing. In his memoir, only once does he

acknowledge that the aristocratic ideal of service has been supplanted. Sometime around 1913, a

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[100] The democracy of isolation that the waiterless restaurant represents has a scholarly equivalent in Thornstein Veblen's evolutionary theory of technology. Veblen argued that "[t]he machine technology takes no cognizance of conventionally established rules of precedence; it knows neither manners nor breeding and can make no use of any of the attributes of worth." In time, industrial man would be disciplined by the machine and would come to abandon such traditional rights as property. Industrial man would then find himself in opposition to the pecuniary man and his profits. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1904), 311.
[101] Daschner, "The New Service--the Waiterless Dining Room," 53.
[102] In its democracy of consumer isolation, the waiterless restaurant prefigures the democratic isolation of many of the twentieth century's most cherished inventions: the television and the internet, to name but two. For more on utopian food technology as uniquely middle class, see Belasco, "Future Notes: The Meal-in-a-Pill," 61.
[103] See also Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 21. Although Cohen focuses more on Progressive campaigns, rather than technological solutions, the idealization of the waiterless restaurant might be accurately considered part of what Cohen calls the "first-wave consumer movement."

stranger visited the Hotel McAlpin. As was his custom, Bock offered the man a demitasse of

coffee to conclude the meal, only this time he was brazenly rebuffed.

> At the same hotel, having only recently come from the Hotel Plaza
> and its exclusive service, I asked a patron, "Would you like to
> finish your meal with a demitasse?" The gentleman, coming from
> some far-western or southern state, replied, "Keep your demitasses
> for the upper classes, a large cup for mine."[104]

Writing thirty years later, Bock could hardly disguise his shock.

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[104] Bock, *Knight of the Napkin*, 37.

Chapter 8: SATISFYING THEIR HUNGER: WOMEN, RESPECTABILITY AND THE DEMOCRACY OF DINING

"I am very sorry, but that is the regulation of the house, and we cannot make any exceptions in its applications," the hotel clerk at the Hoffman House explained to Mrs. Blatch. "We do this for the protection of just such ladies as you are. We do it to keep out objectionable women; women of the type you would not like to have dining in the same room with you." Blatch's reply was pointed. "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 the objectionable men out."[1]

Harriot Stanton Blatch, the daughter of the late Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was coming into her own as a leading voice of women's suffrage in New York in 1907 when hotel clerk James C. Clancy informed her and a female companion that they were not allowed to dine at the Hoffman House. Blatch had spent the day at the Women's University Club. It had been a hot July day; she was tired and hungry. Around six o'clock, she and Mrs. Hettie Wright Graham, a friend visiting from Long Island, made their way to the Hoffman House, an elite hotel that featured a fashionable rooftop restaurant. Blatch and Graham, independent middle-class urbanites, were fully aware that restaurants often barred unaccompanied women from their dining rooms (particularly at night) but they were unfamiliar with the policies of the hotel. In recent years, restaurants and hotels had relaxed their once-strict regulations concerning unescorted women in order to encourage women shoppers to take lunch or an early dinner in the city. Although a sign in the lobby of the Hoffman House advertised a "Ladies and Gentlemen's Restaurant Roof

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[1] "Mrs. Blatch to Sue the Hoffman House," *New York Times*, 6 August 1907, 1.

Garden," Blatch checked with the front desk before entering the elevator. Presumably the clerk was unaware of the time or he mistook Harriot Blatch for a resident of the hotel, because he signaled that the women should go up although the Hoffman House prohibited unaccompanied women who were not staying in the hotel from dining in the roof garden after six.

At the top floor, the two women checked their parasols with the attendant and made their way to an empty table—but before they could sit down, an agitated waiter approached. When he learned that they were unescorted, he refused to serve them. A head waiter was summoned and he also asked the women to leave. Angered, Blatch insisted on speaking with a manager. It was in the manager's office that Blatch was told by James Clancy that the hotel's policy was for "the protection of just such ladies as you are."

"Humiliated by the experience," Blatch vowed to take the Hoffman House to court to establish "the right of women to dine in the public restaurants of the city when and how they desired."[2] Her case was one of the first legal challenges to the widespread policy of barring women without male escorts from public dining rooms.[3]

Harriot Stanton Blatch was a political activist and a sought-after lecturer. Five years earlier, she had returned from England tutored in the British suffrage movement and influenced

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Mrs. John T. Trow, chairman of the New York Equal Suffrage League legislative committee told the *New York Times* on the eve of the Blatch trial that she was unaware of any case that had previously challenged the right of public accommodations—including hotels, restaurants and railroads—to exclude women. But she was incorrect. In 1897 Clara Foltz, the first woman lawyer in California and a path breaking advocate of Progressive legal reforms and woman's rights, sued a New York hotel and restaurant after the proprietor forced her and her daughter to leave because the restaurant did would not admit unescorted women after 9pm. They filed for $5,000 damages. In 1903, a similar case was brought before New York State Supreme Court Justice Greenbaum. Rebecca Israel's suit against the Café Boulevard, an upscale French restaurant, was made under the provision of the state's civil rights laws passed in 1895 to prevent racial discrimination. Justice Greenbaum ruled that since the escort policy had been applied uniformly, no discrimination took place. The author has not located any similar court challenges prior to 1897 although the local character of these cases makes any comprehensive claim impossible. While the practice of barring unescorted women from restaurants declined in the decades that followed the Blatch suit, discrimination was not universally illegal in the United States until the passage of antidiscrimination Civil Rights acts in 1965. "Clara Foltz Is Mad," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 February 1897, 3; "Restaurant Keepers' Rights: Court Upholds Defendant Who Refused to Serve a Woman Because She Had No Male Escort," *New York Times*, 17 May 1903, 3; "Suffragists Aid Mrs. Blatch's Suit," *New York Times*, 5 October 1907, 11.

by Fabian socialism.[4] More radical than her mother, Blatch broke new ground by encouraging

New York suffragists to engage in activist politics, to participate in mass demonstrations (in

particular, parades), and to reach out to working class women both socially and politically.[5] But

Blatch's decision to file suit against the Hoffman House was more personal than political.

> It does seem strange that women, *whose respectability is apparent*,
> may not satisfy their hunger . . . while men, no matter what their
> characters may be, are admitted anywhere. . . . I do not think that a
> restaurant owner has the right to refuse a woman a meal at any
> hour. There are numbers of women working as physicians and in
> other professions. They should be permitted to eat wherever they
> choose and whenever they choose."[6] [Emphasis added.]

While the lawsuit they filed might potentially establish a precedent for any woman to eat in the

restaurant of her choice, Blatch and Graham went to court to defend their reputations and the

reputations of other middle-class women who might seek to dine out alone.

The Hoffman House's renown as one of New York's most elite establishments rested on

its reputation for exclusivity and decorum. When Blatch's case came to court, the hotel turned

the trial into a referendum, not on the right of women to dine as they pleased, but on the right of

a restaurant to deny service to women who did not comport themselves as "ladies." Moritz Weil,

the maitre d'hotel of the Hoffman House, and James Clancy testified that they had offered the

women the opportunity to move to another of the hotel's dining rooms but Blatch and Graham

(described by Weil as the "tail of the dragon") belligerently refused.   Weil told the court that

Blatch, in response to the offer, had told him: "This is what I am after. I will sue you, as I will

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[4] Ellen Carol DuBois, *Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 60-87.
[5] Ibid., 97.
[6] "Mrs. Blatch to Sue the Hoffman House," 1.

any hotel that refuses to serve me."[7]   The defendants, the men suggested, were not "respectable"

women but activists seeking a fight.

Judge Speigelberg of the Fifth Municipal Court apparently agreed. With the judge

instructing the jury "that the women were entitled to be served when they applied for dinner in

some part of the house, but not necessarily on the roof garden," the jury needed only minutes to

find in favor of the Hoffman House.[8] Blatch's attorney moved for a new trial, but the case was

never pursued. Blatch did not mention the incident in her memoirs.[9]

In their tepid endorsement of the Blatch suit, the editors of the *New York Times* argued that

modern women were "not only competing with man on his own footing, but teaching him how to

do things in new ways."[10] However, the Blatch trial was less about "new ways" than old. For

much of the nineteenth century, public spaces of consumption—including restaurants—were

governed by aristocratic privilege and gendered ideals of propriety. Concerns that the

commercial, public sphere might corrupt "respectable" women served to justify restaurant

policies that institutionalized the separate spheres of nineteenth-century society. Barring women

from the masculine world of the restaurant where alcohol was served, cigars were smoked and

business and politics were the main topics of conversation, restaurants argued, preserved a

woman's reputation. However, the rules that governed women's public dining were often more

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[7] "Hotels May Bar Lone Women Diners," *New York Times*, 6 February 1908, 14.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Blatch was accompanied to the trial by members of the Consumer League, the City Federation of Women's Clubs and the New York Equal Suffrage League. Before the trial, there had been talk of civil disobedience if the court ruled against Blatch. Emma Hunt told a members of the Equal Suffrage League that she "would be very glad to go and make a test case myself" if Blatch's suit was "not sufficient to make the desired point." "Suffragists Aid Mrs. Blatch's Suit," 11. But no further action was taken and suit is not mentioned in Blatch's autobiography or a subsequent biography. Despite the jury's ruling, it appears this was not a concerted campaign to challenge discrimination but the protest of an aggrieved diner. See Harriot Stanton Blatch and Alma Lutz, *Challenging Years: The Memoirs of Harriot Stanton Blatch* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1940).
[10] "The Active Woman," *New York Times*, 6 October 1907, 10.

concerned about class than gender. Creating gender-segregated and classed spaces of consumption was part of the aristocratic restaurant's promise of exclusivity.

By 1907 the aristocratic restaurant and the codes of gendered etiquette it embraced were beginning to unravel. The burgeoning middle classes threatened the aristocracy of public dining, challenging the traditions of exclusivity the aristocratic restaurant represented. French menus were condemned, formal service was viewed as passé, and the aristocratic ideal of dining was deemed inadequate by a middle class eager to forge a new relationship with the commercial city of the twentieth century. As the middle classes, tired of cooking at home, resigned to living in apartments, frustrated by the failure to secure trained "help," and committed to experiencing the entertainments of the city, chose to dine out, their claim to public culture upset the gendered assumptions of America's elites. Middle-class men and women did not believe that the guardians of the aristocratic restaurant should pass judgment on their character.

In New York's restaurants and hotels, growing numbers of American women arrived unescorted and asked to be seated, ordered their own meals, paid their own checks and finished their evenings with cocktails and cigarettes. The "new woman" of the early twentieth century was a trendsetter, a maverick flouting the ladylike traditions of yesteryear. Some were middle class; others were not. But whatever their class, the "new women" benefited from the cultural tumult that followed the rise of the urban middle class. As middle-class men and women entered elite restaurants, they forced the restaurateurs who served as guardians of aristocratic tradition to reconsider values that underlay the public culture of the nineteenth century. Ideals of respectability embedded in an aristocratic discourse of respectability were pitted against the purchasing power of the middle classes.

In the end, the democratization of America's public spaces—particularly the restaurant—was not only the work of political activists like Harriot Blatch but also evidence of the influence wielded by the new middle classes. Restaurateurs, tutored in the aristocratic culture of the nineteenth century, may have been reluctant to open their doors to women they did not deem "respectable," but in courting middle-class diners with considerable mass purchasing power, they stretched the definition of respectability to the point where its meaning became impossible to discern.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY ARISTOCRATIC RESTAURANTS AND WOMEN

For much of the nineteenth century, restaurants were male preserves. At a time when "respectable" women kept close to the home, it was rare to see women, particularly unescorted women, dining in the fashionable restaurants and saloons of America's largest cities. As Noah Brooks, a West Coast resident, observed in 1868, "[The gentlemanly Arabs] are the chief patrons of the San Francisco restaurant. . . .Were all the now single men in San Francisco, between the ages of twenty-one and forty-five years, to be married this month, and set up their own household gods, the restaurants would be insolvent, and half the hotels would be forced to close their doors."[11] Like private men's clubs, the early nineteenth century restaurant was a place where men enjoyed the company of men, discussed business, drank excessively and escaped both work and home. "[Before the Civil War,] a visit to Pfaff's, on Broadway, was the only really satisfactory ending to a young man's day. After the theater, after work, after anything and everything, men would saunter in here (and they knew how to saunter in those quieter days) at

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[11] Brooks, "Restaurant Life of San Francisco," 466-7.

any hour of the night, drink beer and eat sandwiches, and smoke cigars, and hold comfortable desultory conversations."[12]

As places where upper- and middle-class young men gathered, restaurants in the mid-nineteenth century were viewed as dangerous for women, part of the corrupting public sphere that a respectable lady should avoid. Many fashionable restaurants and saloons barred all women from eating on the premises while others, particularly in large cities, provided alternative accommodations. Emmeline Stuart Wortley, an English woman who visited the United States in 1849, arrived in New York, traveled to Niagara Falls, returned to New York, and then made her way to Boston before she took her dinner in a public dining room. Traveling without a male escort, the hotels and restaurants she stopped at, to her great displeasure, sequestered her in private rooms.[13] In California, although custom encouraged local women with families to order food delivered to their homes, many of the larger eating establishments, like their East Coast counterparts, provided some privacy to women diners, even if it was only a curtained corner.[14] Other restaurants, particularly those located in large urban hotels, provided special dining facilities for women. A year after Wortley visited the United States, Isabella Lucy Bird stopped at the American House in Boston and noted that the hotel had two dining rooms: "a magnificent eating saloon, principally devoted to male guests" located on the first floor, and upstairs, "a large room furnished with a rare combination of splendor and taste, called 'The Ladies' Ordinary,' where families, ladies and their invited guests take their meals."[15]

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[12] Edith Harman Brown, "Where Old New Yorkers Ate," *What to Eat*, July 1904, 4-5. Brown notes that one woman, Ida Clare of the New York *Leader*, was admitted to the "charmed circle" of newspapermen who regularly met at Pfaff's.

[13] Emmeline Stuart Wortley, *Travels in the United States, Etc.: During 1849 and 1850* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), 38.

[14] Brooks, "Restaurant Life of San Francisco," 467.

[15] Isabella Lucy Bird, *The Englishwoman in America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 100. Descriptions of segregated dining rooms abound. In 1903, for example, the Arena restaurant in New York was described in Where and How to Dine in New York: "This entrance leads to the main hallway at the end of which is

Even when restaurants provided a "Ladies' Ordinary," unescorted women were carefully

scrutinized before they were allowed into a restaurant. "Ladies who may be traveling alone,"

Tunis Campbell wrote in 1848, "should not be left to come to the table without being seen by the

proprietor, and brought in and seated; or, if he is not able to attend to them himself, they should

be seated before the gong is rung, in order to avoid the confusion that generally attends the rush

when the doors are thrown open, and every body is trying to get to their seats."[16] Restaurants

assumed it was their right and responsibility to police their guests.

There were exceptions to the rules that governed where women could dine. In the

hinterland, public eating houses were rare and women were accommodated as necessary. But in

the mid-nineteenth-century city, restaurants that catered to unescorted women were not generally

considered respectable establishments. In these restaurants men and women crowded onto

benches and shared a table d'hote dinner served "family style." When circumstances brought

Isabella Bird to a second-rate Chicago hotel in 1850, she gamely joined her male companions in

the public dining room although she immediately felt "rather out of my element."

> We went down to dinner, and only the fact of not having tasted
> food for many hours could have made me touch it in such a room.
> We were in a long apartment, with one table down the middle, with
> plates laid for one hundred people. . . . There were four brigand-
> looking waiters with prodigious beards and moustaches. . . . Dinner
> began, and after satisfying my own hunger with the least
> objectionable dish, namely "pork with onion fixings," I had leisure
> to look around. Every quarter of the globe had contributed to swell
> that motley array, even China.[17]

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the coatroom. On the right is the ladies' dressing room and waiting room and on the left is one of the dining rooms.
This entire floor is devoted to the ladies' and gentlemen's restaurant, but gentlemen are expected to make use of it
only when in the company of ladies. The café floor below is restricted to gentlemen alone." *Where and How to
Dine in New York*, 19.

[16] Campbell, *Hotel Keepers, Head Waiters, and Housekeepers' Guide*, 41-2.

[17] Bird, *The Englishwoman in America*, 149-50.

Bird joined her traveling companions in the common dining room only because the hotel's

restaurant offered her a rare chance, as a woman, to see "something of American society in its

lowest grade."

Few elite women were as adventurous as Bird. Although the male exclusivity of the

formal restaurant was enforced more often by convention than by law, few women tested the

rules that segregated or excluded women diners. Most restaurants doubled as saloons and

genteel women did not frequent saloons—to do so was to risk social censure.[18] When women

did challenge the gendered boundaries of the restaurant, they were often refused service or, more

subtly, ignored until they left.[19]

In the mid-nineteenth century, women understood that the aristocratic codes that filled

the pages of etiquette manuals demanded that "ladies" not intrude on the male world of the

restaurant. Since it was assumed respectable women would not violate these rules, society

presumed that only women with little or no social standing would dare enter a restaurant alone.

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[18] No formal data is available for the nineteenth century that would make it possible to categorize eating establishments by whether or not they served alcohol. However, entries in the records of the R.G. Dun & Co.'s credit rating records for the late nineteenth century suggest that bars were common in restaurants and sales of alcohol were an important source of income. From entry for Fred. Strothmann's Restaurant, New York City: "November 13, 1882: 'States he has been in bus at above loc. 10 years.'" "March 13, 1886: 'His facilities for doing a restaurant business are small but does a steady trade + does well in his liquor bar.' New York, Vol. 311, p. 4870, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School. Quoted without permission for publication or presentation.

[19] Thomas related an exception that proves the rule. "Two other women tried to break the [no service without an escort rule at Delmonico's] with more diverting results. They were . . . sensational 'lady stock brokers' who played the market on tips from Commodore Vanderbilt, and who advocated spiritualism, free love, and votes for women. . . . Seating themselves boldly in Delmonico's restaurant, without escort, the sisters . . . ordered, 'Tomato soup for two.' The waiter regretted that he could not take their order. They called for Charles Delmonico, who appeared all smiles. He liked the pair, and good-naturedly he offered to cover their retreat by strolling to the door with them, engaging them in conversation, so diners might assume they had merely dropped in to speak to him. By no means, they responded; they had come to dine, and if the presence of a man was indispensable, they would provide that accessory. [The driver of a horse cab was summoned and seated at their table.] In a firm but ladylike voice, Victoria then ordered, 'Tomato soup for three.'" Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 200-1. [Emphasis added] The women were Victoria and Tenesseee Woodhull. Jan Whitaker recounts another story from 1906. Two women travelers to New York were badgered about when their escort would arrive. When they conceded that they would not be joined by a "father, husband or brother," the waiter told them the table they were sitting at had already been engaged. Later, the headwaiter "advised them 'confidentially' that they could not eat there and they left, with 'everybody watching us and wondering.'" Jan Whitaker, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn: A Social History of the Tea Room Craze in America*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 20.

In the curious logic of the nineteenth century, an unaccompanied woman seeking unescorted

admittance into a fashionable restaurant was, as a matter of course, assumed to be a prostitute

trolling for a man to buy her dinner.

> [N]ot unfrequently [sic] one sees in the great restaurants of San
> Francisco the unaccustomed garb of women gleaming out with
> startling effect in the long lines of feeding men. There are women
> at some of the most expensive restaurants, or *rotisseries*, habitual
> customers, whose gay attire marks where they are grouped apart in
> the long saloon, taking their dinner with great self-possession.
> These persons have no better name than "Boston Sal" or the "Girl
> in Green." They constitute almost the only female element in the
> restaurant life of San Francisco, as the great eating public sees it.[20]

The strong association between sexual license and public eating in the mid-nineteenth century

drew on two urban images: the concert saloon and the "hot corn" girl. The concert saloon was a

bar, a primitive restaurant and a dance hall. The more risqué mid-century concert halls

employed waitresses dressed in wench costumes—high-cut skirts and low-cut blouses—to serve

drinks to rowdy male crowds. No doubt many of the women who worked in the concert halls, at

least those found in more respectable entertainment districts like the Bowery in New York,

offered nothing more than alcohol and a dance, but at a time when female wait staff were

unheard of in more respectable establishments, concert saloons (with, reportedly, back rooms

which were rented by the hour) were widely rumored to be fronts for prostitution.[21] Writing in

1869, Matthew Hale Smith wrote:

> THE tramps on the sidewalk, who annoy the passerby, and dog the
> footsteps of men who walk Broadway after ten o'clock, are mostly
> young girls, who have an ostensible trade in which they are
> employed during the day. Many of them are waiter girls in low
> restaurants, who are known as the "Pretty Waiter Girls" . . . Not all
> the girls in saloons and concert-rooms are bad. But few remain
> long in that connection who do not become so. The wages paid to

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[20] Brooks, "Restaurant Life of San Francisco," 467.
[21] Batterberry and Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 102; Luc Sante, *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York*, 1st Vintage Departures ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 109-11.

waiter girls vary from five to fifteen dollars a week. To this is
added the wages of infamy.[22]

Similarly, female peddlers selling food on the street, it was generally assumed, were willing to

sell themselves as well. Most notorious of these vendors were the "Hot Corn" girls, women as

young as thirteen or fourteen, who wandered the streets of Manhattan advertising their licit and

illicit trade with the chant "Hot corn! Here's your nice hot corn—smoking hot, smoking hot, just

from the pot!" The "Hot Corn" girls became a notorious symbol of urban vice after the

agricultural editor of the *New York Tribune*, Solon Robinson, published a series of temperance

tales titled "Hot Corn" in 1854.[23]

Even when a restaurant drew a stylish upper-class crowd and prohibited unescorted

women, elites felt that to dine in mixed company outside the home was a bit daring. Before the

American Civil War, Taylor's was one of New York's most famous restaurants. It was a French-

style café on Broadway with marble floors and marble tables where New York's less staid

aristocrats dined before or after attending the theater. In this mock Parisian splendor, women

dressed "fantastically," many even shedding their bonnets for the night, but no women gained

admittance without an escort. Nonetheless, visitors to the city observed that even if Taylor's was

among the city's best restaurants, it was "*not by any means the most respectable*."[24] No matter

how fashionable the restaurant, suspicion fell on women who dined in public in the mid-

nineteenth century.

In the Gilded Age, as elite women began to play a greater role in the social life of the

American city, some restaurants made efforts to accommodate the new trade. Eager to capture

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[22] Matthew Hale Smith, *Sunshine and Shadow in New York* (Hartford: J. B. Burr, 1869), 424.
[23] Curiously, Robinson never claimed the "Hot Corn" girls were actually prostitutes although he suggested that some would turn to prostitution later in life. Solon Robinson, *Hot Corn: Life Scenes in New York Illustrated* (New York: De Witt and Davenport, 1854), 18.
[24] Bird, *The Englishwoman in America*, 353.

the business of society women, fashionable hotels and restaurant relaxed their rules and allowed

unaccompanied women to lunch in their restaurants while continuing to insist that these women

have a male escort at night. In New York, Delmonico's had, since early in its history, provided

women with a family dining room, but the restaurant changed its rules, segregating women in the

1880s. To accommodate the society fad for afternoon tea, Delmonico's opened its dining rooms

to unescorted women during daylight hours.[25] However, social custom among New York's

aristocratic families was slow to change. An 1894 account of dining at Delmonico's written by a

New York correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times* noted that men and women seldom dined

together.

> One funny thing about Delmonico's at luncheon time is that the
> women seem to prefer to lunch with the friends of their own sex,
> while the men lunch together. This same day there were no less
> than six separate parties of men lunching together and eight or ten
> of women. They all know each other well, and before or after
> luncheon the men went over and spoke to the women, but each set
> went its respective way, and seemed to be well satisfied to do so.[26]

Self-segregation was not only a sign of male or female camaraderie; the codes of conduct that

governed aristocratic society discouraged men and women from dining together. "Indeed, a

[25] Lately Thomas's thorough account of the history of Delmonico's sheds only minimal light on Delmonico's policies regarding women. It appears that Delmonico's began to admit unescorted women in the mid-1880s so long as they arrived before dinner. By the 1890s, Delmonico's was a popular afternoon retreat for women. Lately reprints an 1890s article from the New York Herald (no date given): "In fair weather and in foul, in spring and in winter, in summer and in autumn, [women] head for Delmonico's as if it were the only place left to them on earth. The reason must be that at Delmonico's, New York women, and their imitating sisters from out of town, can collect, eat drink, and regard each other, without anybody knowing or caring particularly whether it is Mrs. Astorbilt, of Fifth Avenue, Mrs. Snooks, of Newark, or Miss Prettyface, of the Royal Flats. In absolute security and peace they sit at adjoining tables and look so much alike you cannot tell one from the other." The quote not only suggests the popularity of Delmonico's but suggests the growing presence of the middle class. Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 199-200, 39-40.

[26] Anhelm, "What Women Do: Separate Lunch for Women and Men at Delmonico's," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 June 1894, 18.

woman and a man lunching together at Delmonico's, if they are not husband and wife, always

creates a little remark," the *Los Angeles Times* noted. "It is not considered quite good form."[27]

Elite women who preferred to avoid the temptations that the men at Delmonico's posed

might also dine at the growing number of establishments—Mallard's in New York was one of

the earliest—that catered primarily to women.[28] Ice cream parlors and lunchrooms were the

most common places for an unescorted woman to dine in the city, but a bakery might also

furnish a few tables where a woman could stop and eat. Initially, these restaurants served little

more than "ice cream, pastries and oysters, but as the feminine carriage trade became more

brazen about lunching out, a broadening fare appeared—beefsteak, boiled ham, sandwiches,

poached or boiled eggs, broiled chickens, omelettes, coffee, chocolate, toast and butter."[29] In

New York, the two most famous "ice cream palaces," Taylor's and Thompson's, could each seat

over seventy-five in their marble-floored, vaulted-ceiling dining rooms.[30] Yet such

accommodations were uncommon enough that restaurants that catered to women (as well as

men) sometimes found it necessary to advertise—an unusual extravagance for a nineteenth-

century restaurant.[31] Mrs. Sallie E. Seward and Mrs. Fannie A. Palmer placed an advertisement

in the *Overland Monthly* for their "Home" Coffee and Lunch Rooms, asserting that the "Home"

was "[t]he only quiet, home-like, down-town Restaurant for Ladies and Gentlemen" in San

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[27] Ibid. See also the various descriptions of dining in Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (New York: Modern Library, 1948).

[28] Evidence of how common it was for women to dine out, even when women's restaurants were available, is scarce. A 1908 article in the *New York Times* notes that Mallard's was opened in 1848 and that fashionable women "took their chocolate" there. "Mallard's Moves," *New York Times*, 15 October 1908, 5. In 1871, Appleton's Journal incidentally noted that one Boston restaurant had served eighty-three women "one day last week." "Varieties," *Appleton's Journal: A Magazine of General Literature*, 29 July 1871, 139.

[29] Batterberry and Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 92; "Women Lunch at Cafes," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 June 1896, 12. On restaurants for working women, see "Mistaken for a Handsome Man," *New York Times*, 4 July 1884.

[30] Batterberry and Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 92.

[31] Restaurateurs were slow to identify women as a potential market. Early accounts suggested that women ordered too little and lingered too long and complained too much to be profitable. See "Nice but Unprofitable," *New York Times*, 30 May 1886, 6; "The Woman in the Restaurant," *New York Times*, 18 July 1876, 3.

Francisco in 1888. The advertisement stated that ice cream was available, a guarantee in the

idiom of the times that the restaurant did not serve alcohol.[32]

Accounts of middle-class women dining in restaurants prior to the 1870s are uncommon.

Although middle-class women might accompany their husbands to an upper-class restaurant,

such visits were expensive and rare, and while nothing barred middle-class women from ice

cream parlors, many middle-class women, aided by servants, took their meals at home. As late

as 1898 an article that appeared in the *New York Times* offering advice to women who might be

traveling alone, assumed that its audience, presumably middle class, would not know how to

handle themselves in a hotel restaurant. "Upon entering the hotel dining room you will be met

and escorted to the seat which you are to occupy, by the head waiter. This official, having seen

you seated, will hand you the menu and place you in the hands of the waiter, who will proceed to

take your order."[33]

The growth of the American city and the emergence of a consumer culture centered on

the department store, however, transformed middle-class dining in the closing quarter of the

nineteenth century. Women shoppers no longer found it convenient to return home for lunch;

young unmarried women workers preferred restaurants to carrying a lunch pail. As a the

proprietor of a New York lunchroom told a reporter for the *New York Times* in 1885, "Five years

ago, the patronage of women in these restaurants down here was so trifling as practically to

amount to nothing, but to-day we all provide special accommodation and special dishes for them,

and their trade is well worth catering for." The lunchroom owner attributed the new patronage to

the growing number of "young women employed as private secretaries, stenographers, type

writers, telegraph operators and copyists" as well as the "wives and daughters of professional

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[32] "'Home' Coffee and Lunch Rooms," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, December 1888, np.
[33] "In the Realm of Women," *New York Times,* 28 August 1898, 14.

and business men" that came to the city for an afternoon's shopping. [34] In Chicago, the *Daily*

News remarked on the changing dining habits of middle-class women in 1896.

> Many women of a generation or two back—and well informed
> ones at that—have lived and died without ever seeing the inside of
> a restaurant. Such a thing, in deed, as a modest wife and mother
> dining unattended in a public restaurant would have been
> considered highly improper, and would have been heralded in "The
> School for Scandal" as an ominous sign. But times change, and
> the sins of yesterday become the virtues of today. No one would
> think for a moment of quarrelling with the woman who skips away
> from household cares and punctuates her shopping tours with a
> friendly chat over a cup of tea.[35]

New restaurants were opened to cater to these middle-class diners. Schraft's, a candy

store chain, opened its first restaurant in New York in 1898: a modern version of the "ice cream

palace" with a mahogany and silver décor. The same year, the Childs brothers opened their

namesake cafeteria chain, an inexpensive lunchroom for both middle- and working-class women

who shopped and worked in the city.[36] Neither restaurant catered exclusively to women, but

both depended on women for their success.

> Noon is a busy hour for the restaurants in the shopping district of
> New York. Here one finds eagerness personified. Men are few,
> and woman rules. At Purssell's, for instances, they swoop down in
> swarms when the luncheon hour arrives, and a man wandering into
> the places may well think himself an intruder. He will get cold
> looks, if he gets any attention at all; and the shoppers that rush in
> for a place will stare haughtily at his pretension to the stool he
> occupies.[37]

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[34] "Fair Women at Lunch," 4; "Unlucky Man in a Woman's Restaurant," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 17 May
1903, 15.
[35] "Women Lunch at Cafes," 12.
[36] Mariani, *America Eats Out*, 113-7.
[37] G. Sudley, "Luncheon for a Million," *Munsey*, March 1901, 845.

Meanwhile, tearooms, once enclaves of aristocratic women and the five o'clock tea, expanded

their menus and their hours to attract middle-class women looking for more substantial dinners.[38]

The growing number of women diners encouraged entrepreneurs to open restaurants that

catered exclusively to women. In 1893, one of the first lunch counters solely for women opened

in Philadelphia and other cities soon followed.[39] If women-only establishments initially embodied nineteenth-century virtue, by the teens they sometimes provided alcohol (often illegally), late night dinners and smoking rooms. Equally important, the women's restaurant bridged the gap between the old male-only establishment and the new less segregated restaurants. As Richard

Figure 8: "During Shopping Hours," 1904 (*New York Times*)

Barry informed readers of the *New York Times* in 1912.

> A tea room is a woman's institution. It is run by women, for
> women. Men enter with diffidence, and seldom alone. . . . On the
> battlefield of the modern woman's invasion of man's sphere the tea
> room is the skirmishing line whereby is defined the position of the
> enemy. It is the last station occupied by those advancing into the
> battle and the first sought by the wounded returning from the
> front.[40]

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[38] "The Tea Room Habit Has Come to Stay," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 3 April 1904, 7. The *New York Times* dates the tearoom craze to about 1895. For an excellent discussion of the social history of tearooms, see Whitaker, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn*.

[39] *Philadelphia Times*, "Restaurants for Women," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1893, 4.

[40] Richard Barry, "The Tea Rooms, Where Society and Business Meet," *New York Times*, 1 December 1912, X1.

But if women's restaurants helped to ease the nineteenth century women into modern society,

they were also viewed by some modern women—especially when run by conservative

proprietors who enforced lady-like conduct—as too restrictive.[41] These women wanted the

freedom to dine where they wanted and how they pleased.

Despite the growing number of urban restaurants that catered to women at the turn of the

century, change came slowly and respectable restaurants that offered accommodations for

unescorted women traveling in the United States remained rare outside of the largest

metropolitan centers. As late as 1910, the British traveler M. M. Maxwell warned women

traveling to the United States alone that they were in for a difficult time. "[I]t will come as a

surprise if not as a positive shock, to many Englishwomen to learn that in some respects a lone

women traveling in the United States has much more difficulty in finding hotel and restaurant

accommodation than she has in England; that, despite what we have long been accustomed to

think of as the American man's chivalry to women, the American women, traveling unescorted

by a member of the male sex, has often a great deal of trouble in inducing hotel managers to take

her in."[42]

Respectability

Historians of nineteenth-century America have described a dichotomy between the

masculine public sphere and the domestic female sphere.[43] Middle-class Americans regarded the

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[41] Mabel Herbert Urner, "Married Life in the Third Year: Helen Dines at Woman's Hotel and Learns Much of the 'Woman Alone'," *Washington Post*, 11 April 1913, 5.

[42] M. M. Maxwell, "Hotels for Women," *New York Times*, 21 October 1910, 6. Despite the growth of alternative restaurants for women, the custom was still strong enough in 1899 following the Spanish-American War for Dorothy Stanhope to find it remarkable that Cuban women dined together without male escorts (for lunch) and to predict that "the force of American example will cause the Cubans to break through their old customs." Dorothy Stanhope, "Food in Havana Is Poor," *New York Times*, 16 April 1899, 25.

[43] The idea of "separate spheres" was established in the 1960s by a number of historians—most notably Aileen Kraditor and Barbara Welter. Aileen S. Kraditor, *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-

public world as dangerous and corrupt, a place where men necessarily flouted the rules of propriety. While some corruption was tolerated as a necessary part of a man's public life, the material of politics and business, other forms of corruption, particularly sexual liberties, were condemned. Yet if some sins were less forgivable than others, all excesses were understood as the inherent risks of public life and men's baser natures.

The domestic sphere served as ballast to the corrupt world. Insulated, populated by family, and protected by the innate goodness of women, the home was a necessary escape from the world's corruption, a restorative for men who struggled with their own turpitude. Although the dichotomy between men's public role and women's private role can easily be exaggerated, home represented—particularly for the middle classes—a refuge from the harshness of life.

Difficulties arose in this idealized schema when women entered the public sphere. On the one hand, women represented the possibility of redemption. Women's native virtue might, some argued, serve as the antidote to vice. Politically, this argument served as a rally cry for men and women who supported the cause of women's suffrage in the second half of the nineteenth century and bolstered women's central role in the emergent Progressive movement. Culturally, it countenanced women's participation in urban entertainments such as the theater since it was assumed women would not tolerate cruder entertainments and that their presence would mitigate the excesses of men. On the other hand, women who entered the public sphere

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1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966). Subsequent works developed the concept further by suggesting that women found both freedoms and opportunities within the "separate spheres." See for example Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1 (1975); Nancy Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). In addition, Mary Ryan has argued that the "separate sphere" is a historically constructed idea of gender. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*; Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). More recent works have questioned how segregated men and women lives actually were (while still acknowledging that ideals were often constructed). Elizabeth White Nelson, *Market Sentiments: Middle-Class Market Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2004). In this work, I contend that the ideal of the separate spheres existed (even if in practice it did not always strictly govern nineteenth-century lives), that it was embraced by both elites and the middle classes, and that the middle classes were the first to question its validity.

risked their innocence. Unaccustomed to the world's vulgarities, even the most virtuous woman

might be led astray. In a restaurant, an innocent glass of wine foisted on a woman by an

overeager and intimidating waiter might set a woman on a dangerous path leading to seedier and

seedier restaurants, then saloons, and eventually to destitution.[44] Worse, the debased woman in

turn posed a danger to men. Once exposed to the public marketplace, the woman desirous of

luxury but lacking financial resources faced the nearly insurmountable temptation to sell her

body, first in the high-class brothel, and later to any man for the price of a dinner.[45] In sharp

contrast to her domestic sister, the debauched public woman was dangerous, a siren who would

capitalize on men's innate corruptibility.

In practice, as Mary Ryan has argued in *Women in Public*, this simple catalogue of

women's virtues and vices was never so simple. The more nineteenth-century man tried to

employ gender as a metaphor for degradation and redemption, the more he "inadvertently

exposed the ambiguities of gender identity and the arbitrariness of gender dualism."[46] To

counter the slippery lines between the righteous and the sinful, middle-class journalists and

reform writers struggled to map out the city in order to catalog where women were most likely to

dispel corruption and where they were most likely to fall prey to vice. The chief criteria that the

reformers imposed was class. As Ryan notes: "The endangered *lady* was clearly of the upper

and middle class; the dangerous *woman* came from the ranks of the poor and the laboring

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[44] The restaurant as a gateway to alcoholism and, eventually, prostitution, was a staple concern of prohibitionists in the nineteenth century. See for example Robinson, *Hot Corn*. Samuel Paynter Wilson, *Chicago by Gaslight* (n.p.: n.d., ca. 1910).

[45] As with alcoholism, the luxury of dining was viewed as a temptation to prostitution. See Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980); David Graham Phillips, *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise*; Robinson, *Hot Corn*. See also Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

[46] Ryan, *Women in Public*, 73.

classes."[47] [Emphasis added.] Women of good breeding, shielded by an ancestral armor of manners and decorum, might enter the public sphere secure in the knowledge that they would transform it or know when to escape. Those who cultivated this discretion, or at least by birth and class had gained the reputation for such discretion, were considered "respectable."

The theater is often referenced by historians to illustrate both the danger that lower-class women posed and the reformation that upper- and middle-class women promised. Until the 1850s, the public theater was a rowdy place with tawdry shows that no respectable woman would attend. But while the theater was a masculine realm, it was never a wholly male affair. The upper tiers of many American theaters were packed with working-class prostitutes offering their wares. This changed, so the story goes, at the mid-century when the prostitutes were evicted and respectable women began to frequent the theater with their gentlemanly escorts. George G. Foster, a reporter for the *New York Tribune* and the most illustrious man-about-town of his generation, famously wrote of Niblo's Gardens in New York in 1848:

> The rope-dancing and comic pantomime of the Ravels, with a just
> respectable comedietta company two nights in the week—these are
> the staples with which Mr. Niblo nightly fills his house, winter and
> summer, year after year. The secret of it is very simple—no
> woman is admitted at this house, under any pretext, unless
> accompanied by a gentleman. The consequence is that rowdies
> avoid the house, or, if they visit it, have not inducement for
> misbehaving—and respectable and quiet people freely come, with
> their wives and children, sure of being neither shocked by
> obscenity nor frightened by violence. The performances, too, are
> always good, piquantly selected, and run off easily, so that if you
> go there you may safely calculate on being amused instead of
> bored.[48]

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Foster and Blumin, *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches*, 156-57.

And Niblo's was not unique. Other theaters, ballrooms and restaurants established reputations for respectability by catering to upper- and middle-class women who mustered a gentleman escort.[49]

Foster's account of Niblo's Garden illustrates the esteem respectable women and their escorts were afforded in nineteenth-century America. But although Foster's account confirms the cultural landscape of class and gender imagined by his contemporaries (and, regrettably, sometimes portrayed as reality by historians), we must be careful not to be drawn too deeply into a portrait that reflected the biases of those who painted it. The chroniclers of the nineteenth-century urban experience were gentlemen and ladies to whom the very thought that a woman of impeccable reputation and substantial means might surrender to vice was an inconceivable violation of their own ethics. These writers found vice where they looked for it and, with a few notable exceptions, they limited their gaze to the working class. In doing so they obscured the historian's view of the relationship between class and respectability, and—because they were naïve or awestruck—failed to see that class did not always predict behavior.

When respectable aristocratic women entered a public sphere, vice *disappeared from view*, but it did not disappear. When George G. Foster wrote about Niblo's—either because he did not know or because he could not see—he told only part of the story. The vice was still there, only now it was discretely hidden behind a restaurant's curtain. Edith Harman Brown, writing in 1904—and thus a little less constrained by the genteel discretion which characterizes Foster's earlier account—recalled Niblo's Garden and the restaurants that surrounded the theater somewhat differently.

> [Keefe's was] a restaurant largely patronized by the Four—or
> rather the One Hundred of that day [i.e., New York Society]. It

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[49] Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States, 1630-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 108; Ryan, *Women in Public*, 80-1.

was on Broadway, just above Niblo's. Here the curtained tables
were in use, and from what we are told, screened off many a noisy
party especially on a night when the Ravels had been performing at
the garden.[50]

Restaurants often turned a blind eye to the indiscretions of their most elite patrons. At the time

of the Civil War, many American restaurants offered private, raised and curtained booths where

men might meet to discuss business during the day and entertain women, not necessarily wives,

at night. As Brown recalled, these curtained booths were particularly common in upper-class

restaurants at fashionable addresses. "Then there were Florence's and Sherwood's, at Broadway

and Park Place, the first restaurant to introduce the curtained tables. Each table being enclosed

by hangings, the advantages and disadvantages of such an arrangement for a hilarious party of

young men are obvious." [51]

Brown's account, if not as myopic as Foster's, is still veiled. Only by subtle

implication—the linking of the Ravel's performances and the curtained booths, the reference to

unexplained "advantages and disadvantages"—is the curtain pushed back, offering us a glimpse

of how wealthy nineteenth-century men behaved. But if Brown's account is less than explicit

(note how she distances herself from the tale by invoking "from what we are told"), it

nonetheless suggests where we should look to understand how the wealthy hid their indiscretions

and how codes of respectability facilitated this ruse.

Restaurant policies that excluded or restricted women did not always, as George Foster

suggests, remove the "inducement for misbehaving," they often only displaced and disguised the

"obscenity" and "violence" of aristocratic male culture.[52] While the curtained booth was short-

lived, appearing rarely after the Civil War, its successor was infamous. Large hotels and

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[50] Brown, "Where Old New Yorkers Ate," 6.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Foster and Blumin, *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches*, 157.

restaurants through the early twentieth century offered private dining rooms for wealthy patrons. Ostensibly a place where ladies could dine hidden away from the boisterous restaurant crowd, the private room also hid a multitude of vices. In 1900, a waitress in a fashionable Midwestern restaurant observed that "[m]ost of the restaurants have private boxes. They never allow girls to serve anybody in there as they are afraid of having them insulted. They are great places for women with other women's husbands."[53] More expensive to rent than the curtained booth, the private room ensured that discretion and indiscretion was the *exclusive privilege of the upper class*. If for the middle classes, the separate spheres assigned to men and women promised moral clarity, for the wealthy class the segregation of men and women facilitated private vice. Class did not, as the mid-nineteenth century reformer believed, eliminate licentiousness.

The private dining room offered protection from the public gaze for only so long. By the 1890s, the growing press was beginning to take an interest in the antics of the rich and nouveau riche.[54] Late nineteenth century reporters, a new breed of professional reporters not cowed by wealth, sought out tales of sumptuous dinners, illegal gambling, excessive drinking and illicit trysts that transpired behind closed doors. In this period, the way in which aristocratic respectability served men's baser interests was fleetingly revealed. For the middle classes who had embraced the idea that respectability stemmed from class, these scandalous revelations fueled their growing contempt for the upper class and contributed to their critique of aristocratic culture.

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[53] Mamie Lawrence, "A Waiter Girl's Experience," *What to Eat*, October 1900, 301. On the coasts where immigrant labor was more available, women were not hired to wait tables at elite establishments until the nineteen teens. Commentators disagreed as to whether the waitress would exploit her sex for higher tips or whether the male patron would seek to exploit his authority over the waitress, but in most fashionable restaurants the illusion of respectability was maintained by hiring men to wait tables.

[54] For a general discussion of the New York press, see Dunlop, *Gilded City*, xix. Not all of the publicity was unwanted. As the numbers of wealthy in New York swelled during the Gilded Age, parvenus sought press coverage of their homes, parties and charitable events to bolster their claims to Society membership. Many elite women hired personal secretaries who acted as press agents.

Lavish dinners served in contrived splendor and at unimaginable cost made headlines.

Sherry's, Delmonico's chief rival for New York's elite diners, drew attention in 1903 when it

hosted a party celebrating the opening of a new $200,000 stable for thoroughbreds. The

fourteen-course dinner, paid for by the "American Horse King" C. K. G. Billings, was served on

horseback in a private dining room decorated in a rustic style for the occasion.[55] Costumed balls

with the guests dressed as historical royalty, artificial lakes with live swans squawking and

swimming, and floral displays that cost more than the china, raised middle-class eyebrows.

Although some of these events passed with a minimum of public concern, others excited popular

outrage. In 1904 James Hazen Hyde's elaborate dinner costing $200,000 led to an investigation

of his family's firm, Equitable Life Assurance Society, and eventually to his self-imposed exile

from the United States.[56]

Scandals of extravagance, however, did not draw the same attention as the scandals of

salaciousness. In 1896, what was known infamously as the "Seeley Dinner," exposed the

lecherousness of wealth. The dinner, which was interrupted by a police raid, featured scantily-

clad dancers and souvenir drug paraphernalia. At the subsequent trial it was revealed that the

Seeley brothers, nephews of the late P.T. Barnum, had trolled "talent" agencies for teenage girls

willing to remove their clothing and that during the party the women were "grabbed and touched

indiscriminately."[57] Gilded Era journalists uncovered other sex scandals. In the early 1890s,

New York's annual French Chef's Ball—a culinary orgy attended by wealthy men of all ages as

well as young working class women—was described by the city's newspapers as a "riot of

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[55] Kate Simon, *Fifth Avenue: A Very Social History*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 117; Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 320. Thomas misstates the date as 1900.
[56] Simon, *Fifth Avenue: A Very Social History*, 118; Wecter, *The Saga of American Society*, 371.
[57] Dunlop, *Gilded City*, 189.

debauchery" and was temporarily suspended.[58] In 1901, the self-made financier James

Buchanan Brady, known as "Diamond Jim," excited gossip when the soon-to-be-notorious

Stanford White treated him to a birthday celebration that featured a near-naked chorus girl, Susie

Johnson, popping out of a giant pie to join the bevy of other chorine souvenirs distributed to the

twenty or so guests.[59] As M. H. Dunlop argues in her account of the Seeley Dinner, the true

tragedy in the minds of many of the Seeley's wealthy contemporaries was that the scandals had

become public, exposing the dalliances of wealthy men and threatening their family's

reputations.[60] But for the middle-class, such events undermined the claim that wealth guaranteed

respectability while reinforcing their own claim to moral superiority.

The most publicized scandals generally did not involve the oldest families or the most

august names nor did they take place in the most staid aristocratic restaurants. In the 1890s, New

York gave birth to the Lobster Palace, "smart set" restaurants that catered to both the wealthy

and the stars, featuring "bird-and-bottle" dinners where the bird was a female dinner companion

and the bottle held champagne. [61] Immortalized in the 1913 song by Hubble and Conn "If a

Table at Rector's Could Talk," the Lobster Palaces were the site of brazen dalliances.

> You would hear what someone's Adam said to someone else's
> Eve/ You would hear that men don't have to wear a moustache to
> deceive . . . A lot of men would pony up a lot of alimony . . . some
> good old reputations would start off on long vacations, / If a table
> at Rector's could talk . . .[62]

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[58] Ibid., 55-6.

[59] Batterberry and Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 166.

[60] Dunlop, *Gilded City*, 182-3. Dunlop argues that during the Seeley scandal, the *Times* and the *Tribune* portrayed the hired chorus girls as the perpetrators and the men as the victims. The Seeley men, although initially facing ridicule, were largely exonerated and even gained the sympathy of some in the public who felt their reputations should have been protected. Likewise, Sherry's restaurant survived the scandal by suggesting, disingenuously, that they had no reason to suspect what the party would entail.

[61] "The Café Madrid may still be called a lively spot in the early morning hours. . . .[Y]ou may see there people who are in Lobster Palace Society but not in the Four Hundred and –hist!—you may also see some people who are in both. It is extraordinary how the two sets overlap each other at the edges—people from Fifth Avenue are such climbers, anyway." Julian Street, "Lobster Palace Society," *Everybody's Magazine* 1910, 654.

[62] Nancy Groce, *New York: Songs of the City* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1999), 39.

But if the scandalous antics of wealthy men were more likely to make the newspapers when enacted in the backroom of Rector's than the backroom of Delmonico's, and the nouveau riche were less able to quell rumors of their scions' profligate escapades than the Knickerbockers, these scandals nonetheless were made possible by the cherished ideals that both the old aristocratic restaurant and the new Lobster Palace embraced: women dined in these restaurants only when accompanied by men whose wealth and breeding placed them above reproach.

Far from having a taming effect, the codes that governed the aristocratic restaurant—that allowed men to determine who was welcome in the restaurant and who was not—empowered vice. Taking advantage of the rules that barred unescorted women from the better restaurants, an aristocratic man might dine with his mistress knowing that his wife or sister, unescorted and uninvited, would be none-the-wiser so long as the celebration did not become so extravagant as to attract the press. Nor would the well-heeled gentleman need to look far for a dinner companion. The gendered economy of the nineteenth century provided few opportunities for a woman to support herself and fewer options still for the unescorted women to experience the culture of the city. For some women, the promise of sexual favors—delivered or not—in exchange for a trip to the theater or a dinner at a nice restaurant offered the only chance she had of experiencing the enticements of city life. How common or voluntary these "dates" were is unknowable, but, in the middle-class reform literature of the turn-of-the-century, restaurant dinners were often portrayed as the wages of sin. In Solon Robinson's *Hot Corn*, the tragic "hot corn" vendor Sally tells her not-yet-wise-to-the-world brother Bill that when she gets "a little bigger" she will no longer have to peddle peanuts or sell hot corn. "No, sir-ee. I will dress as fine as she [a passing prostitute] does, and go to balls and theatres, and have good suppers and wine, at Taylor's, and lay a-bed next day just as long as I please. Why not? I am as good

looking, if I was dressed up, as she is."[63]   In the muckraker David Graham Phillips' tale about

Susan Lenox, the middle-class runaway discovers she cannot survive as a factory worker and

turns to prostitution; Susan's first prostitutes herself when a wealthy college man offers to pay

for her dinner.[64]

The scandals and the prostitutes were only the most notorious revelations of the

masculine economy of licentiousness that flourished where women were barred and money was

plentiful. By excluding women from the public restaurant, elite men created places dedicated to

self-gratification. In private clubs, public saloons and upper-class restaurants where

"respectable" women were seldom admitted without escort, men ate and drank in manly

splendor. Even the décor celebrated male privilege. A San Francisco restaurant featured,

according to its bill of fare, private spaces that celebrated masculinity.

> Our Beefsteak Rooms afford an opportunity for novel
> entertainment, which must appeal to the gentlemen who
> contemplate bachelor dinners or like functions. Here you may
> entertain your friends under the rafters and feel assured that the
> surroundings will aid materially in the success of your
> entertainment.[65]

These masculine spaces featured grand bars and well-stocked humidors and walls hung with

French oil paintings that featured nude women veiled only by the occasional well placed leaf and

the respectability conveyed by classical mythology. Famously, the Hoffman House, otherwise

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[63] Robinson, *Hot Corn*, 19-20.

[64] Phillips, *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise*. Phillips, a muckraking journalist and novelist, described a vast street economy where poor and lower middle-class girls invaded the entertainment districts of New York nightly seeking men who would at least buy them dinner. "On this first night of business weather in nearly two weeks the streets were crowded with women and girls. They were desperately hard up and they made open dashes for every man they could get at. All classes were made equally bold . . . Out from all kinds of shelters swarmed the women who were demonstrating how prostitution flourishes and tends to spread to every class of society whenever education develops tastes beyond the earning power of their possessors." As late as 1909, police in San Diego attempted to enforce a rule that women had to dress formally (no kimonos) when out at night in order to try to distinguish "respectable" women from "women of easy virtue [who] have made a practice of visiting cheap restaurants at night in scanty attire." "Puts Kimonos Off Streets," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 August 1909, I17.

[65] Quoted in Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 127.

one of the most staid turn-of-the-century hotels, featured Bouguereau's mammoth oil painting of

four frolicking nymphs leading a satyr to the edge of a river.[66] (The social critic Julian Street

quipped: "Many Tenderloin restaurateurs and hotel keepers are 'art patrons.' Their taste in

paintings is extraordinarily uniform—ladies out of uniform being the prevailing subjects."[67])

Made possible by the rules that segregated women diners, the art and the carousing that took

place beneath it further vindicated those rules.

The segregation of public dining also benefited aristocratic women. When called upon to

justify the regulations governing when women could dine and who women could dine with,

restaurateurs claimed that their policies protected ladies from the embarrassment of sitting across

the room from unescorted women whose motives for dining alone were all too fathomable.

Harriot Blatch was not impressed with this logic, but in subtle ways, the rules not only served to

enhance the social standing of the wealthy "respectable" woman but also cloaked their own

vices. No less than their husbands, aristocratic women exploited the nineteenth-century rules of

respectably.

Thorstein Veblen wrote in the *Theory of the Leisure Class* that "[a] cheap coat makes a

cheap man;" so too, it might have been said in the nineteenth century, "a cheap restaurant makes

a cheap woman."[68] At the time, the most fashionable restaurants acknowledged a woman's

social status with their exclusivity. Visitors to the tearoom in the Plaza Hotel noted how the

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[66] Dunlop, *Gilded City*, 189. See also Batterberry and Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 145. A best-selling lithograph of the period tellingly shows a hobo looking at Bouguereau's "Nymphs and Satyr" with the caption "I've been looking all over the world for that creek, but darned if I can find it." Of course, hobos were not admitted to the Hoffman House's "gentleman's" bar but the joke required a lower class stooge. The wealthy men of New York's aristocratic society did not need to look for the fanciful river in order to find their nymphs. The Bouguereau painting now hangs in the Clark Institute in Massachusetts.

[67] Street, "Lobster Palace Society," 648.

[68] Equally applicable, Thorstein Veblen wrote about fashion: "Since the wealthy leisure class has grown so large, or the contact of the leisure-class individual with members of his own class has grown so wide, as to constitute a human environment sufficient for the honorific purpose, there arises a tendency to exclude the baser elements of the population from the scheme even as spectators whose applause or mortification should be sought." Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, chap. 7.

headwaiter "in an instant glance of steel-blue eyes decides if you are fit" before he took you to a table.[69] In Delmonico's tea room—in the first decade of the twentieth century—men could not dine unless accompanied by a woman.[70] These policies, along with those that barred the unescorted or unladylike woman, made restaurants status symbols. The woman who dined in an exclusive establishment was assured that she was a respectable lady and she could turn up her nose at any women who dined—at risk to their bodies and reputations—in restaurants that admitted everyone regardless of gender or income. In an age when Society women sought forums to advertise and enhance their reputations, the women's dining rooms of fashionable restaurants affirmed a woman's "respectability" and flattered her sensibilities with flowers, oriental rugs and pastel décors.

Aristocratic women celebrated their segregation as evidence of their ladylike behavior, but these women also used the privacy and reputation of the restaurant to hide their own multitude of sins. For women who indulged in alcohol, illicit affairs or gambling, restaurants and tearooms provided a veneer of respectability that allowed the Society women who frequented the most fashionable of these restaurants the opportunity to indulge in vices (as well as scones and matched china) without tarnishing their reputations.

Alcohol was one of the whispered about vices that wealthy women could find in restaurants. Writing in the early twentieth century, Samuel Paynter Wilson, author of *Chicago by Gaslight*, lamented that "[e]ven women of respectability and good social positions are guilty of the vice of intemperance. They all do not frequent barrooms, however, but obtain liquor at the restaurants patronized by them, and it is a common sight to see well-dressed women, married and

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[69] Whitaker, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn*, 25. The event took place in 1913.
[70] "Society's Latest Fad-Tearooms," *New York Times*, 25 April 1909, 9.

single, rise from a restaurant table under the influence of intoxicating drink."[71] While Wilson, a

self-described "investigator" with a passionate belief that department stores, ice cream parlors

and the Young Woman's Christian Association were dens of iniquity had an ax to grind, a few of

the more snobbish Society women were of the same mind. Gertrude Atherton, California

aristocrat by marriage and a prolific author of gothic and historical fiction, spared little vitriol in

describing the vices of New York society in 1906:

> There is a woman in New York society whose notorious vulgarities
> of speech and action, to say nothing of her abominable manners,
> are only condoned on account of her wealth and inherited position;
> and it is also an open secret that certain of her associates have
> more than once been carried out of fashionable restaurants, or,
> resisting, have made a scene on the pavement until forced into their
> carriages. . . . The wealthier women who have come to believe that
> they are above all laws, do not hesitate to order it any hour in the
> public restaurants. I took "tea" with five of them one afternoon at
> the Waldorf, and those that did not order whiskey revived
> themselves with absinthe. Then they abused everyone whose name
> came up, composing as they chattered, and no doubt forgetting as
> quickly."[72]

More sober voices were less certain. A writer for the *New York Times* in 1894 acknowledged

that rumors of Society women tippling were widespread but could not find a single Society

woman who would admit to drinking. The author concluded "smokers and wine drinkers are the

exception rather than the rule, even among the most fashionable, else such failings would be

more conspicuous" (and then blamed the French for leading the few astray).[73] But the *Times* poll

notwithstanding, inconspicuousness was exactly what the aristocratic woman tippler sought and

what the fashionable restaurant promised. A less gullible reporter followed two well-dressed

women to a tea room in 1913 where he observed a waiter serve the women a "special brand of

tea . . . the notable fact about which was that it failed to steam when poured." Such "tea" was

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[71] Samuel Paynter Wilson, *Chicago by Gaslight* (Chicago: n.d., ca.1910), 146.
[72] Gertrude Atherton, "The New Aristocracy," *Cosmopolitan*, April 1906, 624.
[73] "Women Who Smoke Rare," 18.

served discretely in teapots and teacups.[74] Other reports from the time seemed to confirm that

Society women drank behind the closed doors of restaurants and tea shops.[75]

Tearooms and other women's restaurants were also excellent places for men and women

to meet without attracting undue attention. In 1850 George Foster recounted a visit to an upper-

class New York "Ice-Creamery." Most of the patrons were "fine ladies who visit here between

their shopping calls, their visitations or their millineryings." And most appeared chaste: "Fat

wives of lean financiers, speculators and tradesmen—we beg pardon, merchant princes—

flaunting in scarlet, yellow, blue and green, whose pride is in their cashmeres and carriages, and

whose flirtations are limited to disputes with the clerks at Beck's or Stewart's—these form the

staple of the guests."[76] But Foster also spied a few couples whose motives for meeting in an ice

cream parlor he immediately suspected. For these "well known characters" he constructed

elaborate biographies. "Yonder are a middle-aged man and woman in deep and earnest

conversation. They are evidently man and wife—though not *each other's!* Should their

legitimate spouses suddenly make their appearance, there would be white lips and fearful

hearts!"[77] And these two were not the only illicit lovers Foster uncovered. Yonder sat a

wealthy, young married woman and her kept man, a representative of the city's literati. And

across the room, Foster noticed a cuckolded husband who returned to his table to find his wife

seated next to "a handsome young 'friend of the family.'"[78] "Some unsophisticated reader,"

Foster assumed, "may be shocked at this—but it is a very mild form of the hypocrisy that

pervades the fashionable ranks of society."[79]

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[74] Whitaker, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn*, 19.
[75] Barry, "The Tea Rooms," X1.
[76] Foster and Blumin, *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches*, 133-4.
[77] Ibid., 134.
[78] Ibid., 135-6.
[79] Ibid., 135.

Foster's flirtatious women were imagined archetypes, but fifty years later Genie H. Rosenfeld cautioned readers of *What to Eat* of a similar "hypocrisy." Rosenfeld warned that as "friendly and delightful as [tea times] are it would be a thousand pities if the habit entered so largely into the life of the American woman that she would encourage the establishment of Tea Rooms" since "[t]hese rooms, instituted for the relief of the woman who is separated from her especial tea circles and yet pines for refreshment, have degenerated into places where the undesirable of both sexes meet to idle away an hour or two, and where good for nothing young men lunge in to make life unendurable for the pretty young girls who are engaged as waitresses.[80]

There is no telling how common it was for "respectable" women to sneak a cocktail or a kiss at a fashionable women's restaurant. Nor would it be wise to try to compare the transgressions of aristocratic men to aristocratic women. But both upper-class men and women utilized the respectability of their aristocratic institutions in much the same way; the reputation of elite restaurants sanctified the social standing of elite patrons and sheltered their respectability.

Respectability Redux

During the early years of the Republic, a certain democratic hubris may have led many to the conclusion that any citizen might make a claim to respectability, but by the mid-nineteenth century "respectable" acquired a host of further meanings. "Respectable" came to be closely associated with both wealth and gender. While the 1895 *Century Dictionary* defined "respectable" as "having an honest or good reputation" (regardless—the dictionary editors made of point of stating—of class), the dictionary also acknowledge that the term was used to describe

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[80] Genie H. Rosenfeld, "Notes Dramatic," *What to Eat*, November 1903, 157.

those "occupying . . . a fairly good position in society."[81] In practice, the desire to police its membership led aristocratic America to emphasize the latter, more exclusive definition. "Respectability," in the eyes of Society matrons, must flow from good breeding, social standing and a thorough knowledge of the conventions of dress and manner or it would have no substance; what headwaiter after all could tell if a woman was honest at a glance?[82] For the restaurateur who served as the guardian of an elite establishment, respectability was what the myriad etiquette manuals of the late nineteenth century preached and what the wealthy, by the grace of their birth, breeding and bank accounts, embodied. The trick was to recognize Mrs. Vanderbilt and give her a good table, because no one could question Mrs. Vanderbilt's respectability. The deference afforded wealth was incontrovertible; respectability only became a matter for deliberation when those of lesser means intruded on the spaces that the wealthy called their own.

No doubt there were many middle-class women in the late nineteenth and the early century who embraced this exclusive notion of respectability and who, bearing an armful of etiquette manuals, and marshalling their disposable income, sought a seat at the Waldorf-Astoria. No doubt that there were many who, reading in the *New York Times* or *What to Eat* that Society women were wearing short restaurant dresses in the Winter of 1906, scurried to a Fifth Avenue tailor to have one fitted.[83] But many discovered, as Harriot Blatch had, that the aristocratic definition of respectability was designed to exclude them, not embrace them.

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[81] "Respectable," in *The Century Dictionary: An Encyclopedia Lexicon of the English Language*, ed. William Dwight Whitney (New York: The Century Company, 1895), 5109.

[82] The other term of inclusion and exclusion employed by restaurants and hotels was "lady," a term even more severely limiting than respectability. A lady might be a "woman of good family and established social position" or a "woman of good breeding, education and refinement of mind and manner," but to use the term "indiscriminately" as a synonym for woman was considered vulgar. "'Lady'," in *The Century Dictionary: An Encyclopedia Lexicon of the English Language*, ed. William Dwight Whitney (New York: The Century Company, 1895), 3328.

[83] "A noticeable fact in connection with dining room costumes is a sudden craze for short dresses." Marila Pemberton, "Fads and Fancies of Gotham: Short Skirts for Dining Room Costumes," *What to Eat*, January 1906, 31;

In the nineteenth century, the restaurant was a conservative institution that clung to its

elite patronage and the aristocratic values of that class with tenacity. What bound elite

restaurants like Delmonico's and its many imitators was a mutual embrace of aristocracy and its

codes of respectability. With high prices, sumptuous décor, French menus and policies that

segregated or excluded woman based on their perceived "respectability" and wealth, these

restaurants cultivated well-guarded reputations for propriety and exclusivity.

In the early twentieth century, the staid aristocratic restaurant's commitment to nineteenth

century ideals of "respectability" was challenged by a new urban middle class demanding its

place at the table. New restaurants were opened and old restaurants expanded—eager to capture

the lucrative trade.[84] As competition grew, however, and elite restaurants struggled to secure a

place in the newly competitive marketplace, their dedication to aristocratic respectability seemed

increasingly at odds with an urban middle-class clientele whose nineteenth-century commitment

to separate spheres had been replaced with a twentieth-century ideal of companionate marriage

and an emerging acceptance of women's autonomy.[85] While fashionable restaurants in

America—particularly in New York where the effects of a liberalizing middle class were most

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Marila Pemberton, "Mrs. Belmont's Restaurant Dress," *What to Eat*, January 1906, 32. Restaurant dresses remained popular, although not short, through the early nineteen teens. In 1911, the *New York Times* Sunday edition featured a photo spread of "restaurant gowns and wraps" showing what New York's most elite were wearing. It included a "white satin tunic over black velvet with bolero of point lace" by Pequin and an "Indian bonnet of metal embroidery with black aigrettes" by Marcelle Demay. "Restaurant Gowns and Wraps," *New York Times*, 16 April 1911, np. See also Mary Eleanor O'Donnell, "Smart Costumes for Restaurant and Theater Wear," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 January 1910, F1.

[84] In other countries, women were also establishing a presence in public restaurants. The *Caterer and Hotel Keeper's Gazette of London* noted in 1913 the "presence of ladies in public in restaurants—a thing almost unknown in a previous generation." The Gazette suggested that this followed the tendency of elite families to entertain "in the swell restaurants, such as those attached to the large hotels like the Savoy, Carlton, or Ritz." In contrast, Oliver Hueffer in France credited the increasing numbers of women diners to the "growth of the suffrage movement." Caterer and Hotel Keeper's Gazette quoted in "Restaurants of London and America," *The Steward* 8, no. 4 (1913): 24-5. On suffragists in France, see Oliver Madox Hueffer, "The Restaurants of Des Moineaux," *Living Age*, 9 June 1923, 588.

[85] Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 113-9.

acutely felt—made a spirited effort to pay lip service to aristocratic pretensions, their efforts to maintain the pretense that terms such as "respectable" and "ladylike" corresponded to wealth became increasingly difficult. In the newly realized consumer society of the twentieth century, "respectable" would increasingly become synonymous with "customer." By 1920, the class and gender underpinnings of the aristocratic culture of the nineteenth century had been largely swept away.

The rising numbers of middle-class men and women participating in urban life forced restaurants and hotels to publicly justify their use of "respectability" as a means of preserving exclusivity. In March of 1891, the Fifth Avenue Hotel refused lodgings to an unescorted woman. The Fifth Avenue claimed it had acted appropriately. The woman had arrived at the Twenty-third Street entrance, unaccompanied and late at night. The hotel clerk "at once decided that a woman seeking rooms in that unconventional manner was not one who would dignify the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and told her that she could not be admitted."[86] Within days, newspapers seized upon the story and New York's hotels were struggling to explain policies that barred unescorted and presumably disreputable women. The Fifth Avenue Hotel, which prided itself on being the city's "woman's hotel," asserted that "no respectable woman was ever refused admission to the hotel."[87] Other establishments made similar claims. The Hoffman House, the St. James, the Gilsey, the Sturtevant and the Imperial all claimed that men and women were treated "exactly alike."

But in practice men and women were not treated alike. Although a hotel might turn away a man whose shabby dress suggested he would not be able to pay the bill, no hotel refused a

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[86] "Lone Women Not Slighted," *New York Times*, 1 March 1891, 9. The newspapers are not clear, but the Fifth Avenue may have had a "family entrance" and part of the difficulty may have been that the woman arrived at the wrong door.
[87] Ibid.

room to a man merely because he arrived late or was unescorted. When the hotel clerk at the

Sturtevant hotel explained that he had never heard of a "respectable woman being refused

admittance to a New York hotel," he was parroting the nineteenth century aristocratic convention

that assumed that women of high station were—regardless of behavior—respectable.[88] For those

who embraced this notion of respectability, there was little controversy in a hotel or restaurant

refusing service to a woman who would not "dignify" the establishment. But times were

changing and each subsequent controversy eroded the assumed right of a hotel or restaurant to

pass judgment on the moral standing of its guests.[89]

In January 1907 the Waldorf-Astoria placed a notice on its bulletin board: "Ladies

without escort will be served in the restaurants hereafter at any hour."[90] The Waldorf-Astoria

was the city of New York's largest hotel, and while it was also among its most elegant, the

necessity of filling its vast dining rooms may have encouraged the hotel to be among the first of

New York's fashionable establishments to admit unescorted women at any hour.[91] As Oliver

Herford once quipped, the Waldorf-Astoria "brought exclusiveness to the masses."[92] Yet the

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[88] Ibid. Women, initially, accepted the respectability standard if it was applied universally. The Civic and Political Equality League of the City of New York passed a resolution in 1898 asserting "that women be protected in their civil rights in being entitled to food or shelter in any house of public entertainment by day or night, if they are as respectable as men claiming the same privileges." "Women's Equality Union," *New York Times*, 10 February 1898, 7.

[89] Class distinctions are difficult to categorize in the United States. In the following section, female transgressors are often described, at least initially, as "respectable" women. Some of these women may have been elite Society women. Nonetheless, it will be argued that their ability to enact changes is part of a larger shift in the class of the consuming public and the ways in which such changes destabilized traditional categories of class and consumption.

[90] "Any Woman's a Lady Who Behaves That Way," *New York Times*, 12 January 1907, 8.

[91] The motives of George Boldt, proprietor of the Waldorf-Astoria, in admitting women at all hours can only be guessed. New York experienced a hotel building boom in the first decade of the twentieth century; the St. Regis and the Hotel Astor opened in 1904, the Gotham in 1905, the Belmont and the Knickerbocker in 1906, and, most threatening to the Waldorf-Astoria, the Plaza in the fall of 1907. Boldt made a concerted and successful effort to expand the restaurant and hotel trade in the late 1890s when the Waldorf-Astoria opened and it is possible he saw an appeal to women in 1907 as another way of expanding his trade and warding off competition. In his history of the Waldorf-Astoria, Albin Pasteur Dearing does not offer an explanation for the new policy regarding escorts other than to suggest that the role of women was changing. But Dearing does confirm that the new policy was a first in New York and suggests that it was widely imitated throughout the United States and oversees. Dearing, *The Elegant Inn*, 196, 97, 211.

[92] Wecter, *The Saga of American Society*, 288.

Waldorf-Astoria's new policy was not as democratic or as progressive as it might first appear and the city's middle-class press was quick to scrutinize the nebulous rule.

The Waldorf-Astoria might have intended the new policy as a quiet capitulation to the middle-class dining public, but an enterprising reporter for the *New York Times* turned the decision into a farcical commentary on aristocratic pretension.[93] Writing in a reporter's breezy prose, the *Times'* correspondent acknowledged that until the Waldorf-Astoria took this step it had been "an unwritten rule . . . in most hotels and restaurants in the city that a woman without escort was overlooked—to put it gently—by the waiters, so that she would seek some other places where she would be served." But did the new policy mean that "the 'new' woman had conquered[?]" "Unfortunately, [with the new policy] it did not seem to be a question of a woman's right to dine when and where she pleased, but rather one of her eligibility and right to the title of lady."

The intrepid Times' reporter set out to discover who, in the opinion of the city's hotels, might claim the title "lady." When he put his question to the management of the Waldorf-Astoria, they equivocated.

> "It has always been the rule of this house to entertain ladies—real ladies."
> "But what is a lady? Is it determined by determined by dress or manner or—or accent?" asked the reporter.
> "Why, my dear Sir—why, a lady, my good fellow, is a—um—lady, hey?"[94]

Undeterred, and perhaps engaging in a bit of fun at the expensive of the city's aristocrats, the reporter toured New York's hotels and restaurants posing the same question. Most of the city's restaurants were informally admitting unescorted women as long as they met some hazy and ill-

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[93] The article was reprinted in newspapers across the country. See "Definition of 'Lady' Wanted," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 January 1907, II3; *New York Times*, "Who's a Lady?" *Washington Post*, 13 January 1907.
[94] "Any Woman's a Lady Who Behaves That Way," 8.

defined notion of respectability, but when pressed, none were able to define what they meant by "lady." At Delmonico's, they claimed they "discouraged" unescorted women from dining at the restaurant, but "where the lady is known to us it is all right." Unescorted women who were not "known" were asked to bear the cost of a private room.

> "Suppose she doesn't want to [take a private room]?"
> "Then—Well, one must use discretion. If it is a lady--"
> "Yes, but how do you judge a lady?"
> "Well, a lady is one you can tell easily," said the night clerk. "You can tell by the way she sits, by the way she orders, by the way. Oh, man, a lady is a lady, don't you see?"[95]

Mr. Regan, the venerable manager of the Knickerbocker Hotel and one of the most outspoken restaurant men in New York, was no clearer. Acknowledging the influence of the growing middle-class public, Regan boldly admitted that his hotel's restaurants served unaccompanied women. "We cater for the public," Regan stated. "If a woman comes in here and sits down she'll be served as long as she is a lady." But, once again, when pressed to define what makes a lady, Regan stammered.

> My good Sir, a lady is—is—Now, see here, a woman who may not be a lady comes in here. She sits down and she realizes that there are fine people around her. She immediately sits up and says to herself: "Hm! This is the place where I've got to behave myself."[96]

Other eating establishments in the city were no less able to define respectability. Sherry's admitted unescorted women at any hour "so long as they looked well and behaved well." Rector's repeated the mantra-like refrain "So long as she is a lady." Tom Shanley of Shanley's Restaurant, not the most distinguished of New York's restaurants, refused to discuss what made a lady but promised that when a lady "comes in here, it is not, for an Irishman to treat her

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[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.

otherwise." Only the Hotel Astor allowed that they barred all unescorted women in the evening (unless they were a guest of the hotel).

For middle-class women, however, the nineteenth-century ideal of propriety embedded in the term "lady" was hopelessly out of step with the reality of their lives. A suffragist like Blatch, as the courts made clear, was *de facto* disreputable. Blatch lost her case not because she had created a disturbance but because as a politically engaged woman she was necessarily a threat to the old order and not a "lady." If the Waldorf-Astoria's new policy was intended to formally announce the opening of the restaurant to middle-class women, it was nonetheless clear that the Waldorf-Astoria would continue to discriminate based on a code of propriety that allowed wealthy women to drink alcohol from teapots but discouraged women from caring about issues more than appearances.

One did not have to be a suffragist to realize that the codes that governed dining were no longer applicable to many middle-class woman's lives. Newspaper articles written for working women, scarce as they were, warned modern women that the real threat to their social standing was not arriving at a restaurant without an escort, but rather acquiring, out of necessity, an escort who might compromise one's reputation. An 1897 article in the *Chicago Daily* recounted a discussion between a veteran businesswoman, a female clerk with twenty years experience, and a young graduate of a business college.

> "How about taking luncheon with a really high-toned man if he asks you?" inquired the novice. "Two or three have asked me."
>
> "O! my dear! The men in your office you mean, those you work for?"
>
> The novice nodded.
>
> "Never do it," said the veteran, jointing her chicken wing with a snap. "Never do it in a single instance."
>
> "It is a mistake to accept such attention, even in exceptional cases," said the efficient woman. "Treat all such offers politely,

but decline them firmly and in such a way that they will not be made a second time."[97]

For the middle-class woman, independence was often a better sign of respectability than an escort; middle-class women dined on their own terms.[98] Reflecting this sentiment, a *Chicago Daily Tribune* article from 1908 favorably contrasted the "young business girl" who paid for her date's meal because she received a "fair salary" to the "rich widows who [were] willing to pay the expenses of an escort for the sake of being able to dine at the most fashionable places."[99] Yet from the perspective of the restaurant with its institutionalized ideal of respectability, the equation was reversed and the wealthy, society woman was the "lady."

Restaurateurs' attempts to balance their commitment to the aristocratic codes of etiquette and the demands of the new middle classes produced a considerable degree of double-talk. Restaurant owners encouraged the profitable patronage of the middle-class diner, yet by training and experience, believed that the success of their restaurants required preserving their reputations for upper-class exclusivity. Restaurants that did not guard their reputations, the informal history of the restaurant trade suggested, failed.[100] The pretense of enforcing aristocratic codes of behavior while admitting most women shielded the restaurant from criticism that they encouraged immoral behavior (or that they were promoting women's rights) while ensuring that

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[97] "Women in Business Life: Feminine Wage-Earners Need a Code of Etiquette," *Chicago Daily*, 17 October 1897, 46.

[98] Independent women were winning respect in the larger community. See Chicago Inter-Ocean, "Independent Chicago Girls," *Washington Post*, 1 Jaunary 1888, 9.

[99] Janet Thurston, "Women Often Pay the Check, Man Helps to Eat the Meal," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 August 1908, D8. A similar article in the *Los Angles Times* (reprinted from the *New York Sun*) noted that businessmen woman who sought to hold meetings over lunch often had to pay for escorts. *New York Sun* [author], "Women Who Pay," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 March 1908, VII2.

[100] In 1882 the Hotel Brunswick Hotel sullied its once pristine reputation when it was tricked by Billy McGlory, the proprietor of a notorious "concert saloon," into hosting a party composed of gamblers and prostitutes. In 1907 the popularity of the Paul Potter play "The Girl from Rector's" (and later, the Ziegfeld Follies song "If a Table at Rector's Could Talk") seemed to foreshadow the decline of Rector's. Both restaurants failed years after they were implicated in scandals, but the idea that scandal could ruin a restaurant persisted. On the Hotel Brunswick, see Batterberry and Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 156-8. On Rector's see Dearing, *The Elegant Inn*, 153; Mariani, *America Eats Out*, 59.

their dining rooms were filled. But the equivocating posed its own problem. Delmonico's

conceded that it had once refused to seat Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt because the headwaiter had

failed to recognize the Society woman. [101] And few restaurants could afford mistakes of that

magnitude.

No issue illustrates the uneasy tension between the nineteenth century's standards of

propriety and the twentieth century's commitment to consumer democracy—aristocratic

etiquette versus middle-class accessibility—better than the lingering debate over whether woman

should be allowed to smoke in public restaurants. When a woman was barred from a restaurant,

it was usually a quiet affair. Only an activist such as Harriot Blatch would risk the

embarrassment of publicly acknowledging that a restaurant had found her reputation wanting.

Smoking, however, was never private or inconspicuous; it was a public challenge to the rules of

conduct that restaurants inherited from their aristocratic past.

In the nineteenth century, fashionable restaurants prohibited smoking, regardless of the

smoker's gender, from rooms where both men and women dined.[102] Etiquette demanded that

women were insulated from all evidence of men's corruption and even the smell of smoke on a

gentleman's coat, as one 1873 guide warned, might be considered offensive. "Never enter a

room, in which there are ladies, after smoking, until you have purified both [sic] your mouth,

teeth, hair, and clothes. If you wish to smoke just before entering a saloon, wear an old coat and

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[101] "Any Woman's a Lady Who Behaves That Way," 8. Lately Thomas tells a similar story without naming Vanderbilt. According to Thomas, Charles Delmonico recognized an (unnamed) grande dame but asked her to leave because she was not with a male escort. The rebuffed lady left without incident and later took the incident as a "compliment to Mr. Delmonico and his excellently moral establishment." Thomas, *Delmonico's*, 200.

[102] In 1883 (or 1889, accounts vary) Café Martin was the first restaurant to allow male patrons to smoke in the public dining rooms. Before the new policies, men had to leave their female guests and retire to the restaurant's exclusively male saloon for a postprandial cigar or cigarette. This practice reflected the standard maintained in aristocratic American homes well into the twentieth century; after dinner, well-bred women would retire to the parlor while men smoked and drank in the dining room or library. "Ladies May Smoke: On New Year's Even, and Perhaps Afterward, in at Least One Restaurant," *New York Times*, 30 December 1907, 2; "Not All May Smoke: Gotham Restaurants Puzzled over Woman's Rights," *Washington Post*, 5 January 1908, 10.

carefully brush your hair and teeth before resuming your own."[103] By the 1890s, restaurants had

relaxed their rules prohibiting men from smoking in public dining rooms even when

accompanied by women, but women were still prohibited from smoking. Even in the Lobster

Palaces where wealthy men brazenly courted actresses and chorus girls, women were not

allowed to smoke not least because they might lay bare the hypocrisy of aristocratic pretense.

Henry Collins Brown observed that the women who frequented the Lobster Palaces, "abandoned

creatures" he called them, "did not smoke in those days—for well they knew that an outraged

proprietor would have had them unceremoniously escorted to the door, at such an open affront to

public decency." "However," Brown observed, "there were compensations. Hundred dollar bills

and diamond necklaces were frequently tucked into the bunches of flowers that the flower girls

sold from high-heaped trays [and] champagne flowed like water . . ."[104] Restaurants could

tolerate the dalliances of the rich, but not the indulgence of women.

A decade later, the Lobster Palaces and their more staid competitors still barred women

from smoking. But smoking had, for many women, come to represent freedom from antiquated

cultural and gender norms.[105] When restaurants eventually relaxed their restrictions on women

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[103] Hartley, *The Gentlemen's Book of Etiquette*, 203. See also Frost, *Frost's Laws and by-Laws of American Society*, 102.

[104] Henry Collins Brown, *In the Golden Nineties* (Hastings-on-Hudson: Valentine's manual, 1928), 128. Lobster palaces attracted some middle-class men (especially young men) and, towards the end of the fad, even tourists. But it was wealthy elites who set the tone. "From 12 until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning the huge supper restaurants are wide open. Occasionally they are spoken of as 'lobster palaces.' Here, again, the man who has not a plethoric purse and the woman who is not fashionably gowned is out of place." On both the diversity of Lobster Palace guests and the primacy of the rich, see "New York That Never Sleeps," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 8 January 1905, 2. On Chicago's less licentious "millionaire's bohemia," see "Saturday Night in Chicago. How Millionaires Amuse Themselves in the 'Lobster Palaces' after the Theater," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 January 1908, 8D.

[105] As early as the 1890s, as cigarettes grew in popularity, women seized upon them as a symbol of the "new woman." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Reducing Tobacco Use: A Report of the Surgeon General* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2000), 36-7.

smoking, they irrevocably rejected the idea that there could be a single standard of respectability and sparked a storm of controversy.[106]

The first public smoking scandal took place on the eve of 1908.[107] Martin's Café, a stylish Lobster Palace restaurant, announced it would suspend its no smoking policy for "ladies" during its New Years Eve celebration.[108] Only a few women availed themselves of the new policy.

> There were perhaps a dozen women smoking in the café at one time, a little before 12 o'clock. They did it modestly, for the most part, and it was very evident that many were beginners, taking advantage of the edict just for the fun of it. Others appeared to be used to cigarettes and to enjoy them thoroughly. The smoking, however, was only a small part of the fun, for there was plenty to eat and to drink, songs to be sung, jokes to be played, and everyone was a good fellow, worth wishing a Happy New Years to.[109]

At first it seemed the evening had passed without controversy; few women smoked and those who had did it "modestly." Two days later, James Martin innocently declared that the New Year's Eve "experiment succeeded splendidly" and broadcasted his intention to allow female patrons to smoke unhindered. Martin justified the policy with the claim that "the most

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[106] In the nineteenth century, elite women risked their standing in society if they smoked publicly. The editor of *Vanity Fair* Frank Cronishield recalled the attitude of the aristocratic 1890s New York. "Nobody at the table is divorced because divorce is virtually unknown. The women have not rouged their faces, or reddened their lips. They do not smoke after the dinner, or during the dinner, because such an effrontery would not only make them ill, but would bring down a summary social ostracism upon them. No lady present is even remotely connected with a profession, because woman painters, decorators and singers are contraband. . . . The dinner lasts exactly two hours, during which time all the guests comport themselves with the utmost decorum." Frank Cronishield, "Personal Glimpses: How New York Society Got That Way," *The Literary Digest*, 20 January 1923, 44.

[107] Reports of women smoking in public parlors and dining rooms prior to 1908 suggest that smoking by woman had been quietly on the rise for much of the decade. In 1905, a Washington journalist recounted the story of two women who had been asked to stop smoking and complied. "Inquiry afterward revealed the fact that such a scene is a not uncommon occurrence at restaurants nowadays, but so far public sentiment favors the management." "Had to Give up Her Cigarette," *Washington Post*, 26 November 1905, A6.

[108] "Two Restaurants Let Women Smoke; but the Fifth Avenue Places Will Stick to the Old Rule at Present," *New York Times*, 2 January 1908, 3. Martin had been considering the "experiment" for some time and had recently built a smoking parlor on the second floor for women. It may not be a coincidence that a month before Martin's new policy, the *New York Times* ran an editorial criticizing women who smoked in public. "Ladies May Smoke," 2; "The Women Who Smoke," *New York Times*, 3 December 1907, 8.

[109] "Not Many Women Smoked," *New York Times*, 1 January 1908, 2.

respectable women in the restaurant" were smoking. But to reassure the doubters, he adopted the

hazy standard that had served the Waldorf-Astoria so well when it had abandoned its policy to

bar unescorted women. Martin promised his patrons that he would not tolerate "indiscriminate

smoking" by women who were not "ladies." [110]

> The truth is, it is all in the way it is done. If a respected woman
> comes here with her husband and cares to join him in a cigarette,
> we would not request her to stop, but if a conspicuous young
> woman started blowing rings of smoke simply for show we would
> promptly tell her it was not allowed, and ask her to go to the
> smoking room reserved from women on the second floor. [111]

The *New York Times* summarized the new policy: "In every case, it is likely to depend on the

sort of woman who wants to smoke." [112]

Rector's, Martin's closest competition for the patronage of the "smart set," quickly joined

the movement and announced it would also allow women to smoke. But the more staid New

York establishments—"Delmonico's, Sherry's, the Plaza, the St. Regis, the Gotham, or the other

hotels"—cautiously waited, enforcing the old rule "for the present." While a few of these

aristocratic restaurants were inclined to allow women to smoke, the *New York Times* reported,

none joined Martin's and Rector's with a public announcement. [113] Meanwhile, as word of the

new policy spread across the country from New York to San Francisco, local opinion varied. In

Washington, D.C., restaurant owners claimed that women were refraining from smoking in

public thus sparing the restaurants from having to set a clear policy. [114] In Chicago, "Lucy Page

Gaston, arch foe of cigarettes, made the rounds of cafés also, but she was unable to find women

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[110] "Two Restaurants Let Women Smoke," 3. See also "Ladies May Smoke," 2.
[111] "Not All May Smoke," 10.
[112] "Two Restaurants Let Women Smoke," 3. See also "Ladies May Smoke," 2.
[113] "Smoking by Women Popular," *Washington Post*, 3 January 1908, 2; "Two Restaurants Let Women Smoke," 3.
[114] "Feminity and Cigarettes," *Washington Post*, 14 January 1908, 6.

smoking cigarettes. She expressed herself as much relieved."[115] In San Francisco, according to published accounts, Society women "set the seal of their approval" on women smoking and began to smoke "along with their husbands in full view of the public diners."[116]

The nation's indecision emboldened critics; within days of James Martin's announcement, New York's City Council was considering an ordinance introduced by "Little Tim" Sullivan to restore public morality. "Little Tim," the Manhattan Borough president and a Tammany Hall man, made the anti-smoking bill the first priority of his new term—possibly motivated by the populist appeal of a law that would forbid upper- and middle-class women from smoking in the city's most fashionable restaurants. Confident that the ordinance would be approved by the Board of Alderman, the *New York Times* announced the city-wide prohibition on the front page of the paper on January 21st, 1908, a day before it became law. "After to-day it will be against the law for a hotel or restaurant proprietor, or any one else managing or owning a 'public place' to allow women to smoke in public," the *Times* proclaimed.[117] The ordinance

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[115] "Found No Women Smoking in Chicago," *New York Times*, 2 January 1908, 3.

[116] "Feminity and Cigarettes," 6.

[117] "No Public Smoking by Woman Now," *New York Times*, 21 January 1908, 1. The politics surrounding the passage speaks volumes about the class interests at stake. Rumor at the time held that the legislation was revenge by "well-known politician," probably "Little Tim" Sullivan, who had been denied a reservation at a prominent city restaurant. True or not, Sullivan must have viewed a bill that would bar the "smart set"—both middle class and upper class—from smoking in the city's elite restaurants as a populist cause. "Women Mustn't Smoke," *New York Times*, 22 January 1908, 4. Sullivan had previously earned a reputation as "the Bowery moralist" when he forced theater managers to "cover the billboards with the undraped limbs of well-favored women." "Bars Woman Smokers," *Washington Post*, 7 January 1908, 3. Although, according to the *New York Times*, "[n]one of the Aldermen nor any one else about the City Hall regards [the smoking ordinance] very seriously," the measure, with Tammany Hall support, passed unanimously in both the Committee on Laws and Legislation and the Board of Alderman. "Forbids Women to Smoke," *Washington Post*, 22 January 1908, 3; "Sullivan Controls Board," *New York Times*, 7 January 1908, 4. "Little Tim" acknowledged that the law might not hold up in the Court of Appeals if challenged, but expected that "he 'can get away with his ordinance,' even if it does infringe slightly upon woman's inherent and constitutional rights." "Bars Woman Smokers," 3.

Critics, as Alderman Brown told the *New York Times*, voted for the bill despite the widespread belief that the ordinance was not legal. "Women Mustn't Smoke," 4. Within the Committee on Laws, John Henry Smith, with a distrust of demagoguery, violently challenged Sullivan's commitment to the real hardships of the working class (although he eventually did not vote against the measure). As the newspapers reported it, "John Henry Smith, shaking his fist at Alderman Sullivan, said it would be much better for the board to concern itself with the hardships of the poor than with 'such nonsensical things' as smoking by a few women in a restaurant. If the Aldermen were going to take up the matter at all, why didn't they prohibit everybody smoking, especially boys under 21?" "No

imposed a fine of no more than twenty-five dollars or imprisonment for no more than ten days on those restaurateurs who disregarded the law.[118]

The Sullivan measure was short-lived. The *New York Times*, although not an advocate of women smoking, spared little vitriol in ridiculing the Sullivan Ordinance and its sponsor.

> A more valid objection to the proposed ordinance would be that the surest way to make a woman do anything is to forbid her to do it. The minor Mr. SULLIVAN's ignorance of that established fact indicates that he has never been what is called a "ladies man." But it is not discreditable to his judgment of public policy. . . . As a legislator he endeavors to use the forces at his command to correct the evil. To say that such a law would be unavailing and ridiculous in this practical community is only to say that the exiguous Mr. SULLIVAN is morally superior to his time and his environment.[119]

Politics being what they were in early twentieth-century New York, the city's mayor, George B. McClellan, Jr., a one-time Tammany candidate who had turned against his former cronies, vetoed the ordinance on February 4th when "Little Tim" was vacationing in Hot Springs, Colorado. The mayor claimed (although the law had not been tested in the courts) that while the "police power of the Government" might be used to regulate "the conduct of individuals or of the

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Public Smoking by Woman Now," 1. Alderman Smith's ideas were, a week later, formally presented to the Board of Aldermen in the form of a proposal to ban the sale of cigarettes to minors. Although the bill, on its face, would have posed fewer legal challenges than the ban on women smoking in public, the measure was referred to the Committee on Laws and Legislation where it languished. "New War on Cigarettes," *New York Times*, 29 January 1908, 1.

A short time later, the Sullivan Ordinance was rescinded by Mayor McClellan who, beholden to the middle class after his defeat in 1905 of the left-leaning William Randolph Hearst, declared it illegal before the courts could. "Mayor Lets Women Smoke: Vetoes "Little Tim" Sullivan Ordinance Restricting Them," *New York Times*, 4 February 1908, 1. The only arrest made under the Sullivan Ordinance was of a woman, Katie Mulcahey (age 29), who was arrested when smoking outside a Bowery home. She was fined five dollars but imprisoned when she refused on principal to pay. Curiously, the ordinance did not prohibit smoking outside nor did it call for individual smokers to be fined. "Arrested for Smoking," *New York Times*, 23 January 1908, 1. The *Times* did not note the misapplication of the law but the reporter quoted the arresting officer as having told the woman, unlikely as this seems, "What would Alderman Sullivan say?"

[118] "Women Mustn't Smoke," 4.

[119] "Sullivan the Lesser's Motion," *New York Times*, 8 January 1908, 8.

owners of private property" in the interest of public morality, he did not believe that it could "be invoked to sustain an ordinance of this kind."[120]

When the ordinance was first proposed by "Little Tim," the *New York Times* observed that the new ordinance had been "suggested by the announcement made just before New Year's Eve that in certain restaurants smoking by women would be permitted,"[121] yet by the time the Aldermen met to vote, James Martin had rescinded his policy. Concerned about his restaurant's reputation, Martin posted a sign in the restaurant directing women who wished to smoke to a ladies smoking lounge. "As a rule, smoking by ladies is not allowed in public dining rooms. A ladies' smoking room is reserved for their exclusive use."[122] When put into practice, however, Martin's new prohibition did not differ much from the original policy that allowed "respectable" women to smoke. While contending that "the bulk of the American public is averse" to women smoking in public, he nonetheless pledged only to "stop promiscuous smoking." Once again, ladies, particularly escorted ladies, could do as they please. "If a lady is with her husband and smokes decorously we do not see her, but I must revoke the official privilege."[123]

Martin's change of heart came too late to prevent the Sullivan motion or to quiet the outcry over women smoking. Members of the Gotham Club in New York roundly condemned the upstart women who smoked in public. Following a musical evening of "banjo solos and Chopin preludes" (presumably performed by two different groups of musicians), Mrs. Alfred Arthur Brooks asked the members of the club to censure formally women who smoked in

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[120] "Mayor Lets Women Smoke," 1. McClellan's publicly stated reasons for vetoing the ordinance should be taken with a grain of salt. McClellan, although anti-prohibition, was a champion of the city's Sunday blue laws and employed similar regulations to keep nickelodeons closed on Sunday. Perhaps not coincidentally, the Sullivan family was invested in the nickelodeon business. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio, "Corruption, Criminality and the Nickelodeon," in *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, ed. Henry Jenkins, Tara MacPherson, and Jane Shattuck (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002).
[121] "No Public Smoking by Woman Now," 1.
[122] "Ban on Woman Smokers," *New York Times*, 12 January 1908, II1.
[123] Ibid. Martin's reversal took at least one New York entrepreneur by surprise. A Broadway store, according to the *New York Times*, had been "encouraged" by the "restaurant movement" to advertise meerschaum pipes for women.

restaurants. Brooks did not mince words; the better restaurants had an obligation to uphold their exclusionary tradition of respectability. "Now, you know," continued Mrs. Brooks, "that in all the Bowery cafes and dance halls they are putting a stop to women smoking. It seems a pity that places of the better class should welcome persons who can't even retain a footing in their own section of the city."[124] Generally, the clubwomen supported the "militant" Brooks. Mrs. Imogene King, echoing the language of social Darwinism, told the assembled that she thought it necessary to oppose this "crime" because women who smoked threatened "to corrupt our civilization." For those assembled, the very idea that restaurants considered women who smoked "ladies" brought disapproving shakes of the women's heads and titters from the men. While a few of the woman gathered disagreed, they did so quietly, fearing for their reputations. A reporter who attended the meeting claimed that one of the women who had spoken out against smoking in restaurants privately told him that she often smoked "but it would never do to admit it in public."[125]

Following the 1908 controversy, morality advocates continued to condemn women who smoked in public. Some blamed the new smoking habit on Europeans who by 1908 generally allowed women to smoke in restaurants.[126] Others worried about race suicide. J. W. Nigh told the Pythian Temple in Washington, D.C. that "[a]ny woman who would express a frank preference for frequenting cafes where smoking is allowed evidences a tendency toward perverted, depraved tastes, and the ultimate end of such desires is physical, moral, and mental degradation."[127] The Rev. Frederick E. Hopkins of the Pilgram Congregational Church told congregants in his sermon: "It may look chic; it may seem smart, it may appear pert for a girl to

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[124] "Smoking by Women Called Deplorable," *New York Times*, 24 January 1908, 4.
[125] Ibid.
[126] "Not All May Smoke," 10.
[127] "Smoking Women under Ban in Washington Restaurants," *Washington Post*, 13 November 1911, 2.

catch sight of herself in a mirror in a café with her arm thrown over the back of the chair, . . . and a cigaret between her teeth. She may think that is just the way to bring all the eligible men to her feet. But besides that face in the mirror let us places the bloodless, hollow eyed, narrow headed, slope shouldered, consumptive chested, spindle legged future American citizen, and let me tell you that is the son of his mother. That is what nicotine and his mother will do for the stars and stripes."[128]

In these debates, class lines were blurred. At times, the public held culpable an upper class that had visited Europe and had imported another marker of French decadence. At other times, the public outcry focused on working women who apparently adopted smoking as a false mark of sophistication. But if the public struggled to assign blame, restaurants did not. Restaurants continued to uphold nineteenth-century standards of aristocratic privilege even as they sought to expand their clientele to include the middle classes. A few restaurants barred upper-class society woman from smoking, but every restaurant reserved the right to bar a middle-class woman whose decision to smoke might represent a disregard for the restaurant's commitment to aristocratic pretension. Fundamentally, restaurateurs did not care about smoking; they cared about preserving their reputations for propriety and exclusivity.

Despite the condemnation they faced, women continued to seek the right to smoke in restaurants. Two years after Martin's rescinded its policy, controversy flared when the Ritz-Carlton in New York did not ask a woman smoking in their dining room to put her cigarette out. Once again, the event drew the attention of the local press.

> The woman leaned back in her chair, tilted her head, and sent a
> series of rings toward the gilded ceiling. By that time, every diner
> in the big room had focused his or her eyes on the centre table.
> The waiter, leaving two of the coffee cups unfilled, scurried away
> to inform the head waiter that woman was actually smoking in the

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[128] "Women Smoke? Babies Weak," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 January 1908, 3. Punctuation in original.

main dining room. The head waiter sought the manager, who came in, looked the party over, and went out again. The woman calmly finished her cigarette without interference.[129]

No doubt women had smoked in lesser New York restaurants since Alderman Sullivan's first antismoking campaign, but in 1910 the Ritz-Carlton was one of the newest and most respected hotels in the city. The anonymous woman who lit a cigarette in the hotel reignited the contentious debate about women's growing presence in American restaurants.

Although the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in London had already adopted a policy that allowed women to smoke in its public dining rooms, its New York sister hotel had shied away from an explicit policy.[130] Instead, the anonymous diner's rebellion was met with studied inaction.

> "The manager of the restaurant rushed into my office on Thursday night," said [Mr. Harris] finally, "and told me very excitedly that a woman was smoking a cigarette in the large dining room. "I believe you must be mistaken." I told him. "In fact, I am perfectly sure you are mistaken." "That was all I said and the matter was dropped right there. You see," continued Mr. Harris, "I can't presume to teach American woman anything at all. They know perfectly well what is right and what is wrong. So I have set no rules on the question of smoking. American women know best what is the correct thing to do in a public restaurant and I would never dream of posing as an arbiter of etiquette."[131]

The Ritz-Carlton's refusal to acknowledge the smoke rings that wafted towards its gilded ceilings marked a significant change in restaurants' attitudes toward woman. Not only would women—notice Harris did not say "ladies"—be able to smoke in the dining rooms of the Ritz-Carlton, but no one would presume to judge whether she was worthy of the right. Harris explicitly did not want his hotel to play the role that restaurants and hotels in the United States

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[129] "Woman Smoked in the Ritz-Carlton: Puffed Away Undisturbed at Her Cigarette, Not a Soul Interfered," *New York Times*, 18 December 1919, 14.

[130] London addressed the issue before New York. By 1908, the same year as the Sullivan ordinance, both the Waldorf and the Savoy in London had specific policies that allowed women to smoke (although the manager of the Waldorf London felt that the popularity of smoking among English restaurant-goers had declined). "Women Smoke Less," *New York Times*, 28 November 1908, 12.

[131] "Woman Smoked in the Ritz-Carlton," 14.

had served since the first half of the nineteenth century. The restaurant would not pose as "an arbiter of etiquette."

It did not take long for New York women to start smoking in other city restaurants or for critics to start worrying. Not all New Yorkers, it seems, were ready to trust women to their own devices.[132] A month after the Ritz-Carlton opened its dining rooms to women smokers, the front page of the *New York Times* reported that four woman, one with a "gold mounted cigarette holder," were asked by the manager of the prestigious Palm Room at the Plaza to put out their after dinner cigarettes.[133] The four women stopped, but women continued smoke in public restaurants and once again city government was roused to action. In October 1911, New York aldermen unanimously passed a resolution that ordered the city solicitor to investigate whether there were legal means of preventing women from smoking in public.[134] But the die was cast, and the legal effort floundered. More importantly, this time restaurants were capitulating to women smokers. An account from mid-1911 noted that "[s]moking among women in New York

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[132] From the mid-1800s on, middle-class reform movements opposed smoking in public for both sexes. The WCTU, the largest anti-smoking campaign in the United States, had effectively sponsored anticigarette legislation in the nineteenth century and by 1901 eleven states had some form of antismoking law. These laws, passed at a time when few women smoked, were aimed primarily at male smokers and minors. While the WCTU continued to advocate against smoking, it formally abandoned its legislative efforts in 1919 at a time when women's smoking was on the rise. In New York, where smoking in the early twentieth century was heralded by the "new women" as a sign of liberation, middle-class antismoking campaigns did not specifically target women. Dr. Charles G. Pease formed the Non-Smoking Protective League in 1910 to promote legislation against smoking in "public and semi-public places" by both men and women. "Form Non-Smoker's League," *New York Times*, 10 May 1910, 18. In 1909, he successfully encouraged the city to pass a ban on smoking in the subway. Similarly, the Times, once cynical about Sullivan's proposal, endorsed the broader effort to prevent both men and women from smoking in restaurants in 1912. In an editorial, the newspaper suggested that restaurants should provide separate rooms or dedicated hours for smokers. "The Criminality of Ill-Bred Smoking," *New York Times*, 27 July 1912, 6. As a letter writer from Utica, New York told readers of the *New York Times* during the 1911 debate over a city-wide ordinance banning women from smoking, "[t]here is infinitely more that is offensive to the sight done by [men] than by woman, and it would surely be lamentable if the City Fathers should strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." "Aldermen and Smoking Women," *New York Times*, 14 October 1911, 12. See also U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 29-37.
[133] "Stopped Women Smokers," *New York Times*, 9 January 1911, 1.
[134] "'Tobacco-Smoking Females:' Aldermen Moved to Invoke the Corporate Counsel against Them," *New York Times*, 11 October 1911, 1.

seems to be on the increase. It is an ordinary sight to see women puffing at dinner parties and to see them smoking occasionally in certain restaurants. . ."[135]

As the sight of women smoking in restaurants became commonplace, the local newspapers lost interest in the story. In 1916 the *New York Times* briefly noted that Ritz-Carlton had installed a humidor shop for women (so they could evade the "public gaze" while smoking in the grille room where the afternoon tea was largely an all-female event).[136] Three years later, in 1919, a feature article in the *New York Times Magazine* concluded that the smoking debate was once and for all resolved in the favor of women. "It was not that long ago," the paper declared, "that the woman with a smoking cigarette was a rare sight in the restaurants of our better hotels. . . . Today, despite proper dress committees and prohibition, that individual that takes a definite stand against women's smoking in his dining room is a rare creature instead."[137] The Ritz-Carlton, everyone acknowledged, had broken the etiquette barrier.[138]

The abandonment of regulations that prohibited women from smoking in restaurants received more public scrutiny than the elimination of the escort policy, but both shifts in etiquette followed the same pattern. In the nineteenth century, restaurants were guardians of a public aristocratic culture that restricted women's public roles yet turned a blind eye to upper-class vice. As stewards of this aristocratic culture, restaurants made distinctions between reputable and disreputable women, between ladies and "Boston Sals," and in doing so they won reputations for being exclusive and discriminating—qualities that secured the patronage of the aristocratic class. In the twentieth century, however, as their patronage changed and the

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[135] *New York Press* [author], "Smoking among Women," *Washington Post*, 30 July 1911, E4.
[136] "Ritz-Carlton Opens Women's Humidor," *New York Times*, 21 December 1916, 8.
[137] "Women Smokers Objected to by Some Managers," *New York Times*, 16 March 1919, VII2. A few of the more conservative family hotels discovered a niche market by banning women smokers. The manager of the Woodstock Hotel told the New York Times: "I don't care whether a woman smokes or not. Far be it from me to law down the law controlling the personal habits of others. But I find that, from a business standpoint, it pays to enforce a rule of that kind."
[138] Ibid.

competition for diners increased, restaurants struggled to strike a balance between their fidelity to the aristocratic past and the economic influence of middle-class urbanites. As late as 1911, the "Santerer," a regular contributor to the restaurant-industry journal *The Steward*, worried that the "question of admitting women without an escort" was a "wretchedly complex question and, so far as this side of the ocean is concerned, seems to be as far from a solution as ever." [139] While restaurants initially paid lip service to the aristocratic ideal of "respectability," with each passing year restaurateurs demonstrated their unease with their role as cultural stewards and made compromises.

For the middle-class woman, the aristocratic codes did not speak to their aspirations. The noontime shopper could not be expected to bring a male escort with her. The middle-class woman who occasionally smoked did not want to be restricted from lighting a cigarette while her male companion smoked his cigar. More importantly, middle-class women, recognizing the hypocrisy that excused aristocratic vices but condemned their own, rejected the right of the restaurant to pass judgment. Women tutored in early feminism, the Progressive movement and the celebration of the "new woman" viewed "respectability" through a new lens. As an article on the middle-class businesswoman observed: "There are laws written and unwritten for guidance in matters social and polite, laws formulated when and by whom no one knows, but that are judged admirable in their way and regarded as fixed authority, from which there can be no appeal. In the business woman's particular orbit, and for the guidance of the woman clerk, there are no laws, alterable or otherwise."[140] The middle-class woman would make her own rules.[141]

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[139] The Santerer [psued.], "Notes and Notions," *The Steward* 5, no. 11 (1911): 32.
[140] "Women in Business Life," 46.
[141] For an analysis of home cooking that argues that middle-class women in the early twentieth century embraced an ideal of "daintiness" that stemmed from elite conspicuous consumption, see Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 52-70. Inness'

Restaurateurs recognized that cultural standards were changing and if they clung to the past, they did so because separate spheres were a part of their institutional heritage. Most hoped that the new woman would remain constrained by customary etiquette. Writing just before Martin's new policy sparked a nationwide controversy, the *New York Times* claimed that "[n]o thoroughly sophisticated American woman of good breeding would think of lighting a cigarette in a New York restaurant, because she would know that the men who were puffing cigar smoke in her face would consider the act unladylike." Women "do smoke cigarettes nowadays," the *Times* admitted, but to smoke in public was to risk being "accounted vulgar, if not actually wicked, in a land where the prejudices of Puritanism still survive."[142] Editors at the *Washington Post* also assumed that the old rules of conduct still applied. When the corporate council of New York announced in 1911 that the city lacked the authority to ban women from smoking in restaurants the proprietor of the St. James Hotel Levi Woodbury stated confidently that it did not matter if there was a law in Washington because "I hardly think a woman of any standing would attempt such a thing." The *Post* heartily concurred.[143] But change did come to New York and it would eventually come to Washington, Chicago and other major cities. And when it did come, restaurateurs were forced to react.

By the 1910s, restaurateurs—placed in an untenable position—began to defer to public opinion. When restaurateurs finally abandoned the language of "respectability," they justified their new policies as a capitulation to the people's will. As the *New York Times* reported in 1919 towards the end of the debate over whether women should smoke in restaurants: "Managers of

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suggestion is provocative, but too simple. Nineteenth century sources regularly criticized women's eating habits suggesting that "daintiness" translated into an unhealthy obcession with sweet foods. In the twentieth century, "daintiness" was vindicated by the simple eating movement and both men and women were expected to eat lighter, but this was hardly an embrace of conspicuous consumption. The emphasis on lighter eating was a reaction to upper-class opulence.

[142] "The Women Who Smoke," 8.

[143] "Smoking Women under Ban in Washington Restaurants," 2.

some of the larger and more conservative hotels said their rules against smoking had given way before the popular demand of their customers, some of whom, be it said, come from conservative American families."[144] In a similar controversy in Pittsburgh a few years later, the hotels and restaurants of the city expressed a willingness to admit men not wearing jackets (especially during hot weather) if, and only if, women endorsed the idea. "In fact, as far as eating in comfort in hotels and restaurants goes, the women patrons hold the deciding vote. Downtown café managers are unanimous in wishing the campaign all speed to its accomplishment, but sadly acknowledge their allegiance to woman's opinions."[145]

When restaurants embraced public opinion over tradition, they granted authority to a vocal urban middle class. From 1880 to 1920, the urban middle class dined out in ever increasing numbers. New restaurants were built, new hotels were constructed, and restaurateurs eager to woo middle-class diners listened to their complaints. Collectively, the middle classes wielded more economic influence than the aristocratic class. Numerically they wielded more influence over public opinion. Restaurants responded with compromise and concession until the traditional distinction between "ladies" and "women" evaporated. By the late 1910s, only the grossest violations of conduct could justify asking a woman to leave a public restaurant. Women's right to dine, to smoke or to drink—at least in the major cities of the United States— would no longer be questioned and the issue faded from the public's view.[146]

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[144] "Women Smokers Objected to by Some Managers," VII2.
[145] "Hotels to Let Men Dine Coatless; Spread of Custom Is up to Women," *Washington Post*, 13 August 1916, ES2.
[146] In 1914, a restaurant manager objected, despite the hot weather, to a woman who removed her hat in her restaurant. Miss Florence De Witt and her escort Mr. William B. Wette, offended, tried to leave. The restaurant owner William Weimann asked that the couple pay for their meal and when the couple refused, had them arrested. The couple was quickly released by the police and they promptly sued Weimann for $5,000 in damages. "Suit over Woman's Hat," *New York Times*, 4 September 1914, 16. In 1917, the *New York Times* reported two cases where hotel guests (not restaurant patrons) were suspected of immoral behavior, were questioned and then successfully sued for damages. Both incidents illustrated the risks hotels faced in enforcing nineteenth-century ideals of proper conduct two decades into the twentieth century. In one case, Sadie Disbrow Hurd, the wife of a real estate dealer, was detained by hotel security for kissing her husband outside the door to his room. She sued the Hotel Astor and

Mary Margaret McBride came to New York from a small Midwestern community after she graduated from college in the late 1910s. In a 1931 article in *Scribner's Magazine*, long after the debates over women and the restaurant had been settled for city dwellers, she recalled her initial shock at the liberties enjoyed by women in New York.

> At home, when I left there, virtually nobody considered seriously that a woman could be "nice" if she smoked cigarettes. Even men were chided for it by lecturers, who unrolled colored charts showing the dreadful pass to which nicotine would bring a naturally sound stomach. As for cocktails, a man who was known to take more than one was surely headed for the Keeley cure, while a woman who drank so much as cherry bounce was beyond the pale. Imagine my genuine horror, then, to find that nearly all the girls and women I met in the city both smoked and drank. And, what I thought worse, they did it as a matter of course, with no apologies and no indirectness. They even offered them to me![147]

McBride concluded, with approval, that American urbanites had come to embrace a live-and-let-live philosophy. Women were free to make their own decisions about what behavior was acceptable "with no apologies and no indirectness."

Anxiety

Well before the question of whether women had the right to dine in the public restaurants of the United States was resolved, questions were raised about the social consequences of women joining the throngs of male restaurant-goers. The worrisome fears of social conservatives ran the gamut from the sublime to the melodramatic. Dieticians worried about what women would eat, gourmands worried if women were capable of ordering a gourmet

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was awarded damages. In the second case, Mrs. Mary Boyce, the wife of marine engine manufacturer, received $8,000 in damages from the McAlpin after her husband was detained for visiting her room at night. By 1920, even when women's behavior seemed to justify additional scrutiny, restaurants and hotels found that a litigious middle class was unwilling to be labeled "unrespectable" and would challenge a hotel or restaurant's right to impose morality. "Hotel Astor Loses: Mrs. Hurd, Questioned for Kissing Husband, Gets $2,500 Damages," *New York Times*, 15 June 1917, 9; "Woman Wins Hotel Suit: $8,000 Verdict against Mcalpin for Alleged Insult," *New York Times*, 16 May 1917, 8.

[147] Mary Margaret McBride, "I Come to New York," *Scribner's Magazine*, March 1931, 317.

dinner, husbands worried that their wives would no longer cook, puritans worried about the

effects of alcohol, smoking and men on the purity of America's women.[148] Some, like Amelia

Gere Mason, lamented that when women, the "natural arbiters of manners as well as

conservators of morals," were driven "into the hustling crowd" aggression would triumph to the

detriment of society.[149] Others, more practical, fretted that women consigned to eating out

would forget the "dignity and decency of making their meals attractive by good cooking and

economy."[150] And those of a more salacious bent worried that the dim lighting in restaurants

undermined morality.[151] These were not merely the rumblings of the aristocratic past. Qualms

about the risks of restaurant dining came from judges, journalists, young women, bon vivants,

doctors, scientists, restaurateurs and others, many who were from the middle classes and many

who were implicated in the changes that were occurring.[152]

These voices, persistent, tenacious and increasingly marginalized by the changing culture

of public dining in the twentieth century, serve as a reminder that while the middle-class

transformation of the restaurant from 1870 through the 1920s reshaped American culture, not

everyone in the middle classes endorsed those changes. The revolution in dining reflected the

unspoken will of the urban middle classes and their substantial purchasing power. People voted

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[148] For negative accounts of women's skill at ordering, see "Ladies Fare at Lunch: Capricious Taste Shown in Her Orders at the Restaurants," *Washington Post*, 13 December 1896, 13; *The Spectator*, "How Women Give an Order," *Washington Post*, 29 January 1888, 9. For a later, more positive account, see "Sexes in Restaurants," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 May 1904, 23.

[149] Amelia Gere Mason, "Decadence of Manners," *Century Magazine*, August 1900, 536.

[150] Thomas Beer, "Menu: Conversation on Food and Restaurants, European and American," *Scribner's Magazine*, December 1932, 347. Beer presents his view as a conversation, probably fictional, between an Englishman, an American Society woman and an American journalist.

[151] Harry E. Lewis quoted in "Blames Lights for Immorality: Justice Lewis Wants More Illumination in Cafes as a Check for Lawlessness," *New York Times*, 18 April 1926, 12.

[152] For some of the voices of concern, see Katherine Barber, "The College Girl as a Cook," *What to Eat*, September 1899, 93; "The Kitchen: 'The Heart of the Home'," *What to Eat*, January 1904, 31; "The Maid and the Menu: Can a Woman Order a Dinner?" *New York Times*, 30 October 1904, II6; McBride, "I Come to New York," 316; Rosenfeld, "Notes Dramatic," 157; "Woman Can Order Dinners," 14; "The Woman Wage-Earner's Luncheon," *What to Eat*, November 1902, 194; "Women and Waiters," *What to Eat*, July 1899, 30. As ingénues, however, women were considered remarkably independent. They ordered what they liked and did not tip. "Women in Restaurants: Where They Usually Show Their Superiority over Men," *New York Times*, 10 July 1892, 15.

with their feet even as others lamented the changes. The middle-class press recorded these

events, sometimes with approval, other times with despair, but often with little effect on the

outcome. Men might complain about the "chattering women" and the "talk that rings in subdued

shrillness over the clatter of silver and chinaware," but women continued to dine out.[153] And as

the middle classes expanded, women's right to dine would not be denied.

> Throughout the city, in varying degrees, the same diurnal comedy
> is now in being, on ground floors, on roof gardens, and in cellars.
> The shop-girl and her sweetheart revel in the lights, the tawdry
> decorations and the general joyousness of their humble table-
> d'hôte with wine. The bourgeois dines out one night a week with
> his wife at a bourgeois restaurant, where the orchestra plays the old
> operas that seem to have been written for their springtime of
> romance. Along the Avenue the smart dine with their wives—or,
> with somebody. It is not good for man to dine alone.[154]

CONCLUSIONS

Cultural revolutions are not singular events with simple causalities. The changing role of

women in the public sphere reflected all of the dramatic convulsions American society was

experiencing in the early twentieth century. The emergence of a large consumer economy—

crafted by manufacturers and exploited by department stores—changed the role of women,

invading the once hermetic domestic sphere to draw women into the "hustling crowd." New jobs

for women, political challenges to women's disenfranchisement, and moral reform crusades—as

well as challenges from within the moneyed class—contributed to a reexamination and

reconstruction of women's role in American life. In the nineteenth century, women diners were

shuttered off in secluded rooms. In 1925, when the popular New York lunchroom Child's

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[153] Richard Duffy, "New York at Table," *Putnam's and the Reader*, February 1909, 569; Sudley, "Luncheon for a Million," 845.
[154] Duffy, "New York at Table," 573.

constructed a Fifth Avenue restaurant, "six stories of window rounded a corner, and the multitiered display of ladies at lunch was rumored to have inspired Ziegfeld."[155]

The growing influence of the middle classes on restaurant culture was experienced, not as a quick, precise shifting of values, but as a series of contests mediated within the marketplace. Middle-class urbanites in the nineteenth century embraced separate spheres for men and women, but those in the twentieth century chafed at the entrenched restrictions of the elite restaurant. At the center of their protest was not only the proper role for women in the public sphere, but also the classed language of respectability. Through the first two decades of the twentieth century, these contests pitted an aristocratic ideal of womanhood—a convention of propriety that melded wealth to gender to create respectability—against the emergent belief, embraced by members of the middle classes, that morality was a personal choice. Restaurateurs—owners, managers, waiters and stewards—caught between the demands of their expanding middle-class clientele and the traditions restaurants inherited from the nineteenth century, at first struggled to mediate, and then capitulated to the liberalizing demands of public opinion. From 1900 to 1920, despite the lament of both nostalgic cultural conservatives and uneasy social reformers, women found a place in public restaurant culture and in doing so subverted the traditional relationship between gender and class. By 1920, not only could a woman dine alone, but she would be expected to order her own dinner and she would be surprised if her waiter looked askance at her choice of food, cocktail or after-dinner cigarette.

These changes in the rules did not eliminate all the laws of etiquette and dress that governed public dining, but they tempered the most extreme in deference to an urban, sophisticated middle class that was not only willing to embrace a new role for women, but was

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[155] Claudia Roth Pierpont, "The Silver Spire: How Two Men's Dreams Changed the Skyline of New York," *The New Yorker*, 18 November 2002, 74-5.

suspicious of the aristocratic class' claim to moral superiority. In a 1907 etiquette guide written

explicitly for women from "the representative class of Americans," one of the few etiquette

guides that did not draw on elite ideals of propriety, Mrs. Charles Harcourt rejected the

capriciousness of the aristocratic Society's notion of "respectability."

> Whilst it is possible for a person lacking in the essential of good
> form to assume a veneer of politeness that may pass current among
> superficial observers for sufficient mark of the gentlewoman, true
> good form is based upon certain essential qualities of the heart,
> without which it is as a body without a soul . . . Mere conformity
> to the rules of etiquette is of comparatively little consequence.
> Many a milkmaid, with homely exterior, possesses more of the
> essentials of a lady than does Mrs. Flam Boyant, with surface
> polish and innate ill-nature.[156]

Harcourt's standard of etiquette, grounded not in the distinction that wealth bought, but rather in

"essential qualities of the heart" was sentimental. But despite the Pollyanna overtones, it was

also quintessentially modern. "Essential qualities of the heart" were private virtues that could

not be judged publicly. Decisions about how to act, what to wear and where to eat were no

longer matters of ageless tradition but individual choice (guided, it must be added, by an

amorphous middle-class public opinion). While upper-class women, no less than middle-class

women, had entered restaurants unescorted and flaunted the rules that prevented women from

smoking in public, they did so under the protection and pretext their status as elites guaranteed.

Upper-class women were respectable and their actions—if discreet—would not undermine that

claim. Middle-class women were not allowed such liberties and when they claimed the right to

dine unescorted or to light up a cigarette, they forced restaurateurs to abandon the morality and

language of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, it was the rising importance of the middle

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[156] Mrs. Charles Harcourt, *Good Form for Women: A Guide to Conduct and Dress on All Occasions* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, Co., 1907), 2-3.

classes that offered women the platform for dissent that made possible a reshaping the urban landscape.

Some historians have, understandably, looked to the "Roaring 20s" as the moment when the public life of modern America was born. Flappers, prohibition, speakeasies and jazz clutter our historical memory, obscuring the roots of these social upheavals. But by the time of the outbreak of World War I, the ascendancy of the middle classes and the new woman were *faits accomplis*. On March 17, 1918, C. May, the headwaiter at the Park Avenue Hotel, refused to serve cocktails and beer to a party of five that included a woman. May was not, however, enforcing an anachronistic ideal of what women could or could not do in public restaurants, he was merely enforcing the law. The woman, a Red Cross doctor awaiting orders to sail for France, was denied her cocktail because she was dressed in khaki. As the manager of the Park Avenue Hotel George C. Brown explained the next day:

> The Government's regulation is perfectly plain. A uniform is a uniform, whether worn by a man or a woman. We can't differentiate between them. If a woman is in uniform it is impossible for her or any member of her party to have liquor in any from. It is not up to us to ascertain first if she is regularly enrolled in the United States service—the mere fact that she is in uniform is enough. We have no discretion in the matter.[157]

Restaurants, once arbiters of respectability that prided themselves on exercising discretion in all matters, would no longer determine who belonged.

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[157] "Include Women in Dry Law," *New York Times*, 8 March 1918, 9.

**Chapter 9: "INDIFFERENT GULLETS": MAKING SENSE OF THE MIDDLE-CLASS
RESTAURANT—A CONCLUSION**

Charles J. Rosebault, a former assistant city editor and business manager for the *New

York Sun*, could recall a time in the late nineteenth century when New York was a city of

epicures.

> The '90s saw a host of brilliant guides to the secrets of
> gastronomy, men who gave color and substance to the epicurean
> history of their day. It might be said that every fourth man in our
> best clubs was a valiant defender of the canons of food taste, and
> stood firmly for principles which today are not even understood.
> Heavens! What gusts of passion were aroused among men of
> usually calm and philosophic temperaments by the cry of terrapin
> naturel as against terrapin à la Maryland! [1]

But in an article for the *New York Times* in 1921 titled "The Lost Tribe of Epicures," Rosebault

lamented the decline of Epicureanism in New York.

> Restaurants a-plenty, yes, and fine French chefs, too; but is there
> one whose distinction is unique? Does one not find everywhere a
> sameness of cuisine abhorrent to your true gourmet? A monotony
> in menus, an absence of outstanding feature in service or
> environment; all as though planned by one architect, supplied by
> one purveyor, managed by one maitre d'hotel; the cuisine
> controlled by one chef. [2]

Rosebault did not specifically name the perpetrators of this crime against dining, but his

comments suggested that the "one architect" was the middle classes and their commitment to the

democratization of dining.

> Nothing is so conducive to dulling the initiative of your real chef
> as evidence that those for whom he expends his efforts have no
> discrimination. Why prepare a soigné repast for barbarians? Can

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[1] Charles J. Rosebault, "Lost Tribe of New York," *New York Times Book Review*, 13 February 1921, 5.
[2] Ibid.

there be a greater grief for a thorough gastronome than to see a
masterpiece of his art disappeared in an indifferent gullet? What is
there to hope for from a people who demand jazz with dinner?[3]

Charles Rosebault's wistful recollection of the past would be repeated more than once in

the following decades.[4] The rise of the urban middle class irrevocably changed what it meant to

dine in the United States. In the 1880s, dining was an act of conspicuous consumption, a

demonstration of the elite's sympathy for the fine life of Europe's aristocracy. Wealthy

Americans determined how the nation dined out and the nascent middle classes complained

about their exclusion. By the 1920s, dining was an act of solidarity with the public culture of the

middle classes, a celebration of democratic access to dining and a repudiation of aristocratic

pretension. In the 1920s, middle-class Americans set the table and aristocrats and their

sympathizers, men like Rosebault, complained about their exclusion. Middle-class Americans

had established a hegemonic influence over the way food was served, what was served and who

had access to the public table. Culinary historian Harvey Levenstein notes that by 1929 railway

dining cars run by the Fred Harvey System discovered that they sold more steak—even to some

of their better off patrons—when the menu listed "Small Tenderloin, Mushrooms" rather than

"Filet Mignon, Champignons."[5]

Although the middle-classing of the restaurant is a process that continues to this day, a

tipping point was reached early in the twentieth century. Following prohibition, restaurants

proliferated and the middle-class diner, once concerned about inclusion, now faced the daunting

challenge of choosing among a growing variety of restaurants serving a once unimaginable

variety of cuisines. The debates about restaurant cuisine that have engaged the interests of

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Harvey A. Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 46.
[5] Ibid., 45. Levenstein dates this rejection of French cuisine to the 1920s while I argue it had roots in the nineteenth century.

Americans since the 1920s have been less about who has access to the restaurant table than how to make sense of the increasingly diverse landscape of public dining.

REVIEWING

The middle-class restaurant was less a single, coherent idea than a collection of restaurants that made a commitment to serving the middle classes and accommodating middle-class preferences. The debates over restaurant culture that appeared in the media after 1920 were increasingly concerned about ordering and rationalizing public dining. Chain restaurants sought to impose order with guarantees of cleanliness and consistency.[6] Urban restaurants were exported to rural communities. Ethnic restaurants were challenged by Americanization campaigns that continued the search for a national cuisine. But the ultimate effort to bring order to the landscape of middle-class dining was the emergence of restaurant reviewing and the increasing importance of experts in the construction of the nation's restaurant habits.

Before the twentieth century, little guidance was offered to diners on where to eat. The hegemonic place of French cuisine in American life left little room for discussions of taste and preference. Everyone acknowledged that Delmonico's was the nation's best restaurant, but the recognition stemmed less from a sophisticated and debatable ideal of what tasted good than the incontrovertible fact that Delmonico's was the nation's most French restaurant. French cuisine, exclusivity and a reputation for dedicated service made a restaurant's reputation.

Other than occasionally listing the most recognizable restaurants, city guides and Baedekers offered few hints to urban dwellers and travelers in the nineteenth century on where to eat. In the nineteenth century, the diner was expected to eat in one of a few well-known hotels or

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[6] Ibid., 47.

to take chances with the largely non-descript restaurants that dotted the city. In large cities, where choices existed, word of mouth and not written instructions provided what little guidance diners received.[7]

Appleton's Hand-book of American Travel: Northern and Eastern Tour published in 1876 was typical.[8] The guide insisted that New York was "filled with restaurants, and the ordinary traveler requires no guide to find them; for where ever he may turn, a short walk will bring him to one." No concern was shown for the quality of the dinner that the hungry man might eventually procure. No information was provided on how to find ethnic cuisine or even how to secure an affordable feast. The only exception was made for women diners. Since few restaurants catered to women, the guide felt it prudent to offer "ladies" some brief and general instructions. Fifteen restaurants (including all four Delmonico establishments) were listed with few guidelines on what the various establishments offered other than the guarantee that they catered to respectable women.

> In the Astor House is a fine restaurant.
>
> Bigot, 42 Fourteenth Street, between Fifth Avenue and Broadway,
> keeps a ladies' restaurant, which is quiet and respectable.

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[7] While the following guides may mention restaurants in passing, all are examples of guides that do not discuss restaurants in any detail. Edwin M. Bacon, *Boston: A Guide Book* (Boston: Ginn, 1918); *Illustrated New York*, (New York: International Publishing, 1888); Frederick Wilkinson Kilbourne, *Chronicles of the White Mountains* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916); *Morrison's Strangers' Guide to the City of Washington, and Its Vicinity: Illustrated with Seventeen Original Designs on Steel, and a Head of Washington from a Picture by Wright*, 2nd ed. (Washington: W.M. Morrison, 1844); Edward Alfred Pollard, *The Virginia Tourist: Sketches of the Springs and Mountains of Virginia: Containing an Exposition of Fields for the Tourist in Virginia, Natural Beauties and Wonders of the State, Also Accounts of Its Mineral Springs, and a Medical Guide to the Use of the Waters, Etc., Etc.* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & co., 1870).

[8] *Appleton's* "Southern Tour" was a little more descriptive. "The Restaurants of New Orleans have long been famous for the excellence of their cuisine. Victor's, 185 Canal Street; the Maison Dorée, 144 Canal, and the Restaurant Moreau, have no superiors in the South. Galpin's, 32 Royal Street (steaks and chops); Pino's, 23 St. Charles, and Rivas (oysters), 156 Dryades Street, are among the best of their class in the city." (Italics in original.) Edward Hepple Hall, *Appletons' Hand-Book of American Travel: The Southern Tour; Being a Guide through Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgiand Kentucky. With Maps of the Leading Routes of Travel and of the Principal Cities.* (New York: D. Appleton and company, 1866), 108. See also Waldo J. Curtis (publisher), *Visitor's Guide to New Orleans* (New Orleans: J. C. Waldo, 1875), 172. This guide to New Orleans contained an advertising section that noted restaurants and hours. Typical is the advertisement for McCloskey's: "The best the market affords at prices to suit the times."

Iaunch keeps a well-known and popular place at 804 Broadway, a short distance above Union Square.

Delmonico's, in Fifth Avenue, corner of Fourteenth street, is the largest and most elegantly-appointed restaurant in New York.

The Café Brunswick, at the corner of Fifth Ave. and Twenty-sixth Street, is sumptuously appointed and admirably kept.

E. Solari's, in University Place, corner of Eleventh Street, is noted for its dinners and suppers.

"Overton & Blair's," Tenth Street, near Broadway, is among the cheap and popular eating-houses for both sexes.[9] [Abridged]

Appleton's was not unique. Turn-of-the-century Baedekers published for foreign visitors to the

United States made some general suggestions about what to eat but they offered little advice on

where to eat.

In New York and other large cities the traveler will find many excellent restaurants, but in other places he will do well to take his meals at his hotel or boarding-house. . . . Soup, fish, poultry, game, and sweet dishes are generally good; but beef and mutton are often inferior to those of England. Oysters, served in a great variety of styles, are large, plentiful, and comparatively cheap. In America wine or beer is much less frequently drunk at meals than in Europe, and the visitor is not expected to order liquor 'for the good of the house.' Iced water is the universal beverage, and a cup of tea or coffee is included in all meals at a fixed price. . . . Restaurants which solicit the patronage of 'gents' should be avoided. The meals on dining cars and 'buffet cars' are generally preferable to those at railway-restaurants.[10]

The rise of a middle-class restaurant-going public and the growth of the restaurant

industry in the early twentieth century complicated dining but guides were slow to adopt a policy

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[9] D. Appleton and Company, *Appleton's Hand-Book of American Travel: Northern and Eastern Tour* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1876), 10.

[10] Karl Baedeker (firm) and James F. Muirhead, *The United States, with an Excursion into Mexico, Cuba, Porto Rico, and Alaska* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), xxiv-xxv. Earlier editions did not significantly differ. See Karl Baedeker and M. J. Muirhead, *The United States with an Excursion into Mexico*, 2d rev. ed. (Leipsic: Karl Baedeker Publisher, 1893); Karl Baedeker (firm) and James F. Muirhead, *The United States, with an Excursion into Mexico; Handbook for Travellers*, 3d rev. ed. (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1904). For less descriptive guides, see J. B. Lippincott and Co., *Lippincott's General Guide to the United States and Canada*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1876), 14-5.

of recommending restaurants even in the increasingly diverse culinary landscape of New York.

In 1901, the anonymously published *Where and How to Eat in New York* provided one of the

first book-length guides to dining issued in the United States, but while it listed the most well-

known and respected restaurants in the city, its rich descriptions of elite dining places focused

primarily on the décor and the clientele. The mostly highly regarded restaurant, the Café Des

Beaux Arts, for example, was notable for it clientele.

> There are beautiful women who are smart and smart women who
> are not so beautiful, all in handsome dinner gowns. There is the
> sparkle of diamonds and the sparkle of champagne. There is light
> and laughter and music and bright conversation, all mingling in a
> scene of vivacity that makes the enjoyment of the dinner itself a
> sort of subconscious, though none the less real pleasure.[11]

The food at the Café Des Beaux Arts received more attention than any other restaurant listed in

the guide, but the recommendations were minimal. Nonetheless, *Where and How to Eat* paved

new ground by offering to those not previously initiated to fine dining a glimpse of the once

remote and exclusive world of the public restaurant. As the introduction promised (even if the

book did not fully make good on the promise), the book could "stand as guide, counselor and

friend to the ever increasing army of New Yorkers who practice the gentle art of dining, to

convert that other army of those who have not yet discovered its joys, and to give useful

information to the third great army composed of the strangers within our gates or who may be

planning to visit the city."[12]

Other guides to restaurants followed but most kept with the nineteenth century tradition

of merely listing restaurants without comment. The publication in 1924 of George S. Chappell's

The Restaurants of New York marked a notable if small change. Acknowledging the rapid

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[11] *Where and How to Dine in New York*, 2-3.
[12] Ibid., preface.

changes that dining in the United States was undergoing, Chappell sought to "essay the difficult task of fixing, if only for a moment, some of the remaining restaurants of the old régime and a number of the new ones."[13] *The Restaurants of New York* did not rate restaurants—Chappell felt that his taste in food was "necessarily personal"—but the book did take into account "the excellence of the food" as well as the "interest of the place itself."[14] Although the book, like its predecessors, provides more information on the history, décor and clientele than it does on the food, it offered—in broad strokes—some culinary assistance for the discriminating diner.

> The menu [at Ye Olde Chop House] is surprisingly extensive, and it seems impossible that it can all come out of the little center kitchen, the grill of which opens directly into the back room. Probably there are concealed sources of supply below. Chops, steaks and all manner of grilled foods are the specialties, and the old house also prides itself on Cape Cods and Lynnhavens and Woods Hole clams which really come from the waters whose names they bear, genuine, autographed shellfish, so to speak, the name blown in the shell.[15]

The Restaurants of New York's most significant contribution to the emerging art of restaurant reviewing, however, was the scale of the undertaking. Chappell did not claim to discuss every restaurant—not every restaurant was worthy of inclusion—but he marched through Manhattan recording not only the well-known establishments but the "little restaurants" on "side streets" as well as the "foreign feeding grounds." He even included a chapter that described of some of the restaurants available to motorists.[16]

Chappell preferred not to use a rating system, but restaurant reviewing was not unheard of in the 1920s. In 1900 the French tire manufacturer Michelin offered complimentary hotel guides to wealthy customers seeking information on hotels and in 1926 the Michelin Guide

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[13] Chappell, *The Restaurants of New York*, 4.
[14] Ibid., 8, 7.
[15] Ibid., 40.
[16] Ibid., 122, 48, 33.

began to assign a single star rating to restaurants it considered notable. By the early 1930s, the

ratings had evolved into a three star system designed to distinguish the finest restaurant cuisine

from the less exceptional.[17] But the development of restaurant reviewing in the United States

lagged behind. Although newspapers provided space for discussions of food and recipes in their

women's pages, no newspaper regularly reviewed restaurants and discussions of public dining

were limited to the broad-stroke descriptions of dining trends that appeared occasionally in the

weekend magazines. Generally, newspapers opted for objectivity by not naming the restaurants

they discussed.

The first complete dining guide providing a system of restaurant ratings in the United

States was published in the 1930s. Duncan Hines, a traveling salesman who had amassed a

collection of "reviews" based on his travels, returned to his home in Bowling Green, Kentucky to

publish *Adventures in Good Eating* in 1936. *Adventures in Good Eating* had none of the

pretensions of its French forerunner; it was published by a middle-class salesman for a middle-

class audience, and Hines was often more concerned about cleanliness than food. Nonetheless,

his guide provided a clear set of ratings to guide restaurant-goers. *Adventures* did not claim that

the best food was the most elite food and Hines often reserved his top ratings for chain

restaurants that catered consistently and efficiently to the middle classes. For the thousands who

purchased the guide, it shifted dining from a personal adventure to a professionally managed

event.[18]

The success of Hines' guide set the stage for the first newspaper reviews of restaurants.

Clementine Paddleford at the *New York Tribune* had occasionally profiled restaurant food in her

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[17] *A History of the Michelin Guides: Press Release* (February 23, 2005 2005 [cited April 2005]); available from
http://www.michelinman.com/difference/releases/pressrelease02232005b.html.
[18] Duncan Hines, *Adventures in Good Eating* (Bowling Green: Adventures in Good Eating, 1936); Levenstein,
Paradox of Plenty, 46-7.

syndicated columns in the late 1930s and 1940s, but it was Craig Claiborne, hired in 1957 by the *New York Times*, who pioneered the modern American restaurant review. Claiborne established strict standards for reviewing: he visited a restaurant repeatedly, sampled a variety of the establishment's offerings, and remained anonymous. Like the editors of the *Michelin Guides*, Claiborne used a system of stars to rate the restaurants he reviewed.[19] Clairborne, Mississippi-born but Swiss-trained, could hardly be described as a champion of the middle-class restaurant, but in establishing standards for restaurant reviewing—not all inherited from France—he furthered the middle-class project incorporating diverse culinary experiences into everyday life. By 1979 when Lawrence Van Gelder observed that "[r]estaurant reviewing, next to the destruction of subway car doors, is New York's principal industry," restaurant reviews had become a mandatory column in most large newspapers (and many smaller newspapers) and the majority of the restaurants profiled were establishments that catered to the daily dining of the middle classes.[20]

Restaurant reviews furthered the middle-classing of dining by providing a standard of taste that transcended class. Whereas the first restaurant guides did little more than create lists of the most exclusive restaurants, the reviews of the late-twentieth century embraced good cooking wherever it was found. Reviewers discovered and recommended dishes served in diners, fast-food establishments, ethnic restaurants and small, out-of-the-way, inexpensive restaurants. Unlike the *Michelin Guide* which reserved its best reviews for rarified culinary experiences, the American restaurant review employed a variable scale that recognized the best among the everyday restaurants as well as elite restaurants.

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[19] Bryan Miller, "Craig Clairborne, 79, *Times* Food Editor and Critic, Is Dead," *New York Times*, 24 January 2000, A1.
[20] Lawrence Van Gelder, "New Yorkers, Etc.," *New York Times*, 25 April 1979, C14.

MAKING SENSE OF THE TRANSFORMATION IN RESTAURANT DINING

As modern restaurant-goers, reviews are our means of making sense of the dining landscape. Making sense of how that dining landscape was historically constructed by a nascent middle class of urban professionals, managers and clerks is, however, a more daunting task with few guides. Documenting the changes that the restaurant underwent between 1880 and 1920 provides the foundation for this study; eschewing intellectual histories for a material and institutional history, "Turning the Tables" seeks to demonstrate through a careful examination of the evolution of dining the emergence of modern middle classes with considerable cultural influence.

At first glance, the transformation of dining is not surprising. The industrial revolution of the late nineteenth century changed both production and consumption by manufacturing inexpensive goods and drawing more and more of the population to large cities where these goods—including less expensive food—were consumed *en masse*. The nascent white-collar middle classes had both the numerical strength and the collective purchasing power to play a central role in this new consumer culture. And yet, the degree to which the middle classes were able to shape this emerging consumer culture is at least a little surprising. For while members of the middle classes were at times organized as professionals, political activists or, more rarely, consumers, no group could claim to speak for the middle classes, no organized effort emerged to construct a middle-class identity, and few sought to coordinate Americans response to anything so mundane as restaurant dining.

Lacking the class identities that ownership and work provided for the upper and working classes, the middle classes found in consumption both the substance with which to fashion an identity and the economic opportunity to exercise considerable cultural influence. At first this

may seem circular. Can a largely unorganized group exercise the joint action necessary to forge

unity, identity and authority? "Turning the Tables" argues that the answer is yes, that small

preferences had large consequences. In the case of restaurants—and in a myriad of other small

economies—individual members of the nascent middle classes made choices in their own best

interests. In time, as these actions began to shape cultural institutions, the middle classes began

to recognize themselves as a significant consumer cohort and in their continuing efforts to "keep

up with the Jones" formed an increasingly coherent class. Entering the twentieth century, it may

not be possible to speak of a single middle class, but it is possible to describe a number of middle

classes with a shared sense of consumer authority.

"Turning the Tables" is not the only study to argue that the middle classes came to

recognize themselves through cultural consumption. But it adds to our understanding of the

development of an American middle class and the culture of consumption that middle-class

consumers championed by recognizing the agency of the middle classes. Since those in the

middle classes rarely produced the cultural products they consumed, it has been widely argued—

see Richard Ohmann's marvelous study of magazine culture for example—that the cultural

identity the middle classes discovered through consumption was constructed by capitalists for

capitalists and at most reshaped by the middle classes.[21] While a study of the urban middle

classes and their restaurant habits can not fully refute the importance of elites in shaping middle-

class culture—nor would I want to make that argument—it does remind us that the middle-class

experience of consumption was multifaceted. The construction of a culture of consumption did

not exclude the free and active participation of middle-class consumers. Looking at restaurants

demonstrates that not all—perhaps not even most—economic enterprises were as ideological or

as powerful as the magazine industry and that the consumer landscape that emerged at the turn of

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[21] Ohmann, *Selling Culture*.

the century allowed for individuals acting in unison to exert considerable influence over the character of twentieth-century culture.

The small preferences that established the foundation for a modern middle-class culture were not without recognizable ideological underpinnings. Opposition to what the middle classes viewed as the hedonism of elite conspicuous consumption served to unite middle-class consumers and set the tone for the most organized resistance to the aristocratic restaurant. Campaigns to change the language of the menu, to seek alternatives to patronizing service, and to include women explicitly condemned the codes of conduct that once justified elite privilege. Charles Rosebault longed for a past era when a few wealthy gourmets celebrated French cuisine, but the middle classes sought access over exclusivity and championed a democracy of dining. If the rhetoric of democracy did not eliminate every cultural barrier to formal dining, when coupled with the American economy's ability to lower prices, it nonetheless made sit-down family dining more accessible to more people than it had been in the nineteenth century. Cultural snobs might bemoan the dumbing down of dining epitomized by Howard Johnson's and later Red Lobster, but the rise of the middle-class restaurant opened a gateway to fine dining for millions.

The French restaurant and the aristocratic tradition were never entirely eliminated. French cuisine became one among a multitude of cuisines that Americans—including middle-class Americans—could find in large American cities in the early twentieth century and throughout the century French cuisine enjoyed a number of revivals. In 1939 the popularity of Henri Soulé's restaurant at the World's Fair prompted the opening of Le Pavillion in New York in 1941 and demonstrated that elite New Yorkers were still interested in haute cuisine. In 1961 the publication of Julia Child, Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (as well as Child's subsequent television show) sparked a widespread revival of

French cuisine. But French cooking remained a cuisine among cuisines. Le Pavillion soon faced competition from self-consciously American restaurants such as the Four Seasons and Child's success spurred the emergence of a culinary industry that would publish cookbooks and produced cooking shows that celebrated American and international culinary diversity.

The aristocratic tradition persists in more subtle ways. Recently, I met a friend for coffee at a national bakery-restaurant chain. The restaurant is modern with comfortable couches, track lighting and a television room. But when I stopped at the bathroom, I was struck by the sign on the door. It was the silhouette of a fashionable man of the 1890s with coiffed hair and a high-collar coat. In this small way, the legacy of aristocracy—the idea that all diners are gentlemen—survived. But if the trappings of the nineteenth-century restaurant remain, these are no more than the superficial leftovers of a culinary tradition that no longer shapes our dining experiences. Today we revel in democratic access and it is difficult to find a restaurant that does not cater to the masses. Those restaurants that emphasize high-prices and exclusivity nonetheless lend their recipes to *Gourmet*, are quickly imitated by more accessible restaurants, and eventually package their food for easy access in grocery stores. More importantly, the existence of elite restaurants does not exert a hegemonic sway over American dining culture.

Nonetheless, the persistence of elite restaurants and French cuisine serve as an important reminder that the transformation the middle classes championed at the turn of the century was never strictly about the rejection of a specific restaurant, cuisine or custom. The transformation of dining reflects cultural power. For the middle classes, the exercise of economic choice made possible a new dining order in which the cultural capital and economic capital of the middle classes would be respected. By 1920, the tables had been turned and the middle classes, not the upper classes, sat at the head of the table.

APPENDIX

SOURCES

To look at how restaurants have changed, "Turning the Tables" employs an eclectic mix of sources from journals and newspapers to cartoons, songs and census data. Available issues of three culinary journals, *The Cook*, *What to Eat* and *Table Talk*, were examined in their entirety for the years they were published between 1880 and 1920. Similarly, the study incorporates a survey of the restaurant industry journal *The Steward* from 1906 through 1917. These four journals, never before used systematically in a study of culinary history, were supplemented with a broad selection of newspaper and periodicals. Using both indexes and electronic search engines, two newspapers from New York and one each from Chicago and Los Angeles were also included. A full survey of the Reader's *Guide to Periodical Literature* also produced over one thousand articles that were read (when available) and incorporated when appropriate. Travelogues, travel guides, novels and a few city memoirs were consulted. Early in the project some consideration was given to memoirs and diaries, but after an initial survey indicated that these were not especially rich in descriptive detail, they were abandoned due to time considerations.

A study of a cultural phenomenon is necessarily a study of impressions, but statistical sources were used to establish the growth of restaurants. These include census reports and city directories from New York (used sparingly) and Pittsburgh. Likewise, archival sources—from menu collections in New York and Los Angeles—to the federal patent library were used for

specific chapters. In all cases, this study took advantage of happenstance. Mining secondary

sources, museum collections of artwork and songbooks occasionally provided useful primary

source evidence. Skimming through the women's pages of newspapers to look at cartoons and

illustrations and to explore advertisements and recipes also produced some of the more

interesting data for this study. Nonetheless, the diversity of the sources only supplemented the

backbone of the study, the periodical press. Periodical literature—newspapers included—are

used in this study in two ways. First, they have been used to provide a relatively objective

account of restaurants. Second, they have been used to offer the perspective of the middle

classes. Neither use is unproblematic and, to a degree, these uses are contradictory.

Descriptions of restaurant life were found primarily in magazines and newspapers. In the

case of magazines, these were often articles that intended to celebrate the restaurants of a city.

While they contained a degree of regional bias and were generally celebratory, most included

critical elements and were rich details. These were balanced with accounts from other cities (as

in chapters 4 and 5) and newspaper articles. In addition, biographical details when available

have been provided to offer some perspective on the author's experience and perspective. In

contrast to the magazine accounts, newspaper articles were less given to boosterism and were

usually unsigned. Although it is impossible to know for sure how or why they were written,

reporters—not especially well-paid and working long hours—were regular restaurant-goers.

Contextual clues suggest that these reporters were created as filler material prepared by reporters

who saw an easy way to make a little money by recounting their own experiences. While it is

possible that some liberties were taken, it is unlikely that these journalists had any agenda that

would significantly discount their testimonies. Again, accounts from various cities were used as

an informal check on each other (although the widespread practice of "borrowing" material from

out of town newspapers—often, but not always with attribution—undermines this technique in some cases). In a broader sense, all of these accounts—those in magazines as well as newspapers—probably contain inaccuracies but it is worth remembering that the subject matter was considered often viewed as trivial by contemporaries and that the errors are probably more often evidence of carelessness than any agenda.

The second use of periodical literature has been as a proxy for middle-class voices. Magazines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were written, with many notable exceptions, by and for the middle classes. Editors and reporters were often, if occupation and income can be used as a rough measure of class interests, members of the middle classes. More importantly, as both Richard Ohmann and Matthew Schneirov have argued, while turn-of-the-century magazines were shaped by a complex mix of commercial interests and editorial influences, the intended audience was the emerging middle-class consumer.[1] The same market that drove the growth of the restaurant industry drove the growth of the magazine industry. This does not mean, of course, that every article that appeared in these journals was written by the middle class or with the middle class in mind, but it suggests the potential usefulness of these sources for a study of middle-class impressions of the world they lived it.

In the case of the culinary and restaurant journals, contextual clues—in editorials, letters and articles—indicate the journals were self-consciously middle class. *The Cook*, for example, not only proclaimed its interest in finding its readership among "housekeeps" in its subtitle but provided price guides in every edition. While the term housekeep could be used for either a mistress or a maid, the inclusion of the price guide suggests the former. In a middle-class home, a housewife would have been responsible for the family's purchases. Likewise, although *What*

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[1] Ibid; Matthew Schneirov, *The Dream of a New Social Order: Popular Magazines in America, 1893-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

to Eat, a Midwestern culinary journal, included a eclectic mix of stories and regularly reported on the fads of high society, its commitment to Progressive politics and the numerous articles for women who planned to organize their own entertainments with the help of one or no servants suggests that the magazine considered its audience middle class. Accounts of poverty and wealth often adopted an "outsider looking in" point of view. And the same can be said of *Table Talk* (eventually purchased by *What to Eat*) with the added proviso that the magazine was, for a time, home to Sarah Rorer, a popular culinary school matron who regularly lectured to middle-class audiences. Even *The Steward*, the restaurant-industry journal used in this study, was not targeting the proprietors of restaurants but rather stewards (purchasing agents) and maitre d's, men who with rare exceptions would probably have earned middle-class sized incomes.

Ultimately, the interplay of sources offers some protection against abuse. Census data and the records of R. G. Dun and Company provide evidence that the number of restaurants was growing at a substantial rate. Given their numbers and incomes, only middle-class patronage can fully explain this growth and so it is not surprising that more impressionistic accounts from New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco also comment on the growing number of middle-class diners. Other significant arguments made in this study also are supported by mixed media of concurring opinion. Novels and songs, widely consumed by the middle class, demonstrate frustration with the abuses of elite society. Cartoons and newspaper contests support the claim that the middle classes felt insecure about their place in the consumer economy and the aristocratic restaurant. Scientists and waiters both advocated and observed the changes in diners' eating habits. Menus—only a few of the hundreds examined explicitly appear in the study—confirm these trends.

When it was possible to confirm an event or impression used in this study, those efforts have been noted in the text or footnotes. Patent records, for example, offer evidence that the waiterless restaurant entrepreneur John Daschner was more than just a braggart and had taken some concrete steps to turn his utopian vision into reality. Nonetheless, such fact checking has not always been possible. If individual sources occasionally mislead, it is hoped that the preponderance of a substantial body of evidence will serve to convince the reader that the arguments offered nonetheless have a basis in fact.

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