2004

Whipping up a region: how the North taught the South to cook "Southern"

Erin D. Bartels
University of Richmond

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/1076
Whipping up a Region:
How the North taught the South to cook “Southern”

Erin D. Bartels

Honors Thesis
Department of English
University of Richmond

Dr. Welford D. Taylor, Thesis Director

Spring 2004
The signatures below certify that with this essay Erin Bartels has satisfied the thesis requirement for Honors in English.

[Signatures]

(Dr. W.D. Taylor, thesis director)

(Suzanne W. Jones, departmental rea)

(Dr. Robert Nelson, English honors coordinator)
When people think of the American South today, they are likely to think first of pork barbecue, grits, cornbread, and okra. And in the 1930s and 1940s people, especially outside the South, clung to an image of black cooks in southern kitchens, frying up dinner. Food plays a leading role in the defining elements of southern identity, especially now that southern politics have become mainstream and southern cities are becoming strikingly similar to northern cities; in the words of a friend of Josephine Humphreys, there is “nothing to prevent [urban Charlotte, North Carolina] from being New Jersey.”

Inside those northern-looking houses, however, people know or pretend that there is food frying, stewing, and baking in kitchens that prevent any southern city or town from being too generally American. Southerners may not eat southern foods, whether for health reasons or simple preference, but they tend to assert their high quality or at least a familiarity with them. I stubbornly eat spoonbread in the dining hall, for instance, although I have no particular liking for it and know that it has enough butter to choke off my arteries. If I didn’t eat it, I might have to admit to non-southern friends that it’s not some glorious sign of culture in my region. As the South loses other trademarks, such as its rural quality or slow pace of life, it clings to one aspect of culture that it will always be able to reproduce. “Humans cling tenacious [sic] to familiar foods because they become associated with nearly every dimension of human social and cultural life,” says Donna Gabaccia in We Are What We Eat. Peggy Prenshaw claims that southerners “locate

---

southern identity inextricably in food habits."³ Bill Neal, in Biscuits, Spoonbread, and Sweet Potato Pie, has even ventured to suggest that “we know we are Southerners because we do eat possum and grits and okra,” and that “when we no longer eat these foods, we will no longer be Southerners.”⁴ Cooking may not constitute a culture, but it is not merely an incidental characteristic. People encounter food several times a day and regional staples thousands and thousands of times in a lifetime. And our senses of taste and smell are much more likely to bring on nostalgia or even trigger a particular memory than a sight, perhaps even a sound. Food does, literally and metaphorically, become a part of us.

The host of books like Neal’s, which meditate on the current state but especially the history of southern cooking and southern eating, show that many southerners’ desire to define themselves by their eating habits is symptomatic of their growing tendency to see themselves as southern rather than to identify themselves with their specific hometowns. They choose food as a route to that regional self-definition. Many twentieth-century cookbooks and collections of food writing claim to be “southern,” for instance Kathy Starr’s The Soul of Southern Cooking (1989, 2001),⁵ John Edge’s Southern Belly (2000),⁶ and John Egerton’s Southern food: at home, on the road, in history (1987).⁷ Not all twentieth-century “southern” cookbooks actually claim in their prefaces to represent all food traditions of the southern United States, but their titles, at least, betray their conception of themselves as part of a wider “South.”

⁴ qtd. in Prenshaw 7.
⁶ John T. Edge, Southern Belly: the ultimate food lover’s companion to the South (Athens: Hill Street, 2000).
century texts about food in southern states, on the other hand, tended to define themselves by state. Among these titles are Mary Randolph’s *The Virginia House-wife* (1824), Sarah Rutledge’s *The Carolina Housewife* (1847), a “Lady of Charleston’s” *The Carolina Receipt Book* (1832), and Lettice Bryan’s *The Kentucky Housewife* (1839). Earlier cookbooks sometimes made even fewer generalizations and even less often assigned themselves to a state or region. The earliest Virginians, for instance, used English cookbooks and adapted recipes to their new geography.

Critics have begun to study community cookbooks, the publications of villages and parishes, but there has been little work done on books that see themselves as part of a wider tradition than that of a single community where every housewife knows every other. Colleen Cotter’s essay “Claiming a Piece of the Pie: How the Language of Recipes Defines Community” looks at community cookbooks’ audiences and the ways recipes show who their authors believe will use the books, usually on a quite local level. Cotter has even studied the differences between community and commercial cookbooks, but she fails to acknowledge a set of books that, though commercial, limit their imagined audiences to a certain group of people that they imagine, though they do not know them personally, to share certain knowledge. This intermediary step between the local community and the huge imagined community of the more general commercial cookbook, for example the *Betty Crocker Cookbook* and *Joy of Cooking* that Cotter refers

---

10 *The Carolina Receipt Book: by a Lady of Charleston* (Charleston, 1832).
to, may be the method of setting the kitchen and home inside a context of “region” that Anne Bower mentions briefly in “Cooking Up Stories: Narrative Elements in Community Cookbooks.”

Bower, however, explores this tendency as just one, albeit “strong,” element of some regional cookbooks. When region so begins to define a cookbook that it obscures the local community, we no longer have the kind of cookbook Bower is talking about. In the Louisiana cookbooks she discusses, “time past is used to enrich time present, exoticizing and romanticizing, but also individualizing the recipe donors and their food.” This exoticizing regionalism works in more commercial “regional” cookbooks instead to de-individualize. In these cookbooks one can trace the combination of varying southern practices and tendencies into one umbrella South, usually the product of an outsider’s ideal. The image of the South has become increasingly attached to a set of generic dishes that commercial cookbooks have declared typically “southern.” Because the Northeast has dominated in the publishing industry, there is a sort of culinary imperialism involved. Northern editors and publishers, over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, standardized southern cooking and therein contributed heavily to the image of a single, typified South.

The North has constructed a South for itself largely by creating an image of the generic southern kitchen—even nineteenth-century Northern literature about the South, most notably *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, focuses on home and the kitchen. Southerners (here I mean most generally people living in the southernmost latitudes of the United States)

---

14 Bower 33.
have taken this image as a model for their own understanding of their past. The undifferentiated “southern” kitchen has become synonymous with southern identity, and in today’s South people like Bill Neal can claim that without possum and grits and okra there will no longer be southerners. While the original southern focus on regional dishes may have grown primarily out of the sense of regional cohesiveness necessary during and after the Civil War, I argue that the focus on food one sees throughout the twentieth century and today among southerners comes from an internalization of northern romanticizing of the southern kitchen and diet.

I will trace this progression toward the essentialization of southern cooking and therein southern identity by exploring cookbooks dealing with all or part of the South and ranging in years from 1877 to 1941. By 1941 the generic South whose culinary practices Neal sees as so intrinsic to southern identity is apparent in Marion Flexner’s *Dixie Dishes*. Using Marion Cabell Tyree’s 1877 *Housekeeping in Old Virginia* as a sort of control—because it is relatively unconscious of the idea of southernness (even at a time when the Confederacy had recently ceased to be a politically well-defined South)—I will look at how the concept of southernness begins to emerge in the North after the Civil War in Ohio native Estelle Woods Wilcox’s 1883 *The Dixie Cook Book*, published for a southern audience. I will then move to a period when northern cookbooks seem most intrigued with the South and explore the unified vision of race and region that the Culinary Arts Press of Reading, Pennsylvania followed in its 1939 *Old Southern Cook Book*, comparing it to the still somewhat local 1935 cookbook *Famous Recipes of Old Virginia*. Near the end of the development of this tradition of portraying a single, sunny South, Flexner, a Kentucky woman who very much considers herself a southerner, could
in 1941 produce a volume for northern audiences that overlooks any idea of specific places in the South and allows Flexner to treat her memories of Kentucky foods as if they typify southern dining. Even from within the region Flexner can make no distinctions, and forty-nine years later Neal will be able to claim that “Southerners” eat possum, grits, and okra and would not be southerners if they did not. 15

Even more recently than the 1940s the southern obsession with food has indeed taken on exactly the form Neal describes: southerners feel that they need southern food to remain southern, to set themselves apart from the rest of the country. Their fascination then becomes a focus on the past, a clinging to a time when communities, speech, and landscape in the South differed as much from their northern incarnations as food seems to now. We all know that many a southern family sets pasta or pot roast on the table, but we try to paint these incidents as minor deviations from a norm. We know that southerners eat Thai and Japanese and French food, most likely as often as northerners do, but we redirect attention to the more “southern” meals that they may eat only once or twice a week. As people grasp for unifying characteristics across a region, they tend to exaggerate similarities among people in the subsections of that region and overlook distinctions. Sheldon Hackney contends that the South has a “bipolar identity” and requires some sort of “dissent from America” to maintain that identity. 16 Since “Henry Grady began peddling his New South snake oil to the New England Society in New York in 1886,” however, the South “has been vanishing.” 17 During that same timeframe southerners, from the Agrarians to the organizers of recent attempts to retain Confederate symbols on state flags, have shown a perverse desire to retain their identity as dissenting

15 qtd. in Prenshaw 7.
17 Hackney 69.
Americans. Food traditions are clearly not the cause of this identity crisis, but people have fixated on them as indicators, and they are therefore symptomatic of people’s attempts to define region. If southerners feel that they are losing their southern identity, they will cling to even as seemingly trivial an element as food.

Harder to explain at first glance is the northern (or more generally non-southern) obsession with southern foods. Even generic American cookbooks that tend to avoid regionalizing occasionally point out a southern variation as non-standard. The ubiquitously American *Better Homes and Gardens Cook Book* from 2002 includes an addendum to its cornbread recipe: “In the southern United States, cooks prefer baking their cornbread like this—in a skillet.” Non-southern seems to be standard; southern requires a note. The non-southern United States, with the exception of the Southwest, has learned to treat its food as either local specialty (usually city-based, for instance Boston Brown Bread) or just “American.” No one publishes “northern” cookbooks. Regionalizing happens only when a place lies outside the dominant cultural norm. It is difficult to cherish our own diet unless other people package it and present it to us as special, something that they perhaps envy. For children, food is food; it is just what their parents cook or buy for them. Eventually they may call some foods “foreign,” but until they begin eating outside the home, losing a sort of inward-turned innocence, they tend not to realize that the cooking in their own homes has been one distinct subset of the cooking available in their own area or nation. In the same way, non-southern U.S. culture rarely presents its food as any special marker of culture, perhaps because it has the Southeast and even a few other distinct regions against which to define itself. And it

---

can explore and construct these regions by writing cookbooks. Janet Theophano calls the practice of “[r]eading cookbooks . . . to travel to distant countries without leaving home” “tabletop tourism,” a form of exploration useful perhaps because its cost compares favorably to actual travel but often enough because it requires less risk. Tabletop tourists can “experience the foreign while still feeling the security of home.” In the case of southern cookbooks and northern audiences, the travel experience is of course not international but interregional. In as large and regionally diverse a nation as the United States, however, interregional tabletop tourism still allows its reader a peek at the exotic.

Although the northern United States does have its own internal distinctions, Sheldon Hackney argues that “stereotypical images of New England, Texas, the West, and California . . . are rooted in the past, in certain events (like the Battle of the Alamo), or particular periods (like the transplantation of town-meeting Protestantism to New England in the Colonial period, or the settling of the Great Plains in the nineteenth century by Europeans).” Southern identity, on the other hand, results from the “filtering of common developments and experiences through an awareness of regional difference.” Southerners notice region and use it to define themselves, but why? Bower acknowledges, while discussing the recent Louisiana cookbooks that set their recipes “within a framework of regionalism,” that region is in fact a framework that writers and editors play with consciously. She uses the word “region” to define a much smaller area than the body of southern states, but the sense that region is a construct that one can manipulate remains. Although Louisianans are able to locate their texts in a

---

19 Janet Theophano, Eat my words: reading women’s lives through the cookbooks they wrote (New York: Palgrave, 2002): 272.
20 Theophano 272.
21 Hackney 68-69.
22 Hackney 69.
region, that ability comes from the example of people outside Louisiana who describe it in a particular way and draw its borders according to their own interpretations. Political boundaries often figure heavily in the construction of region. The government decided where Louisiana begins and ends, and people can easily fit their perceptions of “Louisiana culture” or “Louisiana cooking” to these borders. Whether its causes are political or not, region as a concept does not and cannot emerge on its own.

A group of people living in a certain area will never define themselves as a region unless they are following the example of an outside observer. “‘Regional’ is an outsider’s term,” says Eudora Welty in *Place in Fiction.*23 “It has no meaning for the insider who is doing the writing, because as far as he knows he is simply writing about life.”24 Both Welty and Ellen Douglas emphasize “‘place, in the sense of the specific’” as “‘absolutely essential’” in texts whereas region is unimportant.25 In their fiction Welty and Douglas work to establish places that are not generically southern but instead individual, living locations. Although Welty is dealing with the novel as a genre, which she says has “from the start” been “bound up in the local, the ‘real,’ the present, the ordinary day-to-day of human experience,”26 the cookbook, as an equally real and present genre, needs a rootedness in place that it seems to have only when, as Bower mentions, the regional framework of the introduction is set off by individualized contributors and individual recipes.

24 Welty 132.
26 Welty 117.
Not only is “regional” an outsider’s term, but it is also a statement of cultural hierarchy. Writes Richard Gray, “The word region is usually applied to an area judged to be on the fringes; regional and regionalist, in turn, tend to be applied by ‘us,’ the members of a culturally dominant group, to ‘them,’ a group or area whose interest very largely stems from its not being at the center of things.” It is therefore no accident that the publishing industry producing southern “regional” cookbooks is located in an area that sees itself as at the center and southern states as outsiders. And precisely by defining an Other, the “‘mainstream’ culture” establishes itself as “‘center’” and ensures its own identity “through a series of contrasts with its ‘regional’ Other.” The North, then, needs the South, but having once perceived itself as distinctive, the South in return constructs itself in contrast with the North.

What some scholars have suggested does define a South and set it apart from the rest of the United States is its African influences. Margaret Jones Bolsterli speculates that “the distinctive features of Southern culture stem from the Black presence” and points out similarities in southern (black but also white) and West African cultural practices. Although Bolsterli also mentions “objective” markers of southern identity, slavery first among them, she primarily highlights the way “Southerners feel ‘different’ and others feel that they are different too.” Bolsterli traces the cultural heritage of

28 Gray xiv.
30 Bolsterli 120.
southerners of all races back to Africa, using the link of common foods, which she calls “the most accessible of all cultural indicators,” as a starting point.\textsuperscript{31}

Her suggestion that the South is different from other regions primarily because white people there were in closer contact to black people carries over to all of southern culture, but it indicates that to at least some extent there might be a reason for the common elements in recipes that non-southerners (and increasingly over the course of the twentieth century, southerners) call southern. Race in the southern United States is deeply intertwined with the idea of region and with cooking and is perhaps the one element that makes a string of “southern” places from Texas to Georgia up to at least Virginia some kind of whole.

White people in areas of the United States where slavery was once common typically fail to recognize the African origins of much of their traditional diet, probably because of what Bolsterli calls “unconscious racism.”\textsuperscript{32} People fail to consider African influence because of the prevalence of the “notion that Blacks came to this continent so stripped of African heritage that they retained nothing of their own.”\textsuperscript{33} Many of the recipes white women have claimed as their own have come down to them—even if not directly—from slave or servant cooks. In the early days of the American colonies, claim Gabaccia, slaves from West Africa or from Africa by way of the Caribbean already knew how to cook rice, the staple grain of the early South, and were thus the colonial South’s culinary experts.\textsuperscript{34} They rarely recorded recipes, of course, but their dishes worked their way into the southern cooking of most southerners, black and white. And from those

\textsuperscript{31} Bolsterli 121.
\textsuperscript{32} Bolsterli 126.
\textsuperscript{33} Bolsterli 126.
\textsuperscript{34} Gabaccia 30.
African ingredients, African and African-American hands fashioned African and then African-American dishes. According to Gabaccia, “[e]arly visitors rarely mentioned the possibility that African women, who actually did almost all the cooking in elite families, shaped the eating habits of Charleston’s and Savannah’s wealthy Europeans.” 35 Even if Charlestonian housewives were dictating recipes to their slaves, transmission of a recipe does not ensure replication of a product. Two cooks might “whip the whites of three eggs until frothy” 36 (an imperative from one American cookbook) for example, in drastically different ways, and although both meringues would be meringues, they could be of different type, taste, and texture. Interpreting a recipe is a matter of translation from page to mind to hand, and a cook’s own background will color that translation process. Southern cooking reveals that what is, perhaps, common to the places the North thinks of as southern is a biracial heritage. This biracial South seemed exotic enough to the North, especially between 1880 and 1940, to figure heavily in its cookbooks and domestic literature. Among the most “exoticizing” elements in these cookbooks is the portrayal of blacks as utterly distinct from other human beings.

Mammy imagery figures heavily in southern cookbooks and in stories and songs about the South. No preface of any northern collection of southern recipes from before the 1940s that I have run across neglects to mention Mammy working lovingly over the stove. The image fits in well both with association of voodoo abilities with African Americans and with what Kenneth Goings calls “servants in the Aunt Jemima mold—fat,

35 Gabaccia 31.
deferential, but happy.”37 Black women according to this image were quintessentially natural: “unattractive, distinctly nonfeminine, and lacking in most qualities associated with womanhood, with the notable exception of birthing—there they were seen as womanly par excellence.”38 Whereas to cook and serve in the domestic realm in the North was “the mother’s empire” and the kitchen was the “heart of the household”39 in the late nineteenth century, in the South (as imagined by northern publishers) the inclusion of mammies in illustrations and descriptions made cooking a more earthy practice. The exotic quality of this image, foreign to women in other parts of the country who may have been unable to afford servants, whose wages were higher there, makes the book attractive to a reader or cook interested in traveling by imagination.

The figure of the black southerner, whether a mammy, a lazy young man, or the omnipresent “negro assistant,” figures in fact among the most prevalent indicators of the national fascination with the South that characterized the 1930s and ’40s. Kenneth Goings’ research on what he calls “black collectibles,” figurines with “exaggerated racial features that helped to ‘prove’ that, indeed, African-Americans were not only different but inferior as well,” shows that the role of African-American figures in white history was not, however, merely a symptom of the renewed fascination with the South after the first World War but had in fact existed since the days of Reconstruction.40 These figures, as reproduced in Goings’ photographs, closely resemble the drawings in the Old Southern Cook Book and Dixie Dishes: they are quite dark, usually smiling, all too often eating

38 Goings 14.
40 Goings xiii.
watermelon, and they usually serve as kitchen decorations. “Literally tens of thousands” of black collectibles “were produced in the United States, Europe, and Asia from the 1880s to the late 1950s,” writes Goings. To a degree the figures were an outgrowth of the emergence of advertising. Businesses needed endearing figures to lure their customers to products, and the same African American images that people had chosen to see as humorous and lovable in Uncle Remus stories or even plantation romances leaked easily into the world of advertising and unnecessary household products. Quite literally domesticizing an image of the Other by placing it in the kitchen, as a cookbook cover or salt shaker, removes any threat it might otherwise have carried. White Americans probably tended to see these stereotyped depictions as “slightly humorous and very endearing” rather than “degrading to African-Americans.” Making an exotic character still, smiling, and endearing creates an illusion of having integrated it into one’s life and coexisting peaceably with it.

Goings points in particular to the Aunt Jemima character, whose advertising purpose was to persuade the nation that “northerners could now enjoy this distinctive southern treat,” and that the “nation was whole again!” Northern access to idealized strains of southernness probably did create precisely the warmth that advertisers wanted to achieve, especially in this post-World War age of nationalism. In addition, people tend to require some salve for their consciences, and just as the “Uncle Remus stories were helpful in creating the illusion that race relations were progressing smoothly in the South, and that the North need not worry about its colored brethren in Dixie,” smiling black

---

41 Goings xiii.
42 Goings 13.
43 Goings 32.
44 Goings 9-10.
figurines or cookbook illustrations aided the conception that any attribute of America, in comparison to dark, foreign forces, could be positive.

Although this exoticizing trend is primarily a northern phenomenon, Southern-produced recipe books do not necessarily exclude mammy imagery. While Marion Cabell Tyree’s recipe collection, published as *Housekeeping in Old Virginia* in 1877, is not conscious of the South as a region, its first page bears a picture of a smiling black cook in a kerchief stuffing a turkey. Tyree’s collection focuses on the local, on Virginia, rather than a general South, but it assumes black servants as just part of the machinery of the kitchen, and that assumption expands to include what seem to be occasional mammy images. Earlier Virginia cookbooks (for example, Mary Randolph’s) buried the idea of a servant as deeply as possible and addressed itself to the housewife. In the postwar push to legitimize black servitude, the mammy and her smile are just beginning to serve their function in the South, a function that the North will later appropriate to soothe its own conscience. By not apologizing for or even paying particular attention to the presence of black servants in her cookbook, Tyree demonstrates that Northern perception of the South as unique because of its racial situation has not yet impacted her.

Happy servants simply allow the Virginia that Tyree describes to run as it does. While she does admit the existence of impoverished housewives in Virginia, arguing that “the loving hands of the poor man’s wife and daughter” should “take as much pains to make his bread nice and light as hirelings will do for the wealthy,”[45] she promptly forgets about her poorer readers and assumes the existence of servants in all of her advice. Tyree’s cookbook declares itself a tutorial in skills that it assumes a housekeeper should

---

never have to use. Bread-making, for instance, which she ranks as first among the skills a good housekeeper needs, is important because a housekeeper who can bake bread "will be able to give more exact directions to her cook and to more readily detect and rectify any blemish in the bread." In addition, a woman versed in baking will be prepared "if circumstances should throw her out of a cook for a short time."

By the very act of publishing a book of recipes, Tyree has aimed her collection at a literate audience, which she assumes will need not to bake bread but to direct bread-baking. Jane Carson in Colonial Virginia Cookery gives an example to answer one of the most practical questions involved in studying the interactions between cooks, mistresses, and cookery books. Carson explains that a slave at Monticello, when interviewed in the 1840s, "recalled that during his childhood his mother was the pastry cook and that 'Mrs. Jefferson would come out there with a cookery book in her hand & read out of it to Isaac’s mother how to make cakes tarts & so on.'" There is something especially disturbing in this answer to what Carson calls an "obvious practical question." If mistresses have the time to sit and read aloud from cookery books, presumably waiting for the cook to complete each step, then the sense that they employ or own cooks for the same reason that they employ gardeners or housecleaners (to free them for other tasks) evaporates. When both employer or mistress and her servant or slave remain in the kitchen while the bread gets baked, the cook must be doing the labor either because the mistress is inept or because the cook is adept. If the mistress could make better bread and the scene is no training session, then she would be avoiding making the bread out of pure

---

46 Tyree 19.
47 Tyree 19.
49 Carson xv.
laziness or stubborn ideals. It seems more likely that (laziness, stubbornness, and ideals aside) the slave or servant is actually the far better cook or baker. Why, then, does the mistress not allow the superior baker to use one of the methods that she almost certainly has memorized? Housewives keeping cookbooks and reading out of them to slaves suggests a will to maintain power. By choosing recipes, they assure that cookery is at least to some degree still their art. Controlling recipes seems to be the key to controlling the arts of cooking and dining when the housekeeper is unwilling or incapable of performing the labor of cooking.

The image of housekeeper as master artisan, training up subordinates to take care of the manual labor she ought not trifle with, persists throughout Tyree's commentary. A housewife hands out supplies, for instance, makes sure that servants do not treat the supplies with disrespect, oversees the cleaning of utensils, and chooses menus. When a dish requires special preparation, she may even step in and make it herself; a woman with fewer resources may cook almost every dish herself. The individual recipe authors address their reader directly, often in the style of today's cookbooks: sift flour, add sugar. Even if she lacks servants, however, the woman that Tyree addresses will always "have" some tasks "done," perhaps by a husband or child. The grammatical structure of sentences in the housecleaning sections suggests distance between housekeeper/reader and physical laborer. "Insist on having each utensil cleaned immediately after being used," reads one sentence; another implores that she not reuse milk vessels "without having them scalded and aired." As housekeeper, the reader may be filling the milk vessels or using the utensils, but someone else provides the labor to return each piece of

---

50 Tyree 24.
51 Tyree 66.
equipment clean and dry to her kitchen. The woman of the house acts again as artist or artisan who cannot deign to clean her tools; it would not be worth the expense of time or talent.

And yet Tyree assumes that her reader, artist as she may be, lacks basic knowledge of cooking and cleaning. Including recipes for the simplest breads or vegetable dishes, she admits that her audience may not know where to begin. And indeed the women her 1877 collection targeted were often the daughters of women who needed to know only how to direct a kitchen and cleaning staff; perhaps their mothers’ older slaves were more capable of directing staff than they were. When daughters cannot learn cooking from their mothers, they are more likely to turn to books for advice.

*Housekeeping in Old Virginia* presents itself as just such a book of advice. The issues at hand are those today’s readers would equate with southern crises, but with the Confederacy a thing of the past, Tyree genuinely seems to see herself as an American and not as a “southerner.” Nationalism overshadowed regionalism in the late nineteenth century because “[w]omen in the South were attempting to enter the national mainstream.” More concerned with the Virginia housewife as a woman of her nation, who must “succeed in making American homes more attractive to American husbands” than as a southerner, Tyree produces a volume that, perhaps out of postwar necessity, buys in to the idea that culinary skills do not debase a lady. But the decision of whether or not to employ black servants is not problematic for identity. By neither discussing in depth nor avoiding any mention of servants or race, Tyree’s collection suggest that its author does not have the necessary distance to critique or even define southern identity.

---

52 Theophano 58.
In the South the African-American cook was not yet, by 1877, even a "mammy," and she was certainly not exotic. Although "southern" cookbooks of the 1930s and '40s portray her as magical and make the life of a black southerner look like a Florida vacation, showing caricatured African-Americans snoozing under trees, flirting, eating watermelon, and smiling at babies, Tyree's cookbook does not. The later imagery is much more self-conscious and prevalent than Tyree's. I suspect that the infrequency of mammy imagery in the late nineteenth-century southern United States, in former slaveholding states, existed not only because southern women needed to feel some agency in the home and not admit that the wealthy white way of life rested entirely on black labor, but also because southerners did not need to domesticate the black woman as much as northerners did. While the influx of African-Americans to the Northeast was significantly higher after the Civil War and then after World War II than northern whites were used to, the white South was accustomed to a black presence. Having black people in their homes already, southern whites did not need to domesticate the exotic. Any unfamiliarity they may have had had faded. Even in 1847 Sarah Rutledge refers to them as "our native cooks." Exaggerating their domesticity was therefore unnecessary.

Much as southern cookbooks about southern communities, throughout the entire period 1877 to 1941, focus less on race than twentieth-century northern cookbooks about the South, early northern cookbooks include much less mammy imagery and make their culinary tours of the South in less generalizing ways. In Estelle Wilcox's *The Dixie Cook Book* (1883), despite her own lack of familiarity with the South, there is an element of what Bruce Robbins calls a desire for the "real particular" in opposition to "false

---

53 Rutledge iv.
universalism." According to this model, travelers spend their time on the ground, absorbing knowledge from the places they visit rather than simply observing them from physical or ideological promontories. Wilcox seems to sense that an essentialized portrayal of the South fails to capture its diversity, and she includes recipes and essays from individual southern women. In her preface, dedication, and editorial decisions, however, Wilcox does reveal the type of South she imagines. And her portrayal of the South fits into a particular post-Civil War economic and political niche. As Gray has argued, the northern part of the United States had an interest in creating a southern Other that would make the North look more like mainstream and therefore dominant America. On the other hand, the North had a nationalizing process on its hands. After the Civil War there was a nation to rebuild, and between the first and second World Wars, there was a need for national strength in the face of foreign enemies.

According to the model of British imperialism, which experienced similar needs, the key to this balance was domesticity. Susan Zlotnick describes the domestic solution in an article on England and Indian cooking: "the desire for the Other, and the fear of hybridity it unleashes," she argues, "could be deactivated through the metaphors of domestication." Whether gardener, handyman, or cook, the black servant in American advertising and storytelling has tended, in the same way, to be potentially alien but ultimately domesticated. And it is precisely in the domestic world—cookbook illustrations, salt and pepper shakers, cookie jars—that the North bought the image of the southern African-American. The North made not only the southern black but also the

55 Gray xiv.
totality of the southern kitchen and through it the South an Other with eccentricities.

From the mammy at the stove to the mint julep on the porch, the South became a region full of odd little practices that the North had no interest in differentiating from one part of the area it wanted to call the South to another. And in another sense American cookbooks aimed at the South could make southerners more American. This push was mostly the project of the traditional commercial cookbooks such as *Better Homes and Gardens* or *Betty Crocker*, but Wilcox played the same role when she tweaked an Ohio recipe collection and sold it in what she called Dixie. She advertised a supposedly "American" collection of recipes to southerners as "southern" and indirectly invited her regionalized audience to become more "American" in the kitchen.

Because of her access to the publishing world through her husband and even because of her access to capital in a time when the post-Civil War South was still struggling, Wilcox was in a financial situation to tell the South what it needed. Before her collections, there had been cookbooks from the South—ranging from Rutledge’s 1847 *Carolina Housewife* to Tyree’s *Housekeeping in Old Virginia*—but they had not called themselves southern. It took an outsider to decide that recipes appropriate in Virginia would also be appropriate in Mississippi. If Tyree had any knowledge that trends of essentializing southern identity were emerging, she did not address them but instead focused on defining a sense of place through cooking and kitchen practices.

Roughly a contemporary of Tyree’s book, Wilcox’s *The Dixie Cook Book* tries to market post-Civil War perceptions of southernness to southerners, the very southerners who, as Tyree shows by appealing to her readers’ American identities, are beginning to outgrow localized ways. Once a region has completely internalized an image of its foil,
the culturally and economically dominant area can begin to market that image back to the less culturally powerful region. The mainstream culture slices off a portion of a remote culture, seasons it to its own liking, and serves it up to the original culture’s people. Zlotnick describes a similar exchange between England and India: “Ultimately,” after a long period of being written about and cooked in England, “curry became so ‘completely naturalized’ that it could be given back to India.”57 Tellingly, domesticity is at the heart of both attempts to impose a representation of a region onto that the people of that region. I use “impose” cautiously since the attitude more nearly fits the following structure: “You will like this product because it speaks to your culture, and we know your culture so well through our long appreciation of it that we understand what will appeal to you.” Changing the way people view the food they eat, whether one’s actual intent is to change it or whether one is unadvisedly passing on stereotypes, can change the people themselves because we often read the “symbolic nature of food practices as a way of understanding the essence of community.”58 Without outside designation of the states from Maryland southward and west to Texas as collectively “southern,” it is unlikely that residents of that area would ever have considered that they might share traditions that set them apart from the rest of the country. And it is unlikely that they would have played into those stereotypes.

Regional stereotypes in The Dixie Cook-Book are easy to locate because the book descends largely unaltered from a northern ancestor. The first Centennial Buckeye Cook-Book came out in Marysville, Ohio in 1876, one among many American cookery books.

57 Zlotnick 64.  
58 Prenshaw 7.
compiled for church and charity.\footnote{Virginia M. Westbrook, “Introduction to the Reprint Edition,” *Buckeye Cookery and Practical Housekeeping* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988): vii.} Edited by Wilcox, a Marysville native who compiled the project from her home in Minnesota, the book’s original publisher was J. H. Shearer and Son of Marysville, but Wilcox and her husband printed it in Minneapolis.\footnote{Westbrook ix-x.} After buying the rights to the cookbook, the couple expanded and published updated national editions, adding a German-language edition and four editions of *The Dixie Cook-Book*, published between 1883 and 1893 and aimed at a southern market.\footnote{Westbrook xi.} Issued by Clarkson, an Atlanta publisher, the 1883 first edition of *The Dixie Cook-Book* is a reprint, with minor changes, of the most famous of Wilcox’s regionless editions, *Buckeye Cookery and Practical Housekeeping*. It includes, in addition, several essays on southern housekeeping by southern women, and as proclaimed on its title page is “largely supplemented by tested recipes of the more modern southern dishes, contributed by well-known ladies of the South.”\footnote{Estelle Woods Wilcox, ed. *The Dixie Cook-Book* (Atlanta: L.A. Clarkson, 1883): title page.} Most interesting is the subject matter of the added pieces, the interregional variation of the “well-known ladies’” contributions, and the changes in text from northern versions of *Buckeye Cookery*.

Wilcox and her publishing team created a northern version of the southern kitchen, recorded it, and sold it to southern women. With southern presses rare and apparently neglecting the cookery market, Wilcox found an audience ready to buy not simply her all-American *Buckeye Cookery* but specifically the version she, as a northern businesswoman, deemed better-suited for southern women and southern kitchens. *The Dixie Cook-Book* serves as an instance of marketing an identity to southerners from the
outside, and in relaying its notion of southern cookery it displays its compilers' attitudes toward southern women and southern culture two decades after the Civil War.

Whereas Tyree never mentions the recent war, preferring to focus on Virginia’s origins and its future, in its dedication Dixie appeals directly to a postwar clientele. In place of the Buckeye’s seemingly regionless but decidedly American dedication to “those plucky housewives who master their work instead of allowing it to master them,”63 Dixie’s editors devote it to “the Mothers, Wives, and Daughters of the ‘Sunny South,’ who have so bravely faced the difficulties which new social conditions have imposed on them as mistresses of southern homes, and on whose courage and fidelity in good or ill fortune the future of their beloved land must depend.”64 The phrase “Sunny South” and its position in quotation marks distance the dedication’s author from the southern United States; calling the book’s audience mistresses of southern homes and mentioning the future of “their beloved land” frankly declare a non-southern perspective. Region this clearly defined never appears in Tyree. The sympathy with southern mistresses and their land could be a predecessor of the fascination with southernness from which Dixie Dishes and The Southern Cook Book later sprang. A simpler explanation is flattery, Wilcox’s business sense surfacing in an attempt to gain readers’ favor and then their interest in the volume. In her preface, for instance, she “submits” her book “just as it is to the generous judgment and intelligent consideration of Southern housekeepers.”65 But regardless of her intentions, the dedication proves the early existence of a vocabulary for describing a “Sunny South” populated by tragic plantation mistresses. It paints a scene of the South as

63 Buckeye Cookery, Dedication.
64 The Dixie Cook-Book, Dedication.
65 The Dixie Cook-Book, Preface vi.
a pitiable bloc of states newly stripped of its labor force, compelled into the kitchen, and in need of rejuvenation.

*Dixie’s* dedication seems careful to avoid any reference to war or reconstruction. Surely it implies no other “difficulties” or other causes for “new social conditions,” but the dedication commiserates without blaming any particular force: it is the social conditions themselves that impose the difficulties. Just as Wilcox takes advantage of the average (or at least regionless) American woman’s sense of her American independence, dedicating the 1880 edition of *Buckeye Cookery* to “those plucky housewives who master their work instead of allowing it to master them,” she praises southern women’s particular “courage and fidelity.” In *Dixie’s* preface, a reworking of *Buckeye Cookery’s*, both depictions intermingle; “Southern housekeepers” become both regionally distinct—they are “generous” and “perplexed” by circumstances—and generally American—they are women who need a book to “aid them in their successful and happy reign in ‘Woman’s Kingdom’—the Home.” Wilcox seems particularly interested in the idea that southern women cannot, in fact, do all the cooking they have always imagined they are not only capable of but in control of. Her own sense of a market niche is apparent in her descriptions of the South. It is notable that although the 1880 *Buckeye Cookery* appeared earlier and thus three years closer to the end of the Civil War, the war does not exist in the picture of America and America’s kitchens as Wilcox presents them. Granted, the war hit the defeated South harder than it hit the North. But a cookbook written by a southern woman would probably not have dwelt on it any more than

66 The Dixie Cook-Book, Dedication.
67 Buckeye Cookery, Dedication.
68 The Dixie Cook-Book, Dedication.
69 The Dixie Cook-Book, Preface vi.
Wilcox’s cookbook for northern women did. In fact, Tyree does not. If one could imagine the North and South equally privileged regarding access to true American identity, it would make sense that Tyree does not mention the Civil War in her cookbook for people of her own area any more than Wilcox does in a collection for fellow Ohio natives.

Although the *Dixie Cook-Book* retains much of the imagery of American self-reliance and pluckiness, generalizing these qualities as more than merely northern, it downplays major, direct links to northern business and culture. Considering how rarely southern books went (and continue to go) into publication in the South rather than in New York or another northern publishing center, Wilcox’s choice to publish in Atlanta is telling. Tyree had published in New York, after all. Wilcox relocates the entire publication process rather than try to sell a northern cookbook in the South. And the Publishers’ Notice deliberately sidesteps a description of *Dixie’s* origins. The publishers who speak in the Notice appropriate a southern “we” and distance themselves from any connection with the original *Buckeye*. “In attempting to plan a thoroughly practical work on Housekeeping and kindred subjects that would meet the real needs of the Southern matrons of to-day,” the “Publishers” say, the “well known ‘Buckeye Cook-Book’ . . . came under our notice.”70 One gets the idea that L. A. Clarkson had been searching long and hard for an appropriate cookbook to publish for southern women and simply happened to choose Wilcox’s collection. According to the Virginia Westbrook, who prepared the 1880 *Buckeye Cookery* for republication in 1988, “the Wilcoxes were shrewd businesspeople” and “tapped the Southern market” with a revised edition of

---

70 *The Dixie Cook-Book*, Publishers’ Notice.
Buckeye Cookery, "issued as The Dixie Cookbook."\textsuperscript{71} The Wilcoxes almost certainly approached L. A. Clarkson. The Publishers' Notice, however, attributes the action to these southern publishers: "we have made it this," have made the Buckeye into the Dixie, "with the consent of its [the Buckeye Cook Book's] Publishers."\textsuperscript{72} Whether the Wilcoxes were certain or only wary that their status as northerners might hurt their sales, they extracted themselves as much as possible from Dixie's pages. The name of A. G. Wilcox, Estelle Wilcox's husband, appears only once in the book, underneath the Publishers' Notice: "Copyright, 1883, by A. G. Wilcox."\textsuperscript{73} Her own name is absent even from the title page.

The Dixie Cook-Book's other major deviation from the Buckeye is the disappearance or replacement of enough northern place names from recipes to give the collection a sense of regional balance. Whereas the original Buckeye's recipes come mostly from Ohio and Minnesota women, with significant minorities of recipes from Michigan, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Illinois, in the Dixie most, rather than approximately half, of the recipes include no origin. The Buckeye does have a few southern contributors, for instance "Rhoda, Ballsville, Va.,”\textsuperscript{74} or "Mrs. J. S. Sperry, Nashville, Tenn,”\textsuperscript{75} but even with all southern states combined they are insignificant. For a cookbook whose preface speaks of the "American household"\textsuperscript{76} and never mentions a particular area of the country, it focuses heavily on the Midwest and Northeast. And indeed a dominant area can decline to see itself as regional or as less than representative

\textsuperscript{71} Westbrook xi.
\textsuperscript{72} The Dixie Cook-Book, Publishers' Notice.
\textsuperscript{73} The Dixie Cook-Book, Publishers' Notice.
\textsuperscript{74} Buckeye Cookery 39.
\textsuperscript{75} Buckeye Cookery 38.
\textsuperscript{76} Buckeye Cookery, Preface.
of the nation. Glynis Ridley, in “The First American Cookbook,” argues that a “decision to include or exclude immigrant cooking traditions, or to allow the traditions of one region to dominate a text that claims a national brief says much about the relationships of groups of individuals to the state” and in fact “may be construed as a political act.”

Although the Buckeye wants to claim applicability to the entire nation, its compilers have constructed it out of their own regional assumptions. It almost fully ignores the South, excluding it from its vision of the American household by marginalizing its food, and although I found no sales records, it is unlikely that the original Buckeye sold well in the South.

Dixie works to dispel the notion that southern women have no part in a generally American publication. It retracts the idea that Ohio, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania can adequately represent America. Although the page sequence of the Dixie Cook-Book follows the 1880 Buckeye Cookery almost exactly, it occasionally adds or deletes a recipe but much more often simply deletes the hometown of a recipe’s donor, leaving just her name or no tribute at all. “Mrs. George H. Rust, Minneapolis, Minn.,” for example, becomes “Mrs. George H. Rust.” The remainder of the two pages is identical. This excision of northern place names does not occur in every instance; in fact, it is limited to about half of the original northern contributors, and there seems to be no pattern to which names disappear. It is just enough of a change to offer an illusion of balance. Southern or border-area towns, however, remain unchanged from Buckeye to Dixie, and in only one case does the Dixie Cook-Book include a recipe of admittedly northern origin that

78 Buckeye Cookery 17.
79 The Dixie Cook-Book 17.
does not appear in the Buckeye: "Cauliflower Pickles," contributed by Mrs. W. W. Eastman, Minneapolis, appears in Dixie alone.⁸⁰

Among the towns left out of recipes in the Dixie Cook-Book are "Granville, Ohio," "Marysville, Ohio," "Minneapolis, Minnesota," "Lancaster, Pa.," all part of the midwestern and northern region of dominance that presents itself in Buckeye as representative of the United States. Amusingly, "Richmond, Indiana" becomes simply "Richmond," and "Jackson, Michigan," becomes "Jackson" over and over. Without making the cookbook suspiciously southern, since the Publishers' Notice in fact praises the Buckeye Cook Book for its "contributions from all States of the Union" and its "cosmopolitan" character, Dixie's editors make various regions appear to have contributed evenly.⁸¹ Removing the northern city names, since it is one of the only major changes from the northern printing to its sister edition, must be a deliberate act. It is a recognition, in fact, of the political act that the Buckeye committed when it failed to seek out northern recipes and defined American cooking as northern cooking.

In a few instances the Dixie is bolder, blatantly changing the names of recipes or their contributors in ways that must necessarily be disguising their actual origins. Twenty pages into the breads section comes the first major distinction: "Eastern Brown Bread" becomes "Missouri Brown Bread," although the recipes themselves are identical and located in the same place on the page, and the Dixie recipe gains a contributor, "B. S. J., St. Joe, Mo.,"⁸² where in the Buckeye there was none. Missouri, then, had southern status in the Wilcoxes' eyes. A similar change on the same page corroborates the idea that Missouri represents southernness as fully as any other state: the recipe for "Brown

---

⁸⁰ The Dixie Cook-Book 270.
⁸¹ The Dixie Cook-Book, Publishers' Notice.
⁸² The Dixie Cook-Book and Buckeye Cookery 27.
Bread” in both cookbooks is exactly the same. However, the Buckeye attributes it to “Mrs. D. Bassett, Minneapolis, Minn.,”\textsuperscript{83} and the Dixie instead lists “Mrs. M. Irvine, De Kalb, Mo.”\textsuperscript{84} One can only assume that the two women did not submit recipes identical down to the punctuation. A Mrs. Irvine from Missouri may have submitted a similar recipe, but the Dixie’s modification of the contributor’s name in the absence of any modification of the recipe suggests a desire to disguise what must have been its origin. By inventing or misusing a Missouri contributor, the editor cements the notion that a southern woman, as Wilcox imagines her, will appreciate a recipe from Missouri, another southern state. The prevailing stereotype is that southerners stick to themselves and that subdivision within the region matters little.

The substitution of Missouri for Minnesota is no anomaly. “Minnesota Rolls” from “Mrs. Judge West, Bellefontaine”\textsuperscript{85} become “Maryland Rolls” from “Mrs. Judge W.”\textsuperscript{86} Here it is even more apparent that only one woman has actually submitted the recipe. The Dixie Cook-Book does not go to the extreme, here, of saying that “Mrs. Judge W” is from Maryland, but by removing the name of her hometown and changing the name of the rolls, the book makes them more neutral. Wilcox does add southern flavor by including a section of recipes from southern women. Because she presents the recipes apparently without major alteration, and despite the fact that she has selected them from a larger group, the recipes themselves do not present the picture of a unified, monolithic, suffering South that Wilcox uses in her Preface and dedication. They are instead much closer to the “unself-conscious picture of life as it is” that Cotter argues

\textsuperscript{83} Buckeye Cookery 27.
\textsuperscript{84} The Dixie Cook-Book 27.
\textsuperscript{85} Buckeye Cookery 41.
\textsuperscript{86} The Dixie Cook-Book 41.
surfaces in community cookbooks. Wilcox, by using both her own changes to previously existing recipes and the direct contributions of southern women, displays simultaneously the two forms of exploration Robbins points out. While she does sum up southern identity from her own, removed perspective, the promontory, she explores the territory on food, as it were, getting her feet muddy in actual southern contributions. From her promontory Wilcox declares, while introducing the recipes, that they come from “accomplished mistresses of Southern mansions, in nearly every state in Dixie.”

She grants the South diversity of places if not of economic standing. Between Wilcox’s description of the South as traditional “Dixie” and the southern recipes themselves lies a gap: a good number of the recipes give directions for foreign foods rather than traditional “regional” dishes, and most of the rest closely resemble Buckeye’s recipes. One opossum recipe does indeed surface, and more recipes use rice (more available in parts of the South) than do Buckeye’s recipes. Availability of game and agricultural products are some of the “objective” indicators of regional difference according to Bolsterli’s model. Other than these objective differences from latitude to latitude, the South presents itself without much attention to its “regional” status when Wilcox gives southern women a few pages to speak for themselves.

Removed from the publishing industry, the southern women who contribute seem to have phrased recipes less for an imagined audience than Wilcox has her own sections. Her notion that she would need to revise the Buckeye to sell it in the South implies a view of the South as Other that her contributions do fortify. And yet she could not have seen

---

87 Cotter 71.
88 The Dixie Cook-Book 1.
the South as a single, uncomplicated region, or she might have collected all her
"southern" recipes from one woman or one place and called them southern.

Thanks, perhaps, to volumes like Wilcox's, produced in the North and sold in the
South as southern, twentieth-century women from southern states seem to know what
"southern cooking" means as the Northern publishing industry has defined it. These
twentieth-century residents of the southern U.S. have become self-consciously
"southern." The Ginter Park Woman's Club of Richmond published *Famous Recipes
from Old Virginia* in 1935. By "Old Virginia" it means the Richmond and Tidewater
areas from the beginning of their settlement to the Civil War and can thus overlook the
culinary practices of Western Virginia. Although its regional self-consciousness is
heightened over Tyree's, *Famous Recipes* is still a community cookbook written by and
for Virginians and occupies itself primarily with the local rather than the regional.

Although *Famous Recipes* shows little consciousness of being part of the South, it
occasionally offers a recipe called "Southern Spoon Bread" or "Southern Spicy
Gingerbread," admitting that by 1935 there exists a tradition of lumping certain states
together not only because of their political history but also because of culinary traditions
they hold in common. Most often, however, recipes that declare themselves part of any
area wider than a single community limit that area to Virginia. "My Grandmother's
Receipt for Old Virginia Brunswick Stew," for instance, differs only slightly from the
Brunswick Stew recipes that northern tabletop tourist cookbooks call southern. Its
author, however, associates the recipe primarily with family history, only secondarily
with state history, and not at all with any region called the South. Mrs. Boze's

---

Brunswick Stew may incidentally resemble other southern stews, but she has not adopted it because of its southernness.

Famous Recipes’ three pages of biscuit-making methods show even less consciousness of region: biscuit recipe follows biscuit recipe with no indication that the collection might be in any way southern. Separate families offer separate recipes, and together they make up a body that might be representative of Virginia but makes no claim to be regional. And the variety of foods included in the Woman’s Club cookbook exceeds that of Old Southern Cook Book or Dixie Dishes, examples of self-consciously “southern” cookbooks that will follow it. The author of a commercial “southern cookbook” could hardly market a recipe for generic “Lettuce Salad,” an oil, vinegar, and lettuce combination, as southern, but since Mrs. Leland L. Miller of Richmond prepares the salad, it belongs in Famous Recipes. A South emerges that shares some culinary conventions with the North and admits that it shares them precisely because that South is unconcerned, in the context of 1930s Virginia, with being southern. Were the Woman’s Club to market its collection to a non-Virginia audience, it might play more with the conventions of region because it does recognize them, as the occasional titles with “Dixie” or “Southern” in them show.

Although Famous Recipes does not much concern itself with region, it does attempt to enshrine Virginia’s past. Modern America and its lack of tradition threaten Virginia traditions, it implies; so despite the abundance of cookbooks in the world, its Foreword says, this publication is justifiable because it contains the “things that have been handed down to us from our parents and grandparents—things they have tried and

---

90 Ginter Park 141.
found true.”

According to Theophano this tendency to “look back to” and in fact preserve “another era, one that (the author believes) is threatened by or persists in the face of social and cultural change,” is common in cookbooks. Culling its first few recipes from Mary Randolph’s *Virginia Housewife* and Hannah Glasse’s *Art of Cookery*, the most widely owned cookbook in early Virginia (despite its European origins), *Famous Recipes* demonstrates a desire to ensure that Virginians cook as their ancestors did. According to Theophano’s definitions it qualifies as a heritage cookbook written in part to keep natives cooking in accord with their heritage even when they have moved to far off states and countries since it addresses itself in part to “insiders living away from their native country.” “It is just one more bond to hold Old Virginia to her many children and friends who have wandered far away,” reads the Foreword. The historical category of “Old Virginia” may, despite the insistence on individual family traditions, be standing in for the category of “South.” Because Virginia’s lost children still belong to the local group, are in Theophano’s terms still “insiders,” the recipes do not require excessive explanation. Most make the kind of assumptions of prior knowledge that Cotter associates with community cookbooks: “The audience is a known quantity, which explains certain omissions or inclusions in the text.” Whereas *Famous Recipes*’ recipe for “Scotch Bread” specifies a baking temperature, none of its Sally Lunn recipes on the same page say more than to bake “in hot oven” or “bake slowly.” As local recipes, the Sally Lunns can assume a certain audience and omit unnecessary directions.

---

91 Ginter Park, Foreword.
92 Theophano 271.
93 Theophano 275.
94 Ginter Park, Foreword.
95 Cotter 69.
96 Ginter Park 133.
Because it concerns itself with Virginia’s past, *Famous Recipes* does include some illustrations of slaves in the kitchen, but they are less liberally scattered through the book than later commercial southern recipe books’ illustrations will be. The illustrations do attempt to make the same kinds of jokes: “De missus done buy de new cook book. I’se hope she don’ think I cyan’t cook,” reads the caption on the first page illustration.77 *Famous Recipes*’ black figures are not enjoying romantic southern scenery, however; they are all in the kitchen, and their reference to white women as “missus” indicates an earlier setting, probably the pre-war period with which the cookbook concerns itself. Slavery has already become a part of the story of Virginia’s past, and *Famous Recipes* includes references to it in order to assure readers of the cookbook’s ties to Virginia. The process that will make southerners cling to certain kitchen traditions is already developing in *Famous Recipes*. Explicitly Aunt Jemima-type imagery is absent, though. Without a need to sell the cookbook on the basis of an exotic or quaint regional quality, the Woman’s Club seems to include only those illustrations which will be actually amusing to its audience. The attributing of recipes to particular “mammies” also disappears from recipe titles. An attempt to preserve one’s family history has no need for recipes with origins outside the family, and *Famous Recipes from Old Virginia* does not try to locate the origin of any of its dishes in the African-American community.

In the North at about the same time, however, some cookbooks were beginning to idealize the perceived rootedness of southern food and the special domestic magic that the North at this time attributed to the southern “mammy.” *The Southern Cook Book of Fine Old Recipes*, a collection full of descriptions of long brunches and Sunday dinners, seems to approach the South both by idealizing black servitude and by romanticizing the

77 Ginter Park 1.
laid-back southern past. Edited by Lillie S. Lustig, S. Claire Sondheim, and Sarah Rensel, it was published by the Culinary Arts Press in Reading, Pennsylvania. WorldCat lists editions from 1935, 1938, and 1939. I am working with the 1939 edition.

According to its back cover, the *Old Southern Cook Book* was part of a series that included the 'Round the World Cook Book, the New England Cook Book, the Pennsylvania Dutch Cook Book, the Western Cook Book, and the Chinese Cook Book. New England and the American West, two other definable U.S. regions, have then also been singled out as having a regional cuisine, and all three regions fall into a category of exotic, viewed-from-afar American "types." *Old Southern* locates itself in the South by not only naming most recipes "Southern," "Plantation," or after a southern state, but also by peppering its pages with tributes to a romantic southland: "Kentucky, oh Kentucky, / How I love your classic shades, / Where flit the fairy figures / Of the star-eyed Southern maids," reads one bit of verse.98

The *Old Southern Cook Book* attests to its own accuracy at capturing the essence of southern cuisine by quoting a *Charlotte News* review on its front cover: ""Appetite-whetting, competent, delicious recipes that have made southern cooking famous the world over."" To qualify as authentically southern, then, a recipe or collection of recipes must obtain approval from one southerner. The idea that the South is unvaryingly the South has eclipsed Wilcox's assumption that she needed to collect recipes from various southern states in order to represent the region effectively. Despite its southern focus and even its southern endorsements, *Old Southern* presents itself as a resource for northern cooks. Concerned not with reminding its readers of precise measurements or cooking

times, it instead sets each recipe in a context, acting as a how-to for beginners. An Okra Soup recipe, for instance, explains that “[r]ice is invariably served with this soup and sometimes corn and buttered beans.”

International cookbooks also often set recipes thus in the context of a meal, helping cooks entirely new to a particular sort of cooking. *Old Southern* also defines “chitterlings,” rather than merely present a recipe for them, and in its directions for frozen mint ice for roast lamb, *Old Southern* instructs the cook to “[f]reeze as water ice.” This “as” is the type of descriptive language that Colleen Cotter calls “evaluation clauses,” which indicate “a prior knowledge of the genre,” and in this case it also indicates a prior knowledge of the practices of a particular region. A cook and a compiler, whom Cotter calls the “communicators,” “bring to the activity of cooking their own assumptions about the background and social identity of the participants.”

And “water ice” is a regional food, a Philadelphia-area food, in fact, suggesting the compilers’ regional background and their assumption that their readers will share that background.

The introduction’s wording similarly indicates a non-southern reader and cook; it implies, in fact, a generic American reader who lacks a region or a tradition of her own and thus needs an “aid in [her] culinary efforts.” Speaking to an audience that it assumes already has an image of the South, the introduction meditates for a moment on a few typical southern images, perhaps trying to work up a hunger for southern cooking and an associated sense of fulfillment in an audience without roots or traditions. The South that the introduction describes is sunny, fertile, and peaceful. “People think of the

---

99 Lustig 7.
100 Lustig 24.
101 Cotter 57.
102 Cotter 55.
103 Lustig, Introduction.
Southland as the place where the sun shines brighter, the breezes are gentler, the birds sing sweeter and the flowers are fairer,” it begins.\textsuperscript{104} Not at all interested in what southerners think of the “Southland,” the introduction assumes that the collection that follows will be of little interest to southerners, primarily because these recipes will already be universally familiar to all of them, practically running in their veins. The collection does of course admit subdivision within the South, attributing a few recipes to Kentucky, a few to Virginia or Maryland, and some to French Louisiana. It even states outright in the introduction that “[e]very part of the Southland is individual and distinctive in its cookery,”\textsuperscript{105} but the generalization of southerness as unified and exotic soon takes over.

Although the author of the introduction does not specifically credit a source for her recipes, she constructs the “editors’ problem” as the task of selecting from a larger body of recipes; “Many fine dishes,” she says, “had to be omitted to make way for better ones.”\textsuperscript{106} The introduction does point out one source, “Southern city folks,” though it does not explain how it solicited “[m]ost of the recipes in this book” from them.\textsuperscript{107} Regardless of how this transmission happened, it does indicate some actual southern influence on the recipes that made it into this book; the editors may have rewritten them, but they did not invent them. The introduction, in fact, focuses on the idea that no recipe is a product of pure invention, of one person’s mind without a tradition behind it; southern recipes have therefore arrived in the present through a process of transmission from person to person. In this sense they become regional rather than individual, a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{104} Lustig, Introduction.
  \item \textsuperscript{105} Lustig, Introduction.
  \item \textsuperscript{106} Lustig, Introduction.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} Lustig, Introduction.
\end{itemize}
process that does in fact shed light on the idea of community knowledge. Whether any knowledge could be truly regional is another issue.

What sets the *Old Southern Cook Book* apart from other similar collections is its outright admission that even white family recipes come from black sources: the recipes of “Southern city folks,” unquestionably white southern city folks, “undoubtedly in many cases owe their origin to the colored mammies who rarely bothered to write down their recipes.” This admission does not indemnify the *Old Southern Cook Book* or demonstrate a gap between some desire on its editors’ part to give full credit to black cooks and the desire to downplay the blacks’ role in southern cooking that one sees in other cookbooks of the 1930s and 40s. In the sentence directly following its confession that southern recipes do, as Bolsterli argues, originate with black cooks, the introduction explains that “colored mammies . . . didn’t have to” read or write; “you just put ‘em in front of a stove with the fixin’s and they created somethin’ grand . . . even if they couldn’t always ‘splain you jus’ how.” *Old Southern* seems to admit black cooks as a source of culinary knowledge in order to exploit their potential as exotic decoration.

Cooking by black women, in this cookbook and others, is less creation than conjuring. A mammy, according to the interpretation of the Americans in the 1930s and 40s who were so fascinated by this romantic heritage, did not create dishes out of any learned artistic skill; their abilities instead came from nature and magic. The mammy image survives even today: a Biblio.com description of a copy of the *Old Southern Cook Book* claims that it “[f]eatures recipes taken from Mammies [sic] and cooks thoughout [sic] the

---

108 Lustig, Introduction.
109 Lustig, Introduction.
It was this image that helped sell southern cookbooks in the past and perhaps still helps sell them; it offers buyers an opportunity to attempt to prepare a cuisine supposedly given to black cooks by whites originally but then changed for the better by the black cooks' magic.

Not only the introduction of the *Old Southern Cook Book* employs an idealized or otherwise stereotyped image of southern blacks. I have concealed up to this point that although the recipes themselves may hail from white city southerners, the *Old Southern Cook Book*’s selling point was probably its use of rural black images, both in rhymes and pictures, as decoration. The front cover bears, in fact, a heavy, kerchiefed black woman smiling and stirring a bowl of batter. On the title page is a picture of another kerchiefed black woman before a fire, watching two kettles. H. Charles Kellum’s drawings appear thereafter on every page, and only one of his southerners is white.

And what the Biblio.com description calls “[n]eat old southern quotes and poems throughout” are rhymed lines in African American dialects: “Watermelon red, peaches sweet, / Trout line callin’ from de river’s feet. / Mockin’ bird singin’ ‘e song so neat, / I’s livin; easy! I’s livin’ high!” reads one. Nothing makes an Other more manageable than the ability to put words in his mouth, a tendency that cookbooks by and for southerners demonstrate as well. The desire for the South served not only as a psychological need to make blacks manageable but also as a desire to return to the past, perhaps to escape hectic city life. Tellingly, the urban South never appears in cookbook illustrations or the most famous cultural artifacts of the time. The existence of servants in

---

11 "Browsing the Inventory of H&H Bookstore.”
12 Lustig 28.
some southern households (and of course in some northern households despite the less central position of the servant in the ideal of the northern home) indeed allowed for the southern way of life that many harried northerners wanted to see as slow and family-centered. *Old Southern* spends pages and pages describing the leisurely southern Sunday brunch; one points out that housewives could adapt certain brunch dishes to the northern lunch.¹¹³ And yet continued romanticization of the brunch or even Sunday dinner reveals a desire to appropriate more than just recipes.

Non-southerners think in terms of class and race when they think of the South, in a way in which they refuse to think of themselves. The American desire to ignore class might mean that Americans tend to project class divisions on other people. In the recipe for Kentucky Burgoo, the author describes the “picturesque sight” of “Mr. Looney, aided by many negro assistants, preparing this dish over open fires and huge kettles.”¹¹⁴ In a southern version of this recipe or even in a northern version of a similar northern recipe of soup for a crowd of thousands, the author would most likely fail to mention Mr. Looney’s assistants. And even a northern Mr. Looney would be likely to have “negro assistants” or at least poor white assistants. A northern reader would miss them, however, were they absent from a romantic image of the South.

In the most extreme developments of this tradition of romantic southern cooking and dining, even southerners began to expect idealized black servants and leisurely brunches—at least in literature and cultural works about the South. Many southerners never encountered any of these trappings of generic “southernness” in life, but they wanted them to designate southern identity in print. Although its author is a Kentucky

¹¹³ Lustig 12.
¹¹⁴ Lustig 6.
woman who sees herself as a southerner, Marion Flexner's *Dixie Dishes* uses the image of black kitchen help and leisurely southern dining in much the same way as the *Old Southern Cook Book*. The book was issued by a Boston press and addresses itself primarily to a northern and "modern" audience, but Flexner's nostalgia reveals her faith in the Southland she extols. *Dixie Dishes*'s cover flap announces that the "famous recipes of the South" are now "simplified for the modern kitchen and gaily illustrated with true Dixie Land flavor."\(^{115}\) This attitude reflects a culinary tourist's superficial appreciation for the quaint—strange coming from someone who considers herself an insider. Published in 1941, the collection claims to "represent a cross section of the culinary achievements of that romantic section of the United States celebrated in poetry and fiction as "Dixie Land."\(^{116}\) Flexner thus sets her book in a literary and cultural context, attesting to the influence of the romantic notion of the South, from *Gone With the Wind* to Aunt Jemima, in 1930s to '40s America. She dedicates the book to her mother, "The Best Cook South of The Mason and Dixon Line"\(^{117}\) and with that nod to a previous generation introduces an idealization of the past, too. Although she admits in the course of giving a recipe for hoe cake that "[o]ur ancestors were either less critical than we, or else the secret of making a light and palatable hoe cake is an art which has been forever lost" since most old-fashioned hoe cakes could be better used as a "kitchen mallet," Flexner usually presents the old way as better.\(^{118}\) "True Southern corn bread," for example, has no sugar, but she will submit to "Yankee pressure" and offer an optional

\(^{115}\) *Dixie Dishes*, front cover flap.
\(^{117}\) Flexner, Dedication.
\(^{118}\) Flexner 26.
quantity of sugar in her recipe. And even when she has to offer a quick version adapted to modern life, she aims for a product as close as possible to what she imagines to be the traditional dish. "Mammies," too, mourn the loss of an old recipe, Flexner suggests: her grandfather's cook, "Aunt Fanny," calls plantation cookies "a real old time receipt from 'way back" and makes the inferior drop cookies "only effen Ah's in a hurry." Flexner often mourns the necessary replacement of a southern product by a northern, as well: "Unfortunately, charcoal made from southern pine is rarely available in most sections of the country—hickory, or other hardwoods, being substituted."

She sets North and South in opposition, implying that northern cooking relies on no more than the principles of science and business, calling it "a matter of calories, vitamins, and economics" as opposed to its status as "a fine art" in the South. By treating the North in a mode of hyper-realism (using her outsider status to essentialize the North), she can imply that in the South, since it is here the North’s opposite, calories and economics do not matter in cooking. Southern meals in Flexner’s system focus on designing and dining; labor is a figure standing quietly in the corner while a flashy meal dominates the table. The scene laid contrasts sharply with Fox-Genovese’s assertions that domestic work and the kitchen never counted as culture in the South. Mary Titus suggests that "exquisite dishes, beautiful china, elegant table rituals—even recipes—equaled culture" on plantations, "but the labor of cooking itself generally did not."

In Flexner’s portrayal, however, dining almost disappears, and even for the woman

---

119 Flexner 27.
120 Flexner 115.
121 Flexner 50.
122 Flexner ix.
completing the labor, the “average Southern ‘Mammy’ cook,” cooking requires no work that is particularly taxing: “‘Lord, chile,’” says Flexner’s “average Mammy” about her biscuits; “‘I jes’ beats ‘em up.’”124 Since mammies cook by magic and since such cooking lies deeply imbedded in their nature, in Flexner’s world view as well as Old Southern’s, black cooks need not fret over meals; food practically makes itself. Flexner has accepted rewritings of southern history and now promotes them herself.

To Flexner’s southern mistress, however, who manages the kitchen and dining room, designs meals, and preserves past generations’ recipes in “a little, worn, leather-bound ledger,”125 southern food traditions are so important that the mistress must resist giving away her treasures too easily. While she does attribute some mystique to the “colored” cook, Flexner manages to make the white mistress the focal point of the process of recipe transmission. Flexner generalizes what she sees as an African-American ability to create good products without thought: “cooking by ear” is much the same, she says, as how “they know the rhythm, the tune of a spiritual even though they wouldn’t be able to read a note on a printed page.”126 Even as she praises this exotic ability, Flexner implies that black cooks are fortunate to have white women there to record the recipes that they would otherwise undervalue and fail to pass on.

Flexner’s understanding of the process of recipe transmission in the South differs from the Old Southern Cook Book editors’ understanding in that her “colored cooks” have “over a period of years . . . learned to make these things, too.”127 Old Southern’s editors make the opposite claim: even city residents who have had little contact with

124 Flexner x.
125 Flexner ix.
126 Flexner x-xi.
127 Flexner x.
servants rely on family recipes that came originally from African and African-American sources. *Dixie Dishes* belongs instead to the body of racially-biased texts that overlook the possibility that the nature of southern cultural difference from the North comes, as Bolsterli argues, "from the presence of Blacks who contributed African traditions to what became the prevailing culture." Flexner instead wants to locate the essence of southern identity in something white people there do. She promotes the idea that blacks originally ate the simpler southern dishes, "corn bread and collard greens," because their masters had created these foods as "fit fare for the slaves, but not for the masters." Only when hard times descended upon the South during and after the Civil War did the "poverty stricken aristocracy" begin to simplify its fodder and move toward the foods that it had supposedly originally created for slaves. Although the dominant 1940s image of the southern kitchen has seeped into her writing, Flexner resembles Tyree on one count: she wants white authority to trump black skill in the kitchen. She remakes the northern romantic image of the southern kitchen into a similar fiction more flattering to white women. But despite this one similarity to Tyree, Flexner's cookbook shares its vision of the South much more with northern cookbooks of its own time. The "Yankee pressure" that she says has caused her to alter some recipes seems to have affected Flexner in more ways than she notices. It has pressured (or at least convinced) people from her area and other southern places to see themselves as outsiders see them.

The willingness to buy another’s description of oneself stems, however, from a prior self-consciousness of difference. Because one group of states has had particular

---

128 Bolsterli 120.
129 Flexner xi.
130 Flexner xi.
131 Flexner 27.
exposure to biracial society and a “larger-than-life role” in the “American imagination”\(^{132}\) and national politics, argues Hackney, it has started to develop the kind of we/you split that allows both northerners and southerners to “create and use” the “social construction of the South as an American ‘other’ … for political, ideological, and psychological purposes.”\(^{133}\) An area has to have some sense of itself as a unit before it will buy into further strengthening of that image. “Richmond and Norfolk Cookery” might not sell, for instance, if Richmond and Norfolk residents had no sense of themselves as a community, of why those two cities might be separated out as a region and not Richmond and Goochland or Richmond and Charlottesville. Here the Civil War and pre-war politics, but especially the African-American presence that white southerners like Flexner want to reduce to trivial decoration, have perhaps contributed to the southern sense of self. These objective differences between northern and southern latitudes in the United State gave notions of southern otherness a foothold.

Southern cooking is indeed symptomatic of southern culture, but there are no sharp outlines to any area that one could call “the South” and no universal characteristics of the foods of any such region. Virginia cooking differs from Louisiana cooking as much as it docs from New York cooking even though some elements—“southern” elements—are common to the two. Bill Neal misses the mark when he claims that “when we no longer eat [southern] foods, we will no longer be Southerners.”\(^{134}\) He defines the South as the North defines it. Southern cooking could disappear; Virginians could begin to eat pasta (as they of course do) and Georgia supermarkets could stop selling cornmeal, and there would still be something called the South, buried both in its biracial heritage.

\(^{132}\) Hackney 70.
\(^{133}\) Hackney 68.
\(^{134}\) qtd. in Prenshaw 7.
and in a regional mythology that arises from both inside and outside of whatever areas claim to be or are called part of the region at any given time.

To say “I eat grits because my family ate grits” expresses a more natural and rooted concept of identity than any attempt to conform to the exoticizing of region practiced by non-southerners on the South. To be from a particular place, a particular family, a particular neighborhood may be more meaningful than to belong to the stereotyped consolidation that outside imagination has created. Southernness does not reside in the attachment to a smiling black mammy; it does not lie in our affinity for pork. It does not have to rest on the idea, sold to the South by the North, of a unified region. As Humphreys argues, the South is made up of “real places,” primarily towns, which resist both inclusion in general American urban monotony and the essentialization of their southernness. Every “picturesque or festive or quaint or even comfortable” element that one might want to associate with the South is usually absent from them, but with their force, their story, their individuality, and their community, they make up the South—okra or no okra.

135 Humphreys 220.
136 Humphreys 220.
Works Cited


Flexner, Marion W. *Dixie Dishes.* Boston: Hale, Cushman, & Flint, 1941.

Gabaccia, Donna R.  *We are what we eat: ethnic food and the making of Americans.*


---

**Works Referenced**


